

Module 3

Media, Arts, and Literature

Developed by Dr. Heather Harris, First Nations Studies, University of Northern British Columbia

Key Terms and Concepts

- identity
- media
- ideology
- creative expression
- cultural appropriation
- commodification
- the culture industry
- intellectual colonization
- globalization

Learning Objectives/Outcomes

Upon completion of this module, you should be able to

1. discuss northern identities and what influences them.
 2. discuss southern perceptions of the North.
 3. outline some media theories.
 4. describe the ways in which mass media influence and affect northerners.
 5. list the mass media in which northern identities are expressed.
 6. describe some of the creative media in which northern identities are expressed.
 7. discuss the changing perceptions in the art world of indigenous art.
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Overview

This module discusses the ways in which the identities of peoples in northern North America are shaped and expressed. In spite of 200 years of European influence, northern indigenous peoples still retain their identities and cultures. Some people of European ancestry who have settled in the North try to recreate southern culture, but others have created a unique northern identity. Northern peoples are often misunderstood and misrepresented by southern media.

There are many theories about the ways that media (television, radio, newspapers, books, the Internet, etc.) influence people. Global media can inform and bring people greater understanding of each other or it can negatively affect northern peoples by eroding their cultures. Indigenous northerners are now using mass media to reinforce their cultures, express their opinions, and provide others with accurate information about themselves.

Today, northern indigenous peoples are successfully presenting and representing themselves in many creative forms. The most well-known example would be Inuit art, which is respected and desired around the world. In addition to northern writers and musicians, northern visual artists are also being heard and seen.

Lecture

Introduction—Northern Identities: Indigenous and Non-Indigenous

Indigenous Stories

The indigenous peoples of northern North America have their own ways of naming and defining themselves. Outsiders have named them and put them into groupings like Dene (also called Athapaskan) and Inuit (Inuit and Inuvialuit in Canada; and Yupiaq, Yupik, and Aleut in Alaska). These peoples have lived on their lands for centuries or even millennia. In living on the land for long periods of time they have come to understand their place there and their relationships with all the other beings—humans, other animals, plants, spiritual entities, and others who share the land. Each group of people has ways of defining itself as distinct from neighbouring peoples. While neighbouring peoples may share some cultural characteristics, each people has unique characteristics that identify them. The distinct identities of peoples may be expressed in language, beliefs, dress, technologies, and other creative ways.

Cultures change continuously through time as people invent and learn new things, meet new peoples with new ideas, develop new trade ties, move to new

territories, and as available resources vary with environmental changes. However, even with continuous change, a people can retain a sense of continuity—a sense of being the same people—and even with the advent of European contact and the greatly accelerated pace of change that it brought, the peoples of the North have retained their unique identities into the twenty-first century. Some northern peoples have experienced more than 200 years of continuous contact with people of European ancestry; for others, that experience is only a few decades. Today, virtually all northern indigenous peoples are in contact with non-indigenous people. In spite of the changes that this contact has brought in the form of missionization, Western education, and government intervention, the indigenous peoples of the North have retained their distinct identities.

There are many ways that people can express their identity. Each person has an individual identity that sets him or her apart from other people, but there are culturally constructed ways in which each person creates identity. Language is one of the most obvious markers that can be used to identify a person as belonging to a particular group, but there are other markers as well, including beliefs, behaviours, dress, technologies, and art forms. For example, we may recognize a bentwood hunting hat, beautifully decorated with painted designs, carved ivory pieces, and grass, as belonging to an Aleut man; or we may recognize an elaborately beaded white caribou or canvas amautik as belonging to an Inuit woman, probably from Baffin Island. These are markers of identity that people both inside and outside the culture can recognize. Such objects tell us not only what culture the wearers belong to but that they have pride in their culture.

Today, the people of the North continue to express their pride of identity through traditional objects, like the hunting hats and amautik, but they also use new media for cultural expression. Indigenous cultures have always incorporated new materials and ideas as they became available, but the pace of change and the number and variety of new media for self-expression has accelerated rapidly in recent years. Today, the peoples of the North express their identity through the creation of visual artworks that draw on traditional forms and ideas, and they use new materials and concepts in the creation of visual representations. They continue the traditional art of storytelling, telling their stories in written form and expressing themselves on the radio, on television, on the Internet, and in film.

Traditionally, the stories of the Inuit and Dene peoples of the North told of life on the land, of the experiences of the ancestors, of interactions with the spiritual world, and other themes that derived from life as it was. Those stories are still being told today, but the peoples of the North are telling new stories of the experience of colonization and of their drive towards decolonization. The story of colonization is one in which outsiders tried to erase the identities of northern peoples and replace them with European ones or, at least, European-defined

ones. The stories of decolonization are ones in which the peoples of the North refuse to be defined by outsiders, and they are stories in which the peoples of the North are reclaiming their identities and expressing them in their own ways.

Non-Indigenous Stories

Non-indigenous northerners have their stories, too. When people of European ancestry first came to the North, some came to exploit northern resources as whalers, trappers, traders, and miners, as well as in other roles. Other southerners were drawn to the North to Christianize, educate, or regulate the indigenous peoples residing there. The North has been considered the last frontier by many southerners, a place of opportunity and adventure. Many southerners have gone to the North, realized their dreams of wealth and adventure, and returned to their homes in the South. Other southerners have seen their dreams dashed in the unfamiliar climates and cultures of the North. And some southerners have gone to the North and stayed there.

Southerners who have settled in the North have often tried to recreate Euro-American and Euro-Canadian society in northern communities; they have had varying degrees of success. The dictates of distance, climate, and resources make it difficult to reproduce southern society in the North; rather, northern communities usually have their own uniquely northern character. Few people of European ancestry choose to become fully integrated into northern indigenous communities and cultures. Although most indigenous cultures have mechanisms for integrating outsiders into their communities, the prevailing attitude of superiority among Euro-Americans and Euro-Canadians, has made it likely that few could or would assimilate to indigenous cultures. Southerners sometimes go north saying they admire northern cultures and lifestyles, but they often find that what they admire is a romantic and unreal notion of the North.

The ideas about identity and expression of identity held by both indigenous and non-indigenous northerners brought forth in this introduction will be discussed in more detail in the following sections on identity, media, visual arts, and literary arts.

Southern Perceptions, Northern Identities

For a long time, southerners have been fascinated by northern geography, but geography does not exist outside perception (Moss 1994, 1). In attempting to understand and control lands new to them, the colonizers replace one human geography with another, according to geographer, Cole Harris, who recognized more than one geography—“on the ground and in the imagination” (Harris 2002). To southerners, the North has been (and, often, still is) perceived as remote, forbidding, unknown, and empty. To the people who are native to the North, it is their homeland: welcoming, familiar, and full of life (Nelson 1983).

Simpson-Housley (1996, 12) makes the point that the strangeness of environments can result in misconceptions. It is certainly true that the “strangeness” of peoples and their cultures can also result in misconceptions about them. That “strangeness,” of course, is only in the perception of the observer. As Europeans left their homelands over the last 500 years, and assumed the right to colonize others, they also claimed the right to define the people. This process of defining non-Europeans as *strange*, has been called “othering” (Minh-ha 1991).

Anthropologist Ann Fienup-Riordan suggests it is possible that no people on Earth have been more admired and more misrepresented than Eskimos (Fienup-Riordan 1990, 5). They have been, and continue to be, stereotyped as Inuit of the sixteenth-century eastern Canadian Arctic encountered by early European explorers. Inuit and other northern indigenous peoples have alternately been portrayed as caught between the conceptions of Hobbes and Rousseau. Whereas Hobbes maintained that humans were naturally barbarous and needed social controls to prevent chaos, Rousseau contended that humans were pure until corrupted by civilization. Fienup-Riordan states that westerners have projected their values and perceptions on Eskimos, portraying them as incorporating traits valued by westerners (Fienup-Riordan 1990, 16).

In recent years, a generally more positive attitude has been held by non-indigenous North Americans towards indigenous peoples—the interest in Inuit art being a specific example. However, this interest can result in another problem, namely that of the appropriation and commodification of aspects of indigenous culture. “Appropriation” refers to the act of using something without permission of the owners, such as Aboriginal images and names. “Commodification” refers to the marketing and sale of aspects of Aboriginal cultures. Appropriation and commodification inevitably involve stereotyping that can have negative affects on indigenous cultures, which are then romanticized and misunderstood. In such situations, Aboriginal people are seen by outsiders as picturesque people, quaintly dressed while singing and dancing to entertain tourists. Smith and Ward (2000, 14) contend that such commodification can “serve to sanitise the marginalisation of Indigenous peoples into a familiar social and political reality.” In other words, an unreal image of indigenous people is maintained while the real issues and problems of indigenous peoples are ignored.

While indigenous peoples have resisted external definitions, they have to some degree accepted those definitions because of the power and authority of the West. This module focuses on examples of ways in which the peoples of Alaska and the Canadian North have resisted outside definition, but the fact remains that the power of the colonizers to define is great.

One of the ways influence is created is by the choice of words we use. For example, if you attended Canadian or American schools, how often did your

texts refer to North Americans of European ancestry as colonizers? Clearly, Euro-Americans and Euro-Canadians are not indigenous to North America; therefore, they must be colonizers. That is certainly the way indigenous North Americans see them, but people in power always try to legitimate their power, not just legally or militarily, but by an even more powerful force: ideology. When colonized people believe what the colonizers say, then the colonizers are truly successful.

One of the ways Canada and the United States have tried to define the original peoples of the continent is as ethnic groups. Such a definition makes each group just one among many, with no claim to special status, land, or other rights. Indigenous peoples in Canada and the United States have steadfastly refused to accept that definition. Indigenous peoples nearly always consider themselves connected to lands within the state and as having rights that pre-date the existence of the state. They generally argue that land is central to their identity as indigenous peoples (Smith and Ward 2000, 6). The relationship between land and identity is clearly reflected in the creative works discussed later in this lecture.

The indigenous peoples of northern Canada and Alaska typically consider their identity to be layered. That is, the indigenous people in a group may consider themselves to be Sahtu Dene (a specific group of people with shared language, territory, and identity), Dene (a group of related peoples with related languages), and indigenous (the original people of a place; Aboriginal people). They may consider themselves a people deeply rooted in a particular place while at the same time sharing characteristics with indigenous peoples globally.

Student Activity

1. Make a list of your identity markers—things that characterize you as an individual and as a member of your culture(s). Put a check mark beside all of the items in your list that would have identified your grandparents when they were your age.
 2. Divide a page into two columns. On one side make a list of the ways in which southerners typically perceive the North and northern people. On the other side describe the reality.
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Expressing Identity

The peoples of northern North America express their identity in many ways today. A few of these ways will be briefly introduced in this module, including the use of mass media like newspapers, radio, television, film, the Internet; literature; visual arts; and music. The ways people have of expressing themselves has been called the culture industry. Economist Nicholas Garnham defines culture as “the production and consumption of symbolic meaning” and cultural industries as those institutions with industrial structures that produce cultural symbols (Garnham 1990, 154).

Expressions of Identity and Self-Determination through Mass Media

Media Theory

Canadian communications theorists have been very influential in the development of media theories. Marshall McLuhan’s concept of the medium as the message is well known. He was concerned not only with the message that was being transmitted, but with the form or media through which it was conveyed, because he believed that how the message is perceived is influenced by the medium (Vivian and Maurin 2000, 2). McLuhan believed that the “global village”—the new, widely available communications technologies—would contribute to democratization (McLuhan 1964). Some influential media theorists of recent years, like Bill Gates (1995) and Nicholas Negroponte (1996) have essentially adhered to McLuhan’s ideas. Ginsburg claims that they “have failed to appreciate fully the significance and persistence of cultural difference, as well as social and economic inequalities” (Ginsburg 2000, 36). These factors have affected the ways in which the realities of mass media have played out in the twenty-first century, which we will see in the examples outlined in this module.

American sociologists Paul Lazarsfeld and Robert Merton have suggested that mass media serve a number of functions. One of these is the conferral of status on issues, persons, organizations, and social movements (Lazarsfeld and Merton 1996, 14). This means that the public believes that if a person or an issue is represented in the media, he, she, or it must be important. Another function of the media, according to Lazarsfeld and Merton (1996, 16–17), is the enforcement of social norms—that mass media are used to present a picture of what is considered ideal by society. The third function of mass media, as contended by Lazarsfeld and Merton, is its “narcotizing dysfunction” (Lazarsfeld and Merton 1996, 17), by which the authors mean that mass media serve to render the population politically apathetic: the public is too drugged or numbed by the entertainment factor of the media to be concerned with important political issues.

Media theorists Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky (1988) wrote an influential work that contains the idea that media serves the needs of the elite as represented by the state and private interests. They say,

The mass media serve as a system for communicating messages and symbols to the general populace. It is their function to amuse, entertain, and inform, and to inculcate individuals with the values, beliefs and codes of behavior that will integrate them into the institutional structures of the larger society. In a world of concentrated wealth and major conflicts of class interest, to fulfill this role requires systematic propaganda. (Herman and Chomsky 1988, 1)

Herman and Chomsky contend that the special importance of propaganda lies in what Walter Lippmann called the “manufacture of consent” (Lippmann 1921) by which governments maintain social order (Herman and Chomsky 1988, xi).

According to media theorist Stuart Hall (1996, 160), the primary function of media is the production and transformation of ideologies. When ideologies are effectively presented, they disappear and come to be considered natural. Hall contends that “racism is one of the most profoundly ‘naturalized’ of existing ideologies” (Hall 1996, 161). Hall suggests that the media presents both “overt racism,” which presents favourable coverage of openly racist arguments or policies, and “inferential racism,” which presents as fact stories premised upon racist assumptions that are unquestioned (Hall 1996, 162).

The Significance of Mass Media in the North

These dominant schools of thought in communications theory have not really considered how the media affect remote and indigenous populations, although many of the issues raised by mass media theorists are a concern to northern peoples.

Mass media are pervasive in contemporary life—even in remote northern communities, which were isolated from the rest of the world only a few decades ago, bringing into question the very concept of “remoteness.” Northern communities are still isolated by great distances, the high cost of travel, and the unreliability of communication media, but the fact remains that even the most distant of Arctic communities are connected to the world through satellite communication. This process has been called “globalization.” As mass media bring urban, southern, “mainstream” values, beliefs, customs, and products to the North, they change northern cultures and peoples. Alaskan Yupiaq educator Oscar Kawagley has expressed concern about this, saying that satellite TV images beamed from the South present ideals that are portrayed as desirable but are unattainable for young Yupiaq people (Kawagley 1995, 58). These images of southern lifestyles confer status on objects Yupiak cannot have and on people Yupiaq cannot be. Television programs portray the urban, southern lifestyle as the norm, signifying that there is something wrong with the very different lives

of northerners. This can create unhappiness and dissatisfaction with those who do not meet that televised ideal. The “narcotizing” effect of the mass media diverts the attention of northerners, especially of Aboriginal people, away from political issues like loss of lands and resources and lack of self-determination, to narcotizing preoccupations like attaining material objects like cars and stylish clothes.

Some media critics such as Noam Chomsky and Ward Churchill would go so far as to say that colonial governments, like that of the United States, not only encourage or influence the media to present normalizing and narcotizing images, but actually wage propaganda wars and present disinformation in the media (Herman and Chomsky 1988; Churchill 1994). Churchill contends that the US government very effectively vilifies indigenous American groups that speak out about their ongoing colonization (Churchill 1994).

Media critic David Taras (2001, 195) contends that Canadian media is in crisis because Canada is inundated by American programming and the values that it brings. He says that rather than being presented with serious news and information, Canadians are being “Disneytized” by mindless entertainment. Anthropologist Arjun Appadurai applies a similar concept to the Westernizing influence in other parts of the world, calling it a “McDonaldization” (Appadurai 1990, 3),

Although the role of the mass media as a tool to further intellectual colonization is obvious, there is a growing awareness that telecommunications technologies can be used to reinforce the unique identities of indigenous and remote northern peoples, like those of northern Canada and Alaska (Ginsburg 2000, 29; Smith and Ward 2000, 4). In recent years, indigenous peoples have begun using media and other creative forms to express their own points of view. These cultural activists present perspectives that counter the tendencies towards “Disneytization” and “McDonaldization.” Ginsburg argues that they “can simultaneously strengthen their own communities and assist in, and insist on, the broader presence of Indigenous perspectives in a variety of arenas” (Ginsburg 2000, 29). In other words, indigenous artists working in media and other art forms are preserving their cultural heritage for their own communities’ futures while educating the non-indigenous public about indigenous issues and realities. Indigenous media activists are also asserting their right to self-determination and community ownership of cultural property. Ginsburg said, “These activists were attempting to reverse processes through which aspects of their societies have been objectified, commodified, and appropriated by the dominant society; their media productions and writings were efforts to recuperate their histories, land rights, and knowledge bases as their own cultural property” (Ginsburg 2000, 31).

Because this is a short lesson and so many examples exist, only selected examples of the development of northern media will be given here.

Northern Media Arts

Radio arrived in the Canadian North in the 1920s, and television followed in the 1960s with the development of satellite signal transmission. Programming in both media was initially generated in the South and was focused on non-Aboriginal concerns. By the 1970s, Inuit were becoming concerned about the assimilative effects of southern media. Historian Mary Vipond contends that even the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), which is supposed to serve all Canadians, has been criticized for a centralist bias that neglects northern (as well as western and eastern) perspectives (Vipond 1992, 155). Film curator Sally Berger claims that Inuit were concerned that “radio and television broadcasts brought outside values, undermined the use of Inuktitut language, created unrealistic desires and frustrations, and increased generation gaps between the young and the old” (Berger 1995a, 105). Inuit responded by forming regional organizations to influence CBC programming and, in 1981, the Inuit Broadcasting Corporation (IBC) was formed to produce Inuit culture and language programming (Berger 1995a, 105). This movement has produced some remarkable filmmakers, Zacharias Kunuk, among them.

Zacharias Kunuk is an Inuit filmmaker from Igloolik, Nunavut. He has recently received international acclaim with his award-winning film, *Atanarjuat (The Fast Runner)*. According to Berger, Kunuk finds video such an appealing media because of its ability to reflect the oral tradition of Inuit culture (Berger 1995a, 111). Kunuk began his career as a filmmaker with the IBC but, because it was directed by southern managers, he found he could not express an Inuk point of view and, therefore, began making independent films (Berger 1995a, 105). His films include a four-part series portraying the seasons of traditional Inuit life in the Igloolik area; a 13-part series, *Nunavut* (1995); and, the consummate *Atanarjuat* (2001). Kunuk and his partners in Igloolik Isuma Productions, Norman Cohn and Paulossie Qulitalik, contend that presenting Inuit language and images on television is important for their children and for educating outsiders about Inuit perspectives (Berger 1995b, 188).

Although Zacharias Kunuk and Igloolik Isuma Productions have been very successful in the film industry, other northern filmmakers struggle to produce their films; so the filmmakers in Nunavut have banded together to support their emerging industry, forming Ajjit: The Nunavut Media Association. At their second annual symposium, they called for the territorial government to support the film industry with tax credits and other incentives such as those provided by most Canadian provinces (Rideout 2002).

There has been less government and more private support for the development of radio and television in Alaska than in northern Canada. Today there is a proliferation of public and commercial radio and television networks and independent stations in Alaska. Alaskan radio stations are available with general

programming as well as some with specialized programming focusing on Aboriginal issues, news, and science.

Although the need for northern television programming has been recognized for some years and progress in its development has been made, the impact of southern-based media on Aboriginal culture is still a concern, as expressed at the 2002 Inuit Circumpolar Conference (Wilkin 2002, 1). Kuupik Kleist, the chair of the special commission on communications, purported that southern media can be a destabilizing force in the Arctic because of its enormous power to shape public opinion. He cited the collapse of the seal industry following a southern media campaign as an example (Wilkin 2002, 2).

Print/Internet Media

Newspapers in printed form exist in most of the larger northern communities in Alaska and the Canadian Arctic, but in recent years electronic news media have also flourished. Use of the Internet has become more common, the distance between northern communities remains great, and weather and transportation can be unreliable; therefore, electronic media seem particularly suited to the North. *Nunatsiaq News*, produced in Iqaluit, Nunavut, is one such journal that covers local, national, and international stories and provides a forum for northerners to express their views. Alaskan online news journals include the *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner* (<http://www.news-miner.com/>) and the *Anchorage Daily News* (<http://www.adn.com/>). *Nunatsiaq News* (<http://www.nunatsiaq.com/>) is focused on Aboriginal issues, while the *News-Miner* and the *Anchorage Daily News* are predominantly focused on non-Aboriginal concerns.

A few scholarly and popular scientific journals are published in Alaska and northern Canada. One of these is *Alaska Geographic*, published in Anchorage. It is a scientific journal published for a popular readership. The *Alaska Quarterly Review* (<http://aqr.uaa.alaska.edu/>) is a literary journal published by the University of Alaska Anchorage. It features the work of Alaskan authors. *The Northern Review* is a multidisciplinary journal of arts and sciences published by Yukon College in Whitehorse, Yukon.

In recent years, the line between media has become blurred. The Internet, DVDs, and CD-ROMs all have features of visual, literary, and media arts. According to Zimmerman et al. (2000), the Internet is both “a blessing and a curse for Indigenous people”: while the lack of control and censorship allows indigenous people to represent themselves as they see fit, it also allows others to represent indigenous people as they wish or even to represent themselves as indigenous when they are not.

Student Activity

1. Make a list of the ways in which messages from the mass media have a “narcotizing” effect on northern people. Discuss this phenomenon, or create a poster to show the ways in which this happens.
 2. Make a list of examples of racism in the media. Discuss this phenomenon, or create a poster to illustrate both southern, white, middle-class ideals represented in the media as well as northern ideals and realities; you might choose to divide your poster in half to deal with both concepts. You can use images and text in your poster.
 3. Watch an evening of southern television programming and an evening of northern television programming, and compare that programming and its messages. Discuss with your classmates. You could do the same with other media, such as newspapers or magazines.
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Expression of Identity and Self-Determination through Literary Arts

All of the indigenous peoples of northern North America have powerful traditions of storytelling and oral transmission of knowledge. These compelling media are still used, but the written word has been added as another media of expression. Many indigenous and non-indigenous northerners are producing literary works in all forms—poetry, short stories, novels, and plays among them. Northern publishing houses, like Outcrop in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories, publish the work of northern writers. There are far too many northern writers to mention so a few will be briefly presented.

Mary Tall Mountain (Koyukon), born in Nulato, Alaska, writes moving poetry that presents beautiful images of northern peoples and lands and life in the American inner-city. Her works include *The Light On the Tent Wall: A Bridging* (1990a), *Matrilineal Cycle* (1990b), *A Quick Brush of Wings* (1994), and *Listen to the Night* (1995).

George Blondin (Sahtu Dene), with the help of his daughter Georgina Blondin, has written two books of oral narratives ranging from the ancient past to his own experiences. Those books are *When the World Was New: Stories of the Sahtu Dene* (1990) and *Yamoria: The Lawmaker* (1997). They tell the stories of George as a Dene person, and they tell the stories of his people, their beliefs,

and experiences without the mediation of an anthropologist or other Western writer or scholar.

Alootook Ipellie is a visual artist and writer of stories. His stories have been written as short stories (*Summit with Sedna, the Mother of Sea Beats*, 1998), poetry (*Waking Up; Journey Toward Possibilities; Walking Both Sides of an Invisible Border*; all 1998), and in illustrated book form (*Arctic Dreams and Nightmares*, 1993), and are very different from those of George Blondin. The stories of Ipellie meld past and present, Inuit and Western culture, and traditional and contemporary practice and belief. He presents another face of contemporary northern life. Alootook has witnessed monumental change in his life, which has inspired him to write (Moses and Goldie 1998, 503). He was born on the land, and his family lived in camps; then they were forced to settle in Iqaluit, where they experienced great cultural upheaval (Moses and Goldie 1998, 503).

Richard Van Camp (Dogrib) was born in Fort Smith, Northwest Territories. He contends that the multicultural atmosphere of the community has inspired his writing (quoted in Moses and Goldie 1998, 524). Van Camp writes in a variety of literary forms, including novels (*The Lesser Blessed*, 1996; *Come a Little Death*, 1998), short stories (*Birthmark*, 1997a), and children's books (*The Man Called Raven*, 1997b).

Student Activity

Read the poetry, short stories, novels, plays, or another genre by northern writers, and identify the themes in the writings. What do northern writers talk about that southern writers don't? Are their common themes between northern and southern writers? Do this as an individual or group activity.

Expression of Northern Identity and Self-Determination through Visual Arts

Northern Visual Arts

Although artistic expression seems to be universal, "art" as traditionally defined by the West is not. Indigenous peoples have been instrumental in redefining Western notions of art. Western curators, scholars, and art critics once claimed the exclusive right to define art in Western terms and to judge art by Western standards. Indigenous creative works were typically defined as artifacts or curios (Crandall, Richard C., 1999, 9) or, later, "primitive art." In claiming the

right to define the arts of indigenous peoples, Western art critics and curators assumed the authority to determine what was “authentic” Inuit or other indigenous art forms. The concept of “classic” art forms—be they visual art forms, music, or other kinds—implied that forms not considered “classic” were degenerate or, at least, of less value. It has been suggested by some Western art critics that indigenous art made for sale is not authentic and that the works are merely curios. However, indigenous peoples have always created artistic objects to be traded across boundaries (Smith and Ward 2000, 13). Fortunately, ideas about art change over time and, in the last four decades, we have seen a change in perceptions of art in North America that has allowed for the appreciation of northern indigenous art forms by southern art experts. Northern art forms once considered “craft” by southern curators, collectors, and scholars, such as decorative clothing, are now recognized as bona fide works of art.

The Development of Inuit Art in Canada and Alaska

The story of the development of Inuit art is the story of the movement from southern control and definition of northern cultural production to much greater self-definition and control by northerners. Inuit art has become a major vehicle for expression of Inuit identity today and is widely recognized across North America and around the world. The interest in Inuit art in the art world has resulted in the development of a large body of literature illustrating and describing Inuit art. Some of that literature describes the development of Inuit art from its ancient beginnings to its present forms. Where old decorated objects found in archaeological contexts were once designated solely as artifacts, they are now considered art by many scholars.

In Alaska, the more popular kinds of works are walrus ivory carvings, old ivory carvings, and jewellery; soapstone carvings, bone (usually whale) carvings, basketry, dolls, drums, prints, and baleen baskets and etchings. Some artists have organized co-operatives, such as the Oomingmak Musk Ox Producers’ Co-operative, which markets muskox products from remote Alaskan coastal villages. The work of Aboriginal artists in Alaska is controlled by the Indian Arts and Crafts Act of 1990, which has caused some controversy. While the act is designed to protect Aboriginal artists and art buyers from inauthentic works, its narrow definition of who can claim to be an Aboriginal artist excludes some people who consider themselves, and are considered by their communities, to be Aboriginal.

The development and marketing of Inuit art in southern North America and around the world is one of the great success stories in the art world. Today, the creation of works of art is an important part of the northern economy, with artist’s associations (Nunavut Arts and Crafts Association), co-operatives, schools, and festivals (the Festival of Native Arts, at Fairbanks; Nunavut Arts Festival, at Rankin Inlet in 2004; Inuvik’s Great Northern Arts Festival) supporting the development of the arts.

Student Activity

Look around your house and see what northern art forms are found there. Visit a local museum or art gallery to view northern art forms. How do the materials used, and ideas presented, differ between the northern art you see and southern/European art?

Music in the North

The indigenous peoples of northern North America, like probably all peoples of the world, have traditional musical forms. When Europeans went north, they brought with them musical forms that were often adopted and adapted by northern peoples, which resulted in new forms, like Inuit accordion music and Cree fiddle music. Today, a wide variety of musical forms, from traditional Inuit throat singing to urban American hip hop thrive in the North. Studios, like Inukshuk Productions Inc., primarily in Inukjuak, Nunavik (northern Quebec), record these northern musical products. Audiences are exposed to music generated in the North at festivals like the annual Aqpiq music festival, in Nunavut.

Student Activity

As a group or an individual, make a list of your favourite northern musical artists and their best songs. Discuss what it is about the music that appeals to you. Is the music purely traditional, or is it an adapted/adopted style influenced by other musical forms such as folk, blues, jazz, reggae, rock, and hip hop?

Summary

The transition from a traditional life lived isolated from all but immediately neighbouring peoples to instant global satellite communication has been rapid for many northern peoples. The results have been both negative and positive. The negative results include the assimilative effects of southern-generated culture and ideologies. The positive results include the access to northerners of these same media to present their own perspectives, reinforcing their identities and allowing expression of self-determination. Northern peoples have been effective in using many expressive media—communications media, literature, visual arts, and music—to communicate their pride in who they are within and

among their communities, around the circumpolar North, within the states within whose political boundaries they live, and around the world. The accelerating pace at which such cultural production is currently occurring indicates that we can expect to see a lot more of the creative and expressive products of northern North Americans in the future.

Study Questions

1. How have northern identities changed over time?
2. How have the North and northern people been perceived by southerners?
3. Discuss the appropriation, commodification, “Disneyfication,” and “McDonaldization” of northern cultures.
4. Describe some influential media theories. Do they apply to the North? Discuss.
5. How has southern mass media influenced northern people?
6. What are the benefits of northern-produced media? Are there any negative aspects or drawbacks?
7. How can northern creative expression (visual arts, literary arts, music, etc.) affect northern identities?
8. How have northern art forms affected the thinking of southern art collectors, curators, and critics?
9. What are the markers of your identity?

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