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Becoming "Der Indianer": Andrea Robbins and Max Becher's *German Indians*

Every year the town of Radebeul, located outside of Dresden, Germany, holds a festival to celebrate the birthday of Karl May, the enormously popular nineteenth century writer of travel and adventure novels, including the trilogy *Winnetou*. As part of this festival, which began in 1992 and continues to this day, German hobbyists or "Indianists" come from all over the country to celebrate May's life through, among other things, a series of reenactments of various Native American customs and traditions (*Karl May Festtage*). For many hobbyists, these performances, in which they become "der Indianer" through the help of elaborate costumes and accessories, serve as a kind of affectionate tribute to an indigenous culture that they fear is in danger of dying out. As one hobbyist explains, "We respect Indian culture from the bottom of our heart. We are not copying them, or mocking them, but trying to really feel for this culture" (Neuffer). This stated reverence on the part of the German hobbyists notwithstanding, certain scholars and critics, especially those of Native American descent, have questioned the implicit sympathy of these practices and some have even gone so far as to claim that these appropriations function as forms of cultural and spiritual theft that, as Yurok filmmaker Marta Carlson argues, make "entertainment out of genocide" (Carlson 214).

Like Carlson, Native American activist and writer Ward Churchill has also harshly criticized the efforts on the part of German hobbyists to become Native American. Besides assigning the motivation for this practice as a response to Europe's history of colonization and genocide, particularly Germany's fascist ideologies, including Nazism, Churchill has likewise derided German hobbyism as a form of "cultural escapism" that serves to link, not distance, its practitioners from this troubling past (Churchill 213). Here Churchill posits the appropriations of these German hobbyists as inherently imperialistic because of the ways in

which they compromise Native American autonomy and self-identity. As Native American writer Wendy Rose elucidates through the example of "whiteshamanism," or the practice in which non-Natives claim to have a superior expertise in Native American cultures, "by appropriating indigenous cultures and distorting them for its own purposes . . . the dominant society can neatly eclipse every aspect of contemporary native reality" (Rose 404). Given the centuries of imperialist interventions into tribal sovereignty and self-governance that have occurred within the United States, these largely nativist arguments about the exploitive and compromising nature of German hobbyism hold a great deal of historical authority.

At the same time, other scholars and critics, including those, too, of Native American descent, have found such conclusions problematic, especially for their dependence on as well as perpetuation of the notion that there is some authentic and originary Native American in the first place whose "reality" will necessarily be compromised when it is appropriated by non-Natives like the German hobbyists (Madsen 11-16). These scholars and critics further argue that in invoking authenticity as a way to define who is and what it means to be "Indian," Native American people are necessarily reduced to an essence that, as sociologist Colin Samson explains, "simulates the real experiences of people, or in the case of natives, groups of people who become configured as *indians*" (Samson 60). Here, Samson evokes Native American writer and critic Gerald Vizenor's deconstruction of the word "indian," in which he uses italics as well as lower case to remind readers that this term refers not to a real person or group of people but rather to "a calculated, colonial name," or what he also terms a "simulation." Vizenor elaborates: "Natives are the real, the ironies of the real, and an unnameable sense of presence, but simulations are the absence and so the *indian* is an absence, not a presence" (Vizenor and Lee 84-85).

It is precisely this idea of the "indian" as an "absence" that, I would argue, Native American scholars and critics such as Carlson and Churchill neglect to see in the performances of these German hobbyists. Moreover, their binary assumptions about who and who cannot define the authenticity or "Indian-ness" of Native Americans also ignore the ways in which the "simulations" of these German hobbyists might actually call attention to, however unintentionally, the problematics of authenticity and the manner in which it continues to define and

perpetuate commonly held notions about Native American culture and identity. To clarify what I mean in visual terms, in this essay, I turn to the series *German Indians* that photographers Andrea Robbins and Max Becher, who work collaboratively as a married couple, made in the late nineties after visiting the Karl May festival in Radebeul, Germany. My interest in this series is twofold. First, I consider how in becoming "der Indianer," the German hobbyists in these photographs simulate those visual traditions that have come to signify "Indian-ness," especially as perpetuated by the early twentieth-century American photographer Edward Curtis as well as those who participated as "Show Indians" for the Wild West shows that formed part of Hans Stosch-Sarrasani's early twentieth-century travelling circus. Second, in calling attention to these formal conventions and codes, I take up the question of how the photographs in Robbins's and Becher's series *German Indians* do not merely perpetuate stereotypes of Native Americans but rather open up a space, albeit an ironic one, for what Vizenor further advances as the "postindian," or a position from which "to see the absence, the simulation of the other" by these German hobbyists "as a problem" (Vizenor and Lee 85).

The Indians of Edward Curtis

Several critics have noted similarities between Robbins's and Becher's German Indians and the photographs of Native Americans that Edward Curtis took in the early twentieth century, which were published in his substantial 20 volume set, *The North American Indian*. Grace Glueck, for instance, calls Robbins's and Becher's photographs "takeoffs" of Curtis's images while Gary Hesse describes them as a "deliberate allusion" to his work. Indeed, the visual similarities between many of Curtis's photographs and those of Robbins and Becher are striking, particularly the formal portraits that the couple took of participants in the Karl May festival in Radebeul, including *Man with Shield*.

Figure 1: Robbins, Andrea, and Max Becher. “Man with Shield.” 1997-98.

In this image, Robbins and Becher pose a young male German hobbyist against a neutral white backdrop much in the same manner as Curtis photographed many of his Native American subjects, including the elderly man in Esipérmi – Comanche who is depicted in a similar tightly cropped composition, from the waist up, and in a profile pose (figure 2).

Figure 2: Curtis, Edward. “Esipèrmi – Comanche.” C. 1927. Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, Edward S. Curtis Collection, LC-USZ62-136587.

As a result of these framing devices, the viewer is encouraged to read the subjects in both sets of images anthropometrically, meaning that these visual strategies focus the viewer’s attention on the physical characteristics of the subjects’ exterior selves, including their facial features, clothes, and accessories. Such formal choices, popularized especially through nineteenth-century anthropometric photography and then the mug-shot, also lend these photographs their truth value and thus seem to render them into documents, even “facts” (Green).

But, of course, Curtis’s photographs, as numerous critics and scholars have pointed out, were anything but factual. Much of this criticism about the inauthenticity of Curtis’s photographs has focused on the manner in which he avidly staged, altered, as well manipulated the Native American subjects and objects in his photographs, thus compromising the ethnographic as well as scientific value of his images (Lyman 62-78). As James Faris argues about the photographs that Curtis

took of the Navajo, "Navajo sensibilities clearly are not primary considerations," (Faris 115-116) especially given that "his Navajo work was completely set up, using not only 'phony' costumes, additions, and poses . . . but . . . in some cases, actual phony Navajo" (Faris 108). It is this criticism of the veracity of Curtis's photographs and not the formal similarities between the images that Glueck and Hesse seek most to evoke through their comparison of Robbins's and Becher's *German Indians* to the practice of Edward Curtis. In both cases, the authors use what Glueck calls the "confabulations" of Curtis's photographs to condemn the practice, not of the photographers Robbins and Becher, but of the German hobbyists themselves. Hesse elaborates:

> Curtis took broad liberties in embellishing his subjects by combining elements of dress of various nations together to create stylized representations or, more appropriately, misrepresentations of Native American people…Many of the German Indians . . . like Curtis . . . are combining elements of various nations in the creation of their own weekend personas.

In this passage, Hesse evaluates the practice of both Curtis and the German hobbyists in term of their ability (or not) to accurately and truthfully document authentic Native American identity and culture. But, in basing their evaluation in terms of issues of veracity, Hesse as well as Glueck overlook the more interesting ways in which the visual parallels between these two sets of images call attention to the problematics of authenticity within the very (visual) constitution of "Indian-ness" itself.

A number of scholars have responded to the criticism about the supposed inaccuracy or inauthenticity of Curtis's work by arguing that his production belongs more to the tradition of Pictorialism than ethnography. American photography historian Alan Trachtenberg, for instance, has pointed out, that in the introduction to the first volume of *The North American Indian*, Curtis himself claimed, "the story of Indian life will not be told in microscopic detail, but rather will be presented as a broad and luminous picture" (Curtis xv). In using the terms "broad" and "luminous" to define his practice, Trachtenberg maintains that Curtis situates his work in terms of the lighting techniques of Pictorialism, an international art movement in photography whose

practitioners emphasized the medium's capacity to create expressive pictures rather than to record objectively, thereby "distancing," as Trachtenberg further contends, "the viewer from the 'mere accuracy' of the lives depicted" (206). Certainly, the impact of Pictorialism is evident in the ways that Curtis uses the expressive potential created through, among other visual strategies, the contrast of tonal values in the composition of *Esipérmi – Comanche* (see figure 2) "to define a space," as Peter Bunnell has written about Pictorialism, "that was in the picture, not to produce a mirror reflection of the reality of the world" (14). But in spite of the important context that Pictorialism provides for understanding the aesthetic function of the manipulation and posing in Curtis's photographs of Native American, his pictures, as Gerald Vizenor aptly points out, were rarely included in the salons and societies in New York City that promoted this style of photography and, in most histories of this movement, his photographs are seldom cited (Vizenor 186). In short, though Pictorialism serves to situate Curtis's photographs of Native Americans as pictorial representations, even "simulations," this context is not sufficient to offset the ethnographic purpose that his photographs likewise served, especially as they were published within *The North American Indian* and backed by the ideological perspectives of his patrons, Theodore Roosevelt, J. P. Morgan, and Frederick Hodge (Glass 130).

Vizenor elaborates upon this contradiction in Curtis's practice through the now well-known example of *In a Piegan Lodge* (figure 3).

Figure 3: Curtis, Edward. Plate 188 from *The North American Indian*, Vol. 6. Courtesy Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections, Northwestern University Library.

In the photogravure – a favored artistic medium of the Pictorialists – that Curtis made of this image and which was published in volume six of *The North American Indian*, he upholds the romantic and picturesque Pictorialist vision of a pre-modern or pre-industrialized world (Phillips 304) through his focus on the so-called traditional Native American subject. To achieve this effect, Curtis, like many Pictorialists, altered his negative through the removal of a small box with a (modern) clock that was initially positioned between the two seated Native subjects (figure 4).

Figure 4: Curtis, Edward. "In a Piegan Lodge." C. 1910. Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, Edward S. Curtis Collection, LC-USZ62-61749.

According to Vizenor, this erasure cannot be explained merely in terms of the aesthetic strategies of Pictorialism. Instead, he calls this "crude removal of a clock" a "fakery and disanalogy" (Vizenor 188). Here Vizenor, borrowing the term "disanalogy" from art historian Barbara Stafford's book *Visual Analogy: Consciousness as the Art of Connecting*, argues that in removing the clock, or the evidence of the modernity of his Native subjects, Curtis, in spite of his creative Pictorialist intentions, not only perpetuates visual stereotypes about Native Americans but also upholds mainstream political ideologies about their savagery and the inevitability of their extinction. It is through this act of retouching, then, that Curtis recreates a "disanalogy," since, in Stafford's terms, "instead of focusing on characteristics that two or more items share," Curtis's retouching "insist[s] upon what they do not share" (Stafford 63). In contrast, returning once again to Andrea Robbins's and Max Becher's series *German Indians*, I would argue that their photographs offer instead a visual analogy, since, as Stafford further contends about the function of analogy, they "not only [compare] mental representations but inductively [regroup] them into new coordinations" (Stafford 61).

In evoking Curtis visually through their photographs, Robbins and

Becher, in contrast to what Gary Hesse and Grace Glueck imply, do not criticize the inauthenticity of the practice of the German hobbyists and by extension Curtis himself. Instead, the formal similarities between these two sets of images serve a more critical function, namely to problematize the notion of authenticity and the ways in which it has been used to define Native American identity and culture in the first place. In posing their subjects in the same visual terms as found in many of Curtis's photographs, Robbins and Becher call attention to what is similar between these images, namely that neither the German hobbyists in Robbins's and Becher's images nor the Native subjects in Curtis's photographs represent Native Americans. They are in fact, using Vizenor's term, "simulations." But, whereas the removal of such items as the (modern) clock in Curtis's *In a Piegan Lodge* (see figure 3) serves to mask this analogy, thereby perpetuating notions of the so-called authentic Indian, in Robbins's and Becher's *German Indians*, the analogies that occur within and across their compositions encourage viewers to begin to notice the conventions and codes through which the very idea of "Indian-ness" is visually evoked in the first place.

As Maurice Berger has noted about Robbins's and Becher's *German Indians*, one of the most unsettling aspects about these photographs is the contrast between the race of the German hobbyists – their "wan, pink skin" (Berger 147) or what Grace Glueck calls their "Nordic physical attributes" – and the Native costumes and accessories that they wear. In *Man with Shield*, for instance (see figure 1), the profile pose of the hobbyist calls attention to physiognomy of his so-called "Nordic" face. This detail, along with his shortly sheared haircut, stand in stark opposition to the seemingly authentic Native American accessories that he wears, including the ornately decorated feathered cap on his head as well as the rawhide, painted shield and bow that he holds up in front of him. Moreover, the paisley shirt that he wears under his Native vest and jewelry further compromise the assumed genuineness of these objects. With its red floral design, the shirt's patterned sleeves, like his "Nordic" physiognomy, confound commonly held expectations about what Native Americans are supposed to "look" like. As a result of the discomfort that these analogies produce, Robbins's and Becher's photographs encourage viewers to begin to question the ways in which the authority of "Indian-ness" has been visually constructed through photography, including that of Edward Curtis. In so doing, they also remind us that the Native

Americans depicted in both sets of images are neither authentic nor even natural but rather "simulations" that have been mediated through a series of deliberate formal conventions and codes that are no more "real" than the person or groups of people that they purport to represent.

"Real Sioux Indians"

Most German hobbyists, of course, would object to such characterizations. In fact, many of them have gone to great lengths to position their practice in terms of, as theater scholar Katrin Sieg explains, "expertise, seriousness, and mimetic competence" (124). This emphasis on authenticity is underscored in a 1996 *New York Times* article about German hobbyism that situates this practice not as "a normal hobby" but "something very serious and important." To illustrate this genuineness, the article turns to the example of hobbyist Gerhard Fischer, each of whose "costumes," author Stephen Kinzer explains, "is carefully hand-sewn, either by his wife or himself, and each is patterned after one he has studied in a museum or seen illustrated in a book." Here Kinzer establishes the authority and competency of Fischer's practice or his "Indian-ness" in terms of his ability to accurately reproduce the material culture of Native Americans. This understanding that authenticity can be established through a set of calculated conventions and codes is also one that was promoted by the German writer Karl May.

According to August Henrich Kober – who served as a recruiter for the Wild West shows that formed part of Hans Stosch-Sarrasani's travelling circus and whose very inception was greatly influenced by May (Otte 536) – one of the foremost characteristics that May considered "essential for real Indians" were the "feathers, beaded embroidery, leather leggings, tomahawks, bow and arrows, teepees, campfires" (Sieg 127). In short, like the *New York Times* article about Gerhard Fischer, it was the traditional visual props, and more specifically the replication of these items, that rendered someone authentic. That notion is also evident in the portraits of May that were often circulated to fans as postcards. Taken by a studio photographer in Linz, in these portraits May is often depicted dressed as his fictional character Old Shatterhand, who was the friend and blood brother of Winnetou. He is also frequently posed against an exotic "Western"

background while he holds replicas of weaponry from his books, including Winnetou's famous *Silberbüchse* ("silver rifle") that had been made according to May's specifications by a rifle maker in Dresden (Fleischhauer). Copies of these portraits were then sent to his fans as a means of proving his "authenticity" (Bolz 13), thereby suggesting that, for May as well as his readers, competency was established through visual reproduction or, as Gerhard Fischer has explained in relationship to his own practice of becoming "der Indianer," "by imitation of the clothing and the equipment, you comprehend a culture much better" (*German Indian*).

Besides legitimizing the "expertise, seriousness, and mimetic competence" of their practice, for German hobbyists like Fischer, the authenticity of their costumes and accessories also served to bestow upon them, as Sieg further explains, "a valid function *for* the Indians." In other words, as Sieg elaborates, "The hobbyists cast themselves as ethnographers, salvagers of a culture the Indians had thought they had lost and which the Germans now generously share with them" (Sieg 131). This ethnographic function is again evident in another article about Fischer published in the *Boston Globe* in the mid-nineties in which staff writer Elizabeth Neuffer not only describes Fischer as "something of an expert on Native American culture" (Neuffer) but also relates a story in which, during a trip made to Los Angeles, a group of Native American school children mistook Fisher as a museum guide. The Native American children, according to Fischer, "knew nothing about their own history" and so, "There was I, a German guy, telling them about their own heritage" (Neuffer).

While these accounts serve to authenticate the so-called cultural authority of Fischer's hobbyism, they are also part and parcel of a larger and more complicated struggle over who has the right to speak as a Native American as well as to define what it means to be an "Indian." In defining the "Indian-ness" of Fischer in terms of culture instead of blood or genetic inheritance, "this strategy opens the possibility," as American studies scholar Deborah Madsen explains, "that an individual who possesses no tribal blood can 'become' a Native American Indian" (Madsen 2). For many people of Native American descent, such an affiliation, even when it is the product of great sympathy and respect such as insisted upon by the German hobbyists, including Fischer, can easily lead to cultural imperialism, since it essentially enables non-

Natives to establish "Indian-ness" in terms of expertise, or as a form of knowledge and by extension power. Yet, in making these arguments about Native American sovereignty and identity, both sides again assume that there is some authentic "Indian" in the first place. I would argue that Robbins's and Becher's series *German Indians* serve not only to undermine that assumption but, more importantly, to cast into uncertainty the very notions upon which this authenticity is predicated in the first place.

As part of their series, Robbins and Becher also photographed Gerhard Fischer, including a formal portrait in which they frame Fischer's face in the center of the composition so that his feathered headdress fills up a good portion of the top half of the composition (figure 5).

Figure 5: Robbins, Andrea, and Max Becher. "Chief." 1997-98.

In emphasizing this aspect of Fischer's costume, which, as in *Man with Shield*, is ironically contrasted to the physiognomic details of his face, including his blue eyes and the faint stubble of his beard, the

photographers visually underscore the notion that it is through the replication of conventional Native American props and accessories that the authority and competency of German hobbyism can be established. At the same time, in focusing on the elaborateness of this headdress, which Fischer has carefully modeled after the ones worn by the Lakota Sioux (Kim), the photograph also calls attention to the longer history of "Indian-ness" on which the visual reproduction of this prop likewise depends.

When most people, especially those in Germany, think of Native American headdresses, this full eagle-feather Lakota Sioux war bonnet, like the one that Fischer wears, comes to mind. This is largely because this headdress was the one most frequently used for "show" purposes (Bolz and Sanner 98), especially by the members of the Oglala Lakotas from the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota who visited Germany in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as members of the traveling Wild West shows and the Sarrasani Circus. A group photograph from 1928 that depicts the Lakota members of the Sarrasani Circus in Dresden calls attention to the prominent role that this headdress figured within these "shows" (figure 6).

Figure 6: Photograph No. 285597; **"**Sioux Indians in native dress on tour with Circus Sarrasani in Dresden, Germany, 1928" Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, 1793-1999, Record Group 75; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD. Electronic Record.

In this image, the men, including the young male children, stand for a group portrait in front of a traditional tipi all wearing similar full eagle-feather bonnets as symbols of their "Indian-ness." On their tours through Germany, these "Show Indians" met with an enthusiastic reception (Calloway 71), much more so than the members of the Bella Coola tribe from the Northwest Pacific Coast, who, as the German press was quick to point out when they visited Germany just prior to the Lakotas's first visit in 1886, "did not at all look like 'Indians'." Instead, as scholar Wolfgang Haberland explains, "on one hand [the Bella Coola members] were compared to Polynesians, on the other hand to Japanese and this not only by journalists but by respectable scholars of the time" (Haberland 361). This bias again emphasizes the ways in which within Germany the authenticity of Native Americans was established through the imitation of established visual conventions and codes. This is because for Germans who saw these "Show Indians" from the Plains and Prairie regions of the United States perform, their costumes, accessories, and even physiognomy conformed much more to their visual expectations of "Indian-ness," which had already been established through the nineteenth-century representations of such artists as George Catlin and Karl Bodmer (Calloway 63-73).

Between 1830 and 1838, American artist George Catlin travelled to the American West where he primarily recorded the life and culture of Native Americans living in the Plains and Prairie regions. When he returned East, he assembled over 500 paintings and a collection of Native American artifacts into his "Indian Gallery" that subsequently toured major U.S. cities in the United States as well as in Europe. In addition to his "Indian Gallery," Catlin also published over 400 pictures, again mostly of tribes from these two regions, in his widely circulating *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Condition of the North American Indian* (Bolz 14). The images from this publication as well as those produced by Swiss Karl Bodmer, which he made while accompanying German naturalist and ethnologist Prince Maximilian zu Wied on his 1832-1834 expedition to these same areas of the American West and which were subsequently published in Maximilian's *Travels in the Interior of North America* (Calloway 65), became the standard model through which the images of the Plains and Prairie Indians "as *the* Indians became even more fixed" (Bolz 15) in the German imagination. Moreover, the establishment of the Karl-May-Museum in 1928 in

Radebeul from the collection of the German showman Patty Frank (born Ernst Tobis), which again consisted primarily of objects from these two regions, and above all the Lakota Sioux, solidified this cliché (Bolz 16-17) as well as perpetuated the idea that the history of these Indians was in need of "saving." As Catlin himself wrote about the function of his pictures in volume 1 of his *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Condition of the North American Indians*: "Lending a hand to a dying nation, who have no historians or biographers of their own to portray with fidelity their native looks and history; thus snatching from a hasty oblivion what could be saved for the benefit of posterity" (Catlin 3).

It seems reasonable to attribute the creation of this kind of historical memory to Robbins's and Becher's series *German Americans*. After all, their photographs seem to provide visual support for what ethnologist Peter Bolz terms the German "hobby-ethnologist" or "hobby-historian," who, as Bolz explains are individuals who "possess such detailed knowledge that they can perfectly recreate old Indian techniques" and thus "[bring] new information or discoveries to the science of ethnology" (Bolz 19). At least one viewer of *German Indians*, however, disagrees with this conclusion. In the visitor book to the exhibition of Robbins's and Becher's series in the Contemporary Museum of Photography in Chicago, one audience member complained that Robbins's and Becher's photographs cause "a warped view of America's indigenous people," since they "hold up the image of the Native American from the 1800s when in reality many of them walk, dress, talk, and enjoy what the rest of the world does" (Feest 64). This criticism, of course, takes issue with the manner in which German hobbyism and by extension Robbins's and Becher's photo documentation of this practice visually perpetuates certain stereotypes of "Indian-ness" and thereby undermines contemporary Native American identity and sovereignty. But in so doing, this criticism also relegates the meaning of Robbins's and Becher's series to their content, or what the images depict, instead of considering how the formal devices employed in these photographs begin to question the role that authenticity plays in visually defining what "Indian-ness" is in the first place.

In another photograph from 1928, two Lakota Sioux members of the Sarrasani circus stand stiffly in front of a tipi wearing traditional Sioux garb.

Figure 7: Photograph No. 285602; **“**Two Sioux Indians in native dress in front of teepee, 1928,” Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, 1793-1999, Record Group 75; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD. Electronic Record.

The man wears an eagle-feathered headdress and buckskin clothes while the woman next to him wears an elk tooth dress. In many ways this photograph anticipates those that form part of Robbins’s and Becher’s *German Indians* series. Not only do the subjects in both sets of images wear similar traditional garb but they are also framed in analogous ways. There is, however, one important difference. The 1928 photograph was also circulated as a postcard souvenir with the following inscription in both English and German that read “Real Sioux Indians from Pine Ridge South Dakota.” There are several possible explanations for why the term “real” was appended to this image, including the fact that, as historian Rudolf Conrad explains, “Sarrasani did not hesitate to supplement his cast with disguised natives of Dresden” (464). While this term was certainly meant to alleviate such fears about the potential inauthenticity of these Native American subjects, its presence nonetheless attests to

just how much contemporary anxieties about their genuineness abounded. Such anxieties were, of course, well-founded given that, as L.G. Moses points out, the visual codes and conventions perpetuated by this photograph indicate that "little had changed in over forty years of Show Indian performance" (262).

In photographing their subjects in a manner that visually recalls the Native Americans depicted in this image, Robbins and Becher position their series *German Indians* in relation to this same history. Yet, in so doing, they do not merely relegate Native Americans to an ahistoric past or even perpetuate stereotypes of the traditional Indian. Instead, in situating their photographs in terms of the history through which the supposed authenticity of Native Americans has been established visually over time, the photographers remind us that "der Indianer" which these German hobbyists are supposedly becoming is in fact, returning once more to the words of Gerald Vizenor, "the simulation of an absence" that "[has] no real origin, nor original reference, and there is no real place on this continent that bears the meaning of that name" (Vizenor and Lee 85). That is, it is nothing but an empty signifier.

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