

TASOULLA HADJIYANNI and KRISTIN HELLE  
**(IM)MATERIALITY  
AND PRACTICE:  
CRAFT MAKING  
AS A MEDIUM FOR  
RECONSTRUCTING  
OJIBWE IDENTITY IN  
DOMESTIC SPACES**

TASOULLA HADJIYANNI IS AN ASSISTANT PROFESSOR IN INTERIOR DESIGN AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA. EDUCATED IN ARCHITECTURE AND SOCIAL SCIENCE, HER DOCTORAL WORK LED TO HER BOOK

*THE MAKING OF A REFUGEE: CHILDREN ADOPTING REFUGEE IDENTITY IN CYPRUS.*

SHE NOW CONTINUES TO EXPLORE THE DYNAMIC AMONG DESIGN, CULTURE, AND IDENTITY UNDER CONDITIONS OF DISPLACEMENT WITH MINORITY GROUPS IN MINNESOTA.

KRISTIN HELLE STUDIED SPANISH AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON AND COMPLETED HER MFA IN INTERACTIVE DESIGN AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA.

AS A PHD CANDIDATE, SHE FOCUSES ON THE ROLE OF AESTHETICS AND CULTURE IN IMMIGRANTS' IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION.

**ABSTRACT** Through interviews with thirteen Ojibwe, members of a Native American tribe in Minnesota, this article explores how home-based practices relate to the material and immaterial worlds and how they are impacted by a home's spatiality. Conceiving activities as processes that foster social, spatial, cultural, spiritual, and temporal connections, the analysis elaborates on how activities embedded in the craft making tradition are supported or suppressed by the domestic environment; how they relate, as well as how notions

**of home, culture, and identity are constructed. We conclude by highlighting culturally sensitive solutions and approaches that ease the tension between (im)materiality and the practical limitations of housing conditions.**

KEYWORDS: domestic environments, culture, identity, practice, meaning, craft making, Ojibwe

**INTRODUCTION**



Embedded in (im)materiality are material dimensions that in cases of home-making have long linked spatiality and material culture to meaning of home—ranging from an owner’s attachment to the physical environment of the domestic spaces to personal possessions in the home that express who we are and who we hope to become (Després, 1991; Hayward, 1977). Although the literature on these material/immaterial connections, or in one word (im)materiality, is extensive (a classic example is Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton’s 1981 seminal book *The Meaning of Things*), not much research has focused on how home-based practices relate to the material and immaterial worlds and the impact of a home’s spatiality in the process.

The complexity of such an inquiry is revealed in the diversity of approaches and theoretical underpinnings employed to understand how place-making relates to material culture, space, and practice and to how agents craft the self. Operating at the crossroads of anthropology, psychology, and other disciplines, theories that account for how material/immaterial connections are formed differ in their approaches and in what they consider as noteworthy to study. From phenomenology to Bourdieu’s *habitus*, practice theory, and praxeology, each attempt to explain how to understand human activity has its own limitations.<sup>1</sup> The bottom line is that material/immaterial connections are closely linked to practice and spatiality and any research that enhances our understanding of the ways these connections occur will inform discourses on place-making and what it means to be human.

As sites of activity, domestic environments include taking care of basic needs, such as sleeping, eating, and grooming as well as supporting cultural and religious practices. Seminal studies that explored the spatial and meaning manifestations of home-based activities and practices include Bourdieu’s research on the Berber house, which has revealed how daily actions and movements within a home are a subtle but powerful way by which knowledge surrounding social relations and local worldviews is both shared and acquired (Bourdieu 1973). Ingold (2000) built on that premise with the “dwelling perspective,” positing that a person’s immersion into an environment is an inescapable condition of existence. Once again, the forms people build arise

within the context of their daily activities and therefore, spatiality, (im) materiality, and practice intertwine.

More recent theoretical developments adopt an interdisciplinary stand and support that the study of how the material and the immaterial relate cannot be undertaken apart from studies of the body and mind. In *Thinking through Material Culture*, Carl Knappett drew from disciplines such as psychology, anthropology, sociology, and history to propose that:

If we accept that mind and matter achieve codependency through the medium of bodily action, then it follows that ideas and attitudes, rather than occupying a separate domain from the material, actually find themselves inscribed “in” the object... The intermingling of the human and nonhuman adopts different forms and can be distributed over space in patterns of association that are both structured and fluid. (Knappett 2005: 169)

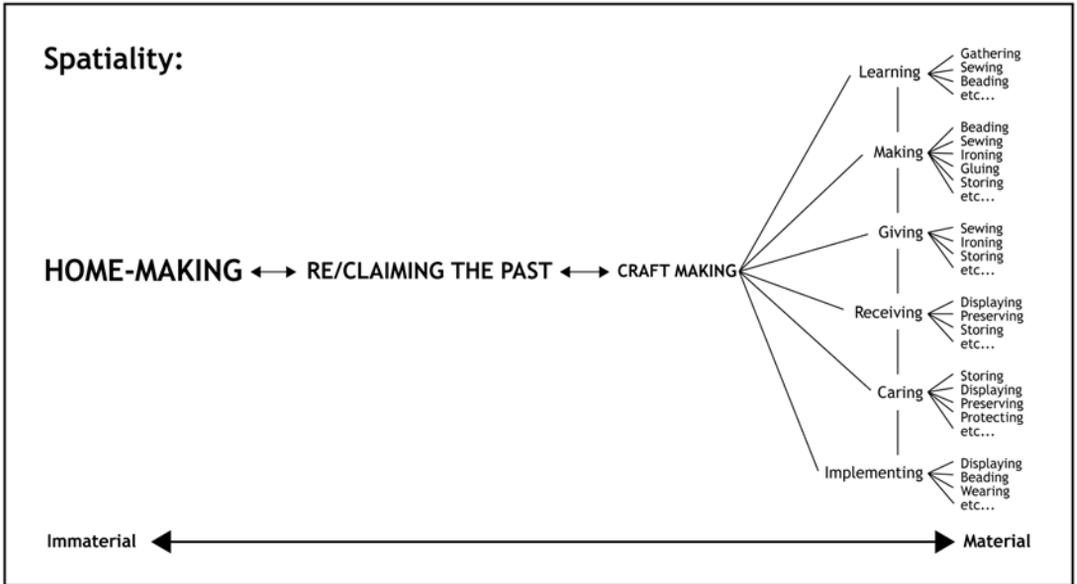
Engaging in these discourses from an interdisciplinary perspective, Knappett argues, would enable diverse fields to learn from each other and contribute to a deeper understanding of how “an artifact holds and encapsulates both action and thought” (Knappett 2005: 170).

Embodied cognition and communication have also been recognized as means by which agents craft the self in space and construct material/immaterial connections. Marchand (forthcoming) used knowledge from neuroscience and linguistics in his study of masons in Nigeria, Yemen, and Mali. He concludes with the recognition that these masons are constantly re-inscribing architecture and place with the changing meanings and values of the local and wider societies of which they are part. It is because of the relational aspect of the material/immaterial that notions of power are inherently woven into these discourses. Bringing together various lines of analysis and the literature on praxeology and subjectivation, Warnier (2001, 2006) argues that material culture mediates bodily practices—it is a sensory-affective-motor medium, where perception, emotion, and motion are inextricably tied. According to Warnier: “Being a subject is not primarily being what one chooses to be, but constructing one’s drives in a material world and gaining access to the moral law in one’s relationship to others, under a number of constraints” (Warnier 2006: 12). Constraints that are often a result of uneven power dynamics are what prompted Pader, in her study of transnational Mexicans living in both the USA and Mexico, to establish the home as a point of mediation between the two cultures and another form of colonization (Pader 1993). Further exploring the continuities between people, things, and action is Barac and McFadyen’s (2007) special issue on *Connected Space*, which positioned homes as “connected spaces” where areas, objects, and activities overlap, as do the disciplines that examine them.

In this article, we posit that the spatial implications of material culture as a sensory-affective-motor medium will never be fully understood unless the study of material culture is enmeshed with the study of space and we therefore call for more discourses around this topic. Delving deeper into the spatiality of material culture could complement works like Christopher Tilley's *et al.* (2006) *Handbook of Material Culture*, particularly when this type of inquiry is centered in conditions of displacement, such as those experienced by the Ojibwe decades ago but the effects of which are still felt today. Being a Native American tribe in Minnesota, the Ojibwe lost almost everything that had traditionally been associated with *home* after they were forced to relocate into reservations by the White European settlers. Disconnected from their ancestral understandings of family, community, privacy, security, ownership, control, as well as a physical setting, the Ojibwe must reconstruct new sets of material/immaterial connections to establish a sense of belonging and define their identity. Understanding how people, practice, space, and objects shape connections can expand the variables through which to work toward creating spaces that support various ways of living or, what is now called, culturally sensitive housing.<sup>2</sup>

Building on this body of work, we ground the study of the (im)material in studies of domestic space use and practice. Linking (im)materiality to spatiality, we investigate the connective abilities of home-based activities, particularly as they relate to the Ojibwe attempts to redefine their identity. As a way to untangle the complex web of practices that take place in a home, we focus on activities related to craft making and ask these questions: which craft making activities are supported and which are suppressed by the Ojibwe people's present spatial reality? How do these activities relate to the material, immaterial, space, time, and each other? And what are the implications of the interactions between people, action, objects, and domestic environments for how notions of home, culture, and identity are constructed? Answers to these questions broaden scholars' and designers' understanding and types of responses to the (im)material side of architecture.

Our interviews with thirteen Ojibwe community members point to craft making being a connective process that fosters social, spatial, cultural, spiritual, and temporal connections through a series of other interwoven connective activities. We conclude that home-based connections are often constructed through processes that are made up of separate activities, which are themselves made up of other activities. Conceiving activities not as individual and scattered acts but as composites that both impact and are impacted by the spatial reality the home occupants find themselves in, allows for the investigation of the intersections between different activities, the overlaps or junctures that either enable or hinder the process from moving along. In this article, we dissect the craft making process,



**Figure 1**  
Practices as connective processes with spatial implications.

enabling a holistic understanding of how some Ojibwe balance and reconstruct material/immaterial connections between people and objects, community and family members, spaces in the home, different cultural understandings, the earth and the spirits, tradition and modernity, as well as the past, present, and future (Figure 1).

The discussion begins with an overview of discourses around home under conditions of displacement. We then zoom in on the Ojibwe history, way of life, and current situation. The methodology and a description of the sample of families we interviewed precede the analysis of how craft making, and the particular activities it entails, fosters connections between the material and immaterial worlds and the impact of home spaces in the process. We close with recommendations for culturally sensitive design solutions and directions for future research.

### HOME UNDER CONDITIONS OF DISPLACEMENT

As is true for countless other ethnic groups, for the Ojibwe, Minnesota's largest Native American group, having survived forced displacement and relocation as well as ongoing assimilation pressures, homes take on additional dimensions of meaning that are guided by varying and often opposing theoretical frameworks. One of these is the idea of home as a site of resistance from mainstream values and ideals (hooks 1990; Shami 2000). Building on the *difference*, rather than the *similarity*, aspect of the duality of cultural identity (Hall 2000), this premise draws energy from both material and immaterial dimensions and the fact that when it comes to supporting cultural traditions and fostering temporal connections between dislocated pasts, the

present, and the future, residential environments are the sites of many cultural practices that forge social memory (Joyce and Gillespie 2000). Examples include activities such as gathering with friends and family to share stories from the past, cooking traditional foods and generating familiar smells and tastes, practicing religious customs and traditions, and decorating using colors, textures, and objects that create a preferred aesthetic (Hadjiyanni 2005, 2007). Such home-based activities become the means through which cultural practices—and resistance through difference—are engaged.

Others reconceptualize the meaning of home under conditions of displacement, situating houses as transnational spaces that produce new modes of constructing identity (Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003) in ways that speak to the diversity in experiences and hybrid identities that characterize border crossings and modernization processes (Bammer 1994). This theorization is closely tied to anthropological discourses on cultural change that point to its selective and appropriative nature (Pilkington *et al.* 2002). According to this body of work, members of cultural groups act as what Ureta calls “moving targets” and actively choose which elements of their culture to change and how to change them (Ureta 2007). In many cases, choices can be “bounded” by limitations brought forward by the family’s housing conditions, and instead of having the choice to appropriate their living environments to support their way of life, a family can only choose between adapting their behaviors to their spatial boundaries or doing nothing (Hadjiyanni 2007). Either scenario can be stressful and can undo the cultural logic behind the group’s cultural identity definition, the glue that holds the culture together (Fischer 1999). This partly explains the well-being concerns found among displaced people and minority groups—research shows that mental, emotional, and physical health problems abound among people who lose their cultural connections.<sup>3</sup>

Fascinating then is the notion that (im)material worlds and understandings of home are much more complicated and difficult to untangle than those dictated by the present scholarship on home. The detrimental impacts that a lack of this understanding can have on well-being highlight the urgency for more research and education in this arena.<sup>4</sup> By looking at the process by which a minority group, such as the Ojibwe, and home places develop relationships through action and objects—the spatiality of the material and the immaterial—the article broadens current debates around the meaning of home (see Moore 2000 for a thorough literature review of the notion of home). As the analysis that follows shows, to many Ojibwe, home-making implies reclaiming the past through the processes of craft making and its embedded activities, purposive acts through which the Ojibwe can overcome their social, spatial, cultural, spiritual, and temporal constraints, nurturing connections that mend their broken pasts and build a sense of continuity in their lives (see Figure 1).

## MINNESOTA'S MILLE LACS BAND OF OJIBWE

The Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe has over 4,000 enrolled members, the majority of whom live on the Mille Lacs Reservation, 100 miles northwest of Minneapolis.<sup>5</sup> From the time it was established in 1855, life on the Mille Lacs Reservation disrupted traditional Native ways by inhibiting the moving of camps according to hunting and planting seasons or wild rice and maple sugar harvests, and by draining surrounding areas of natural resources, causing severe food shortages and poverty. Contact with Europeans also brought foreign illnesses against which the Ojibwe had no natural defenses, and the reservations' crowded and unsanitary conditions encouraged the spread of deadly diseases (Densmore 1979; Kugel 1998).

The detrimental loss of the material world known to the Ojibwe was only paralleled by US assimilation policies which eroded Ojibwe (im) material connections by aiming to “kill the Indian to save the man” (Churchill 2004). Exacerbating the impact of displacement, these policies required Native children to attend boarding schools for a “White” education (Child 1998) where children were often forced to abandon their Native traditions and instead espouse the Christian religion, cut their hair, wear European clothing, adopt English names, and cease to speak the Ojibwe language (Churchill 2004; Peers 1999).

The effects of a history of forced displacement and assimilation contribute in part to the widespread problems among Native people today. Additional burdens stem from contemporary issues that also threaten Ojibwe cultural integrity—ongoing disputes involving land rights, repatriation of sacred artifacts, natural resource management,<sup>6</sup> and use of Native references for sports mascots and marketing (Peroff and Wildcat 2002). For some Native Americans, the anger and grief toward these external circumstances have become internalized struggles manifesting as self-destructive behavior (Churchill 2004). In Minnesota, Natives suffer premature death and violent injury at rates far exceeding those of non-Natives.<sup>7</sup> Depression is also pervasive, and Native Americans have the highest suicide rates in the USA, almost 2.5 times the national average (Bliss 2004). Additionally, Native Americans are the most at-risk group for cardiovascular disease, obesity, and diabetes in the world (Wharton and Hampl 2004), a distinction that has proven links with cultural dislocation (Tomashek *et al.* 2006). Research that deepens our understanding of Ojibwe efforts to reclaim their past and reconstruct lost material/immaterial connections, such as this study, can help contribute to designs and policies that can improve Native people's well-being.

### Spatiality and Ojibwe Cultural Foundations

Four anchors have helped sustain the Ojibwe culture and identity: family and kinship relations, spirituality, respect, and language. Wigwams, the traditional Ojibwe dwellings, in their broader context

of the seasons, supported these anchors (Peers 1999). Historically, Ojibwe bands comprised largely of extended family groups that encompassed three generations—grandparents, parents, and children. The family unit was the nexus of daily life as well as the foundation of economic production, enculturation, and socialization. Camps were seasonal and followed the food supply, so housing was temporary or mobile. Wigwams were constructed of tree branches covered with birch bark swaths and often housed multiple generations, enhancing relationships across ages by keeping members connected through proximity, daily interaction, and merged efforts in the making and breaking of camps (Peers 1999). The activities of cooking and craft making were generally done outside the wigwam, often accompanied by storytelling, all mediums through which Ojibwe language, values, and customs were passed down (Densmore 1979). Exploring how contemporary living conditions relate to traditional practices and the reconstruction of Ojibwe cultural identity is part of the article's purpose.

Ojibwe collectivism extends to spirituality, which perceives all things—earth, animals, people, and spirits—as connected under one Creator (Boatman 1992). Honoring spiritual connections takes place via ceremonial rituals that often involve dancing, drumming, or singing (Johnston 1990). Physical displays and performances, forms of performative memory,<sup>8</sup> are ways through which the Ojibwe carry the collective memory of their people forward, maintaining links with their past while legitimizing and reinforcing their present group identity and strengthening the bonds between participants (Jackson 2002). Although many of these ceremonies take place outside the home, preparation for them begins in the home—through tobacco offerings, body purification rituals, or crafting of ceremonial artifacts (Johnston 1990)—the focus of this article.

Tied closely to Ojibwe spirituality are notions of respect; respect for the natural world, as historically, the earth provided for all their needs (Baird 2004; Boatman 1992; Project Preserve 1989) as well as respect for people—elders as wise, men and women as equals, and children as adults in development, each making a valuable contribution to the group as a whole (Peers 1999). How respect relates to practice, objects, as well as to domestic spaces will be discussed later.

Lastly, much like other cultural groups,<sup>9</sup> language for the Ojibwe was a key component in living and transmitting these cultural understandings and values. Because of language loss during the boarding school era, few Ojibwe are now fluent speakers and many worry about the language's viability. Today's barriers to learning include broken links with the traditional customs and activities from which the language draws energy from (Reyhner 2006), many of which, storytelling and craft making for example, happen in the home.

### Craft Making in the Ojibwe Culture

Crafts have always played important and evolving roles in sustaining the Ojibwe culture and the four anchors. Historically, crafts were utilitarian, supplying clothing, tools, and weapons, items used in daily life. Made with natural materials and ancient techniques, these crafts fostered connections with the earth, the spirits, the community, and the ancestors as material representations of immaterial dimensions of the Ojibwe culture (Densmore 1979; Peers 1999; Simonelli 2003).

Trading with Europeans, introduced goods that decreased the need for certain handcrafted items, but also supplied the Ojibwe with new materials, among them the colorful beads. Examples of successful cultural appropriation, the resulting crafts set the stage for a dialogue around the opportunities that arise when cultural elements and traditions interweave. The Ojibwe adopted the beads into their sewing, pushing the evolution of their unique visual language, the beaded scrolling floral designs (Figure 2). The quilted blankets that Ojibwe girls learned to sew at boarding schools present another example of appropriation as they eventually emerged as integral parts of Ojibwe spiritual rites—they are now prized as ceremonial gifts as well as symbols of resistance and survival (Child 1998; Churchill 2004).

Crafts thereby, provide the visual evidence of Ojibwe difference and a materialized continuity of knowledge and practice passed down through generations. As such, Ojibwe crafts are (im)material power symbols imbued with tradition, spirituality, and kinship, and the processes associated with craft making support Ojibwe cultural foundations while becoming the medium for a negotiation between different aesthetics and ways of living. What remains to be examined is the role of home spaces in the process of craft making and the types of contributions that discourses around the relationship of people, space, action, and objects can make.



**Figure 2**  
Ojibwe floral beadwork  
(Mille Lacs Indian Museum).

## METHODOLOGY

The article is an ethnographic study that draws from thirteen focused interviews conducted inside the homes of Minnesota's Ojibwe community between the months of June and December of 2007. As a way to enrich our perspective with diverse experiences, the interviewees were pre-screened to ensure that both genders (four men and nine women) and both city and reservation residents (six families lived in the metropolitan area, two in the suburbs, and five on the Mille Lacs Reservation) were represented. Their ages also varied (the average being 51.92 years) as did their marital status (seven were married); educational background (from having completed some high school to having completed graduate studies); and income levels (from under US \$20,000 for one family to over US \$100,000 for four families). Their household size ranged from two to six people (the average being four) and eight families had children in the home (average number of children being two)—of these eight, three were grandchildren living with elders. All but one lived in a single-family house with an average of 3.15 bedrooms and 1.92 bathrooms.

Interviews lasted between two to three hours and included both closed and open-ended questions about: a) demographics (ages, incomes, education, and number of people in the house); b) descriptions of current and preferred housing characteristics that targeted the material dimensions of home, such as sizes, furniture, and uses/users of spaces; and c) elaborations on immaterial dimensions of meanings such as: "What does home mean to you and why?", "Which traditions do you wish to pass down to your children?", and "How does your home show it is the home of an Ojibwe?"

Among the strengths of this methodology is that the interviewees' personal narratives allow for a deeper understanding of spaces and the meanings of objects, practices, and traditions, enabling us to better interpret the junctions between the material and immaterial. Even though the interviewees' viewpoints may not be representative of their entire cultural group, their insights provide a forum for marginalized groups to express their perspective and needs (Hadjiyanni 2002). Meanwhile, home visits enrich our understanding by allowing for the documentation of floor plan layout; collection of photographs of interior and exterior spaces, objects, furniture placement, and other physical manifestations of domestic life; as well as researcher observations (Zeisel 1991). Such data complement the narratives and provide visuals that can be shared with students, academic colleagues, policy makers, and the public. The narratives were analyzed looking for themes that include the reasoning behind different spatial uses, meanings, and traditions.

## DISCUSSION: CONNECTING THE MATERIAL TO THE IMMATERIAL THROUGH PRACTICE IN SPACE

Inherent in craft making are activities that support material/immaterial connections and this analysis will focus on untangling this web of activities and their relationship to domestic spaces. As an activity that is instead a process, craft making is made up of six other activities, each a separate process on its own: *connective learning*, *connective making*, *connective giving*, *connective receiving*, *connective caring*, and *connective implementing*. Building on Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton's (1981) concept of "psychic activities" as transactions between persons and things that cultivate meaning, the term "connective" is used here to denote the special ability of these six processes to invoke connections. Allowing for varying expressions, connective processes through craft making can intertwine and overlap, occur in linear or non-linear patterns, concurrently or alone, and while supporting all or just one of the four cultural anchors. Here, they are discussed separately for the sake of clarity.

### Connective Learning

Connective learning refers to the (im)material transfer of knowledge and values that occurs when skilled members of the family and community teach craft making techniques to the younger generations. Although knowledge of craft making was traditionally passed from grandmother to granddaughter, it can be shared between other women or men, fostering social connections. Connective learning also supports respect—for the natural world that provides materials and for elders by honoring their wisdom in teaching. Furthermore, connective learning promotes language preservation, through the sharing of craft-specific terms and vocabulary and the engagement of cross-generational conversations.

In our sample, seven of the thirteen interviewees were craft makers, all women between the ages of 42 and 67—four living on the reservation, the rest in the Twin Cities metropolitan area and suburbs. Many were taught by Ojibwe elders, while some struggled to learn it on their own. A female elder considered craft making one of the most important things she would pass down. Skilled at many crafts, she expressed concern for the future, as well as how teaching and learning are related to respect for oneself and one's possessions:

As a woman, I believe in teaching the young how to make things, like birch baskets, beadwork, moccasins, learning the meaning of dress, like the dresses we wear at ceremonies. These should be highly respected... Respect what you are wearing, respect your identity.

Homes served as the site of connective learning with families and friends gathering to learn craft making. This same woman, who now

lives in Minneapolis, explained the importance of living near other Ojibwe for informal learning experiences to occur. Elaborating on how crafts support community building, she said:

I lived on a reservation a long time ago... All the women would gather at my house and make [dance] regalia; they would all be sewing and doing things. It would be a potluck... All these crafts I know how to make my mother taught me. It is handed down generation to generation. Now kids don't know anything, it will be lost. When the traditions are lost it is like a person that has no identity. My mother taught me, other people who came to the house, they also taught me. Like one taught me how to sew, another elder woman taught me how to make moccasins, another beadwork, leather, and quilt work.

In addition to living near each other, having enough space in the home for gatherings to take place is also important. In homes with small living areas, it was difficult for such gatherings to occur without disrupting daily family routines.

### **Connective Making**

Our interviewees engaged in many types of craft making, from traditional birch-bark objects and dance regalia to beaded jewelry, blankets, and contemporary items that blended Ojibwe and American cultural traditions, engendering material/immaterial connections across cultures and aesthetics. One woman for example made Christmas stockings that resembled Ojibwe moccasins for her grandchildren while another created a picture frame to protect and showcase her daughter's baby moccasins, which she proudly displayed in the family's living room.

While craft materials often included store-bought items like fabric, hands-on interaction with natural materials, such as grasses for weaving and birch bark for baskets and canoes, helped the makers nurture a sense of respect for the natural world while invoking Ojibwe spiritual beliefs. A forty-five-year-old woman who made decorative canoes talked about getting birch bark in the woods, revealing the power of those (im)material connections:

I prefer to live in the countryside. I like lakes and ponds... I tend to think by the seasons, like now I heard berries are ready so I would go to pick berries. Or getting birch bark [for crafts]. Spring is for the medicines; you gather them in the spring and the fall. Or to make wreaths. One time my sister and all her six kids, we got together and made wreaths.

Although variability was noted in the reasons behind craft making, the practice supported the makers' Ojibwe identity definition. Items

were made for personal use, to be given as gifts, or for sale to supplement income. Even in cases of retailed crafts, makers used their craft sales to continue traditions of kinship relations and self-respect. The woman who made canoes used her craft income to help support her unmarried daughter and two grandchildren who shared her two-bedroom apartment. Similarly, a medicine man's wife who made Native dolls for sale used her money to buy Native items, of which she had an amazing collection in her home. She was proud to be able to buy pricey objects and resist discrimination:

One time, I walked into a store in Wisconsin, picked up an Indian doll and looked at it. The woman came up to me and said, "This doll costs a lot of money and you don't have that money". I said: "How much is it?" and she said: "\$120". I paid the \$120, went back to my car, drove home, took out the doll and the next day, I went back to the store, found the owner and returned the doll. I said: "I am returning the doll because this is what happened to me yesterday". This way, it will not happen to another Indian person. You have to confront racism.

Connective making also has spatial implications that in some cases rendered the pursuit of immaterial dimensions stressful for both the mind and the body. All seven craft makers made crafts at home, using almost any room—the living room, dining room, bedrooms or kitchen. Although only one interviewee had a dedicated crafts room, many noted that having such a space would alleviate the problem of lacking storage for crafting materials, supplies, work-in-progress, and finished products. Items and supplies were often stored on the floors of living areas, basements, hallways, porches, bedrooms, and practically everywhere else. Indeed, we witnessed living rooms overtaken by boxes of supplies and work-in-progress was often placed in heavily trafficked areas, increasing chances for damage: bedrooms were piled with fabric, beaded jewelry was laid out on a dining table, and a sewing machine was on a kitchen table (Figures 3, 4, and 5).

Lighting was another concern, particularly for beading and sewing projects requiring highly intricate work. An elder who made beaded jewelry explained how poor lighting hindered her craft making:

When I am beading, I like the natural light, so I take my tray and I go outside to the back porch. It is uncomfortable in my bedroom ... you don't want to strain your eyes. You must be comfortable. I wanted to make this downstairs room my beading room but it does not have the right light. I have two extra lights for sewing and the natural light. I have a great big window on the south and [one] on the north. A skylight to get natural light would be awesome! The colors [of beads] change with the fake light.

Figure 3  
A craft room.



Figure 4  
Beadworking in high-traffic area.



Figure 5  
Sewing in the kitchen.



Space to work on large items, for example quilted blankets used as gifts during ceremonies, is another issue. Said one interviewee: “The blankets are queen size. At the office, I have a long table [to lay them out], but here it is too crowded to do this. You have to do it on the floor. You want to make sure it is clean, and [kneeling] is hard on the body and the knees.”

### **Connective Giving**

Giving is central to the Ojibwe culture, from daily interactions to spiritual and ceremonial customs and therefore, the practice of giving as a medium for material/immaterial connections is cultivated early on. As one interviewee explained: “It is very important to share . . . I teach my children to share . . . If someone says ‘Oh, I like this!’ you take it and give it to them! I gave away my earrings that way!” Along with informal, formal gift presentations, that often take place during ceremonies, are signs of respect and acknowledgment. Several interviewees emphasized the increased significance of gifts made by one’s own hands as opposed to being purchased.

On the sacred occasions of the Big Drum ceremony<sup>10</sup> and other spiritual dances, women are expected to bring handmade quilts to be used as ceremonial gifts (Figure 6). Statements from interviewees reveal the specificity and complexity of such giving that nurtures material and immaterial connections. Said one interviewee:

I need to make 12 blankets now, six for each ceremony. Some people buy them but it is more traditional to make them . . . You can present them as gifts or use them for the ceremony . . . I give you a blanket, you leave it on a chair, and dance. Then you come back and give me a blanket. If you don’t have a blanket to give, you can give cash, like \$10. It costs a lot more to make a blanket but it is also the spirituality behind it, it is not about the money. You always have to reciprocate.

Another woman elaborated:

I am just learning now [how to make the blankets]. It is a big feast, everybody brings food, we have long tables, and then they do dancing, songs . . . there is a certain order. So at the end are the blanket dances, and then you give a blanket to that person [the Drum Keepers],<sup>11</sup> and they appreciate a handmade blanket.

The ritualized practice of ceremonial blanket giving strengthens ties between the Ojibwe by objectifying and affirming the bond between giver and receiver and nurturing their collective identity. The concept of connective giving through crafts therefore relates to the Ojibwe sense of continuity in kinship and family relations as well as spirituality.

**Figure 6**  
Making ceremonial blankets.



Heirloom gifts further exemplify this, as one woman explained that she wants to pass her dance regalia on to her daughter and grandkids. This example illustrates how craft making supports Ojibwe giving while simultaneously it also supports traditional dancing and family connections. In terms of the spatial implications of connective giving, they are similar to those described above in connective making and below in connective receiving.

**Connective Receiving**

Parallel to connective giving is connective receiving, the actual act of accepting a gift. For the Ojibwe, receiving a gift is a sign of respect and appreciation, especially when the gift is handmade by the giver. This immaterial “presence” of the giver in the gift endows handcrafted gifts with enhanced value as representations of the personal ties and relationships behind them. Gifts may be received in ceremony, such as the women’s exchange of blankets in dances or passed between family and friends. One female interviewee proudly showed off a dreamcatcher that her daughter had made for her. She explained that almost all the items displayed in her home were gifts and that she “cherishes them all.”

During another interview, an Ojibwe man said his most prized possession was an intricately beaded belt displayed on his living room wall. He explained: “It was handed down to me from my grandfather. He made it, which is unusual for a man. He gave it to me as barter—I gave him something and did not expect anything in return, [but] he gave me the belt.” By receiving the belt, the man allowed his father to reciprocate the gift, while passing an heirloom down to his grandson.

Connective receiving also has implications for home spaces, primarily because gifts, due to their endowed meaning and significance as (im)material mediums, cannot be reused or discarded.



**Figure 7**  
Displaying gifts.

Consequently, some interviewees had difficulty keeping and storing them all. One woman's basement was full of plastic storage boxes for blankets she receives at ceremonies. Displaying gifts also took a toll on the house, as walls and furniture became crowded, making cleaning difficult and time consuming (Figure 7).

### **Connective Caring**

Connective caring refers to the personal attachments to craft objects and to the way in which they are stored, displayed, and preserved. As items accumulate, caring for them becomes cumbersome. And, while some crafts are purposed for general display, certain sacred or precious items should be carefully stored and preserved for the future. Some interviewees felt uncomfortable showing sacred items to us. One woman said: "I can't show them to you, they are not visible,

they are in storage.” This mother of three, explained: “Most are stored away until the kids are older. We have other Ojibwe knick-knacks [out].” Similar care was devoted to dance regalia, which are elaborate and arduous to make. An elder from the reservation with a home craft room showed us all the dresses she makes for herself and her family. Each dress and headdress is carefully stored in bags in the room’s closet, accessible only through her bedroom.

Craft items that were displayed were positioned thoughtfully, often helping their owners navigate between different cultural traditions and backgrounds. An Ojibwe man and his Caucasian wife balanced their cultural aesthetics by dividing the home’s levels. On the main floor, Euro-centric art and Christian crosses and angels abounded. The lower level, however, was filled with Native art prints, photographs of Ojibwe family, woven baskets, and a wooden shelf made to display a collection of beaded necklaces. Similarly, a mixed-race female interviewee, who connected to her Ojibwe identity as an adult, still cherished her mother’s Catholic rosary and kept it alongside an Ojibwe dreamcatcher over her bed. In her words: “Both cultures co-exist here!”

### **Connective Implementing**

Lastly, connective implementing refers to how ritualized or performative actions incorporate crafts into daily life and imbue one’s experiences with (im)material dimensions. Through connective making, a female elder bent over her beadwork by the light of a table lamp implements the skills and the materials that help define her Ojibweness, transferring the viewer back in time. Through connective exchange of gifts, the giver and receiver acknowledge and implement traditions of respect and ceremony. Through connective caring, objects are endowed with symbolic power, and are implemented for reconstructing Ojibwe identity and for fostering diverse connections. By wearing, for example, the moccasins and by using the eagle feather to cool herself during ceremonial dances, both of which she inherited through her grandfather and which her mother carefully stores, this eight-year-old girl implements connections with the past, her ancestors, and Ojibwe traditions (Figure 8).

As such, connective implementing helps transfer traditional values to the next generation. When asked what they value and want to pass down to their children, six of the thirteen interviewees mentioned respect and the traditional way of life: “It wouldn’t be a beautiful world if there was only one flower... Don’t make fun or put down another culture because it is different. Also, respect for Mother Earth, the rocks, the water, all have a reason for being here. Think of the consequences of no respect for the future. We respect the trees, animals, land, air, water, and fire.” Eight out of the thirteen mentioned language as well, like this fifty-five-year-old woman who expressed worry: “All the tribes know we will lose a lot when the elders are gone. Ceremonies have to



**Figure 8**  
Connective implementing  
through inherited crafts.

be done in Ojibwe, so a lot will be lost when the language is lost. It is a hard language to learn. My mother was fluent ... my uncle speaks it. I know a little!"

Connective implementing however, was often caught at the intersections of finding a balance between traditional Ojibwe values and the consumerist attitudes of modern society. This woman's response to what she wants to pass down to her children was: "The traditional way of life. Be simple, kind, respectful to people. My mother is always trying to help someone. The sense of community is so important. She lives like that. I want to be like that. But, having nice things is more

**Figure 9**  
Enjoying modern materialism.



ingrained in my life than in hers. To her, it is not the same, they are just material things.” In fact, all our interviewees enjoyed the contemporary amenities and entertainment options of televisions, DVD collections, billiard tables, children’s toys, and electronic instruments (Figure 9).

Regardless of whether or not a craft maker lived in the homes we visited, connective implementing was occurring to various degrees and most visibly through the display of objects. When asked how their homes show they are the homes of Ojibwe, ten out of the thirteen interviewees mentioned the Native crafts or objects on display. A sixty-seven-year old widow living on the reservation and caring for her three grown grandchildren, pointed to her dreamcatchers, canoes, and dress regalia saying, “... [These] are not found in a White man’s home.” Furthermore, many of these objects were considered a person’s most prized possession. An example was a 130-year-old beaded necklace kept secure in a woman’s closet:

The necklace has the four directions and the four colors<sup>12</sup>... It has the circle of life and we believe in the circle of life. My brother’s house burned down. My mother gave the necklace to him and she told him you would know whom to give it to. When his house burned, this survived. At the time, I was at a women’s shelter and he told me “You should have it” (Figure 10).

She credits her life turn-around to the good fortune of the necklace and seeing it everyday when she opens the closet door is a reminder of that. In many ways, the necklace’s story resembles that of the Ojibwe, who having survived a broken and violent past, are now trying to change the course of their future by cleaving to what they hold most dear.



**Figure 10**  
Storing a sacred necklace.

## CONCLUSIONS

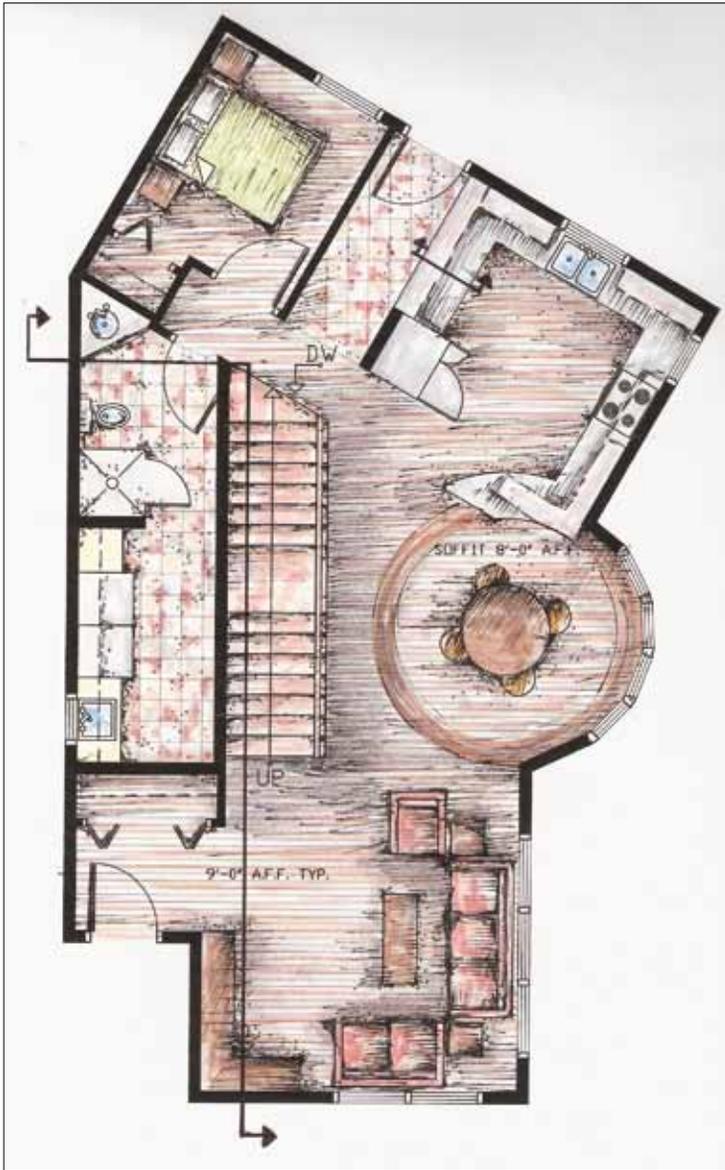
Through the Ojibwe example, this article explored how home-based activities relate to the material and immaterial worlds and the impact of a home's spatiality in the process. With the rising numbers of displaced people, understanding the relationship between space and practice, particularly the practice of cultural traditions, is important for theory, design, and policy. On a theoretical level, our analysis of the thirteen verbal narratives and our impressions of the interviewees' spatial reality demonstrated how (im)materiality is interwoven with the material world in ways that help the Ojibwe reconstruct the social, spatial, cultural, spiritual, and temporal connections they lost due to displacement and forced assimilation. Home-based practices then, are the medium through which material/immaterial connections are forged while spatiality, through its interdependent relationship to practice, informs both the material and immaterial dimensions.

By theorizing activities as home-based connective processes (see Figure 1), the article identifies and describes the sets of connections that exist between and within these processes. As the interviews revealed, craft making and its connective abilities strengthen the (im)material character of the Ojibwe cultural logic by helping teach the language, restore traditional kinship relationships, exalt natural resources, celebrate spiritual ceremonies, and reclaim cultural and gender identities as women craft makers reestablish their role as safekeepers of tradition. Therefore, positioning activities as connective processes enables us to highlight the ambivalent and the opaque, delving deeper into exploring how spatiality supports or suppresses aspects of these processes and a group's or an individual's ability

to enter in the process and engage in each activity. Inherent in this discussion then, is the fact that although holistic in their entirety, connective processes can be intercepted at any point (with activities eliminated, added, or altered) and spatiality can play a role. Considering these interceptions and alterations to a process, we can explore the many ways one can be a member of a culture or *cultures* and the many ways to belong across time and space.

Using spatiality to reconnect with their imagined pasts, the families we interviewed overthrew perceptions of dominance by the mainstream and white culture, disconnecting from a past grounded in colonialism's disrespect for Native ways of life. It is the deciphering of this duality of connect/disconnect that enriches our understanding of how material/immaterial connections are formed through activities and the spaces they occur in. By "cutting," "sewing," "gluing," "storing," and "displaying," these Ojibwe embodied knowledge, establishing both space and body as bearers of cultural memory.<sup>13</sup> Making the invisible visible, they were dynamic players and active agents in the re-creation of their history, spatiality, and sense of continuity, skillfully innovating, negotiating, and reinterpreting their living environments (be those kitchens, living rooms, closets, etc.) as they safeguarded their culture and traditions. Definitions of words that define both actions and spaces must thereby be broadened to encompass (im)material dimensions. A closet for example, entails more than the 2' x 4' space it requires—it is the medium for social, spatial, cultural, spiritual, and temporal material/immaterial connections.

The findings also speak to the creative adaptations of home spaces and their transformation into vehicles for bridging the material and the immaterial; the physical and the spiritual; the embodied and the disembodied; as well as the practical with the untouchable nature of architecture. As immaterial dimensions are entered in very material ways, spatiality often presented constraints that limited our interviewees' ability to engage in the connective processes associated with craft making activities, creating stress and difficulties in their lives. Culturally sensitive housing designs that can ease some of these constraints and support well-being range from the provision of a dedicated craft room to providing extra storage with moisture and temperature control; ample lighting that limits body stress and affords truest appearance of color and texture in materials; display areas for both valuable and decorative items; flexible space to work with others when gathering to teach about crafts or alone; and security measures to protect against damage to in-process or stored projects and materials. As many of the craft makers are elders, consideration should also be given to universal design practices that can accommodate special needs (see Figures 11 and 12 for examples of culturally sensitive designs).<sup>14</sup> Lastly, policies that enable members of a similar group to live close together would also help provide the social atmosphere for connective learning to flourish.



**Figure 11**  
The bedroom on the lower level can also double up as a secure craft making area.

Further research can closely examine how other activities relate to material/immaterial connections and how non-handcrafted objects support meaning making (Richins 1994)—in many of the homes we visited we saw a host of mass-produced material possessions ranging from posters to table lamps, coffee mugs, and flags—objects specific to the Mille Lacs Ojibwe and objects that spoke to a Pan-Indian identity.<sup>15</sup> Delving into these questions and elaborating on the intricacies of everyday practice in domestic spaces will expand our understanding of how home-based connections relate to well-being and increased hope for the future.

**Figure 12**  
A separated space on the upper level also supports craft making and its related needs.



Whether culturally sensitive housing designs and policies will become physical manifestations of the (im)material human right to belong in both space and time remains to be seen.

**NOTES**

1. See Chapter 9, "The Perception of the Environment – Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill," in Ingold's (2000) book for a historical overview of the theoretical literature on culture, perception, and cognition and the limitations that arise from

each approach, and the fact that branches of anthropology are separated. Ingold argues for connections both within and across diverse disciplines.

2. Culturally sensitive housing is housing that supports various ways of living. For how to work toward culturally sensitive housing see Hadjiyanni (2005).
3. For an example of how displacement impacts physical and emotional well-being see Papadopoulos *et al.* (2004).
4. Dutton (1991) also calls for more work around culture from the architectural perspective.
5. For more information on the Mille Lacs Ojibwe, see Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe (2007; [www.millelacsojibwe.org](http://www.millelacsojibwe.org)).
6. The Ojibwe author and activist Winona LaDuke wrote several books that speak of the losses the Ojibwe endured including *Recovering the Sacred: The Power of Naming and Claiming* (LaDuke 2005).
7. See the 2009 Report to the Legislature by the Minnesota Department of Health's *Eliminating Health Disparities Initiative* (Minnesota Department of Health 2009).
8. According to Connerton (1989), bodily rituals and commemorative events are acts of "performative memory" that help transfer knowledge of the past.
9. The most notable scholarly work around the cultural expression of language is perhaps Anna Wierzbicka's (1997) *Understanding Cultures through their Key Words: English, Russian, Polish, German, and Japanese*.
10. The Big Drum spiritual ceremony involves ritual gift exchange, dancing, sacred drumming, and singing in the Ojibwe language, lasting a full two nights several times a year in accordance with the seasons.
11. Ten drums are involved in the ceremony and as a sign of respect, their keepers are offered gifts like blankets.
12. The four directions refer to the north, south, east, and west. The four colors represent the four races (black, white, red, and yellow), as equal and complementary.
13. de Certeau (1984) and Lefebvre (1991) also conceive of space as produced by social interactions and spatial practices that use the body to communicate memory and meaning.
14. Although the literature on universal design is extensive, for a start see Nasar and Evans-Cowley (2007)
15. Powwows are examples of how connections among Indians of all tribes are formed. See Mattern (1999).

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