

Connective Threads: Inspiration, Appropriation and Design in a Global Village

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How, in a global world and an age of information, are we affected as creators of visual identity?

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Definitions for today.

Because words are important.

- ▶ **Appropriation¹**
- ▶ 1 : an act or instance of taking especially wrongly or illegally
- ▶ 2 : the act or an instance of setting apart for a special purpose ...
- ▶ **Cultural appropriation²** is the adoption or use of the elements of one culture by members of another culture.
- ▶ **Exchange³**
- ▶ 1: the act of giving or taking one thing in return for another
- ▶ 2a : the act or process of substituting one thing for another
- ▶ b : reciprocal giving and receiving
- ▶ 3: something offered, given, or received in an exchange

What are we working with?

- Research Paradigms
- Representation Paradigms
- Creation Paradigms (or Applying Inspiration and Artistic License)

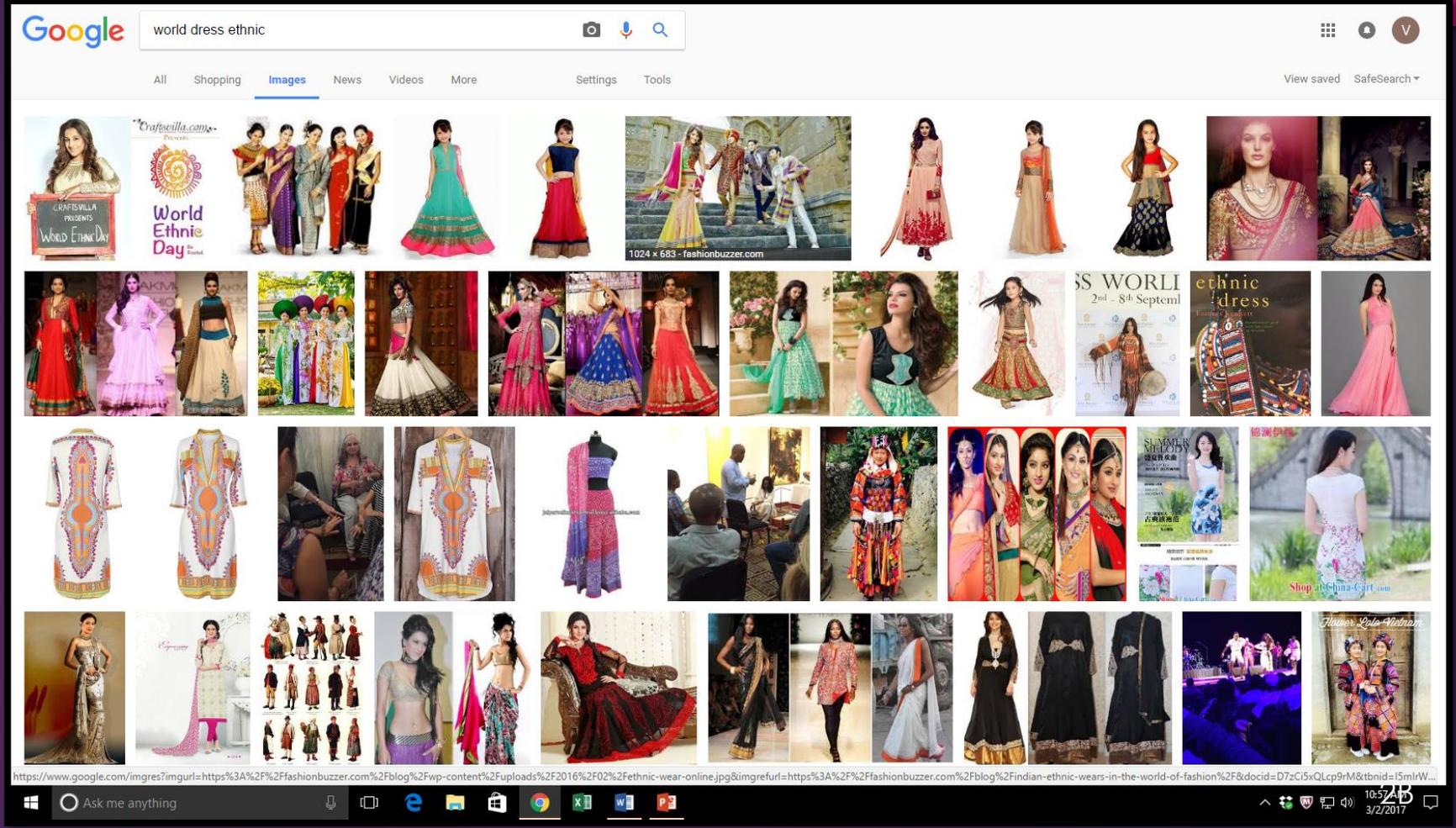
Research Paradigms

- KEYWORD IS KING
- LENSES OF INTERPRETATION

5

- History is in the eye/pen of the observer/researcher. (What I have come to deem “western privilege” in dominant historical accounts and collecting of images.)
- Who controls the presentation? Museums, websites, databases have traditionally relied on observational data *not* originating from or controlled by the source community; a “second museum age” is shifting this trend.
- Digging deeper, being stewards. Thinking of all of the anthropological information we designers research and incorporate, I’ve come to view us as stewards of cultural visual histories and traditions. This demands of us to understand more deeply our source communities’ emotional histories and self perceptions.
 - Ideas such as survivance, ethnography
- Are we inspired by living traditions or historical ones? Less are the lederhosen incidences.

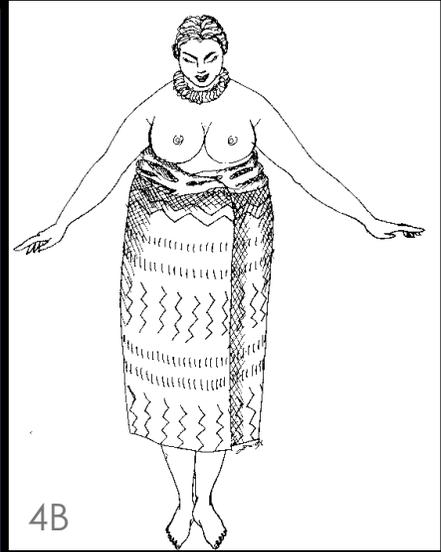
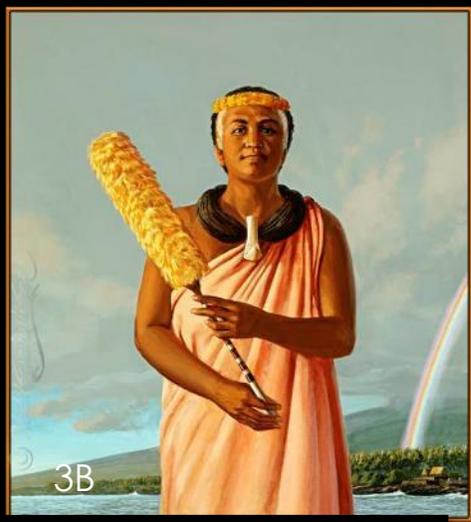
Keyword is King



Screenshot Google search "world dress ethnic"

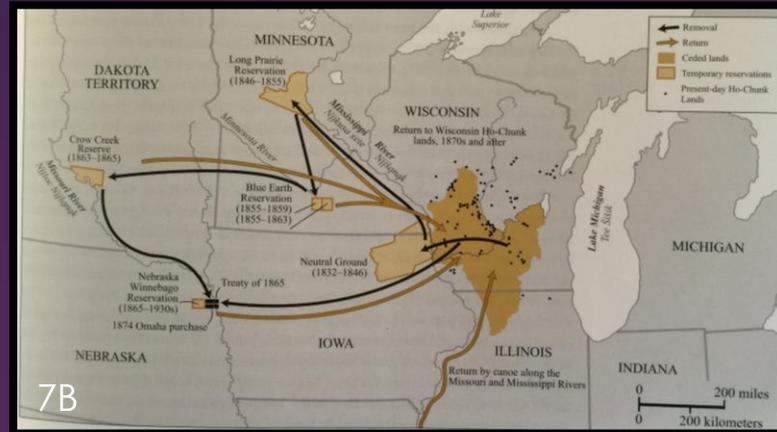
Presented by Valerie St. Pierre Smith, Costume Designer

Lenses of Interpretation- eyes of the observer



Digging deeper

“Unlike the collections of Edward Curtis, who sought to capture images of a ‘vanishing race’ for ethnographic and commercial purposes, these were photographs that Ho-Chunk families themselves commissioned for their own personal use.”⁴



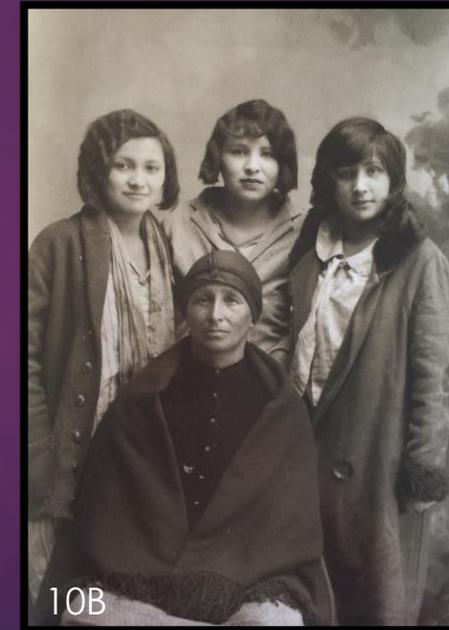
7B



9B



8B



10B

Living traditions or historical ones?

Global Lederhosen incidents- less of an outcry.



11B



12B

Representation Paradigms

➤ REPRESENTATION PARADIGMS

- Whose paradigm of visual identity are we designing to? Originating culture or social group, intended audience, or popular culture?
 - Has community permission, implicit or explicit, been granted? i.e does the source community market products and commercial goods already utilizing design motifs?
 - Using stereotypes- playing to, against and with.
- Our visual identities create character relationships with our audience; what pop culture influences affect their paradigms
 - Fashion is, as fashion does
- Cause/Affect/Effect: How will a member of our inspirational community see themselves in our characters?

Permission granted

Susan Scafidi notes that sometimes implicit permission to adopt is granted when a source community intentionally markets, shares or sells products and goods.⁵

Slippery: Does implicit permission grant permission to distort or remove context? Good practice says no.

NIZHONI RANCH GALLERY

[NAVAJO RUGS ▾](#) |
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NAVAJO RUG STYLES GUIDE



BISTIE



BURNTWATER



CHIEF BLANKET



CHILD'S BLANKET

13B

Permission granted

Who is to be upset?
Florida Seminole's
have granted
tribal
permission for 39
year pregame
tradition of
painting and
dressing 'Chief
Osceola.'⁶



14B

Stereotypes- who are we "playing" to?



How do you visually define a "Rez Indian," honor the status of footwear in the inner city and truthfully present Japanese "ghost" stories with western actors?



Fashion is as Fashion Does- DSquared2's Fall 2015 Collection "DSquaw"



19B

Affect/Effect

"1 in 3
US First Nations
women have
either
experienced
rape, or an
attempted
rape"⁷



Affect/Effect

“It is weird being Asian American right now, because I don’t exactly know what my place is. America is supposed to be for everyone, and people are supposed to treat me like I belong here, and yet you would never know that from watching tv or movies. I still get the questions about where I am really from. Then when I try to explain this feeling of invisibility to those whose every move and moment is entirely visible, they come back at me with, ‘Maybe Asian Americans don’t want to be in entertainment!’ “– Comedienne, Margaret Cho⁸



Concept Paradigms (or Applying Inspiration and Artistic License)

- **SEARCHING TO CREATE AN “OTHER”?**
 - What is really our motivation? Spectacle and commodity often significantly motivate a desire to create an exciting “other.”
 - “Wouldn’t it be cool if...”
 - Looking for a connection to earth. Creating identities that reflect an interconnection of spirituality/cosmology often relies on cultures not historically saturated with dominant, monotheistic beliefs.
- **DOES IT ACTUALLY LOOK LIKE SOMETHING NEW?**
 - Do our characters copy, distort or amalgamate history and imagery? To what ultimate effect (especially within context of script)?



25B

26B

"Africa," Yves Saint Laurent, 1967



Presented by Valerie St. Pierre Smith, Costume Designer

Something new



27B

Alexander
McQueen
Spring 2014



28B

20

Presented by Valerie St. Pierre Smith, Costume Designer



Something new

“ Acts of cultural appropriation often deepen existing divides between haves and have-nots, who has power and who doesn't. Commenting on the appropriation of Native voices by white Canadian novelists, M. T. Kelly has poignantly observed, 'Again and again, papers have been written, careers built, tenure granted, royalties issued, and yet the people upon whom this is based are left behind on the reserves with nothing.'⁹ Minh-Ha T. Pham

”

Look Globally Design Locally



Resources to reconsider

- ▶ Dr. Amy Lonetree, author of (among others) *decolonizing museums* and *People of the Big Voice*.
- ▶ James O. Young *Cultural Appropriation and the Arts*. 2010, John Wiley & Sons.
- ▶ Writings of Susan Scafidi, including counterfeitchic.com and “Who Owns Culture?...”.
- ▶ Local cultural history groups; multi-cultural studies/international studies programs on university campuses good network
- ▶ Local history museums
- ▶ Heritage arts/dance/performance groups
- ▶ Local/regional historical societies
- ▶ Local first nations groups; often housed through tribal offices or native american studies programs at universities
- ▶ Art galleries, dealer and retailers to search out artists in source community

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Photo and Figure Credits/Notes

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