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Changing Traditions: Navajo Weaving and the Germantown Renaissance

Christine M. Bare
University of Pennsylvania

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CHANGING TRADITIONS: NAVAJO WEAVING AND THE GERMANTOWN RENAISSANCE

By

Christine M. Bare

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Abstract

The term “tradition” is often dichotomized with the notion of “modernity.” This opposition prevents cultures deemed “traditional” from changing, inventing, or adopting new traditions in the present-day without forfeiting their cultural identity or being characterized as inauthentic. Utilizing a case study of contemporary Navajo weavers who are revitalizing the Germantown style of weaving, I demonstrate that tradition and modernity are not separate categories but coexist in a dynamic balance. Through focusing on the production, meaning, and communicative properties of Germantown Renaissance textiles, it can be seen that individual weavers draw on previous practices and cultural values, their contemporary or “modern” experiences and perspectives, and new influences to constantly construct and reformulate “traditions.”
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Preface

The strength, beauty, history, and complexity of Navajo culture are expressed through the act of weaving and are embedded within the warp and weft of the textile. Since mythic time when Spiderwoman taught the art of weaving to the Navajo, weavers have infused their textiles with their emotions, their reflections upon the world, and their connections with the past. Due to the personal and sacred nature of weaving to some of the women that I interviewed, I have chosen not to include information that these weavers may not wish to be discussed in print. Also, out of respect for my informants I have chosen not to include their names in relation to specific interview excerpts.
Introduction

Tradition and Modernity

All cultures change. They are dynamic entities shifting in response to internal innovation, altered political climates, new technologies, economic demands, the agency of individuals, and countless other forces (Naylor 1996). Despite this notion of movement within cultures, many anthropologists tend to consider certain groups – particularly indigenous or native groups – as static (Mauzé 1997:1). Underlying this characterization of immutability within certain cultures is the concept of “tradition,” which is often associated with the “perfect transmission of beliefs and statements handed down unchanged from one generation to the next” (Mauzé 1997:5). Due to this conception of “pure” traditions being transmitted from the past, cultures labeled as “traditional” are denied the ability to change, to invent, and to participate in the present “modern” society without forfeiting their cultural identity. According to this view, “modernity” (as representative of change and the present) and “tradition” have been dichotomized; they cannot exist simultaneously. However, an inherent contradiction between dynamic cultures and immutable traditions exists within this perspective. Through this discussion of the concept of tradition I will demonstrate that tradition and modernity are not mutually exclusive, but that they coexist in a dynamic balance.

The conception of tradition illustrated above and my proposed response raise multiple questions around the definition and usage of the term “tradition.” What is tradition? Does tradition change? How do societies deemed “traditional” negotiate between “modernity” and “tradition” as they participate in present day society? How are tradition and cultural identity
linked? How is cultural identity maintained if tradition changes? Is there truly a dichotomy between modernity and tradition?

Recently, these questions surrounding the notion of tradition as a static entity have been explored. Many practices that have been labeled "traditional" “are often quite recent in origin and sometimes inverted” (Hobsbawm 1983:1). For example, the “traditional” use of kilts as a statement of identity for the inhabitants of Highland Scotland was shown to have originated not in ancient Scottish society, but “was invented by an Englishman after the Union of 1707; and the differentiated ‘clan tartans’ are an even later invention” (Trevor-Roper 1983:19). However, in this discussion of the invention of tradition, Hobsbawm and Trevor-Roper distinguish between genuine tradition and invented tradition – “On the other hand the strength and adaptability of genuine traditions is not to be confused with the ‘invention of tradition’. Where the old ways are alive, traditions need be neither revived nor invented” (Hobsbawm 1983:8, emphasis added). By making this distinction, change in tradition is associated with inauthenticity; invention of tradition only occurs in the absence of “genuine tradition” and therefore is not genuine in and of itself (Hanson 1997:196 and Thomas 1992:213). Once again the views of these authors deny a culture the ability to alter its traditions, innovate, or invent without undermining its cultural identity or being deemed false, fake, or not “real.”

The recognition that there is constant change and invention in both culture and tradition allows the division between genuine and invented traditions to dissolve (Hanson 1997:196). Since “invention is a normal and inevitable part of the perpetuation and use of all culture and tradition. . . . the fact that any and every tradition regularly undergoes the process of invention and reinvention in no way compromises its authenticity” (Hanson 1997:196). The realization that traditions are redefined and reformulated in the present and throughout history means that
peoples who are part of what anthropology deems “traditional” societies are not relegated to an unchanging past in order to be true “Indians” or true “Aborigines.” Tradition and modernity do not need to be mutually exclusive concepts. Thus, as she realized, Marie Mauzé’s frustration at being unable to find “real” Indians among a Kawkawka’wakw (Kwakiutl) community that lived in suburban housing with lawn ornaments in their front yards and drove trucks and Cadillacs, was unfounded (1997:2-3). This community could simultaneously incorporate “traditional” practices such as eating a certain cuisine along with the practices and material trappings of “modernity” (Mauzé 1997:2-3).

Amidst these continual redefinitions of tradition, how do individuals retain their sense of cultural identity? While invention and change are present, so is a connection to the past. To effectively communicate, new and reformulated traditions need to reference symbols or beliefs already existing within the culture (Harkin 1997:98 and Pouillon 1997:20). As Mauzé states, “Tradition encompasses both continuity and change as any other cultural product” (1997:7). This drawing from the past to relate changing traditions to aspects of an already existing cultural worldview does not detract from the concept of change in tradition and culture nor does it detract from an individual’s ability to participate in “modern” society. This dialogue between the past and the present allows for a dynamic culture, where continuity, change, traditionalism, and modernity coexist in a fluid balance.

Navajo Weaving – The Germantown Renaissance

In order to demonstrate this process of simultaneous retention and redefinition of tradition and cultural identity within the context of present day society, I will explore a case study of Navajo weavers associated with R.B. Burnham Trading Post located in Sanders, Arizona. These
weavers are revitalizing a style of weaving deemed "Germantown" for the use of brilliantly dyed yarns manufactured in Germantown, Pennsylvania. Rather than merely copying designs from older rugs, many weavers are innovating new designs, pushing the boundary between craft and art form. To some observers this shifting in conception of craft and the innovative designs used in the Germantown Renaissance may appear to be steps away from "traditional" Navajo weaving. However, through examining the history of both the original and contemporary Germantown movements, the weavers' own viewpoints on the changing designs and meanings within the textiles, and the process of weaving a rug, I will show that traditionalism and modernity flexibly coexist within this community of weavers. The dichotomy so often created between these two terms is not present. These weavers remain part of a dynamic Navajo culture through a continual tacking back and forth between continuity and creation of weaving practices, designs, and traditions.

Material Culture: Textiles as Communication

This focus on a contemporary Navajo weaving community enhances the understanding of changes in culture and notions of traditionalism. In addition to exploring the historical and current political changes that have and are impacting the negotiation between the "traditional" Navajo and the "modern" Anglo worlds, the presence and creation of textiles within this community provides information about alterations in traditions.

Material culture, the process of its production, and the use of the created object within a particular historical and social context play an important role within this discussion of traditionalism and modernity. Material culture is a medium through which artisans can communicate their ideas, express their commentary on circumstances in the past and present, and
assert and redefine their cultural identity. Throughout time designs shift in meaning as surrounding contexts change. In particular, the additive nature of textile production allows weavers to express a multitude of variation in style and design (Schneider and Weiner 1989:1). Through the preparation, process, and product of weaving, textile producers can create a medium of communication in which to give voice to their current circumstances. In the Inka empire, textiles were a form of wealth, a marker of status, and a signal of ethnicity (Costin 1998). In Sumba, an island near Bali, women dye and weave cloth of vibrant indigo hues that appear to European tourists as “objects of ostentatious display,” while symbolizing to a Sumbanese audience the secret knowledge of women, the process of production of a child, and a voice of protest against inequalities facing women (Hoskins 1989:141-142). The selection of dyes, designs, and even the type of loom used, express and reflect a system of meaning and belief continuously created by the interaction between the textile producer and her experiences, her cultural worldview, and the surrounding material culture (Christensen 1995:9). Navajo weaving in particular is very expressive since art, and thus weaving, is not a self-contained sub-system within the Navajo culture. The creation of weaving and its meanings are inseparable from notions of kinship, spirituality, history, myth, or any other aspect of Navajo culture (Walters 1996:29). Through understanding this holistic approach to weaving in Navajo society, a textured and layered appreciation of Navajo weaving emerges. While the symbolism and significance of designs in Navajo weaving transform throughout time as the surrounding historical context and individual experience changes, there is an underlying frame of reference in textiles that consists of a uniquely Navajo worldview (Zolbrod 1996:6). Navajo culture – past, present, and future – and individual experiences can be expressed within a textile (Begay 1996:16).
The communicative quality of Navajo weaving is often overlooked in favor of delineating and describing historical periods and style changes (for example Kent 1985, Rodee 1995, and Wheat 1984). While some scholars have examined messages within Navajo art (Hatcher 1974), weaving has been associated with secular expression not acknowledging the holistic and spiritual aspects embodied within Navajo textiles. However, recently, a small number of literary works and museum exhibits have begun to acknowledge the deeper cultural and individual meanings of weaving conveyed by the process and design of Navajo textiles (Bonar 1996, Willink and Zolbrod 1996). These studies have brought forth the meaning implicit within and communicated from the construction of a Navajo textile.

However, it is not only the finished product or the design style that transmit these cultural attitudes and beliefs. Additionally, the process of production – the decisions made and the action of constructing an object – is also a cultural act. In exploring the process of craft production of Hindu potters in the South Indian state of Kerala, Merete Christensen, recognized that “the study of material culture became my entry into the symbolic universe of Hinduism” (1995:11). An artisan reproduces, redefines, and elaborates upon her existing worldview and cultural values while creating a pot, textile, basket, or other form of material culture (Christensen 1995:15).

Due to the intricate connection between the creation of a craft and the message that it transmits (Christensen 1995:14), the production and design of material culture, especially those considered to be part of “traditional” craft communities, speak to the issue of tradition as constantly changing. Often certain styles or processes of production are associated or claimed as symbols of cultural identity (Olwig 1990). One aspect of this claim is a connection with the past, the idea of an unchanging tradition (Olwig 1990:5). However, if this connection with the past is emphasized over the fact that artisans are producing material culture in the present moment,
responding to current economic, technological, and political circumstances, this once again denies cultures the ability to simultaneously express their changing beliefs alongside continuing aspects of their worldview. "Traditional" crafts such as Navajo weaving are stationed at the nexus of the dichotomy that has been created between "traditionalism" and "modernity."

Through the communicative nature of the process and product of material culture (textiles in the case of the Navajo weavers), objects and their surrounding contexts provide a rich area of study to investigate the rigidity of the division between "tradition" and "modernity" and their relation to the maintenance and creation of a cultural identity.

Methods

Due to the nature of the topic of study — the relationship between traditionalism and modernity — and the nature of the Germantown Renaissance, I examined weaving both in present day contexts through the weavers in Sanders, Arizona, and also in the past during the original Germantown movement. Furthermore, I did historical research surrounding the history of the Navajo people and Navajo weaving; in particular, my research pertained to the historical circumstances surrounding the original Germantown weaving movement.

In addition to historical research, I examined a variety of styles of Navajo weaving in museum collections at the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology and at the Heard Museum in Phoenix, Arizona. The Heard Museum displayed works from the original Germantown movement in an exhibit entitled Brilliant: Navajo Germantown and Eyedazzler Textiles. This exhibit, in addition to showing multiple magnificent rugs, included the viewpoints and interpretations of contemporary weavers about these older
rugs. Each of these museum experiences provided a link between weaving in the past and present, highlighting continuities and changes in meaning through time.

To examine contemporary weaving practices, I did field research in Sanders, Arizona, exploring the dynamics and perspectives of weaving among a community of weavers associated with R.B. Burnham Trading post owned by trader Bruce Burnham. I visited the trading post twice, from August 19 to August 21, 2001, and again from December 17 to December 20, 2001. During these two visits I was able to speak with and formally interview weavers, some members of their family, and Bruce Burnham. These interviews took place in weavers’ homes and at the trading post itself, on an individual and group basis. All weavers but one spoke English. The one weaver who did not speak English was interviewed with her daughter-in-law and the daughter of her co-wife, both of whom translated my questions and her answers. While most of the weavers’ interviews were tape recorded, some preferred not to be taped. In these instances I took detailed notes on our conversations. While I did not tape or formally interview Bruce Burnham, I spent many hours speaking with him about the Germantown Renaissance in the art gallery at his trading post.

In addition to these conversations and formal interviews, I observed the personal and business interactions taking place at the trading post: the interactions of weavers with Burnham, how the trading post worked in terms of pawning, credit lending, providing yarn and other weaving supplies, acting as convenience store, and also as tourist art gallery.

**Conclusion**

The following paper will discuss this issue of the coexistence of tradition and modernity through first examining the historical background of the original Germantown movement. The
following section investigates the creation of the Germantown Renaissance, the participants involved, and the historical context surrounding the movement. After establishing this background information the next section discusses the weavers’ views of the Germantown Renaissance through their words and through the communicative medium of their textile designs.
Chapter 1
Navajo History

Introduction

The following section provides a discussion of the history surrounding the original Germantown movement. The purpose of exploring the original Germantown movement is two-fold. First, knowledge of the circumstances surrounding the production of original Germantowns allows for an understanding of the meaning of these brilliant textiles, thus providing insight into the meaning of the revival of these designs. Second, this history will show that the original Germantown movement was considered a break from tradition – eyedazzlers and pictoral motifs were like nothing witnessed before in Navajo weaving. However, Navajo culture embraced this innovation. The bold colors and eyedazzling beauty symbolized the spirit and strength of Navajo culture during a time of great hardship. Here it can be seen that modernity in terms of manufactured Germantown yarns, Anglo influence from traders, and changes in design motif from Rio Grande weavers did impact weaving, but these factors did not detract from weaving as an expression of a dynamic Navajo culture. Today these original Germantown rugs are part of what is considered “traditional” weaving. This movement from innovation into tradition demonstrates that change is everpresent in Navajo culture.

Events Leading to the Long Walk

Throughout the 1800s in the American Southwest raiding for slaves, food, and other goods took place between the Mexican settlers and multiple Native American groups in the region, including the Navajo. While all sides participated in these raids, the Navajo were singled out as culprits by the Mexican settlers and eventually the United States army. After the Civil
War the United States army began to focus on the effects of this continuous raiding which had been deemed the "Indian Problem" (Kaufman and Selser 1985:45). Since both peace treaties and an increased army presence in the area failed to quell raiding, General James H. Carleton was placed in charge of subduing the Navajo. He formulated the plan to gather the Navajo at Bosque Redondo, New Mexico, in order to change the Navajo people into settled, peaceful farmers. He believed that through this move the Navajos would, "... acquire new habits, new ideas, new modes of life ... the old Indians will die off and carry with them all latent longings for murdering and robbing; the young ones will take their places without these longings; and thus ... they will become a happy and contented people ..." (Berlant and Kahlenberg 1977:99).

In order to remove the Navajo from their homeland, Carleton employed Kit Carson. Carson decided to starve the Navajo into submission (Kaufman and Selser 1985:46). Carson and his troops burned the crops of the Navajo, poisoned their water supply, slaughtered their livestock, burned their hogans, and destroyed their orchards (Kaufman and Selser 1985:46). Although the induced conditions were harsh, only 180 Navajo surrendered to Carson at this time (Berlant and Kahlenberg 1977:97). In January 1864, the army raided Canyon de Chelly, the center of Navajo habitation and of great spiritual significance, looking for noncompliant Navajos (Berlant and Kahlenberg 1977:97). As subsistence conditions worsened and as military pressure increased, many more Navajo people were forced or lured by promises of food and clothing to Forts Wingate and Canby (Berlant and Kahlenberg 1977:97 and Kaufman and Selser 1985:46). However, these forts were also ill-supplied and many Navajo died as a result (Kaufman and Selser 1985:46).
The Long Walk

"The tragedy of Bosque Redondo, and the legacy of the Long Walk that removed Navajos from their land and their herds, remains with the people today like scar tissue, prominently etched in the elders’ memories..."
- Paul Zolbrod (1996:17)

In the spring of 1864, the Navajo were forced by the United States army to march to Bosque Redondo, called Hwéeldi in the Navajo language (Figure 1). This journey is known as the Long Walk. About 8,000 Navajo people were forced to walk the three hundred mile distance (Bighorse 1990:34). During the Long Walk many grew exhausted or sick, and the army left behind or killed those who were unable to make the journey (Kaufman and Selser 1985:48, Bighorse 1990:34).

Not all of the Navajo people were caught. Many stayed hidden within the Grand Canyon, on Black Mesa, and in Canyon de Chelly (Bighorse 1990). Among the Navajo who escaped capture was a chief named Manuelito who coordinated many efforts to raise the spirits of the people interned at Bosque Redondo and to actively resist their captors (Bighorse 1990). Although these Navajo were hunted by Kit Carson’s troops, they were not found and remained in hiding until Manuelito signed the treaty that brought their people home from Hwéeldi.

In addition to physical anguish, the Long Walk generated much heartache and sadness. The Navajo were removed from their homeland surrounded by the four sacred mountains – the land that the Holy People had made safe for them (Robert Roessel cited in Hedlund 1996:53). Being separated from their land and being held captive under deplorable conditions, these independent peoples suffered profoundly, an anguish that has persisted to the present day. This memory continues to resonate within the expression of the textiles of the Germantown Renaissance.
Bosque Redondo (*Teweldi*)

Bosque Redondo consisted of forty square miles of flat land devoid of most resources. The Pecos River, the main water supply, was alkaline and caused stomach ailments if it was consumed (Salmón 1976:2). The only source of fuel and wood for the building of homes was twenty-five miles upstream and difficult to reach. Instead of making the perilous journey to the wooded area, many Navajo dug pits in the ground, lined them with grass mats, and used branches as roof cover (Salmón 1976:2). In addition to the lack of housing and potable drinking water, the food supply provided by the government was not adequate in amount and it was foreign to the Navajo thus creating confusion about its preparation and use (Berlant and Kahlenberg 1977:100).

The problems created by the scarcity of food were supposed to be remedied by agricultural crops produced by the new “Navajo farmer” way of life proposed by General Carleton. However, Bosque Redondo was not suited for agricultural activity. In addition to the inappropriate water supply, natural disasters prevented successful crops (Kaufman and Selser 1985:48). This crop failure created a situation where many Navajo were malnourished and in a state of semi-starvation. Other ailments were also affecting the Navajo including syphilis, smallpox, and other serious diseases (Kaufman and Selser 1985:48 and Hedlund 1996:53). In less than two years of imprisonment, one quarter of the Navajo prisoners at Bosque Redondo died (Kaufman and Selser 1985:102).

Despite this picture of severe deprivation, the Navajo people did not passively succumb to this oppression. In addition to the overt forms of resistance witnessed before entering Bosque Redondo, there were many subtle forms of rebellion throughout the imprisonment. The army had planned to control the meager supply of food through issuing food ration tickets to individuals. However, this controlled allotment of food was not successful because the Navajo copied the
ration tickets allowing them greater access to food (Salmón 1976:5). Also, as conditions worsened, more and more Navajo attempted and successfully escaped from Bosque Redondo (Salmón 1976:5-6).

In a most powerful form of resistance, the Navajo did not give up their own beliefs and their own way of life at Bosque Redondo. General Carleton's "experiment" of assimilation failed. A particular example of this is the continuation of weaving through the period of imprisonment. Although the details of this weaving process will be explored in the following sections, it should be noted here that through the continued process of weaving, Navajo women were able to maintain their cultural identity during a turbulent time. This does not mean that Navajo culture is static and unchanging, but rather that women were able to use weaving—adopting new designs and new yarns—to express this time of transformation and emotional anguish. In one particular textile woven in response to this imprisonment, red flannel, most likely obtained from the underclothing of a United States army officer, was used as the predominant weft color (Figure 2). One Navajo elder commented that "'When you want to weave badly enough . . . you find wool no matter how'" (Willink and Zolbrod 1996:48). Also during this time, a small amount of Germantown yarns were supplied to the women at Bosque Redondo (Wheat 1994:14). The impact of this introduction will be explored in later sections. Women drew from a Navajo worldview, from new experiences, new yarns, new weaving influences to redefine a tradition—thus maintaining and reshaping Navajo identity, holding modern experiences and traditional beliefs simultaneously. Weaving no longer was only the muted colors and horizontal lines of Chief Blankets—it was eyedazzling illusions, bright colors and pictorial elements.
In 1868 the Navajo negotiated a treaty with the United States government to be permitted to leave Bosque Redondo and return to their homeland. At this time 2,000 Navajos had died at Bosque Redondo and 1,000 had escaped (Kaufman and Selser 1985:49,51). Soon after the treaty was signed many Navajo began the journey back to their homeland. However, due to the destruction of land and livestock, especially sheep herds, by the United States army, many Navajo were unable to survive without the assistance of government supplies provided at area forts (Kaufman and Selser 1985:51). Economic life changed with increasing dependence on outside agencies and traders to supply the Navajo with necessities such as food and clothing and also commercial goods that had been introduced to the Navajo at Bosque Redondo, including Germantown yarns.

**Germantown Weaving**

As mentioned in the previous section, Navajo weaving, although changed in form, continued throughout the Bosque Redondo period. Here the re-creation of tradition through the process of creating material culture can be seen. During internment, Navajo weavers were exposed to a multiplicity of new influences including the style of Rio Grande weavers, Germantown yarns, and the conditions and experiences at Bosque Redondo. These new inputs combined with a Navajo worldview to produce a new style, a new wrinkle in what some consider to be “traditional” Navajo weaving. Below I will discuss the influence of the Rio Grande weavers and Germantown yarns on specific design elements within Germantown weaving.

**Saltillo Influences**

The Spanish weavers of the Rio Grande Valley had developed a Saltillo style consisting of “large, finely figured concentric diamonds with serrate edges in the center, figured borders,
and a background of geometrically placed dots or vertically oriented zigzags and small ‘butterfly’ figures” (Wheat 1984:19). As Navajo women had done throughout their history, the weavers absorbed this new style, chose aspects that appealed to them, modified these designs, and incorporated these elements into their weaving of Germantown. Instead of copying the Saltillo patterns, the Navajo weavers fit the vertically oriented designs into the horizontal stripes, a pattern seen in older Navajo blankets (Wheat 1994:16). Serrate edges, the use of a central diamond motif, the incorporation of borders, and the addition of fringe are aspects of Germantown weaving that were influenced by the Rio Grande weavers (Wheat 1984:19).

This influence of Spanish weavers on Navajo weaving exemplifies the dynamic nature of Navajo culture and tradition. Faced with changing circumstances, Navajo weavers negotiated their new surroundings through weaving – adopting new concepts and adapting these designs to their own textiles, their own aesthetic, and their own cultural framework of meaning.

_Germantown Yarns_

As weavers were being influenced by the Saltillo style from the Rio Grande Valley, simultaneous changes were occurring in the actual material used in weaving. Government agents at Bosque Redondo realized that if provided with yarn, Navajo weavers could weave blankets and clothing for themselves (Wheat 1994:14). Without access to sheep, weavers required another source of yarn. In the beginning of the internment at Bosque Redondo, the United States army ordered 100 pounds of commercially dyed yarn from Germantown, Pennsylvania (Wheat 1994:14). Since the United States army already obtained supplies such as blankets, stockings, and clothing from the Philadelphia area the connection between Pennsylvania and the Southwest was easily made (Williams 1994:42). This supply of yarn to Bosque Redondo continued to be
ordered in small quantities until 1868 when the Navajo returned to their homeland and demand for yarn increased (Wheat 1994:14).

These manufactured yarns were more refined in texture than handspun yarns allowing for more precise and intricate weaving. Also, because of the use of synthetic and aniline dyes, Germantown yarns were extremely colorful, providing weavers a palate of colors expanded beyond their vegetal dyed yarns (Wheat 1994:14). These Germantown yarns were often used in conjunction with other types of material. Blankets from this time period contain scraps of flannel, handspun yarn, Germantown yarns, raveled bayeta – anything available to the weavers. This combination of yarn types can be seen as a metaphor for the simultaneous continuity and shifting of Navajo tradition within weaving during the Germantown period.

**Germantown Textiles**

The combination of the introduction of Germantown yarns with the influence of Saltillo-like patterning facilitated radical innovation in Navajo weaving. The new bold colors provided by the Germantown yarns were incorporated into blankets allowing for creative juxtapositions of color, recreating mere “traditional” designs into eyecatching patterns. While many of the designs used in Germantown textiles were not incredibly complex, the Navajo weaver’s astute use of color created the illusion of a complex, intricate pattern (Wheat 1994:15). These seemingly difficult patterns were called “eyedazzlers” for their dizzying effects (Figure 4). The combination of serrated diamonds with the plethora of yarn colors created visually stunning patterns. J.J. Brody states that in Germantowns the “juxtaposition of intense colors sometimes blurs the edges of design areas, creating an optical effect which makes it [the textile] impossible to read . . . as a flat surface” (1976:14). The serrate patterns were incorporated from the Rio Grande weavers; however, the use of design, patterning, and unconventional color combination
was entirely a Navajo creation (Kent 1985:77). In addition to these structural changes, other new
elements were added to the weaver’s repertoire as well – meandered lines and different variations

Pictorial weavings also gained a new vibrance during the Germantown period. These rugs
were unique in that rather than containing only geometric designs, pictures and scenes from
everyday life were depicted within the textiles in more of a concrete narrative form (Figure 5).
Also, there were many pictorial samplers that divided the textile into multiple squares with unique
designs in each space (Figure 6). Marian Rodee asserts that these rugs were woven as “a mini
catalogue of rugs available for purchase” (1978:47). Pictoral elements also appeared within rugs
that were predominately geometric in design. Small images such as bows and arrows (Figure 7)
or birds appeared in some Germantown blankets (Figure 8).

Amidst these vast changes in design, weavers continued a connection to past traditions
through the method and worldview brought to the creation of the Germantown textiles.
However, the symbolic repertoire of the Navajo cultural worldview is not static either. The
circumstances surrounding the creation of Germantown textiles brought new meanings to
weavings. Pictoral weavings more concretely depicted the weaver’s commentary on ongoing
circumstances. For example, the appearance of the train in pictoral blankets signaled the
importance, disruption, opportunity, and feelings of ambivalence that were accompanied with the
arrival of the railroad in the 1800s (Figure 9) (Willink and Zolbrod 1996:54). One contemporary
weaver commented that she had been told to “‘Be careful of trains, sometimes they take children
away, never to be seen again’” (Willink and Zolbrod 1996:54). Also, one textile woven around
1875-1880, a Late Classic Serape Textile (Figure 2), includes a double enclosed serrate diamond
motif that some Navajo elders believe signifies imprisonment referring to Bosque Redondo
(Willink and Zolbrod 1996:48). While this connection has not been shown, perhaps the use and proliferation of the diamond patterns within Germantown weaving symbolized the weaver’s feeling or reflections of imprisonment.

While potentially depicting their loss of freedom, Navajo weavers were also utilizing multiple Germantown colors in their weaving with some textiles containing ten or more differently dyed yarns. Stemming from this period of hardship, Germantown textiles signify the beauty and vitality of the Navajo culture (Woal n.d.). Germantown weaving also shows the strength of a dynamic weaving tradition and its centrality in a creation or redefinition of a Navajo identity. During the time of Bosque Redondo, the Navajo identity as an independent people was drawn into question. Germantown weaving illustrated the vibrant reassertion of a Navajo identity. This artistic explosion allowed for creative expression in the midst of trying times. It is interesting to note that this assertion of identity was done through a changed weaving tradition. Thus the acceptance of more “modern” materials or designs from the Rio Grande Valley did not mean that Navajo identity was jeopardized; in fact, this shifting within a weaving tradition allowed for weavers to represent the strength, beauty, and brilliance of Navajo culture during a time of hardship. The dynamism of Navajo culture is further illustrated in that these Germantowns were created for the Navajo people who accepted the changed designs and use of color, allowing change and tradition to coexist (Berlant and Kahlenberg 1977:135 and Brody as cited in Kent 1985:78).

**The Impact of Anglo Traders on Germantown Textiles**

The time period of the Germantown movement coincided with the establishment of Anglo traders on the Navajo Reservation. While the Navajo had traded their blankets with other Native American groups for years before the presence of Anglo traders, this new trading
partnership brought the Navajo into connection with the market economy. Through the work of traders, Navajo blankets became popular among a wider, Anglo audience. To cater to this consumer niche, traders encouraged the weaving of rugs that could be used and displayed in homes rather than used as blankets (Williams 1989:24). Initially Germantown textiles were well received by the Anglo consumers and were heavily marketed in illustrated catalogues by C.N. Cotton and Lorenzo Hubbell, both prominent Anglo traders (Powers 2001:68). However, at the turn of the century after this initial period of acceptance, consumers and traders turned away from Germantowns believing them to be “repulsive aberrations” (Kent 1985:78).

Lorenzo Hubbell, who had always been wary of Germantown dyes as threats to the “integrity of Navajo weaving” (Kaufman and Selser 1985:73), encouraged weavers to weave rugs of a certain preset type resembling more “traditional” Navajo patterns (Powers 2001:68). E. A. Burbank, a painter, was hired by Hubbell to create pictures of rugs with elements and styles of older Navajo textiles for weavers to replicate for sale on the market (Powers 2001:69). Hubbell decried the purchase of “gaudy blankets” stating:

I have been at the greatest pains to perpetuate the old patterns, colors and weaves, now so rapidly passing out of existence even in the memory of the best weavers . . . I can guarantee the reproduction of these antique patterns. The next thing to possessing a genuine old blanket is owning one made exactly on the pattern of such blankets. [Webster 1996:418]

Through this statement it becomes clear that an outside standard of “genuine,” equated here with age, timelessness, and purity, was imposed on Navajo weaving.

Due to this notion of “genuine,” the fact that weavers “acquiesced” to the demands of Hubbell and other traders and began participating in the market economy rather than weaving blankets solely for ceremonies, gifts, or other “traditional” uses, created the idea that once again Navajo weavers were stepping away from tradition. However, due to the communicative power
of textiles on multiple levels, Navajo weavers continued to infuse their own variations, their own Navajo identity within the framework provided by the trader and buying audience. As Minnie Becenti explained, “We did what the trader said to do... But we also managed to do what we wanted. We managed somehow to retain a little bit of our ways, our own ideas. We found a way to stay true to our own patterns” (Willink and Zolbrod 1996:25). These trader-influenced textiles still remained Navajo creations (Webster 1996:429). Continuity in process and some patterning during changes created through participation in the market economy and changes in some design style demonstrate that these rugs reflect a dynamic Navajo cultural identity where tradition and change meet.

Conclusion

The history surrounding the original Germantown movement illustrates the multiplicity of influences that impact the weaving of a Navajo textile. Since weavers are creating rugs in the present, new ideas, economic circumstances, and political environments inevitably shape the textiles. Through the creation of the brilliant Germantown textiles, Navajo weavers simultaneously integrated and expressed traditional weaving practices, present day circumstances, and new economic factors within the design and production of a textile. These changes in the weaving tradition were accepted by the Navajo community. However, Anglo traders and consuming public rebelled against these innovative designs and returned to what they considered to be “traditional” Navajo weaving – muted colors and designs of horizontal stripes, diamonds, and crosses.

The expectations of the trader and buying public, their concepts of traditionalism and modernity, continue to influence Navajo weaving today. Through examining the Germantown
Renaissance, I will show how, similar to the original Germantown movement, amidst innovation, continuity within a Navajo worldview persists allowing weavers to invent styles, comment on their current surroundings, and create "traditions" that incorporate "traditional" and "modern" aspects.
Chapter 2
The Germantown Renaissance

Introduction

The Germantown Renaissance is a contemporary revitalization of original style Germantown weaving currently taking place at R.B. Burnham Trading Post in Sanders, Arizona. The Germantown Renaissance is not a mere copying of older designs; it is a movement beyond them—integrating established designs in new ways and creating new designs. Due to its direct connection and many parallels to the past, the Germantown Renaissance exemplifies the meeting and coexistence of the past and present, traditionalism and modernity. Weavers are responding to the designs woven by their ancestors, imbuing them with new meanings, and creating innovative designs unlike any seen before. However, the process of weaving still connects these weavers to a dynamic Navajo worldview which provides the needed thread of continuity in changing traditions. As with the original Germantown movement, I will discuss the contemporary situation surrounding the Germantown Renaissance, how this movement was created, and the participants—both trader and weavers. The story of the creation of the Germantown Renaissance will lay a foundation for the following section on the weaver’s reflections of this new movement.

The Navajo Nation

The Navajo Nation is the largest Native American reservation within the United States encompassing 25,516 square miles across three states—Arizona, Utah, and New Mexico (Figure 10) (Indian Health Service 1999). The Navajo are one of the largest Native American groups in terms of population within the United States with 180,462 people living on the Navajo Nation.
(U.S. Census Bureau 2000). The boundaries of the reservation have long been in dispute with both the neighboring Hopi and Navajo vying for ownership of certain portions of the land. Due to this Hopi-Navajo Land Dispute, both Hopi and Navajo residents have been relocated to other areas of their respective reservations as ownership of territory has been redrawn.

The 1974 Steiger-Owens bill gave a large quantity of the contested land back to the Hopi people (Brugge 1994). Due to this change of land ownership 10,000 to 11,000 Navajo were moved from their land, while about 100 Hopi residents were removed from their homes. Sanders, Arizona, where Burnham Trading Post is located, is within the New Lands area (Nahátá Dzil) that was designated for these relocated Navajo families and individuals (Indian Health Service 1999). The population of the area is about 898 persons (Indian Health Service 1999). Most of the weavers who work with Bruce Burnham at Burnham Trading Post were affected by this relocation.

Trading posts such as Burnham's still play an important role on the Navajo Nation. At these posts customers can buy groceries, pawn items for money, cash checks, and obtain credit. Also, many traders take an active part in encouraging Navajo weaving and provide a forum for selling Navajo textiles. Due to the high rates of unemployment on the Navajo Nation where 4 out of 10 Navajos do not have a job (Roessel 1995:33), weaving supplies a vital source of income for many families on the reservation. While modern transportation allows weavers more choice in where they can sell their rugs, what prices they can obtain, and what styles they weave, traders remain an important influence on contemporary weaving. These economic variables contributed to the creation of the Germantown Renaissance. For weavers of the Germantown Renaissance, income is often cited as the main reason for weaving.
Bruce Burnham and *Burst of Brilliance*

Bruce Burnham is a fourth generation trader on the Navajo Nation. After moving his trading post to Sanders, Arizona, Burnham began searching for ways to make Navajo weaving an economically viable occupation for the weavers who worked with him. Initially he created Wide & Wooly yarns, a rug yarn that appears to be natural, handspun yarn, but is in fact manufactured. This elimination of handspinning and hand-dyeing allowed weavers the ability to create a rug in less time, therefore earning more money to supplement their family’s income. In order to create this specialized yarn, Burnham partnered with Russ Fawley of Wilde Mills located in Manayunk, Pennsylvania, an area near Germantown. After these yarns became incorporated into the weaving practices of many of the weavers, Fawley continued to work with Burnham to look for new ideas to stimulate the rug market as well as the creativity and economic benefits of the weavers. One idea that Burnham began thinking about was revitalizing the Germantown style of weaving.

During this period of time, unbeknownst to Burnham, an exhibit entitled *Burst of Brilliance: Germantown, Pennsylvania, and Navajo Weaving* was being displayed at the Arthur Ross Gallery of the University of Pennsylvania from November 1994 to February 1995. Lucy Fowler Williams of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology curated this exhibit. She along with Joe Ben Wheat, a prominent Navajo textile scholar, created a catalogue telling the story of the creation of Germantown weaving (Wheat and Williams 1994). This catalogue detailed the experience of the Navajo people at Bosque Redondo and described the textile manufacturing sector in Germantown, Pennsylvania. In addition to this information, the catalogue held examples of forty-one Germantown rugs accompanied by a description of their designs and the yarn used in the weaving process.
Russ Fawley introduced Burnham to the *Burst of Brilliance* catalogue. Bruce Burnham and Russ Fawley worked together to duplicate the original Germantown dyes, a difficult task since most of the original weaving had faded (Woal n.d). Also, there were critics of the process who believed that either the Germantown dyes should be replicated in their faded state or that the Germantown period was sacred and should not be revitalized. However, Burnham and Fawley persisted, and after much trial and error, the dyes were replicated. In conjunction with the creation of these yarns, Burnham bought hundreds of copies of the *Burst of Brilliance* catalogue and handed them out to the weavers who he works with. Since most of the weavers had no previous knowledge of the original Germantown movement and the surrounding circumstances, Burnham encouraged the weavers to read the text in *Burst of Brilliance* before beginning to weave in order to understand the underlying philosophy of the time.

While Burnham initiated the Germantown Renaissance, without the innovation of the weavers the Renaissance would not have been successful. In shaping the Germantown Renaissance, Burnham instilled and encouraged the philosophy of creativity in weaving allowing the weavers greater freedom in weaving textiles. Burnham does make suggestions on the weaving of some rugs; however, he often invites the weavers to construct their own designs and vision of what the Germantown Renaissance embodies. Through the Germantown Renaissance Burnham hopes to empower the weaver, to transform the weaver into an artist who will be able to command more money for her weavings thus opening up further economic opportunities for the weavers that he works with.
The Weavers of the Germantown Renaissance

There is an extensive community of weavers associated with R.B. Burnham Trading Post, many of whom are involved in the Germantown Renaissance. During my field research I interviewed some of the women who have been weaving Germantown rugs for many years and some of their family members – Bah Yazhi Ashley, Mae Clark, Emily Blake Malone, Veronica Six, Jennie Slick, Janet Tsinnie, and the Lee family – Elouise, Danny, and their four children: Cherish, Cheryll, Chancee, and Dannee. Each Germantown Renaissance weaver possesses her own style of Germantown weaving and expresses her own views of the world.

These weavers possess a unique relationship with Bruce Burnham. Burnham thinks of many of the weavers as his children or grandchildren. He has seen these weavers grow up, helped them through difficult times, visits their homes, and advises them in all aspects of their life. When I was at the trading post, one of the weavers and her two children visited Burnham. As this weaver and Burnham were talking, her young son was playfully punching Burnham in the stomach and Burnham was teasing her teenage daughter about boyfriends and school. Their relationship was close and comfortable. After she left Burnham told me that he thinks of her as a daughter.

While there is an acknowledged power dynamic between Burnham as a trader and the weavers that work with and for him, this relationship is not the popular conception of a domineering trader and exploited Navajo weaver. One example of this is that after years of commenting upon the style and quality of weave produced by weavers who brought their rugs into his trading post for sale, Burnham decided that he should learn to weave. He did not allow anyone to teach him but learned to weave from a book. Gradually weavers heard about his project and encouraged him to finish and bring the rug into his trading post. Burnham showed
me the finished product, and while proud of his first effort, acknowledged the questionable quality and multiple mistakes within the rug. The weavers loved this opportunity, and jokingly criticized his rug in the same way that he had been criticizing theirs’ for years. Burnham said that after that experience, he acquired a new sensitivity when commenting upon a weaver’s rug. He now better understands the skills and hard work that are invested within the weaving of a rug.

It is important to understand the dynamic between the trader and the weavers to realize the degree of influence that Burnham has over a weaver’s rug. Weavers obviously consider what the trader will buy when designing their rug; however, Burnham’s emphasis on creativity and his unique relationship with the weavers he works with allows the weavers more freedom to pronounce their ideas and beliefs in their textiles.
Chapter 3
Weavers’ Reflections on the Germantown Renaissance

Introduction

As discussed in the previous section, Bruce Burnham initiated the Germantown Renaissance in hopes of empowering the weaver creatively and economically. However, there is also a cultural connection with the weavers associated with Burnham Trading Post and the original Germantown period that emerged out of the difficult times of the Long Walk and Bosque Redondo. Sanders, Arizona, is part of the New Lands area — land designated for the relocation of Navajo peoples moved off of their land due to the Hopi-Navajo Land Dispute. Due to the deep spiritual connection between the Navajo and their land, this forced relocation was a traumatic event for those involved, so difficult, in fact, that some have named this movement the “Second Long Walk” in reference to the Long Walk to Bosque Redondo. Many of the weavers associated with Bruce Burnham’s trading post were part of this relocation movement. Informant 1 spoke with me about this relocation.

CB: Did you move here [to Sanders] during a relocation?
1: Um hum.
CB: And when did that happen?
CB: Have things changed a lot?
1: Yeah, for me, cause for where I used to live, we didn’t have no running water, no power, no nothing. Lived out in the boonies. Dirt road was all we had. And the closest highway was like, eighty miles or ninety miles from where we lived. And the closest shopping center was in Tuba City — that was like three to four hours drive. The closest city we had was Gallup or Flagstaff [laughs].
CB: So do you like being in a central location?
1: Um, I can’t really say. Sometimes, I usually miss my home.
CB: So you still think of that [previous location] as your home?
1: Uh huh. I usually think that way. ‘Cause out there we think that we had a lot of room to do this and that. Like riding horses, things like that. Whereas here . . . . Yeah, I miss my homeplace [laughs]. We never lived real close to each other. And out here it is so close to everyone. It is so crowded [laughs]. [Interview – Sanders, Arizona, December 18, 2001].
While there is feeling of loss for some of the weavers, there are also advantages to living in the New Lands area. For example, older weavers appreciate the senior citizen lunches, nearby clinics, and medicine men that are easily accessible from this new location. Regardless of these new facilities, the parallel between the relocation due to the Hopi-Navajo Land Dispute and the Long Walk create a link that contributes to the emotion surrounding the Germantown Renaissance. It also suggests that since textiles are a communicative medium, these weavers are expressing their current situation through simultaneously referencing the past and the modern world. In the following sections this coexistence of “tradition” and “modernity” will be explored through examining the learning process of weaving, the act of weaving and designing textiles, the influences on the designs and structure of the Germantown Renaissance textiles, and the importance of weaving in this weaving community today.

Traditionalism and Modernity: A Dynamic Balance Communicated Through Weaving

The word “traditional,” as used within this Navajo community, usually refers to someone who practices certain religious ceremonies or who will not put certain images into her weaving. However, when this concept is examined closely it can be seen that traditionalism and modernity are not mutually exclusive concepts, but that they exist simultaneously, integrating to create and preserve a Navajo cultural identity. One of the weavers, Informant 2, stated, “Um, I would say that I’m very traditional. There are some things I wouldn’t put in my rug. [Waits a few seconds]. But very modern [laughs].” This simple statement corresponds with the idea that Navajo weavers do not dichotomize tradition and modernity, and in fact, can be immersed in both. To further illustrate this point I will examine the story told through a rug woven by Germantown
Renaissance weaver Mae Clark entitled “Four Generations” and the response of the weavers to this particular rug.

Four Generations

“Four Generations” (Figure 11), a Burnham style rug woven by Mae Clark in 2001, beautifully illustrates the dialectic between the continuation of a Navajo worldview and changes within the practice of Navajo weaving. This weaving depicts four generations of Navajo women, each holding a rug appropriate to their period in history. The first woman is meant to represent the great-grandmother of the woman on the far right. She is holding a Second Phase Chief blanket and is wearing kelchi moccasins, the typical footwear of that period (Burnham n.d.). The second woman in line is the grandmother, holding an original Germantown rug. She too is wearing the kelchi moccasins and wearing “traditional” dress. The third woman in line represents the mother. She is carrying a Ganado Red blanket – typifying the regional style period in Navajo weaving. In contrast to the older women, this figure wears a biil dress, a sash belt, and keinsai moccasins – all items that are only worn during ceremonial occasions (Burnham n.d.). Burnham also narrates that this “mother” figure is bilingual in Navajo and English and was educated in a boarding school. The last figure in line is who Burnham calls the “material girl.” She represents contemporary Navajo women and is holding a Germantown Renaissance rug. In stark contrast to the women preceding her, she is wearing a mini skirt, a shirt exposing her stomach, multiple earrings, and has dyed hair. As Burnham explains the story of the rug, the textile and clothing style changes signify the diminishing knowledge of the Navajo language and “traditional” ways and the greater acculturation to an Anglo world.

While clothes and textile designs have changed, this rug also suggests the ability of tradition to both change in response to present day circumstances and to retain aspects of a
continuing Navajo worldview. Throughout the generations each woman is carrying a rug woven in the “Navajo way” although designs and clothing changed. This rug illustrates that modernity in the form of mini skirts and high heels can exist simultaneously with mythic stories of Spiderwoman, the originator of Navajo weaving, and weaving tools that have been in use for hundreds of years, demonstrating the dynamic nature of Navajo culture. This is further shown through Informant 3, who still participates in some “traditional” practices but identified with the “material girl.” She said:

3: When I first saw that one [Mae Clark’s “Four Generation” rug], to me the first thing that went to my mind, remember that far end – the one that was standing with high heels. I said to Bruce – “This one’s me over here” [laughs]. . .
CB: Why do you identify with the girl on the end?
3: I dye my hair, wear high heels [laughs]. And then he [Bruce] goes, “No, this one’s you over here, the one with the dress. I said, “I don’t think so Bruce. I’m not that traditional. I’m over here with the wild crowd [laughs]. I may be old but I’m still wild. I was just teasing him. But I like that [rug]. [Interview – Sanders, Arizona, December 20, 2001]

As depicted in the rug, the Navajo weaving tradition is constantly recreated in response to new contexts, new ideas, and new influences. Due to the continuation of a weaving process the women depicted in the rug are all connected to a dynamic Navajo tradition; however, since they are all living in different times, each individual redefines what is meant by tradition. This recreation allows this community of Navajo weavers to simultaneously hold notions of modernity and tradition that some scholars have divided into dichotomous categories. To understand how a cultural identity is maintained throughout this constant change, it is important to examine the process of transmission, the process of production, the product created, and the meanings attached to these products.
Learning How to Weave

"Maybe
If I watch you now
join the color
shape the whole.
"Perhaps with Time . . .
"Perhaps with Patience . . .
I, too, could learn Your Way."
- The Gift of the Spiderwoman Legend by Noël Bennett (1975 as quoted in Wheat 1984:7)

Learning how to weave is important in understanding the transmission of Navajo culture, the acceptance of change, and the dialectic between these two factors. The Germantown Renaissance provides a multi-generational view of this process. Adult weavers and their children are participating in this Renaissance. A discussion of the similarities and differences in how these generations learned to weave will illuminate the intertwining influences of “tradition” and “modernity.”

The nature of pedagogy within Navajo culture is distinct from Anglo ways of learning. Students learn to weave through watching, helping their instructor weave when it is asked of her, and receiving answers to her questions only when the teacher feels it is appropriate. The Navajo term kóótl'éego means “allowing people to watch and to learn from watching. Teaching is showing” (Begay 1996:18). Weavers are culture bearers of the Navajo and many feel that it is their responsibility to teach weaving and thus the stories, beliefs, and techniques that constitute meaning within weaving and the weaving process (Begay 1996:18). Through teaching, weavers are communicating a culture, a way of life.

An Emphasis on Family and Community

In weaving with handspun and hand-dyed yarns – tasks associated with more “traditional” weaving, multiple steps are involved before the actual weaving begins. The sheep must be cared for and shorn after which the wool must be carded, spun into yarn, and then dyed. While an
individual is often depicted as the sole creator of a textile, in fact an entire family or network of people contributes to the production of a textile. Since Germantown weaving utilizes manufactured yarns it does not require the additional labor that weaving involving handspinning or hand-dying necessitates. However, this does not detract from the continuation of Navajo weaving. The whole family is still involved in the weaving process. The multiple generations and families participating in the Germantown Renaissance reinforce the strong value of kinship emphasized in Navajo culture. This is particularly underscored and demonstrated through the learning process of weaving which involves many family members and communication between older and younger generations.

Many of the weavers told of learning to weave from their female relatives – their aunts, grandmothers, nali’s – father’s mother, mothers, and sisters. While one weaver learned to weave at school, her weaving education continued and flourished under the guidance of her mother-in-law indicating the continued importance of family in the weaving process. However, the family connections do not end at acquiring technical competency. While learning, male relatives – fathers, brothers, uncles – will often construct a loom for the new weaver encouraging the task and reinforcing familial connections. Furthermore, since weaving is part of a holistic system, an important part of the learning process is listening to stories of Navajo creation, the origins of weaving, legends, and adventures. While sometimes the women who are teaching the craft will tell these stories, often other relatives and friends will gather children together and teach them of their history, their beliefs, and their values.

The Importance of Stories

The learning process begins even before an individual is taught the technical aspects of weaving. Stories about Navajo culture, history, and beliefs such as hózhó (a concept discussed in
more detail below) and a deep connection with the land are told to young children. These stories impact conceptualizations about the woven textile, designs included within a textile, and the meaning associated with these designs.

Informant 1 who participates in the Germantown Renaissance has four daughters. During the winter, her father, a medicine man, comes to her house and tells her daughters stories about Coyote and Spiderwoman. In conjunction with these stories, the girls are shown how to play string games where they stretch a loop of yarn over their hands and with their fingers manipulate the yarn to create images of rugs, two coyotes, stars, and other reminders of the stories that they are told. This infuses the yarn that they shape into a transmitter of Navajo culture. Sometimes the yarn for the string games is pulled off of a skein of yarn that their mother uses to weave, creating a physical connection between Navajo stories and weaving. A further connection between stories and weaving is created through the mention of Spiderwoman who will wrap the children in a web if they play the string games during the summer.

These stories are passed down between generations, teaching a Navajo worldview – a way of life – that these girls absorb and utilize in creating their own identities, in shaping their own weavings, and in understanding the designs of other weavers. When asked if Informant 1 thought that the stories that her father tells would show up in the lives of the rugs of her children, she replied, “Yeah, that’s what my dad wants. He wants for his grandkids to learn their traditional ways. Keep it in the family – like weaving and herding sheep” (Interview Sanders, Arizona, December 18, 2001).

While exposed to stories before learning to weave, novice weavers are often taught about Spiderwoman in particular because she gave the Navajo the gift of weaving during mythic time. Most of the Germantown Renaissance weavers, both younger and older, told of hearing this story
in one form or another (for these stories change too) as they were learning to weave. Through this story these weavers learned how to conceptualize the relationship between the weaver and the textile and how to care for tools. Informant 1 told of her father, a medicine man, teaching her the story of Spiderwoman as she learned how to weave. She said:

He just went through it [the story of Spiderwoman]. Real fast . . . . I just remember it [the story]. I usually don’t think about that when I’m weaving. I just concentrate on my designs. . . . If I’m not doing anything, I would think about it. I would sit there and think, ‘Why did he tell me that?’, ‘What was he thinking that day?’ . . . I would think that way. I don’t know [laughs]. [Interview – Sanders, Arizona, December 18, 2001]

This story of Spiderwoman is involved in the process of creation of a textile. While the impact of the story of Spiderwoman varies among weavers, it does reveal that weavers bring Spiderwoman and the teachings that are associated with her to their weaving and to their lives in the present. Stories are integrated into the present and are part of the preservation and redefinition of identity through weaving.

It is interesting to note that weavers such as Informant 3, who does not consider herself “that traditional” still tell stories, although somewhat changed, as she teaches the next generation to weave.

**CB:** When you learned or when you’re teaching your nieces [to weave], did you tell them stories about weaving at all?

**3:** . . . I used to tell them when they left their, um, stick [batten] in there [in the warp] . . . , usually my mom would say, “You’re not supposed to put your stick in there and just run off. Somebody’s going to come in here and do your weaving for you and that’s a bad symbol.” So I told them [her nieces], “Don’t you ever leave your stick in there, a spider might come over and they might decide to finish it [laughs].” They don’t like spiders [laughs] . . . So that’s, that’s just a joke for me so. In a way we’re not supposed to put our stick in there and just take off, we have to undo it. I never asked my mom why or . . . you know my aunt, she really got after me one time when I did that. I was going to ask her, but I thought “no.” When we’re told not to do it we don’t say “Why?” It’s just like you’re talking back, you don’t ask those kind of stuff, you just leave it alone. [Interview – Sanders, Arizona, December 20, 2001]
Through the many permutations of the relevance of Spiderwoman and other stories to the learning process of Navajo weaving, it can be seen that although aspects have changed, certain concepts and behaviors surrounding Navajo weaving are transmitted to the next generation.

While in this section I have mostly emphasized a continuation of stories being handed down between generations, I will show later in this paper that the belief in, the holding on to, and the acceptance of these traditional stories does not preclude the acceptance of new ideas or of changing insights. Weavers are able to draw from these stories of Spiderwoman and other characters as they comment upon their current circumstances and participate within a modern society.

Transmission of Designs

A young weaver is at first taught very simple designs such as straight-line rugs (Figure 12). Then he or she moves on to more difficult designs such as simple geometric blocks (Figure 13). Often designs that the teacher was taught when she was young are passed on to the novice. Mothers teach daughters Storm Patterns, Wide Ruins, and other regional designs. Knowing this, one informant consciously chose not to learn from her mother’s mother, but from her nali, who wove more interesting designs.

Teachers provide a foundation of skills from which a student can grow and expand. As weavers use and encounter other designs or invent new patterns, their contemporary circumstances impact the meanings of these designs. Learning how to weave and learning a repertoire of designs allows individuals to add new meaning to these designs in relation to her unique viewpoint from the present moment while linking these designs to the continued Navajo practice of weaving. Here, once again, cultural identity is not undermined because of an incorporation of other influences that are not considered “traditional” Navajo beliefs, but are
used alongside and integrated with these beliefs to create a new tradition, a new identity, that
reflects contemporary Navajo lives.

In exploring this transmission of designs between generations it is important to realize
that while designs have present meanings they also have significance and meaning that may link
back to what some consider “traditional” religious beliefs (Willink and Zolbrod 1996). An
underlying emotion or knowledge of the importance of this particular design may be transmitted
to viewers who have a Navajo worldview (Willink and Zolbrod 1996). However, each individual
and each generation will add and alter the meanings of the designs in the rug. While present day
viewers may not understand what these designs mean exactly, they do realize that they are
important. Just as children of Christian parents who are not themselves Christian still find the
number three significant or follow the “Golden Rule,” Navajo values and beliefs are still present
within contemporary society and are being transmitted to the next generation (Paul Zolbrod,
personal communication, February 24, 2002).

Children of the Germantown Renaissance Weavers

The balance between “tradition” and “modernity” can be seen in the relationship of
children of Germantown Renaissance weavers to weaving. Informant 4, a daughter of Informant
1, has been weaving since she was very young. She was taught to weave by her mother and her
aunts. The learning process, the emphasis on family, and the teaching of stories provide
connections to “traditions” that exist within the Navajo practice of weaving. However, her
weaving also represents her presence in a “modern” world. She wants to join the Navy after high
school, she is taking computer classes, she listens to mainstream American pop music such as the
Backstreet Boys as she weaves, and she understands the economic implications of weaving.
Rather than replacing or undermining her Navajo identity, these factors which seem contrary to
“tradition” exist alongside knowledge of the Navajo language, stories, beliefs, and values. There is no contradiction. Through weaving she is negotiating her identity as a Navajo teenager in the contemporary world.

The integration of tradition and change can be seen further in examining the sons of Informants 5 and 6. The son of Informant 5 will weave strands of yarn into her weavings, but he does not want anyone to know that he does this. The son of Informant 6 actually wove small Germantown rugs to sell to Bruce Burnham. Burnham told the story that this boy would come into the trading post with a large wad in his pocket. He would look around to make sure that no one would see him and then he would quickly pull a rug from his pocket and hand it to Burnham. While economic incentive may motivate these actions, this does not detract from the fact that these boys are going through learning the process of weaving which is still tied to concepts of “traditional” Navajo culture. Through the outlet of weaving, this younger generation of weavers is finding their own balance between modernity and tradition.

The Weaving Process

As discussed in the Introduction of this paper, the process of production is also a cultural act and provides insight into the creation of tradition. An examination of how Germantown Renaissance weavers create their textiles illuminates this community’s conceptions of the interactions between modernity, tradition, and cultural identity.

Designing a Germantown Renaissance Textile

There are a multiplicity of ways in which weavers generate designs. Informant 1 said, “We just think about, think about design and we just weave it.” This spontaneous generation of designs was exhibited by other weavers as well. Informant 5 said that she comes up with designs
in her mind and also in dreams. Many of the weavers see their designs change and grow on the loom as they are in the middle of weaving. This indicates that the action of weaving a textile is not always a set act, but rather a dialogue between the textile and the weaver. Commenting upon the process of generating a rug design Informant 2 states:

Basically it just comes to me sometimes. Like when I’m starting a rug, and I sit there and thinking how it would come out and then all this flashes of pictures comes into my head, putting it together, and this how its going to come out. Or if I see a painting that I like, I take a little bit here and there and put it together. You get to the point where that’s all you look for. Like you go into stores and you see a design and you take a photo of it and come back and find some way to plan it in your mind and come home and you saw this and you start from there and its starts evolving itself and it gets to be a whole picture. [Interview – Sanders, Arizona, December 18, 2001]

This interaction between the textile and the weaver seems to cross-cut definitions of who identified themselves as “traditional” and who does not. All weavers told of trying to copy designs or planning out designs and having the design morph into another pattern. As one weaver suggested, the design is powerful, something that a weaver has to submit to, something that does not always go as planned.

In seeming contradiction to the above organic creation of designs is the fact that the same weavers who spoke above are also weaving designs that have been planned out on graph paper. In part this is because some husbands are designing Germantown Renaissance textiles for their wives and daughters. The graph paper provides a way of transmitting these designs between designer and weaver. In addition to designing textiles on paper, Informant 2 uses the computer at the local school if she is having difficulty visualizing her design. She says that “its nice to know how its going to turn out after you’re done it. That’s how I do some of it” (Interview – Sanders, Arizona, December 18, 2001). Once again this incorporation of available technology demonstrates that modernity and tradition can coexist simultaneously within Navajo weaving.
Weaving a Germantown Renaissance Textile

Weavers continue to weave on an upright loom utilizing the same type of weaving tools used by weavers in the original Germantown movement. Rather than weaving outside, weavers now usually have a loom set up in a weaving room in their house or in their living room. Informant 1 uses a loom that her brother-in-law made for her that is about seven feet tall and four feet wide. This loom allows for two rugs to be woven at one time. I was able to watch Informant 1 weave a small portion of a rug on a miniature loom. To build the design she pulled a piece of yarn off of a skein, inserted the yarn into the open shed according to the pattern she had devised, and beat the yarn tightly with a weaving comb. A rhythm was created as she continued adding yarn to the loom.

As mentioned previously there still exists a back and forth dialogue between the textile and the weaver that is associated with more of a “traditional” conception of weaving. It is interesting to note that even those weavers who said that they did not participate in Navajo ceremonies and were therefore not “traditional” still maintained this unique conception of the rug. For example Informant 6, who does not consider herself “traditional” still includes what has been called the weaver’s pathway into her rugs because she conceptualizes the rug and its designs as representative of the weaver’s mind. In creating a textile, a weaver has to leave a way out for her mind so that she does not capture it within the rug’s border. The weaver’s pathway or spirit line, a line of yarn extending from the interior of the rug through the border to the rug’s edge, provides this outlet.

This process of weaving and the conception of the rug is very similar to that used in the past. Through the continued process of weaving in this manner, a connection to Navajo
“tradition” persists in the present despite changes that have been made in the materials used, the use of the produced textile, and the changing designs.

Influences Shaping the Overall Design of Germantown Renaissance Textiles

While I will discuss individual weaving designs as demonstrating the simultaneous possession of concepts of modernity and tradition later in this paper, this section explores three key influences that contribute to the overall structure of a Germantown Renaissance textile. These influences are a mixture of the Navajo concept of hózhó, taboos pertaining to “traditional” Navajo religious beliefs, and the participation in the market economy. While these three factors will be discussed separately it should be noted that each participates and exists simultaneously in the textiles of the Germantown Renaissance weavers.

Hózhó and Daily Time

As mentioned previously, Navajo weaving embodies and communicates many of the values of Navajo culture. The inability to separate Navajo beliefs from the weaving process influences the overall design structure of the rug. The Navajo concept of hózhó, which can only be loosely translated as a combination of beauty, harmony, order, and balance, permeates all aspects of life and weaving (Zolbrod 1996:13). Willink and Zolbrod (1996) have demonstrated that weavers of 19th century rugs portrayed this concept of balance through the inclusion of subtle color differences at the bottom and top of their textiles to designate dawn and dusk. Sunrise and sunset are not symmetrical – each with their own intricacies – but are balanced as the seasonal cycle of the year and the complimentary figures of male and female (Zolbrod 1996:26-27). In some of the current Germantowns, this expression of the passage of days is also apparent. Two of Mae Clark’s rugs (Figures 14 and 15) depict dawn and dusk in Monument Valley.
Other examples of contemporary Germantown rugs such as Figure 16 by Marie Watson Nez also show this concept of hózhó. Here colors and designs appear to mirror one another, creating a reflected symmetry. However, closer inspection reveals subtle interruptions in symmetry such as the differing numbers of rainbow colored half diamonds on the left and right sides. The illustrations of the concept of hózhó and the emphasis on the daily rounds of the sun within contemporary Germantown rugs show a connection with this “traditional” concept. However, it is interesting to note that the depiction of these “traditional” values is not shown within a “traditional” way – the composition of Mae Clark’s rugs has never been seen before. These vibrant textiles are more similar to a work of contemporary art than previous Germantown or other period rugs. This innovation in style at once separates these contemporary Germantowns from their predecessors in design, while simultaneously connecting the two eras together through their common expression of hózhó and their emphasis on creativity. Once again the flexibility and change exhibited in Navajo weaving illustrates the dynamic nature of the culture and the ability for modern and traditional beliefs to coexist. As will be discussed below, the same rug, Figure 15, is also shaped by the market economy.

The concept of hózhó can also be connected to the overall process of weaving. As with the original Germantown period, weavers are struggling to figure out their position within a changing world, particularly one with an increasing Anglo influence. Through weaving, these weavers are attempting to strike a fluid balance between contemporary experiences peppered with Anglo influences and “traditional” beliefs and values. The innovation in weaving present at Burnham Trading Post underlines this negotiation of time and traditions. In recording their current emotions and experiences, these weavers are able to create bridges between the past, present, and future – constructing and preserving Navajo culture throughout times of change.
Taboo Images

For weavers who consider themselves as “traditional” Navajo women, there are some images that are not supposed to be woven into textiles. Informant 7 was defined as traditional in part because of her refusal to include certain images into her rugs. Informant 2 mentioned images that should not be placed into rugs. Before weaving some of the rugs that she wove containing Yei figures who are Navajo Holy People or human figures, she consulted with a medicine man to make sure that her weaving certain images was appropriate.

2: My dad was a medicine man. He basically told me what not to put in there [the rugs], what was ok.
CB: There are certain things that you can’t weave?
2: Uh huh. Um, most people say that you’re not supposed to weave with Yeis, but my dad said that you can do it at least once a year. Once a year and then you have to finish the whole thing in one day before you go to sleep [laughs]. Especially the face.
CB: Are they very powerful?
2: Yeah, that’s what I was told. It comes back on you if you don’t finish the face.
[Interview – Sanders, Arizona, December 18, 2001]

Some weavers do include Yeis in their rugs. For example, Figure 14 is a Simpson Yei.

There are many different interpretations of what is appropriate to weave even within those who consider themselves “traditional.” One weaver who weaves Yeis has received various reactions from different people throughout the Navajo Nation.

2: . . . my other brother-in-law . . . is really against the way I weave. Says, you’re going really way out of your tradition.
CB: Do you feel that you’re going out of your tradition?
2: Um, no. I don’t think that I’m going way out of my tradition . . .
CB: Do you feel that what you’re doing is traditional or I mean, I guess, how do you feel about that?
2: I don’t [think] I’m going beyond my tradition. Because basically, what I was taught not to put in there, that’s traditional. What I’m doing is modern and it’s not against my religion. I still have my faith intact [laughs]. [Interview – Sanders, Arizona, December 18, 2001]
Here Informant 2 explicitly states that tradition and modernity coexist. The new innovations in Germantown textiles are different from those in the past because they are created in response to contemporary circumstances. However, their placement within the present does not mean that their traditional significance is replaced, but rather that modernity and tradition are in a dynamic balance.

**Income, Traders, and the Buying Audience**

Each weaver that I interviewed cited the main reason for her weaving as “income.” While this may seem contradictory to a “traditional” vision of Navajo weavers creating blankets for ceremonial purposes or use as clothing, placement in the market economy does not preclude the inclusion of spirituality or traditional beliefs in weaving. In order for Navajo weavers to be able to obtain a livable income they must either be well-known professional weavers such as D.Y. Begay or Kalley Keams, or they have to work through a trader. Bruce Burnham wants to utilize the Germantown Renaissance to empower the weaver to create art in the hopes of allowing the weavers some modicum of financial freedom. However, Burnham has shaped the Germantown Renaissance from the beginning. While he allows creative freedom, Burnham also makes suggestions to weavers about designs based on what he knows will sell. In this way the weavers are influenced by the trader and by the buyer.

The power of the trader to influence designs can be seen in the fact that many women will shift their design pattern depending on where they live on the reservation. When asked if her weaving was affected when she moved to the New Lands area, Informant 2 replied, “If I still lived back there I would still be doing storm patterns” (Interview – Sanders, Arizona, December 18, 2001).
While creativity is encouraged in the Germantown Renaissance textiles by Burnham, the trader does greatly influence design. Informant 8 stated:

It don't matter as long as I weave something for a trader that wants one [a rug]. Yeah, if he wants us to do something that he wants then we can do it. But when we weave without knowing, without telling us what to do, if we bring it [to the trading post], I don't know what's going to happen, but he might not buy it. We have to let him tell us what kind of rug he wants. [Interview – Sanders, Arizona, December 19, 2001]

In addition to shaping designs, the use of trading posts inserts the weaver into the market economy. Due to Burnham's hope of changing weaving into an art, he has also influenced the structure of the textile in other ways in addition to the designs. Weavers now "sign" their weavings with a distinguishing iconographic hallmark in the corner of the rug. These weavers do not use these hallmarks in other aspects of their lives, only on their weaving for Burnham. This signing of a rug is similar to painters signing their pieces of art. Burnham has tailored the Germantown Renaissance to replicate or induce an art market.

Another new feature of the Germantown Renaissance rugs is the naming of the textiles. Mae Clark is currently the only weaver that titles her works. She usually names the rugs that she believes tell stories. When she does not have a name for her rugs she and Burnham collaborate to find an appropriate title. Rugs that she has woven with titles have been named "Four Generations" (Figure 11) and the "Eternity Room" (Figure 17). While Burnham and Mae name these rugs in English, some weavers also name their rugs in Navajo which does not necessarily translate into English for the buying public. This indicates the multiple levels of communication that the weavers construct within a textile.

Implicit within the trader's direction of designing textiles is the desire of the buying audience. Also, since Navajo weaving has become incorporated within the market economy, weavers are also conscious of the messages that they are creating for their audiences of collectors.
and tourists. However, this awareness or weaving toward an audience does not mean that weavers are “selling out,” moving away from “tradition,” or weaving only for money. This selling audience is just one of the many influences meeting to create messages on multiple levels within a textile. Informant 2 admits to keeping a white audience in mind during the weaving of some of her rugs. However, in these same rugs she is also placing her own conception of how the universe is laid out and she is including references that only those who have some knowledge of a Navajo worldview would understand. In describing one rug (Figure 15) a weaver states:

This is the sun [the figure in the upper corner of the rug] and this is the evening light [the orange light extending from the top right corner of the rug], and the morning light [the blue light opposite the orange], and this is the air [the red “arrows” in the middle of the rug], and what most white people associate Navajo reservation and a rug is Monument Valley so we decided to put that one in there and then from here is snow topped mountain, the green pastures [on the bottom of the rug], down to the core of the earth [the yellow and orange pattern on the bottom of the rug]. [Interview – Sanders, Arizona, December 18, 2001].

Morning light, evening light, and the sun are all significant in Navajo mythology and in shaping a Navajo worldview. For this weaver, the early morning is linked to beliefs within the Navajo culture: “It’s just a Navajo way . . . you always get up in the morning because that’s when the Holy People come through and they bless you if you’re up early and keep your house clean.” While projecting an image to the tourist of something typically associated with the Navajo reservation, weavers are also weaving part of her culture into these rugs, thus communicating an alternative or more textured message to other weavers and those who share a common frame of reference.

As Navajo weaving has changed through the years, critics have argued that alterations in materials or established patterns have signaled a “corruption” of Navajo weaving and Navajo culture itself. This static view of tradition, which stands in opposition to modernity, renders
innovations inauthentic expressions of a “traditional” culture. As demonstrated above, Navajo weavers innovate and create designs based on audience appeal. However, these same rugs still refer to traditional beliefs within their rugs. The ability of textiles to communicate on multiple levels allows for the coexistence of modernity and tradition. These innovative textiles are a new facet of Navajo “tradition.”

**Designs Used in the Germantown Renaissance**

The idea that tradition embodies continuity and change can be seen in the designs, and the meanings attributed to these designs, that are used within the Germantown Renaissance. While there are a multitude of influences that impact Germantown weaving, here I will discuss two topics that illustrate the coexistence of modernity and tradition within Navajo weaving. First, I will discuss the designs and the meanings attributed to the designs that are drawn from the *Burst of Brilliance* catalogue. Second, I will examine the presence of stories within current Navajo weaving, both those touching more “traditional” beliefs and those drawn from pop culture.

**The Burst of Brilliance Catalogue**

Many of the Germantown Renaissance textiles utilize the characteristic Germantown design elements such as the stacked serrate diamond motifs (Figures 18 and 19). Also, cross elements that began to appear around 1863 in Navajo weaving are prominent in some of the Germantown Renaissance textiles (Wheat 1994:15) (Figures 20 and 21). Borders, which first were apparent in Navajo weaving with the original Germantown movement, also appear in the Renaissance pieces (Wheat 1994:20) (Figures 22 and 23). All of the Germantown Renaissance textiles use fringe on the edges of the rugs. The original Germantowns, in addition to bringing in influences from other cultures, also utilized Navajo styles such as the Moki design. Moki rugs
usually consist of alternating narrow blue and black stripes, perhaps separated by thin white stripes (Kent 1985:62). Typically these Moki rugs are plain without any designs placed on top of the striped pattern. However, in *Burst of Brilliance*, a number of examples displayed colorful terraced triangle patterns or crosses woven using the characteristic Moki pattern as almost a background (Figure 24). This synthesis of Moki patterns with other designs also appears in the Germantown Renaissance (Figure 25).

The train imagery that is prevalent in many of the Germantown Renaissance textiles (Figures 20, 26, and 27) originated in the *Burst of Brilliance* catalogue (Figure 9). When asked, some Navajo elders revealed a great ambivalence toward the introduction of the train into the west in the 1800s as discussed in previous sections (Zolbrod 1996:54). While this meaning was attributed to the train during the original Germantown movement, most of the weavers I spoke with did not attribute any particular reason for putting the train on the rugs.

**CB:** What does that train mean to you?

3: I’ve never thought about that. Just seeing a Germantown rug, there’s always, well not always, usually there would be a train in there so I figured might as well put one in there [laughs]. [Interview - Sanders, Arizona, December 20, 2001]

When asked where she came up with a train design Informant 8 said:

My sister gave me a picture of her rug that she put like a train on it and then she gave it to me and then I copied that.

**CB:** Did the train have any special significance for you or was it just a design that you liked?

8: I just copied my sister [laughs]. I had no idea how to make a train. I just got her train [laughs]. [Interview Sanders, Arizona, December 19, 2001]

These statements indicate that there has been a shift in meaning over time from the train representing the incursion of white culture to being an interesting design to replicate in a Germantown Renaissance textile. However, this also illustrates the way in which designs move
through this community of weavers. Dialogue and sharing of designs between weavers is a large
source of weaving designs.

Another small pictoral element that was emphasized in the Burst of Brilliance catalogue
was a collection of miniature tools – knives, bows, arrows, and guns – that were woven into the
center of a terraced triangle figure (Figure 7). Similar images of bows and arrows and knives are
woven into contemporary pieces (Figures 20 and 27). In these figures the tools are larger in size
and the guns are missing, but the placement of the weapons within a confined space is very
similar to that found in the Burst of Brilliance catalogue. When I asked a group of weavers about
these tools, they replied that in the past the bow and arrow were used for hunting. Informant 5
said that she knew that the bow and arrow were placed by the door so that when enemies came,
the men would be prepared. Informant 1 included that the bow and arrow were like a shield.
When asked to comment on the use of these tools today, Informant 5 suspected that in the past
the weavers wove these tools to carry on these traditional ways mentioned above; however, now
these tools are placed in the rugs to use up space since they are not part of contemporary Navajo
life anymore (Interview Sanders, Arizona, December 19, 2001). This indicates that other forces
may be acting on the placement of the tools within the rug. Perhaps the weavers were attracted
to the designs or perhaps the weaving audience of tourists or the trader “expects” to see these
emblems of traditional Navajo culture within the rugs. However, the fact that these tools can
conjure up descriptions of their past uses in these Germantown Renaissance weavers also shows
that these textiles are communicating ideas, collective memories to those who have a Navajo
frame of reference.

Another design from the Burst of Brilliance catalogue that impacted many weavers was
the sampler (Figure 6). Bruce Burnham explained that Rose Yazzie generated a response to this
textile (Figure 28). While it is partitioned and separated in the same way as the sampler, there are definite design differences, with bold red zigzag lines crossing through the defined squares. Other weavers also utilized a single block of this sampler as an inspiration for some of their Germantown rugs.

It can be seen through the comparison of similarities between original Germantown textiles and those of the Renaissance that this revival has created a strong connection to the past, to what many consider to be "traditional" Navajo culture. However, as indicated through the changing meanings from the original Germantown period to the present and through the innovative designs that will be discussed below, Germantown Renaissance textiles are responses to contemporary circumstances as well. Weaving and designs express simultaneously the connection with the past as well as the present.

**Stories**

As discussed when exploring the learning process of weaving, stories are important within Navajo culture, expressing cultural values, historical experiences, and mythic occurrences. These traditional stories are being told through the designs of the Germantown Renaissance; however, designs referencing the stories of "modernity" are also present.

The stories that many of the weavers heard when they were growing up do impact how they weave. In an interview with Informant 1, she mentioned that Spiderwoman impacts her designs.

1: If you see a spider web there will be lots of designs in it . . . and I would think - "How in the world did they ever think about that and putting it on a loom [laughs]."
CB: Do you look at things like that and then do you put them on the loom as well?
1: Yes.
CB: Do you do that in Germantowns or in anything else?
1: Mostly, yes, the Germantowns. I try to put those designs in there . . . I usually look at their webs, you know how they have little designs on them. I try to copy those and put
them in my, in my weaving. My dad told me about that when I started weaving, Spiderwoman. [Interview – Sanders, Arizona, December 18, 2001]

Informant 2 also remembers stories that she heard when she was younger. In describing a rug she is currently weaving she mentioned that she was going to have three Yei figures with a feather in the middle of these figures. Figure 14, the Simpson Yei also has a Yei associated with a feather. When I asked her about this she said, “Um, the feather of the Yei. Um, I used to hear stories that Yeis travel on feathers, that’s why I put that in. I guess that’s what I’m trying to accomplish here, now that I think about it [laughs].” [Interview – Sanders, Arizona, December 18, 2001].

The same informant who referenced stories of her youth about Holy figures also created Germantown rugs that reflected American pop culture.

2: We got this one [rug design] out of... Ever watch [the movie] Armageddon?
CB: No, I haven’t seen it.
2: The last part where the asteroid explodes. I was watching it and the asteroid exploded and all that different colors came out—that’s how it [the design] came—this one. And from there my husband drew it like this and said, “Do it like this [referring to his drawing] and see how it comes out.” [Interview – Sanders, Arizona, December 18, 2001]

In addition to Informant 2, Informant 4 used the imagery of a space ship that she saw in a movie to create one of her designs. This juxtaposition of tradition and modernity really is not a juxtaposition, but a coexistence for these weavers. Traditional stories speak to the circumstances of the present day as do movies and paintings. Tradition is not replaced by modernity, but both come together to recreate and redefine the meaning of tradition.

The Importance of Weaving to the Germantown Renaissance Weavers

Weaving remains important for many reasons to these Navajo women. As previously stated, the income that weaving provides is the main reason why women say that they weave.
However, when asked if they would continue to weave if money were not an issue, they all replied that they would. Weaving provides therapy and a connection with the past for these women. These reasons speak to the idea that weaving provides a window into, and a medium for, the negotiation of cultural and personal identity.

Many of the weavers mentioned the therapeutic aspects of weaving, saying they had woven through difficult situations or challenges in their lives. Some said that weaving kept them healthy, gave them beauty, and that weaving was therapy for the mind and body.

CB: Why do you weave?
2: Um, for my income and for basically, I would say, therapy. It gives me a peace of mind no matter how much trouble you have. You sit there and it kind of takes you away. It’s like the time I was starting [the current project]. I sat there ‘bout seven o’clock. I was doing that arch part [of the rug] . . . and I looked up and it was one o’clock. [Interview – Sanders, Arizona, December 18, 2001]

Informant 3 told of a similar experience:

I said [to my niece], ‘How are you doing on your rug?’, I says. She said, “Never in my life did I daydream a lot, you know. When you weave you just want to think, think, think or dream, dream, dream. Do you do that?” she asked me. I said, “Yeah. It makes you wander, it makes you, you know, forget about yourself and whatnot” [Interview – Sanders, Arizona, December 20, 2001]

One weaver noted that weaving functioned similarly in the past, especially as reflected through the original Germantown movement. She mentioned that surrounding the time of Bosque Redondo, weavers had so many things to think about including how to obtain food and shelter. This state of mind is reflected in the “wildness” of the designs and colors used in the original Germantowns. This situation is paralleled in the present day where this weaver now has so many things on her mind – raising her children, earning enough money, and dealing with alcoholism that is prevalent – that she feels like she is in a “pressure cooker” environment. This stress shows up through the fragmentation and wildness that are characteristic of the
Germantown Renaissance textiles. The past is continuously used to inform the unique circumstances of the present day; however, it does not remain unchanged. Weavers hold these past traditions with their experiences today to generate new traditions and new expressions of their lives.

These comments belie the multiplicity of reasons why these women participate in weaving – it is part of their identity, it is part of their household income, it is a way for them to cope with difficult situations, and it is a source of comfort. While in some literature today weaving is decried as being mostly for money, these other reasons accompanying the need for money are not mentioned. Weavers are weaving because it is a part of them, it provides a creative and emotional outlet and a forum for the creation of a cultural identity that integrates tradition and modernity.

Conclusion

Similar to the original Germantown movement, the Germantown Renaissance demonstrates the coexistence of tradition and modernity. The weavers participating in the Renaissance are expressing their creativity and the strength and dynamic nature of the Navajo culture during a period of transition and hardship in terms of economics and the Hopi-Navajo Land Dispute. As shown above weavers are drawing from experiences in the past and the present to both construct and preserve a Navajo identity. Through examining the process of weaving and the textile itself it can be seen that tradition and modernity are not mutually exclusive concepts to contemporary weavers, but fluidly connect to allow for the simultaneous continuity and change of Navajo culture.
Chapter 4
Concluding Remarks

The ambiguous and complex meanings of the term “tradition” have been explored through an examination of a community of Navajo weavers participating in the Germantown Renaissance. As stated in the Introduction, “tradition” is often placed in opposition to the concepts of “modernity” or change, relegating certain groups, particularly native groups, to an unchanging past. Through examining the history of Germantown weaving, the process of weaving, the meaning created and attached to the textile designs, and the influences on the patterns utilized in the Germantown Renaissance it can be seen that the dichotomy between “tradition” and “modernity” is not present within this community, but that these concepts coexist in a dynamic balance. A strict division between tradition and change has been falsely constructed.

The process of creation of Germantown Renaissance textiles simultaneously creates ties to Navajo cultural beliefs that extend into the past while interacting with the present “modern” society. Through this meeting of the past and the present, traditions change while cultural identity is maintained. There is no contradiction in “modern traditions.” The Germantown Renaissance weavers are participating in and creating a change in the weaving tradition each time they create a new rug. Elements from previous notions of tradition and contemporary circumstances are incorporated in the weaving process to create a textile and a new expression of cultural identity and tradition.

The Navajo concept of hózhó is helpful in understanding this process. Mentioned earlier in this paper in relation to the composition of Navajo textiles, hózhó also structures how weavers interact with their world. As in textiles, it is important to achieve balance or harmony in life.
Instead of conflict between tradition and modernity, individuals are able to hold both simultaneously, integrating continuity and change to construct balance. The amount of variation between what people consider “traditional” even within the same culture demonstrates that this balance shifts for each person. The children of the Germantown Renaissance weavers find a different balance of tradition and modernity due to circumstances different from their parents or even some of their peers. These nuances in belief are apparent within the discourse of weavers as they discuss their meanings, interpretations, and impressions of textiles designs.

Through this case study of contemporary Navajo weavers it is apparent that investigating material culture is also very informative when discussing the cultural change. As discussed in the Introduction section of this paper, the production of material culture is a cultural act and can provide insight into the creation of tradition. The process of weaving acts as a foundation or a connection to the Navajo past. Despite changes in materials, design composition, and functionality of textiles, the action of manipulating the warp and weft of a textile references a connection with a Navajo worldview. This contact with cultural beliefs, values, and ideas exists and interacts with the present moment of creation, allowing for tradition to contain both continuity and change.

Also, an examination of textile design, influences in weaving style, and composition of patterned elements provided further insight into how weavers integrate tradition and modernity. The ability of textiles to communicate on multiple levels allows weavers to create messages for very diverse audiences. First, the process of weaving provides a dialogue between the weaver and the textile. As many weavers attested, weaving is a form of therapy, a time to think and dream. An individual’s perspective, meaning, and construction of balance between tradition and modernity are incorporated within images woven into the textile. This can be seen through the
change in meaning from designs used in the original Germantown and the Germantown
Renaissance textiles or in the inclusion of images from a movie that an individual weaver saw.
Second, there is communication between the weaver and the Navajo community. Images within
some of the Germantown Renaissance rugs allude to stories told or beliefs held by those who
understand and hold a Navajo worldview. Yei figures, Monument Valley, hózhó, and morning
and evening light all play a central role in Navajo cultural beliefs. Often stories that are told to
young children about Spiderwoman or the Yei people appear in textiles. Through viewing these
images a Navajo audience can reference the telling of these stories, the teachings they invoke,
and the historical circumstances surrounding these events. Third, textiles allow communication
between the weaver and a buying audience including traders, collectors, and tourists. Here it is
interesting to note that designs can have multiple meanings. Many of the same images listed
above as communicating to a Navajo audience can also appeal to an Anglo audience; however,
the meanings attributed to these designs are different due to limited participation within Navajo
culture or access to a Navajo worldview. Weavers seem to be aware of the “traditional”
conception of the Navajo people within the Anglo community and they can capitalize upon this
image in order to obtain success within the market economy.

This examination of the Germantown Renaissance weavers and the textiles that they have
produced allows a greater understanding of the concept of “tradition.” As witnessed above,
tradition is in constant transition in response to innovation or new circumstances in the “modern”
world. This recognition of coexistence rather than dichotomy demonstrates that cultures deemed
“traditional” by Western society can continue, change, and invent traditions while retaining their
cultural identity.
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Figure 3: Saltillo style sarape. Spanish Colonial c. 1860-1870
(Wheat 1984:40)
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c. 1880-85

(Willink and Zolbrod 1996:55)
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(Wheat and Williams 1994:54)
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