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Exhibit Review Essay

Competitive Displays: Negotiating Genealogical Rights to the Potlatch at the American Museum of Natural History

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A little boy had fallen from his boat into the water. The father felt such shame that he had to make a potlatch. . . . Is it not a strange notion that, in order to make the awkwardness of his child praise-worthy, the father found it necessary to make a show of his generosity? [Boas's initial thoughts on the Kwakiutl potlatch, from an 1886 letter to his parents; see Boas 1969:36]

The speeches of [Kwakiutl] chiefs at their potlatches are unabashed megalomania. [Benedict 1934:190]

Kwakiutl potlatches [became] "wars of property" instead of "wars of blood." [Codere 1950:124]

The term "potlatch" has no valid place in the vocabulary of professional writing on Kwakiutl simply because it is local jargon and not a Kwakiutl term. But the problem exists because around "potlatch" has been constructed the mirage of an institution—The Potlatch. [Goldman 1975:131]

A lot of people have heard about the Kwakiutl. We're probably the most highly anthropologized group of Native people in the world. [Webster, in U'mista Cultural Center 1983]

Even a cursory reading of the anthropological discourse on the Northwest Coast potlatch can provoke a sense of vertigo, as the conflict of interpretations swirling around a century of academic debate can appear to threaten the stability of the subject matter itself. As one of the most fetishized objects in the North American ethnographic archive, the potlatch has achieved a unique place in both the anthropological and the popular imagination.¹ It has correspondingly been a site of resistance for Northwest Coast groups acutely aware that, despite this outside fascination (or because of it?), potlatching was an illegal activity in Canada from 1884 to 1951; indeed, it was colonial perceptions of the potlatch that brought about the most brutal efforts to assimilate native cultures.² The potlatch has thus provided the space for a powerful cross-cultural negotiation—one with distinctly asymmetrical relations of power—for over 100 years. How should scholars (re)evaluate this complex legacy today, par-

ticularly at this historical moment of critically rethinking anthropological histories and agendas, and in the presence of an expanding postcolonial indigenous criticism?

How we think about the anthropological discourse on historical subjects like the potlatch is not an esoteric issue. The set of historical, theoretical, and ethical issues evoked by this discourse has immediate relevance for contemporary anthropologists working in a postcolonial world and speaks to the future of cross-cultural work in North America. For just as indigenous scholars must constantly negotiate the critical discourse on their cultural forms, so too must anthropologists now deal with the interpretive and political legacy of a vast and, at times, troublesome ethnographic archive. In this essay, I would like to examine some dimensions of the political legacy of the current ethnographic archive and discuss some of its implications for collaborative work between indigenous and Euro-American scholars. My intent is to examine how the archive of ethnographic objects and representations produced over the last century by ethnographers on the Northwest Coast now haunts the process and project of cross-cultural communication on this continent. Put differently, I want to ask: After a century of indigenous resistance and reinvention, of academic debate and re-presentation, of colonial repression and popular mythologizing, who now has genealogical authority to represent the potlatch?

My thoughts on this matter were provoked by the traveling exhibition *Chiefly Feasts: The Enduring Kwakiutl Potlatch*, sponsored by the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH).³ Timed to commemorate the centennial of Franz Boas's first work on the Northwest Coast, *Chiefly Feasts* is a state-of-the-art ethnographic exhibit that seeks to navigate the daunting theoretical and historical terrain surrounding Northwest Coast ceremonialism by involving indigenous scholars in the design and interpretive process. As such, it necessarily creates a discursive space riddled with the contradictions and diverging political agendas that currently characterize representations of cultural identity and historical presence in North

America. As a collaborative project, *Chiefly Feasts* also documents the relations of power and points of stress between one of the oldest ethnographic institutions in North America, the AMNH, and a group of indigenous representatives viscerally aware of how external representations of their culture and history can affect events very close to home. My reading of how *Chiefly Feasts* negotiates the slippery political terrain of Northwest Coast ethnography is intended to be both diagnostic and ultimately suggestive for future collaborative engagements.

The Institutional Context and Exhibition Design

Chiefly Feasts is explicitly aimed at correcting the historical discourse on the potlatch while simultaneously promoting the AMNH's world-class collection of Northwest Coast art, which Franz Boas and George Hunt collected between 1894 and 1905 (see Figure 1). This is an inherently complicated, if not conflicted, mission, if for no other reason than the historical role that ethnographic museums have played in the colonial process.⁴ As Daniel Sherman and Irit Rogoff have argued, museums "both sustain and construct cultural master narratives that achieve an internal unity by im-

posing one cultural tendency as the most prominent manifestation of any historical period" (1994:xi). In defining the "tribal" as opposed to the "modern" and erasing the colonial history that led to the production of "world-class" ethnographic collections in metropolitan centers such as New York, Chicago, Ottawa, and Washington, D.C., ethnographic museums have played an important role in producing definitions of *civilization*, *self*, and *nation* in North America now for over a century. Yet Aldona Jonaitis, as curator of *Chiefly Feasts*, has moved to confront this history at the AMNH by inviting Gloria Cranmer Webster to curate a special section on the contemporary potlatch and by consulting with Webster and other indigenous advisors throughout the exhibitionary process.

In this light, consider the cross-cutting historical valences brought to the exhibit by its institutional setting and curatorial history.⁵ Aldona Jonaitis, a prolific writer on the art history of the Northwest Coast, is also heir to the legacy of Franz Boas (director of the AMNH from 1895 to 1905) in her curatorial role at the museum. She has written a salutary history of the AMNH's Northwest Coast collection (1988) and edited a collection of Boas's work on Native American art (1995). Her stated objective in *Chiefly Feasts* is not only to honor the legacy of Boas and Hunt but to bring a "multivocal" curatorial approach to the AMNH. Gloria Cranmer Webster contributes as "guest curator" to the exhibit. Her great-grandfather was George Hunt, Franz Boas's indigenous colleague who was instrumental in collecting the objects displayed in *Chiefly Feasts*. Further, it was her grandfather, Daniel Cranmer, who organized the remarkable 1921 potlatch that brought down the whip of colonial repression, which ultimately forced the gift economy to go underground for 30 years. As the first director of the U'mista Cultural Centre (which opened in Alert Bay in 1979), Webster became curator for the ceremonial objects that had been seized by the Canadian government during the colonial crackdown on the potlatch and were repatriated only after a long struggle.⁶ Thus, the negotiation over the interpretive approach in *Chiefly Feasts* involves representatives from two very different political, institutional, and national, as well as cultural, traditions. The kind words these formidable scholars have for one another and for the process of constructing *Chiefly Feasts* are refreshing, particularly given the intellectual contest that is documented in the exhibit.⁷

This cross-cultural engagement does, however, force the exhibit to negotiate the conflicting histories and divergent cosmologies within which the ethnographic objects have circulated now for over a century.⁸ Curators respond to this challenge by dividing the exhibit into four conceptual units: the entrance,

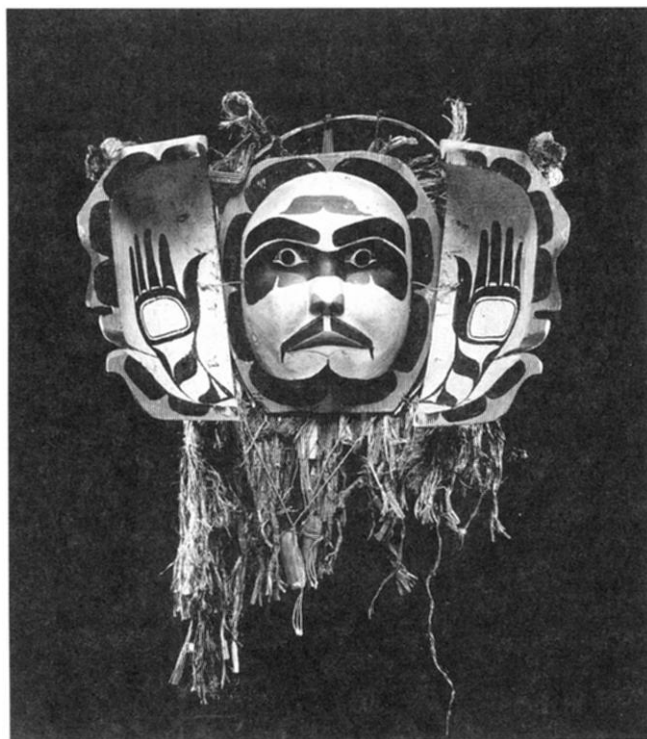


Figure 1

Mask of Born-to-Be-Head-of-the-World. Hopetown, collected by George Hunt in 1901. Negative no. 2A19033. Photo by Lynton Gardiner. Courtesy Department of Library Services, American Museum of Natural History.

which introduces the show and gives historical information on the AMNH's collection; the late-19th-century potlatch display, which is divided into sections on the potlatch host, feasting, marriage, dances, and the copper; a section on the antipotlatching legislation and recent efforts to repatriate confiscated objects; and finally, a concluding section entitled "The Potlatch Today," which provides a glimpse into contemporary gift exchange practices. These meticulously crafted displays utilize a wide range of media, present a remarkably diverse array of objects, and if one is willing to read closely, present a great deal of historical information. This exhibit is, to be sure, an achievement of the first order. But the interpretive narrative in *Chiefly Feasts* is necessarily more controversial and well worth interrogating, particularly for what it says about the contemporary political relationship between scholars working from within an ethnographic archive and indigenous intellectuals working from within a living tradition.⁹ Consequently, my analysis does not forward the objects traditionally at the center of exhibit analysis, but rather the complicated and contested narratives in which the ethnographic objects are presented and which endow them with meaning for contemporary audiences.

The Politics of Naming

This essay focuses, then, on the interpretive narrative in which the ethnographic objects in *Chiefly Feasts* are embedded; it reveals and examines a struggle between scholars at the AMNH and their indigenous colleagues for interpretive control of the potlatch and attempts to assess the political implications of this narrative discontinuity.¹⁰ For a striking feature of *Chiefly Feasts* is that, even before visitors get their first glimpse of an ethnographic object, they are already asked to negotiate a contested interpretive space. Upon entry into the exhibit a visitor reads:

Chiefly Feasts: The Enduring Kwakiutl Potlatch

The Kwakiutl Indians, a Native Canadian Group, inhabit the northeastern quarter of Vancouver Island and the adjacent mainland coast of British Columbia. Their traditional culture has flourished for centuries and continues to thrive today. This exhibition celebrates the continuing vitality of the Potlatch, a Kwakiutl institution which incorporates most aspects of ceremonial, social, and economic life. Today, as in the past, Kwakiutl families stage these lavish affairs during which hosts give away large quantities of goods in order to validate their social positions.

"Chiefly Feasts: The Enduring Potlatch" celebrates the continuing ceremonial traditions of a Native Canadian People. The dramatic and impressive masks, costumes, statues and other artworks dating from the 19th century to the present testify to the outstanding creativity of these

people. The modern-day Kwakiutl participated in creating this exhibition. Indeed, without their involvement "Chiefly Feasts" would never have become a reality. We wish to express our deepest thanks to the following members of the Kwakiutl community for their important assistance. . .

Text set directly opposite this introductory statement then asks, with seeming innocence:

Who Are We?

We are not the Kwakiutl, as the white people have called us since they first came to our territory. The only Kwakiutl (or, as we say, the Kwagu'l) are the people of Fort Rupert. Each of our village groups has its own name; the 'Namis of Alert Bay, the Kwikwasutinuxw of Gilford Island, the Gwawa'enuxw of Hopetown, and so forth. The language we speak is Kwakwaka. The name Kwakwaka'wakw refers to Kwakwaka speakers and accurately describes who we are. To call all of us who live in a specific cultural area "Kwakiutl" is like calling all indigenous people of the Americas "Indians." No longer is either acceptable.

Gloria Cranmer Webster

The first passage presents a set of stable historical subjects: the "Kwakiutl" and the "potlatch," which "endure." Here, the curators alert visitors to the fact that early-20th-century expectations that native Northwest Coast cultures would disappear under the onslaught of modernity have been proven wrong. The continued practice of the potlatch, as well as the existence of indigenous representatives to oversee the construction of the exhibit, testifies to a continuity of tradition. Yet both this evocation of cultural stability and the interpretive authority suggested by the indigenous contribution to the show are immediately undermined by a surprising counterdiscourse. The second statement—signed by Kwakwaka'wakw historian Gloria Cranmer Webster—registers much more than cultural continuity. Webster's counterdiscourse reintroduces her people to the world as postcolonial subjects. In her text the Kwakiutl are not the stable subjects of history suggested in the AMNH's first statement, but a mirage, the invention of a colonizing white society. It is the Kwakwaka'wakw who, as a collective of distinct peoples, have survived the press of white civilization.

Thus, two steps into the exhibition the visitor is forced to ask: Who, in fact, does this show refer to? The Kwakiutl—popular subjects of a 100-year anthropological discourse—or the self-identified, postcolonial Kwakwaka'wakw? And to whom do we turn for ethnographic authority: to the anonymous statements of the AMNH or to those personally signed by Webster? And finally, how do we explain this contradiction over so basic a thing as the proper name for the group being honored with an international exhibition? Imme-

diately following Webster's text is the only comment on the matter in the exhibit:

Because the name "Kwakiutl" is more familiar to the public, the American Museum of Natural History uses it in this exhibition. We hope that our visitors will become familiar with the term "Kwakwaka'wakw" after visiting "Chiefly Feasts."¹¹

Thus, the AMNH chooses to favor "public familiarity" over accuracy and the wishes of their indigenous colleagues, withholding the right both to name and to define the parameters of cultural difference. This is strange, because without a doubt both Webster and Jonaitis are interested in revising popular (mis)understandings of the potlatch with this exhibit.¹² But scholars at the AMNH confine their efforts to correcting the widely reported death of the potlatch in the 1920s, which in terms of the exhibit allows them a stable subject that can be followed without interruption from the late 19th century until today. The Kwakwaka'wakw contribution to the exhibit, on the other hand, works to underscore the impact of colonization on their society and is aimed at challenging the veracity of the ethnographic discourse on their culture; in her first statement, Webster calls into question the very premises on which *Chiefly Feasts* is founded, namely that there are a people called "Kwakiutl" who "endure."

As one walks further into the exhibit, it becomes clear that two conflicting intellectual genealogies, each with historical claims on the potlatch, are being presented: One, based on the formation of the AMNH's collection, valorizes the contribution anthropology has made to preserving and interpreting Northwest Coast cultures by praising the ethnographic skills of Franz Boas and George Hunt. The other, an indigenous discourse, places that same anthropological tradition within the field of colonial practices and, by evoking the social consequences of European contact, subtly argues that the Kwakwaka'wakw have survived not only colonial repression but also ethnographic dissection. The AMNH's narrative recuperates the integrity and resilience of the "Kwakiutl" population, marking at every turn the continuity of their traditions and success at outmaneuvering the potlatch law. But this strategy forwards a peculiarly objectified vision of identity that ultimately begs the question: Could the "Kwakiutl" exist without the potlatch? As we shall see, the Kwakwaka'wakw respond to this materialist objectification by attempting to reterritorialize their identity outside the historical discourse on their culture; they also move to redeploy the AMNH's narrative of continuity by giving voice to their continuing struggle for cultural self-determination and by acknowledging a particular sense of loss.

Salvaging Anthropology

But let us pause for a moment to consider the theoretical implications of the historical shift from a narrative of cultural extinction to one of cultural continuity at the AMNH. Edward Bruner (1986) has productively analyzed how the assumptions that anthropologists have about Native American cultural change have influenced the ethnographies they produce. He identifies two narrative frames that have structured anthropological approaches to Native American ethnography in this century. The first peaked in the late 1930s and emphasized the inevitable assimilation of indigenous groups. For anthropologists working within this paradigm, the past for Native Americans was "glorious," the present was "disorganization," and the future was inevitable "assimilation" (Bruner 1986:143). This was the teleological logic that propelled Franz Boas's energetic salvage efforts among the Kwakwaka'wakw and led to the creation of the AMNH's Northwest Coast collections. The assimilationist mode, according to Bruner, began to break down in the period of global decolonization after World War II and by the 1970s was replaced with a narrative frame assuming that Native Americans were experiencing a process of ethnic renewal, leading to a restoration of cultural identity. Within this (contemporary) paradigm, the past for Native Americans is assumed to be "oppression," the present, "resistance," and the future, ethnic "resurgence" (Bruner 1986:143). Importantly, the temporal reference points in these two narrative frames—and consequently the purpose of ethnographic research in each paradigm—are diametrically opposed; the assimilationist narrative understands the present by comparing it with a lost past, while the resurgence narrative perceives the present in relation to an imagined future. For one, cultural autonomy is forfeit; for the other, it is insurgent.

Part of *Chiefly Feasts's* contribution is therefore a very public reordering and updating of institutional categories, a formal acknowledgment that anthropological assumptions about cultural survival in the Americas have changed dramatically over the last 100 years. Distinguishing *Chiefly Feasts* from the permanent exhibits at the AMNH, which are still embedded within a salvage narrative, Jonaitis explains, "We called this exhibition 'The *Enduring Kwakiutl Potlatch*' to accentuate this persistence of traditions and to signify the shift away from a Boasian Salvage mode to a celebration of cultural endurance" (1992:258). What is important to point out, however, is that *Chiefly Feasts* is "correcting" the anthropological discourse on the potlatch, not the indigenous story, which has consistently identified the potlatch as a source of cultural resistance since the late 19th cen-

tury. In fact, Kwakwaka'wakw oral history, as well as the ethnographic record, shows that the potlatch has been a primary means of mobilizing Kwakwaka'wakw ethnonational consciousness now for over a century (Codere 1950:89; Sewid-Smith 1979). So how should we think about the struggle for interpretive authority in the exhibit? We might ask: Is the main subject of *Chiefly Feasts* the potlatch or the historical problem of representing the potlatch? And are the "Kwakiutl" potlatch and the "Kwakwaka'wakw" potlatch one and the same, or do they mark different cultural events? After all, one counterreading of *Chiefly Feasts* is that the historical tradition it documents is not an indigenous one but the story of outside interest in Northwest Coast cultural forms beginning with Franz Boas in 1886 and continuing through the 1990s at the AMNH. It may now be commonplace to mark an ethnographic display as a complex site of ideological engagement that is more telling about the host culture than about that under description.¹³ Nevertheless, what is fascinating about the AMNH's self-consciously recuperative move in *Chiefly Feasts* is that it remains so limited in its scope.

In disavowing an outdated salvage anthropology paradigm, the AMNH moves to reposition itself as an ethnographic authority; however, *Chiefly Feasts* still does not explore the cultural or institutional logics that produced such a theory, nor does it ask how the current Kwakwaka'wakw narrative engages this historical discourse on their culture. The AMNH does document Boas's efforts to convince colonial authorities that the potlatch was an institution that should be left alone, but this is as much a recuperation of Boas as an analysis of why gift exchange posed such a dilemma for white society at the time. Similarly, while George Hunt receives his long-overdue acknowledgment as a primary ethnographer and collector for the AMNH, given the contradiction between the AMNH and Webster's voice, his recuperation remains oddly circumscribed. We learn in the exhibit catalog that Hunt's father was white and his mother Tlingit and that he was raised in Fort Rupert (a trading post crossroads) to speak both English and Kwakwaka. Hunt's multicultural identity raises a series of intriguing questions about how he came to be vitally involved in every ethnographic project involving the Kwakwaka'wakw over a 50-year period beginning in 1881 (Cannizzo 1983; Jacknis 1991). How, for example, do contemporary Kwakwaka'wakw assess George Hunt's career as primary ethnographer and collector of their culture? Is he seen as an indigenous historian, as a colonial collaborator, or as something else? In the exhibit, we only learn that he was arrested by colonial authorities in 1900 for participating in a potlatch and that he successfully turned to Boas for legal help at that time

(which can be read as a dual recuperation of Boas and Hunt). The panel concludes with a celebratory statement that the Boas and Hunt families jointly commemorated the centennial anniversary of Franz and George's first collaboration on the Northwest Coast in 1886.

Thus, the extraordinary professional relationship that developed between Boas and Hunt is implicitly forwarded as a possible genealogical origin point for the contemporary collaborative process in *Chiefly Feasts*. Yet by not discussing the cultural logics that kept George Hunt from receiving his due for so many years, or the complicated, if not downright problematic, tactics he and Boas used to gather the AMNH's collection (see Cole 1985; Jacknis 1991), statements about Hunt's complex identity and career in *Chiefly Feasts* appear more as a curiosity than as an exploration of the intricate politics of identity supporting Northwest Coast ethnography. The complexity of the AMNH's historical engagement with Hunt and the Kwakwaka'wakw is acknowledged but not interrogated in the exhibit, and the continuing consequences of salvage anthropology for indigenous populations is left unexplored. For while the AMNH can apparently overcome the consequences of a misguided intellectual paradigm through more scholarly work (that is, replace a salvage narrative with a more nuanced reading of Native American cultural change), the long-term impacts of such a paradigm for the Kwakwaka'wakw are not so easy either to assess or to dismiss.

Gloria Cranmer Webster's statement on the contemporary potlatch, which appears in the final room of the exhibit alongside a display of the mass-manufactured goods that serve as current gift exchange items, speaks powerfully to the experience and the long-term consequences of outside interest in the potlatch (see Figure 2):

The Potlatch Today

Each modern potlatch celebrates our survival as Kwakwaka'wakw people in today's world. There are differences between our potlatches and those of our grandparents' time, because the world in which we live has changed radically from theirs. Ceremonies may now be completed in days rather than weeks. Occasionally, we may lack appropriate costumes, because these can only be found now in collections in distant museums. Increasingly, though, our artists and carvers are creating new ones to fill the gaps.

What has not changed is the strong pride we feel in what we do. The legacy our forefathers left us has enabled us to strengthen what we might have lost during the "dark years," as our old people call the period when intense efforts were made to legislate our culture out of existence. We heed the advice of our old people "Do not let the names and rights of your family disappear." In doing



Figure 2

Installation photograph of "The Potlatch Today" display. Negative no. 600782. Photo by Denis Finnin. Courtesy Department of Library Services, American Museum of Natural History.

so, we ensure our continued survival as Kwakwaka'wakw people.

Gloria Cranmer Webster

Webster here implicates museums as well as Canadian officials in the colonizing process; the finest collection of Kwakwaka'wakw art now exists thousands of miles away on the East Coast, and some ritual objects can only be found today in ethnographic museums. Her statements thus perform a very different kind of cultural recuperation, underscoring the violence of colonialism by revealing a double erasure, first of the objects and practices so honored by the museum, and second, of the stability of identity presumed in the AMNH's use of the term *Kwakiutl*. Webster's narrative is more complicated than it first appears, for she attempts to articulate a radical cultural difference—a rejection of colonial inscription—but attempts to do so in English, the language of the colonizers, and from within one of their premier cultural spaces, the museum. Webster reiterates the crisis of history for the Kwakwaka'wakw in her discussion of contemporary gift exchange practices: "There is an appeal for all to work together, because we are so few, so poor and so

weak in our world that what we are able to do is only a shadow of what used to be. . . . At the same time, the strong words of our old people inspire us to hold on to what we have left" (1991:232). Thus, Webster does recognize an essential continuity in Kwakwaka'wakw cultural life; but how do we reconcile her complicated perspective of a survival imbued with seemingly irredeemable loss, with the celebratory enduring-tradition narrative the AMNH presents?

Much of this interpretive conflict can, I think, be reduced to differences over the temporal focus of each narrative. The AMNH is more directly concerned with the era of its ethnographic collection—the late 19th century—and thus offers a recuperative/romantic narrative of "Kwakiutl" identity aimed at correcting the judgmental tone of early ethnographic works on the potlatch, while marking the progressive aspects of Franz Boas's ethnographic research. The Kwakwaka'wakw, on the other hand, are speaking from a present-oriented position of continued resistance to cultural appropriation; their critical/ironic narrative subtly marks the continuing costs of outside interest in their cultural practices, emphasizing that much of what is today being celebrated in the potlatch was,

until relatively recently, actively suppressed by the Canadian government. In doing so, the Kwakwaka'wakw also attempt to take public control over their representation and move toward reappropriating a century of nonnative testimony on their culture.

For the AMNH, the dilemma in accepting the Kwakwaka'wakw's postcolonial narrative at face value comes from the museum's preeminent position as ethnographic archive. The AMNH is institutionally responsible not only to the Kwakwaka'wakw but also to an intellectual tradition going back well over 100 years. The power of this legacy is evidenced a few steps into the exhibition, where Franz Boas is introduced to visitors as the "father" of American anthropology. This statement, regardless of its truth value, does a number of important things in the exhibit: It suggests that because Boas's first and most influential work was on the Northwest Coast, North American anthropology itself was born through his engagement with the "Kwakiutl" and via his descriptions of the potlatch. For the AMNH, Boas's invention of the discipline of anthropology becomes coterminous with his textual production of "Kwakiutl" culture. Thus, what is ultimately at stake for scholars at the AMNH is not just their interpretive accuracy concerning the potlatch but also the historical legitimacy of their archive, its founder, and an academic field. Faced with an indigenous effort to reinscribe the ethnographic discourse on their culture, the AMNH thus (re)turns to Boas for ethnographic authority and not to the Kwakwaka'wakw themselves. This is evidenced by the appearance of extended quotations from Boas's "Kwakiutl" texts throughout the displays on 19th-century feasting, marriage, and the copper (see Figure 3). By underscoring Boas's foundational role in recording "Kwakiutl" culture, the AMNH presents its genealogical credentials for discussing the potlatch. But by claiming their own power of self-representation, the Kwakwaka'wakw perform a preemptory strike at this disciplinary origin story, calling into question not only the interpretive narrative in *Chieftly Feasts* but also the intellectual jurisdiction of the museum in regards to Kwakwaka'wakw culture.

In the midst of this contest over interpretive control—over who, in fact, has the right to represent the potlatch—the AMNH and the Kwakwaka'wakw seem to strike a de facto compromise: the exhibits devoted to the 19th-century collection are primarily located within the field of Boasian interpretation, while the final section on the contemporary potlatch is left to the Kwakwaka'wakw to narrate. But this raises immediate questions, for in marking the continuity of "Kwakiutl" traditions so strongly throughout the exhibit, the AMNH implicitly argues that there have been no historical ruptures in indigenous knowledge about

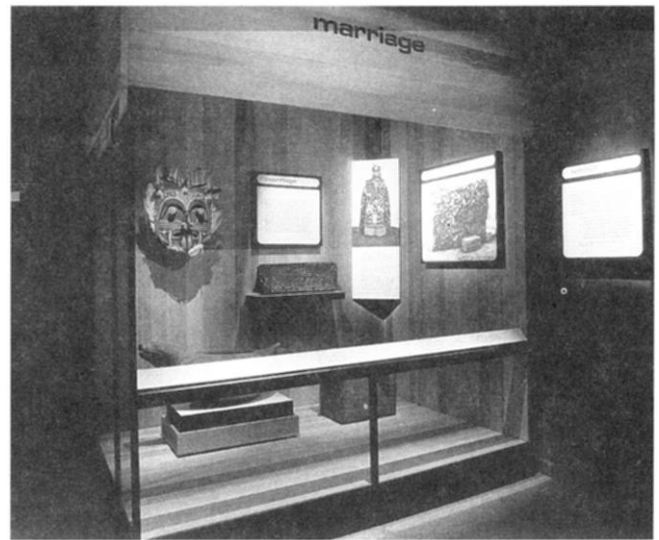


Figure 3

Installation photograph of the "Marriage" display. The labels for this exhibit include extended quotations from Franz Boas's ethnographic studies. Negative no. 600778. Photo by Denis Finnin. Courtesy Department of Library Services, American Museum of Natural History.

the potlatch; thus contemporary Kwakwaka'wakw expertise should be able to account for the entire 100-year history of the potlatch presented in *Chieftly Feasts*. Yet, in the few places where indigenous expertise is explicitly voiced—in signed statements from Gloria Cranmer Webster—it contradicts some of the central terms (about language, national identity, and cultural stability) as well as some of the interpretive meanings (about, for example, the value of ethnographic museums) in the AMNH's narrative. It is within this ambiguous, politically contested cultural space that the ethnographic objects are narratively placed, evoking a strange conflict of meanings over what the potlatch was, or is, and who, in fact, performs it.

Temporality in International Relations and the Law

An important functional effect of the split in authorial voice between the 19th-century and contemporary exhibits is a form of what Johannes Fabian has called "temporal distancing" (1983). Fabian argues that, in the movement from field experience to written text, ethnographers have traditionally relied on both a spatial and a temporal distancing to construct their ethnographic authority. Thus, the classic ethnographic texts locate tribal cultures not only in a foreign land but also in an imagined past, denying the mutual embeddedness of ethnographer and informant in a contemporary world. Ethnographic museums, often far

away from their subject matter and historically located within a salvage paradigm, have utilized a similar temporal and physical displacement to control their subject matter. As such, the role of the ethnographic museum as a tool of international relations between indigenous nations and Western nation-states has been misrecognized as an apolitical project of collecting and cataloging "exotic" cultures, even though the distinctions ethnographic institutions have made between the "tribal" and the "modern" remain instrumental in buttressing Euro-American self-understandings (see Borneman 1995 and Clifford 1988). Fabian locates this temporal logic in the foundations of natural history as a science:

Natural history—a notion unthinkable until the coextensiveness of Time and Space had been accepted—was based on a thoroughly spatialized conception of Time and provided the paradigm for anthropology as the science of cultural evolution. Its manifest concerns were progress and history, but its theories and methods, inspired by geology, comparative anatomy, and related scientific disciplines, were taxonomic rather than genetic-processual. Most importantly, by allowing Time to be reabsorbed by the tabular space of classification, nineteenth-century anthropology sanctioned an ideological process by which relations between the West and its Other, between anthropology and its object, were conceived not as difference but as distance in Space and Time. [1983:147]

Chiefly Feasts reiterates this natural history paradigm by (re)locating its subject matter in a distant past, even while negotiating the insurgency in Webster's statements. Consequently, the exhibit continues to occlude the fact that institutions like the AMNH engage in foreign relations in managing their collections and that their representations of cultural life have a continued impact on the social and legal relationships between indigenous nations and nation-states.

In the United States, for example, the Native American Graves and Repatriation Act of 1990 recognizes that indigenous nations have inherent rights to certain kinds of cultural property. Since 1990, then, the purity and timelessness of the ethnographic archive have been increasingly challenged, as institutions have been compelled to realize their contemporaneity with indigenous nations.¹⁴ Nevertheless, in *Chiefly Feasts*, the AMNH's authorial presence remains based on a temporal displacement, one that gives up authority on current events but still holds onto the 19th century. This approach circumvents the reality that the AMNH and the Kwakwaka'wakw have always experienced a shared modernity and that in the course of the past century's cross-cultural dialogue both parties have reinvented their self-understandings in relation to one another. As Rosalind Morris notes in her wide-ranging study of the representation of North-

west Coast cultures, the "authenticity" of Kwakwaka'wakw culture—established through museums and ethnography, and reinforced by popular culture—is still an important factor in legal relations with the Canadian government:

In the case of the Kwakiutl, the argument for historical continuity requires a demonstration that the contemporary Kwakiutl are the same Kwakiutl as those who were oppressed by missionaries and State representatives. An onerous task, the proof of continuity is required in all legal actions aimed at the reclamation of land-title or the repatriation of objects. . . . We now know that the Kwakiutl of the late nineteenth century are the Kwakiutl of the great potlatch and that it was this culture of rigorous ritual exchange that worried federal legislators. If the contemporary Kwakiutl are to establish the legitimacy of the claims for repatriation, then, they must represent themselves as being identical with that earlier cultural moment, the one divested of ceremonial objects. [1994:138]

Thus, the negotiation of cultural and institutional identities in *Chiefly Feasts* does not occur in a vacuum but participates in, and helps structure, the understandings that support the wider field of cross-cultural power relations. The legacy of the salvage paradigm—as a colonial logic—still influences the legal status of indigenous nations by providing a baseline understanding of what indigenous cultures "should be": a 19th-century snapshot for legal comparison and moral judgment. The conflict over naming in *Chiefly Feasts*, therefore, not only involves a basic question of human rights but also calls into question the Kwakwaka'wakw's status as a First People, with inherent rights of national self-designation. Thus, the AMNH's decision to protect the coherency of their ethnographic archive against the challenge of the Kwakwaka'wakw's postcolonial discourse reiterates the very power relations inherent within the logics of salvage anthropology, in that the security and completeness of the archive is privileged over and against the reality of the living culture.

The Meaning of the Gift

The internal deconstruction of *Chiefly Feasts*'s first subject, the "Kwakiutl," places its second, the "potlatch," in an immediately compromised interpretive position. So, how does the AMNH attempt to resolve not only the problems caused by the salvage-era dialectics of its ethnographic archive but also the historic conflict of interpretations surrounding the potlatch?

The Kwakiutl Potlatch

What was, and continues to be, of utmost importance to the Kwakiutl is their right to display certain artworks,

perform certain dances and tell certain historical stories. They demonstrate these privileges at their potlatches. Invited guests listen to speeches that glorify the host and describe his family's history, watch masked dancers and feast on rich food. Visitors serve as witnesses to the hosts' display of prized stories, songs and art works. After the host family completes the presentation of art works, dances, speeches and stories, guests receive gifts. Accepting the gift signifies acceptance of the hosts' claim to the privileges displayed. Potlatches celebrate many important events: for example, a chief assuming a higher position, marriage, memorializing the dead, raising a totem pole and constructing a house.

At first glance, this is a reasoned introduction to a complex reality: events called potlatches that involve an exchange of gifts and public recognition of changes in social status are still performed. But this statement is undercut by a close reading of the historical time lines in the exhibit, which provide a more complex image of the potlatch. The "Events at a Potlatch" time line, for example, which compares late-19th- and late-20th-century potlatch practices, states that over the past 100 years the potlatch has been compressed from four months of ritual to two days; it also tells us that several rituals performed 100 years ago as part of the potlatch are no longer performed today. "The Enduring Kwakiutl, 1700–Present" time line charts the changes in objects of exchange, from the animal furs and canoes of the early 19th century to the Hudson's Bay Blankets and metal jewelry of the late 19th century and finally to the china, plastic ware, and manufactured textiles of today (see Figure 4). Other statements in the "Suppression and Resistance" exhibit reveal that, during the colonial crackdown on the potlatch in the 1920s, the entire ritual was changed to avoid criminal prosecution. Thus in reading the fine print we learn that, since the early 19th century, the temporal frame, the rituals, and the objects of exchange have all undergone nearly constant change: Under these conditions, what does it mean to say *the* potlatch has endured?

The difficulty here, I think, is in not identifying gift exchange up front as a *dynamic* medium through which the Kwakwaka'wakw have negotiated their evolving socioeconomic conditions. In the AMNH's statements, "Kwakiutl" cultural identity tends to become isomorphic with the potlatch, an activity involving specific artworks, dances, and stories—all objects that can be collected (as they were by Boas and Hunt). This logic presents an objectified view of cultural identity, one marked simply by the presence or absence of specific material traces that can be collected and compared to those in the ethnographic archive. Yet prior to European contact, gift exchange appears to have been a rarely performed ritual: It was only through the

Kwakwaka'wakw's engagement with colonial capitalism in the mid-19th century that gift exchange began to take on a more dominant role in Kwakwaka'wakw social life.¹⁵ And from the mid-19th century on, the gift economy—like Kwakwaka'wakw society itself—has been in a constant state of evolution as the Kwakwaka'wakw reacted to the enormous changes brought on by the colonization of their territories and their entry into a world market.¹⁶ Thus, if anything has been constant over the past 100 years, it appears to be a Kwakwaka'wakw commitment to marking social change through an exchange of gifts, not a particular ritual form or an essentialized meaning. Gloria Cranmer Webster responds to these changes, in her contribution to the *Chiefly Feasts* exhibition catalog, when she asks, "If my ancestors from two hundred years ago were able to be with us today, I often wonder what they would think of a contemporary potlatch. Would they be able to recognize what we do as being related to what they did? Would they pity us for having lost so much, or be proud that we are still here?" (1991:248).

This constant flux in the content and context of the events known as the potlatch obviously presents a formidable challenge for those wishing to construct a coherent narrative display (see Jonaitis 1991a, 1992). But why this need for an immutable potlatch substance? Why not, for example, aim the exhibit at a more general Kwakwaka'wakw ceremonialism, one free of the interpretive dilemma evoked by the potlatch? I would propose two possible answers. One is suggested again by the AMNH's decision to use "Kwakiutl" over "Kwakwaka'wakw"—sheer public recognition. The financial stakes in a show of this size must be enormous, and the "Kwakiutl Potlatch" is one of the few Native American practices with popular name recognition. Who, for example, did not understand the metaphor when a U.S. national television news anchor described the Cold War nuclear arms race between the United States and the Soviet Union as a "potlatching" relationship? Second, despite the volumes devoted to it, the potlatch still possesses a mystery in North American popular culture, a mystery that is located in and charged by a history of cross-cultural misrecognition and desire.

Sensationalistic Canadian reports about the potlatch were encouraged in the United States by publication of Ruth Benedict's ethnographic classic *Patterns of Culture* (1934). Perhaps the single most widely read ethnographic text in North America (almost constantly in print since its publication), *Patterns of Culture* has continued to introduce the "Kwakiutl" to new generations of readers as the Dionysian alter ego of the Apollonian Zuni. Emphasizing the antagonistic rivalries and vast displays of material goods in the late-19th-century potlatch, Benedict concluded that the ceremony was



Figure 4

Installation photograph of the time line "The Enduring Kwakiutl, 1700–Present." Negative no. 600779. Photo by Denis Finnin. Courtesy Department of Library Services, American Museum of Natural History.

nothing less than the product of a "paranoid megalomaniacal" society (1934:222). As a result of this discourse, the "Kwakiutl" potlatch is often evoked by nonindigenous North Americans to illustrate an irrational form of cultural behavior and has been marked, at least historically, as an inversion of white, Protestant, capitalist social values. We learn, for example, in the section of *Chiefly Feasts* dealing with the antipotlatching law, that turn-of-the-century missionaries and colonial officials attacked the potlatch on moral grounds: They believed that it promoted cannibalism (a misreading of the Hamatsa ceremony that nonetheless marked the Kwakwaka'wakw as that most sensationalized of tribal "others"). They also thought that it demonstrated a perverted understanding of material wealth (the Kwakwaka'wakw, after all, accumulated wealth not for private fortunes but to give away or, on occasion, even to burn during social rivalries). Finally, officials argued that the potlatch oppressed women because the amount of wealth exchanged between families during a marriage seemed to them like a commercial transaction. (This, of course, completely ignored the existence of dowries in European societies and the formidable gender separation existing at the time in Canada, which certainly offered Kwak-

waka'wakw women no great personal liberation after the crackdown on the potlatch.) Given its repeated depiction as an irrational behavior and a marker of cultural excess, is it surprising, then, that the potlatch has taken on a life of its own in 20th-century North American popular culture? And given this state of affairs, is it really so remarkable that the Kwakwaka'wakw would now mobilize to regain some control over the representation of their cultural practices?

In fact, a Kwakwaka'wakw counterdiscourse to this history is evident in the exhibit, both in Gloria Cranmer Webster's words and in more subtle gestures such as the revelation that Helen Knox, who served as a consultant on *Chiefly Feasts*, also appeared as a young girl in Edward Curtis's 1914 film *In the Land of the Headhunters*.¹⁷ Here, we can viscerally locate within one person's lifetime the almost surreal trajectory of outside interest in Kwakwaka'wakw ceremonialism, for Helen Knox has been witness not only to the salvage operations of Boas and Curtis and the colonial oppression of Northwest Coast ritual (when the potlatch was performed "underground" to avoid criminal prosecution) but also to the current international valorization of Kwakwaka'wakw art and ritual in *Chiefly Feasts*. Doesn't the political/theoretical context of an

exhibit such as *Chiefly Feasts* shift dramatically when we realize that Helen Knox was already involved in her first outside effort to recuperate “traditional” Kwakwaka’wakw culture in 1914? And given the radical swings in outside revulsion/fascination for Kwakwaka’wakw ceremonialism during this century, what must Helen Knox and her contemporaries think about current American and Canadian interest in the potlatch? After all, Kwakwaka’wakw of her generation have witnessed both the persecution of Northwest Coast ritual by the Canadian government and massive advertising campaigns by the contemporary Canadian Tourist Board that now rely on images of Northwest Coast ceremonialism to market British Columbia to the world (see Schulte-Tenckhoff 1988:118).

Conclusion

Given so tortured a representational history, how should the rest of us who are appreciative of Northwest Coast cultures now approach this legacy of image and counterimage, of appropriation and reappropriation? We might focus on the fact that *potlatch* is not even a Kwakwaka’wakw term but an import from a Chinook trade jargon meaning “to give.” Nineteenth-century Kwakwaka’wakw society had at least four different terms for specific types of gift exchange, but no overarching term for what has become known as the potlatch (see Goldman 1975:131–134).¹⁸ Perhaps it is best, then, to think of the potlatch as an outside invention, one that textually mimicks a complex of practices that the Kwakwaka’wakw perform in private, but whose meaning is now deeply imbedded in the interstitial space between native and white cultures. Or perhaps it is more appropriate to think of the potlatch as a native/white collaboration, a mutually generated myth, filled with asymmetrical power relations and appropriated by either side to suit their immediate political purposes—a fiction increasingly legitimized by time and repetition. After all, the potlatch only began its rapid evolution after the Kwakwaka’wakw gained access to European goods in the late 18th century, and Canadian authorities have certainly been intricately involved in producing the potlatch at least since they decided to ban it in 1884.¹⁹ Given this scenario, the icon of the exhibit would not be the 19th-century mask (see Figure 1) that was used in promotional literature for *Chiefly Feasts* and that references an indigenous reality free from outside influence. Instead, it might be the Dance Apron (see Figure 5), which demonstrates—through its harnessing of European commodities to an indigenous cosmology—the complex merging of European and indigenous forms that has

characterized life on the Northwest Coast since the mid-19th century.

The cost in adopting this position of shared invention, however, is that it equalizes Kwakwaka’wakw and non-Kwakwaka’wakw contributions to the potlatch.²⁰ An uncritical approach risks reinforcing a colonial discourse, in which the subjugated must accept the categories of the colonizing authority in order to be heard. This is an important consideration, because the terms for discussing the potlatch have rarely been set by those who practice it. In *Chiefly Feasts*, the AMNH attempts to reconstruct itself as an “objective” authority, but to do so it must leave unchallenged its historical role over the past century in inventing the potlatch for a nonnative audience. In arguing that Boas “fathered” anthropology through the potlatch, the AMNH is really presenting a genealogical claim, not on the potlatch itself but on Euro-American efforts to un-

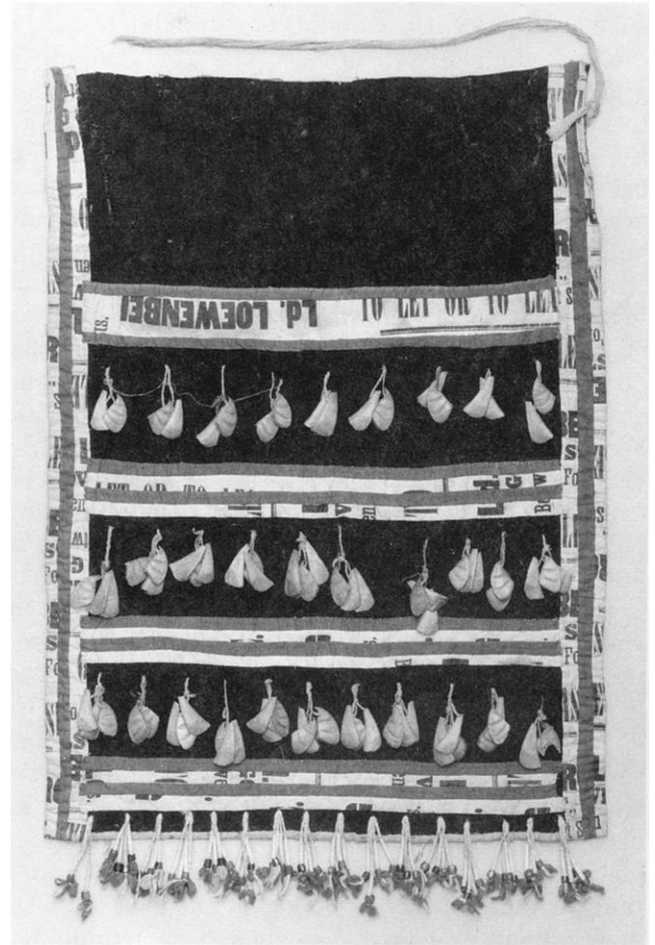


Figure 5

Dance Apron. Made of puffin beaks, beads, flour sacking, and Hudson's Bay Company blankets. Fort Rupert, collected by George Hunt in 1897. Negative no. 2A18957. Photo by Lynton Gardiner. Courtesy Department of Library Services, American Museum of Natural History.

derstand that Kwakwaka'wakw practice. But in an effort to insulate the ethnographic archive from the subversive consequences of the Kwakwaka'wakw's postcolonial discourse, the AMNH divides representational control over the potlatch rather than risk exploring the final ambiguity of identities or the evolving institutional logics that have produced the late-20th-century versions of both Kwakwaka'wakw gift exchange and the cross-cultural potlatch debate. As such, the attempt to reinvent ethnographic authority at the AMNH (from a salvage paradigm to collaborative research), though laudatory, remains stalled and incomplete. Consequently, the exhibit falls into contradiction at precisely the points where it begins to suggest a new model for anthropological practice. *Chiefly Feasts* demonstrates that if collaborative research is to have a role in challenging—not just more subtly reiterating—the asymmetrical relations of power between dominant and indigenous cultures, then institutions such as the AMNH must be willing to publicly analyze the logics that have historically supported their ethnographic archives and authority. It is not enough simply to change the narrative frame that supports cultural representation in such institutions; some form of critical self-understanding must be built into the dual process of cross-cultural engagement and the textual constitution of international Others.

As the AMNH negotiates the continuing political legacy of its 19th-century collection, the Kwakwaka'wakw, on the eve of the 21st century, must also deal with the resources and the burden of the ethnographic archive devoted to their culture.²¹ For the Kwakwaka'wakw, the AMNH's archive presents, at best, useful records of family histories, descriptions of cultural practices, and perpetual storage for cultural objects they no longer own. A hidden cost of this repository, however, is that the Kwakwaka'wakw are no longer as free to reinvent their traditions as they once were: the Euro-American ethnographic archive now provides a permanent record of what "authentic" Kwakwaka'wakw culture once was. We can see the complexity of this negotiation in the way that Gloria Cranmer Webster simultaneously evokes both survival and loss in her descriptions of contemporary gift exchanges. For the density of the archival record devoted to the late 19th century has worked to fix attention on that century's version of the potlatch. The reality of gift exchange as a dynamic medium through which the Kwakwaka'wakw have negotiated their evolving historical circumstance for over 200 years is lost, which means that current practices tend to be understood, as they unintentionally are in *Chiefly Feasts*, primarily in comparison to late-19th-century practices.²²

The difficulty the AMNH has in reconciling the perspectives offered by its ethnographic archive with those of a postcolonial indigenous discourse exposes an important contemporary reality and argues once again for a reconsideration of the goals of ethnographic display. Certainly, it is in the tension between native and outsider viewpoints that the most mutually educational and creative space for cross-cultural communication is opened. The exploration of cultural logics that is possible through museum displays makes them particularly well suited for rethinking the representation and meaning(s) of cultural forms. Despite the incongruities and unresolved tensions in *Chiefly Feasts*, Aldona Jonaitis, Gloria Cranmer Webster, and their colleagues have made a significant contribution to a postcolonial exhibitionary order by realizing a collaborative exhibition space. The project that remains is to address fully the contradictions in Northwest Coast ethnography, allowing the final ambiguity and tension over the meaning of the potlatch not just to surface and remain visible in the exhibit but to become the very subject of cross-cultural analysis. *Chiefly Feasts*, I believe, not only illustrates the profound challenges we now face in trying to move beyond the past century of institutionalized power relations but also points toward a new model of ethnographic engagement, one that investigates the cultural contradictions and asymmetrical relations of power experienced by groups inhabiting a shared modernity.

Chiefly Feasts's important contribution, then, is in opening up a conceptual space in which we can imagine a model of ethnographic representation that explores the engagement of cross-cultural logics, one that allows institutional or disciplinary logics to be visibly questioned and where the hybridity of cultural identities and ethnographic authority is recognized and acted upon. Such an approach would allow the ethnographic archive, as it develops, to be continually read against the grain and recontextualized to provide meaning for evolving cross-cultural relations in North America and elsewhere. Thus, I believe that future exhibits can still strive to produce an interpretive space that is more dialogic than contestory, more collaborative—even in exploring radical difference—than simply contradictory. In the end this is, perhaps, merely to acknowledge that the negotiation over the meaning of ethnographic representation and the process of cross-cultural communication in general is an ongoing project. On the Northwest Coast, after all, the real antagonistic social rivalry may be historically better located, not within Kwakwaka'wakw society, but between the Kwakwaka'wakw and outsiders, over the meaning and ownership of cultural practices such as gift exchange and museum exhibitions. *Chiefly Feasts: The Endur-*

ing *Kwakiutl Potlatch* may ultimately continue this tradition of contestation; but then, when has "the potlatch" not evoked such competitive displays?

Notes

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1. The potlatch has been variously described as an interest bearing investment of property (Boas 1897); as a "total prestation" involving social, religious, economic and political dimensions (Mauss 1954[1925]); as a demonstration of a paranoid, megalomaniacal personality (Benedict 1934); as a substitution for warfare (Codere 1950); as a means of distributing food (Piddocke 1965; Vayda 1961); as a phenomenon of social morphology (Lévi-Strauss 1969; Rosman and Rubel 1971); as an expression of an anal-erotic character (Dundes 1979); and as a religious event (Goldman 1975; Walens 1981).

2. For an analysis of how British Columbian museums deal with the interpretive challenge of Northwest Coast history, see Clifford 1991 and Webster 1990. On the antipotlatching legislation, see Cole and Chaikin 1990; LaViolette 1961; and Sewid-Smith 1979, 1991.

3. The exhibit opened in 1991 at the AMNH and then traveled to the Royal British Columbia Museum in Victoria, British Columbia, the Houston Museum of Science, and the National Museum of Natural History at the Smithsonian. I saw it at its final stop, the Seattle Art Museum, in August 1994; thus, my comments are addressed to the Seattle incarnation of the exhibit.

4. For example, see Clifford 1988; Haraway 1984; Karp and Lavine 1991; Mitchell 1992; and Stocking 1985.

5. Aldona Jonaitis's official title at the AMNH at the time of the exhibit was Vice President for Public Programs.

6. The law against the potlatch was taken off the record books in 1951, but it took until 1979 for the objects seized by the government in 1921 to be returned. Repatriation of the objects not sold by the Canadian government led to the opening of the U'mista Cultural Centre at Alert Bay in 1979 and the Kwagwiltz Museum in Cape Mudge in 1981. See Clifford 1991; U'mista Cultural Centre 1983; and Webster 1990.

7. The dynamic of these conversations is discussed in Jonaitis 1991b, 1992 and Webster 1992.

8. For reviews of the exhibit and exhibition catalog, see Ames 1994; Brown 1992; Hoover 1993; Kan 1992; Lomawaima 1993; McDonald 1992; and Wardwell 1992.

9. See Berlo and Phillips 1992:33–34 for an insightful discussion of how the objects in *Chiefly Feasts* are positioned (through labels, time lines, maps, and documentary photographs) as ethnographic specimens and not simply as works of art.

10. I use "the AMNH" to emphasize the institutional voice behind these decisions. Clearly, Aldona Jonaitis as curator holds the central authority in terms of the exhibit, but others were involved as well. Jonaitis writes:

I also tried to disseminate power and authority to the staff involved with "Chiefly Feasts." Instead of the traditional exhibition-development procedure where the curator was completely in control of the project, I encouraged open dialogue about all the features of the show, from label copy to design decisions to education activities with everyone who participated in the project. [1992:264, n.7]

Thus, I identify Jonaitis by name in this article only when I can attribute a comment or idea directly to her through her writings on the exhibit. Similarly I use "the Kwakwaka'wakw" primarily to mean the group of indigenous representatives who served as consultants for the exhibition, and identify Gloria Cranmer Webster by name only when comments can be directly attributed to her.

11. The *Chiefly Feasts* exhibition catalog is, however, dedicated "To the Kwakwaka'wakw people, with respect and admiration." Jonaitis explains that, during the early days of the collaboration, "we soon learned to use the preferred term Kwakwaka'wakw" (1992:255) and, in a footnote, states:

We used the term "Kwakiutl" for the exhibition because that is the name most people are familiar with, if they have any knowledge at all of native people. In a label in the introductory section to the show, Webster explained why her people prefer to be called "Kwakwaka'wakw" and we explained why we used "Kwakiutl." That label ended with this statement: "it is our hope that visitors will become familiar with the name 'Kwakwaka'wakw.'" At the Victoria venue, the preferred term was used in all the publicity materials, posters, T-shirts and the like. [1992:264, n.1]

The question of naming was clearly a major discussion point during the planning of the exhibit, leading to a change in the publicity materials in British Columbia. I saw the exhibit in Seattle, where it was reported that the Kwakwaka'wakw remained unhappy with the use of "Kwakiutl." Moreover, the Seattle Art Museum uses "Kwakwaka'wakw" in its own permanent Northwest Coast displays.

12. The AMNH's decision is doubly strange, given that two of the curatorial consultants for the exhibit have argued publicly for the adoption of Kwakwaka'wakw as the appropriate nomenclature. See Macnair 1986 and Webster 1990, 1991. Additionally, I could find only one review that acknowledges the conflict over naming in the exhibit: McDonald 1992.

13. Clifford 1988; Haraway 1984; Karp and Lavine 1991; and Mitchell 1992.

14. Canada actually led the way here with its Task Force Report on Museums and First Peoples, a project initiated in 1988. The Task Force Report (1992) redefines the relationship between indigenous nations and museums by emphasizing a collaborative framework and sets out specific categories of objects for repatriation.

15. See Boas 1921:836–1277 and Codere 1950:90–94, 1961.

16. See Codere 1950, 1961; Drucker and Heizer 1967; and Masco 1995.

17. Helen Knox's participation in the exhibit and in Curtis's film is revealed in the label accompanying the exhibit. In the same statement we learn that Curtis's original title for the film *In the Land of the Headhunters* was changed 50

years later to *In the Land of the War Canoes* by Bill Holm when he collaborated with Kwakwaka'wakw musicians to add a soundtrack to the film. Thus, Curtis's attempt to recuperate traditional "Kwakiutl" culture in 1914 by focusing on the lost practice of "headhunting" was recuperated once again by Holm in the 1960s when he forwarded a less sensationalized marker of identity (see Holm and Quimby 1980).

18. Consequently, Goldman has argued that *potlatch* has no specific meaning and should be abandoned as a critical term (1975:131). I would suggest that it is, in part, the historical ambiguity of the word *potlatch* that has endowed the Kwakwaka'wakw gift economy with much of its cross-cultural power, allowing the meaning of the gift to be easily reinvented and, through a process of misrecognition, utilized for divergent psychological, social, and national needs.

19. See Masco 1995. Also see Codere 1950, 1961; Drucker and Heizer 1967; Michaelson 1979; Morris 1994; Sewid-Smith 1979; and Webster 1990, 1991.

20. Bruner concludes that "both Indian enactment, the story they tell about themselves, and our theory, the story we tell, are transformations of each other; they are retellings of a narrative derived from the discursive practice of our historical era" (1986:149). I agree that there is mutual invention at work here (a process clearly taking place in *Chiefly Feasts*), but the pairing is hardly symmetrical. The Kwakwaka'wakw population numbered fewer than 2,000 people in 1934 when Benedict's *Patterns of Culture* was published. By the time of the book's second edition in 1959, 800,000 copies had been sold, and it had been translated into 14 languages (Mead 1959). The Kwakwaka'wakw have no cultural production that can compete on scale with this anthropological discourse.

21. While Webster critiques the process that led to the dispossession of Kwakwaka'wakw cultural objects in the exhibit, in the film *Box of Treasures* (U'mista Cultural Centre 1983) she acknowledges that the Boas-Hunt texts have since become useful records of family histories and rituals (e.g., the origin stories of the different Kwakwaka'wakw speaking tribes collected by Boas and Hunt figure prominently on the walls of the U'mista Cultural Centre in Alert Bay). See also Ostrowitz and Jonaitis 1991 on the rediscovery of ceremonial artifacts in the AMNH archives.

22. Visitors I spoke with at the Seattle exhibit without exception marked a feeling of "shock" in seeing the contemporary mass-marketed potlatch goods displayed in the contemporary potlatch section (see Figure 2). Janet Berlo and Ruth Phillips have insightfully argued that this section of the exhibit therefore serves a useful pedagogical function in confronting "romanticized" images of Native Americans (1992:34).

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⁸ **Review: [Untitled]**

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¹⁶ **"It is a Strict Law That Bids Us Dance": Cosmologies, Colonialism, Death, and Ritual Authority in the Kwakwaka'wakw Potlatch, 1849 to 1922**

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