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BIOGRAPHY

Beverly Diamond is the Canada Research Chair in Ethnomusicology at Memorial University of Newfoundland, where she established and directs the Research Centre for the Study of Music, Media, and Place (MMaP). She received her training at the University of Toronto, where she worked with Mieczyslaw Kolinski. Prior to assuming her current position, she taught at McGill, Queen's, and York universities, and held visiting appointments at the University of Toronto and Harvard University.

Since the early 1970s, she has worked extensively in Inuit, First Nations, and, more recently, Sami communities in Scandinavia and has conducted oral history projects in multicultural communities in Canada. Her publications have explored cultural identity, feminist musicology, Canadian music historiography, Indigenous modernity, and the construction of social meaning via audio technologies. She has co-authored *Visions of Sound* (1994), and co-edited *Canadian Music: Issues of Hegemony and Identity* (1994), *Music and Gender* (2000) and *Post-Colonial Distances: Popular Music in Canada and Australia* (2008). Her book, *Native American Music of Eastern North America* (2008) is part of Oxford University Press's Global Music Series. In 2008, she was elected to the Royal Society of Canada. She was named a Trudeau Fellow in 2009.

ABSTRACT

After a century in which innovation was arguably a defining feature of modernity, what is the political and social weight given to various concepts of repetition and return in defining contemporary Indigenous modernity? The paper begins by asking why the discursive formations of Indigenous studies are arguably dominated by so many “re” words. Drawing on her research with Native American musicians and dancers, the paper also explores Indigenous concepts of history as a “recursive” construct, one that underpins contemporary creative work that defines new forms of community and cross-cultural engagement. It offers a vigilant reading of the most politically charged of the “re” words—relocation and reconciliation—by looking at the way sound was simultaneously a form of oppression and resistance in the residential school system. It comments on the strategies of artists before and during the Truth and Reconciliation Commission era. These strategies both articulate the experience and impact of the residential school system and, at times, contribute to the charged debates surrounding reconciliation and its utopian claims. The study comments on the way “re” thinking might shift approaches to cultural rights in the context of social justice struggles.

LECTURE

“Re” Thinking: Revitalization, Return, and Reconciliation in Contemporary Indigenous Expressive Culture

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Why “Re” Thinking

“Big thinking” —as Congress organizers have labelled a group of special lectures this year—has until quite recently rarely been a label assigned to those of us who study the arts. Indeed, my discipline’s primary focus, music, and other performance traditions were often regarded by people in powerful positions to be divorced from power, politics, or persuasion, or even from public and personal well-being. The Palestinian scholar and prolific writer on music Edward Said, for instance, claimed as recently as 1991 that musicology failed “to connect [sound sources and structures] to ideology, or social space, or power, or to the formation of an individual (and by no means sovereign) ego.”¹ I hope he would have been heartened by the burgeoning of recent music scholarship concerning such things as conflict, human rights, governance, and healing,² among other social domains.

1. Edward Said, *Musical Elaboration* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), xvii.

2. Among the ground-breaking publications in the burgeoning literature on these topics are Suzanne Cusick, “Music as Torture / Music as Weapon,” *Transcultural Music Review* (2006), 10; Jonathan Ritter and Martin Daughtry,

My focus today is less on “big” thinking than on “re” thinking—not “rethinking” but “re” thinking—thinking about the diverse ways in which pastness (both memory and history) is used as a tool in the present by Aboriginal creators and culture bearers in North America. This theme evolved from an easy observation: the number and variety of “re” words used in Indigenous studies by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars is unusually large and rarely scrutinized. Some of these thinkers name colonial processes: forced relocation, removal, problems of recognition. Many assume uncritically that “re” words are positive and above scrutiny; remembering, renewal, respecting, recovering, revitalizing, reviving, reclaiming, reconnecting. Other scholars use “re” words with less warm connotations: resistance, rejection, revolution. Even the CBC has not a “vision quest” program but a “re-vision quest” one. More neutral “re” words—rethinking, recontextualizing—are remarkably few. Arguably, traditional teachers have been “re” thinking for a very long time, but the embrace of these concepts by governments, non-Indigenous teachers, and others is relatively recent, only decades old. And there are differences in what the “re” means. That is what I am attempting to think through in this paper.

eds., *Music in the Post 9/11 World* (New York: Routledge, 2007); Frederick Moehn, “Music, Citizenship and Violence in Postdictatorship Brazil,” *Latin American Music Review* (2007), 28/2, 181-219; David M. McDonald, “Poetics and the Performance of Violence in Israel/Palestine,” *Ethnomusicology* (2009), 53/1, 58-85; John Morgan O’Connell and Salwa El Shawan Castelo Branco, eds., *Music and Conflict* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010); Andrew N. Weintraub and Bell Yung, eds. *Music and Cultural Right* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009); Jocelyn Guilbault, *Governing Sound. The Cultural Politics of Trinidad’s Carnival Musics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); John Troutman, *Indian Blues: American Indians and the Politics of Music 1879-1934* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2009); Benjamin D. Koen, *The Oxford Handbook of Medical Ethnomusicology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

Who uses which “re” words and within what cultural framework? Who can speak about removal and relocation, for instance, histories that are so painfully central to the colonization process? Why does no one use “renovation”? Words relating to innovation have been strikingly absent in Indigenous studies, even in disciplines that claim to address creativity so centrally. Is the “re” necessary all the time? In this regard I think of a comment that Mi’kmaq curator Stephen Augustine made to me: that it was not “revitalization” that was needed in Indigenous communities but “vitalization.”³ The “re” implied that the cultures were not vital and it failed to recognize the ongoing need to vitalize, in order to keep any culture strong. I thought about “re” words that I associated with myself. “Re-doing,” “re-writing,” “re-searching.” These words implied that by doing something again I might eliminate a few deficiencies, get better. The work ethic “re” words, I suppose. Linear words. I also thought about feminist theory, particularly work by philosopher Judith Butler who has, for over 20 years, demonstrated how reiterated behaviours become “performative” in that they naturalize stereotypic constructions of gender and race. “Re” thinking, then, also queries whether Aboriginal artists find strategies for avoiding stereotypes that may be expected of them. The issue that connects all these “re” words is how memory and history are constituted and represented, or denied.

We seem, furthermore, to be at a “re” moment in the history of Indigenous and non-Indigenous relationships in Canada, marked strongly by the establishment of the truth and reconciliation

3. Stephen Augustine generously served as a member of an Aboriginal advisory committee for the textbook *Native American Music in Eastern America* (2008) that Oxford University Press commissioned me to write for its Global Music series. The conversation about “vitalization/revitalization” took place in 2006.

commission on residential schools. In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, many elders and artists were already making reference to a new circle in the history of North America (the end of the seventh fire or beginning of the eighth in Anishnabe narratives), to return, to coming home, and going back.⁴

On the other hand, the current historical moment is one in which some Indigenous rights activists and legal historians are questioning the efficacy of cultural rights arguments in social justice initiatives. I will argue that their doubts result from a particular kind of “re”thinking that is inconsistent with ones I have encountered in Aboriginal communities. I will suggest some significant aspects of the way history and memory are curated⁵ by Aboriginal artists and elders with whom I have worked, ways in which the past is mobilized to address the present and the future. I will draw examples from two quite contrasted research projects: one exploring museums artefacts, the other contemporary performance both live and in the recording studio. Both embody history and both trigger reflection. In the final section, I will turn to the most difficult and contentious of the “re” words, “reconciliation,” to consider the peril and potential of positioning artistic production at the centre of the truth and reconciliation process.

4. A few examples of work that incorporates the ideas of circularity, return, and coming home in titles include Jan Kahehti:io Longboat and Dawn Avery’s *Coming Home. Stories of Residential School Survivors* (Bradford, Ont.: Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2010), and CDs by Jerry Alfred and the Medicine Beat, *Nendaä. Go Back* (Whitehorse: Caribou, 1996), Mishi Donovan, *Journey Home* (Winnipeg: Arbor, 2000), and Aboriginal Women’s Voices, *We Are Full Circle* (Banff: Banff Centre for the Arts, 2003).

5. I thank Amber Ridington (currently a PhD student in folklore at Memorial University) for developing the concept that oral traditions are means of “curating” memory.

The “Re” of Indigenous Ways of History: Remembering, Returning, Revitalizing

English is practical, good for getting things done. History echoes every time a Seneca word is uttered.

Sadie Buck, Haudenosaunee⁶

My people’s memory reaches into the beginning of all things.

Dan George, Salish⁷

The very way that we evoke memory or selectively represent history is culturally diverse as many historians⁸ have argued. Different “ways of history,” as Peter Nabokov calls them in his writing on Indigenous concepts of history,⁹ may be diverse, incompatible, and even unthinkable. My education led me to see memory as a reflection back, not a beginning. My teachers taught history through printed documents not in the very resonance of the spoken word. I have repeatedly encountered alternative perspectives. The epigrams at the head of this section, for instance, point to one of the most frequently described aspects of Aboriginal historical narratives: their recursiveness. Often oversimplified as circular rather than linear thinking, the ideas of returning full circle, turning back, or coming home evoke both memory of the past and a way forward.

Over 20 years ago, I undertook an archival project that taught me a lot both about the ways memory is embodied, and the way the past is “read” as a tool for the present. I formed a small research group to explore music-related artefacts in museum collections,

6. Personal communication, 1986.

7. Poem titled “My People’s Memory Reaches,” in *Native Poetry in Canada. A Contemporary Anthology*, eds. Jeannette C. Armstrong and Lally Grauer (Toronto: Broadview Press, 2001), 9.

8. See, for example, Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

9. The most expansive of these writings is his book *Forest of Time: American Indian Ways of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

largely because a number of Aboriginal teachers told me and other colleagues that they were eager to know more about those collections. We documented hundreds of artefacts, took copious photographs to communities, and discussed what knowledge should be shared about those objects.¹⁰ We were told hopeful stories about the day when the artefacts would be liberated from this period of incarceration to return with knowledge about the museums and other institutions that imprisoned them. Repatriation initiatives were beginning albeit haltingly, perhaps proving them right. We knew that ceremony was a way of renewing historical narratives. Now, we were taught how objects and places also embody history, demonstrating what Mohawk historian Deborah Doxtator has observed, that while Europeans relied mostly on words and especially writing to record history, Native Americans had a much wider array of documentation. She notes that images, places, and objects were more effective than specific languages in facilitating a shared history.¹¹

Consider a few examples that challenged my thinking. Many objects embodied or were inscribed with personal or group histories. A Haudenosaunee cowhorn shaker belonging to Seneca chief Bigbone, who was educated at the Carlisle boarding school in Pennsylvania, was incised with symbols (as shown in the line drawing below; they include a seven-pointed star, zigzag lines, a cross, and an arch of words “Jesus Onem to Pray”; illustration 1) that seem to signify his conversion from traditional belief to Christianity. But the object is round: which came first and which next? Some

10. See Beverley Diamond et al., *Visions of Sound. Musical Instruments of First Nations Communities in Northeastern America* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1994).

11. Deborah Doxtator, “Inclusive and Exclusive Perceptions of Difference: Native and Euro-based Concepts of Time, History, and Change,” in *Decentering the Renaissance: Multidisciplinary Perspectives from Canada and Europe 1500-1700*, eds. Germaine Warkentin and Carolyn Podruchny (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 43.

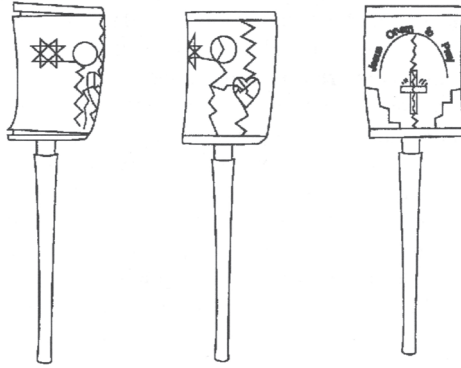


Illustration 1: Images on Chief Bigbone’s cowhorn shaker. Artifact is in the collection of the Canadian Museum of Civilization III-I-465.

contemporary interpreters described the symbols as an “ecumenical” accretion of beliefs, not a linear move from one to another.

Handmade objects embodied time because they took a long time to make. Young Anishnabe women may work for a whole year to make a jingle dress, one jingle cone per day in the tradition of some communities.¹² Other regalia may also involve an accumulation of pieces over time. A dance outfit, then, is a physical manifestation of commitment as well as a narrative of personal experience.

The sound producers we documented in the archival project were not static and fixed but often had additions at different points in time: a new layer of paint, a new image, an appendage. Elders told us new colours or designs were needed for new contexts, different ceremonies or life stages. Old and new meeting points—meetings that included but were not limited to the social encounters of humans—were designed with particular care. The two interlaced

12. Similarly, older Innu women add beadwork rings to the band of their hat, signifying each year in the life of their family with a new ring of beads.

membranes of a frame drum might be edged with red and blue to signify the meeting of earth and sky, or divided with a line that marked the meeting of good and evil. More lighthearted were additions of new “technology”: mirror-like CDs sewn into a powwow outfit, for instance. Both the dance outfits and musical instruments were palimpsests of individual or group experience.

The museum project revealed a great deal about how old life gives itself to generate new forms. In traditional narratives, the turtle gives itself to become a shaker, the deer to be the “voice” of a drum. Arguably less traditional are the tobacco tins and baking soda containers transformed into Anishnabe shakers. “Why were these mundane objects used in ceremony?” we asked an Anishnabe elder. The tins had the necessary colours of the thunderbird—black and red or blue and red—he explained. He told us that, for a while, Pepsi cans were preferred; the metal alloy produced a “sound that you can hear inside the sound of thunder” when it occurs in the unusual circumstance of a clear day. He signalled a way of paying attention to sounds inside other sounds, to materials around us that recreate or evoke certain visual qualities or sounds, to very specific environmental circumstances. The Pepsi can shaker demonstrates what my fellow ethnomusicologist Victoria Lindsay Levine has articulated so clearly when she writes: “Native American processes of musical change include the adoption or adaptation of music performed by other peoples, the blending of indigenous and external idioms, and the revitalization and recontextualization of repertoires that have become moribund or have been temporarily discontinued.”¹³

Elders’ readings of archival objects taught me much about the different ways history might be inscribed, layered, adapted, used for renewed purpose in the present, or viewed as prophecy. New materials, images, and lifeways are integrated not as some less

13. Victoria Lindsay Levine, “American Indian Musics, Past and Present,” in *The Cambridge History of American Music*, ed. David Nicholls (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004 <1998>), 19.

authentic form of the past but as a way of speaking to new circumstances or renewing beliefs that are central to Indigenous knowledge. This plasticity was purposeful and vigilant. I agree with Nabokov that the question “What is history?” may be far less important than “When is it necessary, permissible, or culturally appropriate for Indian historicity to come to life?”¹⁴ The late Art Solomon, an Anishnabe elder from northern Ontario, put it slightly differently. Only when the fire is strong enough, he said, can a lot of people be invited to share in its warmth. Otherwise, someone might stumble, fall on the kindling, and put it out.¹⁵ The careful, purposeful nature of history also suggests that there can be many different agents of history; individual narratives have validity. Multiple histories, as Doxtator has eloquently argued, can coexist.

Recontextualization, Relocation, Reconciliation

A more recent project seemed, as I had originally devised it, to be in a different world altogether. In the 1990s, I developed an interest in the ways that audio technologies and the processes of using them were invested with social meaning. The burgeoning Aboriginal music scene in the late 20th century was a dizzying place in which to think about these aspects of Indigenous modernity. Thousands of CDs and tens of thousands of new songs¹⁶ were created in an astonishing variety of styles,¹⁷ I started working with recording artists and

14. Peter Nabokov, *A Forest of Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 34.

15. Notes on a presentation he made at an Elders Conference at the Native Canadian Centre, Toronto, in 1986. SPINC archive, now housed at the MMaP Research Centre, Memorial University.

16. A very useful discography is Brian Wright-McLeod’s *Encyclopedia of Native Music* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2005).

17. Relative to Anglo-American popular music with its fixation on romantic love relationships, there are some noteworthy patterns: far more historical songs, and reference to family and to place. As in many musical traditions, there were songs that spoke eloquently to injustice but many songs that refused the victim role for Aboriginal people and spoke strength.

sound engineers focusing in particular on the parts of the recording and mixing processes that are most often hidden from public view. I thought I was studying the impact of globalization on one facet of Aboriginal culture and had not anticipated the ways it would connect to the earlier archival work. However, I began to understand how both live performance and commodified forms of Aboriginal music were thoughtful and intentional forms of social action.

Social action, however, was inseparable from “ways of history.” Like the museum artefacts, audio recordings could also embody memories of place and personal experience (sonically as well as verbally), recontextualizing and resituating the past to be useful in the present and future. I was interested in how the technology itself facilitated this. How were the very distinctive regional sounds of drums, for instance, brought out or altered in the studio, and why did that matter? Why were reverb and echo used to excess for Aboriginal music, and how did the musicians themselves interpret this? More specifically relevant to this lecture were questions about how sampling was used to create an aural palimpsest not unlike the layers of materials and images on objects I just described. Today I want to focus on several examples that relate specifically to those colonial “re” words: removal, relocation, and residential school experience.

A precursor to the ways Aboriginal recording artists articulated their “re” experiences, however, were their aural memories, particularly those of the residential schools themselves. Is sound so important, you might ask? To respond, I think of Basil Johnston’s account of his own residential school experience, a more literary account than most of the other published survivor narratives. In a chapter titled “A Day in the Life of Spanish,”¹⁸ he describes a typical day, primarily in terms of sound and silence, showing how both were forms of oppression and coercion. One of his most vivid descriptions is as follows:

18. He attended the residential school in the town of Spanish in Ontario.

Clang! Clang! Clang! I was nearly clanged out of my wits and out of my bed at the same time. Never had anything—not wind, not thunder—awakened me with quite the same shock and fright... Bells and the black book [were two] instruments of oppression.¹⁹

In volumes of residential school testimonies published over the past 10 years, the bell is consistently described as a tool of regulation. “We lived by the bell. A bell for everything.”²⁰

The first bell rang early in the morning calling the Sisters to prayer. The second bell rang at nine o’clock calling us to class. Next came the welcomed recess bell followed by the not-so-welcome one calling us back to class. The dinner bell rang at noon and another at one o’clock summoning us to the afternoon class and then another telling us that class was over. The eighth bell of the day was the supper one which had a different sound because it was a smaller bell and finally, the bell calling us to Benediction. Nine bells in each day.²¹

Many describe the violent intrusion of “the incessant bells,”²² regimentation, and rigid organization of time that contrasted markedly with the context-sensitive way of life that Aboriginal children had come from. Isabelle Knockwood, for instance, tells one such story about the traditional listening skills she learned as a child. She recounts that her mother told her “to listen to my footsteps as I went along so when I retraced my steps back home I would recognize the different sounds and realize if I was going the wrong way before going too far.”²³

19. Basil Johnston, *Indian School Days* (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 1988), 28-29.

20. Oral narrative by Fran Luther on the DVD *Residential School* (Vancouver: First Nations Films, n.d.).

21. Isabelle Knockwood, *Out of the Depths. The Experiences of Mi’kmaq Children at the Indian Residential School at Shubenacadie, Nova Scotia* (Lockeport, NS: Roseway Publishing, 1992), 48.

22. Lorna’s story in Longboat and Avery, *Coming Home*, 28.

23. Knockwood, *Out of the Depths*, 18.

Another oppressive aspect of the residential school soundscape was the absence of familiar sounds—the sound of the voices of parents and siblings, the sound of one’s own language, which was forbidden. Pete Sydney (Tlingit) explains that “after a while you get so damned embarrassed [that] you don’t do anything Indian, eh. I didn’t even want to tell them my name after a while.”²⁴ Isabelle Knockwood gives a similar description: “For a long while, about three years, I kept quiet so I wouldn’t be noticed.”²⁵ Some stories reference the silence of the nuns who stole up and down the aisles looking for errors in students’ work, errors to be punished with a slash of the switch they carried.

Music was behaviour modification. The regulations for teachers at the Shubenacadie Residential School in Nova Scotia, for instance, state that the children should be taught “simple songs and hymns. The themes of the former to be interesting and patriotic. The tunes bright and cheerful.”²⁶ Knockwood explains the irony of learning “Columbus sailed across the sea and found this land for you and me.”²⁷ But she also notes that she sang with pleasure some of the hymns she had learned, on the rare occasions when her parents could visit.

School children used the same tools, however, as forms of resistance. Hymns were parodied with new words: “There is a boarding school far far away/ Where we get mush ’n’ milk three times a day” replaced “There is a happy land, far far away.”²⁸ Mi’kmaq children in Shubenacadie developed “Shubie slang” to shift meaning and to criticize while laughing. Isabelle Knockwood described how

24. Interview (1992) with Daniel Janke in the archive of the Canadian Musical Pathways project, MMAP Research Centre, Memorial University.

25. Knockwood, *Out of the Depths*, 54.

26. *Ibid.*, 47.

27. *Ibid.*, 50.

28. Musical and text transcription printed on the back cover of Elizabeth Graham, *The Mush Hole. Life at Two Indian Residential Schools* (Waterloo: Heffle Publishing, 1997).

Clara Julian could reduce us all to helpless laughter in church when she would take a line from one of the Latin hymns for Benediction, *Resurrexist sicut dixit* (“He said he would rise up again”). But Clara would sing at the top of her voice “*Resurrexist kisiku piktit*,” which in Mi’kmaq means “When the old man got up, he farted.”²⁹

Parody, then, was indeed a kind of hidden transcript.

As the many volumes of narratives published by survivors and their collaborators (mostly since the late 1980s) demonstrate, Aboriginal people did not wait for the Harper government to offer an apology and set up the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada to give voice to the experience they or their parents had in the residential schools. The same is true of musicians who have narrated experiences of removal and forced relocation for decades.

Jerry Alfred, a Tutchone musician from Old Crow in the Yukon, attended residential school in Carcross, where he was immediately placed in the choir because he had a good voice. His “Residential School Song” uses the studio to show the remarkable contradictions of his experience. The ubiquitous “bell” signals the beginning of the song. He starts the song with the Tutchone frame drum and melodic shape of a gambling game song, but it morphs into a pop refrain. Swirling electronics convey confusion and disorientation. Later we hear children’s voices, but they are faint, suppressed, barely an allowable memory. The words, on the other hand, defiantly assert that he did *not* forget his own language even though he was not allowed to speak it. As performance often does, more than one message is conveyed at the same time: the pain of memories but the resilience that leads him to the future. When I met Jerry in 1999, he explained that his three CDs formed a circle, after which he would return to his community of Old Crow to work on land claims. The title of the second CD, *Nendaa. Go Back*, signaled his intention to return. Music was the vehicle that prepared him for the political work he would do.

29. Knockwood, *Out of the Depths*, 124.

Many responses to the residential school experience have been made by the second generation, the children of survivors who suffered the disconnection that was inevitable if their parents were not able to relearn to give the care and affection that had been denied them. The title song of Inuit Lucie Idlout's debut album, *E5-770 My Mother's Name*, expresses anger about the system of numbering Aboriginal people of an earlier generation. She samples her mother's gentle and jovial voice as a radio announcer and as a throat singer, implying a backgrounded murky memory perhaps. The anger over the dehumanizing of people by not recognizing their names is palpable in the hard rock beat and her intense voice. A snare drum evokes authority and regimentation. But she also taunts by changing her vocal timbre on the line "I'm not lying," a line that follows the hard-hitting critique.

Mohawk cellist, singer, and ethnomusicologist Dawn Avery, the granddaughter of one of the high-steel Mohawks who helped build the skyscrapers of New York, did not grow up in a family touched by residential schools, but her art and research give voice to those who have suffered from the process. Both a composer and performer, Dawn who is "as at home in a sweat lodge as on stage in Lincoln Centre," as her online bio accurately asserts, has performed with artists ranging from Pavarotti to Sting. But she has turned in the last decade back to her Mohawk roots, learned the language she heard but never spoke, participating in social and ceremonial events, and establishing a close relationship with Haudenosaunee elder Jan Longboat of Six Nations in Ontario, with whom she has co-authored a book of survivor narratives: *Coming Home* (see footnote 4). As a composer, Avery is a leader in what many are calling the Classical Native movement. One of her compositions, "Decolonization," reveals how she puts those parts of her life together. She told me, "I wanted to use old American tunes," but she challenges what "old American tunes" are by including a plainchant with Mohawk words, a Geronimo song, a Stomp Dance. As Idlout did, Avery cites the past

to comment on contemporary life, nowhere more dramatically than in a section where she performs an exaggerated imitation of Jimi Hendrix’s legendary parody of the American national anthem at the Woodstock Festival in 1969. “People get it,” she says. “Even if they’re too young to remember Woodsock,” I add. But it’s an acoustic cello, not an electric guitar. Like her moccasin and elegant gown attire, not a combination you expect. Hard to read as rock and roll or as Indigenous. The Creek poet and musician Joy Harjo once wrote, “The saxophone complicates things,”³⁰ (referencing expectations we have about the history of Aboriginal performance, the history of jazz, the alliances we read among oppressed peoples, and so on). Well, so does the cello. Is the Hendrix reference thumbing the nation-state, or does the cello proclaim the cracks in the public solidarity of the United States or perhaps imply a sense of futility about American popular culture? Avery explained that she likes to use found objects. Who has the right to use such objects? Are the citations of earlier music “safe symbols of authenticity” as Steven Feld has claimed of such references,³¹ as components of an aesthetics of pastiche as Veit Erlmann has asserted,³² or as means of connecting generations, connecting tribal peoples, and positioning them in relation to the nation-state, as Avery asserts?

Finally, the late Floyd Westerman was one of the first Native American musicians to articulate his residential school experience in a song called “Relocation Blues.” He too cites tradition, by using a powwow melody and vocables. Buffy Sainte-Marie subsequently included the Westerman song text in a history of residential schools

30. In “The Musician Who Became a Bear,” recorded on *Heartbeat. Voices of First Nations Women* (Washington: Smithsonian Folkways, 1995).

31. See Steven Feld, “From Schizophonia to Schismogenesis: On the Discourses and Commodification Practices of ‘World Music’ and ‘World Beat,’” in *Music Grooves*, Charles Keil and Steven Feld (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 265-71.

32. See Veit Erlmann, “The Politics and Aesthetics of Transnational Musics,” *The World of Music* 35, no. 2 (1993), 3-15.

she wrote for her online Cradleboard curriculum.³³ An interesting aspect of the song's recontextualization in this innovative curriculum is the question she poses to teachers and children: "What emotions do you find in the words to the song? Anger? Despair? Hope? Determination?" She insists that listeners read the song like the elders read those archival instruments as past evidence that requires present and personal interpretation. Sainte-Marie performed the Westerman song at the first national TRC event in Winnipeg in 2010, right after she sang an energetic orchestrated pop tune from her latest album *Chocho Nishige*. In contrast, "Relocation Blues" was sung a capella with her trademark vibrato intensified to resemble a "powwow voice." As she said by way of introduction, "Sometimes a song can make more of a difference than a fat tome or a political speech." The unaccompanied performance and powwow voice arguably traditionalized Westerman's country inflections, claiming Indigenous pride. The audience (75 percent of which were estimated to be residential school survivors) went silent.

These few examples, then, demonstrate a variety of creative strategies that Aboriginal musicians have used as a means of response to the painful legacy of residential schools and a strategy to promote recovery. These songs showed that painful memories and resistant attitudes can coexist. They prepared a composer for political engagement, critiqued specific abuses, and laughed at the arrogance and ironies of "civilization." Many of these and other musicians use citation to recontextualize and reorient the meaning of memories.

Ironic Twists in the Relation of Indigenous Expressive Culture to Political Action

Performances such as the ones I have just discussed have a huge potential for impact. The impact of both traditional and contemporary Indigenous song cultures, however, has often been affected by

33. Cradleboard was an imaginative Aboriginal-centred curriculum project that Sainte-Marie developed during the 1980s and 1990s.

political policy, and there have been several ironic twists in the patterns policy has taken. The first ironic twist is in the power accorded Indigenous performance at different historical moments. Music has been a key component in both the Canadian and U.S. government’s agendas of citizenship. A severe instance was the 1880s banning and criminalization, by both countries, of traditional Indian performances together with joint initiatives by government and Christian churches to eradicate traditional language, traditions, and land-based knowledge by establishing boarding schools. At the same time, there were performances, some for ethnographers and some for entrepreneurs who contained performance in such strange phenomena as Wild West shows. Ethnomusicologist John Troutman posits that music served as a hidden transcript of resistance (to use James Scott’s concept)—

blatant in the public nature of performance, yet hidden in the sense that music could be considered an innocent social entertainment as much as it could represent an assault on the assimilation policy. That is what made the practice of music such a viable, cunning, and complex political form—its transformative power often lay in the eyes and ears of the beholder as much as in those of the performer.³⁴

By the turn of the 21st century, governments seem to have completely reversed their policy to control, contain, or eradicate traditional performance. Is this ironic moment incredulous or hopeful? There are many who agreed with Buffy Sainte-Marie that “a song can sometimes make more of a difference than a fat tome or a political speech,” and yet there is a big gap between those who regard expressive culture as innocuous, as entertainment, as aesthetic experience that transcends the mundane, and those who see its potential to effect social change or to reinforce patterns of domination. The stakes of that gap are considerable.

34. John Troutman, *Indian Blues. American Indians and the Politics of Music, 1879-1934* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2009), 13.

A second ironic twist is in the place accorded “culture” in the language of social justice struggles. It is useful to remember that, prior to the 1980s, the language of human rights and certainly the “right to culture” was mistrusted by Indigenous people as a Euro-American-centred strategy that validated individuals not groups and thereby weakened claims for territory and self-determination.³⁵ A number of initiatives in the 1980s³⁶ shifted attention to the right to culture, often simultaneously dropping language of “self-determination.” Legal historian Karen Engle has demonstrated that this new approach enabled progress of various kinds, including the recognition of group rights and, following that, land rights initiatives, since Indigenous personhood is frequently linked to knowledge and uses of land. Her 2010 book *The Elusive Promise of Indigenous Development*, however, argues that the right to culture approaches have been misguided. Culture, she claims, has been framed as heritage, something past and “not necessarily what or who they are” in the modern world.³⁷ Heritage has been alienated from the source of its production, the people, permitting “states and even international institutions to pick and choose the parts of the heritage they believe are worth protecting, and to suppress those of which they do not approve.”³⁸ Engle observes that right to culture claims “fits the neoliberal model well, both nationally and internationally. It is neither threatening to the promotion of economic and

35. James W. Zion, “American Indian Perspectives on Human Rights,” in *Human Rights in Cross-Cultural Perspective*, Abdullah Am Na’im, ed., (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), 211; Karen Engle, *The Elusive Promise of Indigenous Development. Rights, Culture, Strategy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 43.

36. Among them were a revised declaration by the American Anthropological Association and Convention 169 of the International Labour Organization.

37. Engle, *The Elusive Promise of Indigenous Development*, 142.

38. *Ibid.*, 143.

political decentralization nor dependent upon indigenous economic power.”³⁹ It is significant that this critique emerges near the moment when the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada begins.

I agree with Engel that culture, objectified as heritage, could be a dangerous distraction from the work of redress and social justice. Culture as an intentional interjection in a process of dialogue, however, has more potential, as I hope the examples I discussed indicate. The old processes, those ways of history, are still relevant: to give thanks for the gifts of creation; to revitalize relationships with the land and with fellow beings, including humans; to welcome newcomers and prepare the way for dialogue that might in many cases avoid conflict; to legitimize alliances by representing them symbolically. In the words of modernity, these are diplomacy, peace, even law but only if the eyes and ears of the beholders are up to the task.

To realize the potential that Aboriginal expressive culture offers, however, non-Indigenous people in Canada will have to develop new ways of paying attention, new habits of ethical listening. I have argued that the multidimensionality of performance is especially effective as a means to use the past in the malleable fashion in which First Nations tradition has always functioned, to make sense of the present and future. Artistic performance does not replace land rights or sovereignty, but performance could be framed as an integral part of the work of political transformation. Particularly at the current moment, when there is a shared commitment to heal the wounds of past injustices, there is opportunity for powerful repositioning of sounds, images, narratives, and ways of being. But there is equally opportunity to focus only on the celebratory character of song or the pastness of the “re” words, and to reaffirm a dangerous victim role for Aboriginal people. If expressive culture is seen simply as entertainment, as aesthetic experience separate from social sustainability, the positioning of the arts at the current juncture in

39. *Ibid.*, 157.

the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Canada may well be a new colonialism, a camouflage, or celebration as a distraction from political action. Memorialization without vitalization. Alternatively, in this historical moment we could witness an acceptance of divergent ways of history, reconsideration of how past, present, and future echo together, and acknowledgment that revitalization is not a matter of bringing to life what was not living, but to vitalize regularly what will sustain powerful communities, healthy families, and strong individuals. It may depend on how we think the “re.”