

AMERICAN INDIAN GRAFFITI MURALISM: SURVIVANCE AND GEOSEMIOTIC  
SIGNPOSTS IN THE AMERICAN CITYSCAPE

By

Gavin A. Healey

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As members of the Dissertation Committee, we certify that we have read the dissertation prepared by Gavin A. Healey, titled *American Indian Graffiti Muralism: Survivance and Geosemiotic Signposts in the American Cityscape* and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the dissertation requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

\_\_\_\_\_ Date: (4/8/2016)  
Ronald Trosper

\_\_\_\_\_ Date: (4/8/2016)  
Benedict J. Colombi

\_\_\_\_\_ Date: (4/8/2016)  
Sheilah Nicholas

\_\_\_\_\_ Date: (4/8/2016)  
Olga Bever

Final approval and acceptance of this dissertation is contingent upon the candidate's submission of the final copies of the dissertation to the Graduate College.

I hereby certify that I have read this dissertation prepared under my direction and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the dissertation requirement.

\_\_\_\_\_ Date: (4/8/2016)  
Dissertation Director: Ronald Trosper

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SIGNED: Gavin A. Healey

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DEDICATION

For

Minus "Nana" & Conrad Stephenson

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## Abstract

American Indian graffiti muralism<sup>1</sup> is a terminology that embodies the contemporary public art form of mural production by American Indian artists using public art installations to express ontologies of sovereignty, self-determination, and identity in different public spaces and on different objects. To date, there is no scholarship that has focused solely on American Indian graffiti muralism and ethnic markers within the medium of graffiti muralism. The dissertation, “American Indian Graffiti Muralism: Demystifying the Graffiti Medium and the Visual Harmonics of American Indian Signatures on the Modern Landscape,” centers on the functionality of American Indian graffiti murals as markers of sovereignty, self-determination and identity in off-reservation municipal urban settings. Using a mixed methods framework of both qualitative and quantitative analysis this dissertation will provide new scholarship within the field of American Indian/Native American Studies and discourses on Native art and Native public art. Due to the fact that these public artworks contain multiple functions and meanings a mixed methods interdisciplinary analysis using the American Indian theoretical model of Survivance coupled with a social science theory of Geosemiotics, interviews with American Indian graffiti muralists, and quantitative empirical data collected through community-based Q survey creates a multi-narrative on the functionality of American Indian graffiti muralism.

The aim of this research is to explore the functionality of different American Indian graffiti mural installations using Gerald Vizenor’s Indigenous theory of survivance and the social science theory of geosemiotics. The theory of survivance aids analysis on

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<sup>1</sup> “graffiti muralism” is a label for mural installations using aerosol paints (spray paint) and techniques of contemporary aerosol art.

how American Indian graffiti muralists infuse iconography and visual semiotic elements in their public art installations that (re)claim public spaces and infuse ontologies of sovereignty, self-determination, and identity in cityscapes. This is the first usage of survivance theory with Native public art and provides an ethnically appropriate means to investigate American Indian graffiti muralism. Geosemiotics theory provides analysis on how different American Indian graffiti murals interact with the physical landscape they reside within to create ideals of place and place perceptions in the populace. Geosemiotic analysis of American Indian graffiti murals illuminates how the art adds to a pluralistic public dialectic of place. By creating a dualistic theoretical lens this research addresses the suggestion that new discourses on Native art and Native public art require more analysis involving theoretical models and Indigenous ways of knowing through use of survivance theory, while also showing how a secondary social science theory can bolster a qualitative narrative on the functionality of Native public art. Artistic analysis is inherently subjective and the multi-theoretical application in this dissertation addresses how subjectivity and socio-political elements of American Indian graffiti muralism require a fully rounded framework to explore the function of these installations in our cities.

The narratives of American Indian graffiti muralists regarding their mural installations offer intimate knowledge on the function of this art form and in this research provides first-person accounts of how artists approach public art differently than their studio art productions. It was also important to offer the perspectives from the artists themselves to illuminate how this graffiti muralism came to be the chosen form of artistic

expression. The conversations with Yatika Fields and Jaque Fragua offer a secondary perspective to those of the researcher and public citizens.

To further capture all of the perceptions surrounding American Indian graffiti muralism a public survey using Q methodology was completed to provide a platform for community-based input. Q methodology was used as a means to collect empirical data on the subjective attitudes towards American Indian graffiti murals. The output of Q surveying provided the first empirical data on American Indian graffiti muralism and concluded the multi-narrative of this project in the statements generated and tested by multiple public citizens. Furthermore, this multi-narrative foundation furthers future discourses in American Indian/Native American studies, the social sciences, and Native art historical research by offering elements that each can utilize as points of discussion and dissection.

## **Introduction**

The story of this research began in 2011 when I was asked to give a lecture on American Indian stereotyping for an introductory course in American Indian Studies (AIS) at the University of Arizona. As a non-American Indian researcher and teacher I felt that I should take a balanced approach to such difficult and damaging subject matter. After seeing student reactions to the deeply tragic histories of the United States, I felt it appropriate to end the lecture on a positive note by highlighting the contemporary actions of American Indian artists to reclaim and reform the damaging stereotypical images of American Indian peoples in their artwork. I felt that there must be an acknowledgement of respect to Native Nations that I, as a non-American Indian researcher and teacher, have only limited perspectives on societal and personal impacts involving stereotyping of American Indian peoples. Out of personal respect and in the attempt to be a conscientious ally of social justice, I contacted various contemporary American Indian artists to ask permission to highlight their work in my lecture in order to give a culturally specific voice to the issue of stereotyping. The artists' responses was quite amazing in the excitement displayed in contextualizing their work to students. I cannot thank the artists enough for the support, insight, and help they provided in supplying images and helping me articulate their art in the way that they would prefer it be discussed. My goal was to cover different mediums of material culture from textile to public art in order to give students the full spectrum of contemporary artistic reclamation of images that have become the genesis of American Indian stereotypes.

During the construction of the lecture I came across murals of various sorts painted by American Indian public artists. One in particular struck me as a prime example of a contemporary statement of American Indian sovereignty, self-determination, and identity. This mural in Pawhuska, Oklahoma installed by Jaque Fragua, Ryan Red Corn, and Bunky Echo-Hawk for the Osage language building captivated me and as any diligent academic I began researching the mural artists (See Figure 1.1). I was familiar with the work of Red Corn and Echo-Hawk, but Jaque Fragua was a new name to the list and I decided to see if I could find him. After some online research I found an email address and reached out to Jaque explaining my lecture and asking his permission to use images of his work. He responded fairly quickly and informed me that he was in Tucson working on a mural in protest to the recent decision of the Tucson Unified School District to cancel American Indian and Mexican American Studies courses offered at the local high schools. Jumping at the opportunity to meet Jaque we arranged a meeting at a downtown Tucson coffee shop to chat and look over the mural. I showed up very early, ordered a coffee, sat down, opened up my computer, made sure I had the lecture PowerPoint open to show Jaque, and waited. A few minutes later I was approached by a gentleman with paint stained jeans and small bag of paint cans. Jaque and I hit it off immediately and he asked, “So how did you find me?” to which I replied, “I have my ways...” in a sarcastic tone. After a couple hours of discussing contemporary issues facing Native America and Native art<sup>2</sup> we strolled over to his mural-

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<sup>2</sup> The term Native art will be used to denote the canon of artworks produced by American Indian artists. This same art has been referred to as “Indian art” and “American Indian/Native American art” in the past. The author has chosen Native art after discussion with numerous American Indian artists.

in-progress a couple of blocks away. I watched Jaque paint for a while and I was captivated with the process of using aerosol paints, or 'spray paint' as the more common term goes, seeing the ways the can was manipulated and the precision it takes to create 'line work' for an image. I left Jaque to work not knowing what I had just gotten myself into. Suffice it to say, the lecture went well and several students responded with a "Thank you" for the positive ending.



**Figure 1.1:** Osage Language Building mural Pawhuska, OK ©Jaque Fragua

Photo credit: Jaque Fragua.

Jaque and I kept in touch becoming very good friends. Soon enough I found myself traveling to New Mexico visiting Jaque at Jemez Pueblo where his family lives. After hanging around and helping with *The Hour Has Arrived* mural exhibition for the 2012 Southwestern Association for Indian Arts (SWAIA) Santa Fe Indian Market in Santa Fe, New Mexico I found myself entrenched in an aerosol mural artist community. As the friendships built the travels helping with mural installations took me all over the country and Puerto Rico watching this amazing expression of American Indian persistence. Jaque introduced me to Yatika Fields during *The Hour Has Arrived* and after a helping as an artist assistant in Miami, FL for the 2012 *Art Basel* exhibition and a leisure trip to Puerto Rico Yatika became another very close friend. I was captivated by the collaboration between these two young American Indian muralists and the thought of what this art was promoting, creating, and reclaiming in terms of social justice and social consciousness. I was slowly introduced as a documentarian and friend of these great men and at one point having to play the 'manager' in an argument over wall space. After spending so much time working, chatting, sweating, socializing, and some interesting adventures with Jaque and Yatika the three of us agreed that I should start writing about these murals and adventures using my degree aspirations as the tool for respectful and honest dictation of Native public art and American Indian graffiti muralism. This task has been a wonderful journey and I have been honored to meet so many talented artists along the way.

Looking into the history and literature, there was a gap in including this medium in discussion on Native art. There are significant markers along the way of American

Indian muralist promoting stations of sovereignty, self-determination, and identity. Historically there is a cross-cultural desire for human beings to leave a footprint on the landscape. American Indian peoples, communities, and societies have been leaving historical footprints for centuries. These same communities have developed intricate signage and iconography to graphically depict different parts of their experiences, ontologies, and cosmologies. Without delving into the richly diverse historical footprints and stories this research focuses instead on the contemporary footprints of recent contemporary American Indian artists. As a non-American Indian researcher there are limits to my analysis on historical footprints and the intimate knowledge future American Indian scholars can provide culturally informed analysis on those footprints, so out of respect to those future researchers that discussion is limited in this research. Instead, this research investigates what has been shared with outsiders and myself, but there must be the acknowledgement of this rich past of Native Nations and instead Jaque Fragua eloquently touches on this topic stating:

But for me I, and a lot of other muralists, think the tradition of creating murals is a selfless one and it's also one that connects people. And it can be in a spiritual way, which is how I understood it first growing up with the Kiva walls and seeing it on sacred sites, and I saw them more as living beings, you know, like Kachina dolls are living to me. I, you know when you're impressed from a young age that the walls are living, then you want to make sure that you're not a disruption but that you're a contributor to that life, and that's how I see it. And the way that I can do that is create murals that speak, create murals that talk. (Interview with author)

When Hopi artist Fred Kabotie was asked by the National Parks Commission to paint a mural in the "Hopi Room" in the Watchtower at Desert View on the south rim of Grand Canyon National Park in 1933 he unknowingly began a contemporary movement of American Indian muralism (Kabotie and Belknap 1977). Kabotie shared his

community's iconography and expression with outsiders in a means to claim physical and intellectual space for American Indians within the Grand Canyon. Kabotie decided to paint the Snake Legend and in an act of (re)historicizing the land then controlled by the Fred Harvey Company Kabotie brought a counter-narrative of American Indian sovereignty, self-determination, and identity into the public purview. Kabotie reflected, "Since the Colorado River at the bottom of the Grand Canyon is the main feature that people see from the Watchtower, I painted the Snake Legend, showing that the first man to float through the canyon was a Hopi—hundreds of years before Major John Wesley Powell's historic Grand Canyon trip in 1869" (Kabotie and Belknap 1977, 49). The Snake Legend mural still resides in the Watchtower to this day as a reminder to the massive amounts of Grand Canyon visitors of the Indigenous<sup>3</sup> peoples of the area. While 'Western' artists were generating the false images of American Indians donning head dresses, bows and arrows, buckskin clothing, etc. Kabotie created honest renditions of his people and in a tribally specific artistic counter-narrative was combating the prior misrepresentations.

Kabotie has a very similar background to other contemporary American Indian studio artists like Fritz Scholder who were the products of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Boarding Schools. At 6 years old Kabotie started attending Boarding Schools in Toreva and later the Santa Fe Indian School in New Mexico, but expressed a love for drawing early in life:

I think it was down at the cornfield that I drew my first kachina figures, scratching them on rocks. And in Shungopavi, other kids and I drew kachina heads with

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<sup>3</sup> The terminology of *Indigenous* connotes the original peoples of a certain geographic region and this study will differentiate American Indian artists as Indigenous peoples from the United States. The term American Indian was chosen due to the U.S. political designation by governmental doctrine.

charcoal on walls in the abandoned houses. While we were at Oraibi, an older boy named Tuwyesva and I would go out and find earth colors, hard ones, and draw pictures with them. That was just play, but I loved to draw. (Kabotie and Belknap 1977).

Play or not, Kabotie grew into a significant American Indian public artist and muralist.

Kabotie went on to travel the world showcasing his art at the Museum of Modern Art in New York and became a Guggenheim Fellow. One of the more interesting accolades was illustrating a Boarding School language reader *Field Mouse Goes to War* for the Indian Service in 1944. Kabotie's work has spawned a new generation of American Indian muralists who have melded their traditions with graffiti training to perpetuate the ontologies of sovereignty, self-determination, and identity by infusing the modern landscape with their art. Contemporary artist Jaque Fragua of San Felipe and Jemez pueblos also uses Kiva murals as inspiration in his recent American Indian graffiti murals, "...traditional work like Kiva murals and that style; so it was just an evolution...that coupled with ancestral art that I saw on ruins and on our ancient sites really impressed me to continue in something creative" (Interview with author).

American Indian artists have pushed public art in the 21<sup>st</sup> century to acknowledge and celebrate our cultural differences by adjusting to the destruction and construction of the modern city.

Cityscapes are ever-evolving landscapes that endure evolutions in appearance under the manipulation of human activity that is fueled by shifting social and political discourses. Public art has consistently played a central role in city identity as an intricate part of urban aesthetic. Murals have historically been important community markers

infusing color and message into the everyday cityscape. Muralism<sup>4</sup> has been adopted as a visual means of communication where contemporaneously it has seen an exponential growth in production due to aerosol paints commonly referred to as “spray paint.” Muralists have spawned from the streets as the American graffiti renaissance of the 1960’s and 70’s encouraged youth to defiantly detail the cities with their art. The deviant roots and growth in aerosol, or graffiti, muralism has caused large amounts of discursive and divisive attitudes towards the medium in modern America. Without delving into the dizzying maze of these attitudes, graffiti muralism has become one of the most prevalent visual semiotic elements of the 21<sup>st</sup> century American city. In a highly visual contemporary culture that privileges visual semiotic discourses graffiti murals have become a common marker of the citizen public in different urban communities. Graffiti artists abound from all walks of life and backgrounds with different agendas, training, and locations to their art. Within this group of artists a sub-group of American Indian artists have embraced graffiti muralism as a chosen means of Indigenous expression projecting ideals of sovereignty, self-determination, and identity onto the cityscape for the public consumption. Therefore, this medium needs to be included in contemporary Native art and Native public art discourses. With important means to capture audiences outside the art worlds this medium can aid in contemporary Native art discourse by taking the discussions outside of the museum and gallery.

Considering American Indian graffiti muralism a definitive medium of artistic expression it is a terminology that embodies the contemporary art form of aerosol mural

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<sup>4</sup> This term has commonly been used in analysis of Mexican American muralists work such a Diego Rivera. Muralism could be defined as the process of mural installation, location of the mural(s), medium of installation.

production by North American Indigenous artists using public art to express their Indigeneity in different public spaces and on different objects. There are important implications to analyzing public artistic expression targeted, either explicitly or implicitly, at the impacts on cross-cultural social consciousness regarding Indigenous peoples and socio-political issues affecting different communities. The aim of this research is to explore the various ideals, attitudes, and impacts American Indian graffiti mural installations by artists from different Native Nations impart in public purviews and mindsets, while advocating for inclusion in the discourses on contemporary Native art. American Indian graffiti muralists infuse iconography and visual semiotic elements in their public art installations that blend into the modern urban and reservation landscapes demarcating and (re)defining multiple meanings of community. In many cases within urban landscapes in the United States and abroad where perspectives of Indigenous absence prevail, spectators are given doses of Indigeneity within these artworks and visually (re)introduced to the ongoing presence of Indigenous peoples. This research focuses solely on public mural installations in defined off-reservation municipalities, but it is important to note that within various reservation landscapes graffiti murals have been used to highlight the vibrancy of Native Nations and highlight the vibrancy of the community. This decision to focus on off-reservation mural installations was fueled by the idea that as a non-American Indian researcher my perspectives and observations are more appropriately aligned in shared American municipal cityscapes that are more familiar in my experience. American Indian mural installations, regardless of placement on or off reservation, hold the power to remind, educate, and empower observers from all ethnic backgrounds of the histories and contemporary issues facing American Indian

peoples. As American Indian graffiti muralist Yatika Fields states, “not everyone wants to see it, but there's aspects of it that do a lot for communities... beautifying places, they can be tools, elements in the murals can be used as teaching tools... depending on what [each] particular mural is about, or is trying to do, there is a function for it” (Interview with author).

The multi-faceted intellectual implications of this artistic medium are situated in the discrepancy between transgressive attitudes stemming from the illegal history of graffiti that effect legally commissioned art works within the public consciousness. This research focuses solely on legally commissioned graffiti murals, but it is necessary to devote a small portion of this study on how the transgressive stigmas surrounding the term *graffiti* as an art form effect legally sanctioned and commissioned murals. The specific placements of murals are an important point of analysis, because as a mural becomes part of a landscape it allows for widespread community awareness of Indigenous survivance that combats ideas of absence and cultural stereotyping. As the National Museum of the American Indian curator Paul Chaat Smith (2009) states, “[American Indians] are not marginal, and in the twenty-first century we are everywhere and nowhere, invisible and standing right next to you” (10). American Indian graffiti muralism garners this same mythos in the abundance of graffiti murals in our modern landscape sometimes appearing mysteriously with the artist or artists’ not always known, yet containing iconography that (re)claims physical and mental space that acknowledges American Indian presence. Using aerosol paints to produce public murals has increased in popularity and visibility due to varying factors; such as expert training is not limited to formal art schooling and the prominence of essential materials like aerosol paints and

canvases<sup>5</sup> within the contemporary landscape. American Indian graffiti artists abound from the streets of reservations, urban centers, and formal art schooling backgrounds where differentiation of background is often moot and the placement of their work across public spheres constitutes validity as an artist. There still remains questions as to why and how graffiti muralism is adopted by American Indian artists as a means of expression and how the citizen public interacts with this public art form. This research investigates these questions of functionality by offering a mixed methods approach involving qualitative analysis, artist narratives and their work, alongside a quantitative Q survey involving different public statements and attitudes concerning American Indian graffiti muralism.

Current scholarly research has produced a splattering of literature on graffiti writing and aerosol murals highlighting social groupings like gang affiliation and urban hip-hop culture (Phillips 1999), but has yet to speak of the growing ethnic subgroup of American Indian graffiti writers and muralists. American Indian graffiti muralists navigate multiple sociopolitical and socioeconomic worlds in their personal lives, while producing art that navigates a similar labyrinth of social strata. These artists are born with a unique political standing as both part of a sovereign nation and citizens of the United States. Transitioning back-and-forth between arenas of traditional and contemporary, reservation to American municipalities, and tribal enrollment to U.S. citizenship the dualistic station of American Indian artists as both inside and outside the American public creates a multi-narrative of citizenry. The expression of this multi-narrative through public art is an important visual semiotic declaration of persistence, diversity,

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<sup>5</sup> In terms of graffiti “canvas” can be describe as the traditional cloth matting surface or almost any solid surface, i.e. natural elements (rocks), buildings, lampposts, mailboxes, etc.

history, and identity in contemporary America. Therefore, the aim of this research is to highlight American Indian graffiti muralism and public art in diverse ways using a mixed methods framework. This research will explore, and connect, current research in the fields of sociology, political science, art history, and the humanities in order to create a new platform for singular analysis within American Indian/Native American Studies<sup>6</sup> on Native public art<sup>7</sup> and graffiti muralism.

In Chapter 1, a survey of current literature on Native art, Native public art, and the larger discourses on graffiti and public art will expose the gaps in the field of American Indian Studies, and address the gaps in other fields, concerning academic analysis on this canon and topic. Using a dualistic qualitative discourse analysis with Survivance theory (Vizenor 2008), and Geosemiotics theory (Scollon and Scollon 2003), Chapters 2 and 3 will provide insights regarding the functionality of American Indian graffiti muralism. These chapters will analyze place and placement of different murals alongside the ideals of American Indian sovereignty, self-determination, and identity produced by American Indian graffiti murals and how they affect sense(s) of place within different public cityscapes. To further the inclusive nature of this study narratives from two established American Indian graffiti muralists are included in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 involves quantitative analysis of empirical data collected using Q methodology surveying of public attitudes towards American Indian graffiti muralism. The outcome of this tandem

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<sup>6</sup> The label American Indian Studies will be the preferred term throughout this research indicating the field of academic discourse involving American Indian peoples. This is not meant to negate the validity of other choices of labeling.

<sup>7</sup> The term “Native public art” follows suit with “Native art” as one of multiple terminologies for public art. In terms of synergy this will be the preferred term in this study.

relationship between the qualitative and quantitative is necessary to provide an inclusive, and holistic, dialogue on the functionality of American Indian graffiti muralism. This will build a platform for personal narratives on the functionality of this art and how artists, academics, and the citizen public identify with this art form. The driving sentiment for this study is that American Indian graffiti murals (re)claim traditional public spaces they live within and allow for historical and contemporary narratives of Indigenous peoples to be expressed to the observing public<sup>8</sup>. While utilizing homogenized labels of American Indian there is a secondary driving sentiment to highlight the diversity of Native Nations and how American Indian graffiti muralism highlights both the Pan-American Indian community and the tribally specific. The overall intent of this research is to fill a gap within American Indian Studies scholarship and the inclusion of American Indian graffiti muralism in Native art and Native public art discourses.

#### Research Questions

- How can qualitative analysis using the theories of Survivance and Geosemiotics with American Indian graffiti muralism help understand artistic impacts on aesthetic perceptions of place?
- What can a Q survey reveal regarding perceptions of American Indian graffiti muralism, and how do those perceptions overlap with the analysis based on survivance and geosemiotic theories?

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<sup>8</sup> the verb “live” was chosen here because it is the author’s belief that by the end of this study the idea that graffiti murals have a lifespan due to the ephemeral nature of the medium.

These research questions intend to mine the different discussions about how the medium of graffiti muralism interacts with public spaces and peoples when ethnic markers are infused into the artwork. There is a secondary layer to this research that discusses how these murals add to the narrative of Indigeneity in different cityscapes and social stratifications within the 21<sup>st</sup> century as markers of urban diversity. This inquiry will aid in defining and adopting American Indian graffiti muralism within the field of American Indian Studies as a significant expressive artistic medium to be included in the larger discourses on sovereignty, self-determination, and identity. Notable scholars such as Rader (2011a and 2011b), Berlo (1999), Phillips (1999), and Smith (2009) have structured discourse around other American Indian artistic products, material culture, and visual culture. To date, there is no study that has focused solely on American Indian graffiti muralism or addressed the implications of aerosol art created by American Indian artists in the United States<sup>9</sup> or abroad. The unique nature of this study is to examine, and then reconnect, American Indian graffiti muralists along and their work in the larger spectrum of public artistry, thus filling a gap in academic discourse concerning public artistic expressions of Indigeneity. American Indian muralists represent critical perspectives that adhere to ideals of sovereignty and self-determination that affect public perspectives of “place.” They are adding narratives to the ways in which contemporary urban publics visually interpret space and aesthetic in terms of specific locales. The inclusion of this medium in academic discourse on Native art and Native public art will enrich discourse on ontological messaging concerning Native Nations. There are

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<sup>9</sup> Scholarship does exist on Mexican American protest murals in the United States. There are also studies that have included graffiti “writers” identifying as American Indian within larger socio-ethnic minority groups.

important implications in discussing the choices of contemporary American Indian artists to embrace aerosol paint techniques and graffiti muralism as means of expression due to the essence of public spectatorship. Museums and galleries are loosening transgressive stigmas toward aerosol art, going so far as to elevate it to the high art arenas by including the medium in representations of contemporary Native artistry. Recently, prominent museums devoted to Native artistry like The Museum of Contemporary Native Art (MOCNA) in Santa Fe, NM and The Heard Museum in Phoenix, AZ (See Figures 1.2, 2.1, 2.2) have commissioned American Indian graffiti muralists to produce pieces on the exterior of their respective buildings in an acknowledgement that this medium is exemplary of contemporary Native artistry. It is an appropriate time for scholarship to follow suit in acknowledging the importance of this public art form. Previous academic discourse has also yet to discuss the implications of American Indian artists using graffiti techniques and aerosol paints in their studio art and gallery exhibitions. This research will address the choice of using this medium through artist interviews and their personal narratives on utilizing aerosol paints and graffiti techniques. The contemporary literature on Native art has yet to provide a discourse of analysis of either the exclusion or inclusion of graffiti and aerosol styles as an accepted representative of contemporary Native art. Therefore, this research will begin the discussion of this gap in Native art dialogues and offer suggestions of why attitudinal shifts occur through theoretical application and the gathering of public sentiment through Q methodology. Weaving theories of survivance and geosemiotics in the discourse of “place” perceptions influenced by visual and physical surroundings that include American Indian graffiti

muralism will prove beneficial for future comprehensive studies on American Indian public artistry, spaces, and expression.



**Figure 1.2:** Thomas “Breeze” Marcus (O’odham) mural on the Heard Museum façade.

Photo Credit: Thomas Marcus.

As an introduction to the methodological overview of this research Figure 1.3 contains an American Indian graffiti mural installation that was located in the Wynwood District of Miami, FL that expresses ideals of survivance with the inclusion of traditional Pueblo designs that provide the notion of survivance regarding “presence over absence”<sup>10</sup> (Vizenor 2008, 1). In a busy urban center like Miami where public art imagery of American Indian peoples are commonly absent this mural has (re)infused a dose of Indigeneity. French graffiti scholar Alain Milon (2002) believes that graffiti, “[Are] integral parts of the City; they contribute to the definition of its exterior aspect, its size, as well as to the definition of its interior design, its soul” (87). This type of semiology infuses a different type of “soul” into the public landscape and “place” as a reminder of colonial histories of the United States and the ongoing persistence of Native Nations as vibrant and present. The Pueblo iconographic detail is a geosemiotic display providing a point of reference or meaning through visual semiotics of indexicality (index of meaning) and dialogicality (a semiotic interplay of image) of Native presence. The mural embodies, “renunciations of dominance, detractions, obtrusions, the unbearable sentiments of tragedy, and the legacy of victimry” (Vizenor 2008, 1) by suggesting an ongoing vibrancy of American Indian peoples and Pueblo iconography in a space far from New Mexico. The geosemiotic selection (Scollon and Scollon 2003), represented by action and actor of iconography, creates a space where visitors are asked to engage with the “place,” both internally and physically, concerning the “legacy” of colonial histories.

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<sup>10</sup> Source definition, Vizenor, Gerald Robert. 2008. *Survivance: Narratives of native presence*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.



**Figure 1.3:** Mural by Jaque Fragua, Yatika Fields, and Ben Angotti.

Photo credit: Gavin A. Healey

## Chapter 1: Literature Review

To date there are only scatterings of analysis across the social sciences on the larger community of graffiti artists and artwork. All of these studies ignore the important dialectic of ethnic sub-groups like American Indian graffiti muralists<sup>11</sup> choosing rather to analyze graffiti artists as a homogenized group. American Indian graffiti artists hold a unique standing as members of sovereign nations and their public artistic expressions can be viewed as multilayered narratives of this membership. This does not denote that other American graffiti artists work could be analyzed through an ethnologically unique lens. What will come to light in this research is that the ethnic marker of American Indian is unique, or multilayered, due to political station and social standing as Indigenous peoples in North America. This station and standing adds another layer to perceptions of place in non-reservation urban cityscapes that have been either taken or purchased from the various Native Nations in the United States.

The culturally specific lens on American Indian graffiti muralism includes discourses from numerous fields of the social sciences like AIS, Sociology, Anthropology, Geography, and additional foundation in Art History. The goal of this work is to connect ethnicity as a significant element of graffiti muralism within discussions of public art. Using a focused analysis on American Indian and Indigenous expressionism through public art new insights into the functionality of graffiti muralism can be added to the discussion. Analyzing connections between ethnicity and muralism

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<sup>11</sup> See Snyder, Gregory J. 2009. *Graffiti lives: Beyond the tag in New York's urban underground*. New York: New York University Press. Snyder explains that much of the analysis on graffiti has been conducted by sociologists adhering to the “broken windows theory” (Snyder 5) fostered by James Q. Wilson and George Kelling.

using an interdisciplinary approach will amplify discourse within the field of American Indian Studies by positioning public expressions of sovereignty, self-determination, and identity through graffiti muralism as an important factor to include in analysis of contemporary social and political public spaces. As Gerald McMaster articulates in his chapter “Towards an Aboriginal Art History” contemporary Indigenous artists and artistry, “asserts a kind of sovereignty, which is exercised in their art and practice, placing them in strategic attitudinal situations, unlike our impoverished ancestors who were heavily controlled by legislation. Contemporary aboriginal artists can make choices and they are essential in the articulation of aboriginal people’s consciousness of self-determination” (McMaster 1999, 92)<sup>12</sup>. American Indian graffiti muralists adhere to McMaster’s idea by contributing public art works that influence consciousness and speak to the larger discourse on American Indian sovereignty and self-determination facing Native America. These contemporary voices hold the ability to contribute to the larger scholarship through their visual representations of sovereignty, self-determination, and identity in public spaces instead of confined spaces like museums or galleries. Their public murals exhibit acts of sovereignty in (re)claiming public spaces for Indigenous peoples which can enliven the Indigenous identity of those spaces. As the murals claim public space the artists are asserting American Indian self-determination by taking steps to contribute to the public dialectic for Native Nations positionality as both within and outside the American consciousness depending on the circumstances. Sovereignty, self-determination, and identity are inherent in all American Indian Studies interdisciplinary analysis because of the unique social and political standing of American Indian peoples

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<sup>12</sup> Aboriginal is the preferred terminology in Canada for Indigenous peoples.

in the United States. American Indian graffiti muralism will enhance discourse by adding semiotic markers recognizable to public citizens not involved in the discursive discussions within American Indian Studies. The power of public art to announce these ontological attributes of Native Nations to public citizens not aware of, or willing to search out, the literature purporting sovereignty, self-determination, and identity of Native peoples is an important ally to the discursive arguments for these topics.

The field of American Indian Studies has yet to produce any studies or literature on American Indian graffiti muralism because the focus in Native art analysis has instead surrounded studio art works of different mediums confined in closed spaces like museum installations and gallery exhibitions involving American Indian artistry. As Janet Catherine Berlo and Ruth B. Phillips explain, “Native artists are thus part of a contemporary process of debate and critique in which the boundaries that separate art from non-art, art from other forms of visual culture...As these explorations proceed, they will also, undoubtedly, bring new insights to the understanding of [Native] arts” (Berlo and Phillips 1998, 17). This research will bring new insights in discourse on contemporary Native art and Native public artistry through focusing on the medium of American Indian graffiti muralism, but highlighting how Native public art regardless of medium is functioning as a semiotic means to communicate sovereignty, self-determination, and identity to wider publics.

Contemporary aerosol and graffiti muralism has traversed the boundary of art and non-art since the explosion of aerosol art in the late 1960’s New York and Philadelphia art scenes. This explosion of aerosol art has fueled debates in the art world concerning the legitimacy of the medium, which will be discussed further below. American Indian

graffiti artists are producing art that explores the boundaries of Native art alongside attitudes of transgressive and accepted public art. When art becomes transgressive it is out of place or in the ‘wrong’ place according to societal norms (Scollon and Scollon 2003). American Indian graffiti murals are positing new understandings of Native art, sovereignty, self-determination, and identity using arguably the most popular and noticeable medium of contemporary art. Graffiti muralism can be viewed as both out of place and/or completely appropriate depending on the purview of the public. Nancy Macdonald (2001) echoes this type of sentiment stating, “The graffiti covered walls and surfaces of the city act as a form of subcultural advertisement” (70). Where studio art remains a strong expression of American Indian ontologies this new form of Native public art and the debate surrounding it offers new opportunities for understanding the unique standing of Native art, and Native Nations, both aesthetically and politically in the United States. In order understand the focus on public and visual art over other forms of Native art, this study uses qualitative and quantitative methods that investigate the functionality of contemporary semiotic representations within different installations of American Indian graffiti muralism. The importance of adding this medium to the larger survey of Native art in terms of American Indian sovereignty and self-determination will be shown in the ability of American Indian graffiti muralism to visually “voice” these ontologies by reaching vast public audiences due to the unconfined nature of mural placement on public facades.

Janet Catherine Berlo’s and Ruth B. Phillips’s (1998) edited compilation *Native North American Art* stands as a central text to discussing the state of Native art at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This work is expansive and insightful when looking into how

academic, collector, museum, and gallery worlds have treated Native art over the course of colonization in North America, while also providing the insider artist and Native Nation dialogues on that same history. In their Introduction to the work Berlo and Phillips (1998) summarize this history and the newest movements in post-colonial Native art and art history:

[O]ur choices have been guided by our belief in the importance of addressing Native American arts in terms of a specific set of issues...such as the role art plays in the expression of political power, group identity and cosmological belief, or in the presentation of the individual self—are long-standing concerns of art-historical work. Others, such as the impact of gender, colonialism or touristic commoditization on the production of art, represent more recent concerns within art history. (6)

Berlo and Phillips begin discussing these sets of issues concerning “historical objects” and explore the trends of those involved in the production and consumption of Native art. Western ideologies have dominated the museum and gallery markets concerning the value of non-Western historical objects. This majority control is exemplary of political power influencing the value and validity of Native art objects where museums and gallery decisions become problematic because, “As a judgment made in relation to historical objects, the distinction imposes a Western dichotomy on things made by people who do not make the same categorical distinction and whose own criteria for evaluating objects have often differed considerably” (Berlo and Phillips 1998, 7-8). Berlo and Phillips do acknowledge the attitudinal shift in contemporary Native artistry where the artists understand the “art and culture system”<sup>13</sup> stating, “the use of Western categories is less problematic, for many contemporary artists were trained in Western art schools and work in full cognizance of the discourses and debates...although they often contest

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<sup>13</sup> Berlo and Phillips attribute this terminology to James Clifford.

aspects of the integrated system of scholarship, collecting, museum display and market value” (Berlo and Phillips 1998, 8). American Indian graffiti muralists are certainly cognizant of both the systems of acquisition and the power structures that are the impetus for the set of issues that have dominated Native art discourses. In contrast, some are not trained in Western art schools or necessarily familiar with the formal art schooling techniques because contemporary aerosol art holds a tradition of training outside the classroom, “Writers come from every race, nationality, and economic group...In economic background members range from the sons and daughters of the wealthy to kids who live in the streets” (Castleman 1982, 67). They have taken a further step of contesting the aspects of systematic elitist valuation by producing art works that move the set of issues outside the classroom, museum, gallery, and private collection systems where ownership of the art is communal. The communal ownership of public art brings with it opportunity to break from western hegemonies and classifications because the medium is creating a larger inclusive public discussion outside historically closed spaces like museums and galleries. As Berlo and Phillips have shown in their work, Native art has intrinsic differences due to the unique political and cultural standing of American Indian peoples, American Indian graffiti muralism embodies this same unique standing in art historical discourse. Creating a discourse using survivance theory crosses the boundaries of traditional western categorization that allows discourse to cross the boundary into Indigenous ways of knowing and expression in public spaces.

What is missing from discussions of Native art is how contemporary American Indian artists are taking the issues of political power, group identity, and cosmological belief outside the museum, gallery, or private collection and depositing them on public

exteriors. In negating the exterior public landscapes dialogue has missed an opportunity to create a larger dialectic on these sets of issues in public forums. Some observers are not intentionally seeking to be part of the discussion in comparison to voluntary patronage at a museum or gallery. Not all citizens are avid patrons of the arts or pontificate on the role of art in society. There is value in attempting to investigate the ideas and attitudes of the non-patron public towards art in their societies because of the power public art holds in influencing public image, opinion, and policy concerning Indigenous peoples. Just as American Indian peoples and communities have been stereotyped through popular media as the exotic “Other” in traditional American public purviews, graffiti muralism has become mysterious and exotic along the same lines of homogenized speculation of what the artwork is and how it functions. In this study the collection, testing, and inclusion of multiple narratives will give credence to multiple public opinions regarding Native public art and graffiti muralism.

The touristic acquisition of Native art by non-American Indians that has historically fueled certain appreciation for American Indian artistry, whether genuine or disingenuous, is of no concern here because the ownership of public art is communal. What is of concern in this project is the addition of those same touristic mentalities, visual consumption and exoticism, that fuel narratives regarding American Indian graffiti muralism. Berlo and Phillips address the recent concerns of touristic commoditization of Native art stating, “Currently, the subject of authenticity is being scrutinized by scholars in relation to Native arts produced in response to the growth of tourism in North America...the commoditization of Native art and issues of stylistic hybridity. These factors, which have long been deplored by scholars and art connoisseurs, are now being

recognized as among the most important stimuli for artistic production during the past 150 years” (Berlo and Phillips 1998, 16). If Native art being produced in response to tourism or public demand is being recognized as amongst the most important artistic productions of the past 150 years due to stylistic hybridity American Indian graffiti muralism is the perfect embodiment of such an assertion because graffiti muralism is a medium with hybridized stylization that has come about only since the availability of aerosol paints circa 1960. The early graffiti artists developed their own school of styles and techniques unique to using aerosol paints outside formal art schooling. The use of aerosol paints and public canvases are artistic adaptations to contemporary visual consumerism. Graffiti muralism contributes to the discussion of important stimuli in Native art by exemplifying a specific stylistic hybridity and visual stimuli that is meant for public consumption of all types, even the complacent, or touristic, viewer. There is a common thread in analysis of graffiti that, “Graffiti is thus far more than a string of individual identity marks or tags but rather involves a process of narration and [imagination]” (Pennycook 2011, 144). With this type of understanding American Indian graffiti muralism can mobilize the different set of issues stated by Berlo and Phillips into a richer, more inclusive, 21<sup>st</sup> century art-historical analysis that responds to public narratives on the role of Native art.

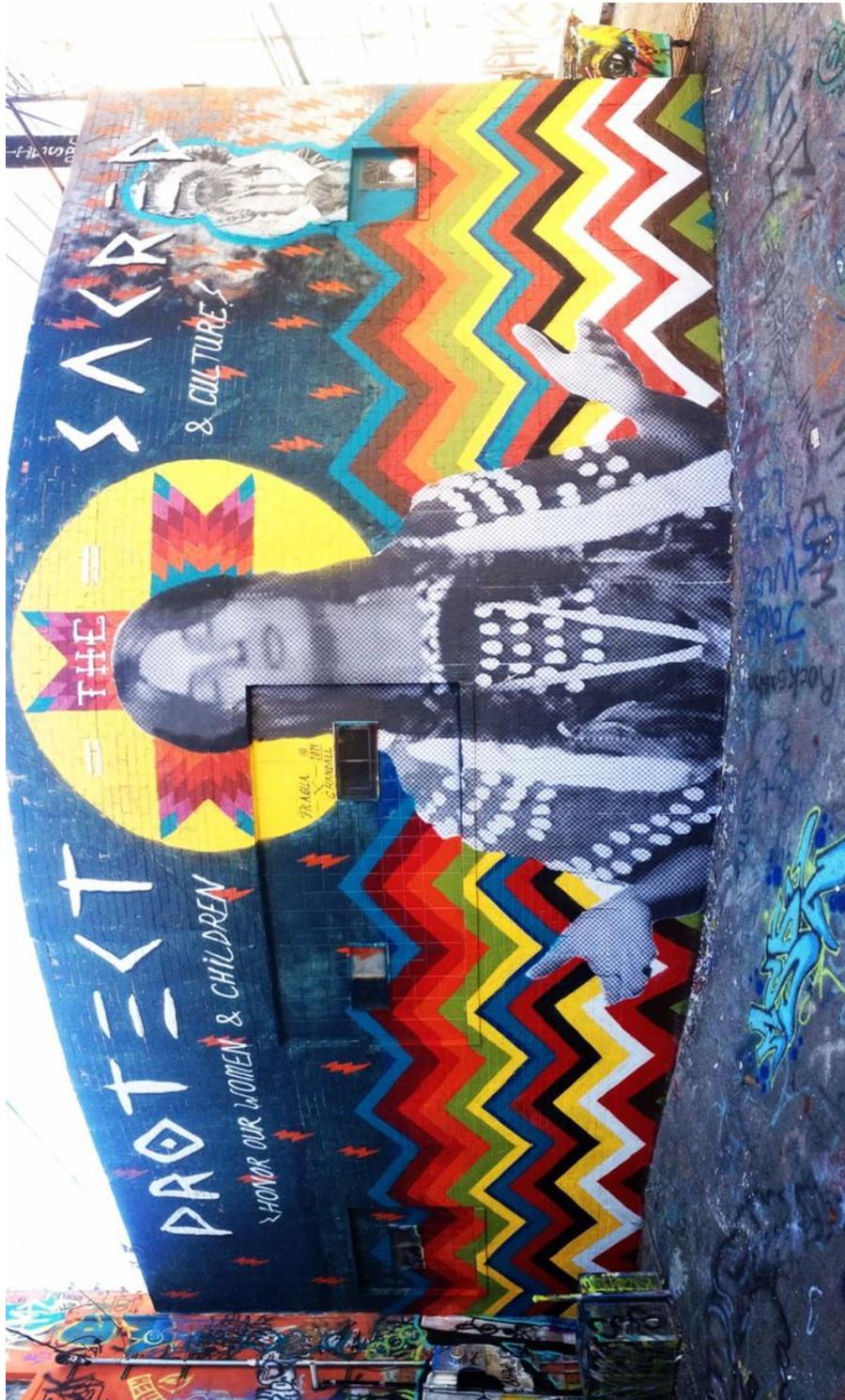
Berlo and Phillips (1998) also tackle the current trends in theoretical analysis and push for an inclusive new means of creating discourses on Native art. This trend at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century still holds true today in some academic circles where:

Our current understanding of these arts, then, responds to another important thrust of recent post-structuralist and post-colonial theories: the ‘decentering’ of the representation of art, and the replacement of a unitary, Eurocentric history of the

Western tradition with multiple histories of art...Such a 'new' art history must, of course, attend carefully to recent interpretive work by Native American writers and scholars. (6-7)

The assertion to carefully consider works by American Indian writers and scholars is where this research can aid new theoretical directions on Native art with the inclusion of Gerald Vizenor's survivance theory. Gerald Vizenor provides a place to consider the implications of Native public art and graffiti muralism as his expansive work includes both the fiction writer (artist) and the scholar who uses the French post-structuralists common in Western theoretical analysis as one point of reference to Eurocentric viewpoints when creating his discourses. Survivance theory attends to creating a new Native art analysis through the inclusion of Vizenor's notion of the *postindian*, "the Native presence after the simulation who represents both the resistance and survival, reinvented as *survivance*" (Pulitano 2003, 152). The use of survivance theory can help shift the art-historical perspectives away from western paradigms and aid in a branching into American Indian Studies perspectives to create an interdisciplinary Indigenoucentric vantage point of analysis. By creating such a vantage point the gaps in disciplinary perspectives can find more depth in discourse and support the reinvention of a new inclusive Native art historical dialogue. The catalyst for a new dialogue should include American Indian public art and graffiti muralism because it has the ability to move the dialogue out of a confined space, both intellectually and physically, and into the expansive landscape of interdisciplinarity. For example, the set of issues previously mentioned in the art historical narratives confines Native art to representative factors such as authenticity, "definition[s] of authenticity is part of a widespread tendency to romanticize the past of Native peoples at the expense of their present" (Berlo and Phillips

1998, 16). When Indigenous or non-Indigenous peoples judge authenticity it is a simulation of dominance, American Indian graffiti murals are *postindian* turns in the simulation using a stigmatized contemporary medium of art to create a visual semiotic vocabulary of survivance not concerned with created definitions of authenticity. Dominance and authenticity fuel stances of idealism that negate the important messages of sovereignty, self-determination, and a diversity in identity within Native art productions. Furthermore, in a Vizneorian discussion the romanticized past of American Indian peoples is a byproduct of ‘master narratives’ produced from western perspectives. American Indian graffiti murals are representative of Native presence both past and present as a new narrative of contemporary survivance. In Figure 1.4 the mural is mixed with what could be representative of a romanticized past in the female dressed in traditional regalia, but also includes the present station of American Indian communities through use the lexical “Protect the Sacred.” Using elements of survivance provides an interdisciplinary reading of the mural by decentralizing the art historical simulation of authenticity, instead focusing on the Native presence, or location, of the mural as well as the representative factors, authenticity, that an art historical reading necessitates. This brief analysis of the mural in Figure 1.4 is an interdisciplinary reading where Art Historical, American Indian Studies, and discursive stances on simulations of authenticity (Art History), representation of sovereignty, self-determination, identity (American Indian Studies), and Native presence in this location (survivance) are all interacting together.



**Figure 1.4:** Mural by Jaque Fragua and Cheyenne Randal in Sioux Falls, SD.

Photo Credit: Jaque Fragua

Published shortly after Berlo's and Phillips's (1999) work, *Native American Art in the Twentieth Century* edited by W. Jackson Rushing III stands as another preeminent example to discuss the canon of Native art and the dichotomous nature of discussing Native artistry. Rushing (1999) offers another excellent expansive interdisciplinary exploration of the contemporary attitudes, ideals and histories of Native art and as he summarizes in the Preface to his compilation, "[T]he continued resistance of Native artists to dominant orthodoxies of the art market and art history... argues forcefully for Native art's place in modern art history" (Preface). The call for inclusion in modern art historical dialogues agrees with Berlo's and Phillips's notion of a "new" Native art history pointing to the notions of inclusion in modern art historical texts. Phillips is a contributor in Rushing's work where she participates in the discussion amongst Native art historians concerned with "documenting Native 'exploitation of the western historical tradition in art' in order to reclaim and preserve aboriginal values... consider[ing] art history's contribution to the 'suppression and museumification of Native culture'" (Rushing 1999, 78). Phillips and the other contributors are concerned with how traditional art history and museum practices have marginalized Native art. Gerald McMaster coins this marginalization the "mainstream" language that art history has produced. McMaster uses the French poststructuralist language of Lyotard's *grands récits*, or "grand narratives," that contemporary Native artists are resisting. The direction that McMaster et al. take in this work is that the *grands récits* is complementary to Vizenor's conjecture of the "literature of dominance" creating a discursive language that does not acknowledge the diversity between Native Nations, Indigenous communities, and peoples. The grand narratives are also the culprit of polarizing audiences by

promoting ideals of a unitary centering of Native art analysis in western theoretical models, instead of the need for a decentralization using Indigenous theory illuminated by Berlo and Phillips. McMaster uses examples of contemporary Aboriginal Canadian artists like Rebecca Belmore who have resisted against such marginalization and ideals of inclusivity. In Belmore's (1991, 1992, 1996) installation *Speaking to their Mother*, where a large stylized megaphone was placed in a forested natural setting for participants to speak into, McMaster proclaims, "[Belmore's] insistence that the event take place outside carries with it the idea of inclusiveness-everybody and everything. Having an event out of doors places everyone on an equal basis; no one is greater or lesser than anyone else" (McMaster 1999, 92). McMaster's assertion that Belmore's resistance to traditional museum or gallery installation by insisting the event be outdoors speaks to the power of moving artistic expression into public arenas. There is an inclusiveness that comes from public art that American Indian graffiti muralists have taken advantage of to encourage public participation. This movement also combats the *grand récits* because currently there is no artist narrative of Native public art expression. Although art historical analysis, and some of the methodology is used in this study, can be placed on American Indian graffiti muralism the goal must become to explore the art form through less marginalized lenses. Survivance theory will provide a platform to move away from the western *grand récits*, but the second movement in this project is to acknowledge the diversity of Native America. The narratives of Yatika Fields and Jaque Fragua partially speak to tribal specificity and further aid this secondary movement here in the same means that McMaster and other artists have done for Berlo, Phillips, and Rushing. As

well-known American Indian graffiti muralist Thomas “Breeze” Marcus states in an interview with the website *PHX Murals* (Accessed 12/10/2015, Author unknown):

Although I still use the medium of spray paint, and my intricate linework woven patterns have basic graffiti letter structure and influence, I consider my work to be abstract and more about the concept of weaving together styles and cultures, especially my own Native cultures. I also paint a lot of desert landscapes and sunsets. The desert is home for my people the Tohono O’odham and Akimel O’odham, both original inhabitants of the [Arizona] Valley and surrounding deserts to the south. (“Artist Interview: Q & A with Thomas Breeze Marcus”)

Marcus’s statements here also speak to breaking the homogenized lens and tribal specificity, but also speak to the hybridity of graffiti muralism and using contemporary means to visually represent cultural heritage to a large audience. The weaving of styles and cultures is a direction toward a new Native art narrative and discourses addressing the inclusion of Native art as an important cannon in Art Historical discourses. Marcus’s statements also showcase the ability of Native art to resist the homogenized Eurocentric lens to a culturally specific Indigenoucentric lens of analysis.

Rushing’s rationale for inclusion by resistance to dominant orthodoxies can be strengthened by the inclusion of Native public art and graffiti muralism by the inherent nature of these mediums to embody resistance. The implicit stigmas of deviancy associated with *graffiti* and graffiti muralism compliment this assertion about Native art as resistant to dominant orthodoxies. As Pennycook (2011) posits, “Graffiti writing challenges assumptions about who has access to public literacy, who controls the space, who can sanction public images and lettering, who gets to decide on what a city looks like” (140). The bridge created between American Indian graffiti muralism and Native art in this research encourages the shift in perspective away from the literature of dominance. Discourses on Native art have attempted to include Native public art within ideas of

resistance and analysis, but the trend is to include it with all other artistic mediums in a grand Native art narrative. Native public art falls into the same realm of relegation and marginalization in discussions on the larger canon of Native art much like graffiti muralism encounters in public art discourses. In a Vizenorian sense, American Indian public art and graffiti muralism can provide, “the later indication of new narratives, [as] an invitation to the closure of dominance in the ruins of representation” (Vizenor 1994, 63). The works of Berlo, Phillips, and Rushing utilize artists and scholars from many different academic fields and stand out as outstanding examples of the majority of literature discussing contemporary Native art, so in their charge for a new Native art history the focus can be narrowed on specific mediums as well as Indigenous theories, instead of western, applied to analysis of those mediums.

The contributions of all the artists and scholars involved with these volumes are incalculable because they appear at a time period of convergent interdisciplinary Native art analysis between philosophy, literature, and art history at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The careful authorial respect to diversity and the acknowledgement of artist contributions that went into these works was admirable. To situate contemporary Native art from historical object while keeping the integrity of cultural diversity and traditions in mind is astounding. These works redefined Native art historical analysis by showing that western theory has, and can, be used when creating discourse on contemporary Native art, but also declare that a new Native art history must pursue Indigenous ways of knowing as a theoretical counterpart. As Rader (2011b) states, “Part of the project in creating a new American Indian aesthetic discourse involves erasing the old. When Picasso claimed that every act of creation is also an act of destruction, he no doubt had something else in

mind. But deconstructing the constructions of false Indian identity has always been part of Indian art” (144-5). That is the intent of this dissertation project by using Vizenor’s (1993, 1994, 2008) survivance theory. Survivance theory can be a movement towards an American Indian theoretical analysis of contemporary Native art not only because Vizenor is American Indian, but because he has embedded American Indian oral narrative and traditional discursive techniques as important elements of the survivance model. One of the subtexts of *Native North American Art* and *Native American Art in the Twentieth Century* is that different visual modes of art can be explored to expand the canon of contemporary Native art. As Rushing points out, “Phillips cites Native performance and installation art as an exploration of the ‘politics of vision.’ Rejecting an object-oriented history of (fine) art, she recommends investing instead in the notion of ‘visual culture’ [semiotics], which allows us to discover and appreciate the linkage between contemporary Native artists and ‘earlier generations working in very different formats and media’” (Rushing 1999, 78). American Indian graffiti muralism is yet another visual medium to explore to create an additional discussion of Native public art as an inclusive, and invasive, medium that speaks to the ‘politics of vision’ like Belmore’s *Speaking to their Mother*. This study begins a larger narrative on Native public art and visual culture that is not discussed in either of these works. Secondly, the following analysis shows how American Indian graffiti muralism is keeping with traditions of Native representation and expression, yet breaking from tradition in location and locale. Adding a discourse on contemporary Native art meant to invade urban communal public spaces enlivens the canon by forcing a reevaluation of the urban grand narrative. The urban grand narrative consists of the multiple dialectics created by citizens,

politicians, and community leaders that represent a municipality. These urban grand narratives tend to be controlled by those in positions of power, but public art and Native public art create a signage, or language, that reflects the whole of a citizen public.

American Indian graffiti muralists are resisting museumification and questioning western modes of art consumption while appropriating arguably the most popular public art medium today just as McMaster asserted moving installations out of doors opens up new opportunities for the Native art dialectic and a diversified urban grand narrative.

A seminal book chapter devoted solely to Native public art by Rader (2011a) has explored the divisive nature of public artworks created by non-Native and American Indian artists. In his work, Rader (2011a) provides a focused discussion on Native public art and examines “the coding of visual reception by addressing the semiotics of public sculptures, statues, and painting of Indians, Indian symbolism, and Indian absence” (184). Rader’s chapter is an excellent starting point for the discussion of American Indian representations in public art concerning non-Native public artworks and American Indian produced public artistry. Rader explains the discussion surrounding American Indian representations where:

Almost all Indian public art trades on the same stereotypical ideas of what an Indian means. The difference between public sculptures like the Howe Indian [non-native] and Edgar Heap of Bird’s [American Indian] *Wheel*, for example is that the former implies Indians are supernatural, primitive beings whom the audience should both marvel at and fear, while a text like *Wheel* grounds Indian identity not in Anglo nostalgia but in Native semiology. The former traffics in an invented iconography of the past, the latter in indigenous iconography of the lived past, the active present, and the visionary future. (184)



**Figure 1.5:** Howe Indian ©Dean Rader



**Figure. 1.6:** Edgar Heap of Birds *Wheel* ©Dean Rader

Rader's assertion that public art displays of American Indians by non-Native artists have long hindered the contemporary positionality of American Indian peoples in the American psyche is valid. This falls in line with Berlo and Phillips discussion of authenticity. The desire of non-Native publics and artist creating pieces in a romanticized nostalgia discounts the present station of American Indian peoples. One of Rader's (2011a) main points in this chapter is that, "Public art in [America] carries with it—both intentionally and unintentionally—municipal, geographic, and cultural associations that extend beyond narrow notions of art and art history" (184). Rader acknowledges here that an interdisciplinary approach is necessary because of the power of public art to carry images and messages beyond art and art historical hegemonies. The discussion of place and place perceptions in terms of sovereignty, self-determination, and identity are allowed the opportunity to escape what Rader refers to as "narrow notions" of the disciplinary or canonized in order to find the less marginalized and more respectful means to communicate the diversity of Native America. Rader goes on to state, "On one hand, the pervasiveness of Indian imagery reminds Americans passing through Native lands that Indians are still here. On the other hand, the stereotyping-especially among roadside statues and sculptures-continues to rankle" (186). Rader's chapter is a starting point to critical analysis of public art representations of American Indian peoples because it offers a focused discussion strictly on public art representing American Indians that is traditionally woven into discussions amongst other mediums and/or public museum installations. Rader has taken space to separate, and connect, Native public art and non-Native representations as a singular point of analysis in this chapter to showcase the

importance of public art in addressing some of the same notions that Berlo, Phillips, and Rushing highlighted in their work:

The symbolic interplay between Indian art and capitols becomes an incredibly complex canvas on which historical, cultural, political and racial issues get painted in big, broad strokes. The conflict of history (as opposed to the conflict of fantasy) actuates Native public art that facilitates both the contextual and compositional resistance and also cultural and aesthetic engagement. (2011a, 193)

The research in this study is another layer to Rader's important analysis of Native public art and graffiti with authors, scholars, and artists concerned specifically with American Indians. Survivance theory builds on Rader's survey of Native public art by offering an even more expansive analysis by addressing Rader's suggestion of "Indian absence" to a point of analysis in ideas of presence, or in Rader's terminology "Indian presence."

Including American Indian graffiti muralism furthers interdisciplinary approaches in art historical and American Indian Studies discourse in both how American Indian peoples are portrayed to different publics, non-Native and American Indian, and the unique positioning of American Indian public artistry facilitating discourse on the cultural, political, and racial issues of Native America. In order to build on Rader's specificity in Native public art and cultural resistance this research focuses one layer further in centering on one medium within Native public art, graffiti muralism.

Rader understands the importance of the cultural and aesthetic interaction that Native public art encourages in the observing public and facilitating cultural resistance. This interplay between public art and municipalities can be explored further by dissecting the different iconographic imagery and physical placement of Native public art and graffiti muralism by including geosemiotic analysis. In focusing on indexical, dialogical, and visual semiotic elements a connection can be made to the specific cultural and

aesthetic engagement that Native public art, graffiti muralism, and Native art encompass in terms of resistance. Rader acknowledges in a short section that American Indian graffiti holds a significant power when participating in social movements of resistance. He takes the opportunity in *Engaged Resistance* to begin the discussion of American Indian graffiti in a section discussing the American Indian Movement's occupation of Alcatraz in 1969. Rader's small section in Chapter 1 titled, "War Paint on the Walls: Alcatraz's 'Graffiti' and the Semiotics of Place-Names" explores how, "painter-occupiers staked their claim through the equally powerful mode of semiotics" (Rader 2011a, 28). Rader provides an initial analysis of American Indian graffiti art as a function of activism in social movements like the American Indian Movement. Rader proclaims that the, "more than two hundred paintings on walls, buildings, doors, signs and facilities, and those that remain stand as the most enduring visual evidence of the Indian occupation" (Rader 2011a, 28), which as public art displays of social resistance exemplify the power of graffiti and Native public art. The graffiti that appeared during the American Indian Movement occupation could be seen as the first instances of American Indian peoples using aerosol and other paints as signs of sovereignty, self-determination, and identity to combat oppressive governmental policies.

The appropriation of popular transgressive art by members of the American Indian Movement occupation at Alcatraz is a significant historical demarcation of the power this artistic medium holds in semiotic representation of socio-political activism. In decorating the former prison and government run facility with their own signs and symbols the American Indian Movement declared part of their dissent toward ideals of American governmental dominance through graffiti and the choice of doing so added to

the visibility of their cause. The adoption of graffiti as a semiotic means to proclaim resistance to current American governmental policies was an act of survivance. As Rader (2011a) articulates, “My readings of the paintings on the facades of buildings, on water towers, on walls, and, most provocatively, on other signs asserts that the artist-occupiers also re-created an iconography of resistance that has been part of Native aesthetic production for centuries” (28-29). The artist-occupiers of Alcatraz used iconographic symbols that overtook the government façade in the same ways contemporary American Indian graffiti muralism attempts to recreate a sense of place for American Indian peoples in municipal settings. Rader very poignantly uses N. Scott Momaday’s notion that, “ethical appropriation [of iconography] can certainly be applied to the built environment as well as the natural one, meaning that the establishment of a sense of place requires a reciprocal arrangement with the surroundings” (Momaday qtd. in Rader 2011a, 28), leading to the notion that, “[occupiers] understood the significance of the occupation, so they marked Indian land with Indian symbols, Indian phrases, and Indian images” (28). Rader’s analysis compliments the assertion in this study that American Indian graffiti muralism creates a sense of place for conveying sovereignty, self-determination, and identity for American Indian peoples. Using iconography and semiotic elements of their ancestors in graffiti murals the artist proclaim to the public that American Indian peoples embody, and demand, these ontologies be honored by the American majority. The images and symbols are also a proclamation to the American public that American Indian peoples are contemporaneously subjugated, but not assimilated by government policies. As Rader (2011a) states, “At their core, the signs attempt to right a wrong, to refocus attention from the transgressive government and orient it toward their own sovereign

society” (32-33). The American Indian Movement’s occupation of Alcatraz was an important part of the American Indian and national civil rights movement. Adopting public art and graffiti displays were also an important part of showcasing survivance and resistance to the effects of the governmental paternal “domestic dependent nations”<sup>14</sup> relationship established early in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century through the Marshall trilogy. Occupying and creating a sense of place through resistance at Alcatraz in 1969 captured the attention of America. The use of graffiti adorning all parts of Alcatraz as a means of resistance within a social movement was illegal, but important. So important that recently the National Parks Service took measures to preserve the American Indian Movement graffiti. Alexandra Picavet, a spokeswoman for the National Park Service stated in an interview with the New York Times, “Normally, the federal government is not in the business of preserving graffiti...The water tower was the occupation’s most outwardly focused message to the world and it is an important part of the island’s history” (Wollan 2012). The debate over legality has plagued the definition of contemporary graffiti since contemporary artists began placing their work in the public during this same period in American history, mirroring the American Indian movement’s graffiti proclamations toward a transgressive American government.

The growth of graffiti in alliance with social movements has created divisive attitudes towards the medium. Rader (2011a) discusses this dualistic mindset concerning graffiti where in terms of the occupation of Alcatraz, “those who see the takeover through the lens of anarchy, sedition, or subversion will likely view the works as desecration and

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<sup>14</sup> As precedent in the ruling by Chief Justice John Marshall in *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* (1831).

defacement; and those who see the occupation as a project of positive resistance and self-determination will understand that the marking of the infrastructure of Alcatraz was a gesture of independence, autonomy, and self-naming” (28). If the focus is on the latter elements of celebratory markers of cultural identity then contemporary American Indian graffiti muralism has the ability to reorder the viewpoints when installations are curated under legally sanctioned means. As highlighted in this excerpt from Malia Wollan’s New York Times article “Antigovernment Graffiti Restored, Courtesy of Government” there are shifts in graffiti significance:

The park service spent most of a year and \$1.5 million restoring the 250,000-gallon tank and 103-foot steel tower. The task included carefully matching the graffiti’s paint and inviting Native Americans to participate in tracing over the final block letters. Park service employees say that in the month since the project’s completion they have noticed a significant rise in the number of tourists who see the graffiti and ask questions about it. (Dec. 24, 2012)

This research will focus on the artwork of legally sanctioned American Indian graffiti murals in an attempt to reposition the dialogue beginning with the acceptance of this medium. The stigmas of illegality have fraught perceptions of graffiti muralism since the explosion of aerosol artwork in the 1960’s and 1970’s American public. Although these stigmas may remain in some public purviews towards the medium there are advantages to analyzing how legal works are attempting to convey the same messages of “independence, autonomy, and self-naming” for contemporary social movements to the observing public. Rader provides the first glimpse at American Indian graffiti and chose a very poignant and important place to begin with concerning the Alcatraz occupation. What this research can offer is a refocus on contemporary works that stem from his examples of illegal works of American Indian graffiti to how the legal works function in

similar ways to reclaim public space for American Indian peoples. This becomes important in investigating public attitudes that have been trained to view aerosol art and graffiti muralism as transgressive yet appear to be losing, or even negating, these stigmas in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As Rader points out the negative stereotyping of American Indians amongst public art displays has created fantasies about American Indian peoples, the graffiti medium has endured a similar stereotyping of marginalization and graffiti artists assuming invented generalized identities in the public consciousness. This makes Native public art and graffiti muralism fruitful allies in social change.

Considering the broad nature of contemporary aerosol graffiti the social science fields and Art History have attempted in various theoretical analysis, such as criminology, to discuss aerosol art and graffiti muralism through disciplinary and collaborative means. Graffiti involving aerosol paint has become one of the most debated and stigmatized mediums in the contemporary public art vocabulary<sup>15</sup> due to the ambiguous nature in which it is constructed and utilized. There is one group of the public that sees graffiti as Richard Ravitch the New York Metropolitan Transit Authority Chairman of the 1980's believed, "the public sees graffiti as a form of deterioration...I have an obligation to respect the rights of the public and they all hate graffiti" (Castleman 1982, 176) and another public faction that believes, "that [graffiti writers] are beautifying the city with their train painting and consider their writing a public service" (Castleman 1982, 71). Once, and still, viewed as transgressive acts of vandalism or defacement in some public circles the term "graffiti" is now embraced by many factions within the

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<sup>15</sup> See Phillips, Susan A., 1969. 1999. *Wallbangin: Graffiti and gangs in L.A.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

public sphere with a seeming acceptance of graffiti murals. Contemporaneously, some high-art communities have deemed graffiti an outsider art, yet in contemporary art markets collectors have made works by graffiti and street artists one of the most popular art mediums to purchase<sup>16</sup>. The significant attitudinal shift from vandalism to gentrification has led to impacts in the ways in which aesthetics of public art have shifted in the last century. Modern graffiti artists attribute the roots of graffiti to different time periods and events. Some adhere to the graffiti renaissance in the United States during the 1970's and 80's where aerosol paints became widely available for youth to procure and artist pseudonyms began appearing on city walls and subway cars in New York and Philadelphia. Others see the ancient cave paintings like those found in The Cave of Altamira in Spain or ancient petroglyphs as the first examples of graffiti. Scholars, art historians, gallery owners, and museum curators have also followed this trend to decipher what exactly the term *graffiti art* includes and excludes. Some include all works that utilize multiple tools and mixed media approaches like stencils, paint markers, stickers, etc. with aerosol paints. Others adhere to a purity of only aerosol paints with minor tools such as duct tape for guiding lines of paint. Regardless of the tools, much of the scholarship and artists acknowledge that, “[Graffiti is] about the semiotic reinterpretation of urban environments... [it] transforms cities into different kinds of places that carry not only the designs of urban planners but also the redesigns of urban dwellers” (Pennycook 2010, 142).

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<sup>16</sup> The London based street artist Banksy is one of the top-selling artists in the contemporary art market. See the film, *Banksy Does New York*, directed by Chris Moukarbel (2014; New York, NY: HBO Films 2014).

The literature discussing graffiti and muralism has centered on sociological and anthropological approaches discussing the functionality of graffiti on the contemporary landscape. Gregory J. Snyder's (2009) work *Graffiti Lives: Beyond the Tag in New York's Urban Underground* is an excellent treatise on the debate of graffiti through interactional narratives between Snyder and New York graffiti artists. Snyder's work alongside Craig Castleman's (1982) *Getting Up: Subway Graffiti in New York* both attempt to humanize aerosol art and bring the art form out of the discourse of illegality involving the "broken windows theory" progressed by James Q. Wilson and George Kelling (1982) in 1982 (Snyder 2009, 5) to a place of legitimacy and humanity. Broken Windows Theory is a sociological and political science terminology arguing that urban neighborhoods with the appearance of urban decay, i.e. broken windows, produced citizens more likely to participate and commit criminal acts (Snyder 2009, 5). In her work *Wallbangin': Graffiti and Gangs in L.A.* Susan A. Phillips (1999) argues that all things termed *graffiti* must fall into a category of illegality, "Even though graffiti resembles many forms of legal inscription and legitimate art through the ages, today it is inextricably linked with illegality" (18). The problem with Phillips's position of illegality within the term *graffiti* is that it is perpetuating the ideas of broken windows theory, which are superficially marginalizing the medium. Phillips analysis on gang graffiti is inherently illegal when connected to the subversive activities gang members participate in and she is correct in trying to narrow the confines of graffiti where, "the pit dug by many graffiti researchers who manage to lump everything from skywriting to bumper stickers to tattoos into a category called 'graffiti'" (20). What can be agreed upon here is that graffiti carries with it multiple messages of identity, culture, and political positioning

so analysis must become focused on the messages and producers of these messages. Instead of focusing on the parameters of legality there is a cultural side to graffiti that even Phillips admits, “graffiti is often adopted by those without power to negotiate relationships with both the society from which they are disempowered and others within their own groups” (20). The arguments over semantic labels of this medium carry as much baggage as the art itself, but those who produce graffiti under legal situations and circumstances are unfairly vilified by negative stigmas surrounding the medium. Although some graffiti artist may embrace or even revel in the stigmas of illegality it becomes prejudicial to label their art as such if it done with permission or on commission. Spending time on the labels and semantics of the graffiti medium takes away from the valuable messages that Rader explained concerning cultural vibrancy and identity. Artists like Banksy and Shepard Fairey have established themselves as a couple of the most popular artists of the 21<sup>st</sup> century art market through previous illegal art installations. So is their studio and commissioned work illegal when labeled *graffiti*? In terms of broken windows theory it is important to remember Rader’s assertion that public art carries with it, “both intentionally and unintentionally—municipal, geographic, and cultural associations,” so this debate over *graffiti* embodies the expansive representational landscapes that can be found outside of the debate. Sociological and criminological theory like broken windows discourse inhibits the voice of the proletariat by inferring that governmental viewpoints explicate the entirety of aerosol art and graffiti muralism.

Broken windows theory has become a successful tool to analyze the stigmas created by media outlets and political entities surrounding graffiti art, but falls short by excluding the voices of citizen members that have created counter-narratives in support

of graffiti art. In Toby A. Ten Eyck's survey of news articles involving graffiti in 2012 he found that, "typical framing is that graffiti is a crime and this is justified through a civic order of worth that fits with the broken windows theory" (Ten Eyck 2014, 1), but he also found a counterpoint where, "those who appreciate [graffiti] also see it as a form of community, as some efforts that have grown up around graffiti and graffiti writers are being used to bring communities together" (Ten Eyck 2014, 7). Ten Eyck's work exposes a case that in-person community surveying of the ethnic nature of some graffiti muralism can provide a new avenue for focused data on the medium. As governments attempt to create an ideology of civic order is ultimately up to the citizens of a place to define and adhere to such ideologies. If city politicians like Sanford Garelik in 1972 New York believe that, "Graffiti pollutes the eye and mind and may be one the worst forms of pollution we have to combat," (Castleman 1982, 136) this creates a type of civic duty to clean up graffiti. This is a noble civic order to proclaim because pollution of any kind is unwanted regardless of historical era. Conversely, if researchers like Ten Eyck, Snyder, and Castleman can find communities that support this "pollution" conflict over the ideology of civic order arises. The tension of civic order and what, if any, consensus of ideology can be gleaned concerning graffiti is found within the graffiti artist community. As cultural ethnographic researchers like Nancy Macdonald (2001) have attempted to move into a realist and partially postmodernist view concerning graffiti writing where there is a, "rejection of reality as a unified and singular concept...we accept reality as multiple, that is different to different people, then we must also accept the existence of 'independent' realities; those unrelated to our own and, therefore, existent beyond our recognition and experience of them" (22-3). Exploring the different realities of the

graffiti community and elevating the narratives of graffiti writers is a means to explore civic order from those who sit both inside and outside the debate.

Macdonald's, Snyder's, and Castleman's efforts can be furthered by disconnecting American Indian graffiti muralists from the larger group of graffiti artists as having a unique political standing inherent in their public art installations. Harkening back to Rader there is a stereotyping of graffiti muralism, graffiti artists, and communities that support them by popular media and political powers in much the same way Americans Indians see continual stereotyping by some of the same entities. This is a similar case with the shortcomings of broken windows theory when concerning the entire discussion around civic justification<sup>17</sup> of graffiti muralism. When the narrative of the media claims that all graffiti must be illegal an encompassing stereotype of transgressive and subaltern attitudes becomes the popular identity. This is not always the case with American Indian graffiti artists who produce strictly legal works, so by elevating the narratives from American Indian graffiti muralists here a more encompassing view of representation of graffiti muralism can be found. Just as Macdonald (2001) and Snyder (2009) found in their research, the goal in this research is to provide the platform for American Indian graffiti muralists to voice their attitudes toward the exposure their art has garnered. There is an agreement between the scholar and artist, which Macdonald found, "Graffiti writers receive a fair amount of media coverage, much of which is, in their view, uniformed and distorted. While they are not necessarily adverse to the negative coverage, they realize that they lack the power or voice to challenge these

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<sup>17</sup> Ten Eyck uses this term to discuss the parties in support of graffiti as an acceptable, even valuable, form of public art.

stories even if they wanted to” (27). This is a place where civic justification can be explored as, “Landscapes [that] are not mere backdrops on which texts and images are drawn but are spaces that are imagined and invented” (Pennycook 2009, 310). Instead of the imagined and invented civic justification confining graffiti muralism as a medium of deviancy there is much to be gained by (re)imagining the spaces of exploration in terms of marginalized and stereotyped populations. Broken windows theory has done nothing but perpetuate a reactionary response to crime, not art, negating the important cultural markers of U.S. citizens. The narratives of Macdonald’s (2001), Snyder’s (2009), and Castleman’s (1982) ethnographic work illustrate the ways in which this type of research can (re)claim both narrative and physical spaces for the artists in the same means American Indian graffiti muralists can (re)claim that same space for their communities and peers.

Cultural specificity is an important new means to investigate graffiti muralism. As Castleman states, “Writers come from every race, nationality, and economic group...including Chinese-Americans, West Indians, Ukrainians, Filipinos, Dominicans, and Nigerians. In economic background members range, from the sons and daughters of the wealthy to kids who live in the streets” (Castleman 1982, 67). If this is the case with membership seemingly unlimited to ethnicity or social class there is a worth to examining the sub-groups contained within the larger graffiti community. Snyder and Castleman argue that in order to fully expose the issues surrounding graffiti an ethnographic approach can be used to allow the writers themselves to speak about the art and explore self-identification. These narratives between the scholar and artists support the ability of ethnographic research to fully illuminate the vicissitudes concerning graffiti muralism.

Neither Snyder nor Castleman break up artists into self-identifying ethnic groups, so a goal of this research is to offer an opportunity to explore new narratives on public art and Native art dialogues that broaches the subject of ethnicity. Graffiti crews<sup>18</sup> have traditionally formed out of peer associations and living proximity as a means to avoid being arrested or assaulted while placing illegal installations. Crews, as Castleman shows, do not always have uniform ethnic identification and relied on trust in one another to protect and progress the art form when engaging in illegal activity. American Indian graffiti artists have formed graffiti crews and are members of larger crews. The narratives in Chapter 4 here are from American Indian graffiti muralists who formed the American Indian Mural Krew (AIMK) that is now disbanded but a marker of cultural unification. The goal of AIMK was to produce a voice for American Indian graffiti muralists and communities while providing a space for highlighting social issues facing Native America.

The ability of graffiti to encapsulate subaltern voices has powerful impacts for voices subjugated under contemporary social power structures. Robert G. Reisner (1971) declares, “Graffiti, then, are little insights, little peepholes into the minds of individuals who are spokesmen not only for themselves but for others like them” (1). This makes American Indian graffiti muralism a great point of expansion in discussions on aerosol art and public art because American Indian artists could be considered the subaltern of the subaltern. The graffiti artist is the subaltern through subjugation by socio-political and legal stigmas, so the American Indian graffiti artist as part of this group is automatically subaltern but further subjugated by also holding unique cultural political standing as part

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<sup>18</sup> Groups of individuals working together to produce graffiti art.

of a sovereign peoples, or a second subaltern. In a similar methodological style as Snyder and Castleman this research includes first-person narratives of American Indian graffiti artists and muralists in order to bring an authentic voice to the discussion of American Indian graffiti muralism as a voice of the subaltern. Just as Snyder's own interaction with graffiti artists my interaction with American Indian graffiti artists has instilled the importance of having the artists contribute their own narrative to the art. Putting Reisner's assertion that graffiti artists are spokespersons for larger social groups into practice aids filling the gap in narratives involving ethnic expressions of sovereignty, self-determination, and identity through graffiti muralism. By highlighting the sub-groups of graffiti culture a focused glimpse into the important impacts of these spokespersons work helps narrow the discourse on graffiti muralism by deconstructing master narratives on the medium. The accessibility of aerosol graffiti training outside the traditional tuition-based classroom has allowed the expression of subaltern voices with intentions of improving ethnic vitality to permeate the public landscapes. Public murals using aerosol paints and graffiti techniques expressing social and political issues facing different ethnic communities have begun to surface in public spaces where the rhetoric was previously relegated to those directly affected by these issues. Graffiti muralism has become a multi-community endeavor where social justice issues are advertised across demographics. Different publics are exposed to the discourse of subjugation by the presence of graffiti murals and the power structures created under regimes of hierarchal systems of the status quo. These factors surrounding graffiti muralism make the medium important in terms of a new "voice" and outlet for expressions of Indigeneity.

Focusing on the cultural aspects of American Indian graffiti muralism and the terminological use of graffiti is meant to provide better understanding to legality. American Indian artists hold unique political standing in the United States and the legal maze that American Indian and Indigenous Law encompasses can be explored by including graffiti muralism as artistic expression of the maze itself. There is an honoring of inherent sovereignty, self-determination, and identity by using a term that is as semantically debated as the status of American Indians in the history of the United States government. As Rader points out these public art displays carry with them functions of communication about the histories and fantasies of United States history. Therefore after careful consideration and dialogue with American Indian graffiti artists the term of *graffiti* was chosen for this project in place of aerosol<sup>19</sup>. My discussions with different artists produced the same ideals that Snyder found working with New York City artists, “The term ‘graffiti,’ which connotes vandalism...served those who wished to influence public opinion about the culture and its practitioners...While many writers eschewed the term, others have chosen to continue to use ‘graffiti’ even after the recognition that it was a label affixed by outsiders. When I hear writers use the term ‘graffiti’ or ‘graff,’ I interpret it as a conscious choice to reclaim the term in a positive way” (Snyder 2009, 28). There is a movement to reclaim the term graffiti in a positive light in the same way that American Indian graffiti muralism is reclaiming public space for positive Indigenous presence. The sentiment is that American Indian identity is an important marker of these artists within the larger graffiti artist community because,

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<sup>19</sup> On numerous occasions I asked different American Indian artists what their preferred term was for their mural work no clear consensus was found, but the term *graffiti* was always accepted.

“such images ‘speak to people,’ or put another way, they are readily interpretable in various ways. Yet they also transcend questions of particular languages and present instead a broader domain of social semiotics” (Pennycook 2009, 303). Graffiti muralism is a means to connect American Indian graffiti artists to the larger community while also embracing the specific cultural attributes of being American Indian.

### Survivance Theory

Survivance theory has been used mainly in literary analysis concerning American Indian literature and discussing ideas of American Indian authorship. Best defined by Dr. Gerald Vizenor, the creator and avid docent of the term, American Indian survivance is, “an active sense of presence over absence, deracination, and oblivion; survivance is the continuance of stories...renunciations of dominance, detractions, obtrusions, the unbearable sentiments of tragedy, and the legacy of victimry” (Vizenor 2008, 1). Vizenor is very well versed in western theory and uses many of the western theorists to set up his reshaping of western theory into an American Indian critical theory. Vizenor has used Baudrillard, Foucault, Derrida and the French poststructuralist in his work, but has continually identified the lack of American Indian theoretical moldings to better understand the American Indian condition in the United States and abroad.

Vizenor is not shy about his use of the western philosophies and theories that dominate contemporary analysis. In *Manifest Manners* he begins the text with multiple quotes including Albert Camus and Jean Baudrillard alongside Russell Means to set up his blending of western and American Indian viewpoints. His concern with deconstructing simulation of American Indians by creating identity markers of the

mixedblood and *postindian*<sup>20</sup> in urban environments makes the theory of survivance an appropriate companion to American Indian graffiti muralism as both provide new narratives to American Indian public representations. As Elvira Pulitano (2003) notes in her work *Toward a Native American Critical Theory* the metaphor of the mixedblood is, “the idea of tribal people in cities trying to understand how their mythic traditions apply to their everyday lives...by engaging with the mythic and the metaphoric as they are articulated in tribal stories will Natives escape, Vizenor argues, the conceptual inventions that trap them as they search for the sacred in the city” (146). Vizenor postulates on the invention of the term “Indian” as a terminology created by ideals of dominance, or the literature of dominance, to simulate American Indian identity. As Vizenor articulates, “The *indian* [original emphasis] was simulated to be an absence, to be without a place. The reference of the simulation is a weak metaphor of colonialism, and, of course, manifest manners” (Vizenor qtd in Pulitano 2003, 152). The concentration on words and terminology that Vizenor uses to create a discourse on simulation and the redefinition of terminology has encouraged scholars to embrace his work as a point of literary analysis but there is a large gap slowly filling in using his theories in other disciplinary arenas.

Some literary scholars have devoted whole publications to Vizenor’s breadth of work for example Kimberly Blaeser’s (1996) *Gerald Vizenor: Writing in the Oral Tradition*, yet like his presumed western influences such as Derrida, Foucault and Baudrillard the application of Vizenor’s work begs expansion to other discourse on American Indian social and political issues. When discussing Blaeser’s *Gerald Vizenor*

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<sup>20</sup> Postindian is a terminology that Vizenor created to define the actors of Native American identity in the contemporary world. See *Manifest Manners* (167-169).

Pulitano nicely summarizes where these scholars see the ability of Vizenor's work to fill gaps in academic analysis and create American Indian critical theory that opens new spaces in research, "Vizenor intends to create a new space on the written page...someplace where his tribally based ideas can be creatively and effectively incorporated into a new, original creation" (Pulitano 2003, 147). Deborah Madsen's and Robert A. Lee's (2010) edited volume *Gerald Vizenor: Texts and Contexts* also use Vizenor's texts as a point of analysis in the literary world and Lee's (1999) work in *Postindian Conversations*, a compilation of interviews he conducted with Vizenor, are excellent works that expose Vizenor's view on his discursive styles across his work. All of these titles reflect the use of Gerald Vizenor as an ideal point of literary analysis because of his reconstruction of western philosophy in terms of American Indian oral traditions and the American Indian experience in the post-colonial world. The journey AIS scholars are just beginning on is to take Vizenor out of literary analysis and use his work in other disciplines. Much like the French deconstructionist and poststructuralist writings have been used in many different disciplines such as Art History as important points of analysis Vizenor's work is now enjoying that same expansion outside of literary analysis.

In Brian Brayboy's (2006) *Toward a Tribal Critical Race Theory in Education* he uses the theory of survivance as a tool to articulate new theories in education. Brayboy states, "Vizenor's concept of survivance is useful in articulating the uniqueness of the American Indian experience with persevering in hostile contexts. Survivance, which combines survival and resistance, calls for adaptation and strategic accommodation in order to survive and develop the processes that contribute to community growth" (435). Although Brayboy's use of survivance theory is isolated in the usage of survivance

theory in a specific discipline it shows the permeation of survivance into disciplines other than literary analysis. There is still no study to use this particular point of analysis on Native art, Native public art, or American Indian graffiti muralism.

Survivance theory is used in this research to fill a gap in social science and art historical research by using a point of analysis that speaks to the American Indian experience and provides a direct theoretical angle to the work of American Indian graffiti muralists. The usage of survivance theory in this study will provide a respectful and explicit ethnic connection to American Indian graffiti muralism. It will also expand discourse in the field of AIS and Art History by filling the gap in literature within Native art and Native public art through American Indian graffiti muralism using a non-western point of analysis. Where the existing literature on Native art has relied on western theories and the larger Art Historical analysis has utilized the poststructuralists and deconstructionists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, usage of survivance theory in this study can open new directions of analysis in the larger discourse on public art within Art History and the social sciences.

Current analysis on public art transitions between contemporary Marxist and modernist discourses to the French deconstructionist and postmodernist theories. In *Art, Space and the City: Public art and urban futures*<sup>21</sup> Malcolm Miles (1997) speaks about ‘new genre public art’ from the perspective of Suzanne Lacy’s (1995) work *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art* where, “The value of new genre public art is, then, in its ability to initiate a continuing process of social criticism” (Miles 1997, 164). This ongoing process and shift from modernist to postmodernist analysis has created a struggle

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<sup>21</sup> The lower case usage “art and urban futures” is consistent with the author’s usage.

between how to analyze hyper-contemporary public art forms like aerosol art, graffiti art, and graffiti muralism. As Miles (1997) states, “the failure of the modern project for an ever-better world, are two separate possibilities: the deconstructive, in which meaning and value are seen as aspects of an outmoded approach to a world in response to which only irony and cynicism are now possible” (165). The tension between points of analysis has produced a gap in literature, or a discourse, that is still searching for other viewpoints concerning graffiti muralism. Cher Krause Knight (2008) states in *Public Art: Theory, Practice and Populism* that graffiti has been an elusive medium where, “critics could not translate their art historical language to accommodate graffiti, even when an eager art market enticed the [graffiti] writers to show in its galleries and museums” (119). This confusion stems from a generalization that all graffiti has similar meaning in action and/or artist intent. This is not to say that there is some overlapping of graffiti artists and muralists in personal expression and stylistic choices, but in terms of cultural affiliation and identity Knight nicely asserts that, “the majority of first generation [graffiti] writers were teens from minority ethnic groups and poor neighborhoods. Today writers often collaborate to protect and preserve their culture” (119). A gap forms by the generalizations of graffiti as a simplistic medium, but the truth is that it has a very dynamic nature in message and in the ability to protect and preserve culture.

Survivance theory offers a new direction of analysis through connections to the existing modernist and postmodernist analysis of graffiti and public art. Vizenor’s own, “notions of infinite play, indeterminacy, manipulation, and creative escape, [are] concepts that play a crucial role in postmodernist and poststructuralist discourse theory,” (Pulitano 2003, 147) offers a new perspective to the tensions between modernist and postmodernist

public art analysis. Vizenor has created a theory that may adopt some of the western philosophical foundations but his end product is something that reflects a very unique American Indian vantage point. Survivance theory will expose the unknowns of Native public art and American Indian graffiti muralism by narrowing the gaze of analysis and offering a direct cultural connection to the medium, artist, and community. It will also offer a means to expand the larger discourses on public art by offering a means to focus on ethnicity in public art installations through infinite play and creative escape from western ideologies. The public art dialogue can benefit from new theoretical points of analysis that narrow the scope of discussion in medium and practice, here survivance theory supplies such an opportunity. The new genre of public art demands new points of analysis investigating how each medium can encapsulate significant meaning and/or message for the whole body of public art discourse.

#### Geosemiotic Theory

Geosemiotic theory and the term *Geosemiotics* was coined by Ronald Scollon and Suzanne Scollon (2003) meaning, “an integrative view of [the] multiple semiotic systems which together form the meanings of which we call place” (12). The meaning of place is an important discussion within the field of AIS concerning ontologies of identity and community. The discussion of place can be elusive and in AIS scholarship is typically combined with discussions on perceptions of traditional and sacred spaces. Keith Basso’s (1996) work *Wisdom Sits in Places* stands as a good example of a text dedicated to the discussion of place. Basso’s work is representative of focused tribally specific, Western Apache, discussion of American Indian ontology and cosmology regarding place. The idea of place in terms of American Indian perspectives can sometimes be folded into

larger generalized discussions regarding both physical and internal spaces. *Wisdom Sits in Places* highlights the importance of cultural and tribal specificity in order to provide a counter-narrative to the generalizing and marginalizing of American Indian place names. Using geosemiotics theory is a means to integrate a western theory in this research to maintain a focused discussion on the physical space of different murals and the landscapes in which they live, but also how they create a cross-cultural interaction in sense(s) of place.

There is no current AIS analysis that includes a geosemiotic analysis of place in terms of Indigeneity or American Indian identity. This new analysis can provide some insight into how American Indian artists are (re)infusing an American Indian sense of place through semiotic engagement with American municipal populations. The topic of the urban American Indian experience has become a popular topic of discussion as other scholars have seen the gap in literature concerning the ‘urban Indian’ experience. Donald Fixico’s (2000) book *The Urban Indian Experience in America* is a central text that speaks widely to the urban experience where Fixico, “Exam[ines] the problems caused by [relocation and assimilation] and analyzing the persistence of a native identity” (3). The urban American Indian experience is a dynamic topic and here through geosemiotic analysis on Native public art and American Indian graffiti muralism can further address this issue. This analysis can offer a focused site-specific discussion on expressions of American Indian identity in the urban spectrum and how these public art expressions contribute to the urban American Indian experience.

The field of AIS will benefit from this new point of analysis as other social science fields have from the application of geosemiotics to place perceptions. Although

this theory and methodology is of a western origin the tandem weaving with survivance theory will help fill further gaps in AIS literature on place perceptions by offering a focused point of analysis and theoretical analysis on American Indian graffiti muralism. The Scollons' (2003) work *Discourses in Place: Language in the Material World* is the central text where the Scollons' define and apply geosemiotic analysis. The entire work outlines the Scollons' theory of geosemiotics with applications and observations by the authors. The Scollons' touch on graffiti throughout this work, but focus on the unsanctioned transgressive nature of graffiti as, "a sign which is in place but which is in some way unauthorized" (146). This particular focus has produced a gap in geosemiotic literature on graffiti and to date there is only one scholar Alastair Pennycook who has conducted geosemiotic analysis of graffiti as both transgressive and welcomed by different publics.

Pennycook's (2009) book chapter "Linguistic Landscapes and Transgressive Semiotics of Graffiti" speaks to the Linguistic Landscape community by challenging notions of language and text in geosemiotic analysis. Pennycook believes that graffiti, "opens up the linguistic to a broader semiotic domain," (303) and supports this claim by multimodal semiotic analysis. Pennycook identifies the gap in literature this research aims to help fill in the opening portion of this chapter with the instance of Father Gwilym Henry-Edwards of St. Luke's Anglican Church in Sydney, Australia that commissioned a graffiti muralist to produce a mural on the outside of the church. Pennycook hints toward the social action of graffiti muralism as expression of the sacred, which is the gap this research will illuminate in terms of American Indian graffiti muralism as representational (re)claiming of place in urban landscapes. The use of geosemiotic analysis will aid in

answering the questions of the functionality graffiti muralism has, and does, imbibe in urban areas for publics cross-culturally. Spirituality is a strong marker of identity and this study will use Pennycook's observations as a platform to continue filling this gap in academic analysis.

Pennycook's (2010) "Spatial Narrations: Graffscapes and City Souls" examines the ability of graffiti to become part of the self-determination of a city's identity. Pennycook states, "I want to make a case for an understanding of graffiti as part of the urban landscape, as one of the ways in which cities are brought to life and space is narrated" (137). This point of analysis is a beginning point for a geosemiotic reading of graffiti as a citizen art, a part of a cityscape, and "art viewed in motion" (137). This research will help further the discourse on graffiti by narrowing the generalized terminology of "graffiti" in analyzing the geosemiotic functions of the art form when it is put into a cultural context involving ideals of self-determination, sovereignty, and identity in terms of place perceptions.

The existing gaps in AIS and wider scholarship of graffiti and graffiti muralism has produced a necessity to narrow the focus on these topics in order to gain further understanding of the functionality they serve in urban environments. More importantly, there is a necessity to fill this gap because of the major implications American Indian graffiti muralism embodies for sovereignty, self-determination, and identity for American Indian individuals and communities in American municipalities. In order to fully understand the functionality of public art and Native public art there are important gaps to fill with focused analysis. The two pronged theoretical analysis in this study will set a further foundation for investigating the life of space and place in terms of American

Indian sovereignty, self-determination, and identity while also bringing to light how perceptions of place are formed and articulated for all.

## Chapter 2: Stamps of Survivance

There are many different expressive forms of cross-cultural survivance found throughout the world. The machinations of survivance appear in glimpses of many different kinds of expression depending on the histories of a given group or person. Fine art and public art have long been an expressive outlet for Indigenous peoples to signal their presence in colonized spaces that appear to have Indigenous absence. This signaling of presence by Indigenous groups are the practice of survivance that demarcates objections to dominant colonial ideologies. Elizabeth LaPensée (2014) believes that survivance, “is an indigenous social impact game that honours [original spelling] storytelling and art as self-determined pathways to healing from historical trauma caused by colonization” (264). American Indian artists and Native art create narratives of survivance by continually creating signposts of American Indian presence in the world. These narratives function as a communal space to explore the truisms of American Indian presence instead of the false representations created by dominant cultures or, as Gerald Vizenor calls them, “simulations” of American Indians. Vizenor (1999) believes that American Indian literatures, oral traditions, and the spoken word are communal spaces that hold more power than simulations created for American Indians, “Tribal power is more communal than personal, and the power of the spoken word goes with the stories of the survivors, and becomes the literature of survivance” (135). Native public art acts as an illustration to the written and spoken word as a second narrative of survivance because it lives in unconfined communal public spaces. The ability of public art displays to infiltrate a secondary space, off of the page and into a public space, helps facilitate counter-narratives of colonial simulation. Just as books can be confined to libraries

Native art can be confined to museums and gallery spaces. When the literature and art are freed from these spaces the narratives reinvent structure and simulation of American Indian sovereignty, self-determination, and identity in a culturally appropriate arena. Vizenor uses the example of postmodern theory and Vassilis Lambropoulos (1993) who writes in *The Rise of Ethnocentrism*, “The postmodernist work reflects the experience of the library, where everything is available and within reach but placed in an order that eliminates any sense of hierarchical history” (256). This liberation of the library ordering systems frees literature of constraint and opposes the sense of dominance. Vizenor furthers this notion by using modernism as an antithetical surveillance of art stating, “Alas, surveillance is a modernist separation of tribal imagination and the concoction of the other in ruins of representation. Postindians discover the survivance of their others and double others in libraries” (Vizenor 1999, 169). Native public art and American Indian graffiti muralism is a counterpoise to the libraries of public spaces by establishing a communal place of civic reflection that were original Indigenous spaces of presence. Working together the written, spoken, and visual create postindian counter-narratives by American Indian artists that when taken into the public cityscape are not beholden to narratives of non-American Indian creation. Vizenor identifies the postindian narrative as acts of survivance that find applicability in postmodern discourses:

The postindian is an ironist. . . ironies and humor in the postmodern are heard in tribal narratives; the natural reason of tribal creation has never been without a postmodern turn or counterpoise, a common mode that enlivened the performance and memories of those who heard the best of their own experiences in stories. The shadows of the heard and that touch of coherence in natural reason persist in the postindian literature of resistance and in the stories that are told at the end of federal exclaves and reservations. (68)

In his linkage between the postmodern ironist and the postindian through humor and natural reason Vizenor exposes the characteristics that promote survivance. The ability of literature and art to enliven a counterpoise for American Indian communities and peoples make these mediums of expression important allies in the larger spectrum of survivance narratives. Vizenor (1999) enjoys entangling western theories with his meditations on American Indian simulations and also points out the pitfalls of theoretical application, “Modernism, a persuasive disguise of aesthetic individualism, is the tragic flaw of historicism. The postmodern condition, then, is a counterpoise in “wild knowledge” and language games, an invitation to a “reflexive nature” that would undermine the trust of presence in translation, representation, and simulations” (69). Modernism and postmodernism have long been used to analyze American Indian literature and Native art, but as Vizenor points out we have entered an era where it is necessary to begin branching out to Indigenous theoretical analysis in order to better honor the unique station of American Indian artistic expression. Doing so creates a counter-narrative, or a counter-discourse, to previous western theories that have led to homogenization, generalization, and colonial simulations of American Indian definitions. Although this was presumably not the intention of previous scholars, the continuance of American Indian simulations in popular media has rankled just acknowledgement of the diversity of the numerous Native Nations living in the United States and abroad. The ability to bring forth an American Indian model of analysis makes Vizenor’s work important in constructing new critical discourses on American Indian artistic expression. Vizenor (2009) believes that, “Survivance is a practice, not an ideology, dissimulation, or a theory. The theory is earned by interpretations, the critical construal of survivance in creative literature, and by

narratives of cause and natural reason... The incongruity of survivance as a practice of natural reason, and as a discourse on literary studies, anticipates a rhetorical or wry contrast of meaning” (89). This type of statement is a deliberate postindian act by Vizenor to point out the false reliance on theory to explicate artistic productions when it negates the practice, or action, of the production. The natural reason is meant to be reflexive and Vizenor is proclaiming that theory can cloud such reason and reflexivity by burying, or simplifying, the practice of survivance narratives, “Natural reason and a reflexive nature are virtues of the literature of survivance” (Vizenor 1999, 69). Moving forward these Vizenorian ideologies will be taken into account with the hope that theory does not outweigh the practice of survivance narratives by American Indian graffiti artists and their murals. In order to follow Vizenor’s direction of survivance practices the ideals of sovereignty, self-determination, and identity will each illuminate the practice of survivance in terms of natural reason and reflexivity in American Indian graffiti muralism.

American Indian artists and the canon of Native art have endured many simulations of what canonization implies about American Indian artistic productions, but the ideals of sovereignty, self-determination, and identity have remained inherent in Native art. The creation of generalized views of American Indian peoples and colonial simulations that ignore these ideals within Native America have led to contemporary expressions of survivance in Native art, Native public art, and American Indian graffiti muralism. Many of these generalized views come from scholarship and outsider research such as the research here, but the purpose of survivance is to demystify and provide some clarity as to the practice. To best honor this process Jaque Fragua articulates:

I would say that any art created by an indigenous person is Native art, whether that be smearing shit on a wall or creating a mural. And that's why it's important because it's an extension of that life, it's an extension of that voice and once the voice is gone then you can't ever have that back you know? So I would say yeah, if someone was to label it under [Native art] and it's going to be in a museum years from now it should be, it should be recognized it should be given that respect. And I wouldn't say that a lot of these – it's a really Western way to think about it but you know, deciding what is and what isn't is up to the intellectuals you know...I would say to prolong or to continue a conversation is to continue a culture or to continue Indian identity. Once, like I said, once the voice is gone, then you can't get it back. Once the languages are gone you can't get them back, once the traditions and the ways we do things are gone then there's no one to tell us how to do it anymore. We have to keep having that conversation, not only the oral tradition but also the visual, and that is survivance. (Interview with author)

In order to expose the simulations of the 'American Indian' Vizenor has continually pontificated on the damage these simulations have caused in the mindsets of both American Indian and non-American Indian peoples using western postmodern theories, "Native American Indian literatures have been pressed into cultural categories, transmuted by reductionism, animadversions and the hyperrealities of neocolonial consumerism" (Vizenor 1993, 5). Vizenor adopts the terminology of hyperreality used by postmodern theorists to describe "pleasurable misreadings" (Vizenor 1993) of American Indian literatures. He points directly to Umberto Eco's (1986) *Travels in Hyperreality* to describe American consumer culture where Eco states, "This is the reason for this journey into hyperreality, in search of instances where the American imagination demands the real thing and, to attain it, must fabricate the absolute fake; where the boundaries between game and illusion are blurred" (Eco qtd in Vizenor 1993, 5). Social sciences have continued a reformation of Native art to liken the postmodern simulation of cultural reduction to a monolithic base in order to access aesthetic through western theoretical lenses. The social sciences have continually desired to compartmentalize

creative and expressive cultural products making them part of a hyperrealistic discourse, fabricating the fake. These actions cause the debasing of the artwork as a product without true cultural genesis. Fragua has seen the effects of this on the Native art community where reactionary art, in reaction to Western societal simulations;

But there's some stuff where I wouldn't put it in a book one hundred years from now you know, it's just irrelevant. And like I was saying a lot of these indigenous artists aren't considering all of the above and I would – any people that I run into and want to have a discussion a dialogue about it I'm always open to that, I'm always willing to debate and call someone out on what they're doing you know. And it's just the way that our communities used to police each other about what's going on or what their actions are...when I was talking about all of the above or the lack of considering is the reactive way, or the reactive art that I've seen and from Native artists. And it just takes less energy, it takes less effort to be reactive. It's like an explosion you know, that rises fast and dies quick and with that there's no sustainability, there's no real conversation. You know it's like small talk and to really gain or to really. (Interview with author)

As Charlene Touchette (2003) states of Native art, “comes directly from the intricate web of experiences of Native Peoples; ancient, modern, urban and reservation...But Indian art defies easy categorization because ndn [Indian] experience is multifaceted. ndn's art's challenges containment” (Touchette qtd in Rader 2011b, 143). Eco (1975) discusses the importance of original, as opposed to the hyperreal, semiotic communication with his different levels of textual aesthetics in *Theory of Semiotics* where, “the entire operation, even though focused on codes, frequently produces a new type of *awareness about the world* [original emphasis]...insofar as the aesthetic labor aims to be detected and scrutinized repeatedly by the addressee who thereby engages in a complex labor of interpretation...so that the aesthetic text represents a network of diverse *communicational acts* [original emphasis] eliciting highly original responses” (Eco 1975, 261). Eco's theorizing explains the power of aesthetic to open up the reflexive thinking required in

the practice of survivance. In creating a new counter-narrative to view Native art the ability to communicate through culturally specific lenses can be achieved. Without an Indigenous discourse as a counter-narrative to western social science discourse artistic expression becomes a product of the simulated narrative, thus marginalizing and stripping the soul of the object, “Social science theories constrain tribal landscapes to institutional values, representationalism and the politics of academic determination. The narrow teleologies deduced from social science monologues and the ideologies that arise from structuralism have reduced tribal [art] to an “objective” collection of consumable cultural artifacts” (Vizenor 1993, 5-6). Theory and scholarship based in western ideologies have created a monologue, a hyperreal abstraction, when analyzing American Indian culture and art because of the basis outside of American Indian traditional methodology that encourages a communal dialogue of survivance. In the practice of survivance the narrative is multi-vocal, not a monologue. The monologues and hyperreal abstractions have led to the colonial simulation where, “The instrumental language of the social sciences are tragic or *hypotragic* modes that withhold communal discourse” (Vizenor 1993, 9). There is a constraint in analysis based in western social science theories because there is no acknowledgement of the communal or tribal in the majority of contemporary theories. This makes survivance theory an important multi-vocal tool of theoretical revision with a foundation of un-simulated Indigenous narrative, instead of the invented, that likens to the natural reason and reflexivity required in the practice of survivance.

Vizenor appropriates the postmodern, the deconstructionist, the post colonialist, in order to expose the fallacies of each in negating Indigenous and American Indian traditions or natural reason. He asserts, “Native American Indian literatures have been

overburdened with critical interpretations based on structuralism and other social science theories that value incoherent foundational representations of tribal experiences” (Vizenor 1999, 74). The foundational representations by social science theories are simulations that have led to believed generalizations about American Indian peoples. Jean Baudrillard’s (1994) postmodernist theorizing supports Vizenor’s claims as he postulates:

In order for ethnology to live, its object must die; by dying, the object takes its revenge for being “discovered” and with it death defies the science that wants to grasp it...Science loses precious capital there, but the object will be safe, lost to science, but intact in its “virginity.” It is not a question of sacrifice (science never sacrifices itself, it is murderous), but of the simulated sacrifice of its object in order to save its reality principle. (7)

Baudrillard and Vizenor point to the death of the object in the ruins of scientific narrative dominance. The originality and purity of natural reason are stripped away through hyperreal simulations of the object created to support the appetites of science. This type of irony where science and theory pursue new knowledge but ultimately ‘kill’ the object has become the postmodern paradox of theoretical application, especially when it involves peoples and culture. By killing, or creating generalizations, that inappropriately marginalize a diverse community the “American Indian” is trapped in a stoic gaze of the past. The simulations cause the death of the real when claiming realistic representations based on scientific monologues where the object “American Indian” disappears in the reality principle. The need to perpetuate authority and hierarchies of science has only furthered a false reality and the death of the object. More specifically, in this case Vizenor has made the argument that the practice of survivance is in direct opposition to social science simulations attempting to explain or represent the true “American Indian” as elusive as that may be due to the vast diversity of the racialized label. His construction

of the postindian discourse supplies the humor and irony needed to reflect upon the simulations that social science has created about American Indian peoples. The simulations are created through mis-histories of American Indian peoples and Lambropoulos (1993) explains that postmodernism, “is not ignorant or innocent of history but rather sees it as the total, synchronic, undifferentiated presence and availability of tradition. While modernist artwork is about itself and seeks redemption from history through form, the postmodernist is about tradition that surrounds itself happily with history; the former strive to establish its own code, the latter thrives on borrowed codes” (256). The social science simulations of centuries past have created a ‘death’ of the traditional American Indian that prefers narratives of tragedy in order to gain sympathy and create cultural artifacts out of the American Indian. Survivance becomes a counter-narrative theory by reinterpreting “the critical construal” and creating “narratives of cause and natural reason” (Vizenor 2009) that understand the lived histories of American Indian peoples in order to reinvent the narrative. Through humor and irony the postindian narratives of survivance combat sentiments of tragedy. Wylie Sypher (1956) declares, “So the comic spirit keeps us pure in mind by requiring that we regard ourselves skeptically. Indeed this spirit is an agent of that civilizing activity Matthew Arnold called ‘criticism,’ which is essential in ‘culture’” (Sypher qtd in Vizenor 1993, 12). Vizenor also points to Aldous Huxley’s (1931) assertion that in creating a tragedy, “the artist must isolate a single element out of the totality of human experience and use that exclusively as his material. Tragedy is something that is separated out from the Whole Truth...” (Huxley qtd in Vizenor 1993, 11-12). The postindian narratives of survivance offer the spirit of skepticism through irony and humor. They become the

signposts for reflexive natural reason on conceptions of truth, which include new practices of survivance like those created in American Indian graffiti muralism and public art to express culturally appropriate truisms through visual semiotics. As Yatika Fields states about his graffiti murals, “Oh yeah, they claim space previously where nothing was, or continue over an older existing space. They open up that space for thinking, they open up that space to a new reality and new realm of thinking” (Interview with author).

Traditional social science analysis has dwelled on the ‘hypotragic’ in order to gain sympathies leading to what Vizenor calls ‘hypotragedies’ (Vizenor 1993, 11), “Causal research strains to discover the “whole truth” or the invented truth in theories and models; these “whole truth’ models imposed on tribal experiences are *hypotragedies* [original emphasis], abnormal tragedies in this instance. They have no comic imagination, no artistic intent, no communal signification of mythic verism” (Vizenor 1993, 11). Vizenor is correct that social science theories have traditionally created invented truths about American Indian culture due to the ignoring of Indigenous wisdom, imagination, and verism in western theoretical applications. Because the postmodernists question the truths of the human experience they make an appropriate ally in Vizenor’s (re)envisioning of tribal literatures and theory. Vizenor finds support in revising western simulations through postmodernism because as Jean-Francois Lyotard states in *The Postmodern Explained*, “it should be made clear that it is not up to us to *provide reality* [original emphasis], but to invent illusions to what is conceivable” (Lyotard 1993, 15). This is the pursuit of American Indian literature and art to expose the illusions of representation and simulation that lead to reflective moments on the misrepresentations of American Indians in dominant literature. The subjectivity of fiction and art are places to open reformative

spaces of simulation and the elusive search for truths. This is also the outcome of American Indian graffiti muralism as Fields has observed, “Yeah and so a lot of people can kind of just free-associate with it. But I know for a fact that, from doing it for a little bit, or from different murals, people see different things; especially kids and adults, and it’s funny to hear” (Interview with author). Vizenor chooses the comic and the trickster to uncover the colonial simulations where, “The trickster, a semiotic sign in a third-person narrative, is never tragic or *hypotragic* [original emphasis], never the whole truth or even part truth” (Vizenor 1993, 11). The Vizenorian trickster narrative finds foundation in the oral traditions of Native storytelling to break the tragic cycles of western social science theory’s pursuit of truth. Vizenor frequently uses oral traditions of storytelling as the closest ‘methodology’ to break from analyzing American Indian culture through western lenses. Elaine A. Jahner (1993) eloquently articulates the modern misstep of privileging textual evidence over American Indian oral traditions due to conditioning and training of academics in western methodologies. The same academics that desire truisms to be found in the surface information on American Indians drown in the elusiveness of truth. In a turn toward creating new Indigenous theories founded in cultural specificity Jahner (1993) states:

During the last two decades many critics have joined in the process of tracking those conversations and metaphors—often extended into songs and poems and even novels—that show the oral traditions living beneath the surface of the written word that is our stock in trade. Much of our critical endeavor has been to work out instructions on how to breathe beneath the surface of the written word because most of us have been trained to walk on top of these particular waters. (156)

The theory of survivance involves traditional ways of knowing, natural reason, and reflexivity as a means to ‘breathe beneath the surface’ in order to create more appropriate

Indigenous discourses because, “Survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, detractions, obtrusions, the unbearable sentiments of tragedy, and the legacy of victimry. Survivance is the heritable right of succession or reversion of an estate and, in the course of international declarations of human rights, is a narrative estate of native survivance” (Vizenor 2008, 1). Vizenor is invested in creating new narratives that fuel social science discourse, as is the pursuit of Native art historical theorists like Rader, Berlo, Phillips, Rushing, and Chaat-Smith. Although Vizenor points out the problematic nature of ‘theory’ his work creates a narrative that points to worldview and analysis, thus a theory of survivance. Survivance theory includes the practice of survivance, which can be seen in American Indian graffiti murals that promote new understandings of the urban grand narrative.

A driving force of Native art (Berlo and Phillips 1998, 209) is to create culturally, tribally, and Nation specific narratives, and contemporaneously American Indian artists are using their artistic expression to continue the visibility of Native art as not ‘cultural artifact’ but revisions of American Indian survivance. Different productions of Native art are renunciations of historically damaging assumptions about the presence of American Indian peoples that are the products of simulation. The abundance of Native art has led to assertions that, “The contemporary vitality of Native American art is also evidence of an extraordinary story of survival” (Berlo and Phillips 1998, 1). Survival and the theory of survivance only interact at a basic ontological level of Indigenous endurance and persistence amidst assimilationist social and political pressures, “While ‘survival’ conjures images of stark minimalist clinging at the edge of existence, survivance goes beyond mere survival to acknowledge the dynamic and creative nature of Indigenous

rhetoric” (Stromberg 2006, 1). Vizenor’s survivance promotes a notion of dynamism in relation to the properties of Native survivance that extends further than a basic notion of survival:

Native literary artists in the furtherance of natural reason create the promise of aesthetic sentiments, irony, and practices of survivance. The standard dictionary definitions of *survivance* [original emphasis] do not provide the natural reason or sense of the word in literature. Space, time, consciousness, and irony are elusive references, although critical in native history and literary sentiments of the word *survivance* [original emphasis]. (Vizenor 2008, 19-18).

Vizenor’s focus on the literary spectacle is transferable to the material and visual realm of Native art through the ontological application of sovereignty, self-determination, and identity.

Modernist American Indian artists have produced artworks of survivance that complement Vizenor’s notion that, “survivance is the continuance of stories, not a mere reaction, however pertinent” (Vizenor 2008, 1). A guiding sentiment of survivance is evaluation and redefinition of the simulations of dominance and victimry, “offer[ing] natives modes of personal and social renewal attained through welcoming unpredictable cultural reorientations. These reorientations promise radically to transform current native life without requiring abandonment of the enduring value of their precontact cultural successes” (Kroeber 2008, 25). American Indian artists of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century have provided a foundation for cultural reorientation through abstract artworks that use a playful irony of historical representation with a contemporary tease of modernity much like Vizenor’s postindian and trickster. Beginning with the works of the Kiowa 5 and onto the works of Fritz Scholder and T.C. Cannon a contemporary Native art shift occurred in the early-to-mid twentieth century toward acknowledging the silliness of

colonial simulation and reorienting the spectacle to modern American Indian notions of sovereignty, self-determination, and identity. Scholder's *American Portrait with Flag* for example has become famous for the mixture of artistic abstraction with an American Indian partially draped in an American flag. Both the title and image including an ironic mixture of American, flag, feather, etc. are acts of survivance by reorientation of American Indian simulation by and American Indian artist. As Berlo and Phillips (1998) state, "Both Scholder's expressionist style and Cannon's pop-art imagery, however, were deployed in order to explore a politics of identity that was new to both Native and non-Native art. Both artists reclaimed and subverted the stereotypical, pervasive images of 'Indianness'" (225). The American Indian modernist painters and Vizenor have begun a revolution of simulation that has created a movement toward realistic and modern representations of sovereignty, self-determination, and identity.

American Indian artistic and material productions have long provided cross-cultural and cross-tribal communication of these ontologies (Berlo and Phillips 1998, 21) and contemporary American Indian artwork is an important impetus of communication. Berlo and Phillips (1998) ruminate on cross-community communication stating, "Inherent in the arguments of Heap of Birds, Rushing, and Bernstein is a common set of criteria for modern Indian art: the intended audience includes those outside the community, the issue of communication with those outsiders is a critical part of the discourse, and issues of cultural survival combined with resistance to white domination are at the forefront" (214). Berlo and Phillips statement here is very much along the lines of Eco, Baudrillard, Lambropoulos, and Lyotard's notions in postmodern aesthetic where new worlds of communication are opened up as aesthetic coding offers the

communicative act between art and observer. By including Native public art and graffiti muralism the world of communication is taken out of the museum and gallery and infused into the public aesthetic. Vizenor himself has stated that contemporary Native art has found appreciation in the fine art world when it redefines the colonial simulations of authenticity and the communicative power of American Indian artistic reevaluation of image. He agrees that Fritz Scholder's work in divergent abstract painting has done more for accurate representation of contemporary American Indian sovereignty, self-determination, and identity than ongoing realist artworks of tribal ancestors and non-American Indian artists. Vizenor (2010) states, "Scholder rejected the simulated traditional images of Natives and painted abstract portrayals of Natives, which ran counter to the simulations of popular culture" (44). Scholder's work is certainly the first to break out of the traditional Native art motifs and gain wide acceptance from the modern art world. This breaking from tradition has inspired other contemporary American Indian artists to explore new avenues of art and encouraged the art world to reevaluate representations of Native art. Vizenor sees Native art as a place where large strides have been made in terms of American Indian representations of sovereignty, "This breakthrough in Native arts from simulation and traditional representation...to abstract figuration and expressionism was grasped almost immediately by most aficionados of Native American art" (Vizenor 2010, 44).

The newest artistic breakthrough has come in American Indian graffiti muralists who have taken this abstract and deconstructionist approach out of the gallery and museum and into public spaces in true acts of sovereignty, self-determination, and identity over image and space. American Indian graffiti muralists are creating new

representations through Native public art similar to the accomplishments of Scholder and Cannon in studio art. American Indian graffiti muralism functions as a new narrative of ontological representation by changing the images and ideas of American Indians in both American Indian and non-American Indian publics. As Fragua feels:

And for me I want all indigenous art to be relevant, I want everybody to create something meaningful...But if you're a proponent or you're a leader of this or any other communal movement in identity or culture...create work that's going to contribute rather than be a distraction, and I feel a lot of it's a distraction from the real issues and the real stories that need to be spoken and heard" (Interview with author).

These graffiti muralists are changing the American semiotic and intellectual landscape regarding American Indian presence using the physical and visual cityscape to take a sovereign approach over the aesthetics concerning their tribal heritage. Traveling through the ideals of sovereignty, self-determination, and identity as singular yet interconnected aspects of American Indian graffiti muralism can help in understanding how this medium of artistic expression creates a narrative of survivance. The following murals were presented to different American Indian graffiti muralists for approval of usage to exemplify sovereignty, self-determination, and identity, all were agreed upon.



**Figure 2.1** and **Figure 2.2:** Nanibah “Nani” Chacón and Jaque Fragua, MOCNA, Santa Fe, NM.

Photo credit: Jaque Fragua and Gavin A. Healey

## Sovereignty

Surveying the breadth of American Indian graffiti murals and the different stylistic choices there is a large opening for acceptance by observers of different aesthetic tastes. Within American cityscapes observers not familiar with American Indian iconography or only basic knowledge of popular media simulations of American Indians, American Indian graffiti murals provide an impetus to larger awareness of American Indian presence. American Indian graffiti muralist Jaque Fragua speaks to this assertion stating, “So there’s things that are universal and the iconography and symbolism and the designs, I feel like those are the root language of human beings or people’s understanding even before they learn how to speak when they’re babies and there’s colors that babies grasp, there’s designs that babies grasp too” (Interview with author). As acts of survivance these murals are displaying sovereignty both explicitly and implicitly by living in public spaces where visual and semiotic American Indian presence tends to be void or subversive. American Indian graffiti murals are the opportunity to express sovereignty in explicit means like Figure 2.1 and by more subversive means, like Figure 2.2. Utilizing the same sub-textual nature of public signage that project omnipresence of governmental and private stewardship and a claiming of public spaces for municipalities, murals like Figures 2.1 and 2.2 function as markers of American Indian presence and reclamation in a cityscape.

The murals in Figures 2.1 and 2.2 represent reclamation of image and space in an act of sovereignty; they are self-governing definitions conveyed to the public perceptions through artistic aesthetic. The public nature of the murals takes the narrative and practice of survivance out of the confined museum and/or gallery and presents it in a public

display. This opens the dialogue of American Indian sovereignty to all public citizens instead of those that make a choice to navigate a museum or gallery. They become criticism of the hyperreal constructions and simulations of dominance in the American psyche. Figures 2.1 and 2.2 painted by Jaque Fragua and Nanibah “Nani” Chacón were commissioned on the façade outside the Museum of Contemporary Native Art (MOCNA) in Santa Fe, New Mexico where the passerby is introduced to a specific semiotic marker of American Indian sovereignty through American Indian graffiti muralism. These murals occupy the same placard on the front of MOCNA and were created on separate occasions with Figure 2.2 (2013) painted over 2.1 (2012) at a later date and speak to the ephemeral nature that graffiti muralism sometimes embodies. In different instances graffiti murals are commissioned over one another or due to short paint life, weather, demolition, etc. new murals replace the old. In Figure 2.1 the definition of American Indian sovereignty is lexically introduced into the Santa Fe Plaza with the abstraction of an upside down American flag, which traditionally signifies ‘distress.’ This mural proclaims that American Indian sovereignty is both an abstract notion and also distressed under colonial simulations. In creating an abstract advertisement for American Indian sovereignty Fragua and Chacón have communicated that this space is a point of reflection on the current state of American Indian sovereignty under a paternal United States government. The ironic postindian twist in this mural is using the basic semiotic structure of an American flag but abstracting it with angled red and white lines instead of the traditional horizontal design of the American national flag. This postindian play represents the non-linear cosmological beliefs of many American Indian ways of knowing that tend to be antithetical to western notions of linear time. The mural makes a

connection with American Indian literature and the partnership that all American Indian art can have in terms of political and theological sovereignty. As author Leslie Marmon Silko (1996) explains in *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit: Essays on Native American Life Today*:

For those of you accustomed to being taken from point A to point B to point C, this presentation may be somewhat difficult to follow. Pueblo expression resembles something like a spider's web--with many little threads radiating from the center, crisscrossing one another. As with the web, the structure emerges as it is made, and you must simply listen and trust...that meaning will be made. (48-9)

Fragua and Chacón have asked the public observer to see the dynamic nature of American Indian theological sovereignty and acknowledged the unique political sovereignty of American Indian peoples through the abstraction of the American flag. They also chose to include southwestern American Indian iconography in place of the traditional stars in the American flag. The icon appears to the western observer as a variation of the Nazi swastika, but in Diné cosmology the “whirling logs” symbol<sup>22</sup> represents wind and the four cardinal directions joining together. Fragua articulates the universality of iconography as, “Yeah it’s Pueblo but I think a lot of the iconography is universal. A lot of it is expressive of the same thing. It’s like the word “love,” you can say it in so many different languages but in essence it’s the same thing” (Interview with the author). The infusion of American Indian iconography adds an index for those familiar with the symbol creating a sense of place for American Indian communal presence in the Santa Fe Plaza. A trickster trait in this iconographic usage can be found in the adjacent structure to MOCNA. The Cathedral Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi sits

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<sup>22</sup> See, Simpson, Georgiana Kennedy. 2003. *Navajo ceremonial baskets: Sacred symbols, sacred space*. Summertown, Tenn: Native Voices.

across the street facing MOCNA and the murals, so by placing a different signpost of theology begs a semiotic interplay between Catholic and American Indian cosmology. Yatika Fields who was commissioned to paint the pillars just under this placard talks to the nature of painting in this specific location, “But you know right across the street from these pillars of MOCNA is St. Francis Cathedral built in 1886 and Santa Fe is already kind of this place with a lot of history, and you know it’s kind of whimsical and magical in its own – its little adobe structures adorned with southwest colors, piñon scent in the air” (Interview with author). The mural is temporary where the cathedral is stationary, so the mural is a trickster sign of comedy to the spiritual freedom of the Santa Fe Plaza public square, “Freedom is a sign, and the trickster is chance and freedom in a comic sign; comic freedom is a “doing,” not an essence, not a museum being, not an aesthetic presence... The trickster is agonistic imagination and aggressive liberation, a “doing” in narrative points of view and outside the imposed structures” (Vizenor 1993, 13). The mural is living outside of the museum, marking American Indian presence, liberating the public space occupied by a singular spiritual monologue, and a binding element to the imagined normality of the surrounding semiotic elements of the Plaza.

As the mural changed to proclaim “Civil War” the new semiotic image creates another practice of sovereignty. The idea that American Indians and/or the United States could engage, or is currently, in a second civil war acknowledges the sovereign right of Native Nations to self-government. The mural is a marker and educator that Native Nations have their own tribal governments, albeit under a ‘domestic dependent’ definition according to U.S. doctrine, that function as governing bodies for American Indian communities. This type of acknowledgement offers a space where American

Indian and non-American Indian observers can reflect upon the relationships between Native Nations and the United States governments. The use of lexical messaging in Fragua work is not taken lightly as he states:

I saw kids doing letters in their notebooks and they were doing – practicing graffiti letters. So that kind of turned me onto – you know taking the idea of writing and calligraphy to a new level and I was – I had good penmanship as well so I really thought that, you know it was one of those mind-blowing times when you're a kid and you see someone write a letter in a crazy way that you've never seen before. That really, you know, made me look at lettering and typography in a different way and you know living on the reservation there's not that much in terms of that. Unless it's on like old signs or trading posts stuff, or like government documents or even, uh, commodity labeling, stuff like that. So after that then I started really looking at typography and lettering as a real form of communication. (Interview with author)

As a postindian irony the billboard suggests contestation between the two governments being at war with one another. The Civil War mural asks observers to reflect upon relationships in a quasi-comedic fashion, but address an important right of Native Nations in their sovereign status. Fragua and Chacón have presented a postindian irony in the simulation of tragedy in American Indian sovereignty, a notion that some non-American Indian U.S. citizens may have no knowledge of, through an abstraction of internal warfare that has historically situated Native Nations in a tragic narrative. These murals are acts of survivance in renouncing ideals of dominance and victimry under political and theological systems of oppression instituted by the American government. In a true act of survivance and sovereignty the murals project a vibrant and staunch presence of American Indians to the public through the semiotic imagery. The counter-narrative expressed through American Indian graffiti murals such as these examples adds to a more positive contemporary presence that combats the destructive simulation of absence. As expressions of sovereignty American Indian graffiti murals can utilize different lexical

and iconographic elements in the practice of survivance. The power of graffiti murals such as Figures 2.1 and 2.2 to claim space once occupied by Puebloan peoples and infuse a cross-cultural communal space of reflection on the historical and contemporary public space in Santa Fe is an important ally to survivance narratives.

Survivance in practice with American Indian graffiti muralism is a (re)claiming of American Indian identity by means of creating spaces of reflection and education for the viewing public. The relationship between survivance, semiotic narratives of sovereignty, and American Indian graffiti muralism create a space that reminds the non-American Indian public that American Indians are self-governing and hold the right to do so while also creating a space of unification for American Indian citizens to take pride in. Vizenor is right in illuminating the falsehoods that have arisen through non-American Indian simulations, marginalization, and fantasies that have come to represent American Indian people. These representations defile the diversity of Native America and the 566 sovereign communities in the United States. Karl Kroeber (2008) supports Vizenor's claims of "indian" simulation, "[Vizenor's] persistent claim that indian [author uses the lower-case 'i' just as Vizenor] is an unreal construct of white colonialism, a stereotype that blocks authentic native survivance, dramatizes the historical fact that for most natives alive today continuity with their traditional cultures has been irretrievably disrupted" (27). Although there are ways to find unification in homogenized American Indian representations the historical non-American Indian representations have made attempts at finding a pan-tribal identity difficult (Rader 2011a). As Vizenor (2008) states, "The theories of survivance are elusive, obscure, and imprecise by definition, translation, comparison, and catchword histories, but survivance is invariably true and just in native

practice and company” (1). Vizenor acknowledges that survivance theory is difficult to define because of the historical misrepresentations perpetuated in different Medias since the time of European contact, but there is an inherent trust in “native practice and company.” What is accomplished here with American Indian graffiti muralism is a “true and just” representation that exposes the ideals of sovereignty, self-determination, and identity to observing publics.

Producing public art that (re)claims public space that was originally occupied by American Indian peoples aids a “just” definition of what American Indian sovereignty and self-determination embodies. Dean Rader (2011b) refers to Native public art and Heap of Birds *Wheel* (see Figure 1.6) stating, “His canvas is not canvas but the built environment—as though the “structures” themselves function as metaphors for the constructed networks that under-gird the very foundation of American value systems” (148). American Indian graffiti murals function in a similar means through the practice of survivance that question American value systems. Value systems that perpetuate simulations of dominance, victimry, and violence in terms of American Indian peoples. Murals like “Sovereignty” and “Civil War” occupying the same space also speak to the ephemeral nature of this medium. The non-static nature of murals and erosion due to time, weather, life of the paint, or re-commission as in the case of the MOCNA placard can represent the erosion of American Indian sovereignty over decades of American governmental oversight, while also showcasing the persistence of Native Nations and peoples to exert and promote ongoing sovereignty. Creating spaces and a sense of place that offers semiotic encouragement to reflect upon histories for publics from all walks of life is important to creating a socially and politically conscious public. American Indian

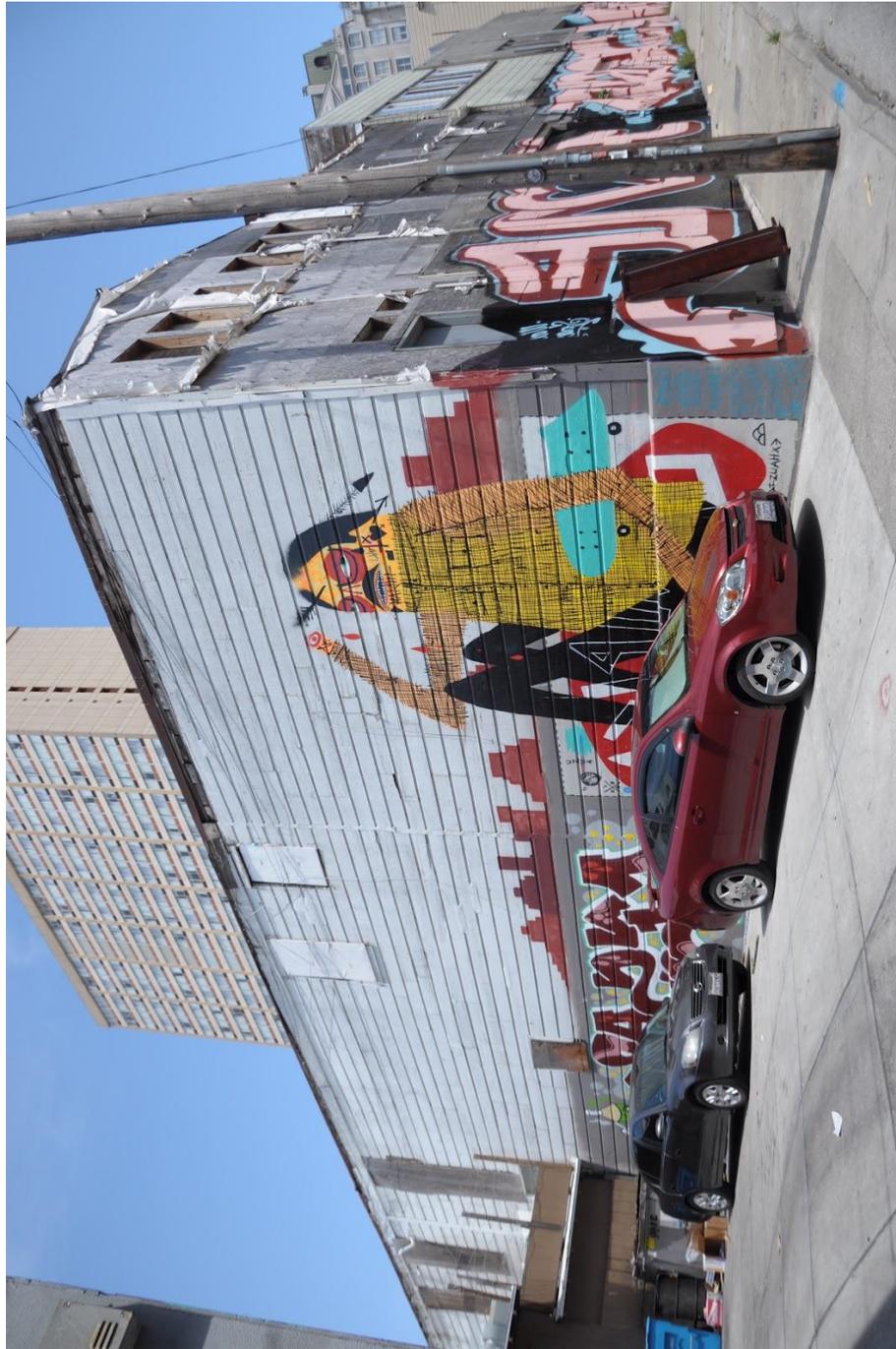
graffiti murals create this sense of place that encourages self-determined perceptions of sovereignty.



**Figure 2.3:** Detail of *American Indian Occupation* by Jaque Fragua and Spencer Keaton

Cunningham, Tenderloin District, San Francisco, CA.

Photo credit: Jaque Fragua



**Figure 2.4:** *American Indian Occupation* by Jaque Fragua and Spencer Keaton

Cunningham, Tenderloin District, San Francisco, CA.

Photo credit: Jaque Fragua

## Self-Determination

Following in the footsteps of Kabotie, Scholder, and Cannon creating contemporary public images of American Indian peoples is an important facet of American Indian graffiti muralism. In doing so American Indian graffiti artists are promoting a more welcoming sense of place for their counterparts and a venue for prideful navigation in the urban cityscape. There is also an element of social commentary that is encouraged in these images. For example in Figures 2.3 and 2.4 Jaque Fragua and Spencer Keaton Cunningham's mural "American Indian Occupation" in the Tenderloin District of San Francisco, California includes a representation that speaks to the condition of eroded American Indian occupation in the contemporary American purview. The imagery is an act of self-determination and survivance by deconstructing the simulation of 'noble savage' or 'stoic Indian' and instead presenting a contemporary image of an American Indian occupying space with social commentary contained in the arrow through his head and dismembered appendages. This image is very much akin to Scholder's famous painting *Indian with a Beer Can*, which as Dean Rader (2011b) explains, "the painting snarls at the viewer with a look of contempt. The sunglasses shield his eyes, denying us full access to him, while he enjoys complete access to us. A virtual panopticon of power and surveillance" (152). The arrow through the head accompanied by dismembered hand and foot the figure symbolizes the effects of colonization on American Indian peoples through simulations of the defeated and disenfranchised. This mural is an act of self-determination in bringing a vivid depiction of contemporary American Indian presence to the urban center of San Francisco, but the juxtaposition against the rendition of the city skyline in the background also points out the struggles of

American Indian peoples to find an identity in American urban cityscapes. Fragua's placement of the lexical "occupied" behind the figure harkens to the historical occupation of American Indian identity by popular media. This mural is an act of American Indian self-determination and sovereignty by encouraging a new occupying of representation through the practice of survivance. This is the same kind of postindian trickster play that Vizenor uses in his writings, "[Vizenor's] fundamental rhetorical strategy is to seize key verbal sites of white racism and oppression and to turn them into bases for reconstituting the colonizer's language and social prejudices so as to empower new native imagining" (Kroeber 2008, 28). So just as Vizenor uses language to encourage evaluation so too does the American Indian graffiti muralist use semiotics as encouraging self-determination through reclamation of public image. Playing the trickster role these acts of survivance also shift the contemporary images of American Indians and, "Through playing tricks with his oppressor's language to upset his sociopolitical power structures, Vizenor reawakens the individual visionaries that he identifies as uniquely characterizing New World natives" (Kroeber 2008, 28).

The image in "American Indian Occupation" can be taken as a disturbing abstraction of mutilation and disfigurement, but the chaos created by negative aesthetic reaction in an observer gives the image the ability to address the colonial misrepresentations of tragedy. Vizenor (1993) supports chaos through trickster play in the hypotragic narratives that have dominated American Indian simulations through, "The comic and the tragic, the *hypotragic* [original emphasis], are cultural variations; the trickster is opposed by silence and isolation, not social science. The antithesis of the tragic in social science is chaos, rumors and wild conversations" (12). Creating chaos in

built cityscapes that project a normalized environment has become a tradition of graffiti muralism. When cityscapes mimic each other they project a normalized sense of place, the early transgressive and illegal graffiti murals disrupted this normalization. American Indian graffiti muralists use transgressive stigmas concerning aerosol art of the past as an ally in promoting American Indian self-determination and a counter-narrative to absence. Within the chaos that the artwork can place in the public forces a reevaluation of societal semiotic norms of environment and hypotragic stereotypes. These murals are creating a public dialectic, something not confined to academic literature, theory, and conversations. Vizenor points to Paul Watzlawick's analysis of social sciences where there is a, "supposition that the world cannot be chaotic—not because we have any proof for this view, but because chaos would simply be intolerable" (Watzlawick qtd in Vizenor 1993, 12). Thus, Fragua and other American Indian graffiti artists infuse bits of presumed chaos by using strikingly visceral imagery of American Indians to catch the attention of observers in the silence and isolation of the cityscape. Images such as Figure 2.3 and 2.4 promote American Indian self-determination in addressing the chaos in being American Indian in the 21<sup>st</sup> century navigating urban landscapes with presumed identities of tragedy, "This trickster storytelling liberates natives from both their current victimization by white culture and the subtler self-limiting impulse to accept themselves as representative survivors of cultures dead just as Latin is a dead language" (Kroeber 2008, 30).



**Figure 2.5:** Mural by Jaque Fragua and Tom Greyeyes in Phoenix, AZ.

Photo credit: Jaque Fragua

Much of Vizenor's fictional work involves tricksters who constitute totems of civil, emotional, and physical chaos or in Vizenor's words, "The trickster summons agonistic imagination in a narrative, a language game, and livens chaos more than bureaucracies" (Vizenor 1993, 188). When looking at the function of American Indian graffiti muralism and the artists infiltrating colonized spaces both assume a sense of trickster activity in using an artistic medium entrenched in a mythos of chaos and anarchistic background to illuminate social issues. Fragua speaks to this outsider feeling stating:

I felt like an outsider when I got there and the only people I would connect with were people who didn't fit in either, and those type of people are graffiti writers or... And it just made me more – it just made me empowered in being Native, in being different and being on the outside. And the way I channeled that feeling was through art and through being on the street and being in my own world or creating my own reality and having those experiences. I still feel that today, I still feel that expulsion from mainstream society. Or even, even just like any society you know, traditional or in art world, graffiti world. (Interview with author)

American Indian graffiti murals that exemplify social problems facing Native Nations can embody trickster traits by unsettling the presumed healthy landscape with messages, and/or images, of social ills (See Figure 2.5). The artist and mural become trickster-esc and more importantly express the ideals of survivance by placing American Indian presence in spaces void of such representation. Combating the vantage point of absence and becoming a system of narrative within the image or message is an act of self-determination within the cityscape. The effects on the observer(s) could be similar to the Vizenorian or tribal trickster of oral tradition by insinuating an evaluation of the ordered landscape and imagery that precludes much of the urban landscape. This energizes a reevaluation of place by functioning as a signpost of sovereignty and self-determination

inherent in Native Nations. Murals like figures 2.3, 2.4, and 2.5 use a mixture of the visual, abstract, and lexical in a semiotic announcement of human rights and social justice issues facing Native Nations and the right to self-govern.

When speaking to the functionality of American Indian graffiti muralism survivance theory offers a foundation for discourse on the permeating effects on public landscapes of American Indian iconography. The act of creating American Indian presence in places of presumed absence, like urban centers, reminds citizens of the colonial histories of colonized spaces. American Indian graffiti muralism in this regard functions as an educational tool of visual acknowledgement denouncing ideals of dominance. Just like Vizenor's writing the murals at times, "are founded on verbally turning upside down actual social circumstances of natives in the contemporary white world" (Kroeber 2008, 27). American Indian graffiti murals in urban centers can be tools used to illuminate socio-political issues facing Indigenous peoples while also acting as symbols of sovereignty and self-determination in an otherwise subjugated, or muted, public mindset of dominance, victimry, and tragedy. As Kroeber believes, "The contemporary storier creates a new nativeness expressing an imaginative reformulation of a specific cultural past by nativizing a present-day social situation" (Kroeber 2008, 30). In becoming part of the urban landscape American Indian graffiti muralism is an act of survivance by using artistic aesthetic to pervade majority occupation of public opinion concerning American Indian peoples.



**Figure 2.6:** Jaque Fragua and Shepard Fairey, Indian Alley, Los Angeles, CA.

Photo credit: Jaque Fragua

## Identity

The interplay between survivance theory and American Indian graffiti muralism creates a counter-narrative that combats negative cultural stereotyping and produces more authentic public identity for American Indian peoples. They incite public discourse through the semiotic elements contained within the art in conjunction with the locale of the artwork that promote a cross-cultural dialogue on identity. To pair survivance theory with Native public art, and additionally test the pairing with public opinion, can aid efforts in analyzing public discussion on American Indian graffiti muralism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in terms of identity and reclamation of space, while debunking historically damaging stereotypical imagery concerning Indigenous peoples. As seen in Figure 2.6 a mural can embody survivance by coopting popular culture and reframing it into a contemporary sign for American Indian identity. This mural collaboration between Jaque Fragua and Shepard Fairey in Los Angeles's 'Indian Alley' reconstructs contemporary imagery and with verbiage that speaks very directly to the practice of survivance. "WE ARE STILL HERE" and "Decolonize and Keep Calm" interact with the imagery of a contemporary American Indian man with his horse and the popular design appropriated from British World War II propaganda in the same means American Indian imagery has been appropriated in various ways since the travel brochures and dime novels of early 19<sup>th</sup> century America (Sheyahshe 2008). The interplay between these two murals visually introduces the notions of contemporary American Indian identity in opposition to the headdress, loincloth, bow and arrow, etc. imagery that has proliferated popular media by showcasing a young man from the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. The murals together promote a psychological break from colonized ideals and debunk a sense of

American Indian tragedy, “Tragedy is not the primary mode of native North American storytelling and may indeed be a peculiarly specialized and rare feature of but a few societies” (Kroeber 2008, 37). The use of a contemporary American Indian partnered with the lexical WE ARE STILL HERE the mural promotes a self-determined modernity of identity. Fragua discusses this notion in his work stating:

I think about the future a lot I – I really don’t put too much emphasis on the present moment. I’d say place the least emphasis on the present moment, I think a lot about the past and I think a lot about the future – I think most about the future because as, for me as it is now I’m already dead. You know I’m like a dead man walking I feel like, and whatever I do whatever I create from this point on has to be relevant to the future generations. (Interview with author)

The interplay with a call to decolonize narratives of American Indian sovereignty in urban cityscapes promotes the reformation of American Indian identity in the citizen public at large. Cityscapes are meant to perpetuate a hyperreal simulation of governmental and cultural dominance and these murals are questioning that dominance by creating signs that promote American Indian presence, identity, and self-determination. As Ying-Wen Yu (2008) articulates with Baudrillard:

The simulation of *Indian* [original emphasis] not only, as Baudrillard says, “threatens the difference between the ‘true’ and the ‘false,’ the ‘real’ and the ‘imaginary,’” but also destroys “every referential, of every human objective, that shattered every ideal distinction between true and false, good and evil.” The simulation or the stereotypical representations reiterate throughout history and culture... “[the capital] does nothing but multiply the signs and accelerate the play of simulation” (95).



**Figure 2.7:** Thomas “Breeze” Marcus, *Phoenix*, Phoenix, AZ

Photo credit: Thomas “Breeze” Marcus

Appropriating the imagery and iconography of municipalities is a common trope of the American Indian graffiti muralist. This is done using the same methodological appropriation American Indian image, culture, and traditions has endured through practices of appropriation by outsiders and in a practice of survivance American Indian graffiti muralists are using the same methodological appropriation of outsider imagery to reclaim public space. The choice to appropriate such imagery is motivation to question and understand municipal identity because as Vizenor declares that the most prominent urban American Indian semiotics are, “hyperreal simulations of Indian, created from a model without actual origin or reality” (Vizenor 1994, 4). What American Indian graffiti murals like Thomas “Breeze” Marcus’s mural in Figure 2.7 have done is taken the hyperreal images of municipal identity and placed an iconography of the original Indigenous peoples within the image. This is very much a trickster play on civic identity when a city’s image is juxtaposed or infused with the Indigenous symbology of the original inhabitants of the area within a public artwork. For instance, in Figure 2.7 Thomas “Breeze” Marcus’s mural exhibits his pride for the city of Phoenix, Arizona while also paying homage to his Tohono and Akimel O’odham heritage. The design in the phoenix based on O’odham basket weavings act as an act of identity and reminder to Phoenix citizens that they occupy traditional O’odham lands. Marcus himself explains:

Although I still use the medium of spray paint, and my intricate line work woven patterns have basic graffiti letter structure and influence, I consider my work to be abstract and more about the concept of weaving together styles and cultures, especially my own Native cultures. I also paint a lot of desert landscapes and sunsets. The desert is home for my people the Tohono O’odham and Akimel O’odham, both original inhabitants of the [Arizona] Valley and surrounding deserts to the south. (“Artist Interview: Q & A with Thomas Breeze Marcus”)

In an act of survivance Marcus has simulated the municipal iconography while making a tribally specific statement about honoring the original inhabitants of the area. The sacred mountains with cellular towers in the backdrop juxtaposed against the cityscape speak to the denunciation of occupation and O'odham urban identity in Phoenix. Marcus has infused American Indian iconography as a means to educate and create a public identity through semiotic representation of his cultural heritage. Placing traditional O'odham design inside the symbol of a phoenix, closely related to the icon used by the city of Phoenix speaks to the idea of blending identities in suggesting that the O'odham are still present in the city's population and landscapes. The elements of self-determination of O'odham people as rising above the city speaks to persistence of culture in one of the United States largest populated and richly diverse cities. This abstract appropriation of municipal iconography functions as a fusing of the urban and traditional creating a multifaceted identity for urban American Indian Phoenicians. The non-O'odham citizen and American Indian citizen can both find a source of pride in the city through the murals semiotics, while also acknowledging the colonial histories that built boundaries later named Phoenix, Arizona.



**Figure 2.8:** Yatika Fields mural, Okmulgee, OK.

Photo credit: Yatika Fields

The imagery used by American Indian graffiti artists have also tested the expressionist and abstract when including traditional American Indian iconography. Yatika Fields has pushed the limits of this abstraction in many of his murals by reshaping and reforming imagery and using vibrant color schemes to represent American Indian identity. The reformation of this imagery aids a restructuring of urban American Indian imagery and identity in the same means Vizenor (1994) asks for a reimagining of simulation where, “simulated leaders in the cities who wore bone, beads, and leather, and strained to be the representations of traditional tribal cultures...The private, and the remembrance of the sacred, was overturned once more; the privacy of ceremonies became a simulation, and the absence of the tribal real became the real in public media. The new simulated leaders in the cities...had encountered the unreal associations of institutions” (149). As seen in Figure 2.9 Fields has used abstract expressionism to bring natural and traditional tribal elements to the urban landscape through the fire and the hands holding stickball sticks. The playfulness of this iconography amidst the vibrant color scheme act as a promotion of contemporary identity and survivance in a trickster play on the cityscape. These reminders of American Indian identity and presence nestled within the monotone colors and buildings command viewer’s attention and infuse ideals of American Indian presence. In *Postmodernism, or, the cultural logic of late capitalism* Fredrick Jameson (1991) contemplates the idea of spectacle stating, “the culture of the simulacrum comes to life in a society where exchange value has been generalized to the point at which the very memory of use is effaced, a society of which Guy Debord has observed, in an extraordinary phrase, that in it ‘the image has become the final form of commodity reification’” (18). Fields’s Osage, Creek, and Cherokee heritage is displayed

as an act of (re)claiming the monotone atmosphere of the surrounding buildings and projects an honorable reification, or material object on display, of American Indian culture that was relocated to Oklahoma territory a century before. As Fields himself explains:

I would say there's elements of [my heritage] in there for sure. I think, you know, art's an expressive – an expression of yourself, and with that I try to include my everyday surroundings, everyday travels and then just try to come up with new – new ideas and atmospheres with it. And then, those upbringings and those inspirations that you have from growing up with it, you know, do come out in your work. So I mean it's not all that but yeah there's elements of it definitely. (Interview with author)

Once again the projection of identity, self-determination, and sovereignty over the image is presented to the public through iconographic detail, but in this case abstracted to fuel the spectacle. The abstract expressionist backdrop can entice observers that prefer such artistic style to engage with this place in new ways. When combined with previous examples and other murals Fields's work adds a new dimension of the pastiche between modern, abstract, and traditional musings to the observing population who appreciate different artistic style. Jameson (1991) explains of the pastiche, “this omnipresence of pastiche is not incompatible with a certain humor, however, nor is it innocent of all passion: it is at the least compatible with addiction—with a whole historically original consumers appetite for a world transformed into sheer images of itself and for pseudoevent and spectacle” (Jameson quoted in Yu 2008, 99). Projecting the ideals of sovereignty, self-determination, and identity through iconographic detail, abstraction, color use, and reclamation of traditional space Fields has created a spectacle within the cityscape. Fields proclaims about the spectacle and pastiche:

Different people are going to see different things, you know. Kids see candy and hamburgers and stuff, and adults will see maybe sexual things or – you know I mean everybody sees something different, especially different ages. But that’s the fun thing about a painting, So I don’t like to come out and say this is that and that is this– especially if it commissions particular objects or things or scenarios bend towards this is what that is...I like to just paint and see what emerges. (Interview with author)

It is also compatible to Vizenor’s trickster narratives as spectacle and clear chaotic juxtaposition with the surrounding buildings. Fields mural is a mixture of contemporary identity and honoring of the sacred through the different semiotic elements contained within the installation. Murals such as Figures 2.6, 2.7, and 2.8 all work together to create spaces of natural reason and reflection on contemporary American Indian identity. They beg a reevaluation of the stereotypical through lexical, iconographic, and abstraction of popular notions of American Indian urban narratives.

### Conclusions

The idea that survivance lives within American Indian graffiti muralism is apparent in the essence of promoting American Indian stations of sovereignty, self-determination, and identity with the urban cityscape. The murals advertise a semiotic American Indian presence in urban areas where there is presumed absence. The murals are signposts that encourage acknowledgment of Native Nations as present and vibrant pieces of the American cityscape. The sanctioning and commissioning of American Indian graffiti muralism has provided the same counter-narrative that Kabotie, Scholder, and Cannon brought about in Native fine art in the early-to-mid 20<sup>th</sup> century that renounces the dominance over image construction. American Indian graffiti murals have taken the practice of survivance off the page and out of the museum and gallery, staking claim in urban public spaces through various means of semiotic play. They are creating a

new sense of place in the modern American cityscape that embraces the diverse histories of Native Nations and America.

As sovereign signposts these murals are a reminder that Native Nations are an important part of the American social and political fabric. Through a postindian play in chaos American Indian graffiti muralists pieces are the call for acknowledgement of American Indian sovereignty. They are deconstructing the hyperreal and the hypotragic sentiments of colonization by producing murals that attract a myriad of viewership. Using iconographic and lexical languages elements in abstract ways American Indian graffiti murals give viewers of all aesthetic tastes a point of reference and reflexivity. They are providing points of cross-cultural communication that is unconfined to pages or classrooms. The subjective nature of art allows this medium of public art to reach different audiences. The application and observations here are subjective also but as Fields nicely articulates, “Oh yeah, they claim space previously where nothing was, or continue over an older existing space. They open up that space for thinking, they open up that space to a new reality and new realm of thinking... so a lot of people can kind of just free-associate with it” (Interview with author). Sovereignty can be an allusive ontology for any citizen in the contemporary world and the more they are reminded of the beauty in the inherent rights to self-govern the world is less controlled by hierarchies of power and more by the citizen public. American Indian graffiti murals like Figure 2.1 and 2.5 are reminders of the inherent sovereignty and free will of all human beings. Going one step further these murals are reminders that American Indian sovereignty is under duress if we are not to honor this inherent right. The deeply intertwined promotion of social

justice in American Indian graffiti murals furthers other ontological rights and beliefs through self-determination and identity.

The murals promote American Indian self-determination through trickster play and deconstructing the hyperreal simulations of identity created for American Indian peoples and not always by American Indian peoples. As with any ethnicity, the ever-changing identity of contemporary American Indians is expressed through these murals and a space of honorable acknowledgement in diversity among Native Nations is omnipresent in American Indian graffiti murals. This observation comes from a non-American Indian researcher who's observations of how urban American Indian identity has been historically absent or simply used damaging homogenized iconography to promote American Indian presence, but what has changed is a honorable promotion of inclusion alongside large public markers that combat the absent and damaging. When American Indian graffiti muralist choose to reevaluate image and sign such as Figures 2.3, 2.5, and 2.6 there is a respectful promotion of self-determination in Native Nations. They also encourage the non-American Indian to reevaluate the validity of other homogenized or damaging imagery of American Indians in urban environments. Using the lexical language of "Honor the Sacred" (Figure 1.4), "Justice and Protection for Native Women Everywhere!!!" (Figure 2.5), "WE ARE STILL HERE" (Figure 2.6), and so on these murals promote a sense of self-determination and identity cross-culturally to audiences from all walks of life. Fields sentiments honor this thought stating, "It can just be a mural about just straight expressionism, and then that people gather what they want from it, and you know, you can have murals that can be about a statement, a political statement, they can be controversial pieces, you know they can really cause anguish.

Drive questions into people's minds and, or you can have just tribute Mural to a person that has passed away. So there's a lot of aspects of murals" (Interview with author).

Reframing American Indian identity for American Indian and non-American Indian audiences decolonizes, as the mural in Figure 2.6 asks of us, the common stereotypes of American Indian peoples. Providing the citizen public with image and message that opens up a sense of place by creating a counter-narrative of informed inclusion. There is also the element of authenticity of representation in terms of identity that can be questioned when these murals are added to public discourse. American Indian graffiti murals are infusing the contemporary identity of American Indian communities into the urban landscape. The murals promote a community building aspect by asking citizens to acknowledge and think about the space in which they occupy. The sense of place is articulated by the suggestion that our diverse citizen public can be explored first through artistic expression and furthered in social and political arenas.

Moving through the ideals of sovereignty, self-determination, and identity in terms of survivance what is found is that American Indian graffiti murals are providing narratives of survivance by (re)claiming parts of the cityscape and promoting a more knowledgeable public on what the term American Indian embodies. Reclaiming such space for American Indian or Indigenous peoples is an important practice of survivance because it aids in the sociopolitical climate within that space. Artistic expression can be a great caveat and ally to social justice issues and with American Indian graffiti muralism the message is taken out into the public. In order to promote inclusive sense of place in the citizen public all the narratives that make up a complex American dialectic must be given credence. American Indian graffiti muralism has become an important practice of

survivance because it gives credence to a minority population while inviting a cross-cultural exchange that is not always overtly promoted in our public spaces.

### Chapter 3: Geosemiotic Theory in Action

The modern urban landscape has seen many transformations as buildings, signage, and public artworks continue to reflect the semiotic evolution of spectrums for the citizen public. Daily urban life inundates the passerby with millions of semiotic signatures as citizens move through the urban terrain. In these transformations social scientists are continually seeking to pinpoint the interactions of our built physical places through theory and analysis. The field of Linguistic Landscapes (LLs) has created a community of researchers interested in, “consider[ing] languages and scripts embedded in larger contexts of the semiotic representation of the signs. The approach stresses the interconnection of multiple modes of representation of linguistic and semiotic resources” (Bever 2015, 233). One of the main tenets within LLs is the observation of multimodality where visual design in signage, “combines print, image, form, layout, code preference and color” (Bever 2015, 233), as different modes of analysis in public signage. Multimodal discourse investigates the different layers of a sign and looks for the interconnectivity within those layers that provide meaning to the sign. LLs and multimodality are a great compliment to American Indian graffiti mural analysis because of the multiple modes, layers, and meaning contained within the installations. They are also good partners to survivance theory in locating the points of meaning contained in the murals that speak to elements of survivance theory. LLs scholars have begun to open up the definition of linguistics to include semiotic language with the lexical. Bever (2015) suggests that the field of LLs benefits from, “the notion of text in a broad semiotic sense; meaning making in LLs involves multiple semiotic and linguistic resources...which facilitate negotiation of ideologies and discourse in particular socio-cultural and geo-

political contexts” (233). Narrowing the LL lens even further the theory of Geosemiotics is another compliment to multimodal and survivance theory analysis on American Indian muralism because it involves investigating the modes as they pertain to sense of place. As Alastair Pennycook (2010) states, “Graffiti, as both products of artists moving through an urban landscape and as art viewed in motion, are part of the articulation of the cityscape” (137). The articulation is furthered through focused geosemiotic, multimodal, and survivance analysis.

*Geosemiotics* was coined by Ronald Scollon and Suzanne Scollon (2003) and intends to determine how, “an integrative view of [the] multiple semiotic systems which together form the meanings of which we call place” (12). This theoretical framework is used to interpret how we contextualize space, namely public spaces, in different community contexts. This is done by categorizing different human physical manifestations according to placement in public spheres and discussing the modals of each particular semiotic element in terms of how they together develop a sense of place. There are three fundamental principles, or modals, used in geosemiotic analysis that aid in understanding how public spaces develop perceptions of place in the observer. In geosemiotic analysis the semiotic interaction of a space is explored through Indexicality, Dialogicality, and Visual Semiotics, which lead to inferences on the Social Action of the place perceptions. Social action is the product of the multimodal interaction between constructed physical space and the genesis of place perceptions. The principle of multimodality as explained by Irina Gendelman and Giorgia Aiello (2010) stemming from Gunther Kress’s and Theo Van Leeuwen’s (2001) work which involves the different semiotic coding mechanisms that, “helps us understand facades as an arrangement of

various modes of communication” (Gendelman and Aiello 2010, 259). Taking into account the different elements of the landscape and superimposing the three principles of geosemiotics onto American Indian graffiti murals it is possible to make inferences into the type of meanings that have been placed with a given space and the interactions of these meaning in place perceptions. The Scollons’ (2003) define the principles of Indexicality, Dialogicality, and Visual Semiotics as:

**Indexicality:** all semiotic signs, whether embodied or disembodied, have as a significant part of their meaning how they are placed in the world.

**Dialogicality:** all signs operate in aggregate. There is a double indexicality with respect to the meaning attached to the sign by its placement and its interaction with other signs...There is always a dynamic among signs, an intersemiotic, interdiscursive dialogicality.

**Visual Semiotics [Selection]:** any action selects a subset of signs for the actor’s attention. A person in taking action selects a pathway by foregrounding some subset of meanings and backgrounding others. (23)

Turning the geosemiotic focal point to American Indian graffiti murals within public space a cross-cultural communication of survivance can be found using these principles. It can be easy to look at a piece of public art and dismiss the communicative properties the installation holds, but as will be illuminated further looking at public artwork as a narrative sign the sense of place is effected along the lines of American Indian survivance. Rethinking murals in terms of signage helps set aside some of the subjective properties inherent in public art as a singular entity and instead consider the multimodal interaction with space and the surrounding structures, signs, and symbols. Exposing this

relationship is important because as David Crystal (2003), “stresses the notion of outdoor media as represented by posters, billboards, electric displays, shop signs, etc. as the most noticeable part of everyday life” (94). Adding American Indian graffiti murals to the list will invigorate LLs discourse greatly by adding a new ethnic artistic marker to the field of analysis.



**Figure 3.1:** Geosemiotic reading of *Estrella De Norte* winery mural, artist Jaque Fragua.

Photo credit: Gavin A. Healey

Geosemiotics can help define the operational impacts of graffiti murals in public spaces by illuminating the fluidity of public perceptions of “place.” To help visually expose geosemiotic methodology Figure 3.1<sup>23</sup> provides an example of how these principles work in terms of American Indian graffiti muralism. The wine barrels provide indexicality with the winery the mural is interacting with by pointing to the specific production, locale, and environment. Dialogically the mural is working in aggregate with the sculpture depicting human viewership, the winery, and the natural environment. The visual semiotics contained within the mural use a transformation from left to right, or vice versa, from bright pastel colors to muted earth tones creating a dynamic interplay of communication between the art and the environment. The North Star at the peak of the roof brings all three principles together as another multimodal element of the specific winery *Estrella De Norte*, dialogically the cycle of the ecological systems, and the visual semiotic representation suggesting navigation and/or direction. The social action becomes acceptance of this medium as part of the landscape and a dialectic of “place” by exposing the relationship of the artwork in terms of the locale and space it occupies, a winery in northern New Mexico. The application of the three systems provided in Figure 3.1 can be dually applied to other murals that provide lexical, or more objective, advertisement within the mural such as Figure 3.2.

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<sup>23</sup> This model was adopted from Image 1.04 in Scollon, Ronald, and Suzanne B. K. Scollon. 2003. *Discourses in place: language in the material world*. London: Routledge. Pg. 10.



**Figure 3.2:** *JWB* brewery mural, Art Basil 2013, Miami, FL. Artists Yatika Fields, Thomas “Breeze” Marcus, and Ben Angotti.

Photo credit: Yatika Fields

The “J.W.B” in this mural gives a specific lexical index that promotes the company logo and brewery within the building. Using the lexical index is comparative to other lexical advertisement common in the modern landscape for private businesses and LLs analysis. The mural expresses a dialogicality in the location of the mural, the Wynwood District of Miami, where every year during the Art Basel Festival of Art each wall in the area is resurfaced with a new graffiti mural. This particular mural in Figure 3.2 is the same wall in Figure 1.3 painted in 2012 after the previous year’s 2011 Art Basel exhibition, highlighting the important ephemeral nature of some graffiti murals this dialogicality of the murals working in aggregate to promote the evolution of American Indian survivance along different indexical semiotic iconography. The wall has become a marker for the changing images of survivance and the continued persistence of American Indian graffiti muralists to promote American Indian presence in the busy urban Wynwood District of Miami. What the ephemeral nature can add to LL and geosemiotic discourse is interconnectivity between ephemeral signage and modality. As signs change in visual semiotics the message can remain, this is much like when a public sign goes from monolingual to bilingual or trilingual. The dialogicality conveyed by this mural suggests that the business owners are purveyors of the arts and welcome the artisan consumer. A second dialectic mode is seen in the orange orb and black line designs of Thomas “Breeze” Marcus. As discussed in the prior chapter these designs are based on his O’odham heritage and dialogically speaking to Indigeneity and survivance of tradition one year after Jaque Fragua used Puebloan designs on the same wall. In another turn of artistic expression the visual semiotics of the J.W.B mural embody a mixture of the abstract and the realist by including a female American Indian figure in the upper right

portion of the mural much like the previous year's mural in Figure 1.3. As an advertisement the artists have decided to demarcate an American Indian presence, an act of survivance, suggesting that this business is culturally accepting and supportive of American Indian muralism. The turn to using realist iconography suggests a cross-cultural communication to the public through such signage. Modern private advertisement signage conveys different messages to the observer and in this example the artists have used private advertisement to (re)claim a certain piece of the Wynwood District for American Indian survivance.

The shift between private and municipal public art is a tricky labyrinth of message and/or intent. The private is a means to sell wares and goods to create a monetary profit. The municipal or public is meant to convey community aesthetics, regulatory statutes, and socio-political direction. Social action is effected in different ways between the two categories of signage, but graffiti murals tend to weave issues of advertisement and public communication. What these previous examples illuminate is that American Indian graffiti muralists use the medium as a forum of American Indian survivance, and presence, to create signage that is multilayered in meaning and geosemiotic interplay. The power of public art and muralism is the ability to contain a multimodal communication that other urban signage cannot due to restrictive social or political standards. Within the American cityscape the two types of signage have boundaries of communication. Graffiti murals, alongside other mediums of muralism, have a tradition of communicating location, community, and identity through multimodal visual representations of image, language, and color that broadens the boundaries of communication. Geosemiotic categorizing of public signage using the broader geography

of urban landscapes provides discussion on the social action the different signage creates for larger ideals of space, place, and survivance in a viewing public.

Building on the ephemeral contributions to geosemiotics and survivance there is also the transgressive stigmas that remain with graffiti muralism. Much like the history of aerosol art and graffiti, American Indian graffiti muralism is transgressive in some mindsets. The multi-layered transgressive nature between the medium and the subject matter that modern graffiti muralism has come to embody makes American Indian graffiti muralism an important tool of connectedness between geosemiotic and survivance analysis. As LLs scholar Pennycook (2009) states, “such images ‘speak to people,’ or put another way, they are readily interpretable in various ways. Yet they also transcend questions of particular languages and present instead a broader domain of social semiotics” (303). The transgressive nature of the murals in the urban landscape mimics the navigation between worlds of acceptance and renunciation that American Indian imagery must endure while navigating physical and mental landscapes in the United States and abroad. They also create a social semiotics affect the sense of place as a reference for contemporary representations of American Indian peoples. This makes American Indian graffiti muralism an important point of cross-cultural connection to sense of place in some audiences that feel isolated in the American urban municipal landscapes. The murals provide a source of normality and a source of empowerment in their communication of transgressive identity because, “[Graffiti is] about the semiotic reinterpretation of urban environments... [it] transforms cities into different kinds of places that carry not only the designs of urban planners but also the redesigns of urban dwellers” (Pennycook 2010, 142). This redesign is an invitation for the American Indian

and non-American Indian citizen public to contextualize the urban landscape in terms of transgressive attitudes and beliefs. They are asked to question how and where contemporary American identity is communicated, while offering the possibility for larger awareness of American Indian presence in the urban community. When the two positions of American Indian and non-American Indian encounter a space that includes an American Indian graffiti mural the sense of place invites a semiotic contextualization of transgressive attitudes, “We should be aware as well that what is ‘transgressive’ at one time can become itself a semiotic system that can be used symbolically at another time or in another place” (Scollon and Scollon 2003, 151). Those parties that embrace the interplay of the mural with surrounding structures and accept the sense of place as one of cross-cultural communication the transgressive nature of the mural is allowed deconstruction. These murals offer the opportunity to either a continued notion of “out-of-place” or the acceptance of the art as “part-of-place” through multimodal layers of semiotic display. In either positionality of the viewer, or actor, the murals act as a conduit to furthered discussion on socio-political and cross-cultural barriers of acceptance.

Transgressive semiotics are subject to attitudinal positions of what is permissible or sanctioned semiotic systems in space. In order to be transgressive the sign, or mural in this case, must be physically out of place according to indexicality. The complimentary layer of transgressive ideologies makes the sanctioned placement of American Indian graffiti murals a dualistic endeavor where the aggregate dialogicality is expressing modals of American Indian presence and acceptance of art and culture in the sense of place. When a business owner, gallery, museum, city official, etc. sanction a wall for an American Indian graffiti mural installation they are agreeing to promote all the dynamics,

social and political, that the label American Indian embodies. More specifically, they are promoting the ideals of sovereignty, self-determination, and identity through art aesthetic. Dwight Conquergood (1997) supports this promotion by stating, “[graffiti] is not formless or disorganized...it has its own internal structure and highly efficient strategies for mobilizing meaning” (358). Over the course of human history the arts have frequently been an impetus for creating ontological icons and symbols of indexicality, or location. Graffiti muralism embodies this notion because, “For the perpetrators, makers or writers of graffiti, their work is about style, space, identity, and reimagining the city” (Pennycook 2010, 141). As transgressive icons and symbols are decontextualized a movement toward celebrating diversity can be fully understood because the space is opened to a multimodal sense of place. The murals promote a decontextualizing of the transgressive through visual grammar of public spaces which can be explored cross-culturally by inviting social actors from all walks of life according to different aesthetic tastes. American Indian graffiti murals become signposts for interaction visually, internally, and outwardly.

Narrowing the geosemiotic focus one step further it is important to note how the term ‘sign’ is defined according to geosemiotic discourse. The Scollons’ analysis of ‘sign’ is the interaction of signs and symbols as human constructs in the urban environment that pull meaning from place and placement within the environment. There is a multimodal function of public signage where signs contain layers of symbols, and semiotic direction, which have been normalized over continued usage across public arenas, “All of the signs and symbols take a major part of their meaning from how and where they are placed – at that street corner, at that time in the history of the world. Each

of them indexes a larger discourse” (Scollon and Scollon 2003, 2). Signs and symbols contain multiple meanings in the place and time they reside and depending on the audience these visual elements create multiple modes of action in the individual, or group, interacting with the environment. Signs also endure metamorphosis in symbology, for example American pedestrian traffic signals that once used the lexical “Walk” and “Don’t Walk,” but now use icons to signify direction. The Scollons’ offer a more specific definition of signage stating, “In geosemiotics, as in all branches of semiotics, the word ‘sign’ means any material object that indicates or refers to something other than itself” (Scollon and Scollon 2003, 3). Thus the signs that appear on the landscape are markers of direction and meant to influence human thought and behavior in terms of signifiers to something beyond the surface image. Signs are meant to guide and direct us in both inner and exterior space by creating a sense of safety in a normalized environment. The larger discourse of a place is visually signified through the semiotic elements in signage. Signs can appear as mundane through this normalization but contain multiple strategic elements meant to influence direction of interpersonal and intrapersonal communication with the urban landscape. This communication is accomplished through three elements that signs tend to contain; icon, index, and symbol.

In geosemiotic analysis signs contain three different types of elements Icon, Index, and/or Symbol (Scollon and Scollon 2003). The three elements are not mutually exclusive and signs can embody either one or all of these elements. These three elements are important to express meaning from a sign and how humans communicate meaning through signage. Without any of these elements a sign becomes unrecognizable and arbitrary to the viewer. Icons, such as pictographic imagery are commonly used to infer

connection to a specific object or persons. Revisiting pedestrian traffic signs, when approaching an urban intersection in the United States we are trained to watch for the “Walk” sign, which in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is represented by an image of a human in motion in order to avoid language or lexical barriers encountered in the past. When the icon appears we know that it is safe to walk across the intersection. Indexes specifically point to meaning, most often depicted through an arrow that guides movement. Indexical signs are common in street signage where an arrow is used to indicate the location or direction of a specific street, structure, or space. Symbols are the most arbitrary of the elements where the meaning of the image has become so normalized in our semiotic world that there is little question as to its meaning (Scollon and Scollon 2003). The Scollons’ (2003) use the example of our computer desktops that contain symbols for the computer on which we are interacting. We know how to access parts of the computer via the desktop through symbols rather than text. Symbols have been the basis for communication and advertisement as the fundamental means to impart meaning, “Since Ferdinand de Saussure it has been emphasized by semioticians that the relationship between signs and the objects they represent is entirely arbitrary, but this arbitrariness may be only on the surface” (Scollon and Scollon 2003, 27). The symbols that make up language have become arbitrary on the surface when in fact they have deep etymological histories.

When concerning public art many times the more abstract or contrasting to other signage an installation embodies to the normalized semiotic world surrounding it, the more it will fall into a symbolic category due to the subjectivity of meaning. There is an iconographic and indexical nature to the “Charging Bull” on New York’s Wall Street district, but the symbol of the bull is arbitrary to the observer unaware of what the space

and human action in the Wall Street District contains or the interplay between symbol and semantics of a *bull market*. Public art pieces can also find interplay between these three categories if the abstraction involves a familiar object. As seen in Figure 3.3 the image of the woman is an iconographic connection to humans and gender, the direction of her hand and the abstract coloring moves toward the doorway indexing direction toward the lexical “occupied” and “No Dumping” signs, and the symbolism of the colors, lines, and objects coming off of the burning sage bundle infers symbolization of smoke and the sacred. All of the three elements working together promote the presence of American Indian occupation and survivance. The mural is a public ‘sign’ of survivance by promoting presence instead of absence of American Indian peoples.



**Figure 3.3:** Geosemiotic explanation, mural by Jaque Fragua, Yatika Fields, and Ben Angotti for Art Basel 2011. Miami, FL.

Photo credit: Jaque Fragua

In terms of public art, a form of public signage that is much more subjective in thought and direction than normalized municipal signage, there is a benefit to investigating the functionality of public artworks interacting with secondary objective signage in the same space. In Figure 3.3 for example, there is a small “No Dumping” sign on a door in the bottom right portion of the mural. The interplay of the mural and the lexical sign create a sense of place that communicates art and cleanliness. As Bever (2015) suggests, “Thus, there are complex layers of signifieds beneath the immediate surface structure of LLs, contain denotational and connotational meanings. These convey the scope of the literal and symbolic messages mediated by the cultural and linguistic competences of the producer and the reader of the signs” (240). Looking further into how public art interacts with the mundane and homogenized urban landscape reveals insight into cross-cultural visual communication between citizen and landscape. As Bever points to Roland Barthes (1977) assertion that, “the viewer of the image receives *at one and the same time* [original emphasis] the perceptual message and the cultural message” (Barthes qtd in Bever 2015, 240), public art encapsulates messaging across spectrums which is an important aspect of American Indian graffiti muralism practices of survivance and ideals of sovereignty, self-determination, and identity. With the placement of “occupied” in Figure 3.3 creates a lexical cross-municipal interplay with the “No Dumping” where in the same moment a social actor is asked to question signs of culture and the interplay of social action regarding cross-cultural communication. This example is an act of survivance in promoting new narratives concerning American Indian occupation in urban communities.



**Figure 3.4:** Yatika Fields mural commissioned for *Forrest for the Trees* project.

Portland, OR.

Photo credit: Yatika Fields

The Scollons' highlight the work of anthropologist Edward T. Hall and his two books *The Silent Language* (1969) and *The Hidden Dimension* (1969) as important influences when developing geosemiotic discourse. They point to Hall's work as central to our understanding, "that much of our communication happens outside of our own awareness of it... a primary tenet of psychoanalytical theory... has become a foundational basis for much of our understanding of cross-cultural and intercultural communication" (Scollon and Scollon 2003, 48). The communication that American Indian graffiti muralism and graffiti muralism offer is an abstraction of direct communication and conveyance of culture through semiotic obscurities in normalized signage and structures. In Figure 3.4 the mural infuses starkly contrasting colors in comparison to the surrounding facades of the buildings. This juxtaposition of color is communicating a space encouraging more than superficial interaction with the environment, bringing with it a redefined sense of place. Color is a powerful semiotic messenger in public signage and both the Scollons' and Bever point to Kress and Van Leeuwen (2002) who state that color is, "a mode, which like other modes, is multifunctional in its uses in the culturally located making of signs," (343) and there are, "differential motivations and interests of sign makers in the different groups [micro/macro and local/global]" (345). The mixing of bright pastel colors to form the wings of the multiple bald eagles defies natural color scheme association but the realist depiction of color in the beak, head, and neck of the eagles offers reference to a living place with a soul. Fragua speaks to the power of color in American Indian graffiti muralism positing, "And so yeah colors matter— I feel like that's one of my strong points as a visual artist is my color palette and to create harmony or discord whenever I need to and it's great you know. And I love now with accessibility

to paint and to development – even in a spray can development of ranges of hues and different saturations is great” (Interview with author). This mixture of color and image helps convey meaning and/or enticement to participate in the practice of survivance in rejecting normality and dominant narratives while developing a sense of place that acknowledges persistence and existence of life.

There is also a second instance of interaction in the overlapping municipal sign stating, “NOTICE THIS IS NOW A PAY TO PARK LOT,” which in geosemiotic interplay is creating a multimodal discourse of place. The symbolic abstract semiotic language of the mural with the bald eagles and color interacts with the indexical English language in the “NOTICE” sign. The mixing of the two languages creates a place of interplay along the lines of Hall’s notion that our cross-cultural communication happens between awareness of language and the abstraction there of in the landscape where semiology is skewed and begs a question of how this space is truly defined. Is it a parking lot (normalized structure), a space of artistic expression (abstraction of the normalized), or both? As the artists Yatika describes while painting this mural:

Yeah depending on locations I choose colors and any kind of imagery that I might use. Like for a recent mural I did in Portland, that was a huge mural and it was Downtown near the Columbia River, so I used six eagles. They’re spiraling in and out of each other with the colors of the Pacific Northwest as well as having this outdoorsy look. I suppose it’s similar to something I did in Phoenix a few years back where the colors are just so vibrant and colorful, they kind of play with the intense sun and the palm trees around it. It’s just one intense wall. That might answer the question of aesthetics and what I choose for space. You know I look at a space already painted and decide what’s needed by just kind of eyeing the wall in a certain area and what that area needs. (Interview with author)

With the foundational principles and elements of geosemiotics set in place exploring each principle as they relate to sense of place these questions can be unpacked even further and connected to the theory of survivance.

### Indexicality

The Scollons' put great emphasis on the meaning that is created by a sign in terms of physical placement and interaction with other elements within the space. Signs acquire, "a major aspect of [their] meaning that is produced only through the placement of that sign in the real world in contiguity with other objects in that world" (Scollon and Scollon 2003, 30). A common example is American cities that decide to place the first letter of the city on a hill or mountainside to demarcate identity and political boundaries. American Indian graffiti murals have been placed in many different urban spaces to demarcate Indigenous or community presence in the same manner. The murals become indexical markers reminding urban dwellers of historical and contemporary presence of American Indian peoples and communities in North America. Contemporaneously, these are important indexes for Indigenous remembrance and persistence. American Indian graffiti murals have become a means of cross-cultural communication that provides opportunities to initiate indexes concerning community diversity. In Edward T. Hall's (1969, 1976) anthropological work he found that cross-cultural communication is inherent in social life and socialization between peoples of different backgrounds. The Scollons' (2003) highlight Halls conclusions that:

1. culture *is* communication and communication *is* culture [original emphasis on 'is'],

2. much of what governs our daily lives is outside our own awareness of the processes by which it is happening, and...

3. the vast amount of miscommunication we experience when we deal with others is a result of this 'out-of-awareness' aspect of communication (Hall qtd in Scollon and Scollon 2003, 48).

Hall (1969, 1976) refers to these ideas of cross-cultural communication as the 'hidden dimensions' in the normalized landscape that lead to assumptions of the Other, and in this case homogenized stereotypes of American Indian peoples. American Indian graffiti murals are (re)claiming public space through artistic communication of culture using different imagery, or indexes, of American Indian peoples. The artists are communicating that American Indian people and communities are present and vibrant as practices of survivance that denounces the dominance of built environments by urban planners and politicians. Knowledge of the historical and contemporary stations of different American Indian communities can be hidden behind U.S. nationalist issues occurring outside the awareness of the larger American populace. American Indian graffiti murals bring awareness to social and political issues by artistically indexing them within the public sphere, "Landscapes are not mere backdrops on which texts and images are drawn but are spaces that are imagined and invented" (Pennycook 2010, 310). This type of service is a direct connection to the theory of survivance in creating a public forum for communicating social and political issues in a renunciation of the damaging simulations of American Indian peoples. This speaks to Hall's second notion that much of what is occurring in Native America is out of the awareness of the non-American Indian public, but American Indian graffiti murals create an index, such as Figures 1.4, 2.5, and 2.6 that

highlight contemporary social justice issues facing Native America. The murals denounce the muting of American Indian indexes in urban spaces and instead create an indexicality for cross-cultural communication between American Indian and non-American Indians in urban spaces. This indexicality changes the sense of place to include diversity among ethnicities and create perceptual spaces that include a point of unity for American Indian citizens.

In terms of indexicality and survivance the location of these murals in different urban settings instead of isolated within a museum or gallery is important to encourage a privileging of American Indian narratives in off-reservation public municipal communication. The populace of America involves American Indian peoples both within and outside of American socio-political issues because of sovereign status and American citizenship of American Indians. Locating the navigation between two worlds that American Indian citizens must embark upon in daily life can be eased by the indexicality created by American Indian graffiti murals. As Rader (2011a) articulates the power of public art in this area is, “The symbolic interplay between Indian art and capitols becomes an incredibly complex canvas on which historical, cultural, political and racial issues get painted in big, broad strokes. The conflict of history (as opposed to the conflict of fantasy) actuates Native public art that facilitates both the contextual and compositional resistance and also cultural and aesthetic engagement” (193). The dualistic function of these murals in standing apart from normalized signage and becoming part of the normalized signage over time the sense of place is enlivened for American Indian ideals of survivance. The communities as a whole are provided with a perceptual space, and indexes, for honoring diversity within the American narrative. Additionally, bringing

presence in presumed absence creates an indexical space for the cityscape that enlivens inclusivity in senses of place.

In Hall's hidden dimensions the idea of perceptual space is very important to cross-cultural communication. Our perceptual space is a vast arena that carries with it massive amounts of information (Scollon and Scollon 2003). The creation and dependence on signage to guide action while lessening the burden of thought is an interesting facet of human conditioning. The power of graffiti murals to both disrupt and work with the normalized perceptual urban landscapes makes them important allies in the visibility, or indexing, of American Indian and Indigenous presence. The privileging of our visual and auditory senses when moving through urban environments elevates graffiti muralism to a tool of visual survivance. As the Scollons' (2003) point out, "Perhaps our visual space is the largest space, or at least when we are outdoors and the weather is clear we can see for light-years of distance" (52). Visual spaces lead to the encouragement for communicative interaction with our built environments. American Indian graffiti murals are visual signs speaking against the damaging stereotyping of American Indian peoples in transgressive modality because they can be viewed as out of place in the normalized environment. Both image and message find a new indexicality through graffiti muralism, but because of histories and normalization elements of transgression can usurp immediate acceptance of the installations. As graffiti murals have become more commonplace in the modern cityscape and through acts of survivance American Indian graffiti murals can shift from transgressive to normalized in order to bring valuable communication instead of Hall's (1976) miscommunication that occurs because of our cross-cultural "out of awareness" of each other, thus breaking from the hidden dimensions of communication.

## Dialogicality

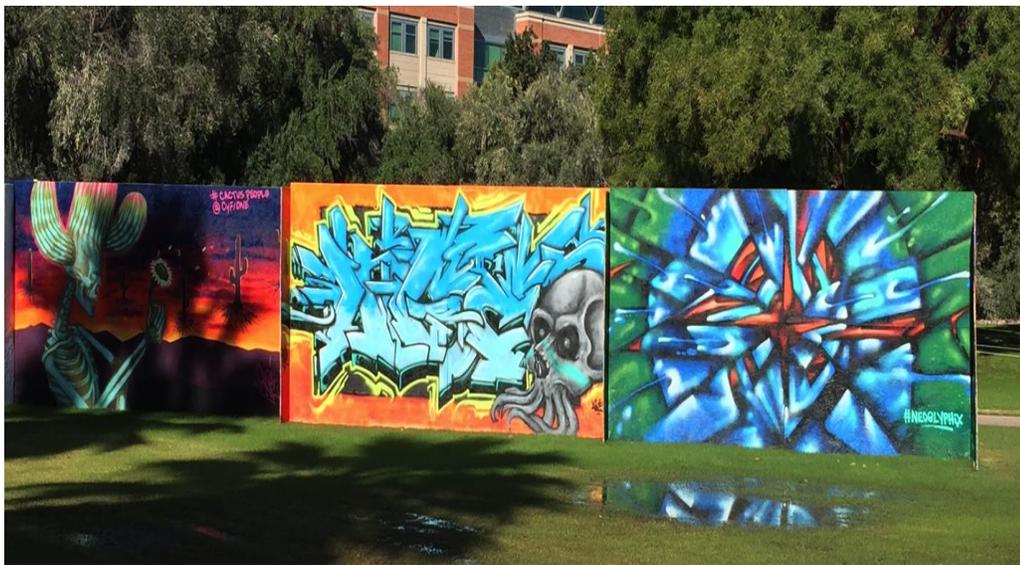
The new grammar created by opening up transgressive attitudes and spaces allows American Indian graffiti muralism to work collectively with the surrounding landscape. What is created is an interdiscursive dialogicality, “the mutual influence of discourses within a semiotic aggregate” (Scollon and Scollon 2003, 167). The murals work in tandem with the surrounding buildings to find narratives that work independently of each other, but communicate a combined sense of place. As seen in Figures 3.5 and 3.6 the temporary murals in front of the Arizona State Museum installed and painted during the 2015 *Neoglyphix* exhibit creates a discourse of the unconfined nature of public art and culture when placed in outdoor public spaces instead of the confined museum displays. The museum backdrop suggests multiple discourses of study, analysis, preservation, etc. of material objects and culture within the museum. The mural installations encourage an unconfined discussion of these actions by scientific and public desires. Both structures work in aggregate to promote a sense of place where American Indian culture is to be celebrated in an unconfined nature. The interdiscursive dialogicality expresses elements of survivance by testing the historical consternations in museum collections involving Indigenous peoples. Using contemporary graffiti muralism and colorful abstraction ideas of ‘artifact’ are placed on the front lawn of the museum creating a discourse that combats stereotypes of frozen ‘stoicism’ in historicity regarding American Indian peoples. The museum creates a discourse of dominance in the size of the structure in comparison to the murals, but the foregrounding of the murals on the lawn displays both a connection and disconnection from the museum façade in an act of dialogical survivance. The murals create a whole new interdiscursive dialogicality of survivance promoting a Vizenor’s

“continuance of stories” in the narrative created through interaction with the museum. Although there is existing presence of American Indians within the museum, mainly as artifact or relic, the murals provide a contemporary element of presence. As Gregory Snyder (2009) learned from interacting with graffiti artists, “they pushed me to see graffiti for its crudeness and its complexity, its subtleties and its stupidities, its banality and its beauty, and ultimately as a medium capable of embodying contradiction” (9). The coloring and use of Tohono and Akimel O’odham imagery in the mural on the right-hand side of the installation painted by Dwayne Manuel (Salt River and Tohono O’odham) is a breach of the regulatory dialogicality where the museum has muted colors and architecture built to reflect uniformity with other university buildings. Ultimately the museum commissioned and sanctioned the *Neoglyphix* exhibit, so it has both kept regulatory control of the semiotic discourse but opened the public space to an interdiscursive dialogicality by including the mural exhibition. The museum is also promoting the persistence and practice of survivance by supporting the medium of American Indian graffiti muralism and artists. As Yatika Fields states, “you have murals and then you have all these arrows pointing out from the murals which is you know this, you can make a whole flow chart from just one mural, and it kind of stems out from what that mural is trying to do or say” (Interview with author).



**Figure 3.5:** Mural commissions for *Neoglyphix Indigenous Aerosol Event*, Arizona State Museum, Tucson, AZ. Artist and Curator, Dwayne Manuel (two pictures cropped together to show a panoramic viewpoint).

Photo credit: Gavin A. Healey



**Figure 3.6:** Close-up of murals in Fig. 3.5

Photo credit: Gavin A. Healey

American Indian graffiti muralism is a test to regulatory dialogicality. In typical regulatory dialogicality municipalities have created standards for private signage in a given city. These rules attempt to create uniformity in spaces of contiguity between a private business and public space, i.e. sidewalks and streets (Scollon and Scollon 2003, 191-192). In many cases private signage is required to not impede on the public space. American Indian graffiti muralism is a test to this regulatory dialogicality by questioning the visual landscape of the contiguous spaces through transgression. Graffiti has a history of transgressive readings and combating regulatory standards of space where, “a case can therefore be made that participation in graffiti production may have important social, cultural and educational values, it is also its unsanctioned deployment in public space that is central” (Scollon and Scollon 2003, 139). The acceptance of private businesses to use graffiti muralism as advertising signage challenges the transgressive assumptions while working in aggregate with the public sidewalk and street. Although the advertisement may have regulations on physically impeding into the public space and adhere to the regulatory standards of space, the use of aerosol paints and graffiti techniques is a contemporary attitudinal shift in visual language. Twofold, American Indian graffiti murals like the mural in Figure 3.7 also expose the liminal space of survivance when located on busy urban spaces of interaction. As acts of survivance the multimodal narrative American Indian graffiti murals are perpetuating, “theories of survivance [that] are elusive, obscure, and imprecise by definition, translation, comparison, and catchword histories” (Vizenor 2008, 1). Peeling back the layer of these murals, on the surface they are advertising a private business, but also promoting American Indian and Indigenous presence within the perceptions of the place they live. The murals create a dialogical

grammar akin to the Vizenorian trickster dialectic in the public by creating a multilayered symbology that is, “agonistic imagination in a narrative, a language game, and livens chaos more than bureaucracies” (Vizenor 1993, 188) by, “challeng[ing] assumptions about who has access to public literacy, who controls the space, who can sanction public images and lettering, who gets to decide on what a city looks like” (Pennycook 2010, 140).



**Figure 3.7:** Mural in Santurce, Puerto Rico. Artists Jaque Fragua and Yatika Fields.

Photo credit: Gavin A. Healey

The visual grammar that is created by geosemiotic dialogicality is a main system of integrating cross-cultural communication, but there are limitations to visual literacy that involves culturally specific iconography. The Scollons' discuss the theorists Kress's and van Leeuwen's work *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* in terms of cultural visual language:

[It] is a grammar of contemporary visual design in 'Western' cultures, and hence an inventory of the elements and rules underlying a culture-specific form of *visual* [original emphasis] communication... This means, first of all, that it is not a 'universal' grammar. Visual language is not transparent and universally understood, but culturally specific (qtd in Scollon and Scollon 2003, 146-7).

Following Kress's, van Leeuwen's, and the Scollons' line of reasoning American Indian graffiti muralism is a hybrid of culturally specific visual communication to those familiar with the iconographic use of traditional symbology while also vibrant artistic expression to the uniformed audience. The techniques and artistic medium of aerosol art are western forms of visual communication, but the icons, indexes, and symbols used by American Indian graffiti muralists like the examples in this study are a culturally specific visual communication. The visual language of the murals is not always universal and decipherable by someone unfamiliar with American Indian or tribally specific iconography because of artistic abstraction. When tribally specific iconography is recognized it takes the concept of culturally specific dialogicality one step further where a mural can reach multiple audiences bringing them together in communication. These murals create a space of communication where social actors can open a dialogue about American Indian presence in contemporary society. The aggregate interaction in dialogicality of the mural and surrounding structures provide a sense of place that promotes, educates, and provides reclamation of space for Indigeneity in an act of

survivance. As an interaction of survivance the murals are also visually promoting a new narrative that forces a reevaluation of master narratives of American Indian vibrancy and presence in the urban community.

### Visual Semiotics

The mixture of traditional icons, indexes, and symbols in American Indian graffiti murals activate cross-cultural and intercultural social interaction through four visual semiotic systems identified by Kress and van Leeuwen. The systems of Represented Participants, Modality, Composition, and Interactive Participants (Scollon and Scollon 2003) together aid an understanding of how American Indian graffiti murals visually interact with the environment. When applying these four systems the complexity of the visual elements of these murals becomes less ambiguous. The use of these four systems includes the interaction of visual semiotic elements and techniques that normalize signage across different platforms. What these systems can help illuminate with American Indian graffiti murals are the imagery and narratives of survivance that American Indian graffiti muralists are coding in their murals. The four systems of visual semiotics uncover the multiple layers of murals showing how each layer effects the sense of place. As the murals interact and participate in the narrative of a given space there are certain truths that are visually contextualized through readily identifiable icons, indexes, and symbols alongside subtexts of cultural narratives and identity.



**Figure 3.8:** Mural by Jaque Fragua.

Photo credit: Jaque Fragua



**Figure 3.9:** Detail from mural in Fig. 3.8.

There are two cases of cultural representation in American Indian muralism, the traditional or tribally specific symbology and the realistic or humanistic image. The system of Represented Participant(s) offers a means to decipher these two representations by defining, “Key concepts in representing participants in pictures are the participants and vectors which relate them. When one participant looks at or is oriented toward another, for instance, a vector (arrow of gaze in this case) is produced which shows how the one relates to the other” (Scollon and Scollon 2003, 87). The use of traditional tribally specific imagery creates a vector where a participant familiar with such imagery finds a connected sense of place that includes Indigenous presence. This is important in urban American municipalities where there is a lack of American Indian visual semiotic and modal indexes in connection to sense of place. The mural in Figure 3.8 contains a mixture of symbology and in Figure 3.9 showcasing details within the mural of traditional southwestern Native Nation imagery of clouds provides a Composition to participants knowledgeable of such iconography. This facet of represented participants was discussed in terms of the “Sovereignty” (Figure 2.1) and “Civil War” (Figure 2.2) murals in Chapter 2 where the lexical was used as a modal of information sharing. In this instance, if the Interactive Participants vector is focused on this same image a naturalistic index of weather or clouds could possibly still be inferred in the unknowledgeable. Thus through the symbol a new narrative of survivance is accomplished through the represented participants presence in this space. When a realistic or humanistic image appears in a mural similar dynamics of survivance arise.



**Figure 3.9.1:** Detail from Figure 1.3

Photo credit: Gavin A. Healey

In Figure 3.9.1, a close-up detail of the mural in Figure 1.2, an American Indian woman is used as a modal and compositional semiotic, to relate participant and structure to human activity. The woman's long braid provides composition for American Indian traditional regalia, which for the knowledgeable is a direct modal linkage to American Indian culture but can also supply a vector of investigation for the unknowledgeable interactive participant. The image also provides an indexical sense of survivance through American Indian presence in a place of presumed Indigenous absence. The woman provides a semiotic text of representational participation in reclaiming intellectual presence for American Indian and Indigenous peoples through the physical and visual representation on a built structure. There is a relation between the built, the natural/organic, and the narrative in this image that encourages a cross-cultural discussion of traditional/tribally specific and the realist/humanistic.

Naturalistic symbology connects to the system of modality interaction or, "refers to the truth value or credibility of statements about the world" (Kress and van Leeuwen qtd in Scollon and Scollon 2003, 89). The naturalistic index of clouds in Figures 3.8 and 3.9 helps the geosemiotic interaction with the staircase and structure by creating a vector of truth and coding credibility for the participants. In the abstraction the clouds allow a 'truth value' to the coloring and other imagery setting a naturalistic foundation for the mural. Kress and Van Leeuwen view naturalistic representation as a significant modality for western participants, or observers, as "the primary or default modality" (Scollon and Scollon 2003, 90). Artistic naturalistic representation supplies a comfort in organic landscapes within the built urban environment for western participants. These symbols create a modal trust in the image speaking to the default comfort that human beings seek

in the natural environment. American Indian muralists cleverly use this notion to invite the western audience into a cross-cultural narrative of human 'nature' and ideals of cultural diversity. Creating a sense of comfort through the naturalistic is a means to invite then redefine cultural information regarding American Indian peoples. The Scollons' allude to the signage of National Parks in North America, "where 'authentic' wilderness means that there should be the absolute minimum from the 'natural' colors of the scene. Park signs overall color schemes are in brown, yellow and green to 'match' the natural semiotics of the wilderness area. This 'modality' is highly conventionalized...The central theme seems to be 'untouched' or non-semiotized character of the 'natural' world" (Scollon and Scollon 2003, 90). Modality is important in terms of American Indian graffiti muralism and survivance theory because it connects the cross-cultural new narratives produced in each toward a truthful statement about American Indian culture.

The new narratives can be seen through four different modal coding systems the Scollons' (2003) have also utilized as principal points of dissection for western visual semiotics; the technological, the sensory, the abstract, and the naturalistic. Of these four coding systems the abstract is important because many of the murals are blatantly abstract in visual image, but also abstract in communication. In the various examples already provided the variety of color and image are important to American Indian muralists. The use of vibrant colors creates a vector for the social actor that can draw attention to these murals, "Followers of Rubens held that color was more true to nature and pointed out that drawing, being based on reason, appealed to the expert elite while color appeals to everyone" (Scollon and Scollon 2003, 91). When a passerby encounters these murals they are asked to engage in ideals of survivance and challenge assumptions

of American Indian absence and inclusion in the urban American narrative through the ideals of the vibrant color schemes that can engage the sensory, abstract, and naturalistic. As the sensory vector is experienced the geosemiotic interplay with the landscape is backgrounded in the social actor where the sense of place is profiled as one of cross-cultural interaction. If the naturalistic is an important visual code and universal default for western observers the American Indian observer can also find connection with the murals like Figure 3.8 as both cultures share indexes of the organic (clouds) and living (the bird) as a sustaining feature of human existence. As different ethnicities finds singular ontologies and cosmologies in community, there is also unifying factors that all humans acknowledge in our organic surroundings. American Indian graffiti murals are displaying the dynamic of cross-cultural and social connections among peoples of all walks of life, “It is clear that modality is a feature of specific sociocultural groups and their coding practices and so this becomes an extremely important area for analysis in a globalizing world” (Scollon and Scollon 2003, 91).

The systems of technological and composition in geosemiotic analysis takes globalization into account when discussing company branding and logos. According to the system of composition there are parameters that have developed when constructing a sign and symbol for communication of information. Bilingual shop signs include a lexical description and/or naming in order to communicate what wares are available by the merchant to multiple interactive participants. These same signs include symbols to create an index through the creation of logos for each specific merchant. Our various fast food establishments have utilized this system of information sharing, “*salience and framing* [original emphasis] to form the full composition system” (Scollon and Scollon 2003, 92).

These visual markers create a noticeable and normalized system of identification. American Indian graffiti muralism utilizes this information system by using a contemporary medium that has grown to become part of the normalized urban landscape. The normalization of graffiti muralism has created a compositional framing of acceptance therefore opening new senses of place as artistically inviting and challenging transgressive stigmas. If the participant falls into this latter category there is the possibility that they will stop to answer questions of illegality, thus still engaging with the space. The difference depending on intellectual outcome is a space involving legal or illegal activity, but both are giving the sense of place an enticing interactive quality that may not otherwise arise in this space without a graffiti mural.

The final system of interactive participants overlaps the compositional system in refining the social distance of interaction. The Scollons' use Hall's relationships of interpersonal distances that have been established through face-to-face interaction: intimate, personal, social, and public. According to Hall personal and intimate distances range from touching to 4 feet, with the intimate touching to 18 inches (Scollon and Scollon 2003, 53). If it is assumed that humans will only socially interact with one another in these spaces along these distances we can use them as the intimate boundary of interaction with objects. Graffiti murals vary in size depending on the space and interaction will differ with the size of the mural. The variability of size promotes different interactions in regards to proximity for interactive participants. Allowing interactive participants to choose distances of interaction free of the stigmas of interpersonal distance opens spaces to uncontrived engagement with the landscape. Even the smallest graffiti mural can be visually interacted with at a distance of 4 feet. Providing comfort in distance

can encourage human mediation on the interplay of the visual semiotics of a space while promoting, or creating, a sense of place in the social actor.

### Conclusions

With a better understanding of the multiple factors concerning geosemiotic analysis the functionality of American Indian graffiti muralism becomes less mysterious. Although artistic expression is subjective in representational and communicative abstraction there are still shimmers of insight that are gleaned from exploring the outcomes of theoretical and artistic interplay. Geosemiotic readings of American Indian graffiti murals expose the embracive and invasive notions of American Indian graffiti muralism in the public visual landscape depending on the context of installation. Using the geosemiotic principles to code the different elements of the murals and the places they appear such as iconographic and symbolic usage, language use, and interface shows the infusion of American Indian presence on the landscape. If American Indian graffiti muralism could be considered an organic and/or part of constructed cityscapes, both urban and rural, there are major implications in infusing American Indian presence where it once thrived. A benefit of using geosemiotics in this discourse on ideals of “place” is the focus on how notions of place and space are constructed when including acts of survivance. Interrogating our multiple semiotic systems vis-à-vis visual stimuli that observers might take into consideration when experiencing the functionality of American Indian graffiti muralism is a means to better understand ideals of survivance.

What multimodal analysis combined with the principles of Indexicality, Dialogicality, and Visual semiotics has illuminated is that American Indian graffiti murals function as markers of American Indian survivance along multiple layers and

modals of communication. The murals are providing an indexicality of survivance by reclaiming public spaces with American Indian iconography involving the traditional/tribally specific and realistic/humanistic depictions of American Indian peoples in spaces with an absence of such iconography. These murals are addressing Hall's hidden dimensions of communication through semiotic infusion of iconography, while encouraging a breaking from the hidden dimension through cross-cultural communication. The urban off-reservation placement of the murals in this study creates indexes for further social and political discussions of American Indian presence in urban communities. The placement provides a sense of place for urban American citizens as an index to community and the diversified dialectics each holds. The indexicality creates a multi-narrative that connects to the dialogicality of cross-culture interaction and transgression in urban spaces and place perceptions.

Dialogically the murals produce a double indexicality by challenging built environments that involve American Indian and non-American Indian interaction such as the *Neoglyphix* murals and the ASM museum. Whether public or private commissions these murals are infusing a secondary dialectic to urban environments. American Indian graffiti muralism challenges regulatory dialogicality of the municipality in representing the discussion of transgressive beliefs and behaviors of the citizen public. The visual language that is created by American Indian graffiti murals is one of survivance that challenges notions of dominance and victimry through vibrant use of traditional iconography and color schemes. Using semiotic language these murals are signs of survivance in the urban visual spectrum that beg further cross-cultural discussion of community and diversity.

The Visual Semiotics of American Indian graffiti murals resituate public discourse to discussions of American Indian presence within the urban environment. American Indian graffiti muralists use different iconographic symbols from traditional to abstract in order to promote the contemporary station of American Indian peoples both urban and reservation. These artists bring a composition of traditional iconography to their heritage and/or American Indian represented participants to spaces that either historically contained such imagery, like a Puebloan design in a mural in New Mexico, or a space that is in need of recognition of Indigenous presence, a Puebloan design infused into Miami art districts. Both spaces can benefit from the use of traditional iconography as a modal of survivance as a recognition of presence that insights cross-cultural communication. Using naturalistic elements American Indian graffiti murals are also providing an impetus for interactive participant cross-cultural communication through visual semiotic display of American Indian iconography. Without these murals the sense of place is void of American Indian presence and conversations of American Indian sovereignty, self-determination, and identity are muted by visual colonial dominance in the built environment.

The opportunity that American Indian graffiti murals provide for social action in the observer are important for the continuance of deconstructing the historically harmful simulations of American Indian peoples while providing a new narrative of survivance alongside redefined senses of place. American Indian graffiti murals and the messages they are conveying to the public are important signs within the cityscape because without them discussions of diversity within communities is relegated to the classroom, museum, gallery, and popular media. As Yatika Fields states:

It's activism in itself because of what it is. Because I mean it's activism in what we were discussing earlier: what a mural does to a wall and what it does to the public, and what it does to consciousness, and in the moment in time and in the times we're living ... you know as a Native American I know all the issues that are facing us and facing me and facing my family and my community, and the people all around that I feel like there's even a greater thing to do to kind of paint and, something that's so unique and different to kind of open up the doors and go beyond that and to see beauty in things. (Interview with author)

There is an abundance of public art representing American Indians created by non-American Indian artists, but as Rader points out they tend to rankle accurate information and knowledge about American Indian culture and peoples. American Indian graffiti murals enliven a sense of place with authentic and honorable representation of American Indian culture and peoples. Through geosemiotic and survivance theories there is now a means to move forward with a better understanding of how these public art displays are functioning in the urban cityscape. There is now a presence to combat the absence of American Indians in our place perceptions and signs that promote a more culturally informed citizen public.

## **Chapter 4: Conversations with American Indian Graffiti Muralists**

The following chapter contains conversations I had with two prominent American Indian graffiti muralists, Yatika Fields and Jaque Fragua. Out of all the chapters in this dissertation I consider this one to be the most important compliment to the discussion of American Indian graffiti muralism. The voices of those closest to the art form provide the best insight into how this medium functions from the producer's point of view and outside the researcher. There is only so much theoretical analysis that can be put forward before the voices of the artists are needed. In this case, as a non-American Indian scholar it is important to position the narrative in the hands of those who see the art through other lenses. After multiple conversations with many American Indian graffiti muralists not all desire a platform or the request to speak about their art and this is where my positionality has developed. Out of these conversations there was a sense that someone needed to connect the worlds of artist and scholarship. I am honored to bring these narratives forward and act as the conduit for the full narrative of this important contemporary medium of cultural expression.

To fully understand all facets of this medium the narratives of the artists help the understanding of American Indian graffiti muralism from yet another angle. In the past I have helped both artists, separately and on collaborations between the two, with mural installations, viewing their process and product from an intimate vantage point. They were chosen as interviewees because of the close interaction and friendships I hold with them would allow a deeper discussion on the topic. I believe that our friendships would provide even more intimate knowledge of the medium and their process of expression. After being entrenched in the graffiti mural community I have found that both of these

muralists are highly revered by their peers making them two of the best American Indian graffiti muralists to speak with. The depth and breadth of each artists work, spanning across the United States, Puerto Rico, and beyond, supplies narratives from artists who have produced graffiti murals in a diverse array of places and spaces. I cannot thank these two enough for the insight they have provided in this work. Each interview transcript was provided to the artist and they were allowed to edit any material they saw fit. The interviews were conducted in accordance to the University of Arizona Internal Review Board regulations, in a public place and a signed consent form was acquired. A list of questions was provided to each artist with time allowed at the end of each interview for the artist to add whatever comments or information they pleased.

#### Yatika Fields Introduction

Yatika Fields is an American Indian artist from Oklahoma who has become widely revered for his mural installations involving abstract styles, vibrant color schemes, and natural environmental elements. Many well-known galleries specializing in Native art have commissioned his studio artwork. The following Artist Statement was supplied by Fields to speak to his background from a personal point of view:

Yatika Starr Fields, Osage/ Cherokee/ Creek, is an Artist, Painter and Muralist. While attending the Art Institute of Boston from 2000 to 2004, he became interested in graffiti aesthetics, which has been integral to his knowledge and process along with Landscape painting- and continues to influence his large-scale projects. Fields currently lives in Seattle and is from Oklahoma but has spent the last decade on the East Coast and New York City, where the energy of urban life

inspires and feeds the creative force in his artwork. He seeks to influence his viewers to rethink and reshape their relationships to the world around them. His compositions are sometimes spontaneous and left open for interpretation so that multiple stories can be drawn from them. His kaleidoscopic imagery, with its dynamic pop culture aesthetic, references both historical and contemporary themes. His work has been likened to abstract, surrealist and futurist painting. Fields, whose first name is Creek (Yv'tekv) and means interpreter, creates his paintings by infusing them with power and emotion. His canvasses and Murals are alive with movement and filled with images that rely on vibrant colors and swirling patterns to build narratives that dazzle the eye. (Fields 2016)

In 2015, I was invited to Idyllwild Arts Academy to speak about American Indian graffiti muralism for a Native American Summer Arts Program and Fields was also asked to do a live mural painting during the festivities. Nestled in the California mountains Fields and I decided Idyllwild was the appropriate atmosphere to sit down and discuss his work in American Indian graffiti muralism.

#### A Conversation in the Wild: Yatika Fields

**Gavin Healey:** June 28<sup>th</sup>, 2015, Idyllwild, California. Idyllwild in Heavenly Grounds Coffee Shop, I'm here with Yatika Fields. (Please state your name for the record).

**Yatika Fields:** My name is Yatika Starr Fields.

**GH:** what is your Native Nation and Tribal affiliation?

**YF:** I am of Osage, Cherokee, and Creek Nations.

**GH:** And can you provide any background to your upbringing, either on-

reservation, off-reservation, or both?

**YF:** I grew up in Stillwater, Oklahoma, which is in the middle. Never really grew up on any of the reservations. I lived in Hominy and Tahlequah, Oklahoma for a tad bit when I was a little kid. But that's not really a Res- you know that wasn't a Reservation. You know when you hear Reservation I think a lot of things come to mind for different people. And a lot of reservations are different, vary in different places for different Nations, communities of indigenous peoples. So, I never really grew up on the Reservation I guess. But I did grow up in Oklahoma, participated in some ceremonial aspects of the Osage Tribe and I have been raised around ceremonies and the Osage community and their ways, grew up also in the Native American church in Oklahoma, with the Osage people as well.

**GH:** Talking about your family and your upbringing, how or is your family involved in artistry, either professionally or otherwise?

**YF:** Yeah, growing up my mom and dad were both artists. They both have been influences and have been around the arts, Native arts, themselves. My mom works in clay and my dad's a photographer. Growing up I was with them a lot, traveling to art events especially in Santa Fe, New Mexico during Indian Market. So I grew up around that going there every August as a little kid. And so yeah, art has kind of been around in my life.

**GH:** How old would you say when you, you kind of said you began an interest at a young age. Do you know how old you were when you first knew that you wanted to do that as a profession?

**YF:** I first knew when I wanted to be an artist, I wouldn't say I first knew but I had a big

interest in it when I was probably like in Junior High into High school. I think that's when, you know, when I really knew in that sense that's what I wanted to do. I've always been interested in it and doing it as a little kid and it's something I really excelled at ever since I can remember. Like 2<sup>nd</sup> Grade drawing and being asked to be the student to design the posters for the contests of whatever, you know, and the kid that was always chosen to draw something for other students or whatever.

**GH:** Haha that's pretty cool.

**YF:** Or I remember having drawing contests with other kids, and all the kids would gather around, like who could draw the best Werewolf or something (laughs).

**GH:** Like comic book characters.

**YF:** yeah so at that point I didn't think much of it you know. Junior High is when I was also Painting I also started reading and going and looking at a lot of art books and just trying to really gather information for myself and knowledge about all aspects of art. And then getting a studio of my own and just trying to figure out painting, you know. And so, I don't know if that says anything.

**GH:** What about – what about your interests in graffiti or muralism, public art. When did that come about?

**YF:** You know I really can't say when that came about exactly, it just kind of, everything's kind of just been – it's evolved, everything from being that kid drawing that Werewolf you know, and there's been these progressions and steps, and different opportunities and challenges. You know I don't just call myself a muralist, I just call myself an artist. And I take away from each experience and opportunities and just point it to whatever's in front of me at that moment you know. But really maybe like 2005, 6, 7

somewhere in there, 8, somewhere in that matter of four years. Um, yeah I think the first big mural I did was for the Osage Nation at the new Sand Springs Casino, which was a really large commission that took me like two weeks to do. And, at that point I didn't look at it as murals. You know I just looked at it like a large painting you know. And I mean this is what they are but there's a name for them they're called murals, and they just kind of evolved you know. I was listening to MoMA Talks podcasts by some artists and even, you know, back into Expressionism and all these days in New York and the muralists or the painters you know they always tried to go as big as possible you know and it's just the artists' drive to create something big, you know to go big, and um, I think it just kinda progressed from that to just wanting to do something so big. And then opportunities happened. I felt comfortable doing them. And then as far as graffiti goes, it was when I went to Boston to go to art school. At the Art Institute of Boston in 2000/2001 and then during that time I met up with another artist, a fellow student, he was into graffiti and I had kind of dabbled around in it and we formed an alliance and started doing graffiti and painting on the streets of Boston in the East Coast and kind of disregarded after that. On my background- studies and teachings and fine art and previous to that, you know, I was doing landscape painting too – I had spent a little time in Italy, Tuscany doing landscape painting and what not. In 2000 I went to Borneo to go do some stuff, and work with indigenous artists from the Pacific rims. I was doing a lot with the arts then, just having fun painting and then I got into graffiti and kind of focused all my time into graffiti and stopped painting with the brushes, used the can and kind of just adopted this lifestyle.

**GH:** So it was mainly aerosol, not markers or –

**YF:** Oh yeah, well it was aerosol and big markers that we made ourselves, you know, with Krink and One Shot mixed with xylene- mixing it up you know so for that permanent adhesiveness. And then making our own mops, as they're called, making our own markers. I remember one story, you know, you get these little plastic bottles- you can get them at like Staples or a post office you know, office spot but they're for like envelopes or something. You just fill it up with Ink, the goodness that graffiti can offer, whatever you can mix up that you can make a concoction with and then it's only good for one use and you squirt the hell out of it. And you carry it around in a bag cause you don't want it to leak on you, if it does then whatever your wearing is permanently messed up. It's permanent and so you just squeeze it and it all comes out on one surface at one time and one use and you throw it away. So, you know, that's what graffiti was for me, at a time and place but I always had this other upbringing too with art.

**GH:** So does your Native heritage, provide anything to your work. Is it a source of inspiration or anything? Your specific tribal affiliation?

**YF:** I would say there's elements of it in there for sure. I think, you know, art's an expressive - an expression of yourself, and with that I try to include my everyday surroundings, everyday travels and then just try to come up with new - new ideas and atmospheres with it. And then, those upbringings and those inspirations that you have from growing up with it, you know, do come out in your work. So I mean it's not all that but yeah there's elements of it definitely.

**GH:** So do you think, or, do you feel public art, graffiti, muralism play any kind of role in educating the publics that they're in, either aesthetically or otherwise?

**YF:** Yeah I think so- or not all of the public you know, not everyone wants to see it. But

yeah there's aspects of it that do a lot for communities. Beautifying places, in different murals you know they can be used as tools, they can have elements in the murals to be used as teaching guides, workshops with students and kids, families, there's a lot of facets to murals. And depending on what that particular mural is about, or is trying to do then there's a function for it. So you know, you have murals and then you have all these arrows pointing out from the murals which is you know this, you can make a whole flow chart from just one mural, and it kind of stems out from what that mural is trying to do or say. It can just be a mural about just straight expressionism, and then that people gather what they want from it, and you know, you can have murals that can be about a statement, a political statement, they can be controversial pieces, you know they can really cause anguish. Drive questions into people's minds and, or you can have just tribute Mural to a person that has passed away. So there's a lot of aspects of murals, but yeah I think they do.

**GH:** Do you think they claim or reclaim space?

**YF:** Oh yeah, they claim space previously where nothing was, or continue over an older existing space. They open up that space for thinking, they open up that space to a new reality and new realm of thinking, so . . .

**GH:** Is there anything that, in the murals that you create, or the murals you collaborated on...is there anything specific you would want a person looking at it to take away?

**YF:** No, they can take away whatever they want. I just paint it and most of the time, a lot of time I'm kind of just free-styling it which means I'm just going with the flow of it and just kind of working in unison with that minute, that time of day and painting, you know, and letting things happen—letting myself truly feel a form of expression. I guess an

expressionistic way of painting. And taking it, you know, onto a larger scale, I think which might be the true essence of painting. And figuring it out myself what it's going to be, I don't have to think too heavily on what it actually is, and that way I kind of stand in the same stance as the viewer of, "what isn't it?" Well, don't think too hard because you know, you're not allowing yourself to really enjoy it. You've just got to sit there and let it feel and move you, be in pure existence a time of non-identification- let your eyes just kind of wander within.

**GH:** So they're kind of, like multi-vocal – multiple messages but then –

**YF:** If that's what your mind wants to say to you, yeah. I leave it up to the viewer- I always use the word "free- associate."

**GH:** I like that.

**YF:** Different people are going to see different things, you know. Kids see candy and hamburgers and stuff, and adults will see maybe sexual things or – you know I mean everybody sees something different, especially different ages. But that's the fun thing about a painting, So I don't like to come out and say this is that and that is this– especially if it commissions particular objects or things or scenarios bend towards this is what that is, But I like to just paint and see what emerges.

**GH:** Like overly visceral.

**YF:** Yeah and so a lot of people can kind of just free-associate with it. But I know for a fact that, from doing it for a little bit, or from different murals, people see different things; especially kids and adults, and it's funny to hear. I can tell at this point that one's young and one's older you know.

**GH:** By what they're saying about it?

**YF:** Yeah

**GH:** Is there a performance aspect to the way you work with aerosol paints or even house paints? Any type of way of painting, is there a performance aspect to that?

**YF:** I wouldn't say performance, no not when you're doing a mural. You're kind of just in it with yourself on the wall. It could be a kind of a performance, you know, in a way- depending on who's watching maybe.

**GH:** But you're not intentionally –

**YF:** No you're just kind of working the world into your studio or vice versa. So you're just kind of in your element at that moment, painting – a performance happens. But if no one's is there to see it, is it a performance?

**GH:** How do you feel murals that you've done function in the various places that they appear. Is there a general idea – we kind of talked about that, that there maybe is no one message, so a general idea or aesthetic – that you use in your murals?

**YF:** Yeah depending on locations I choose colors and any kind of imagery that I might use. Like for a recent mural I did in Portland, that was a huge mural and it was Downtown near the Columbia River, so I used six eagles. They're spiraling in and out of each other with the colors of the Pacific Northwest as well as having this outdoorsy look. I suppose it's similar to something I did in Phoenix a few years back where the colors are just so vibrant and colorful, they kind of play with the intense sun and the palm trees around it. It's just one intense wall. That might answer the question of aesthetics and what I choose for space. You know I look at a space already painted and decide what's needed by just kind of eyeing the wall in a certain area and what that area needs. I did it

in a recent commission in Santa Fe on these pillars – which painting pillars are harder than painting an actual wall; it's very unique and different. But you know right across the street from these pillars of MOCNA is St. Francis Cathedral built in 1886 and Santa Fe is already kind of this place with a lot of history, and you know it's kind of whimsical and magical in its own – its little adobe structures adorned with southwest colors, piñon scent in the air. So I just kind of intensified the area with – I felt this beauty and this serenity that it already has but just kind of encapsulate it even more with these certain colors. So colors do so much to an area, and can create a deeper landscape within a landscape. And I think I nailed it. It doesn't have to be about something really, it can just be a play on colors, and that's what it was you know, so. . I'll look at something and then decide this is what it needs for the area because the area is screaming, "I need this." You know, so you're kind of like an interior decorator for an urban setting.

**GH:** Like the exterior decorator (laughs).

**YF:** Exterior decorator yeah.

**GH:** And who commissioned the pillars?

**YF:** That was the Museum of Contemporary Native Arts, I ended up titling it "Paradise."

**GH:** So speaking along those lines, is there one particular mural that you're most proud of?

**YF:** I would say probably the Portland mural, just because I came in there and knew what I wanted, you know met with the right person, and everything just fell into place and it was pretty huge and I had a week to complete it. It was just a trying time because you know I had to work through pretty much rain every day, and had a lift, and it was just go time. And you know I didn't really have a sketch for it, I just started painting

large scale, and marked it out well I thought.

**GH:** Is there anybody that you like collaborating with, or do you have anything to say about collaboration?

**YF:** Yeah collaborations are interesting you know, they're fun to do. Working with other artists it's always cool and always nice cause you get to share ideas and see other people's styles and share ideas and share styles. It's pretty cool to do that when the opportunity arises. And it can be difficult too at the same time, you know, it's kind of just part of the challenge. Some people work good with it and some people don't, some people don't know how to and some people don't like to.

**GH:** Do you feel an obligation to inform people about issues facing Native America or Native Americans, either social issues or otherwise?

**YF:** Do I like to?

**GH:** Do you feel an obligation or do you –

**YF:** No I don't feel an obligation.

**GH:** Do you like to?

**YF:** No

**GH:** So you wouldn't consider your work activist work at all?

**YF:** It's activism in itself because of what it is. Because I mean it's activism in what we were discussing earlier: what a mural does to a wall and what it does to the public, and what it does to consciousness, and in the moment in time and in the times we're living ... you know as a Native American I know all the issues that are facing us and facing me and facing my family and my community, and the people all around that I feel like there's even a greater thing to do to kind of paint and, something that's so unique and

different to kind of open up the doors and go beyond that and to see beauty in things. Okay this person is Native American and you know, why isn't he painting an Indian that's crying? Or you know something that's like, you know, breaking treaties or whatever you know? I mean that's done and I think this is important too, what I do, is to kind of encapsulate the beauty that does exist in the underlying terms of all these things. Everyone knows – I know – that I could do that. But I feel like there's something that's driving me and I want to follow my drive and intuition. You know this is important too, there's this beauty that does exist. And then there's artists that feel like it is their mission to paint that, Native issues, Native imagery and well that's their mission and I'm proud of them and happy that they do it, you know. I wouldn't say I wouldn't do that, you know, if it comes and I feel like there's a specific wall or specific place that needs something like that then yeah, I'll do that. But I also think it's important to kind of – to show a beauty that cannot be showcased, you know, by anyone else's hand but mine.

**GH:** It is a nice balance –

**YF:** To show the world – There has to be a balance, it can't just be all, you know, activism in that sense of way of: this is what happened, this is what needs to happen.

**GH:** I call it the wagging of the finger, you know, sometimes it's appropriate to wag a finger and then other times you got-to embrace them through other means to really affect change.

**YF:** Yeah I mean, it's not like I'm choosing to do this to be an outsider. You know this is a role that I was given, as I mature in my position of an artist I'm understanding what it is I do.

**GH:** Are there – You kind of hit on it, and feel free to kind of just throw this one

off, but are there any certain colors or designs, um, that you regularly use? And is there any inspiration behind those, if so?

**YF:** You know in a lot of my work there's a lot of movement, and I think every artist has to come to terms with their own style and figure it out. And it's something that stands out to be like "this is their own work" and they can claim it as theirs and people can relate to it – not relate to it but people can see it and be like "that's the artist's work" because people know it, because they do it well and often. I think there's a lot of motion and movement with colors in my work, trying to figure out colors can be hard in itself. It's something that I've always gravitated to and figured out well. Luminous colors and fluorescents, pastel colors – I like to use brights and stuff like that.

**GH:** Do you see Native American graffiti muralism, as part of the larger group of Native art? I mean you've grown up in an artistic family of different mediums, do you think that this medium should start being included or have a larger dialogue within the cannon of Native art or Indian art (in air-quotes to say)?

**YF:** I don't even know (laughs).

**GH:** Does it matter?

**YF:** I don't think it matters; it's just doing what it needs to do. It's kind of the question what is Native art? You know, where is it going? And that's so opinionated, there's no right answer or wrong answer. Everyone grew up differently, everyone's from different places and everyone's going to say something different. It's like the bible – it's called the bible question because there's different opinions on it, you know?

**GH:** It's all subjective.

**YF:** It's all subjective. Who cares? Let it do what it needs to do, you know? It's going

somewhere and you can't do anything about it. That's the question, you know. What does it mean to Native American art, the term? I don't know, cause I don't know.

**GH:** Do you think Native public art has any kind of different obligation or function inherent in it?

**YF:** No. I just think, you know, because it – again going back to that question of what my work does and the wagging the finger thing – it just does what it needs to do. And every artist is going to answer that question with their work in their own way. You've just got to be doing something, you know different, so. . . What was that question?

**GH:** Oh, in your opinion is there a different obligation, function, or aesthetic inherent in Native public art? Compared to just general public art.

**YF:** No, I don't think so. Obligations. . .

**GH:** Kind of a loaded term.

**YF:** Yeah obligation is a loaded word, for Native peoples. Obligation. . . I don't know

**GH:** Well that's all I got, unless if there's anything else you just want to shoot the shit about.

**YF:** No.

**GH:** No (laughs). Thank you Mr. Fields.

**YF:** Yup, thank you!

END

#### Jaque Fragua Introduction

I met Jaque Fragua in 2011 in Tucson, Arizona while he was in the process of completing a mural installation in the downtown area. The mural was in response to the local school board cutting high school courses in American Indian Studies and Mexican

American Studies. Jaque embraces issues of social justice in his work and has partnered with social justice groups like *Honor the Treaties* providing artwork to advertise topics of injustice, diversity, environmental degradation, and human rights. Jaque is a native to Jemez Pueblo in New Mexico and he uses his Pueblo heritage through designs and patterns in his artwork. Jaque has been known to include traditional ceramic, blanket, and tattoo designs in an honoring of American Indian traditions within the contemporary era of Native art. His artist statement reads, “Fragua authentically repurposes his culture’s iconography, which conceptually subverts our overconsumption of misappropriated Native American design” (Fragua 2016). Jaque comes from a family of artists with uncles and aunts that work in different mediums. Jaque pushes the contemporary envelope of Native art and has gained praise from some of the public art elites of today like Shepard Fairey, “Jaque is passionate and can express his aims with his mural far better than I could” (Limon 2015). Jaque himself articulates his work as:

Art is a Western concept that separates itself from everyday life and into a conundrum of luxury. Art may be perceived as unnecessary, beguiling, and pretentious. However, I believe Art to be an everyday activity, as vital as drinking eight glasses of water. My first language has no word for Art. Although, the traditions I have been raised in are overflowing with Art. From the prehistoric petroglyphs/pictographs to ceremonial pottery and head-dresses, designs, lines, color, symbols, metaphors, technique, and composition can be found in the physical manifestation of visions we now call Art. I create art within nature and exposed to elements in order to spark dialogue and action. (Fragua 2016)

Jaque sat down with me to discuss American Indian graffiti muralism and gave further

insight to how this medium alongside Native public art is functioning in the contemporary world from his perspective.

Vitality in the Public: Jaque Fragua

**Gavin Healey:** June 14<sup>th</sup>, 2015, Exo coffee shop [Tucson, Arizona]. Please state your name.

**Jaque Fragua:** Jaque Fragua.

**GH:** So, first of all, um, can you explain your Native Nation or tribal affiliation? And maybe provide some background to your upbringing, either on reservation, off reservation or both.

**JF:** Alright. I'm legally enrolled in San Felipe Pueblo Tribe in New Mexico, and I'm also a part of the Jemez Pueblo Tribe in New Mexico. I'm not enrolled there, but that's where I was raised and that's where I understand culture in the indigenous sense. Um, when I was a young kid we moved to Jemez, which is where my father's from and, um, spent my childhood there up until high school. In high school we moved to Denver for a number of years, I completed high school there and from there I moved to Seattle and then to Santa Fe to continue my education in art at the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe. And, um, since then I've moved around nomadically for the last ten or so years.

**GH:** Nomad (laughs). Do you, uh, do you participate in any traditional ceremonies or anything? Through your tribal affiliations.

**JF:** Yes I've, uh, definitely been active in my community in ceremonial or traditional ways and that's been impressed upon me ever since I could walk. So I've been a part of the community as much as anybody else can as a young adult. So everything that a

young male in the tribe I would say, is obligated to. I take upon the responsibilities that are involved with that and I see them through.

**GH:** Was or has your family been involved in artistry like yourself, either professionally or in any other means, or otherwise?

**JF:** Yeah I would say, uh, definitely in a commercial and a creative way. Not my immediate family but family – close family members and relatives I've grown up around, creativity, and before I even knew it was art, or called art. And one of my inspirations is José Rey Toledo, who's, uh, who is my great grandmother's brother, and his work was everywhere in our relative's homes. So he definitely had a, like a visual impression on me and my family, and what our family stood for, what our family heritage is.

**GH:** What type of medium did he work in?

**JF:** He worked in, uh,– gouache, mainly. And, um, that style or that medium was introduced to him at the Santa Fe Indian School. And so he is part of that whole movement under the artist Dorothy Dunn, and learned how to create, I guess, learned how to create two dimensional works in a very illustrative way but also a way that was already developed in traditional work like Kiva murals and that style; so it was just an evolution. So those works are all – I think they're usually gouache or watercolor.

**GH:** So there was some public art in there too, though. Muralists and some –

**JF:** Yeah, uh, I guess I would say you know, there's that influence from the bloodline. So there was José Rey, and then I have...my Aunt Laura who is also a practicing visual artist, she's a sculptor, a painter.

**GH:** Is her last name Fragua also?

**JF:** Yeah [We're both Fragua]. And, also my cousin Juana, he's a potter, he makes pottery. And then my distant uncle Clifford, Clifford Fragua he's pretty renowned in the Native American art scene and he's a master sculptor. He studied in Europe, Italy for ten years or so before he started becoming, well known. So he's a very, for me, he's definitely an inspiration on how to live as an artist or how to become an artist. And I think— that coupled with ancestral art that I saw on ruins and on our ancient sites really impressed me to continue in something creative. So, yeah my immediate family, um, I'd say everybody is creative but then also like the ancestral part of my culture and my ancestral family is what's impressed me the most I think.

**GH:** You kind of talked about this already but when – how old were you, or when can you first remember really getting interested in becoming an artist and, maybe spring boarding off that, what brought about your interest in graffiti and muralism and public art?

**JF:** I would say – mm, let's see; comic books. Yeah when I was a kid I really liked, uh, well my – this was even before my family had a video store, but on television there was, Bugs Bunny and like uh, what else was there, there was Ninja Turtles at the time, uh, there was this – I can't remember other than – oh there was Smurfs too. So there was a couple of shows that I would watch as a kid and I think that impressed me from the very get-go that I wanted to replicate what I saw. You know I wanted to see, I wanted to – to me it was like if I was able to do that then I could have those things in my life all the time, you know. If I drew Spiderman then he'd be like a part of my everyday, you know, consciousness. So I wouldn't have to wait until the show came on you know, to have that story around. And I think that kind of went into other areas of, not just pop cultural

experience but you know, the Native experience. You know drawing hunting scenes or drawing animals, or even drawing my family. So that was all for me it was just entertaining or that was fun. I found joy in that when I was a kid. So coloring and drawing and all that stuff was, I don't know – I gravitated towards that. And I was good, you know. Not to toot my own horn but, you know I think mainly what it was, was just my focus and with drawing and art I was able to focus on that more than anything else. When I was in elementary school a lot of people knew I could draw well, my friends did so I, just drew them pictures and eventually, I saw kids doing letters in their notebooks and they were doing – practicing graffiti letters. So that kind of turned me onto – you know taking the idea of writing and calligraphy to a new level and I was – I had good penmanship as well so I really thought that, you know it was one of those mind-blowing times when you're a kid and you see someone write a letter in a crazy way that you've never seen before. That really, you know, made me look at lettering and typography in a different way and you know living on the reservation there's not that much in terms of that. Unless it's on like old signs or trading posts stuff, or like government documents or even, uh, commodity labeling, stuff like that. So after that then I started really looking at typography and lettering as a real form of communication. And then I started doing the same thing in my book. And eventually we moved to Denver, Colorado, and then I saw more of that, you know visual language out on the street both through marketing, mainstream marketing billboards and stuff like that and signs and then also through graffiti.

**GH:** Was the school that you were going to, was that on Jemez?

**JF:** Yeah I went to the Jemez day school which is a BIA school, and then I also went to

the Mission which was a charter school and it was held at the old Jemez Mission church. And, after that I went to Jemez valley and did my middle school there. And in between we moved to Houston for a little bit we moved to, um, Albuquerque so you know I got a year here a year there and other places but for the most part, it was always in Jemez. So Denver we moved there in '98 and that's when I really started to see the possibilities I guess of other creativity and I was really getting into hanging out with outsiders, I guess, cause I felt like an outsider when I got there and the only people I would connect with were people who didn't fit in either, and those type of people are graffiti writers or...

**GH:** Did your ethnicity or anything have to do with that?

**JF:** Yeah that had a lot to do with it. And so I would meet – I would actually meet other Native kids who didn't go to my school or who weren't in my neighborhood you know, but they were running around on the street and that's kind of how I created my own – I guess I created my own, group or clique just of people who didn't want to fit in I guess. Or maybe they wanted to but they couldn't and so they just did their own thing. You know, that formula is usually the most creative, cause we don't care so...With that no-boundary approach and, you know, get into a lot of trouble, get into a lot of crazy situations. So, from that point then I really started getting into graffiti and it was mostly just the regular, traditional graffiti, or just letter based.

**GH:** Would you consider it tagging or –

**JF:** Yeah yeah, I guess, yeah we did a lot of tagging but, um, also you know throw-ups and burners and stuff like that. And we were just starting, or I was just starting you know, and anything I did was looking pretty amateur. But I stayed consistent with it and eventually that became a little rudimentary for me. And back at that time I was writing

“Jesso” and I was writing “Flesh” too— I wanted something different and that’s when I started coming across people like, um, Sheppard or Obey Giant, and Chris Stain and a lot of people were using stencil graffiti. And so I started doing a little stencil graffiti and I realized that wasn’t – I mean that was fun and all but I don’t know if that’s what I really wanted – I felt like I was too confined with that you know, and I didn’t really have the tools or workspace to do big stencils, you know epic stuff. So I would just make small stuff and put it on stop signs and you know dilapidated buildings around Denver and paint people’s bikes or backpacks or. . . so I would just do it however I wanted to wherever I could express myself and yeah that’s kind of like the beginning.

**GH:** So after – you were still in high school at this point right?

**JF:** Mhmm [Yes]

**GH:** So where – what did you do after high school? Did you immediately go into art school or can you just do like a brief...

**JF:** Yeah yeah I was in high school. I wasn’t being challenged in the school I was going to which was North High School. So I somehow— oh yeah it was my neighbor was the Superintendent or the ex-Superintendent of the Jefferson County school system and she said: why don’t you just apply to this, IB program? It’s the International Baccalaureate education program out of, it was developed in Wales. So the original was there and they have these satellite schools all over the nation, the world and they had one there in Denver this place called Lakewood and so I went over there and talked to them and they were pretty— it’s funny because the lady from there that was in charge of the IB program was obviously racist and said I could apply, but that there was no guarantee that I’m going to get in because they had never had a Native American student. So it was pretty,

um, I don't know, it was pretty uh, demoralizing in a way. And I remember going on the way home and being really upset because I felt disrespected you know what I mean?...in like such a condescending but subversive way, you know. And so through that experience I – I'm the kind of person who likes to take challenges so I took their challenge and I entered the program and I applied for it and everything that I had was on point. My GPA just my educational credentials, I was a good student so I would say that my good student status kind of went a little sour when I was in high school (laughs), not only because of you know the rigorous education that was the IB program that's like, you know, advanced courses, college level classes. And one of those classes was art, so that's where I'm trying to get to is that point. But yeah going through that program a lot of the teachers that were there were obviously racist or they had a problem with me being in the classroom for whatever reason, and then there were some really cool ones too. But there was some power trips going on there and that just makes it difficult to learn you know. So a lot of the stuff I feel like there was no support for me, there was support for the other white kids. So I really struggled through that time and to just like keep that promise to myself that I would come out on top and not quit. So then I got into the art program and the art elective was awesome. I had a teacher and he was also a musician so we connected on that level and we started the after school music club. So we got to know each other very well and the music scene also connected with the, I would say the street scene or like the night scene you know, and that was like. . I was into both because I used to play in punk bands at that time and I was playing guitar and had a drum kit – I was playing in groups where the other members were older and– some were going in their first year in college or they were seniors. People knew about how I was

interested in music and so that's kind of how I got connected to all these other folks and then, you know jam with other musicians and got really good. I started going out with these guys you know and playing and there'd be parties or we'd play at a club downtown I'm not supposed to be in because I'm definitely under 18 so, I got into a lot of like cool spaces before that I wasn't supposed to be in and then I also got my crowd with me too, you know the other riffraff...and we would party and we would paint and we would run around in the street you know. And, so, one access to that nightlife and to that whole street experience was my art teacher. And because we liked music he would take me to jazz clubs, and blues clubs, you know it was like off the record and I'd just meet up with him and we'd go hangout and, um, I've seen some amazing acts go through Denver. It really has a great Jazz scene there and always has...and then afterwards you know I'd go paint and do my own thing...and he knew that, he knew that I was doing stuff out in the street – and he never outwardly said “you shouldn't do that” but. . . Yeah I would say he was supportive because he liked the shit that I would show him, you know. He really, I don't know, for me he was one of the first supporters of what I was doing out on the street.

**GH:** He got it.

**JF:** Yeah he got it. And you know he gave me critique too. So like I would try and do something different and it wasn't like I was trying to please anybody but it was cool to see him condone what piece or what work I was doing and that was cool. Then I had another class where I, it was another teacher, it was when I was in – I think it was senior or junior – when I went into her class because he only taught freshman and sophomore. I went into a junior art class and that was very more, I guess less about craft and more so

like conceptual or about the content of art. So we did a lot of research on artists and – one of our first projects I remember was researching our favorite artist or artists that come from my area, local artists and all I could think of was indigenous artists you know. And um, I remember I have in this book Mateo Romero, his work, um Jane [inaudible] work um, who else, oh Dan Meminga – all these people who now I’ve met or you know interacted with on some level or other. And to me they were, just like, these enigmas you know back then. And this was like the beginning of it, for me like really experiencing the internet so, like being able to go online and type in a name and their work come up was pretty phenomenal. And to see Native artists in that plethora of information was, was cool so. . I think before that, everyone was like I said before, an enigma. I remember going to Indian market when I was a kid and, you know, people would introduce me to famous artists like Kevin Red Star or, you know, other folks who were big in the arts. And to me it wasn’t a big deal but you know, I’ve never been one to be star struck, so people I would meet and know nothing about, nothing of what they’ve done but, it seemed like people would consider them a famous artist if they were important, you know, and that I should be grateful to have met these people. And in some cases yeah, but in other cases I’m like, you know now that I’m older and an adult and I know the story, I’m like “Uhh, not a big deal to me.” So, I would research certain artists and – like I said it was more about information than real hands-on knowledge in that class and we went to a lot of galleries, a lot of art shows. We were forced to – well definitely me I was forced to be outside of my comfort zone, going to these types of social soirees for art, but that’s what the teacher, made us – those were our assignments. So I remember going with, it was a good way to hang out with girls too you know we

were in the class so we'd all caravan to the art show and hangout and get dinner and all this. So, it was a cool class. The teacher, I remember at the end of the semester, we had gone to an art show or something like that and she was giving me a ride home and she said, this is why I'm telling you all this cause it's important to the story, but she told me "You --" we were talking about being an artist and being, you know creative, and she said, in so many words she said "don't become an artist, you're better off not becoming an artist." It was like an insult, because everyone else she would encourage them to become an artist right? And then just between me and her on the ride home she told me not to become an artist. And then after she said that I just shut up you know, cause I was furious. And she just had like this, I don't know she just had this, she, I don't know, she singled me out of the whole class and I don't know why. And I always feel like it was because I was Native, you know. I think a lot of people think Natives get a pass or like, or they see me there so I must've had some type of benefit to be able to be in amongst that crowd you know, so I'm getting a handout and so they should treat me extra hard for some reason. And I think -- that's the case I guess for us in a generalized way for some Natives you know, they get some, uh, you know they get a per cap check every month and people think like "oh well you get a benefit so I should treat you less human or I should treat you like shit because I don't get that, you know, so we have to equalize it somehow, I don't know. But I think people just get crazy on that kind of shit so. . So that was kind of my experience through high school, I was going to this prestigious program and it was like I -- I felt like I didn't deserve to be there. And that feeling was projected on me by other people and the people who were supposed to be teaching me and supporting, my education and who are getting paid to do that. So that was kind of a

really awkward time in those years as a teenager, you're trying to, uh, figure out who you are, what you identify with or what's important to you. And it just made me more – it just made me empowered in being Native, in being different and being on the outside. And the way I channeled that feeling was through art and through being on the street and being in my own world or creating my own reality and having those experiences. I still feel that today, I still feel that expulsion from mainstream society. Or even, even just like any society you know, traditional or in art world, graffiti world. I've always been on the outside. So those experiences growing up really, you know, it really prepared me for my life now and how I live it, because I'm living it in a way that no one has lived before. And that's true for everybody but for me I don't identify with any group strongly. I mean I feel most connected to Jemez, my tribe, and I would do everything for that tribe but at the same time there's a lot of corruption and there's a lot of stabbing and there's a lot of undercutting and in all ways, in a spiritual way and a political and like a physical way. . . when I go back home I hear people, like especially my brothers, like "oh yeah this guy's trying to find me," and I'm like "dude that's – he's your fucking cousin. Why is this guy trying to pick a fight with you?" And then you know we have to go and squash it somehow. You know not in a violent way but you know, in almost a scolding lecturing way you know. This is your family you can't break them apart, but that's just how communities are these days I feel more so...I feel like that's America in general, you know, is getting the better piece of the pie and everybody wants that and everybody feels like they're entitled to it, every individual. So community is a very challenging concept for this society. And that's the story that informs a lot of what I do now.

**GH:** So do you feel public art, graffiti, muralism, play a role in educating the public?

Does your art play some kind of role in education or –

**JF:** I think about the future a lot I – I really don't put too much emphasis on the present moment. I'd say place the least emphasis on the present moment, I think a lot about the past and I think a lot about the future – I think most about the future because as, for me as it is now I'm already dead. You know I'm like a dead man walking I feel like, and whatever I do whatever I create from this point on has to be relevant to the future generations. And I really felt that when my brother had his daughter and when I met her I thought: Man this life's so precious and we have – most of its suffering, you know, for everybody most of life is suffering. But you know it's like the tiny moments in between that really matter. And you know those moments of joy or those moments of connection with another person or with a spiritual presence . . . a feeling. And my work I want it to be pervasive, but subtle, and remind you of the really essential things in life; and to me that's what real art is. It's not mass produced, it's not you know, cookie cutter style it's not, for money, it's informed by the real existing conditions around it. But for me I want it to inspire the future and say, you know, maybe "this is how it could be" or "this is how it was and this is where it's going." And if you take the time to look at it then maybe whatever direction you're going in right now it can help you in making a decision or help you get off the path you're going and get on the path that you're meant to be on, you know. So yeah I feel like public art is – its always been that way for me, every time I've seen a monumental piece or even like a little ice cream tag or ice cream cone tag or something like that just something very benign but understated and powerful in times that you're feeling depressed or whatever. It just makes you laugh you know, it makes you feel something other than the suffering that happens and – so from all scales I feel

like public art is the need to - not only the need to belong but also the need to live, you know, it's an expression of the need and will to live. And people who don't do that or express themselves in that way they do it in other ways, and if they don't do it in any way then they're just, you know, doing a disservice to their own existence.

**GH:** So the various murals that you've done, do you see those functioning individually in each place that they're at or is there a general aesthetic or message or something along those lines that you're - how might each mural function either individually with the place that they're in or do they function as a group?

**JF:** Well they only function as a group as long as they're around. If they get covered up then you know, it's no longer a group so I like to think they're dynamic, you know they do both. They collectively work together and I've seen it because of feedback. Out of all the murals that I've done in the last few years someone just texted me on my phone and said "I saw this piece, the image you posted of the train with that tag the - "I call it like this staircase tag, and said "didn't you, this is on the back of the Prada Martha in Texas. Is that the same - are you the same person?" I'm like "yeah that's me" you know. I was just kind of surprised and blown away that there's this consistency or there's this story happening and they were a part of it and they didn't even know it. Or maybe- it was like a, inherent or intuitive feeling of presence, you know. And that motif when it's seen in another context, not intangible but in virtual, it still had the same affect. So I would say that they both work individually of each other but I think they work as a group more so than individually and it's because of the way our world works now with virtual experience and the internet and having access to information. And when people look at my work - they see it when they travel and then they'll go on. . . they don't know who it

is but someone will turn them onto my work and they'll go to my feed and I'll see: "oh he did that, oh he did that, he did that and he did that?" Like man I saw all those and I had no idea this was happening. But in some way it's like all those murals made an impression, those murals made a story for that observer and that – not only for the person that was travelling everywhere but for the community that's stuck there, you know, or not that's necessarily stuck but the community that the mural belongs to, you know that mural is part of their psyche and part of their story and their history so you know, it's good...

**GH:** So is – speaking to your work, your profile or your portfolio of work, is there one mural that you're particularly proud of or most proud of?

**JF:** As I was saying earlier I like challenge and I think every opportunity or every wall or project that I have coming up or the future work, I always want to challenge myself to do a better piece, a better painting, better line work, concentrate more – get better tools, upgrade everything and just get the best quality out of the mural as well as the best content and best story. So I would say there isn't ever one everlasting mural that I've done. I haven't done the Sistine Chapel or anything like that yet.

**GH:** Do you take the physical space that the wall is in – you talked a little bit about the community that these things become part of – do you ever take the physical space or even the human element of that space into account when you –

**JF:** Oh yeah, I think there's definitely a lot of muralist or public artists who are complete nihilists when it comes to painting and they just do it for themselves or they just do it just to do it, and then somehow they get paid. But for me I, and a lot of other muralists, think the tradition of creating murals is a selfless one and it's also one that connects

people. And it can be in a spiritual way, which is how I understood it first growing up with the Kiva walls and seeing it on sacred sites, and I saw them more as living beings, you know, like Kachina dolls are living to me. I, you know when you're impressed from a young age that the walls are living, then you want to make sure that you're not a disruption but that you're a contributor to that life, and that's how I see it. And the way that I can do that is create murals that speak, create murals that talk. There was this project going on in Puerto Rico that was a total connection to that concept, that concept that these things are actually living, breathing contributors you know. They're like an extension of the artist you know, they're an extension of the energy that they express. And some of the murals that I see they're just, you can just tell this guy is sick, or this guy or this girl is a narcissist, or this sociopath (laughs), or I don't know. There's so many things that I see when I look at murals that now for me the challenge or the way that I can create the best mural in my mind is –my most recent work it's the thing that I'm most, that's most current, and in my practice because I feel like I'm only gaining more knowledge, I'm only gaining more insight and more wisdom and more experience every day and that could only be, that can only inform, what I do in my craft or my art and in my life so I feel like. . . even though I might feel destructive or angry or upset about something I feel like it's still going to be my best work because I know how to channel it in a way that speaks.

**GH:** Do you consider your work activist, in the activist arena?

**JF:** No I don't really do that. I think I did at one point, but that word has such a –

**GH:** Kind of loaded.

**JF:** – awkward. . yeah it's a loaded stigma, and you know not all things activist I'm

supportive of and I think it's become a trend as well. You know the same thing as with graffiti, I used to say I was a graffiti writer. Even graffiti writers from New York era in the 70's don't even call themselves graffiti writers, they just don't want to have anything to do with that commodification of that culture, you know. And it's become so oppressed you know, or so exploited and they don't want to have anything to do with the exploitation of it. I feel like the mainstream is trying to say Native Americans, or Indians, versus tribal recognition. It's just a way to package it in a digestible way for the public and . . . So I guess – I don't know. .

**GH:** Are there certain colors and or designs that you regularly use? You talked about the steps, or what you call the steps, and what might be the inspiration behind those colors or iconography?

**JF:** Yeah, in Pueblo culture colors are very symbolic they're . . . very meaningful. And just like Native languages, one word can mean a lot of things. It's the way you say it, the tone, the conversation or the context you know, that informs the meaning of the expression, the verbal expression. So – and I feel like that's the same with color and art in muralism –

**GH:** Visual

**JF:** Yeah visual language because the context that informs the meaning behind it. And so yeah colors matter– I feel like that's one of my strong points as a visual artist is my color palette and to create harmony or discord whenever I need to and it's great you know. And I love now with accessibility to paint and to development – even in a spray can development of ranges of hues and different saturations is great. And I try and use that or I try and exploit that as much as I can for the benefit of the mural and yeah I'm

very picky with how I choose colors. I even have an app on my phone now, it's the Pantome app and I use that in addition to Adobe Color and I use those to create color swatches. And like I said to create harmony or you know, I know what not to pick to create discord. Informed by my sense of aesthetic and Pueblo understanding of color that's what I use.

**GH:** Because I've seen you paint in other places like Puerto Rico, when you put – when you use some Pueblo iconography in a mural in say a place like Puerto Rico, do you have anything to say to that?

**JF:** Yeah it's Pueblo but I think a lot of the iconography is universal. A lot of it is expressive of the same thing. It's like the word "love," you can say it in so many different languages but in essence it's the same thing.

**GH:** Would you say it's an expression of indigeneity or Native American?

**JF:** Yeah, but at the same time I feel like indigeneity or indigenous identity is an expression of everybody, it's an expression of all of us you know. Even if you're third generation Dutch or –

**GH:** White kid from Nebraska

**JF:** yeah you're still a part of that story you know. As much as people now in 21<sup>st</sup> century America don't want to admit to having a connection to that history, they're part of that history... And I feel like people relate genocide to things outside this country so much but they don't ever look at the genocide that's happened here by their grandparents or their great great great great grandparents you know. And this time, this era, is not about shaming or about trying to put blame on anybody or particular group because now we're all mixed you know. So if I say like "fuck white people" and my grandma was

white or I have to be careful as an artist on how I express my views and my feelings, but at the same time there are things that need to be said, there are things that need to be expressed and they can be expressed in a non-violent creative way. So there's things that are universal and the iconography and symbolism and the designs, I feel like those are the root language of human beings or people's understanding even before they learn how to speak when they're babies and there's colors that babies grasp, there's designs that babies grasp too...anywhere –somewhere up north in Alaska they, women get tattooed on the inside of their thighs so that the baby can experience beauty –it's the first thing they see when they come out you know. So I think that in that similar process I like people to be reborn in a way when they look at the types of things I paint, I want that type of experience for the observer to see something that they've never seen before and experience beauty on a level that's – I would say primal or visceral but then also on a level that's sophisticated and intelligent. Just like Native culture, people think that it's so basic and so pre-human but it's been around for a long time and we're still here and its consistent so. .

**GH:** Do you see a different obligation or what might be your opinion of the function of Native public art, is there a different obligation or function or aesthetic comparatively to the larger –

**JF:** No I don't think so, I think just the fact that people are doing it is enough. So I try not – I'm an educator as well, for youth from different reservations across the country and one thing I always express is just to have the experience. To create – just to do it, don't feel pressured, don't feel judged, it's a miracle that we're even...have the ability, we're still here and that we can have this conversation we can have this exchange. And I

can show you how I've done it and maybe you'll get something from that and the fact or the possibility that you just would be able to do it or would be inspired to create is for me...that's the seed, that's the seed to all this. Cause Native people don't have that empowerment; we've been so demoralized, we've been so hard on ourselves, hard on our own kids, hard on our community. People feel like failing, people who just accept it, people don't want to fight back anymore. They just want to live, and that's fine but we have to do a lot more than that, we can't just keep growing our population without having a – having some sort of education or traditional knowledge passed on. So there is, I mean there is an obligation for Native people I think. But at the same time I feel, in my opinion, it's great that it's just any creativity is happening or any public art is going up or anything that's involved with Native and art is happening and of course I feel happy about that, but then I'm also very critical about who's carrying it or who's taking ownership of it I would say. And if you're going to do that then really consider everything else, consider all of the above and a lot of the artists who are in the position they're not doing that, so. . .

**GH:** Do you like the idea, or would you embrace the idea or reject the idea of Native American graffiti muralism being put into the category, the larger category of Native art? Or Indian art as it has been referred to in the past. Or just any opinion on that.

**JF:** Yeah I don't know, I haven't thought about that in a long time. Um,

**GH:** [Train noise audible in background] As a train goes by (laughs).

**JF:** yeah let me think about that one. I would say that any art created by an indigenous person is Native art, whether that be smearing shit on a wall or creating a mural. And that's why it's important because it's an extension of that life, it's an extension of that

voice and once the voice is gone then you can't ever have that back you know? So I would say yeah, if someone was to label it under that and it's going to be in a museum years from now it should be, it should be recognized it should be given that respect. And I wouldn't say that a lot of these – it's a really Western way to think about it but you know, deciding what *is* and what *isn't* is up to the intellectuals you know. But there's some stuff where I wouldn't put it in a book one hundred years from now you know, it's just irrelevant. And like I was saying a lot of these indigenous artists aren't considering all of the above and I would – any people that I run into and want to have a discussion a dialogue about it I'm always open to that, I'm always willing to debate and call someone out on what they're doing you know. And it's just the way that our communities used to police each other about what's going on or what their actions are. Now everybody's afraid of being, you know, shunned or being shamed or being caught. So me I don't care, like I said I've always been an outsider so I can – and my family's that same way too and that's just I think how I'm built. Always being an outsider always calling people on their bullshit and so some of it yeah, some of it can be under that label, but some of it is just garbage.

**GH:** So I'm going to read you a quote from Gerald Vizenor on what he calls Native survivance and maybe you can give any words that you want speaking to Native American graffiti and muralism.

**JF:** Okay.

**GH:** It says: “Native survivance is an active sense of presence over absence, deracination, and oblivion; survivance is the continuance of stories, not a mere reaction, however pertinent. Survivance is greater than the right of a survivable name. Survivance

stories are renunciations of dominance, detractions, obtrusions, the unbearable sentiments of tragedy, and the legacy of victimry.”

**JF:** Yeah that’s it; I mean that’s exactly what I was thinking. But a lot better than I would –

**GH:** Better than a lot of us (laughs).

**JF:** Yeah (laughs), it’s definitely – when I was talking about all of the above or the lack of considering is the reactive way, or the reactive art that I’ve seen and from Native artists. And it just takes less energy, it takes less effort to be reactive. It’s like an explosion you know, that rises fast and dies quick and with that there’s no sustainability, there’s no real conversation. You know it’s like small talk and to really gain or to really . I would say to prolong or to continue a conversation is to continue a culture or to continue Indian identity. Once, like I said, once the voice is gone, then you can’t get it back. Once the languages are gone you can’t get them back, once the traditions and the ways we do things are gone then there’s no one to tell us how to do it anymore. We have to keep having that conversation, not only the oral tradition but also the visual, and that is survivance. And people who react to those conversations they – it’s like I said it’s not going to last, and it won’t be in the history books, it won’t be in the traditional knowledge, it won’t be in the stories. It’s irrelevant so like I was saying earlier, any art that an indigenous person makes is indigenous, but whether it’s relevant or not is another story. And for me I want all indigenous art to be relevant, I want everybody to create something meaningful and who am I to say what’s meaningful or not? But if you’re a proponent or you’re a leader of this or any other communal or movement in identity or culture –

**GH:** Story

**JF:** Yeah if you're in the story and you're the protagonist then you should consider all of the above, and not react – create work that's going to contribute rather than be a distraction, and I feel a lot of it's a distraction from the real issues and the real stories that need to be spoken and heard.

**GH:** Cool, is there anything else you want to throw in? You said a lot, I want to leave it open to you for however long you want.

**JF:** I want to shout out my boys in the 505 keeping it alive... I'm out.

END

### Concluding Thoughts

Once again, I cannot thank these two artists enough for sharing their thoughts and adding to the narrative of this discussion. As a non-American Indian researcher it is important to honor the peoples and Native Nations that have come to shape my perspectives as an outsider researcher. These two artists have brought me into their worlds professional, socially, and familial and have given me wonderful perspectives on how they go about navigating the human experience. This section gives praise to the late Keith Basso and his work *Wisdom Sits in Places* (1996) as a model of how to communicate the words of others in a respectful manner, while acknowledging the outsider researcher position. I have kept these concluding thoughts brief to allow the voices here precedence and obscure the voices of these great artists. My personal interactions helping these two paint both individually and collaboratively greatly increased my knowledge of the craft called graffiti muralism. These experiences helped

shape the observations that are made throughout the text. As each spoke about their communities I was honored to feel as though they were talking to someone who would never understand, but had a respectful intrigue in honoring those communities through this work. Fields and Fragua offer some interesting points of similarity and difference that illuminate the dynamic nature of the individual, the art, and the concept of place.

Through these two discussions similar stories arise in familial inspirations and artistic inspirations. Fields and Fragua both come from artistic families, but speak to the development of graffiti and mural work as something they had to develop skills in through additional popular media inspirations like comic books. Both work from the vantage point that they are honoring their heritages and upbringings, Fields saying, “Its in there...” and Fragua proclaiming a more outward narrative of traditional iconographic usage. In both cases the two are not hesitant to use their traditional iconography in their murals as seen in the examples in previous chapters of this study, what differed is in repetition, Fields rarely and Fragua frequently. The two have similar views in the ability for American Indian graffiti murals to claim, or reclaim, the spaces they are living within, which gives credence to the conclusions in this analysis that one function of American Indian graffiti muralism is to reclaim urban spaces for American Indian peoples.

The two take similar approaches to the living environment in which they are painting. Fields states that he takes into account the physical environment and natural elements, this possibly stemming from his experience and passion for landscape painting. Fragua also views the walls as alive and attempts to add to the narrative of the wall. Each artist is fusing the natural environment in their murals, taking into their own

sense of place. Fragua speaks of the walls as alive and speaking which as he explains stems from his Puebloan upbringing. Fields sees the natural environment in which he is painting as inspiration through which his heritage fuses with his natural state of being.

Where the two provide different narratives is the idea of subjectivity in Native art. Fields believes that it is all subjective, so what is the point of a canon. Fragua agrees with the subjective, but speaks to the meaning and social relevance that can come through in sectioning off certain works as Native art. Both agree that subjectivity relies on the observer and neither views themselves as the person to substantiate what is Native art and what is not. Fields does not see, or feel, an obligation to be a cultural ambassador through his art and Fragua takes on a presumed role as cultural ambassador in some of his narrative and art. They also differ in approaches to the space or wall that they paint. Fields takes the natural elements into account where Fragua, at times, has a message that he wants to put forth in a particular mural. Both seem to convey a sense of ambiguity to the argument here to include American Indian graffiti muralism in Native art discourse, but do agree that it functions as a tool of education in more public means than studio art. Both Fields and Fragua agree upon that graffiti muralism and murals create a new outlet for this generation of Native artist.

The words that these two have provided in support of this study are very important to capturing the largest narrative possible surrounding American Indian graffiti muralism. For that I am eternally grateful. I know that these two are inspiring younger Native artists to take on the medium, which means that there will be plenty of work for those to come in the future. I feel it best to conclude with a quote from Fragua that best sums up these two conversations, “I feel like public art is the need to - not only

the need to belong but also the need to live, you know, it's an expression of the need and will to live."

## **Chapter 5: A Survey of Public Sentiment on American Indian Graffiti Muralism using Q Methodology**

American Indian graffiti muralism, Native art, aerosol art, graffiti, and public art are all very subjective topics which makes them difficult to gauge public opinion on. Canonization has created some sense of order to the volume of work created, and being created, within these topic areas of art. The canons have led to discourse highlighting different points of analysis concerning visual and material culture according to the topic and intersections in-between them. The subjective nature of art has created discourses surrounding Native art that have come to suggest different means to respectfully acknowledge the canon as a unique representative art concerning Indigenous peoples and American Indians (Berlo and Philips 1998, Rushing 1998, Rader 2011a and 2011b). The suggestion that Native art and Native public art must be separated from larger canons of art is valid and necessary depending on the discourse of analysis concerning ideas of Indigenous representation and cultural specificity. As the previous chapters have discussed the need for new Native art discourse using Indigenous theories is an important shift toward analyzing cultural productions in culturally appropriate ways. In other circumstances looking through the larger lens of historical and/or contemporary art Native art has provided a valuable narrative to the larger canons of visual and material culture (Berlo and Philips 1998, Rushing 1998, Rader 2011a and 2011b). In Chapter 2 the application of survivance theory has shown how Indigenous theoretical application furthers our knowledge of Native art functionality in public sectors. In Chapter 3 the use of geosemiotics, a western theory of analysis, is used to show the function of cultural specificity in public art, but also shows how American Indian graffiti muralism functions

with the structures and signage of municipal and/or private construction in the larger public arenas and spaces. Chapter 4 gave credence to the artists producing American Indian graffiti murals and showcases the intimate knowledge of those producing the art. The last discussion to bring the discussion of American Indian graffiti muralism is the viewpoints of the citizen public and art professionals.

The following chapter will add a new dimension to these discussions on aerosol art and American Indian graffiti muralism by presenting the results of statement rankings gathered from the citizen public, academics, and those in the museum and gallery professions, through a Q surveying of attitudes toward this medium of public art. In the case of Native art historians, there is a justifiably significant encouragement of new Native art historical analysis looking at community and Indigenous narratives as modes of analysis (Berlo and Philips 1998, Rushing 1998). There is a dearth of input from the various citizen publics, most notably American Indian publics, that are effected by, interact with, and consume Native public art and American Indian graffiti muralism. The following cross-cultural citizen public opinions provide valuable data to add to the discourses on the functionality, life, and essence of Native public art and graffiti muralism. There has been very little quantification through statistical survey analysis concerning public sentiments toward graffiti muralism and the trend is to use statements from prominent individuals who hold a stake in the interpretation, canonization, or stigmatization as generalized opinion on the topic of Native public art and graffiti muralism. The question then arises to the validity of these statements when it comes to the citizen public. The majority of literature on the aforementioned topics involves discussions facilitated by scholars, researchers, artists, and politicians that hold important

insights into graffiti muralism as an artistic process and product, but all of these actors also have a stake in the interpretation of the medium. In sociological and ethnographic studies on graffiti muralism by Phillips (1999), Castleman (1982), Snyder (2009), and others there is a heavy dependence on the narratives and interactions with graffiti artists and using the statements of elected political officials to create their respective discussions on graffiti and aerosol art. Although ethnographic research is an important first step to understanding an artistic medium, as it is included in this study, questions still remain on how citizen public feels about the medium and have allowed the evolution of graffiti muralism into a contemporary global phenomenon. Secondly, why has public sentiment become more accepting of artistic and cultural expression through graffiti muralism, or has it? The insights about graffiti and aerosol art gained from the artists themselves and those with positions of socio-political power are monumental in the creation of contemporary discourse, but the next step must allow the citizen public to provide input into the discussions on the medium. What this chapter will further add to the discourse is the voices of the public, artists, scholars, and politicians all interacting together in different capacities to provide quantifiable data on this highly subjective topic through a Q study. The following Q surveying of the citizen public and art professionals, the largest consumer and participant groups of American Indian graffiti muralism and aerosol art, provides the complementary narrative on existing ideas and discussions concerning graffiti muralism and American Indian graffiti muralism needed in discourse. What will come to light is that multiple publics not only embrace the medium, but also welcome more of it in the future.

#### Q Methodology Background

Q methodology was chosen for this study because the developers and provisionary researchers of Q were interested in compiling data on heavily subjective topics. Q Methodology was first introduced by William Stephenson (1902-1989) and is best explained in a combination of his early articles; “Correlating Persons Instead of Texts” (1935), “Foundations of Psychometry: Four Factors Systems” (1936), “Alternative Views on Correlations Between Persons” (1939) with Sir Cyril Burt, and “The Study of Behavior: Q-technique and Its Methodology” (1953), where Stephenson outlines the goal of Q methodology to test subjective areas of presumed group consensus (Brown 1991, 91). Q methodology asserts that, “Subjectivity is ubiquitous and Q methodology provides a foundation for the systematic study of subjectivity” (Brown 1991), and is accomplished through a system of phases involving statement collection and ranking by participants on a subjective topic, in this case American Indian graffiti muralism and public art. As Steven R. Brown, Dan W. Durning, and Sally C. Selden (2008) state, “Q methodology is best understood as a type of research that identifies the operant subjectivity of individuals in regard to a particular subject. The methodology encompasses a broader philosophy of how subjectivity can best be studied, an inherent epistemology, and a method that includes a series of well-defined steps or phases” (722). The statements are based on matters of opinion, not fact, concerning the topic:

[T]he fact that the Q sorter [participant] is ranking the statements from his or her own point of view is what brings [additional] subjectivity into the picture. There is obviously no right or wrong way to provide “my point of view” about anything... Yet the rankings are subject to factor analysis, and the resulting factors, inasmuch as they have arisen from individual subjectivities, indicate segments of subjectivity which exist” (Brown 1991).

Q Methodology has become a sibling to traditional scientific R Methodology, which bases statistical analysis on objective research method; Q on the other hand bases research in subjective topic areas and factor analysis to investigate popular opinions within the subject group. As Steven R. Brown, Dan W. Durning, and Sally C. Selden (2007) state, “In fact, the designation of this method as “Q” is intended to differentiate it from “R” methodology, the statistical methods used for “objective” or “scientific” research in the social sciences. The differences between Q and R methods are not simply a matter of technique; they reflect different philosophies of inquiry that encompass competing epistemologies and different understandings of what constitutes sound scientific practice” (722). In short, Q was created to bring some objectivity to subjective areas, hence an ideal methodology to test public art aesthetic and public opinion of American Indian graffiti muralism. Brown, Durning, and Selden (2008) point out the key differences between Q and R methods as:

- Q methodology seeks to understand how individuals think (i.e. the structure of their thoughts) about the research topic of interest. R methodology identifies the structure of opinion or attitudes in a population. Thus, the results of Q method will identify how an individual, or individuals with common views understand an issue [in this study American Indian graffiti muralism and public art]; the results of R methods describe the characteristics of a population that are associated statistically with opinion, attitudes, or behavior (e.g. voting) being investigated.
- Although R methods are intended for the “objective” analysis of research issues, Q methodology is designed to study subjectivity. R methodology is found on logical positivism in which the researcher is an outside objective observer. Q

methodology is more closely related to postpositivist ideas (Durning 1999) that reject the possibility of observer objectivity and questions the assumption that the observer's vantage point, if not objective, is in some sense superior to that of any other observer, including the person being observed.

- Q methodology is an intensive method that seeks in-depth understanding of how at least one person thinks about the topic of investigation. As an intensive method, Q methodology requires a small number of well-selected subjects to complete the Q sort. (726)

With all of these proclamations about Q methodology in mind the subject of public art and graffiti muralism are two topics of wide subjectivity, so Q provided a framework to glean insight into the subjectivity and functionality of American Indian graffiti muralism. The focus on a specific ethnic marker within the larger graffiti muralism and public art communities helped narrow the Q study and identify specific demographic populations. One of the requirements of Q to target specific participants can become daunting with a topic with a large population of social actors, in this case the citizen public at large. The goal was to collect surveys from a participant pool across demographics with two distinct identifiers as a division. The first identifier was ethnic identification, American Indian or non-American Indian, and the second General Public or Art Professional. These two distinct markers helped create a participatory study across ethnic and professional lines. Fortunately the outcome of participant demographic data (See Table 5) was sufficient to represent fairly equally all of the social and political categories in America.

Q is a branch of participatory research that begins with the construction of the survey through what is referred to as the 'concourse' where, "the idea of concourse

incorporates virtually all manifestations of human life, as expressed in the lingua franca of shared culture” (Brown 1991). Q Methodology was chosen for this dissertation research project because it adheres to participatory community development and testing the ‘lingua franca’ of shared publics concerning graffiti muralism alongside public art, Native art, and American Indian graffiti muralism in research construction. Through public participation statements provided through the concourse building exercises and existing literature on graffiti and Native art provided a structure for public opinion, the ‘lingua franca,’ on American Indian graffiti muralism. In the last phase a second ‘well-selected’ public provided ranking data by participating in Q sorting. The final participants were a mixture of in-person public citizens recruited at different artistic events; the monthly Second Saturday arts celebration in Tucson, AZ, the 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue Street and Art Fair Tucson, AZ, and the weekly Phoenix Public Market in Phoenix, AZ, while a second group of AIS, art, museum, and gallery professionals were recruited for online Q sorting.

The unbridled nature of Q methodology, placing the construction and power in citizen public hands, and requirement that the author/researcher only act as a facilitator to test the statements made on the topic, supplied a true community narrative and the first collection of public opinion on American Indian graffiti muralism, aerosol art, and public art to date. Following Indigenous ways of knowing and the mission of the University of Arizona AIS department mission of community service producing and conducting a Q survey on American Indian graffiti muralism and public art has created a ‘community participation’ element to this dissertation study. Many times the public holds the knowledge of what they desire from researchers and academics better than the researcher or academic believes is desirable. It must be acknowledged that this is an initial inquiry

into Native public art aesthetic, more specifically American Indian graffiti muralism, and it would be impossible to represent all 566 federally recognized Native Nations but there was a diligent attempt to have an even number of American Indian and non-American Indian participants as well as public citizen to professional ratios. The third key difference between Q and R methods outlined by Brown, Durning, and Selden in “well selected” participants was broadened in this study because the citizen public interacting with public art is large in scope, so recruiting the “well selected” became those participants attending events built around a celebration of the arts to the everyday passerby. The intent was to recruit citizens that were intentionally interacting with public space. Although this was a slight broadening of Q method it was important to gather the opinions and have the opinions tested from everyday citizen individuals from numerous backgrounds. Gathering as many American Indian participants as possible from concourse to survey participation was intended to offer an impetus for further Native Nation specific studies on public art aesthetic. Brown (1991) states 3 points of achievement within a Q survey as:

1. The Q sample is comprised solely of things which people have said, and it is therefore indigenous to their understandings and forms of life.
2. The Q sorting operation is wholly subjective in the sense that it represents “my point of view”...issues of validity consequently fade since there is no external criterion by which to appraise a person’s own perspective.
3. As a corollary, the factors which subsequently emerge—factors, that is, in the factor-analytic sense—must represent functional categories of the subjectivities at issue.

To better understand the evolution of the Q survey contained here within on American Indian graffiti muralism the 6 Phases (Brown, Durning, and Selden 2008) of construction and data analysis this study followed is discussed below.

#### Q Sorting Research Methodological Phases<sup>24</sup>

In Phase 1: “Identifying the concourse” a Concourse Building Packet was prepared with a description of the project, images of American Indian graffiti murals, and driving questions underneath the photos (see Appendix A for packet example)<sup>25</sup>. Random public participants were asked guiding questions in regard to the images, but also given the opportunity to write any other statements or comments on the artwork in the bottom portions of each page. The Concourse Building Packet went through three revisions over the three different data gathering outings, with different public participants in each of the three outings. In these revisions American Indian graffiti mural images were swapped in and out while questions were revised with the additional language in brackets to number 3 below and the addition of question 6, always leaving room for general comments at the end of the packet. In the final Concourse Building Packet round participants were only given images without any questions and asked to write a “sentence or two” about the images. The following is the full list of questions included in the Concourse Building Packets:

1. What is your opinion of Native American murals?
2. In your opinion how does this mural speak to a sense of “Place”?

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<sup>24</sup> The 6 Phases were adopted from “Q Methodology” (Brown, Durning, and Selden 2008).

<sup>25</sup> This study was approved by the University of Arizona Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects research (IRB) before any participants were approached for Concourse Building and final Q Sorting participation. A University of Arizona IRB approved consent form was collected from each participant in both phases of the study.

3. What stands out in this mural [and what kind of thoughts or actions does it inspire in you]?
4. What does this mural accomplish?
5. How does this mural make you feel about the space it occupies?
6. Explain how this mural might show the presence and/or absence of Native Americans in a community or the United States.

Phase 2: “Sampling the concourse” began after gathering a sample group of 50 Concourse Building Packets on the three separate occasions in Tucson, AZ and Phoenix, AZ. There were a total of 167 statements with some being discarded due to illegibility, incoherence, and/or incomplete sentences. A grid was constructed with cells that represented main ideas from the qualitative analysis in this study, survivance and geosemiotic theory, and that tied into factors of place perceptions regarding these theoretical models. This was done, “with the goal of capturing the diversity and complexity of the different views contained within the concourse” (Brown, Durning, and Selden 2008) and group the large amount of statements into manageable categories to bring a cohesive testing of survivance and geosemiotic theory to the survey. The requirement of this phase is, “guided [by] the selection of a sample framework [survivance and geosemiotics] that has been formulated to model the important elements of the topic” (Brown, Durning, and Selden 2008). Due to the overwhelmingly ‘positive’ comments additional statements from existing literature on graffiti and Native art were combined with the public statements to cover areas of the cell grids outlined in Table 1. The literature review statements were also deemed necessary by the author to test statements pertaining to Native art historical discourse and the historically transgressive stigmas on graffiti muralism using politically charged statements by city government officials.

In Table 1 the horizontal groupings of statements reflect broad categories of concourse statements developed based upon the different elements involved in notions of ‘sense of place’ as it pertains to survivance theory and geosemiotics. The grouping of statements was done along the subject theme of Aesthetics and Presence/Absence/Expression of Indigeneity in order to represent survivance theory. Groupings in the themes of Place and Social Action represent geosemiotic theory. The vertical groupings were developed by the author to separate concourse statements that represented the strata of public art opinion in developing ‘sense of place’ through public artworks: Visual, Community, Political, and Emotional. Table 1 shows the initial grouping of the best representative public concourse statements for each cell without statements from existing literature.

	Aesthetics	Place	Social Action	Presence/Absence / Expression of Indigeneity (EoI)
Visual	15, 19, 21, 30, 60, 83, 88, 156	24, 31, 56, 80, 105, 132, 141	110, 139	52, 107, 125, 150
Community	2, 61, 62, 121, 159, 167	50, 74, 79, 82, 92, 129, 135, 151	45, 94, 96, 122	3, 89, 118, 120, 155, 166
Political	48, 57, 140, 143	33, 35, 85, 102, 119, 128, 157	39, 46, 84, 93, 98, 104, 136, 163	6, 71, 99, 109, 127, 134, 148, 153
Emotional	8, 10, 63, 103, 117, 149	41, 43, 126, 133	32, 53, 55, 86, 95, 114, 124, 161	70, 131, 154, 158, 160

**Table 1:** Groups with Type of Claim

	Aesthetics	Place	Social Action	Presence /Absence / EoI
Visual	8	7	2	4
Community	6	8	4	6
Political	4	7	8	8
Emotional	6	4	8	5

**Table 2:** Initial Number of Statements per Cell

In Phase 3: “Q sorting” the survey was constructed and a ranking system created for the statements compiled from Phase 1. An initial concourse of 32 representative statements were chosen for ranking and a -3 to 3 (9 columns) ranking spectrum was chosen for the Q Sorting. At the extremes of -3 and 3 a two statement limit was set for participants to rank the 2 statements they “Most Agree(d)” and “Most Disagree(d)” with. In an initial test of 7 participants there was very little variance in the results and it was determined that 4 additional statements, increasing the statement total to 36, would be added to the survey and the ranking spectrum raised to -4 to 4 (increasing from 7 to 9 columns of ranking), while keeping the 2 statement limit on the extremes. Statements were added from the dissertation literature review material with some statements replacing public statements in order to create more negativity in statement variance and that spoke to different cells of the study. Statement numbers 6, 19, and 25 from Table 3 use semantic language like “background scenery,” “awful,” and “deterioration,” all negative lexical signifiers to allow those participants that may view graffiti muralism along a negative spectrum to express their opinion in ranking. It is important at this point to note that after surveying the citizen public for comments during Phase 1 the statements were overwhelmingly supportive of graffiti muralism and American Indian graffiti muralism, which will be readdressed in the findings phase. Table 3 includes the added statements from the Literature Review in Chapter 1, with statement number and cell representation. In Table 4 the cells were numbered 1 through 16 and the representative statement numbers are included for each cell. The list of cells with categorical description, representative statements, and statement number can be found in Appendix B.

Statement #	
3	Pictography is nearly universal in practice but naturally by no means identical in style or meaning...it was sometimes an attempt at purely aesthetic expression (Cell 1)
6	Graffiti is background scenery, an urban white noise which is recognized but rarely registered (Cell 3)
11	The significant feature of the new graffiti is its sense of purpose, the particular emphasis it places on the individual (Cell 5)
19	Not all graffiti is worthy of attention; like most pursuits, some of its products are great and some are awful, and this range requires seeing [Native American] graffiti as a complex expression rather than a monolithic act (Cell 9)
20	Such images 'speak to people,' or put another way, they are readily interpretable in various ways. Yet they also transcend questions of particular languages and present instead a broader domain of activism (Cell 9)
22	Graffiti writing challenges assumptions about who has access to public literacy, who controls the space, who can sanction public images and lettering (Cell 10)
25	The public sees graffiti as a form of deterioration...there is an obligation to respect the rights of the public and they all hate graffiti (Cell 11)
29	Graffiti is not formless or disorganized...it has its own internal structure and highly efficient strategies for mobilizing meaning (Cell 13)
31	The pervasiveness of Indian imagery reminds-especially among roadside statues and sculptures-reminds Americans stereotyping continues today (Cell 14)

**Table 3:** Added Literature Review Statements, Final Statement Number, and Cell Representation

	Aesthetics, EoI	Place	Social Action	Presence/Absence /EoI
Visual	<b>1</b> (1, 2, 3)	<b>2</b> (4, 5)	<b>3</b> (6, 7)	<b>4</b> (8, 9)
Community	<b>5</b> (10, 11)	<b>6</b> (12, 13)	<b>7</b> (14, 15)	<b>8</b> (16, 17)
Political	<b>9</b> (18, 19, 20)	<b>10</b> (21, 22)	<b>11</b> (23, 24, 25)	<b>12</b> (26, 27)
Emotional	<b>13</b> (28, 29)	<b>14</b> (30, 31)	<b>15</b> (32, 33)	<b>16</b> (34, 35, 36)

**Table 4:** Cell Number [BOLD] and Statement Numbers

After researching online Q sorting programs the program Q-sortware<sup>26</sup> was chosen for recruiting art professional and AIS academic participants across the United States. The statements were loaded into the program and Splash pages were created for directions on Q Sorting, Demographic Data, Comments on the survey, and the University of Arizona IRB approved Consent Form. Q-sortware required a two-step process; an initial sorting of statements into one of three categories of Disagree, Neutral, and Agree and a second step ‘dragging and dropping’ the statements into the number value columns of -4 to 4.

The final Q Study survey included a basic demographic data questionnaire asking participants to note how they identify themselves across different social and political categories. The demographic categories were as follows:

- Age Range (18-23, 24-29, 30-35, 36-41, 42-50, 50+)
- Ethnicity (American Indian or Non-American Indian)
- Gender (Male or Female)
- Residence (Urban or Rural)
- Profession (Art Professional/Scholar or Other)

In the Ethnicity category no Certificate of Indian Blood (C.I.B) card or other identification was asked for to substantiate participant identification. This was decided upon in order to allow participants to freely identify without feeling investigated upon and follows a Q methodological approach of individualism in participant response. Only one in-person participant questioned this category stating, “I have relatives that are

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<sup>26</sup>More information on Q-sortware can be found at:  
<http://www.qsortouch.com/home.html>

Native American...” and it was explained that they were to check the box that they see best fit their personal identification. There were also 2 participants that decided to not identify which was not questioned by the author. The main utility of these data points was to quantify assertions of subjectivity and shed new light on public aesthetic regarding American Indian graffiti and muralism across public demographics. The demographic data was also used to test the historical stigmatization of graffiti and murals by different public subgroups with the assumption that differences would arise from the younger populations to older populations, as this is a stereotype commonly stated in graffiti literature (Castleman 1982, Phillips 1999, Snyder 2009). Compiling such data in this fashion and as a surveying of this nature on American Indian graffiti muralism has never prior to this project, the demographic data has provided reasoning of opinion through particular groups within the citizen public. Due to the fact that in each category there was a substantial representative number of participants the output data suggests opinions across the demographic of the citizen public. The final demographic data numbers are shown in Table 5 below.

<b><u>Gender</u></b>					
<b>Male: 21 (52%)</b>			<b>Female: 19 (48%)</b>		
<b><u>Ethnicity*</u></b>					
<b>American Indian: 14 (35%)</b>		<b>Non-American Indian: 24 (60%)</b>		<b>*(2 non-identify)</b>	
<b><u>Living Area*</u></b>					
<b>Urban: 31 (77.5%)</b>			<b>Rural: 8 (20%)</b>		<b>*(1 non-identify)</b>
<b><u>Employment</u></b>					
<b>Professional: 18 (45%)</b>			<b>Public: 22 (55%)</b>		
<b><u>Age Range</u></b>					
<b>18-23: 5</b>	<b>24-29: 6</b>	<b>30-35: 4</b>	<b>36-41: 5</b>	<b>42-50: 7</b>	<b>50+: 13</b>

**Table 5:** Final Demographic Data of Q Survey Participants

Participants for the final survey were identified in Phase 4: “Selecting the sorters (P sample)” keeping in mind, “The selection depends highly on the topic that is being investigated...If the study addresses a broader topic affecting a larg[e] group of people and interests, the selection of participants should be designed to make sure that the full range of opinions and positions are represented in the P sample” (Brown, Durning, Selden 2008, 723). As mentioned prior, due to the fact that American Indian graffiti muralism and graffiti muralism as a whole invites participation of large groups of public participants a grouping of “General Public” participants was necessary to cover the general population. A second “Professional” group was identified as Art professionals, those who work in museums and galleries, and more specifically American Indian focused museums, along with AIS scholars. The second Professional group was recruited mainly using online research for contact information that was open to the public and a Contacts List of AIS professionals put together by the author for the University of Arizona AIS department as part of an Outreach Graduate Assistantship. Online participants were recruited through an initial email inviting the recipients to take part in the survey and an explanation of the study. The final totals for the online recruitment and participation were 142 invitation emails with 31 response emails of agreement to take part in the survey. A personalized email and URL generated by Q-sortware was sent to each respondent agreeing to take part in the study; 11 of the 31 who agreed to take part in the survey completed the survey by the deadline to start analysis.

The second general public group was recruited in-person at the aforementioned community arts events in Tucson and Phoenix, Arizona. A physical board was constructed with the ranking columns, the IRB description of the study, and pictures of

American Indian graffiti murals. The statements were placed on index cards and were arranged on the board by participants according to their viewpoints. These participants were asked to sign the IRB approved consent form and were given contact information for Healey after completing the survey. Participants were also given the opportunity to make outgoing comments on the survey and any other general comments.

In Phase 5: “Analyzing the Q sorts” a second software created for analyzing Q sorts PQMETHOD was chosen to analyze the survey data and produce the findings. PQMETHOD is one of the most popular Q sorting softwares available and was recommended by the Q Method society website (<http://qmethod.org/>). A total of 40 Q sorts were entered into PQMETHOD; 29 In-person and 11 Online/Professional sorts. There were a total of 3 self-defined artists that took part in the survey; 2 in-person and 1 online. As Brown, Durning, and Selden (2008) explain of Phase 5, “statistical analysis begins by correlating the Q sorts, followed by factor analysis of the correlation matrix and factor rotation. The statistical analysis takes into account a distinct feature of the Q sort data: the statements comprising the Q sample are observations of the study and the individuals completing the Q sorts are the variables” (724). Table 6 shows the factor analysis of the 40 sorts after a 33-degree rotation. From the initial analysis before rotation there was large consensus on Factor 1 at 16.2638 (41%) between the surveys and Factor 2 with a slight 1% or .02 percentage over the remaining 6 factors identified by the PQMETHOD software. Along Factors 2 (6%) and Factor 3 (5%) the variance was very low in comparison to Factor 1 (41%), so a 33-degree factor rotation was chosen to increase the variance for Factors 2 and 3. As seen at the bottom of Table 6 after rotation the variance along Factors 1, 2, and 3 changed to 30%, 15%, and 7%. This brought

tighter grouping around Factors 2 and 3 by decreasing the large majority of sorts on Factor 1. Put more simply, the factor rotation was important because, “when factor analysis and factor rotation are completed, the Q factors are made up of groups of sorters who have similar views on the topic of [American Indian graffiti muralism]” (Brown, Durning, and Selden 2008, 724). The Q sort groupings after rotation increased variance between factors and aided larger participant groupings along those factors easier to identify. The final rotation can be seen in Table 8 where Factor 1 and 2 are represented by the vertical and horizontal axes and survey numbers within the matrix. Many of the Q sorts closer to Factor 2 (the horizontal axis) were originally located at roughly the 45 degree area before factor rotation and by rotating them closer to Factor 2 a group was easier to identify along Factor 2.

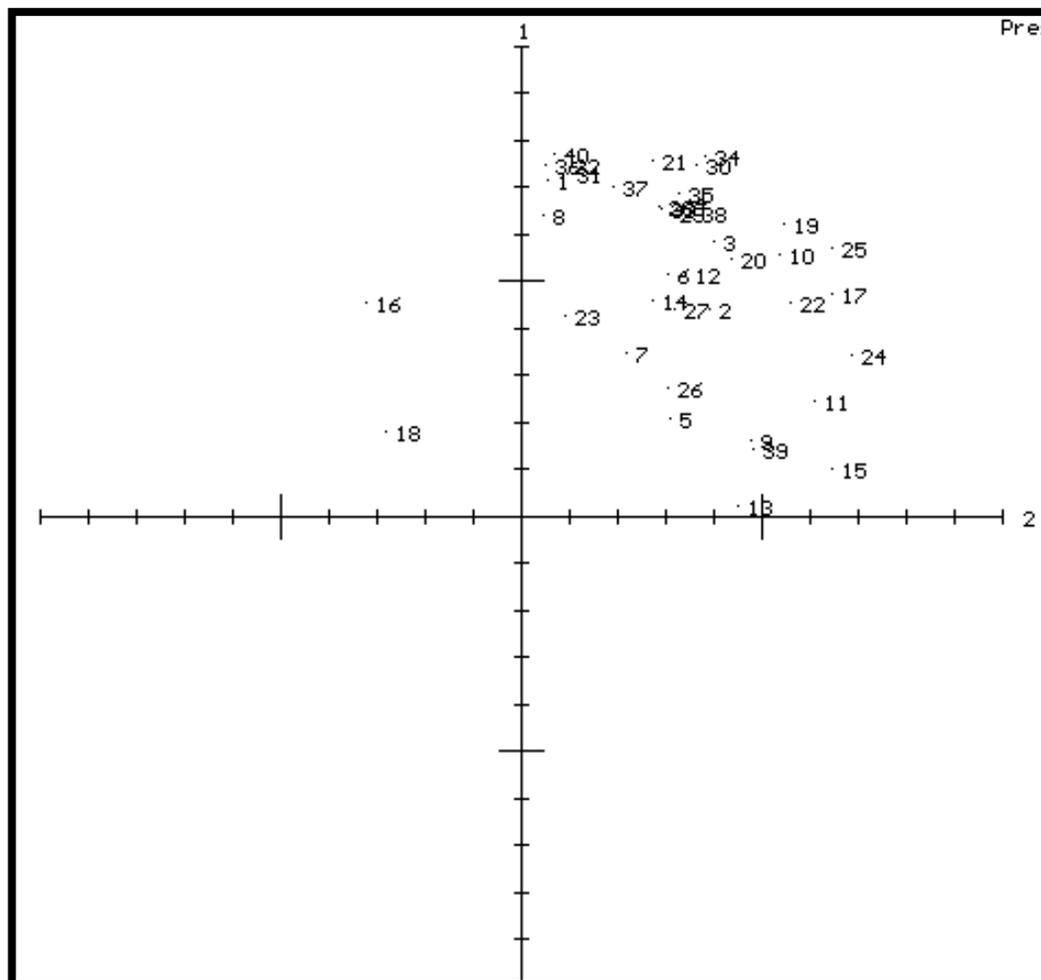
In Table 6 the Defining Sorts for each factor are highlighted with an “**X**”. These defining sorts were produced by PQMETHOD after the correlation and rotation of the 40 sorts. Using this data to identify the Defining Sorts helps identify those sorts closest to the norm of the factor. Each sort represented with an “**X**” in the factor column is a Defining Sort of that factor. Table 7 shows the demographic identifiers for each of the Defining Sorts to show the demographic strata of each factors representative sorts. Following the percentage variance of each factor there were 24 Defining Sorts for Factor 1, 8 Defining Sorts along Factor 2, and 3 Defining Sorts for Factor 3. The Defining Sorts became reference points for each factor across statements with the loadings (high number of sorts) on specific groupings of statements the Defining Sorts aided in moving onto Phase 6: Results of the survey.

<b>QSORT</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
Sort 1	0.7180 <b>X</b>	0.0542	0.3411
Sort 2	0.4399 <b>X</b>	0.3897	0.0236
Sort 3	0.5857 <b>X</b>	0.4012	0.0166
Sort 4	0.6702 <b>X</b>	0.3390	0.1704
Sort 5	0.2079	0.3096	-0.0849
Sort 6	0.5175 <b>X</b>	0.3049	0.2322
Sort 7	0.3492	0.2202	0.6422 <b>X</b>
Sort 8	0.6437 <b>X</b>	0.0438	-0.3496
Sort 9	0.1625	0.4751 <b>X</b>	0.1405
Sort 10	0.5586	0.5385	0.2882
Sort 11	0.2468	0.6080 <b>X</b>	0.0000
Sort 12	0.5173 <b>X</b>	0.3387	0.3548
Sort 13	0.0239	0.4500	0.5178 <b>X</b>
Sort 14	0.4594	0.2730	0.3875
Sort 15	0.1011	0.6439 <b>X</b>	0.2061
Sort 16	0.4552	-0.3246	0.4514
Sort 17	0.4734	0.6444 <b>X</b>	0.1282
Sort 18	0.1810	-0.2814	0.0909
Sort 19	0.6220 <b>X</b>	0.5461	0.0142
Sort 20	0.5502 <b>X</b>	0.4351	0.0058
Sort 21	0.7561 <b>X</b>	0.2745	0.2124
Sort 22	0.4556	0.5583 <b>X</b>	-0.0866
Sort 23	0.4256 <b>X</b>	0.0928	0.3391
Sort 24	0.3443	0.6845 <b>X</b>	0.1720
Sort 25	0.5743	0.6435 <b>X</b>	-0.0515
Sort 26	0.2739	0.3058	0.6763 <b>X</b>
Sort 27	0.4415 <b>X</b>	0.3185	-0.1228
Sort 28	0.6622 <b>X</b>	0.2856	0.1709
Sort 29	0.6454 <b>X</b>	0.3105	0.2533
Sort 30	0.7494 <b>X</b>	0.3650	-0.0425
Sort 31	0.7300 <b>X</b>	0.0935	-0.2123
Sort 32	0.7466 <b>X</b>	0.0887	0.1396
Sort 33	0.6555 <b>X</b>	0.2917	-0.2008
Sort 34	0.7652 <b>X</b>	0.3833	-0.0798
Sort 35	0.6889 <b>X</b>	0.3290	0.1873
Sort 36	0.7470 <b>X</b>	0.0488	0.0918
Sort 37	0.7013 <b>X</b>	0.1921	0.2104
Sort 38	0.6477 <b>X</b>	0.3555	0.0001
Sort 39	0.1435	0.4839 <b>X</b>	-0.0092
Sort 40	0.7703 <b>X</b>	0.0686	0.0535
% expl.Var.	30	15	7

**Table 6:** Factor Matrix after Correlation and Rotation with “X” Indicating a Defining

Sort for the Factor

**Factor 1 Art Aesthetic (24 Defining Sorts)****Gender****Male:** 11 (45%)**Female:** 13 (54%)**Ethnicity\*****American Indian:** 7 (29%) **Non-American Indian:** 16 (67%) \*(1 non-identify)**Living Area\*****Urban:** 19 (79%)**Rural:** 5 (20%)**Employment****Professional:** 15 (62.5%)**Public:** 9 (37.5%)**Age Range****18-23:** 0**24-29:** 2**30-35:** 4**36-41:** 4**42-50:** 4**50+:** 10**Factor 2 Geosemiotics (8 Defining Sorts)****Gender****Male:** 6 (75%)**Female:** 2 (25%)**Ethnicity\*****American Indian:** 3 (37.5%) **Non-American Indian:** 5 (62.5%)**Living Area\*****Urban:** 6 (75%)**Rural:** 1 (25%)**Employment****Professional:** 0 (0%)**Public:** 8 (100%)**Age Range****18-23:** 2**24-29:** 2**30-35:** 0**36-41:** 0**42-50:** 2**50+:** 2**Factor 3 Survivance (3 Defining Sorts)****Gender****Male:** 0 (0%)**Female:** 3 (100%)**Ethnicity\*****American Indian:** 3 (100%) **Non-American Indian:** 0 (0%)**Living Area\*****Urban:** 3 (100%)**Rural:** 0 (0%)**Employment****Professional:** 1 (33%)**Public:** 2 (67%)**Age Range****18-23:** 0**24-29:** 1**30-35:** 0**36-41:** 1**42-50:** 0**50+:** 1**Table 7:** Demographic Data for Defining Sorts Across Factors



**Table 8:** Final Rotation Along Factors 1 & 2

In Phase 6: Interpreting the Factors/Results each factor is given explanation as to how it is differentiated from the other factors as well as what similarities arose among the factors. First, each Factor was given a title according the elements within the highest ranking statements in that Factor. Statements ranked in the two highest values, +4 and +3, were used to create a label for each factor. Tables 9, 10, and 11 all represent each individual Factor and the output of statement ranking for that Factor. These tables were used to determine the Factor labeling, so each Factor representation can be fully explored. The Z-score<sup>27</sup> calculated by PQMETHOD for each statement was included to aid in understanding the ordering, or ranking, across the value spectrum (-4 to +4). Factor 1 was given the label of “Art Aesthetic” because statements #13, #29, #20, and #14 all speak to graffiti muralism and murals in the broader sense of public art. For instance statement #14, “This type of painting is a reminder that it exists within a larger spectrum of life by connecting people that live around it and/or view it” speaks to the affect the participants believe graffiti muralism has on human-to-human interaction. The participants grouped along this factor show that they are supportive of the universal nature of art with the exception being statement #1 with the label “Native American” contained within. The rest of the language in statement #1 still speaks to the connection between the individual and murals. Seeing that Factor 1 was the most heavily agreed upon factor, 40% before rotation and 30% after, the results of statement ranking means that the aesthetics of the art, regardless of ethnic marker, were important aspects of American Indian graffiti muralism. This suggests that public art is important to citizens

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<sup>27</sup> Z-scores or the Standard Score is expressed in terms of standard deviation from the mean. Because

and professionals who see it as a positive element in their sense of place. Looking further into the demographic strata of the Defining Sorts there is a distinctive distribution between American Indian and non-American Indian individual sorts, which supports the assertion that this is a cross-cultural finding. Of the Defining Sorts almost half are American Indian individuals which is a higher representative number than current U.S. census data of less than 1% (.012) of the population<sup>28</sup>. There were also somewhat even distributions across Profession and Age Range, which suggests that Factor 1 is representative of a wide range of social station. There is a consensus regardless of profession that public art and graffiti muralism is embraced by the public that was surveyed and this participant group would desire more graffiti murals. The wide strata in Age Range along the Distinguishing Sorts 24 to 50 suggests that graffiti muralism, according to this participant group, is embraced by older sectors of the public. There is a common stereotype that graffiti muralism is only supported by younger generations of the public (Castleman 1982, Phillips 1999, Snyder 2009), but the survey results in this study found differently.

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<sup>28</sup> <https://www.census.gov>

No.	Statement	RANKING	Z-SCORE
13.	Art is an expression of the self, taking into account everyday surroundings, everyday travels in order to come up with new ideas and atmospheres.	+4	1.294
29.	Graffiti is not formless or disorganized...it has its own internal structure and highly efficient strategies for mobilizing meaning.	+4	1.270
1.	Native American murals beautify the wall, capturing the viewer, it brings a personal connection to the location of the mural.	+3	1.246
20.	Such images 'speak to people,' or put another way, they are readily interpretable in various ways. Yet they also transcend questions of particular languages and present instead a broader domain of activism.	+3	1.137
14.	This type of painting is a reminder that it exists within a larger spectrum of life by connecting people that live around it and/or view it.	+3	1.035
9.	These murals provide Native American context with contemporary overtones, as if it says the past is still alive.	+2	0.971
10.	This art, in scope and the presence of organic, human, and geometric form, claims space for Native American people.	+2	0.913
8.	The fantastic art of the people, better than a blank wall through expression of Native American culture and inspirations of cultural diversity.	+2	0.826
16.	Muralism is a valuable outlet for native artists to express values important to their spiritual traditions.	+2	0.810
4.	A mural helps emphasize an otherwise un-noteworthy place, brightens up the area by giving the visual environment cultural purpose.	+1	0.788
34.	Native American murals accomplish attention and visibility for Native Americans where they otherwise would not be acknowledged.	+1	0.753
3.	Pictography is nearly universal in practice but naturally by no means identical in style or meaning...it was sometimes an attempt at purely aesthetic expression.	+1	0.659
12.	Murals show the influence of a muralist, it makes me feel that the space has special significance to the artist.	+1	0.613
22.	Graffiti writing challenges assumptions about who has access to public literacy, who controls the space, who can sanction public images and lettering.	+1	0.584
24.	Native American murals remind people not to forget how Native Americans have been, and still are, misrepresented in American popular media.	0	0.490
23.	Native American murals advocate that Native Americans have a place in the world to be very politically influential.	0	0.454
27.	Native American murals are not invasive, but maybe more insistent or persistent that Native American people have been displaced.	0	0.408
33.	Native American murals give a message of life in perpetuity.	0	0.292
18.	The message of sacredness in Native American murals allow graffiti/street art to be elevated from vandalism to acceptable forms of social expression.	0	0.270
19.	Not all graffiti is worthy of attention; like most pursuits, some of its products are great and some are awful, and this range requires seeing Native American graffiti as a complex expression rather than a monolithic act.	0	0.234
11.	The significant feature of the new graffiti is its sense of purpose, the particular emphasis it places on the individual.	0	-0.014
36.	Native American murals are expressions of a longing to preserve Native American spiritual awareness.	0	-0.105

15. Protection for the Native American culture, these murals inspire me to become more culturally informed.	-1	-0.204
31. The pervasiveness of Indian imagery reminds-especially among roadside statues and sculptures-reminds Americans stereotyping continues today.	-1	-0.323
7. Native American murals are a colorful reminder of human abuse and the dark nature of our existence.	-1	-0.432
26. Native American murals highlight a feeling of “forgottenness” by the American government.	-1	-0.442
32. I think there is a social interaction that occurs between people of different races, which could not happen without Native American murals.	-1	-0.547
17. All Native American muralists enter this subculture with an ambition to be the best, the most famous, the most respected, and it is this that makes a graffiti career a ‘moral career’ in its purest form. All its paths, progressions and purposes lead to one openly recognized end goal; a strong self-concept.	-2	-0.763
30. I find murals and graffiti a bit overpowering for the place I live, not all graffiti or murals are art.	-2	-1.019
6. Graffiti is background scenery, an urban white noise which is recognized but rarely registered.	-2	-1.092
35. I personally don’t relate murals to Native Americans. It doesn’t speak to me in that way.	-2	-1.302
28. Native American murals create a chaotic vibe in home-like spaces.	-3	-1.406
21. Murals are very urban and give a city vibe sense of character, they don’t fit in rural environments.	-3	-1.432
25. The public sees graffiti as a form of deterioration...there is an obligation to respect the rights of the public and they all hate graffiti.	-3	-1.583
2. Screams inner-city, I see it as frustration and an eyesore.	-4	-2.080
5. It looks messy and like it doesn’t belong in the public, makes me wonder why this art is deemed acceptable.	-4	-2.305

**Table 9:** Factor Scores and Ranking—Factor 1 (Art Aesthetic)

The highest ranking statements along Factor 2 speak to elements of geosemiotic theory thus Factor 2 was labeled “Geosemiotics.” In statements #1, #36, and #31 there are elements that speak to the interaction between American Indian graffiti murals and the surrounding environment. In statement #1 the notion that these murals bring a personal connection to the location and “beautify” the space speak to geosemiotics interactions with sense of place. The connection is a geosemiotic indexing of the space through artistic signposts, while the visual semiotics are creating a dialogicality, or interaction, of ‘beauty’ suggesting the ‘wall’ was less attractive before the mural installation. Factor 2 suggests that American Indian graffiti murals are supporting a positive sense of place and “brightens up the area” (#4), while combating American Indian stereotyping is an ongoing occurrence (#31).

Along the Defining Sorts there was once again a strong balance between American Indian (37.5%) and non-American Indian (67.5%) representative population. This suggests that once again cross-culturally graffiti muralism and American Indian graffiti muralism affects a participant’s sense of place in a positive way according to this participant group. The findings support the notion that graffiti muralism and American Indian graffiti muralism supports a cross-cultural space of communication by providing a space and place open to dialogues of ethnicity and diversity. According to the Defining Sorts Profession in the arts was not a factor to these rankings with 100% of the sorts coming from the General Public participant group. This suggests that the public agrees with geosemiotic theories analysis in this study that public art, graffiti muralism, and American Indian graffiti muralism have a significant impact on citizen public sense of place. Lastly, the Age Range of the Defining Sorts for Factor 2 suggest that both the

youngest participants and oldest participants agreed that their sense of place is impacted by graffiti muralism and American Indian graffiti muralism.

No.	Statement	RANKING	Z-SCORE
36.	Native American murals are expressions of a longing to preserve Native American spiritual awareness.	+4	2.018
13.	Art is an expression of the self, taking into account everyday surroundings, everyday travels in order to come up with new ideas and atmospheres.	+4	1.917
1.	Native American murals beautify the wall, capturing the viewer, it brings a personal connection to the location of the mural.	+3	1.602
4.	A mural helps emphasize an otherwise un-noteworthy place, brightens up the area by giving the visual environment cultural purpose.	+3	1.375
31.	The pervasiveness of Indian imagery reminds-especially among roadside statues and sculptures-reminds Americans stereotyping continues today.	+3	0.908
14.	This type of painting is a reminder that it exists within a larger spectrum of life by connecting people that live around it and/or view it.	+2	0.901
34.	Native American murals accomplish attention and visibility for Native Americans where they otherwise would not be acknowledged.	+2	0.839
18.	The message of sacredness in Native American murals allow graffiti/street art to be elevated from vandalism to acceptable forms of social expression.	+2	0.746
8.	The fantastic art of the people, better than a blank wall through expression of Native American culture and inspirations of cultural diversity.	+2	0.737
9.	These murals provide Native American context with contemporary overtones, as if it says the past is still alive.	+1	0.658
23.	Native American murals advocate that Native Americans have a place in the world to be very politically influential.	+1	0.542
12.	Murals show the influence of a muralist, it makes me feel that the space has special significance to the artist.	+1	0.498
10.	This art, in scope and the presence of organic, human, and geometric form, claims space for Native American people.	+1	0.495
16.	Muralism is a valuable outlet for native artists to express values important to their spiritual traditions.	+1	0.440
7.	Native American murals are a colorful reminder of human abuse and the dark nature of our existence.	0	0.394
33.	Native American murals give a message of life in perpetuity.	0	0.368
15.	Protection for the Native American culture, these murals inspire me to become more culturally informed.	0	0.238
27.	Native American murals are not invasive, but maybe more insistent or persistent that Native American people have been displaced.	0	0.086
11.	The significant feature of the new graffiti is its sense of purpose, the particular emphasis it places on the individual.	0	0.014
24.	Native American murals remind people not to forget how Native Americans have been, and still are, misrepresented in American popular media.	0	-0.233
22.	Graffiti writing challenges assumptions about who has access to public literacy, who controls the space, who can sanction public images and lettering.	0	-0.276

29. Graffiti is not formless or disorganized...it has its own internal structure and highly efficient strategies for mobilizing meaning.	0	-0.373
6. Graffiti is background scenery, an urban white noise which is recognized but rarely registered.	-1	-0.429
32. I think there is a social interaction that occurs between people of different races, which could not happen without Native American murals.	-1	-0.502
26. Native American murals highlight a feeling of "forgottenness" by the American government.	-1	-0.517
20. Such images 'speak to people,' or put another way, they are readily interpretable in various ways. Yet they also transcend questions of particular languages and present instead a broader domain of activism.	-1	-0.520
19. Not all graffiti is worthy of attention; like most pursuits, some of its products are great and some are awful, and this range requires seeing Native American graffiti as a complex expression rather than a monolithic act.	-1	-0.619
3. Pictography is nearly universal in practice but naturally by no means identical in style or meaning...it was sometimes an attempt at purely aesthetic expression.	-2	-0.665
35. I personally don't relate murals to Native Americans. It doesn't speak to me in that way.	-2	-0.730
17. All Native American muralists enter this subculture with an ambition to be the best, the most famous, the most respected, and it is this that makes a graffiti career a 'moral career' in its purest form. All its paths, progressions and purposes lead to one openly recognized end goal; a strong self-concept.	-2	-0.870
25. The public sees graffiti as a form of deterioration...there is an obligation to respect the rights of the public and they all hate graffiti.	-2	-1.011
30. I find murals and graffiti a bit overpowering for the place I live, not all graffiti or murals are art.	-3	-1.332
21. Murals are very urban and give a city vibe sense of character, they don't fit in rural environments.	-3	-1.445
28. Native American murals create a chaotic vibe in home-like spaces.	-3	-1.523
5. It looks messy and like it doesn't belong in the public, makes me wonder why this art is deemed acceptable.	-4	-1.669
2. Screams inner-city, I see it as frustration and an eyesore.	-4	-2.061

**Table 10:** Factor Scores and Ranking—Factor 2 (Geosemiotics)

Factor 3 was labeled “Survivance” because the top ranking statements represent Gerald Vizenor’s notions of American Indian perseverance of culture while also speaking to the damage of stereotypical imagery in public signage. These statements are denouncing the damaging facets of homogenized imagery and at the same time promoting introspection, knowledge, and understanding facilitated by American Indian graffiti muralism. The ranking of statement #36 was very significant in suggesting that participants believe American Indian graffiti muralism provides, “a social interaction that occurs between people of different races, which could not happen without [them].” If the consensus along the third highest factor is that American Indian graffiti murals are promoting the opening of dialogue and American Indian “life in perpetuity” there appears to be public support for the communicative elements of these murals.

The Defining Sorts of Factor 3 show that the defining participants were 100% American Indian and female. This suggests that the survivance analysis in Chapter 2 of this study is supported by this quantitative data that American Indian graffiti muralism embodies a practice of survivance as viewed by American Indian participants in this study. As the observations in this study are of outsider researcher observations, the findings in this Q survey suggest that among the participants in the survey agree with the applicability of survivance theory with graffiti muralism and American Indian graffiti muralism. The wide age range of participants in the Defining Sorts also suggest that both young and elder view American Indian graffiti muralism as a significant sign of contemporary survivance in urban areas.

No.	Statement	RANKING	Z-SCORE
32.	I think there is a social interaction that occurs between people of different races, which could not happen without Native American murals.	+4	2.001
1.	Native American murals beautify the wall, capturing the viewer, it brings a personal connection to the location of the mural.	+4	1.273
33.	Native American murals give a message of life in perpetuity.	+3	1.245
15.	Protection for the Native American culture, these murals inspire me to become more culturally informed.	+3	1.178
36.	Native American murals are expressions of a longing to preserve Native American spiritual awareness.	+3	1.135
4.	A mural helps emphasize an otherwise un-noteworthy place, brightens up the area by giving the visual environment cultural purpose.	+2	1.040
18.	The message of sacredness in Native American murals allow graffiti/street art to be elevated from vandalism to acceptable forms of social expression.	+2	0.933
16.	Muralism is a valuable outlet for native artists to express values important to their spiritual traditions.	+2	0.918
34.	Native American murals accomplish attention and visibility for Native Americans where they otherwise would not be acknowledged.	+2	0.780
8.	The fantastic art of the people, better than a blank wall through expression of Native American culture and inspirations of cultural diversity.	+1	0.667
20.	Such images 'speak to people,' or put another way, they are readily interpretable in various ways. Yet they also transcend questions of particular languages and present instead a broader domain of activism.	+1	0.649
11.	The significant feature of the new graffiti is its sense of purpose, the particular emphasis it places on the individual.	+1	0.468
17.	All Native American muralists enter this subculture with an ambition to be the best, the most famous, the most respected, and it is this that makes a graffiti career a 'moral career' in its purest form. All its paths, progressions and purposes lead to one openly recognized end goal; a strong self-concept.	+1	0.422
27.	Native American murals are not invasive, but maybe more insistent or persistent that Native American people have been displaced.	+1	0.404
26.	Native American murals highlight a feeling of "forgottenness" by the American government.	0	0.324
3.	Pictography is nearly universal in practice but naturally by no means identical in style or meaning...it was sometimes an attempt at purely aesthetic expression.	0	0.248
14.	This type of painting is a reminder that it exists within a larger spectrum of life by connecting people that live around it and/or view it.	0	0.245
29.	Grffiti is not formless or disorganized...it has its own internal structure and highly efficient strategies for mobilizing meaning.	0	0.141
12.	Murals show the influence of a muralist, it makes me feel that the space has special significance to the artist.	0	0.000
31.	The pervasiveness of Indian imagery reminds-especially	0	-0.030

among roadside statues and sculptures-reminds Americans stereotyping continues today.		
24. Native American murals remind people not to forget how Native Americans have been, and still are, misrepresented in American popular media.	0	-0.048
23. Native American murals advocate that Native Americans have a place in the world to be very politically influential.	0	-0.080
25. The public sees graffiti as a form of deterioration...there is an obligation to respect the rights of the public and they all hate graffiti.	-1	-0.217
6. Graffiti is background scenery, an urban white noise which is recognized but rarely registered.	-1	-0.248
10. This art, in scope and the presence of organic, human, and geometric form, claims space for Native American people.	-1	-0.312
21. Murals are very urban and give a city vibe sense of character, they don't fit in rural environments.	-1	-0.358
9. These murals provide Native American context with contemporary overtones, as if it says the past is still alive.	-1	-0.532
13. Art is an expression of the self, taking into account everyday surroundings, everyday travels in order to come up with new ideas and atmospheres.	-2	-0.710
7. Native American murals are a colorful reminder of human abuse and the dark nature of our existence.	-2	-0.716
19. Not all graffiti is worthy of attention; like most pursuits, some of its products are great and some are awful, and this range requires seeing Native American graffiti as a complex expression rather than a monolithic act.	-2	-0.790
35. I personally don't relate murals to Native Americans. It doesn't speak to me in that way.	-2	-1.288
22. Graffiti writing challenges assumptions about who has access to public literacy, who controls the space, who can sanction public images and lettering.	-3	-1.352
2. Screams inner-city, I see it as frustration and an eyesore.	-3	-1.395
30. I find murals and graffiti a bit overpowering for the place I live, not all graffiti or murals are art.	-3	-1.536
28. Native American murals create a chaotic vibe in home-like spaces.	-4	-2.035
5. It looks messy and like it doesn't belong in the public, makes me wonder why this art is deemed acceptable.	-4	-2.423

**Table 11:** Factor Scores and Ranking—Factor 3 (Survivance)

With a better glimpse of what the rankings of each Factor individually detected and what the Factors came to represent, Table 12 shows how each statement ranked across the three Factors. This table is where conclusions can be drawn about public and professional sentiment on American Indian graffiti muralism. The table represents where some statements that were important to participants regardless of Factor difference. The statements that received consistent positive and negative rankings across factors represent a quantitative norm across participants and demographics are highlighted in Tables 13 and 14. These two tables represent the extrapolated groups of statements with consensus ranking, either positive (agreement) or negative (disagreement), regardless of Factor.

No. Statement	<b>FACTORS</b>		
	A	B	C
1. Native American murals beautify the wall, capturing the viewer, it brings a personal connection to the location of the mural.	+3	+3	+4
2. Screams inner-city, I see it as frustration and an eyesore.	-4	-4	-3
3. Pictography is nearly universal in practice but naturally by no means identical in style or meaning...it was sometimes an attempt at purely aesthetic expression.	+1	-2	0
4. A mural helps emphasize an otherwise un-noteworthy place, brightens up the area by giving the visual environment cultural purpose.	+1	+3	+2
5. It looks messy and like it doesn't belong in the public, makes me wonder why this art is deemed acceptable.	-4	-4	-4
6. Graffiti is background scenery, an urban white noise which is recognized but rarely registered.	-2	-1	-1
7. Native American murals are a colorful reminder of human abuse and the dark nature of our existence.	-1	0	-2
8. The fantastic art of the people, better than a blank wall through expression of Native American culture and inspirations of cultural diversity.	+2	+2	+1
9. These murals provide Native American context with contemporary overtones, as if it says the past is still alive.	+2	+1	-1
10. This art, in scope and the presence of organic, human, and geometric form, claims space for Native American people.	+2	+1	-1
11. The significant feature of the new graffiti is its sense of purpose, the particular emphasis it places on the individual.	0	0	+1

12. Murals show the influence of a muralist, it makes me feel that the space has special significance to the artist.	+1	+1	0
13. Art is an expression of the self, taking into account everyday surroundings, everyday travels in order to come up with new ideas and atmospheres.	+4	+4	-2
14. This type of painting is a reminder that it exists within a larger spectrum of life by connecting people that live around it and/or view it.	+3	+2	0
15. Protection for the Native American culture, these murals inspire me to become more culturally informed.	-1	0	+3
16. Muralism is a valuable outlet for native artists to express values important to their spiritual traditions.	+2	+1	+2
17. All Native American muralists enter this subculture with an ambition to be the best, the most famous, the most respected, and it is this that makes a graffiti career a 'moral career' in its purest form. All its paths, progressions and purposes lead to one openly recognized end goal; a strong self-concept.	-2	-2	+1
18. The message of sacredness in Native American murals allow graffiti/street art to be elevated from vandalism to acceptable forms of social expression.	0	+2	+2
19. Not all graffiti is worthy of attention; like most pursuits, some of its products are great and some are awful, and this range requires seeing Native American graffiti as a complex expression rather than a monolithic act.	0	-1	-2
20. Such images 'speak to people,' or put another way, they are readily interpretable in various ways. Yet they also transcend questions of particular languages and present instead a broader domain of activism.	+3	-1	+1
21. Murals are very urban and give a city vibe sense of character, they don't fit in rural environments.	-3	-3	-1
22. Graffiti writing challenges assumptions about who has access to public literacy, who controls the space, who can sanction public images and lettering.	+1	0	-3
23. Native American murals advocate that Native Americans have a place in the world to be very politically influential.	0	+1	0
24. Native American murals remind people not to forget how Native Americans have been, and still are, misrepresented in American popular media.	0	0	0
25. The public sees graffiti as a form of deterioration...there is an obligation to respect the rights of the public and they all hate graffiti.	-3	-2	-1
26. Native American murals highlight a feeling of "forgottiness" by the American government.	-1	-1	0
27. Native American murals are not invasive, but maybe more	0	0	+1

insistent or persistent that Native American people have been displaced.			
28. Native American murals create a chaotic vibe in home-like spaces.	-3	-3	-4
29. Graffiti is not formless or disorganized...it has its own internal structure and highly efficient strategies for mobilizing meaning.	+4	0	0
30. I find murals and graffiti a bit overpowering for the place I live, not all graffiti or murals are art.	-2	-3	-3
31. The pervasiveness of Indian imagery reminds-especially among roadside statues and sculptures-reminds Americans stereotyping continues today.	-1	+3	0
32. I think there is a social interaction that occurs between people of different races, which could not happen without Native American murals.	-1	-1	+4
33. Native American murals give a message of life in perpetuity.	0	0	+3
34. Native American murals accomplish attention and visibility for Native Americans where they otherwise would not be acknowledged.	+1	+2	+2
35. I personally don't relate murals to Native Americans. It doesn't speak to me in that way.	-2	-2	-2
36. Native American murals are expressions of a longing to preserve Native American spiritual awareness.	0	+4	+3

**Table 12:** Statement Scores on Each Factor

<b>No. Statement</b>	<b><u>FACTORS</u></b>		
	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>
1. Native American murals beautify the wall, capturing the viewer, it brings a personal connection to the location of the mural.	+3	+3	+4
8. The fantastic art of the people, better than a blank wall through expression of Native American culture and inspirations of cultural diversity.	+2	+2	+1
13. Art is an expression of the self, taking into account everyday surroundings, everyday travels in order to come up with new ideas and atmospheres.	+4	+4	-2
14. This type of painting is a reminder that it exists within a larger spectrum of life by connecting people that live around it and/or view it.	+3	+2	0
16. Muralism is a valuable outlet for native artists to express values important to their spiritual traditions.	+2	+1	+2
18. The message of sacredness in Native American murals allow graffiti/street art to be elevated from vandalism to acceptable forms of social expression.	0	+2	+2
34. Native American murals accomplish attention and visibility for Native Americans where they otherwise would not be acknowledged.	+1	+2	+2
36. Native American murals are expressions of a longing to preserve Native American spiritual awareness.	0	+4	+3

**Table 13:** Statements with Positive Ranking (Agree) Across Factors.

No. Statement	<b><u>FACTORS</u></b>		
	A	B	C
2. Screams inner-city, I see it as frustration and an eyesore.	-4	-4	-3
5. It looks messy and like it doesn't belong in the public, makes me wonder why this art is deemed acceptable.	-4	-4	-4
6. Graffiti is background scenery, an urban white noise which is recognized but rarely registered.	-2	-1	-1
21. Murals are very urban and give a city vibe sense of character, they don't fit in rural environments.	-3	-3	-1
25. The public sees graffiti as a form of deterioration...there is an obligation to respect the rights of the public and they all hate graffiti.	-3	-2	-1
28. Native American murals create a chaotic vibe in home-like spaces.	-3	-3	-4
30. I find murals and graffiti a bit overpowering for the place I live, not all graffiti or murals are art.	-2	-3	-3
35. I personally don't relate murals to Native Americans. It doesn't speak to me in that way.	-2	-2	-2

**Table 14:** Statements with Negative Ranking (Disagree) Across Factors

## Conclusions

Considering this Q study was the beginning of a quantitative discussion on public art, Native public art and American Indian graffiti muralism there is much more to be found in future research. What can be found here is that the most prominent element of Native public art and American graffiti muralism is the semiotic and aesthetic elements in the murals. Secondly, it was interesting to find that elements of both Survivance and Geosemiotic theories were agreeable with the citizen public and help substantiate the qualitative analysis in Chapters 2 and 3. These findings were important to the public opinions on American Indian graffiti muralism in providing some insight into how the public views the medium across demographics. What was found is that regardless of profession, ethnic identification, age, or living situation all participants supported the positive aspects of American Indian graffiti muralism. Along those statements that ranked the highest on the positive spectrum across factors the public believes that American Indian graffiti muralism can, “beautify the wall, capturing the viewer, it brings a personal connection to the location of the mural” (#1), “brightens up the area by giving the visual environment cultural purpose” (#4), “connecting people that live around it and/or view it” (#14), and “expressions of a longing to preserve Native American spiritual awareness” (#36), which all speak against a transgressive nature in the medium.

The transgressive discussion illuminated in Chapters 2 and 3 were also debunked according to the data gathered here. Those statements speaking to the transgressive aspects of graffiti muralism commonly used to support graffiti abatement like, “frustration and an eyesore” (#2), “messy and like it doesn’t belong in the public” (#5), “deterioration” (#25), and “chaotic” (#28) all ranking in the mid-to-high negative

rankings across factors. This suggests that the public that was surveyed does not see American Indian graffiti muralism as a transgressive act or piece of society. Although graffiti muralism has endured a history of transgressive attitudes toward the installations we are now in an era where there appears to have been an attitudinal shift to acceptance and support for the medium as important to the public sense of place. With graffiti abatement programs costing hundreds of thousands or millions of taxpayer monies an argument could be made by these findings that some of those tax dollars are better spent on the commission of more murals to abate tagging and gang activity. This study did not detect a large negative public stigma toward graffiti muralism, so regardless of ethnic markers or semiotics the public is accepting of the medium. Support for this claim can be found in Statement #5, "It looks messy and like it doesn't belong in the public, makes me wonder why this art is deemed acceptable," that had a unanimous -4 (Disagree) ranking across factors. Furthermore, Statement #2, "Screams inner-city, I see it as frustration and an eyesore," received two -4 and one -3 rankings across Factors. This suggests that the public views graffiti muralism as acceptable and that it belongs in the public cityscape. There was an overwhelming positive ranking of the statements that supported more graffiti muralism and American Indian graffiti muralism. The public appears to want more art aesthetic in their cityscapes and landscapes as supported by the 40% and 30% loadings on Factor 1.

Looking closer at Factor 1 "Art Aesthetic" the surveys supported American Indian graffiti muralism as a mobilizer for greater awareness of American Indian social and political issues. Statement #20 with a +3 score, "Such images 'speak to people,' or put another way, they are readily interpretable in various ways. Yet they also transcend

questions of particular languages and present instead a broader domain of activism,” and Statement #29 with a +4 ranking, “Graffiti is not formless or disorganized...it has its own internal structure and highly efficient strategies for mobilizing meaning,” support the notion that American Indian graffiti murals not only provide aesthetic pleasure but can mobilize meaning of socio-political issues across ethnicities. Like Statements #1 and #13 suggest that these murals encourage a personal connection to community and diversity through art aesthetic. These suggestions are a cross-cultural finding according to the Defining Sorts where there was a 37.5% to 67.5% stratification between American Indian and non-American Indian participants.

The interaction of the public and sense of place that Factor 2 provided speaks to the geosemiotic discourse in Chapter 3. As statement #4 ranked at +3, “A mural helps emphasize an otherwise un-noteworthy place, brightens up the area by giving the visual environment cultural purpose,” is a direct suggestion that our “un-noteworthy” places can become noteworthy through mural installation. Secondly, participants ranked statements that suggested the sense of place is enlivened by American Indian artistic expression in the higher positive rankings along Factor 2. Statement #36 with a +4 ranking suggests that the public is encouraging of mixing American Indian imagery into their sense of place, “Native American murals are expressions of a longing to preserve Native American spiritual awareness.” This is a cross-cultural assertion according to the Defining Sorts in these factors, so this suggestion is not limited to one demographic group. The desire of American Indian indexicality among the other high ranking statements #13, #1, #4, and #31 supports the assertion in Chapters 2 and 3 that geosemiotics and survivance theories work together to aid the public's sense of place. If

American Indian imagery and “spirituality” (#36) are included with the art aesthetic the function of American Indian graffiti murals is influencing both sense of place (geosemiotics) and the presence of American Indians (survivance) in the public purview.

Factor 3 showcases the appropriateness of survivance theory application with American Indian graffiti muralism with Statements #15, “Protection for the Native American culture, these murals inspire me to become more culturally informed,” and #33, “Native American murals give a message of life in perpetuity.” These statements together promote elements of the ongoing promotion of American Indian culture and the renunciation of dominance, victimry, etc. akin to survivance theory. The participants agreed by the high positive rankings along Factor 3 that American Indian graffiti muralism is aiding the ongoing presence of American Indians in the contemporary cityscape. Both statements #15 and #33 were written by the public citizens and did not come from existing literature, which speaks to the organic reactions in support of American Indian survivance within the contemporary landscape. The participant agreement in terms of “protection” of Native American culture supports the value in promotion of sovereignty and self-determination of Native Nations through public art and graffiti muralism. The Defining Sorts being solely from American Indian participants also supports that this view is coming from those closest to the issue at hand and benefit from continued American Indian acts of survivance. The cross-cultural participant group also agreed that American Indian graffiti muralism is an important product of identity and promoting American Indian, “life in perpetuity.” If a multicultural public across demographics agree that the protection of American Indian culture and the promotion of

an ongoing presence of American Indian iconography benefits the urban landscape there is good reason to support more American Indian graffiti mural installations.

This Q survey is the beginning of quantitative interpretation on American Indian graffiti muralism. It has provided the foundation for continued research in other communities and the methodology speaks to community-based input and research that is needed in Native Nation specific surveying. Further Q surveying on Native public art opinion within reservation boundaries and in Native Nation specific communities can benefit from this pilot survey data. There is also ample opportunity to investigate different mediums of Native public art and public art representations of American Indian peoples by both American Indian and non-American Indian artists. The field of AIS and Native Nations can benefit from continued community-based research on public art aesthetic in order to find how Native public art and American graffiti muralism can continue to advocate for American Indian sovereignty, self-determination, and identity in contemporary place perceptions. Additionally this pilot survey found that cross-cultural spaces of communication and awareness are created around graffiti muralism and American Indian graffiti mural installations. There is a new understanding as a result of the quantifiable data here on the functionality of the medium to be a highly influential piece of our cityscape and provide positive elements to our public spaces.

## Chapter 6: Conclusions

Scholars, art historians, and politicians have produced many different discussions surrounding the medium of graffiti muralism and aerosol art that parallel those concerning the canon of Native art. The questions that have arisen mainly include the use of traditional Western academic systems of analysis that utilize Western theories of analysis. Questions such as these are given further conversation when viewed through the interconnectivity of graffiti muralism, Native art, and American Indian graffiti muralism. By taking what is considered an outsider art form, a unique canon of fine art, and a culturally specific public artistic expression the arguments for inclusion and exclusion can be fully explored. There are few better, if any, ways to analysis insider/outsider art perception than investigating a medium and ethnicity that are stereotyped as having both of these attributes depending on the situation. The research here on the functionality of American Indian graffiti muralism through qualitative and quantitative analysis has brought to light the importance of this medium of public art expression in terms of the effect it has on sense of place in American off-reservation environments. The following are conclusion that were found as the research progressed and at the conclusion of the project.

- *American Indian graffiti muralism can enliven future contemporary Native art and AIS discourses and should begin to be included in discussions on the canon of contemporary Native art and Native public art.*

As acts of survivance American Indian graffiti murals are reminders of the ongoing presence of American Indian peoples in the American urban cityscape where such presence has been muted through non-American Indian public art that freezes

American Indian peoples in the past. Statues, sculptures, popular media, and so on have hindered a contemporary identity of American Indian peoples with the cityscape and populace. As Rader (2011a) states:

Almost all Indian public art trades on the same stereotypical ideas of what an Indian means. The difference between public sculptures like the Howe Indian [non-native] and Edgar Heap of Bird's [American Indian] *Wheel*, for example is that the former implies Indians are supernatural, primitive beings whom the audience should both marvel at and fear, while a text like *Wheel* grounds Indian identity not in Anglo nostalgia but in Native semiology. The former traffics in an invented iconography of the past, the latter in indigenous iconography of the lived past, the active present, and the visionary future. (184)

The ability of American Indian graffiti murals to push back against American socio-political hierarchies of power and normalization, in the same means that Native art has prompted discussions of cultural specificity in fine art, makes this medium and canon important allies in creating new Native art historical discourses. American Indian graffiti muralism can aid Berlo's and Philip's (1998) assertion that, "Such a 'new' art history must, of course, attend carefully to recent interpretive work by Native American writers and scholars" (6-7) and the decentering of Native art historical discourse entrenched in Western theories. These murals are reclaiming place, both physical and mental, for American Indian and Indigenous peoples, while acting as educational tools for non-American Indian peoples. Looking at the interaction between survivance theory and American Indian graffiti muralism it attends to a new Native art discourse that provides analysis through an Indigenous lens. The presumed transgressive and outsider nature of graffiti muralism in art historical and Native art historical discourses makes this medium a great entry point of observational analysis about Native art discourses and the function of Native art in the larger art historical discussions needing non-Western theoretical

analysis. The highly contemporary nature of American Indian graffiti muralism can also help grow the Native public art discourses by providing another medium of inspection in how American Indian artists are producing public art to bring a balance to the plethora of non-American Indian public art installations.

Native public art is an act of Indigenous persistence and embodies the practice of survivance by infusing contemporary Indigenous semiotic presence in public spaces. Native public art installations are important to combat the historically damaging non-Native public art depicting American Indian peoples and showcase contemporary imagery of American Indian peoples as part of the American populace. Native public art and American Indian graffiti muralism exemplify a new narrative in the American urban grand narrative where, “The symbolic interplay between Indian art and capitols becomes an incredibly complex canvas on which historical, cultural, political and racial issues get painted in big, broad strokes. The conflict of history (as opposed to the conflict of fantasy) actuates Native public art that facilitates both the contextual and compositional resistance and also cultural and aesthetic engagement” (Rader 2011a, 193). They expose the fantasies with informed contemporary voices and imagery. The ability of American Indian graffiti murals to infiltrate secondary semiotic spaces, off of the page or the spoken word, and into a public space, helps facilitate counter-narratives of colonial simulation. As the American urban grand narrative is constructed through socio-political powers, physical structures, signage, and public art not always involving input from American Indian peoples and communities, American Indian graffiti murals become reminders of the richly diverse populations in the United States.

- *As a focus of analysis American Indian graffiti muralism invigorates survivance and geosemiotic analysis concerning American Indian presence and persistence in contemporary cityscapes.*

When American Indian graffiti muralism, survivance, and geosemiotic theories are thrust together they show how these public art installations are functioning as semiotic signposts of American Indian presence, persistence, and place in urban American cityscapes. American Indian graffiti murals project ideals of survivance as visual semiotic markers providing, “an active sense of presence over absence, deracination, and oblivion; survivance is the continuance of stories...renunciations of dominance, detractions, obtrusions, the unbearable sentiments of tragedy, and the legacy of victimry” (Vizenor 2008, 1). The murals promote new stories of American Indian sovereignty, self-determination, and identity, through the contemporary practice of survivance and, “the later indication of new narratives, [as] an invitation to the closure of dominance in the ruins of representation” (Vizenor 1994, 63). American Indian graffiti murals function as modern visual and semiotic advertisements of American Indian presence, persistence, and survivance. These murals encourage acknowledgment of Native Nations as present and vibrant pieces of the American cityscape and supply a narrative of socio-political diversity. Following in the contributions of Kabotie, Scholder, and Cannon to Native art in the early-to-mid 20<sup>th</sup> century in Native public art and studio art American Indian graffiti muralists are using a contemporary medium to express ideals of American Indian sovereignty, self-determination, and identity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The sanctioning and commissioning of American Indian graffiti muralism has provided the same counter-narrative that the predecessors and ancestors producing Native art

embraced by western audiences created for cross-cultural communication in the past. American Indian graffiti murals have taken the practice of survivance into the streets of urban American cities using a contemporary means of expression to remind the urban public of American Indian presence. They are creating a new sense of place in the modern American cityscape that acknowledges the diverse histories of Native Nations and America.

- *American Indian graffiti murals express central ideals of survivance theory; sovereignty, self-determination, and contemporary identity. These ideas can also be teaching tools cross-culturally as promoting a celebration of diversity.*

As signposts of sovereignty these murals are a reminder that Native Nations are an important part of the American public and ideal of political sovereignty. Through Vizenorian postindian acts of survivance American Indian graffiti muralists are reshaping American cityscapes to situate a contemporary awareness of American Indian sovereignty over representational imagery and socio-political issues facing Native America. American Indian graffiti murals are deconstructing the hyperreal and the hypotragic simulations created by other public art and media by promoting, both intentionally and unintentionally, sovereignty over public imagery and representation of American Indian peoples. American Indian graffiti murals attract viewers of different aesthetic tastes and offer a sense of place that encourages a cross-cultural referencing and reflexivity of American Indian sovereignty and American sovereignty. As Fragua explains, “murals [create] a story for that observer and that – not only for the person that was travelling everywhere but for the community that’s stuck there, you know, or not that’s necessarily stuck but the community that the mural belongs to, you know that

mural is part of their psyche and part of their story and their history” (Interview with author). American Indian graffiti murals are the public signage of inherent sovereignty in not just the American communities, but American peoples as a whole. American Indian graffiti murals are constant reminders to citizens cross-culturally of American Indian sovereignty through Native public art as shown different examples in this research.

The educational tool offered by Native public art and American Indian graffiti murals contributes to the survivance of self-determination in Native Nations to counteract American municipal settings with built walls to normalize the landscape absent of Indigenous presence. American Indian graffiti muralists utilize Vizenorian trickster play to deconstruct the hyperreal simulations created *for* American Indian peoples by popular media and the American governmental systems. These murals are reclaiming ownership over public images of American Indian representation and as American Indian graffiti muralist Yatika Fields states:

I would say there are elements of [my heritage] in there...those upbringings do come out in your work...not everyone wants to see it, but there's aspects of it that do a lot for communities...beautifying places, they can be tools, elements in the murals can be used as teaching tools...depending on what [each] particular mural is about, or is trying to do, there is a function for it. They claim something...they open up that space for thinking...a new realm of thinking. (Interview with Author)

American Indian graffiti murals create spaces of honorable acknowledgement in diversity among Native Nations and the American populace. When American Indian graffiti muralists choose to reconstruct and reclaim image and sign as the examples in this research have shown there is a respectful promotion of sovereignty, self-determination, and a contemporary identity of Native Nations that is colorfully projected to observers. Lexical language is an important partner to the iconographic and abstract elements of

these murals. When sayings of “Honor the Sacred” (Figure 1.4), “Justice and Protection for Native Women Everywhere!!!” (Figure 2.5), “WE ARE STILL HERE” (Figure 2.6) are infused into the public semiotic landscape a direct advocacy by the artists for a sense of self-determination and identity in that space.

American Indian graffiti murals sculpt a new contemporary cross-cultural civic identity and break from stereotypical imagining of American Indian peoples. Providing the cross-cultural spaces of communication with image and message encourages an informed inclusion in the urban grand narrative and a more inclusive urban dialectic. As Fragua states, “So there’s things that are universal and the iconography and symbolism and the designs, I feel like those are the root language of human beings or people’s understanding even before they learn how to speak when they’re babies and there’s colors that babies grasp, there’s designs that babies grasp too” (Interview with author). American Indian graffiti murals question authenticity of American Indian representation in public discourses by replacing the homogenized images of American Indian peoples with contemporary realist and abstract images. American Indian graffiti muralists are reimagining the contemporary identity of American Indian communities into the urban landscape by using contemporary expressions of their lived experiences. Fields views the diversity of mural messaging stating, “It can just be a mural about just straight expressionism, and then people gather what they want from it, and you know, you can have murals that can be about a statement, a political statement, they can be controversial pieces, you know they can really cause anguish. Drive questions into people’s minds and, or you can have just tribute Mural to a person that has passed away” (Interview with author). The murals create community building aspect in urban cityscapes by asking

citizen to acknowledge and think about the culturally diverse spaces in which they occupy. The different imagery and lexical announcements of American Indian and American life can bring different audiences together in creating cross-cultural sense of place.

Replacing presence in the appearance of absence in public spaces for American Indian or Indigenous peoples is an important aspect of survivance. American Indian graffiti murals are providing the narratives of presence by (re)claiming parts of the cityscape and promoting cross-cultural communication. Artistic expression can lay a foundation for social awareness and the results of this research have proven it to be an effective ally to social justice issues. As Fields explains, “[murals] claim space previously where nothing was, or continue over an older existing space. They open up that space for thinking, they open up that space to a new reality and new realm of thinking” (Interview with author). American Indian graffiti muralism provides messaging unconfined to museum and gallery spaces and instead thrust out into the shared spaces of the cityscape. Public spaces are presumed to be constructed as inherently inclusive, so creating an inclusive sense of place in the citizen public with cross-cultural narratives honors the complexity of the American dialectic. American Indian graffiti muralism contributes to this honoring as it has become an important practice of American Indian survivance that gives credence to a minority population while inviting a cross-cultural exchange that is not always overtly promoted in our public spaces. This is done using different semiotic imagery and messaging that Fields believes, “To show the world – There has to be a balance, it can’t just be all, you know, activism in that sense of way of: this is what happened, this is what needs to happen...it’s not like I’m choosing to do this to be an

outsider. You know this is a role that I was given, as I mature in my position of an artist I'm understanding what it is I do" (Interview with author).

- *American Indian graffiti murals (re)claim public space for Indigenous acknowledgement and interact with other structures to create a cross-cultural sense of place open to communication and interaction.*

Geosemiotic principles help code the different elements of American Indian graffiti murals and the places in which they appear. Elements such as iconographic and symbolic usage, language use, and physical interface shows the interaction American Indian graffiti murals bring to sense of place in the cityscape. American Indian graffiti murals meld with other signposts of constructed cityscapes, both urban and rural, where the major implications is infusing American Indian presence into places it thrived before European contact. Ideals of place and space are constructed around public signage and landscape, therefore when American Indian graffiti muralism is infused into the multiple semiotic systems of visual stimuli in public space there is a means to better understand what each individual's sense of place means in terms of ethnicity and culture. In coding the different stimuli of American Indian graffiti murals through the three geosemiotic principles of indexicality, dialogicality, and visual semiotics the functionality of the murals are understood as, "the later indication of new narratives, [as] an invitation to the closure of dominance in the ruins of representation" (Vizenor 1994, 63).

The geosemiotic principles of Indexicality, Dialogicality, and Visual Semiotics highlight the function of American Indian graffiti murals as markers of American Indian survivance along multimodal layers of communication. There is an indexicality of survivance that is added to public spaces that elevates American Indian iconography

involving the traditional/tribally specific and realistic/humanistic depictions of American Indian peoples to that of municipal signage. Looking back to Hall's (1969) hidden dimensions of communication, the semiotic inclusion of American Indian iconography encourages cross-cultural communication in public spaces by reminding observers of the diverse public surrounding them. American Indian graffiti murals create indexes for further social and political discussions of American Indian socio-political issues and the station of American Indian peoples and communities in the American psyche. The public nature of these installations provides a sense of place for all citizens as the index of community and the diverse narrative of American 'community' dialectics and identity.

Dialogically, American Indian graffiti murals produce a double indexicality by interacting with other public buildings, signage, and natural environments that involve cross-cultural interaction that closed museum and gallery exhibits of Native art cannot. Because of the confined indoor nature of gallery and museum operation the important practices of survivance by Native artists are closed off from overall public consumption. Whether public or private commissions these murals are infusing a secondary dialectic of survivance to urban environments. American Indian graffiti muralism brings to question regulatory dialogicality and municipal control over public language and image. By utilizing the transgressive beliefs and behaviors of the citizen public, graffiti muralism as a whole can function as a medium of introspection and investigation because of the historically out-of-place attitudes toward graffiti. The visual language that is created by American Indian graffiti murals challenges notions of dominance and victimry through transgressive stigmas and asks observers to question the American history and education that has decidedly left out American Indian contributions to such history. An important

educational aspect of American Indian murals are the ability to highlight the contemporary contributions of American Indian peoples and communities to society and the human experience. Using semiotic language these murals are signs of survivance in the urban visual spectrum that beg further cross-cultural discussion of community and diversity. Although the quantitative portion of this research has found that within the participant group there are less prevalent transgressive observations of graffiti muralism by the public and scholarship, there are still sections of the public that will be reached through transgressive mindsets because those peoples are still observing the installations and a message is communicated. With less transgressive attitudes there is more opportunity for fruitful public conversation and interaction prompted by graffiti muralism and there is now the need to promote more mural installations cross-culturally. The more semiotic and iconographic mixtures of ethnicity infused into the cityscape, the more celebration of American diversity can be had.

In bringing a composition of traditional iconography and naturalistic elements to cityscapes American Indian graffiti murals are also providing an impetus for cross-cultural interactive participant communication through visual semiotic display. Without these murals the sense of place is void of American Indian presence and conversations of American Indian sovereignty, self-determination, and identity are muted by visual colonial dominance in the built environment. The opportunity that American Indian graffiti murals provide for social action in the observer are important for the evaluation of historically harmful simulations of American Indian peoples, while providing an (re)evaluative measure of place perceptions. American Indian graffiti murals and the messages they are conveying to the public are important signage to direct investigation of

what the observer desires of their semiotic cityscape. Without American Indian graffiti murals discussions of diversity within communities is relegated to the scholastic, selective spaces of artistic coddling like museums and galleries, and popular media dominated by non-American Indian participants. There is an abundance of public art representing American Indians, but there is a contemporary necessity to combat the historically damaging non-American Indian installations such as the Howie Indian statue highlighted by Rader. Geosemiotic and survivance theories allow discourse to move forward with a better understanding of how these public art displays are functioning in the urban cityscape to create a sense of place. A sense of place that is inclusive and interactive with both the physical and mental landscapes of participants. This research also offers a beginning model of how a new Native art historical analysis might weave Indigenous and Western theories of analysis when investigating Native art, Native public art, and muralism.

- *According to participants in the Q survey, regardless of profession, ethnic identification, age, or living situation all desire more public art and art aesthetic in cityscapes.*

The Q study conducted in this dissertation project sets a foundation for future quantitative research and discussion involving Native art, Native public art, and American Indian graffiti muralism. A significant finding in the Q study in this research is that the most prominent element of Native public art and American graffiti muralism is the semiotic and aesthetic elements in the murals. These findings were important to the public narrative on American Indian graffiti muralism in providing a beginning insight into public opinions across demographics on the medium. In the study regardless of

profession, ethnic identification, age, or living situation participants showed that they would like to see more public art, graffiti muralism, and American Indian graffiti muralism. Statements in the survey that were ranked the highest by participants across factors on the positive spectrum suggested that American Indian graffiti muralism can, “beautify the wall, capturing the viewer, it brings a personal connection to the location of the mural” (#1), “brightens up the area by giving the visual environment cultural purpose” (#4), “connecting people that live around it and/or view it” (#14), and “expressions of a longing to preserve Native American spiritual awareness” (#36), which all speak against a transgressive nature in the medium.

- *Among participants in the Q survey, transgressive attitudes did not appear to exist toward American Indian graffiti murals and graffiti murals in general.*

The data collected in this Q study combat the transgressive discussion illuminated in Chapters 2 and 3 by suggesting that the participants do not view graffiti muralism or American Indian graffiti muralism as “out-of-place.” Those statements that were used to address the transgressive aspects of graffiti muralism such as, “frustration and an eyesore” (#2), “messy and like it doesn’t belong in the public” (#5), “deterioration” (#25), and “chaotic” (#28) were all ranked in the mid-to-high negative rankings across factors. This suggests that the public that was surveyed views American Indian graffiti muralism as a common piece of society. Although graffiti muralism has been labeled as transgressive in the past, contemporary attitudes toward graffiti mural installations are now in an era of acceptance. There was a suggestion among participant responses in support for the medium as an important factor to the public sense of place. With graffiti abatement programs costing hundreds of thousands or millions of taxpayer monies are

better spent on the commission of more murals and public art instead of graffiti abatement programs that use base color paints to cover graffiti. Using tax monies in this way would also support local artistry and allow citizens to influence the public control of semiotics, literacy, and signage. This study did not find a negative public stigma toward graffiti muralism, so regardless of ethnic markers or semiotics the public is accepting of the medium. Support for these claims can be found in Statement #5, “It looks messy and like it doesn’t belong in the public, makes me wonder why this art is deemed acceptable,” that had a unanimous -4 (Disagree) ranking across factors. Furthermore, Statement #2, “Screams inner-city, I see it as frustration and an eyesore,” received two -4 and one -3 rankings across Factors. If the public views graffiti muralism as acceptable and that it belongs in the public cityscape after decades of negative stigmas and treatment as though it were a deviant medium, there is support for more public art of all other mediums that have been historically embraced by the public. The public appears to want more art aesthetic in their cityscapes and landscapes as supported by the highest factor loadings on Factor 1.

- *According to Factor 1 results American Indian graffiti murals mobilize messages of American Indian survivance and presence in American urban cityscapes.*

Factor 1 “Art Aesthetic” results supported American Indian graffiti muralism as a mobilizer for greater awareness of American Indian social and political issues. Statement #20 with a +3 score, “Such images ‘speak to people,’ or put another way, they are readily interpretable in various ways. Yet they also transcend questions of particular languages and present instead a broader domain of activism,” and Statement #29 with a +4 ranking, “Graffiti is not formless or disorganized...it has its own internal structure and highly

efficient strategies for mobilizing meaning,” support the notion that American Indian graffiti murals not only provide aesthetic pleasure but can mobilize meaning of socio-political issues across ethnicities. It also suggests that graffiti murals of all kinds can convey public sentiment and create positive perceptions of place. High ranking statements in Factor 1 suggest that these murals encourage a personal connection to community and diversity through art aesthetic and promote cross-cultural communication. These suggestions are a cross-cultural finding according to the Defining Sorts where there was a 37.5% to 67.5% stratification between American Indian and non-American Indian participants.

- *Public sense of place is affected by graffiti muralism in constructive ways and support survivance and geosemiotic analysis.*

Factor 2 provided support of geosemiotic discourse in Chapter 3 where the interaction of the public and sense of place are important components of American urban settings. As statement #4 ranked at +3, “A mural helps emphasize an otherwise un-noteworthy place, brightens up the area by giving the visual environment cultural purpose,” furthers the idea that “un-noteworthy” places can become noteworthy, or important, through mural installation in creating a positive sense of place. Secondly, participants ranked statements that suggested the sense of place is enlivened by American Indian artistic expression in the higher positive rankings along Factor 2. Statement #36 with a +4 ranking suggests that the public is encouraging of mixing American Indian imagery into their sense of place, “Native American murals are expressions of a longing to preserve Native American spiritual awareness.” This is a cross-cultural assertion according to the Defining Sorts in these factors, so this suggestion is not limited to one

demographic group. The desire of American Indian indexicality among the other high ranking statements #13, #1, #4, and #31 supports the assertion in Chapters 2 and 3 that geosemiotics and survivance theories work together to aid the public's sense of place, while providing an American Indian presence. If American Indian imagery and “spirituality” (#36) are included with the art aesthetic the function of American Indian graffiti murals is influencing both sense of place (geosemiotics) and the presence of American Indians (survivance) in the public purview.

- *American Indian graffiti murals are viewed as acts of survivance in the Q participant responses and Indigenous presence is accomplished through mural installations.*

Factor 3 validated the usage of survivance theory with American Indian graffiti muralism with support from statements #15, “Protection for the Native American culture, these murals inspire me to become more culturally informed,” and #33, “Native American murals give a message of life in perpetuity.” These statements combined speak to the ongoing promotion of American Indian culture and the renunciation of dominance, victimry, etc. central to survivance theory. The participants provided high positive rankings along Factor 3 that American Indian graffiti muralism is aiding the ongoing presence of American Indians in the contemporary cityscape. Both statements #15 and #33 were written by the public citizens and did not come from existing literature, which speaks to the support of American Indian survivance as articulated by the public and supported by survey participants. There was also participant agreement in terms of American Indian graffiti muralism's ability to promote the “protection” of American Indian culture, which is a powerful attribute to be associated with an artistic medium. Historically objects that are deemed “historical objects” across cultures or theologies,

created for ceremonial use or otherwise, hold this type of attribute such as a calendar stick or catholic rosary. This is a powerful suggestion by the survey participants to suggest that American Indian graffiti murals promote and protect the persistence of American Indian culture. The Defining Sorts being solely from American Indian participants also supports that this view is coming from those closest to the issue at hand and benefit from continued American Indian graffiti mural installations. The full cross-cultural participant group also agreed that American Indian graffiti muralism is an important product of identity and promoting American Indian, “life in perpetuity.” If a multicultural public across demographics agree that the protection of American Indian culture and the promotion of an ongoing presence of American Indian iconography benefits the urban landscape there is good reason to support more American Indian graffiti mural installations.

- *Due to the success of this Q survey future Q surveying can be extended to include reservation communities and surveys can be more focused on tribally specific public art perceptions. This data would add complimentary information to the data gathered in this research.*

This Q survey in this study is simply the beginning of quantitative interpretation on American Indian graffiti muralism. It has provided the foundation for continued research in other communities and the methodology speaks to community-based input and research that is needed in Native Nation specific surveying. It was important in this dissertation research to find a methodology that was community-based and required community input. As a non-American Indian researcher this community-based surveying was a means to honor the input of the citizen public as a whole. The hope is that this will

encourage further Q surveying on Native public art opinion within reservation boundaries and in Native Nation specific communities that can benefit from this pilot survey data and methodology. There is also ample opportunity to investigate different mediums of Native public art and public art representations of American Indian peoples by both American Indian and non-American Indian artists in American urban settings. The field of AIS and Native Nations can benefit from continued community-based research on public art aesthetic in order to investigate how Native public art and American Indian graffiti muralism can continue to advocate for American Indian sovereignty, self-determination, and identity in contemporary place perceptions. Additionally this pilot survey found that cross-cultural spaces of communication and awareness are created around graffiti muralism and American Indian graffiti mural installations. There is a new understanding as a result of this quantitative data on the functionality of American Indian graffiti muralism to be a highly influential piece of our cityscape and provide positive elements to our public spaces and place perceptions.

#### Summary of Conclusions

- American Indian graffiti muralism can enliven future contemporary Native art and AIS discourses and should begin to be included in discussions on the canon of contemporary Native art and Native public art.
- As a focus of analysis American Indian graffiti muralism invigorates survivance and geosemiotic analysis concerning American Indian presence and persistence in contemporary cityscapes.
- American Indian graffiti murals express central ideals of survivance theory; sovereignty, self-determination, and contemporary identity. These ideas can also be teaching tools cross-culturally as promoting a celebration of diversity.
- American Indian graffiti murals (re)claim public space for Indigenous acknowledgement and interact with other structures to create a cross-cultural sense of place open to communication and interaction.

- According to participants in the Q survey, regardless of profession, ethnic identification, age, or living situation all desire more public art and art aesthetic in cityscapes.
- Among participants in the Q survey, transgressive attitudes did not appear to exist toward American Indian graffiti murals and graffiti murals in general.
- According to Factor 1 results American Indian graffiti murals mobilize messages of American Indian survivance and presence in American urban cityscapes.
- Public sense of place is affected by graffiti muralism in constructive ways and support survivance and geosemiotic analysis.
- American Indian graffiti murals are viewed as acts of survivance in the Q participant responses and Indigenous presence is accomplished through mural installations.
- Due to the success of this Q survey future Q surveying can be extended to include reservation communities and surveys can be more focused on tribally specific public art perceptions. This data would add complimentary information to the data gathered in this research.

The future of American Indian graffiti muralism is bright and vibrant. There are many young artists across ethnicities taking up cans of paint and creating their marks on the world. The young Native artists are going to continue the persistence of American Indian signatures on the landscape in a practice of survivance. Jaque Fragua eloquently states, “those murals made a story for that observer and that – not only for the person that was travelling everywhere but for the community that’s stuck there, you know, or not that’s necessarily stuck but the community that the mural belongs to, you know that mural is part of their psyche and part of their story and their history so you know, it’s good” (Interview with author), and the stories will go on in Native public art and American Indian graffiti muralism for peoples of all walks of life. There is a need to include this medium in Native art discourses because of the power to tell stories and

create narratives of place in public settings is necessary for a more informed society. The story of this dissertation research has been as much a professional journey as it has a personal one. There are few words for the tremendous gratitude I have for these amazing artists who took in an outsider and “academic” and shared their knowledge. The journey and story have become a very life affirming one. This is what I believe these artists’ and their work embodies, life affirming opportunities to see the world in different ways. American Indian graffiti artists and Native public artists are creating a selfless body of work that educates and elevates social consciousness.

## APPENDIX A

### Concourse Building Packet Sample

**Project Title: “Implications of Native American Murals on the Urban Landscape”**

*The goal of this study is to find out how murals created by Native American artists interact with public spaces and discussions of public art.*

This is a project meant to gather comments from people on public murals and graffiti created by Native American artists in order to get a better understanding of how the public feels about this type of artwork. Please feel free to write your thoughts without a limit on length, language, or any guidelines. There are guiding questions to help begin your comments, but feel free to write whatever comment comes to mind.

Your input here is very appreciated. You are not required to give your name or any identifiable information to participate in this study on this packet. The answers you provide to the following questions are, and will remain, completely anonymous and not attached to the consent form you will be asked to sign. All answers are voluntary and partial answers are completely fine.

Thank you for your participation!

For questions about your rights as a participant in this study or to discuss other study-related concerns or complaints with someone who is not part of the research team, you may contact the Human Subjects Protection Program at 520-626-6721 or online at <http://ocr.arizona.edu/hssp>.

An Institutional Review Board responsible for human subjects research at The University of Arizona reviewed this research project and found it to be acceptable, according to applicable state and federal regulations and University policies designed to protect the rights and welfare of participants in research.



- 1) What is your opinion of Native American murals?
- 2) In your opinion how does this mural speak to a sense of “Place”?
- 3) What stands out in this mural?
- 4) What does this mural accomplish?
- 5) How does this mural make you feel about the space it occupies?



- 1) In your opinion how does this mural speaking to a sense of “Place”?
- 2) What stands out in this mural?
- 3) What does this mural accomplish?
- 4) How does this mural make you feel about the space it occupies?



- 1) In your opinion how does this mural speak to a sense of “Place”?
- 2) What stands out in this mural?
- 3) What does this mural accomplish?
- 4) How does this mural make you feel about the space it occupies?

## **APPENDIX B**

### List of Cells with Categorical Description, Representative Statements, and Statement Number

#### **Cell 1: Aesthetics & Visual**

- 1- Native American murals beautify the wall, capturing the viewer, it brings a personal connection to the location of the mural. (1)
- 2- Screams inner-city, I see it as frustration and an eyesore. (1)
- 3- Pictography is nearly universal in practice but naturally by no means identical in style or meaning...it was sometimes an attempt at purely aesthetic expression (1)

#### **Cell 2: Place & Visual**

- 4- A mural helps emphasize an otherwise un-noteworthy place, brightens up the area by giving the visual environment cultural purpose. (2)
- 5- It looks messy and like it doesn't belong in the public, makes me wonder why this art is deemed acceptable. (2)

#### **Cell 3: Social Action & Visual**

- 6- Graffiti is background scenery, an urban white noise which is recognized but rarely registered (3)
- 7- Native American murals are a colorful reminder of human abuse and the dark nature of our existence. (3)

#### **Cell 4: Expression of Indigeneity/Presence/Absence/& Visual**

- 8- The fantastic art of the people, better than a blank wall through expression of Native American culture and inspirations of cultural diversity (4)
- 9- These murals provide Native American context with contemporary overtones, as if it says the past is still alive. (4)

#### **Cell 5: Aesthetics & Individual**

- 10- This art, in scope and the presence of organic, human, and geometric form, claims space for Native American people. (5)
- 11- The significant feature of the new graffiti is its sense of purpose, the particular emphasis it places on the individual (5)

#### **Cell 6: Place & Individualism**

- 12- Murals show the influence of a muralist, it makes me feel that the space has special significance to the artist. (6)
- 13- Art is an expression of the self, taking into account everyday surroundings, everyday travels in order to come up with new ideas and atmospheres.

#### **Cell 7: Social Action & Individualism**

- 14- This type of painting is a reminder that it exists within a larger spectrum of life by connecting people that live around it and/or view it. (7)
- 15- Protection for the Native American culture, these murals inspire me to become more culturally informed. (7)

#### **Cell 8: Expression of Indigeneity/Presence/Absence & Individualism**

- 16- Muralism is a valuable outlet for native artists to express values important to their spiritual traditions. (8)
- 17- All Native American muralists enter this subculture with an ambition to be the best, the most famous, the most respected, and it is this that makes a graffiti career a 'moral

career' in its purest form. All its paths, progressions and purposes lead to one openly recognized end goal; a strong self-concept (8)

**Cell 9: Aesthetics & Political**

18- The message of sacredness in Native American murals allow graffiti/street art to be elevated from vandalism to acceptable forms of social expression. (9)

19- Not all graffiti is worthy of attention; like most pursuits, some of its products are great and some are awful, and this range requires seeing [Native American] graffiti as a complex expression rather than a monolithic act (9)

20- Such images 'speak to people,' or put another way, they are readily interpretable in various ways. Yet they also transcend questions of particular languages and present instead a broader domain of activism (9)

**Cell 10: Place & Political**

21- Murals are very urban and give a city vibe sense of character, they don't fit in rural environments. (10)

22- Graffiti writing challenges assumptions about who has access to public literacy, who controls the space, who can sanction public images and lettering (10)

**Cell 11: Social Action & Political**

23- Native American murals advocate that Native Americans have a place in the world to be very politically influential. (11)

24- Native American murals remind people not to forget how Native Americans have been, and still are, misrepresented in American popular media. (11)

25- The public sees graffiti as a form of deterioration...there is an obligation to respect the rights of the public and they all hate graffiti (11)

**Cell 12: Expression of Indigeneity/Presence/Absence & Political**

26- Native American murals highlight a feeling of "forgottenness" by the American government. (12)

27- Native American murals are not invasive, but maybe more insistent or persistent that Native American people have been displaced. (12)

**Cell 13: Aesthetics & Emotional**

28- Native American murals create a chaotic vibe in home-like spaces. (13)

29- Graffiti is not formless or disorganized...it has its own internal structure and highly efficient strategies for mobilizing meaning (13)

**Cell 14: Place & Emotional**

30- I find murals and graffiti a bit overpowering for the place I live, not all graffiti or murals are art. (14)

31- The pervasiveness of Indian imagery reminds-especially among roadside statues and sculptures-reminds Americans stereotyping continues today. (14)

**Cell 15: Social Action & Emotional**

32- I think there is a social interaction that occurs between people of different races, which could not happen without Native American murals (15)

33- Native American murals give a message of life in perpetuity. (15)

**Cell 16: Expression of Indigeneity/Presence/Absence & Emotional**

34- Native American murals accomplish attention and visibility for Native Americans where they otherwise would not be acknowledged. (16)

35- I personally don't relate murals to Native Americans. It doesn't speak to me in that way. (16)

36- Native American murals are expressions of a longing to preserve Native American spiritual awareness. (16)

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