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**THE POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION:
A "RATIONAL" HISTORY OF THE ETHNOLOGICAL COLLECTIONS
OF THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF CANADA
1910-1925**

**by
COLLEEN BURKE, B.A.**

**A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of**

**Master of Arts
School of Canadian Studies**

Carleton University

Ottawa, Ontario

17 November 1993

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**The Politics of Representation:
A "Rational" History of the Ethnological Collections
of the National Museum of Canada 1910-1925**

**submitted by Colleen Burke, B.A.
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts**

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ABSTRACT

The basis of this thesis is the recognition of the contextual nature of reason. It examines and questions the rationality which informed the development of the ethnological collections in the National Museum of Canada during the years 1910-1925. The dominant rationality emerged from faith in the hegemony of the Canadian state over Indigenous Peoples. Using elements of Noam Chomsky's institutional analysis, this paper studies the relationship between the Museum and the state, and the influence which this relationship exerted on the Museum. While the Boasian anthropology which dominated the Museum's ethnological outlook espoused cultural relativism, it was limited by the biases of non-Indigenous people describing and defining Indigenous cultures. A narrative of "salvage ethnology" led ethnologists to study an idealized "pre-contact" past at the expense of contemporary Indigenous cultures. Techniques of museum display further prevented understanding of Indigenous Peoples by exhibiting only carefully selected objects defined by narrow taxonomies.

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I am grateful to Dr. John Barker of the University of British Columbia's Department of Anthropology for permission to cite his unpublished paper "The Publication of *The Bella Coola Indians*: T.F. McIlwraith and the National Museum." Dr. Ruth Phillips provided me with copies of two unpublished papers, "Why Not Tourist Art?: Significant Silences in Native American Museum Representations" and "How Museums Marginalize: Naming Domains of Inclusion and Exclusion," and also suggested directions for my research.

I offer special thanks to Barry Ace who took time to read an early draft of this paper (while finishing his own thesis) and provided many helpful and thought-provoking suggestions.

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NOMENCLATURE

In the writing of this paper I have had difficulty determining what terminology to use with respect to Indigenous Peoples. Valid arguments can be made for using both First Nations People and Indigenous Peoples. I have chosen the latter because this term is internationally recognized, and I feel that the struggles of Indigenous Peoples should be placed in an international context. Although First Nations is widely used in Canada, it has political connotations linking it to the Assembly of First Nations. This term may not be as appropriate when discussing Inuit, Metis and "non-status" Peoples who are not represented by the AFN. When writing of specific Peoples, I have attempted to use appropriate names in the Peoples' language, as opposed to using names imposed by non-Indigenous travellers, missionaries and anthropologists. Thus, Nootka are Nuuchahnulth, Bella Coola are Nuxalk, Kwakiutl are Kwakwaka'wakw, Huron are Wyandot and Iroquois are Haudenosaunee. I have attempted to use names which are most acceptable to the Peoples discussed, and if I have not, no offence is intended.

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INTRODUCTION

Most museums collect, confine and classify objects of material culture in their role of educating the public. Their reasons for collecting, their methods of display and their systems of classification may vary greatly. Fundamental to a museum's activities is the rationality shaping and giving meaning to its work. Michel Foucault argues that reason is not absolute, that "reason and truth have historical, social and cultural contexts."¹ Consequently, the functions of museums are not absolute, but have changed over time to reflect the "the context, the plays of power, and the social, economic, and political imperatives that surrounded them."² Although the actions of museums may seem to be the same, the catalysts of these actions may be very different systems of knowledge. Any analysis of museums must look beyond their practices to the systems of rationality which give meaning to their functions and make them necessary.

In *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*, Eilean Hooper-Greenhill questions traditional histories of museums which assume an unchanging reality or a fixed identity for museums, regardless of time and place.³ She stresses that a critical history must analyse the structures of rationality

¹ Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*. (London: Routledge, 1992) 9.

² Hooper-Greenhill 1.

³ Hooper-Greenhill 1.

informing a museum's practice, and examine how they were affected by the "plays of power, and the social, economic, and political imperatives that surrounded them."⁴ Hooper-Greenhill's "effective" history of European museums reveals a measure of consistency in the collection, confinement and classification of material culture in a variety of museums over time. However, the rationalities which have informed these practices, which have decided which articles are desirable, how they should be exhibited, and according to which taxonomies they should be understood, have changed dramatically.⁵

She observes that museums have until recently escaped the critical analysis focused on other institutions like the education system and the media.

The lack of examination and interrogation of the professional, cultural, and ideological practices of museums has meant both a failure to examine the basic underlying principles on which current museum and gallery practices rest, and a failure to construct a critical history of the museum field.⁶

The structures of rationality which inform the conception, creation and function of museums in the past and present are considered unproblematic, and are generally not questioned or examined in historical studies.⁷ Traditional histories of museums project the existing, unquestioned form of

⁴ Hooper-Greenhill 1.

⁵ Hooper-Greenhill 192.

⁶ Hooper-Greenhill 3.

⁷ Hooper-Greenhill 4.

museums backwards in time and create a linear development in which museums from different eras and different nations are viewed as parts of a logical progression leading inexorably to contemporary museums.⁸ Hooper-Greenhill questions this idea of a fixed identity for museums, and presents an alternative model of history which interrogates the "givens" of museums and analyses the "structures of knowing" which establish the parameters for knowledge within the museum.⁹

Most histories of Canadian museums are enumerative, merely listing institutions and providing a chronology of their development. In most cases, emphasis is placed on the people who were instrumental in the museums' creation and on the objects displayed. Questions about why the museums were founded, and what their goals were, are notably absent. For example, in Carl and Grace Guthe's work *The Canadian Museum Movement*, published in 1958 for the Canadian Museums Association, they discuss "the conviction that all museums adhere to certain fundamental principles, policies and objectives, which determine the museum function in society."¹⁰ They do not attempt to explain these "fundamental principles," and assume that they are identical to all museums, regardless of their time and place of origin. Their work is primarily an inventory of Canadian museums in this period.

⁸ Hooper-Greenhill 7.

⁹ Hooper-Greenhill 12.

¹⁰ Carl E. Guthe and Grace M. Guthe, *The Canadian Museum Movement*. (Toronto: Canadian Museums Association, 1958) 34.

Archie F. Key's work *Beyond Four Walls: The Origins and Development of Canadian Museums*, is also essentially a list of museums in Canada, focusing on the "dedicated individuals and idealistic societies [seeking] to serve as guardians of Canada's heritage."¹¹ Key states that his "book is not too much concerned with political ideologies,"¹² and his study of the National Museum of Canada reflects this. He focuses on the founder, William Logan, and his struggles with lack of interest from the government, and with lack of space in his various Museum buildings. There is no reference to the Museum's ethnological collections, except for a bizarre mention of the ceremonial Potlatch material confiscated by the RCMP and given to the National Museum in 1922 which states that the "naive code of the Indian perceived a fine distinction between free-will offerings and what they felt was outright theft."¹³ Key's work, while valuable in providing information on the people and dates involved in the founding of Canada's museums, does not offer critical analysis of why these museums were founded, or what they were intending to accomplish through their collections and exhibits.

Works dealing specifically with the National Museum have similar limitations. Loris Russell's *The National Museum of Canada, 1910-1960* provides a chronology of administrators and researchers at the Museum, and

¹¹ Archie F. Key, *Beyond Four Walls: The Origins and Development of Canadian Museums*. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1973) 98.

¹² Key 218.

¹³ Key 309.

lists the types of exhibitions mounted.¹⁴ *Reading the Rocks*, Morris Zaslow's exhaustive history of the Geological Survey of Canada provides valuable information about the workings of the Museum. He discusses some of the influence of government on the Museum's work, but because the focus is primarily on the Geological Survey, Zaslow does not offer detailed analysis of the Museum's ethnographic collections.

One work which goes beyond mere description of museum collections and analyses representation of the "other" in exhibits of ethnological material and "primitive art" is Lis Smidt Stainforth's thesis, *Did the Spirit Sing?: An Historical Perspective on Canadian Exhibitions of the Other*. While her focus is on the 1988 exhibit, *The Spirit Sings: Artistic Traditions of Canada's First Peoples*, she does provide a brief historical overview of the development of anthropological museums. Providing more than a linear history, Stainforth discusses the museums' focus on ethnographic salvage and their ethnocentric bias. Since Stainforth's paper concentrates on display techniques and does not discuss the origins and political rationality of the National Museum, my own work will not be covering the same areas of research.

This paper is a history of the National Museum which is not an encyclopedic account attempting to "produce chronological, incremental descriptions of [the museum's] 'development'."¹⁵ This will be a "rational"

¹⁴ Loris S. Russell, *The National Museum of Canada, 1910-1960* (Ottawa: Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources, 1961)

¹⁵ Hooper-Greenhill 19.

history of the ethnographic collection of the National Museum of Canada during the years 1910 to 1925, focusing on the underlying political, social and scientific rationalities influencing the museum. In contrast to traditional histories, which passively accept the Museum anthropologists' goals and methods, this work will more fundamentally question why certain decisions were made and why certain objects of material culture were sought after.

I have chosen the period from 1910 to 1925 in the Museum's history because it coincides with the tenure of Edward Sapir as Director of the Museum's Anthropology Division. With the establishment of the Division of Anthropology in 1910, the Museum launched into a formal program of collecting material culture from Indigenous Peoples; prior to this, collection had been peripheral to the Geological Survey's work. The new Victoria Memorial Museum building was opened to the public in 1913, and this offered Sapir and his colleagues the opportunity to organize and create all new exhibits. These new developments are an apt place to begin a "rational" history. Since a break was being made from past practices, and new policies and new exhibits were being developed, the rationalities informing the Museum's activities are more evident. The period under study ends with the departure of Sapir for the University of Chicago and the beginning of a decline in the amount of staff and resources given to the Division of Anthropology. By the time of Sapir's departure, the philosophies and administrative techniques of Boasian anthropology had been firmly established at the Museum. Since this is not

intended to provide a precise chronology, events both before 1910 and after 1925 are mentioned, but the emphasis will be on events during these years.

I plan to focus on the political and scientific atmosphere in Canada in this period and the effect it had on the rationality of the National Museum. The most significant "truth" pervading the Museum's intellectual environment was the hegemony of the Canadian state over Indigenous Peoples, and this affected every aspect of the Museum's anthropological work. Interaction between non-Indigenous and Indigenous Peoples was catalysed by colonial expansion, which accelerated the growth of anthropology. Furthermore, the declining population of Indigenous Peoples in the nineteenth century, as a result of colonial policies, added a sense of urgency to anthropological studies. The position of Museum anthropologists as privileged members of an unequal political system greatly affected their view of Indigenous Peoples and their interpretation of Indigenous cultures in Museum exhibits.

The first two chapters will examine the relationship between the Museum and the federal government and its effect on the Museum's practices. Borrowing from Noam Chomsky's institutional critique of the American media, these chapters will examine the "filters" which influenced the Museum's anthropological activities. The next three chapters will examine the dominant anthropological theories of the time, and especially the assumptions and methodologies of Boasian anthropology, of which Sapir was a student. Chapter five will focus on the subject of "collection," examining the direct effects of the

colonial situation on the purchase and theft of Indigenous material culture. The final chapter will look at the exhibition practices of the Museum, and the fragmentary nature of object-oriented museum display, which bases understanding of a culture on "attentive looking" at isolated objects.

CHAPTER I: PROPAGANDA IN A DEMOCRACY

To a society proud of its democratic traditions and imbued with a sacred belief in freedom of thought, propaganda is anathema. The idea that propaganda is not only used on a regular basis, but is actually the cornerstone of a democratic society is simply inconceivable for most people; however, this is the basis of Noam Chomsky's analysis of the American media and educational institutions. He argues that the "manufacturing of consent"¹ is vital in democratic societies because the government and special interests² rarely have coercion and physical force as options to control the population. Controlling the flow of information and shaping its interpretation become vital because the government must influence what people think in order to control what they do.³

North Americans must realize that control of information and manipulation of public opinion are not practices limited to totalitarian regimes. It is necessary to analyse the many routes which information takes on its way to the public, and the filters which can eliminate facts that are considered

¹ This term was coined by Walter Lippmann in *Public Opinion*, (1922; New York: MacMillan and Co., 1961) and explored in detail by Chomsky.

² Chomsky uses this term to refer to corporations and their owners and managers, not to marginalized groups like women, people of colour, disabled people, etc., whose interests are considered "special," and not in the "national" interest.

⁴ Noam Chomsky, "The Manufacture of Consent," *The Chomsky Reader*, ed. James Peck (New York: Pantheon Books, 1987) 132.

unacceptable by the government and special interests. Chomsky uses an institutional analysis of the structure of mass media in the United States to examine the manipulation of public opinion through the control of information. Chomsky argues that the use of "selective, reshaped or completely fabricated"⁴ information is a "valuable mechanism of control, since it effectively blocks any understanding of what is happening in the world."⁵ This type of control is absolutely necessary to democracies, (as opposed to totalitarian governments) because "the state lacks the capacity to ensure obedience by force."⁶ It must control the thoughts which may lead people to action and may threaten the state's idea of the "national interest."

Chomsky challenges the right of political, media and educational elites to interpret the world for the public. He argues that the public is perfectly capable of understanding and analyzing complex questions of government policy, but that its attention is intentionally diverted from questions of importance.⁷ In the case of the contemporary United States, for example, this means the media will focus on problems in Central America or the Middle East, and not on American institutions and "their systematic functioning and behaviour, the real source of a great deal of violence and suffering in the

⁴ Chomsky, "Manufacture" 124.

⁵ Chomsky, "Manufacture" 124.

⁶ Chomsky, "Manufacture" 132.

⁷ Chomsky, "Manufacture" 124.

world."⁸ The political system gives individuals little opportunity to effect real change, and this sense of impotence together with the manipulation of information by the media and government causes the public to focus its intellectual and analytical skills on politically irrelevant issues, like sports.

This is an area

which has no meaning and probably thrives because it has no meaning, as a displacement from the serious problems which one cannot influence and affect because the power happens to lie elsewhere.⁹

Chomsky believes that the self-appointed intelligent minority is a barrier to increased understanding of complex issues, and not a necessary aid.

Chomsky does not see the role of the mainstream media in furthering the agendas of the state as a conspiracy. Instead, he presents an institutional critique which explains the levers of wealth and power which affect media's interests and choices in news coverage.

Most biased choices in media arise from the preselection of right-thinking people, internalized preconceptions, and the adaption of personnel to the constraints of ownership, organization, market and political power.¹⁰

⁸ Chomsky, "Manufacture" 124.

⁹ Noam Chomsky, "Interview," *The Chomsky Reader*, ed. James Peck (New York: Pantheon Books, 1987) 33.

¹⁰ Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988) xii.

In explaining his propaganda model, Chomsky describes these "constraints" as "filters." The concentration of ownership and wealth in mass-media corporations; advertising as the primary income source; reliance on government, business and "experts" supported by agents of power for information; "flak" as a means of discipline; and "anticommunism" as a national religion, all serve to "filter out the news fit to print, marginalize dissent, and allow the government and dominant public interests to get their messages across to the public."¹¹ In the propaganda model, each filter is an additional barrier added to the most basic one of not having been present to personally observe an event. Each filter removes the public further from the original event, by allowing an additional layer of interpretation on the original information and with that, an additional opportunity to interpret it according to accepted ideas.

The filters discussed above are specific to contemporary North American mass media, but elements of Chomsky's analysis of the control and manipulation of information can also be applied to academia. He suggests that the "intellectual elite is the most heavily indoctrinated sector [of the population]."¹² In their role as a "secular priesthood", they act as "guardians of the faith."¹³ This faith means different things to different academic

¹¹ Chomsky, *Consent* 2.

¹² Chomsky, "Interview" 35.

¹³ Chomsky, "Interview" 35.

disciplines, but it can encompass anything from an interpretation of history which adamantly denies the contributions of women or people of colour, to an interpretation of medicine which disregards any solutions other than pharmaceutical ones. When these ideas are internalized among "experts" in a particular field, anyone with views or research which challenge the articles of faith will be filtered out by what Chomsky calls the "professional guild structure"¹⁴ of academia.

The "faith" which intellectuals protect can also include the "national religion" which Chomsky cites as one of the filters affecting the mass media. The academics in the area of historical study are often influential in preserving and protecting this religion. The events of history can be manipulated to justify the current national interest. Eric Willmot discusses the need of humans to construct a past.

We, as human beings live in a flat time world,
our total reality is only an instant thick.
Nevertheless, it is the nature of human beings
to want to build around us a round world, to
push our reality forward and backwards through
dimensions which ceased to exist or which do
not yet exist, to create an intellectually,
and emotionally satisfying living space.¹⁵

When constructing a satisfying world in the backwards direction, one must deal with conflict between known facts and truths that may not be compatible

¹⁴ Chomsky, "Interview" 30.

¹⁵ Eric Willmot, "The Dragon Principle," *Who Owns The Past?: Papers from the Annual Symposium of the Australian Academy of the Humanities*, ed. Isabel McBryde (Melbourne: Oxford UP, 1985) 41.

with present values and opinions. Furthermore, as contemporary historians are realizing, it is difficult to construct a truth that is "emotionally satisfying" to all elements of the population. One person's truth may exclude or denigrate a large portion of the population.

In order to create a history that is both durable and unquestionable, two steps must be taken.

These two elements consist firstly of constructing some kind of a story to describe and explain the past, and secondly to erect a custodian or a holder of this postulated truth.¹⁶

This role of "custodian" is analogous to Chomsky's idea of "guardian of the faith." The duty of the "guardian-keeper"¹⁷ is to indoctrinate the public with the truths of the constructed history. Willmot calls this the "Dragon Principle"¹⁸ because information (and sometimes objects) are hoarded in the same way a dragon hoards jewels. Willmot discusses this in terms of Australia's Indigenous Peoples:

With all good intentions they [European-Australians] gathered the treasures of Australia's past to themselves, bestowed it on their own, but excluded the people whose birthright they had collected.¹⁹

¹⁶ Willmot 42.

¹⁷ Willmot 44.

¹⁸ Willmot 45.

¹⁹ Willmot 44.

In this case, the collection is of both information and material culture, and it is studied and interpreted within the paradigm of European-Australian hegemony. The role of the guardian-keepers is to ensure that only one version of history is accepted as legitimate.

Through the Dragon Principle, the possession and dissemination of the dominant group's idea of past events, academia practices the same engineering of consent that Chomsky analyses in the American mass media. Once again, this is not a conspiracy. When these views are fully internalized, they seem to be the objective truth to intellectuals and journalists. While there are independent minded people who are critical of the official story (whether it is a story of history or of contemporary politics), they are filtered out through various means. For those who remain as gate-keepers of information, "the norm is obedience, adoption of uncritical attitudes, taking the easy path of self-deception."²⁰ These closely guarded ideas, whether an interpretation of history or a political ideology, become what Chomsky calls the "state religion."²¹

A framework for possible thought [is established] that is constrained within the principles of the state religion. These need not be asserted; it is better that they be presupposed, as the unstated framework for thinkable thought.²²

²⁰ Chomsky, "Interview" 39.

²¹ Chomsky, "Manufacture" 132.

²² Chomsky, "Manufacture" 132.

This state religion becomes the filter through which all information is interpreted.

Chomsky's institutional critique and Willmot's Dragon Principle can be applied as effectively to museums as to academia in general. Museums, in themselves, are a "potent social metaphor and. . . a means whereby societies represent their relationship to their own history and to that of other countries."²³ Certainly all the powerful national symbols and articles of faith which affect interpretation of information in the media are present in the museum as well. The display of artifacts, however, lends an additional veracity to the version of history being presented. Faith that empirical evidence, whether in the form of data or of museum artifact, is unequivocal, is one of the many myths on which modern democratic society relies.

Every museum exhibition, whatever its overt subject, inevitably draws on the cultural assumptions and resources of the people who make it. Decisions are made to emphasize one element and downplay others, to assert some truths and to ignore others. The assumptions underlying these decisions vary according to culture and over time, place, and type of museum or exhibit. ²⁴

²³ Robert Lumley, introduction, *The Museum-Time Machine: Putting Cultures on Display*, ed. Lumley (London: Comedia/Routledge, 1988) 2.

²⁴ Ivan Karp and Steven Levine, introduction, *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, eds. Karp and Levine (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991) 1.

Museums are as apt to distort information as any institution run by human beings with built-in prejudices, ideas and beliefs. In fact, the barriers of time and place are much greater between contemporary museum-goers and the artifacts from ancient cultures which are on display, than between the public and a local or national news event. Therefore, there is ample opportunity for manipulation of information.

A critical analysis of museums which examines them in their cultural and historical context, is necessary in order to understand that the barriers which exist between the museum goer and the artifact encompass more than a glass case. At every step in the process of setting up an exhibition--from its conception, to collection of material, to interpretation through display and descriptive labels--another filter is added which further separates the museum visitor from the original scene of action. The artifacts in the museum are given a meaning beyond their significance as objects of material culture, or objects with aesthetic value.²⁵

Objects are brought together not simply
for the sake of their physical manifestation
or juxtaposition, but because they are
part of a story one is trying to tell.²⁶

They become part of a discourse which is specific to the museum itself, and is composed of the ideas, biases and interpretations of the people involved. The

²⁵ Peter Vergo, "The Reticent Object," *The New Museology*, ed. Vergo (London: Reaktion Books, 1989) 46.

²⁶ Vergo 46.

artifact on display, no matter how concrete in appearance, is ambiguous in meaning: it means whatever the exhibit's creators intend it to mean. Museum exhibits must be read as critically and questioned as thoroughly as any information presented to the public by the guardians of history or by gatekeepers of information.

Museums are of particular interest to those concerned with the manufacture of consent in democratic states, because these institutions are often established and funded by the state, itself. While the media, and to some extent academia, can claim an objectivity which comes from a degree of financial independence from the government, museums often cannot. In fact, many are established precisely to celebrate the achievements of a particular people or polity. In this case, history becomes "a political resource whereby national identities are constructed and forms of power and privilege justified and celebrated."²⁷ The Dragon Principle ensures that only the official version of history will be protected and passed on, and state-funded museums ensure that this version is accessible to many citizens. Even when there are honest efforts by museum staff to strive for objectivity and present aspects of history which may be critical of the state, powerful filters are in place. The museum can, in fact, become the education arm of the state.

It would seem then that the accepted picture of freedom of thought and information in democratic societies is at odds with the reality.

²⁷ Lumley 2.

The democratic postulate is that the media are independent and committed to discovering and reporting the truth, and that they do not merely reflect the world as powerful groups wish it to be perceived.²⁸

The same independence of thought and objectivity is claimed by academics. Barriers of time, place and complexity can keep the public from experiencing events directly and these barriers are augmented by filters of wealth and power. Finally, most information, whether of a journalistic or academic nature, is viewed through the narrow framework of the "national religion." All these elements combine to seriously compromise the revelation of truth in reportage or scholarship.

²⁸ Chomsky, *Consent* xi.

CHAPTER II: THE FILTERED OUTLOOK

I propose to use Chomsky's institutional critique to analyze the National Museum of Canada's relationship with the federal government throughout the years from 1910 to 1925. The Museum and its parent body, the Geological Survey of Canada (GSC), were both established and funded by the federal government as institutions of research and public education. While this relationship with the government provided the Museum with necessary resources and a national reputation, it appears to have placed many demands on the Museum regarding its spending and its areas of study. It can be argued that, despite the intentions of those working at the Museum, these governmental constraints limited the independence of the Museum's research. In this respect, the Museum and its relationship with the federal government seems to correspond with Chomsky's propaganda model of the American media.

An examination of the National Museum of Canada will reveal filters which affected the freedom of the Museum's research. Although these filters influenced both the Museum and the GSC from the time of their respective foundations, particular attention will be paid to the Museum's anthropological research between 1910 and 1925. While the filters which affected the Museum at this time are not identical to those which Chomsky specifies for large media institutions in North America, they do correspond in function. Government

control through actual legislation, and through allotment of resources served to influence the choices in research and collection made by the Museum and the GSC. Chomsky discusses the use of flak to discipline the media when they cover stories which the government deems off-limits. Flak, or the threat of it, was also used to ensure that the National Museum pursued research which pleased the government. Furthermore, I would argue that the research and educational functions of the Museum were firmly placed within what Chomsky terms "a framework of possible thought that is constrained within the principles of the state religion."¹ Using specific examples from the early years of the Geological Survey and the National Museum, I intend to establish how these filters had an effect on their work.

¹ Chomsky, "Manufacture," 132.

Filter One: Government Influence Through Legislation and Resource Allotment

The relationship between the government (first provincial, then federal) and the Geological Survey of Canada was somewhat different from that of other government departments. A bureaucratic structure was established to administer the primarily individual research of the GSC's field workers.

As part of the Federal Government it was a line of organization, hierarchical and authoritarian; on the other hand the scientific inquiry was individualistic and cooperative as the need arose.²

The employees of the GSC and the Division of Anthropology enjoyed independence in the field, but experienced government constraint when they returned to Ottawa. There existed a "potential conflict between the anthropologist as scientist and the anthropologist as public servant."³ While scientific research was expected and encouraged, successive governments demanded that this research must benefit the Canadian people in some financial way. Certain governments were suspicious of funding scientific research for its own sake. The influence of the provincial and federal governments of Canada upon the National Museum and its parent body, the GSC, constitute the first filter in this rational history.

² Tom McFeat, "The National Museum and Canadian Anthropology," *The History of Canadian Anthropology: Proceedings of the Canadian Ethnology Society*, ed. J. Freedman (Canadian Ethnology Society, 1976) 151.

³ John Barker, "The Publication of *The Bella Coola Indians*: T.F. McIlwraith and the National Museum" (University of British Columbia, working paper, 1978) Used with permission. 1.

From its inception, the Geological Survey of Canada had been in the position of having to justify the utility of its programs and the value of its expenditures to consecutive governments. Governmental influence on the GSC has ranged from the explicit directives of various legislative acts, to the more subtle controls of financial allocations and governmental "attitudes towards its freedom of action."⁴ In a history commissioned by the GSC, Morris Zaslow concludes, however, that the Survey's

status as a separate department of government from 1890 to 1907 . . . left it relatively free except for the meagre funds placed at its disposal. The ability to communicate the results of its work directly to the general public in addresses and newspaper reports made the agency and its staff highly visible, and secured the backing of an influential, well-disposed public following capable of deterring governments from laying violent hands on it.⁵

This may have prevented "violent hands" from being laid on the Survey, in the form of major institutional change, but everyday pressure from the government certainly did exist.

The founding of the Geological Survey Museum (the precursor of the National Museum of Canada) in 1844, was in fact intended to alleviate some pressure which the fledgling GSC was feeling from the government. William

⁴ Morris Zaslow, *Reading the Rocks: the Story of the Geological Survey of Canada* (Ottawa: Macmillan, 1975) 513.

⁵ Zaslow 514.

Logan, director of the GSC, needed to impress the "tangible results"⁶ of his geological work upon the legislators of the Province of Canada who were hesitant to renew its funding. Logan may have envisioned the GSC as having "the increase of theoretical geological knowledge,"⁷ as its primary purpose; however, he was forced to design his Survey

to conform to the aims and outlooks of
those who determined its (and Logan's)
fate, namely the government and business
communities of Canada.⁸

The GSC was expected to balance its theoretical explorations with practical ones which would assist the mining industry in the province.

To convince the public and the provincial government that these economic ends were being effectively pursued, Logan decided to establish a small museum. In displaying the concrete examples of his fieldwork, he deliberately put the "economic specimens conspicuously forward:"⁹ large specimens would make the deposits seem more valuable, especially to those with little geological knowledge.¹⁰ By creating this new museum, publishing reports of ongoing fieldwork, and by extensive lobbying of business and

⁶ Zaslow 48.

⁷ Zaslow 34.

⁸ Suzanne Zeller, *Inventing Canada: Early Victorian Science and the Idea of a Transcontinental Nation* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1987) 53.

⁹ Zaslow 48.

¹⁰ Zeller 60.

political elites,¹¹ Logan was able to convince the government to grant the GSC permanent funding.

The original mandate of the GSC did not include any ethnological collection; however, in 1877 the Canadian Parliament made the GSC part of the Department of the Interior and encouraged it, through legislation, to collect "the necessary materials for a Canadian museum of natural history, mineralogy and geology."¹² Alfred A.C. Selwyn, Logan's successor as the GSC's Director, resented the expansion of the GSC's duties and felt that the main priority of the GSC should be geological exploration;¹³ the GSC Museum was still primarily devoted to geology throughout the rest of the century.¹⁴ However, as a branch of the Department of the Interior, the GSC lost a degree of autonomy. Selwyn could not overtly oppose the collection of natural history specimens, but he did advise his employees in the field to collect them only "when the doing will not interfere with the main objects of the exploration."¹⁵ This advice seems to have been followed, because before its Division of Anthropology was established in 1910, the GSC's anthropological and

¹¹ Zeller, discusses Logan's astute use of his social, business and political connections to achieve first permanent status, then an international reputation for the GSC.

¹² Canada, "An Act to make Better Provision Respecting the Geological and Natural History Survey of Canada, and for the Maintenance of the Museum in Connection therewith." *Statutes of Canada*. (Ottawa: Brown Chamberlain, 1877) 49.

¹³ Douglas Cole, *Captured Heritage: the Scramble for Northwest Coast Artifacts* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1986) 76.

¹⁴ Cole, *Captured* 76.

¹⁵ Cole, *Captured* 79.

ethnological collecting had been described as "spasmodic and entirely secondary."¹⁶

Over thirty years later, when the Division of Anthropology and the Museum had a program of ethnological collection and research, the government continued to influence its work. The restoration of Gitskan totem poles along the Skeena River provides a specific example of how the conflicting priorities of the Museum and other government departments affected the outcome of a project. By the 1920's, the totem pole was becoming an "endangered species,"¹⁷ the victim of acquisition by museums and private collectors, destruction, and natural decay. The public and various public institutions like the Royal Society and the Historic Sites and Monuments Board were alarmed at the number of poles leaving the country. Sapir explained the reason why non-Indigenous Canadians had an interest in this aspect of Northwest Coast cultures.

As our sense of historic pride develops, the old Indian landmarks will come to be felt more and more keenly as distinctive of our land. I am convinced that the sentimental

¹⁶ Canada, House of Commons, *Summary Report of the Geological Survey Branch of the Department of Mines for the Calendar Year 1910* (Ottawa: C.H. Parmelee, 1911) 7.

¹⁷ David Darling and Douglas Cole, "Totem Pole Restoration on the Skeena, 1925-1930: An Early Exercise in Heritage Conservation," *B.C. Studies* 47 (1980): 30.

interest in the Indian background of Canada is by no means weak nor negligible.¹⁸

These poles were now seen by many people as part of a *Canadian* heritage, not as belonging exclusively to the Indigenous Peoples who had originally designed and constructed them. Emily Carr believed that totem poles "should be to Canadians what the ancient Briton's relics are to the English."¹⁹ This is an example of the Dragon Principle at work. Non-Indigenous Canadians "have gathered the treasures of . . . [the] past to themselves, [and] bestowed it on their own [past]."²⁰ Totem poles are appropriated as symbols of ancient cultures to which non-Indigenous Canadians have no claim, and are displayed as trophies commemorating the colonization and marginalization of their builders.

Various proposals were discussed to preserve and protect these poles.

Sapir suggested purchasing them outright as Museum property so

the totem poles could, with the consent of the Indians, thus properly remunerated, be either left standing or, at the discretion of the Museum, removed to Ottawa or assigned to other museums in Canada.²¹

¹⁸ Canadian Museum of Civilization (CMC), Canadian Ethnology Service (CANES) EDWARD SAPIR PAPERS, Sapir to Charles Camsell, 16 April 1923.

¹⁹ Daniel Francis, *The Imaginary Indian: the Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1992) 31.

²⁰ Willmot 44.

²¹ SAPIR PAPERS Sapir to Camsell, 16 April 1923

Marius Barbeau, ethnologist with the Museum, whose area of study included the Skeena district, favoured preservation of the poles *in situ*. This was a novel idea, because poles had never been displayed by non-Indigenous people for a primarily non-Indigenous audience in their original locations before.²² *In situ* restoration was becoming popular partly through the growing belief that poles "lost much of their interest and value when removed from their natural associations with the native villages and individual families whose history they concerned."²³ More importantly, however, the completion of the Canadian National Railway had recently made the Skeena River accessible to the travelling public. The poles were now of significant value as tourist attractions. This proved to be the catalyst for the restoration of poles in this area. The clusters of poles on the Queen Charlotte Islands and on Vancouver Island, did not have the same commercial value, and they were not seriously considered for restoration.²⁴

It became apparent that the interests of the various branches of government with regard to the Skeena River poles were quite compatible. The Department of Indian Affairs wanted to preserve them as examples of Indian art, the Museum was interested from an ethnological standpoint, and the Parks branch and the CNR were interested in exploiting the tourist potential

²² Darling 31.

²³ Darling 31.

²⁴ Darling 48.

of the area. A Committee was convened with representatives from all concerned parties (with the exception of the Gitskan, of course): Dr. Charles Camsell, Deputy Minister of Mines (the Ministry responsible for the GSC and Museum); D.C. Scott, Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs; J.B. Harkin, from Parks; and Sapir and Barbeau from the Museum.

The "Totem Pole Preservation Committee" sent Barbeau to the Skeena district in 1924 to complete an inventory of the remaining poles and make recommendations on their preservation. Barbeau noted that the Gitskan in the area were suspicious of Euro-Canadians in general, and especially lacked confidence in any project proposed by the federal government.²⁵ He recommended that work should begin in the village of Kispiox, which had the largest number of poles of the villages in the valley, and whose people seemed more receptive to the preservation project.²⁶

In 1925, a team consisting of National Museum archaeologist Harlan Smith, and a CNR architect and engineer set out to begin work. The work was financed and supervised by the Department of Indian Affairs, with Scott nominally in charge.²⁷ The CNR provided "all possible RR facilities,"²⁸ including passes for travel. Smith was "responsible for general planning, for

²⁵ Darling 33.

²⁶ Darling 34.

²⁷ Cole, *Captured* 273.

²⁸ SAPIR PAPERS Sapir to L.L. Bolton, 22 April 1925.

policies dealing with Indians, and for selection of particular places to work out."²⁹ Despite Smith's freedom in the field, it was clear that his work was influenced by the Committee. Scott had written Smith that "it is the aim of our committee to preserve the poles and other objects that will be of interest to tourists,"³⁰ and Smith accepted this goal and worked with it in mind.

Smith did not begin at Kispiox, as Barbeau had recommended. Instead, he got "permission to do ten poles here [at Kitwanga,] on the Railroad instead of having begun far from the Railroad."³¹ In his report, dated 22 July 1925, he mentions plans for the removal of tree tops which "obscure [the] view of Gitseygucia from passing CNRy [sic] car windows,"³² the erection of directional signs for stopping tourists, and the building of a gravel and cinder path linking the railway station and the village, to make access to the poles more convenient.³³ He also recommended the sale of souvenirs such as "larger pictures and models of totem poles (good ones not fakes), bracelets, earrings, etc. as advertisement for [the] Ry [Railway]."³⁴

Sapir had hoped that this project would improve relations between Indigenous Peoples and the federal government. He wrote in 1923 that by

²⁹ SAPIR PAPERS Sapir to Bolton, 22 April 1925.

³⁰ Darling 35.

³¹ SAPIR PAPERS, Harlan Smith, *Report*, 22 July 1925.

³² SAPIR PAPERS Smith, *Report*, 22 July 1925.

³³ Darling 37.

³⁴ SAPIR PAPERS Smith, *Report*, 22 July 1925.

cooperating sympathetically with the Indians themselves, we are likely to secure their good will and to help somewhat to smooth over the regrettable misunderstandings that have arisen between the Indians and their administrative superiors.³⁵

During the first season's work in Kitwanga, relations between the Gitskan and Smith's team were good. All but one owner, Chief Semideck, allowed their poles to be restored. Smith wrote that he was "not asking permission of them as they are asking me to fix poles faster than we can."³⁶ This reception was not repeated in subsequent excursions to other villages. Late in the 1926 season, Smith faced opposition from Tom Campbell in the village of Hazelton. Campbell had a grievance with the government because provincial road crews had knocked down one of his poles and had not compensated him.³⁷ In Kitsegukla, in 1927, Smith was met by Joe Brown, representing the chiefs of the village, who presented a petition saying that the poles were not to be touched because they were "the only honorable [sic] property that remain in our hands."³⁸ They also hired a lawyer to protest to the Department of Indian Affairs.

The opposition of the Gitskan to yet another government intrusion on their land is quite understandable. They had reason to be cynical about a

³⁵ SAPIR PAPERS Sapir to Camsell, 16 April 1923.

³⁶ SAPIR PAPERS Smith, *Report*, 22 July 1925.

³⁷ Darling 38.

³⁸ Darling 39.

government which suddenly wanted to save a specific part of their material culture, after working for years to assimilate them into Euro-Canadian society. Smith cited some of their grievances.

The white men had settled on their land and were pushing the Indians more and more to the wall; they were cutting all the best timber in the country so that within a few years none would remain for the Indian; they sold whisky in Government liquor stores and put the Indians in jail when they drank it. A few years ago, they had prohibited the erection of totem poles; why did they wish now to preserve them?³⁹

Even the people at Kitwanga who had initially consented to the restoration grew disillusioned. They felt "that the C.N. Ry. Co. is getting all the successful benefit out of [the restoration project] and us people, the sole owners, get nothing."⁴⁰ They were quite right. Concern about the decaying poles came from many quarters, but the catalyst which began this project was the commercial potential of the totem poles. The committee and the field crew never lost sight of this.

Despite Smith's enjoyment of the restoration work and his desire to "do all 71 poles even if it takes 7 years,"⁴¹ he was replaced by the CNR engineer, J.B. Campbell after the 1928 season. D.C. Scott had little confidence in Smith, particularly in his ability to conciliate the Gitskan, and was happy to let

³⁹ Darling 39.

⁴⁰ Darling 45.

⁴¹ SAPIR PAPERS Smith, *Report*, 22 July 1925.

Campbell continue the work on his own. With Smith no longer involved, Deputy Minister Camsell felt that there was no reason for the Department of Mines (and the Museum) to stay with the project. Indian Affairs and the CNR took over entirely.⁴² By the time the project ended in 1930, only thirty poles had been restored. All of these poles were visible from the Railway, and only eighteen of the thirty were among those recommended for work in Barbeau's original report. It is clear that in this particular coalition of government, railway and Museum interests, those of the first two players were paramount.

These examples show that the connection between the National Museum and the federal government did have some effect on the Museum. It did not dictate specifically what the Museum should exhibit, collect or study, but it did act as a filter. Logan was considering the government's interest in the mining industry when he emphasized geological specimens with economic potential in his museum. Geologists under Selwyn were encouraged to collect natural history specimens, despite that Director's feeling that this was a waste of GSC's time and resources. Finally, the totem pole restoration project along the Skeena River demonstrates one undertaking in which government priorities (in this case the CNR's desire to encourage tourism) were always paramount. Despite Smith's supposed authority in the field, the project was carried out in a way intended to benefit the CNR. None of these incidents in itself proves

⁴² Darling 43.

undue government control over the GSC or its Museum. Together, however, they do establish a pattern of influence. The relationship between the federal government, the GSC and the Museum forms a filter through which decisions are made and through which information passes on its way to the public.

Filter Two: Flak

In his analysis of the contemporary American media, Chomsky explains flak as a means of disciplining the media for running stories which are considered inappropriate or contrary to the state's view of the national interest.⁴³ In the case of the GSC and the National Museum of Canada, this discipline could be incurred by research or publication which was not deemed appropriate for a government department. The main producer of flak was the federal government, the body which controlled the finances of the GSC and Museum. This financial control gave the government leverage to reprimand these organizations when they were perceived to have stepped out of bounds. One form of discipline was the government's refusal to publish research deemed offensive by Members of Parliament.

There were at least two works by Museum employees that were censored or withheld from publication altogether, because of pressure from the federal government. There was conflict over what the Museum, as a public institution, should publish. Anthropological papers

sometimes included explicit descriptions of sexual activities, human physiology, and other phenomena that non-anthropologists within the Museum found frankly pornographic and therefore unfit for publication by a government agency.⁴⁴

⁴³ Chomsky, *Consent* 2.

⁴⁴ Barker, "Publication" 6.

In the case of *Malecite Tales*, by W.H. Mechling, the government's refusal to publish the work was accompanied by threats to discontinue all Museum publications that did not comply with government wishes.

Mechling, an ethnologist with the Museum, wrote to Sapir in the early 1920's discussing the difficulty he was experiencing in publishing his *Malecite Tales*. It had been initially delayed because of a moratorium on government publishing during the First World War. In 1920, Sapir wrote to Mechling saying that the chances of publishing it were not good. In 1924 Mechling inquired about the possibility of publication, and was told by Sapir that it had been "accepted in its present form [sic] by the Director of the Museum, and has been recommended for publication."⁴⁵ He did mention that it may have to be edited, as "the chronic cry here is economy."⁴⁶ Although it was also approved by the Deputy Minister of Mines, Charles Camsell, it was rejected by an Editorial Committee. From Sapir's correspondence with Mechling and with acting Museum director L.L. Bolton it would seem that the only obstacle to publication was the manuscript's length. *Malecite Tales*, however, was deemed pornographic, because of its sexual references, including a legend of a "Talking Vagina."⁴⁷ Tom McFeat cites a "now forgotten source" which says that *Malecite*

⁴⁵ SAPIR PAPERS Sapir to W.H. Mechling, 22 February 1924.

⁴⁶ SAPIR PAPERS Sapir to Mechling, 22 February 1924.

⁴⁷ John Barker, introduction, *The Bella Coola Indians*, by T.F. McIlwraith (1948; Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1992) xxv.

Tales was debated in the House of Commons, withdrawn from publication and that all copies were burned by angry Members of Parliament.⁴⁸

John Barker documents the difficulties of another Museum ethnologist in getting his work, *The Bella Coola Indians*, published. T.F. McIlwraith conducted research among the Nuxalk (then known as the Bella Coola) from 1922 to 1924, and first submitted his manuscript for publication in 1926. In a letter to Diamond Jenness in that year, McIlwraith expressed worry that he may have the same difficulty getting published as Mechling, stating that *The Bella Coola Indians* contained material "of just the type to cause all kinds of inconvenience and unpleasantness."⁴⁹ He considered the use of terms like "*anus, puberty, sexual intercourse, ease oneself and sexual organs . . .* justifiable in a scientific work, and that to omit all references to such subjects would result in a one-sided picture."⁵⁰ Following Sapir's advice, McIlwraith had several questionable passages translated into Latin, but this did not meet with approval. Jenness cited opposition from the Supervisor of Government Publications, "who has the authority, apparently to refuse publication to anyone, [and] had ruled that Latin was no better than English and would

⁴⁸ McFeat, "National Museum" 166.

⁴⁹ CMC, CANES, DIAMOND JENNESS PAPERS, T.F. McIlwraith to Diamond Jenness, 8 February 1926.

⁵⁰ JENNESS PAPERS McIlwraith to Jenness, 5 February 1927.

admit neither."⁵¹ McIlwraith's manuscript was rejected in 1927 and again in 1929, despite extensive revisions.⁵² Jenness received

a severe castigation from the Deputy and Assistant Deputy [of Mines] for submitting a MS. to which the public could take exception on moral grounds. The Deputy [Charles Camsell] announced very emphatically that if the department published any report that aroused criticism of this nature all anthropological publication might thereafter be banned.⁵³

The Bella Coola Indians was tentatively approved in 1930, and then shelved because of the austerity measures of the Depression. McIlwraith finally managed to have his work published by the University of Toronto with a Canadian Social Sciences Research Council grant in 1948, twenty-two years after it was originally submitted to the Museum for publication.

The correspondence between McIlwraith and Jenness (who succeeded Sapir as Director) shows their conflicting views of the role of the Museum as a branch of the government. McIlwraith felt that if the public was paying for his field work, then it had the right to see the full results, not a version edited by non-anthropologists. Jenness, however, felt that government control over publications was an unpleasant fact that must be accepted.⁵⁴ Jenness wrote

⁵¹ JENNESS PAPERS Jenness to McIlwraith, 3 March 1927.

⁵² Barker, "Publication" 7.

⁵³ JENNESS PAPERS Jenness to McIlwraith, 30 January 1929.

⁵⁴ Barker, "Publication" 8.

Freedom of Research is not restricted, but the Dept. reserves the right of deciding what it is wisest to *publish* with the limited money placed at its disposal. . . It is not a matter of what is good anthropology, but of what is policy for a government department, what it may or may not publish.⁵⁵

The dilemma of a government employee trying to exercise scientific freedom is once again apparent. Jenness feared that Camsell's threat to ban all anthropological publications could go even further. He reflected on what would happen if

a member of Parliament criticises a certain branch [of government] and proposes that the money voted for its support be deleted from the estimates. It is quite conceivable that it may be deleted. Automatically that branch of the service is abolished.⁵⁶

As Director of the Division of Anthropology, Jenness had to protect the interests of his division as a whole, and in the case of McIlwraith, it meant sacrificing the work of one of his scientists.

One reason for the government's reluctance to publish works with explicit references to matters of sexuality and physiology was the wide distribution of the Museums's publications. Jenness explained to McIlwraith that *The Bella Coola Indians* would become "a Government report issued free to the general public, and the general public includes a considerable number

⁵⁵ JENNESS PAPERS Jenness to McIlwraith, 20 January 1929.

⁵⁶ JENNESS PAPERS Jenness to McIlwraith, 27 February 1929.

of school mam's [sic] who are continually pestering us for our publications."⁵⁷ Sapir dealt with the possibility of public disapproval by "routinely restrict[ing] any anthropological publications that might cause offence to a limited mailing list of anthropologists and scientific institutes."⁵⁸ The fear of flak from the public, which in turn could influence members of the government, caused Sapir and Jenness to limit the accessibility of their publications to the public, or to succumb to government pressure not to publish them at all.

Fear of flak also forced Museum employees to exercise some self-censorship if they hoped to have their works published. In 1912 F.W. Waugh was learning about the traditional medicine practised by the Mohawks on the Six Nations Reserve at Grand River, Ontario. He wrote to Sapir about the suitability of this material for publication.

There is a lot of what some might call vulgarity connected with the subject, and plain reference must of necessity be made to a number of objects which are seldom discussed in polite society. Will it be objectionable to mention these plainly in the final writing of the material? For instance I have remedies for gonorrhoea and syphilis and one or two love charms have vulgarity in them. . . I should like to know how far we shall be able to handle this from the shoulder. It is really a matter of interest and possibly the vulgar parts can be toned down sufficiently to make them inoffensive.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ JENNESS PAPERS Jenness to McIlwraith, 8 February 1927.

⁵⁸ Barker, introduction, xxv.

⁵⁹ SAPIR PAPERS F.W. Waugh to Sapir, 8 May 1912.

Although Sapir replied to this letter, he never alluded to Waugh's questions about publication; it is impossible to know whether he forgot to address this issue, or whether he did not know what advice to give.

Chomsky notes that "the ability to produce flak, and especially flak that is costly and threatening, is related to power."⁶⁰ The federal government's position of power enabled it to use flak in the form of censure, refusal to publish works it considered questionable, and in the unspoken threat of removing financial support. While the outright censorship such as that experienced by Mechling and McIlwraith was the exception and not the rule, the fear of this flak did influence the work of the Geological Survey and the National Museum and acted as a filter. Often the geologists of the GSC and the ethnographers of the Museum had to anticipate government intentions and values in order to avoid rejection of their manuscripts.

⁶⁰ Chomsky, *Consent* 26.

Filter Three: State Religion

The final mechanism of control affecting Museum activities to be discussed here is the filter which Chomsky terms the state religion. This comprises the beliefs which give the state meaning and coherence in the minds of its leaders and citizens, and it is used to manipulate knowledge by placing information in one particular context. The principles of this religion "need not be asserted; it is better that they be presupposed, as the unstated framework for thinkable thought."⁶¹ In Willmot's *Dragon Principle*, the custodians of history construct a vision of the past which justifies and perpetuates the beliefs of the state religion. Even critics of the state tacitly reinforce its religion because their critiques are confined to the parameters of acceptable debate.⁶² They question details of policy and of the mechanisms of the state while leaving the most fundamental beliefs of the society unchallenged. Chomsky argues that in the contemporary United States, the state religion is one of anti-communism, and he establishes that the information and analysis in the mainstream media is viewed through this filter.

I would hypothesize that in the case of nineteenth and early twentieth-century Canada, the state religion can be described as "nation-building." The continental expansion into new territory, which was a physical manifestation

⁶¹ Chomsky, "Manufacture" 132.

⁶² Chomsky, "Manufacture" 132.

of nation-building, included overt ownership of land through political annexation, as well as possession through exploration, mineral exploitation and the settlement of non-Indigenous peoples. This religion of continental expansion required the marginalization and, in some cases, the extermination of Indigenous Peoples living on territory claimed by Canada. In many cases, this faith lamented the demise, whether physical or cultural, of Indigenous Peoples, but it nevertheless saw their colonization as necessary in the face of "progress."

Any research done by Canada's scientific establishment in this era fits into this ideological framework. The men of the GSC and the Museum were products of their time, and adhered to the faith of Canada as a transcontinental nation. Thus, their work was both influenced by this state religion, and served to reinforce it. Both these organizations explored Canada's expanding territory, and brought information about the Indigenous Peoples living there and about the natural resources of the area to Canadian citizens. Public knowledge of this growing nation was shaped by the publication of GSC and Museum research. Even criticism of the government and its policies (especially towards Indigenous Peoples) voiced by members of the Museum staff were within the bounds of acceptable thought determined by the unspoken framework of the national religion.

As Suzanne Zeller suggests in *Inventing Canada: Early Victorian Science and the Idea of the Transcontinental Nation*, the growth and popularization of scientific study was one of the factors influencing the vision of Canada which developed in the Victorian period. Victorian science, and geology in particular, contributed to the idea of a transcontinental Canadian nation. The establishment of an historical and geographical unity for the continent, the territorial expansion inherent in Victorian inventory science and the pride stemming from Canadian scientific achievements all contributed to the doctrine of nation-building throughout the period. These ideas made a transcontinental nation seem natural and inevitable.⁶³ In this respect, science was used to legitimate the political aims of an expanding British Empire. The opening up (or the invasion) of the continent no longer seemed to result only from British political ambition; instead, it now seemed pre-ordained by nature. Canada was a geographical and geological whole from the Atlantic to the Pacific. The Geological Survey of Canada and its leading role in scientific research contributed greatly to the dissemination of these ideas, and the reinforcement of the religion of nation-building.

The scientific research of the period, much of it carried out under the auspices of the GSC, resulted in the intellectual "transformation of conceptions of what Canada--and Canadians--were to be."⁶⁴ It provided Canadians "with

⁶³ Zeller 8.

⁶⁴ Zeller 269.

not only the practical means to dominate their physical surroundings but also an ideological framework within which to comprehend the experience of doing so."⁶⁵ In terms of practical knowledge, geology informed Canadians of the mineral wealth and economic potential of their land. This was especially significant in changing the perceptions of the Canadian Shield, which had previously been considered a waste land. Geological research

enhanced public appreciation of the value of the land within Canada's boundaries. At the same time it exposed inadequacies represented by those same boundaries.⁶⁶

For example, the realization of the absence of coal in the province of Canada caused "some influential Canadians [to turn] their interest to territories far beyond the limits of Canadian settlement"⁶⁷ in order to find the means to fuel their ambitions. This encouraged the residents of the province of Canada to become more outward looking, and gave scientific and economic reasons for expansion, instead of just sentimental ones. While European Canadians did not have a nationality stemming from a common culture, they were developing the sense of one which came from common interests.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Zeller 6.

⁶⁶ Zeller 83.

⁶⁷ Zeller 60.

⁶⁸ Zeller 8.

The tendency to support expansion was rooted not only in the practical work of the GSC, but also was based in its scientific ideology.⁶⁹ The GSC's founder, William Logan, was a follower of English geologist Charles Lyell, whose uniformitarian approach to geology promoted an historical framework for study. It entailed "investigation of the successive changes that had taken place in nature over a far longer period of time than previous theories had imagined."⁷⁰ This encouraged study by historical period, rather than by geographical region, or arbitrary political boundaries. The natural phenomena that shaped North America's geological structure were common to all areas, therefore there was no scientific reason for the GSC to stop its field work at the borders of the Province of Canada.⁷¹ In 1861, the GSC offered free assistance to Nova Scotia in establishing a geological survey, worked with New Brunswick's geologist in 1864, and sent a GSC employee to conduct a survey of Newfoundland in the same year.⁷² The GSC may have been limited, by legislation, to the Province of Canada but Logan's adherence to uniformitarian geology was leading him to look beyond this boundary.

The historical focus of uniformitarian geology also affected perceptions about the land of Canada. In Lyell's (and Logan's) context, "North America

⁶⁹ Zeller 107.

⁷⁰ Zeller 43.

⁷¹ Zeller 53.

⁷² Zeller 108.

became not just a primitive, more barbaric version of Europe, but rather a unique and valuable repository of cosmological information."⁷³ Catherine Parr Traill had described Canada as appearing "newly formed" and having "no hoary ancient grandeur" in *The Backwoods of Canada*;⁷⁴ this expressed the sense of physical and historical isolation felt by many early settlers. With the exertions of the GSC and the publication of its reports, Canadians were now gaining a sense of appreciation for the age and geological importance of the land. Zeller argues that this brought Canada and Canadians into the "historical mainstream."⁷⁵ The Canadian Shield, now valued as an area rich in minerals, was lauded as "the repository of the earth's earliest life forms."⁷⁶ Canada's prehistoric significance was viewed by Canadians heady with the religion of nation-building as "a portrait of the country's future greatness."⁷⁷

Canada's new found pride in its mineral wealth and geological age encouraged it to see a new place for itself in the Empire. The GSC was "one of the principle agencies for publicizing Canada's natural resources at home and abroad"⁷⁸ and it promoted this "collective sense of pride, self-confidence and

⁷³ Zeller 50.

⁷⁴ Quoted in Zeller 50.

⁷⁵ Zeller 270.

⁷⁶ Zeller 52.

⁷⁷ Zeller 52.

⁷⁸ Zaslow 125.

self-respect associated with the land"⁷⁹ through its participation in international fairs and exhibitions. Canada's new sense of importance in the Empire received additional encouragement at London's Crystal Palace Exhibition of 1851. Logan, along with other Canadian geologists and mining companies, took the competition very seriously, and intended to impress the world with Canada's richness and scientific advances. Canada's display was extremely well-received, and was situated "at the right hand of Britain"⁸⁰ in the exhibition area. The significance of this placement and this new international prestige was not lost on proud Canadians.

Study of Canada and its geological age and richness had political implications, as did the methodology of that exploration: the method of research and reporting is at least as important as its content. The inventory science of the Victorian period emphasized mapping, cataloguing and categorizing.⁸¹ The science's practical nature appealed to the pragmatic Victorian mind, but it "masked the subjective social, economic and political interests of its proponents."⁸² While the placement of the disparate elements of nature into taxonomies can contribute to a better understanding, it also serves a much more fundamental purpose. Margaret Atwood describes the

⁷⁹ Zeller 78.

⁸⁰ Zeller 81.

⁸¹ Zeller 4.

⁸² Zeller 5.

settler as "a square man (sic) in a round whole"⁸³ who is trying to impose the "squares, straight lines, oblongs and similar shapes"⁸⁴ of Western culture on the curved and seemingly chaotic order of nature. Victorian science was able to make the continent seem less alien and threatening because it could explain natural phenomena, and in addition, illustrate how European settlers could make money from them. Imposing a name and a rational explanation on something (whether an island or a type of rock formation) is a form of control and a way of taking possession. According to the Dragon Principle, the person (or organization) who imposes names can control the public's perceptions and control any future study or discourse on the subject.

For example, the GSC was the first to explore Canada's geological structure, and it did so in the context of resource extraction and economic opportunity. This influenced the way generations of Canadians viewed the land and its purpose. Long before Canada possessed the Hudson Bay Company's lands and the North politically, it possessed them ideologically, through reading the GSC's reports which constructed a context for them and confined them within narrow scientific categories. These areas were seen as geological treasures to be developed for the good of the Canadian economy. They were not viewed as lands belonging to Indigenous Peoples who were already living on them and using different resources.

⁸³ Margaret Atwood, *Survival* (Toronto: Anansi, 1972) 120.

⁸⁴ Atwood 120.

The GSC's research was shaped by the needs of a growing nation.

In a young and only partially developed country such as Canada, with limited appropriations for exploration service, the energy of the G.S. should be almost wholly directed towards assisting in the opening up of the country, and in the exploitation of its natural resources.⁸⁵

This meant that the GSC would explore, survey and map ever broader areas, further assisting non-Indigenous settlement. Zeller views "exploration not as a series of isolated events, but as integral to the process of colonization,"⁸⁶ because it paved the way for settlement, and also because it defined and explained the unknown according to terms the non-Indigenous Canadians could understand. This led to the intellectual possession of the land as mentioned above.

Some expeditions, however, were more overtly linked to the colonization of territory by the Canadian state, than others. On one such expedition, the GSC combined scientific work with a very tangible extension of Canadian sovereignty. In 1903, A.P. Low of the GSC commanded the expedition of the steamer *Neptune* to the Arctic. More than merely a voyage of scientific exploration, the expedition would also establish permanent Northwest Mounted Police stations "for the collection of customs, the administration of justice and

⁸⁵ Canada, House of Commons, *Summary Report of the Geological Survey Branch of the Department of Mines for the Calendar Year 1908* (Ottawa: C.H. Parmelee, 1910) 2.

⁸⁶ Zeller 16.

the enforcement of the law as in other parts of the Dominion."⁸⁷ In short, it was intended to assert Canada's sovereignty over the Arctic islands, at the expense of the land rights of the Inuit living there. The membership of the expedition reflected its dual nature. It included Low and his assistant, a topographer and surveyor, a zoologist collecting for the museum, a botanist, physical anthropologist and physician, as well a Northwest Mounted Police staff sergeant and four constables.⁸⁸ The police were to open a post at Fullerton Harbour on the west coast of Hudson Bay to supervise American whaling operations in the area. Among other activities of the expedition, the *Neptune* landed at Cape Herschel, Ellesmere Island "where a document taking formal possession in the name of King Edward VII, for the Dominion was read, and the Canadian flag was raised and saluted."⁸⁹ Similar proclamations of sovereignty were made at Beechey Island and Port Leopold, Somerset Island. The members of this expedition would have no difficulty with a voyage combining independent scientific research and political possession of territory. The GSC and the NWMP provided, respectively, scientific and military manifestations of the political and ideological ownership of the north.

⁸⁷ A.P. Low, *Cruise of the Neptune: Report of the Dominion Government Expedition to Hudson Bay and the Arctic Islands on Board the D.G.S. Neptune 1903-4* (Ottawa: Government Printing Bureau, 1906) 3.

⁸⁸ Zaslow 173.

⁸⁹ Low 48.

Victorian Canadians dreamed of expanding their territory to include the whole northern continent. This of course, meant the invasion and occupation of the territory of Indigenous Peoples. Just as science was used to justify colonization of land, it was also used to justify colonization of people. If land use was determined by resource extraction and economic development, then Indigenous Peoples were clearly not using their land to its full potential. The colonizers felt that it was perfectly within their rights to settle and develop this land according to their own ideas of land use.

Willmot's Dragon Principle, in which knowledge is defined and controlled by a small group of guardian-keepers, was also at work with regard to study of Indigenous Peoples in Canada. The non-Indigenous settlers of Canada learned about Indigenous Peoples from the reports and publications of Hudson Bay Company workers, missionaries, government administrators, and later, from the scientists connected with the GSC and the Museum. These works, written in a colonial context, established and controlled the discourse about Indigenous Peoples. The process of naming and categorizing which had already taken place with respect to the land, was now expanding to include its Peoples. Indigenous Peoples were denied the privilege of naming themselves, and of interpreting and explaining themselves to the colonizers. Some of the ramifications of anthropological study of Indigenous Peoples will be covered in another section of this paper. Here, it is sufficient to note that early inventories of the Peoples inhabiting the continent were created in the same

ideological context as were the inventories of the land and its resources. All was done within the framework of nation-building, which encompassed expansion and possession of the land.

One of the most telling ways to see the pervasiveness of the state religion is to examine criticisms of government policies. Chomsky argues that even the harshest critics debate only the details or tactical questions of policy, while leaving the "fundamental doctrine"⁹⁰ of the state unchallenged. The same can be said of the Museum and its employees. Although they had serious criticisms of the government's prohibition of the Potlatch, these criticisms were still firmly placed within the framework of nation-building. The case of the Potlatch and the anthropologists' opposition to its suppression provides a powerful example of the pervasiveness of the state religion.

The Canadian government's policies towards Indigenous Peoples were shaped by the ideology of nation-building. Although many policies dated from the early years of British colonial rule, before the idea of a continental Canadian nation became dominant, they were consistent with the expansion of non-Indigenous settlement across the continent. Self-governing nations of Indigenous Peoples were perceived as obstacles to the inevitable goal of British (and later Canadian) possession of the continent. The many laws enacted over the years were designed to make the expansion of non-Indigenous settlement

⁹⁰ Chomsky, "Manufacture" 132.

smoother (for the non-Indigenous people) and facilitate the assimilation of Indigenous Peoples into a society marked by European, Christian values. By the late-nineteenth and early twentieth century, amalgamation through intermarriage and assimilation through education were the goals. Duncan Campbell Scott, Deputy Superintendent of Indian Affairs from 1923 to 1932, asserted in 1920 that the department's "objective is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic, and there is no Indian question, and no Indian department."⁹¹

It is significant that, regardless of the motives for the British and Canadian policies, they were couched in terms of protection of the Indigenous Peoples. This was based on "the sentiment that a superior race (the British) had definite responsibilities towards an inferior (the Indians)."⁹² A letter from J. Dawson to the Deputy Minister of the Interior in 1874, which advocated the prohibition of the sale of alcohol to Indigenous Peoples, expressed many of the beliefs of the time regarding their ability to conduct their own affairs.

It is quite evident that some legislation is necessary for the protection of the Indians. An interesting people, in many respects, but little in advance of children, have fallen, with all their virtues, and all their wealthiness, to the care of the Dominion. A new order of things is opening upon them for which they are but ill-prepared and the

⁹¹ Douglas Cole and Ira Chaikin, *An Iron Hand Upon the People: the Law Against the Potlatch on the Northwest Coast*. (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1990) 93.

⁹² L.F.S. Upton, "The Origins of Canadian Indian Policy," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 8.4 (1973): 51.

question to be considered is whether they are to be watched over and guarded until they can take care of themselves, which in the course of a limited period they will be, or left to the tender mercies of rival fur-traders and exposed to all the demoralizing influences which accompany the influx of settlement.⁹³

This idea of the incompetence of Indigenous Peoples led to the belief that they must be protected by the state, but they must also "be *reformed* according to White criteria and their labour, lands and souls put to 'higher uses' in line with White goals."⁹⁴ The belief was that they must be saved from the damaging aspects of non-Indigenous society, like alcohol, and indoctrinated with the valuable aspects, like a work ethic linked to wage labour.

Many laws were passed with the goal of assimilating Indigenous Peoples into Christian, British-Canadian society, and it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss them all. One Act, however, is important to note, because it represented a change in the goal of "civilizing" Indigenous Peoples. From 1830, the goal of Indian Department policies had been "the creation of civilized, Christianized, and self-governing native communities seated securely on reserves protected by the British imperial government."⁹⁵ The *Gradual*

⁹³ Public Archives of Canada (PAC) Department of Indian Affairs (DIA), v. 1923, f. 3007, S.J. Dawson to E.M. Meredith, Deputy Minister of the Interior, 9 April 1874.

⁹⁴ Robert F. Berkhofer, *The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1979) 113.

⁹⁵ John S. Milloy, "The Early Indian Acts: Developmental Strategy and Constitutional Change," *Sweet Promises: A Reader on Indian-White Relations in Canada*, ed. J.R. Miller (Toronto: U Toronto P, 1991) 148.

Civilization Act of 1857 (20 Vict., Chap. 26) represented a break with this goal, because it allowed individual Indigenous People to become enfranchised, upon meeting "standards for acceptance that many, if not most, white colonials could not meet, for few of them were literate, free of debt, and of high moral character."⁹⁶ Once an individual was enfranchised, he or she would be given twenty hectares of reserve land. The new goal was to civilize individuals, rather than whole settlements; in order to achieve this, communities had to be broken up even to the point of subdividing collectively held reserve land.

Indigenous Peoples were opposed to enfranchisement that meant partitioning reserves and relinquishing any link to their community and People. Dr. Oranhyatekha, of the Six Nations Reserve in Brantford called the Act

an ingenious provision by which an Indian has the liberty accorded to him of surrendering all his rights and privileges and the rights and privileges of his wife and children, for the inestimable boon of *paying taxes*, and being sued for debts⁹⁷

Between 1857 and 1876, only one application for enfranchisement was approved,⁹⁸ and it became evident to the government that other means of

⁹⁶ John L. Tobias, "Protection, Civilization, Assimilation: An Outline History of Canada's Indian Policy," *Savage Promises: A Reader on Indian-White Relations in Canada*, ed. J.R. Miller (Toronto: U Toronto P, 1991) 130.

⁹⁷ *SCA v. 1935*, f. 3589, Report of the Select Committee on the Affairs of the Six Nations Indians in Brant and Haldimand. Second Report.

⁹⁸ Milloy 150.

disrupting the traditional way of life of Indigenous Peoples must be used. In 1889, Hayter Reed, Indian Commissioner, stated that

the policy of destroying the tribal or communist system is assailed in every possible way and every effort made to implant a spirit of individual responsibility instead.⁹⁹

Only one of the policies intended to instill "a spirit of individual responsibility," the prohibition of the Potlatch, will be discussed here. Douglas Cole describes the outlawing of the Potlatch as the extreme to which the Canadian government was willing to go in exerting its dominion over Indigenous Peoples.¹⁰⁰ From the vantage point of the late twentieth century, this law may seem an extreme example of repression, but its intent was the imposition of the state religion, and it functioned completely within the goals of the various government policies which intended to assimilate Indigenous Peoples by destroying traditional communities and customs.

⁹⁹ Canada, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Treaties and Historical Research Centre, *Historical Development of the Indian Act* (Ottawa: 1978) 89.

¹⁰⁰ Cole, *Iron* 1.

It is difficult for a non-Indigenous person to understand and define as complex an institution as the Potlatch.¹⁰¹ George Clutesi, of the Nuuchah-nulth people, describes it as

the time when all ties of kinship were encouraged to grow, expand and extend beyond the mere security of relationship. This was the time when co-existence exemplified itself beyond the mere desire to be tolerant, to live and let live. This was the time to share your good fortune, wealth and affluence with your fellow man, be it your worldly belongings, your food or your good-will. This was the time when tribes of different dynasties were drawn together in one common bond--fellowship.¹⁰²

The festival was held so the people could witness and honour an event, such as a marriage, the assumption of a new name by a young person, or the erection of a totem pole.¹⁰³ Jim Quatel described how the chief recited his own history and that of his people, "not for the time being, but for all time, through countless generations [sic] which has come down to us all."¹⁰⁴ The hosts of the

¹⁰¹ The term "Potlatch" is an English distortion of the Nuuchah-nulth word *patshatl* meaning "gift" or "giving." This was adopted by non-Indigenous people because gift giving was one of the common features of these festivals. It is not ideal to use this term, but since each nation would have different terms depending on the particular ceremony, and because government, anthropologists and Indigenous Peoples, themselves, used the term "Potlatch" when discussing the legislation, it is a convenient omnibus term.
Cole, *Iron* 6.

¹⁰² George Clutesi, *Potlatch* (Sidney, B.C.: Gray's Publishing, Ltd., 1969) 20.

¹⁰³ Wilson Duff, *The Impact of the White Man*, Vol. 1 of *The Indian History of British Columbia* (Victoria: Provincial Museum of Natural History and Anthropology, 1964) 58.

¹⁰⁴ DIA v.3629 f.6244-2, Jim Quatel, Campbell River, B.C. to Department of Indian Affairs, 14 May 1914.

Potlatch displayed their hereditary possessions of dances, songs and carvings, and told the histories of their origins.¹⁰⁶ In this way, ranks and privileges were maintained and passed on to new generations. An important aspect of the Potlatch, and the one which legislators found most disturbing was the display and distribution of wealth.

The more [the host] gave away, the more prestige he acquired. Every person wanted to raise himself in rank, and most had some claim through inheritance to more important positions, but it was only by means of potlatching that one could assume and hold positions of high rank.¹⁰⁶

Such an institution, which brought many communities together several times a year, which reinforced traditional ties of kinship and rank, and which taught traditional songs and dances to the younger generation, was considered by the government to be incompatible with the propagation of Christian, British values and way of life.

In the 1870's and 80's, Indian Agents and missionaries began to present arguments to the federal government which opposed the Potlatch. Their opposition was usually based on three areas: health, morality and economics. There was concern about the spread of disease when people were gathered for days in close quarters which Indian Agents considered unsanitary.¹⁰⁷ There

¹⁰⁶ Philip Drucker and Robert F. Heizer, *To Make My Name Good: A Re-examination of the Southern Kwakiutl Potlatch* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1967) 8.

¹⁰⁶ Duff 58.

¹⁰⁷ Cole, *Iron* 18.

may have been a justifiable concern about the spread of communicable diseases, but to consider the Potlatch to be "the main cause of sickness and death among Indian children,"¹⁰⁸ as Cowichan Indian Agent, William H. Lomas, did, was certainly an exaggeration. The other health concern was that the accumulation of gifts necessary to hold a Potlatch was done at the expense of necessities, like food.

The objection to the Potlatch which rested on the grounds of Christian morality was the belief that it forced Indigenous women into prostitution. According to Indian Agents, this became a way of acquiring funds for Potlatch gifts. Philip Drucker claims that this objection was based more upon condemnation of prostitution and bootlegging by people of all races. However,

although they deplored it, neither officials nor missionaries could realistically hope to alter the white man's institutions of vice, [so] they chose as their target the potlatch, in which the Indian expended both his honest and ill-gotten gains.¹⁰⁹

There was also suspicion of the dances held at the Potlatch, which were considered debauchery by some puritanical Victorians.¹¹⁰

The objection to the Potlatch on economic grounds was considered the most serious by critics of the practice. As discussed above, the government

¹⁰⁸ Cole, *Iron* 18.

¹⁰⁹ Drucker 29.

¹¹⁰ E. Brian Titley, *D.C. Scott and the Administration of Indian Affairs in Canada* (Vancouver: U of British Columbia P, 1986) 163.

was trying to undermine the collective nature of Indigenous society and replace it with individualistic values. One step towards this goal was the introduction of wage labour and the concept of private property. In the view of the Northwest Coast Indian Agents and missionaries, the Indigenous Peoples in the area were beginning to participate well in the wage economy, and the continued practice of the Potlatch was the one remaining obstacle to their integration into the Canadian capitalist economy.¹¹¹ This argument was based on the idea that Potlatching kept Indigenous Peoples from work for weeks at a time, and that the lavish gift-giving undermined ideas of thrift. John A. Macdonald called the Potlatch "the parent of numerous vices which eat out the heart of the people. It produces indigence, shiftlessness, . . . and is inconsistent with all progress."¹¹² Assimilation of Indigenous Peoples meant instilling the British-Canadian values of steadiness, regularity of work and holidays, and thrift. According to legislators, "the insane exuberance of generosity which seems to be encouraged by these meetings"¹¹³ was not only wasteful, but was antithetical to the advancement of civilization.¹¹⁴ The Potlatch was banned in an 1884 amendment to the *Indian Act*, and in 1895,

¹¹¹ Drucker 28.

¹¹² DIA v. 3628, f. 6244-1, Superintendent General of Indian Affairs (John A. Macdonald) to Privy Council, 19 June 1883.

¹¹³ House of Commons, *Debates*, 7 April 1884, 1399.

¹¹⁴ Titley 163.

the Act was further amended to be more specific, banning any festival which involved the giving away of money or goods, or the paying of debts.¹¹⁵

As established above, the Potlatch was a festival which reinforced the social structure of Northwest Coast societies, but it also had an important economic function, to which most non-Indigenous Canadians were oblivious. The host of the Potlatch did not become impoverished, as non-Indigenous observers claimed. In a letter to D.C. Scott in 1914, the "Indian Chiefs and Subchiefs of Squamish, Musqueam and Kwakiutl"¹¹⁶ tried to end this basic misunderstanding of the Potlatch. They countered the idea "that we spend all our earnings, and waste our money away for nothing. But this is not so. What we spend is to be returned back sometimes [sic] in the future."¹¹⁷ Anthropologist Franz Boas described two economic functions of the Potlatch: debts were paid in public, and wealth was invested in the form of gifts, so benefits would be paid to the host, or his or her children, with interest.¹¹⁸ In 1913, when the Indian Agent William H. Halliday announced renewed enforcement of the 1884 amendment, older residents of Alert Bay were concerned that they had contributed for years to the Potlatch, and would not

¹¹⁵ Canada. "An Act to Further Amend the Indian Act, 1880" *Statutes of Canada*, 47 Vict., Chap. 27. (Ottawa: Brown Chamberlain, 1884) 107.

Canada. "An Act to Further Amend the Indian Act" *Statutes of Canada*, 58-9 Vict., Chap. 35. (Ottawa: Samuel Edward Dawson, 1895) 119.

¹¹⁶ Cole, *Iron*, 129.

¹¹⁷ quoted in Cole, *Iron*, 129.

¹¹⁸ DIA v. 3629 f. 6244-3 Franz Boas, "Twelfth and Final Report on the North Western Tribes of Canada, for the British Association for the Advancement of Science", 1898.

receive repayment now that they were unable to support themselves.¹¹⁹ What seemed to be inexplicable waste to the government, was actually a way of redistributing wealth to those who needed it.

The Indigenous Peoples of the Northwest Coast spent years petitioning the government and their respective Indian Agents to discontinue the law. They felt that those opposed to the Potlatch simply misunderstood its important economic role. They realized, however, that it was also part of a much wider policy. A petition dated 1914 stated that

many well-meaning white men believe that it would be a great thing for the Indians to have their tribal unity broken up, so that they may more readily adopt themselves to the ways of the whites, but we, who understand our people and have watched the fate of other tribes, know too well that the indian is doomed once he is cut adrift with out [sic] the restraining force of tribal traditions.¹²⁰

The fight to keep the Potlatch was part of a much larger battle to maintain their communal society in the face of government attack. The signatories to this petition expressed the hope that Edward Sapir, who had attended their ceremonies, would listen to their arguments.

Sapir was sympathetic to their case, and in 1913, when D.C. Scott began a new campaign to enforce the law, he opposed it, and lobbied Scott to have it changed. What makes this whole question significant, is the fact that Sapir's

¹¹⁹ Cole, *Iron* 131.

¹²⁰ DIA v. 3629 f. 6244-3, "To the Government of the Dominion of Canada from . . . ", received 14 December 1914. Poor copy, with names and signatures illegible.

criticism of the Potlatch law stayed well within the bounds of acceptable debate at the time. Although several members of the Museum staff protested the law on the grounds of economics and of religious tolerance, none appeared to have questioned the right of the government to govern Indigenous People at all and none questioned the inevitability that Indigenous cultures would soon disappear. With the pervasiveness of the state religion, it was inconceivable for them to voice their opposition in any other way. This is consistent with Chomsky's analysis of national religion as one of the filters in the dissemination of information. The parameters of debate are so well-defined in the national sub-conscious that it is almost unthinkable to go beyond them, even for critics of state policies.

In 1915, Sapir asked several anthropologists from the Museum for their opinion on the Potlatch law, so he could forward them to Scott. Several of their arguments countered the conventional objections of Indian Agents and missionaries against the tradition. In responding to charges that the Potlatch encouraged laziness and poverty, Sapir cited its economic importance as "naturally the weightiest"¹²¹ argument in its favour, and J.A. Teit stressed that it "incite[d] to thrift and industry and thereby to an accumulation of wealth."¹²² They also stressed that the Potlatch provided entertainment which

¹²¹ DIA v. 3629, f. 6244-f, Sapir to Scott, 11 February 1915.

¹²² DIA v. 3629, f. 6344-3, J.A. Teit to Sapir, 18 February 1915.

supplied "life and colour during the long, dark winter nights."¹²³ These arguments were fairly common among supporters of the Potlatch at this time.

The anthropologists also recognized the Potlatch as an integral part of Northwest Coast society. Teit called it "a part of the Indian organism, so to speak," the removal of which would damage the whole society. Charles Hill-Tout advised that it was "too intimately interwoven with the whole fabric of the old religious and social life of the Indians, to make it safe or wise to abolish it altogether."¹²⁴ Sapir warned that ending the institution would lead to the "demoralization"¹²⁵ of the Indigenous Peoples. Sapir's strongest statement against the law actually condemned the idea of enforced assimilation, a cornerstone of Canadian policy towards Indigenous Peoples. He said that it was "high time that white men realized that they are not doing the Indians much of a favour by converting them into inferior replicas of themselves."¹²⁶ The feeling among the anthropologists was that legislated assimilation was unfair, but also unnecessary, because the process was inevitable. In the last half of the nineteenth century, the "single belief dominat[ing] the thinking about Canadian aboriginals. . . was that they would not be around to see much of the twentieth."¹²⁷ By the 1920's, the Indigenous population was increasing,

¹²³ DIA v. 3629, f. 6244-3, C.F. Newcombe to Sapir, 16 February 1915.

¹²⁴ DIA v. 3629, f. 6244-3 Charles Hill-Tout to Sapir, 3 March 1915.

¹²⁵ DIA v. 3629 f. 6244-3, Sapir to Scott, 11 February 1915.

¹²⁶ DIA v. 3629 f. 6244-3, Sapir to Scott, 11 February 1915.

¹²⁷ Francis 23.

but the belief in their demise remained deeply ingrained, and non-Indigenous people began to lament the death of Indigenous cultures, rather than the death of Indigenous Peoples, themselves. This became an important facet of the national religion. It was considered lamentable, but inevitable, that Indigenous cultures would pass away in the face of civilization and non-Indigenous settlement. The anthropologists were not opposing the idea of assimilation, they were just pleading for time.

C. Marius Barbeau saw the relations of Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous settlers as "a deadly conflict between two cultures so different in every respect [where] the smaller one was bound to give way to the other."¹²⁸ Teit wrote from the Interior of B.C. where the Potlatch was already on the decline.

Those parts that lose their use value and become unsuitable to the changing conditions of the Indian's life brought about by contact with civilization and new social and economic influences and conditions, will of their own volition naturally drop out of use or be discarded. This process is going on in a natural way all the time. . . *Let it die naturally.*¹²⁹

Hill-Tout proposed directing this process, but in a more subtle way than through the Potlatch law. He advocated allowing the older people to

¹²⁸ DIA v. 3630, f. 6244-2 C. Marius Barbeau, "Prospective Monograph for *Native Property Rights and Transaction (Potlatch) Among the Indians of B.C.*", enclosure in Sapir to Scott, 23 April 1918.

¹²⁹ DIA v. 3629, f. 6244-3, Teit to Sapir, 18 February 1915.

participate in the Potlatch, while the younger people would be "weaned from the practice, and taught to regard it as heathenish, and savouring of savagery. Treated thus the custom would fall naturally into disuse. . ."¹³⁰ These members of the Canadian scientific community adhered to the state religion of nation-building, disagreeing with the federal government over the details of its policy, but supporting its intent, as well as the belief that Indigenous cultures could not survive within the Canadian state.

In Chomsky's discussion of the perception of the state within the contemporary American state religion he notes that part of "the fundamental doctrine [is] that the state is benevolent, governed by the loftiest intentions."¹³¹ Similarly, in the minds of enthusiastic non-Indigenous Canadians, the nation being created out of the "virgin soil" would be marked by tolerance and generosity, especially with regard to its less fortunate residents, like the Indigenous Peoples. Critics of the Potlatch law saw this legislation as an aberration and its harsh enforcement as a well-intentioned mistake. Sapir complained that Canadians "pride ourselves so much on tolerance in dealing with European foreigners, and so conspicuously fail to apply this same tolerance in dealing with our own aborigines."¹³² Harlan Smith appealed to

¹³⁰ DIA v. 3629, F. 6244-3, Hill-Tout to Sapir, 3 March 1915.

¹³¹ Chomsky, "Manufacture" 132.

¹³² DIA v. 3629, f.6244-3, Sapir to Scott, 11 February 1915.

"British fair play" to allow Indigenous Peoples freedom to assemble.¹³³ The anthropologists believed that the motives of the state were basically good, and none of them questioned the right of the federal government to be passing legislation controlling Indigenous Peoples. The idea of Indigenous Peoples as self-governing nations was simply beyond the parameters of acceptable thought, and was unthinkable and unspeakable in the minds of non-Indigenous Canadians.

Faith in the fundamental benevolence of the state was extended to include the individuals involved in administering its laws. Teit called it an injustice for "the Government or anyone else (however well intentioned) to try and abolish"¹³⁴ the Potlatch. Newcombe claimed that the "self-denying efforts [of the Indian Department and Missionaries] to raise these Indians are well-recognized by them."¹³⁵ Barbeau wrote that there is "no lack of good will and devotion on the part of Government agents and Gospel preachers."¹³⁶ Within the nation-building framework, even the most repressive Indian Agent was seen to be doing what was best for the Indigenous Peoples placed under his jurisdiction. Since Indigenous Peoples were considered to be weak like children, they must be disciplined like children. So even bureaucrats who

¹³³ DIA RG 10 v. 3629 f. 6244-3, Smith to Sapir, 16 February 1915.

¹³⁴ DIA v. 3629 f.6244-3, Teit to Sapir, 18 February 1915.

¹³⁵ DIA v. 3629, f. 6244-3, Newcombe to Sapir, 16 February 1915.

¹³⁶ DIA v. 3630, f. 6244-2, Barbeau "Monograph" in Sapir to Scott, 23 April 1918.

advocated the withholding of food rations on reserves where illegal dancing took place,¹³⁷ were seen as misguided but well-intentioned. The anthropologists' dissent was based on the idea that legislators and administrators of the *Indian Act* were only misinformed, and if they were educated about the Potlatch, they would change the law. Any injustice was inadvertent; it was not seen by the anthropologists as being inherent in the relationship between the government of Canada and Indigenous Peoples.

The letter of Harlan Smith stands out from the others as the most harsh criticism of the government. He understood why the Indigenous Peoples had little respect for "those missionaries and Indian Agents who, living in comparative luxury among them, [had] so little sympathy for them that they [would] try to abolish"¹³⁸ the Potlatch. He also saw the political oppression under which Indigenous Peoples were forced to live, being "a race which cannot hold land and has no say in its own government."¹³⁹ Despite these breaks with accepted arguments, Smith still subscribed to the belief in the inevitable demise of Indigenous cultures: "sooner or later his financial system must break down in front of ours, but we might at least leave him his drama and his own arts."¹⁴⁰ Although he criticized the political marginalization of Indigenous

¹³⁷ DIA v. 3826, f. 60511-3, Assistant Deputy Secretary to George H. Race, 26 January 1914.

¹³⁸ DIA v. 3629, f. 6244-3, Smith to Sapir, 16 February 1915.

¹³⁹ DIA v. 3629, f. 6244-3, Smith to Sapir, 16 February 1915.

¹⁴⁰ DIA v. 3629, f. 6244-3 Smith to Sapir 16 February 1915.

Peoples more harshly than the other anthropologists, he did not question its inevitability.

Despite the efforts of Sapir and his colleagues, Scott had no intention of advocating change of the law. Furthermore, the Museum's efforts were compromised by its status as a government institution. In 1920, Barbeau compiled a report for Scott on the Potlatch. Despite Barbeau's personal objection to the law, the report made no recommendations whether to uphold or rescind the law. Compiling information mostly from Indian Affairs files, and summarizing old arguments on both sides, he did not interview any Indigenous Peoples. The only hint that Barbeau might have been opposed to the law was that some of the arguments against it were italicized in his report, while those in favour were not.¹⁴¹ In an effort to shape his report for his Indian Affairs audience, Barbeau ended up with a document that did not express any of his own ideas on the Potlatch.

The awkward position of the Museum was mentioned in letters between Barbeau and Sapir in 1920. Before Barbeau headed out to Hazelton, B.C. for a summer of research, D.C. Scott asked him to report to him about any Potlatch activity, "but not to attract the attention of the Indians."¹⁴² Barbeau did not intend to act on Scott's behalf. Sapir responded to this by asserting that

¹⁴¹ DIA v. 3631, f. 6244-X, C. Marius Barbeau *The Potlatch among the B.C. Indians and Sec. 149 of the Indian Act*.

¹⁴² SAPIR PAPERS, Barbeau to Sapir, 7 July 1920.

there are to be no communications touching Indian affairs sent to the DIA without the consent of the proper authorities within the Geological Survey. . . I hate to have to make this rule so explicit, but I am afraid that if we do not follow it very literally, we will find ourselves drifting into the position of genteel spies for the DIA. We cannot afford to be misunderstood by any Indians in Canada.¹⁴³

In this instance Sapir and Barbeau were able to avoid being "genteel spies," for Scott and Indian Affairs, but two years later the Museum was put in the position of receiving confiscated goods for the Department.

Indian Agents had difficulty enforcing the Potlatch law for several reasons, and for many years, caused continuous, but relatively minor, harassment of Indigenous Peoples. This situation continued until the early 1920's, when William H. Halliday, Indian Agent at the Kwawkewlth Agency in Alert Bay, was empowered by a 1918 amendment giving Agents jurisdiction to try, convict and sentence people in their Agencies who Potlatched, and began to take action. The most notable of his convictions was of thirty-four Kwakwā ka'wakw after a Potlatch held by Dan Cranmer at Village Island in December 1921.¹⁴⁴ In the face of four Crown witnesses, the defendants all pleaded guilty, with a plea for leniency because they had pledged not to Potlatch again.¹⁴⁵ The RCMP Sergeant prosecuting the case, Donald

¹⁴³ SAPIR PAPERS Sapir to Barbeau, 7 July 1920.

¹⁴⁴ Cole, *Iron* 118.

¹⁴⁵ Cole, *Iron* 120.

Angermann, would not accept their signatures without "some tangible evidence of good faith."¹⁴⁶ They were required to surrender all of the ceremonial objects used in their Potlatch or face a jail sentence. Most of those who were convicted, as well as those who feared conviction complied. Twenty-two who did not were taken to prison in Vancouver in April of 1922.¹⁴⁷

The confiscated objects consisted of over 450 ceremonial pieces, including several coppers, hamatsa whistles and masks. They became the property of Indian Affairs, but the bulk of the collection was to be housed in the Victoria Memorial Museum. Sapir's correspondence with Scott discusses the mechanics of delivery of the collection and remuneration of the owners, but it does not mention the circumstances of its acquisition. Despite Sapir's desire not to be "misunderstood by the Indians of Canada" through inappropriate collaboration with Indian Affairs, he seems to have been willing to accept the surrendered objects. His letters to Scott do not mention his campaign of 1915 to change the Potlatch law, or his fundamental objections to it. It is difficult to hypothesize what Sapir's feelings about the Potlatch collection were. Whatever his personal reaction to the Museums' new acquisition and the method in which it was obtained, it is clear that as a government Museum, he was obliged to accept and display it.

¹⁴⁶ Cole, *Iron* 120.

¹⁴⁷ Cole, *Iron* 122.

The role of the third filter, state religion, is the most difficult to assess, because it is not evident in clashes with government bureaucrats, or in censorship and reprimands, but in an entire context for thought. It is certainly no surprise that the work of the GSC and the Museum reflected the national sentiment of their era. It would be more notable if it did not. However, it is important to identify the national religion which was predominant at the time, and enumerate how that faith was expressed in the work of the GSC and the Museum. Scientific study was influenced by and, reinforced faith in, the expanding state of Canada and its mineral wealth. In this context, Indigenous Peoples were seen as an obstacle to settlement and civilization. Although there may have been criticism of their treatment at the hands of the state, particularly in the instance of the Potlatch law, this dissent existed well within the safe boundaries of the national religion. As Chomsky writes, "the intellectual elite is the most heavily indoctrinated sector. . . [because] it's hard to be a convincing exponent of the faith unless you've internalized it and come to believe it."¹⁴⁸ The scientists of the GSC and the Museum studied the continent with the intention of exploiting its natural resources and studied Indigenous Peoples with the belief that their cultures would pass away in the face of progress: they could not study them in any other way. This was the only vision of Canada's future that they understood, and they conducted their research accordingly.

¹⁴⁸ Chomsky, "Interview" 35.

To understand any body which disseminates information, one must analyse all the filters which affect it. The National Museum and other institutions, as guardian-keepers of scientific and historic knowledge, had the task of interpreting information about Indigenous Peoples and the land of Canada to Canadians. As we have seen, this interpretation was influenced and shaped by various filters. The constraints of dependence on government legislation and resources, as well as the limits of viewing Canada through the lens of the state religion of nation-building, altered the way in which GSC and National Museum scientists studied Indigenous Peoples, their land and their cultures.

The GSC and the Museum had the credibility of both the state and scientific knowledge behind them, which made them powerful participants in the Dragon Principle of constructing and controlling one view of history. The social and political marginalization of Indigenous Peoples denied them the right to define and interpret themselves for the "official" history books. If their own thoughts on resource exploitation, non-Indigenous settlement on their land, and the prohibition of the Potlatch were able to reach non-Indigenous Canadians at all, it is unclear what effect they might have had in counteracting the information control of the Dragon Principle. Speaking without the official sanction of the state or of science, speaking across barriers of geography and cultural difference, the words of Indigenous Peoples were

coming from beyond the pale of the religion of nation-building and, as such, would have been unintelligible to non-Indigenous Canadians.

An institutional critique of the National Museum during its formative years illustrates that it, and the GSC, were instrumental in furthering the colonial policies of the Canadian government. Scientific research reinforced the ideas that resources were only valuable if they were being exploited and that land was only valuable if it was being settled. Because Indigenous Peoples were not perceived to be participating in either project, they were obstacles to industrialization and "progress." If anthropologists at the Museum argued in favour of a more just treatment of Indigenous Peoples, it was based on the idea that their culture would soon disappear, regardless of government policy. This faith in the demise of Indigenous cultures was central to their anthropological work, and will be explored in chapter four.

CHAPTER III: DESCRIBING THE "OTHER:"

THE LIMITS OF BOASIAN ANTHROPOLOGY

The anthropologists of the National Museum of Canada had the difficult role of being civil servants as well as independent scientists. We have already seen the effect that its relationship with the federal government and the adherence of its staff to the state religion had on the Museum's undertakings. In addition to these influences, the anthropological training of Edward Sapir and his staff provided its own framework for the study of Indigenous Peoples. As students or followers of Franz Boas, they were trained in the school of relativist anthropology which represented a major break with the evolutionary anthropologists of the nineteenth century.

Boasian anthropology rejected the notion of a single evolutionary line with humanity advancing from the most primitive to the most advanced societies. It espoused a cultural relativism which recognized that each society has its own system of values, and could not be evaluated by another group's standards of morality and propriety.¹ While Boasian anthropology did not support a hierarchy of cultures like its antecedents, it still presented the myriad problems associated with outsiders attempting to study "the meaning

¹ Bruce G. Trigger, *Natives and Newcomers: Canada's "Heroic Age" Reconsidered* (Kingston: McGill-Queen's UP, 1985) 113.

of the culture in its various aspects to the individual members of the culture;"² it still consisted of non-Indigenous people describing Indigenous cultures for a primarily non-Indigenous audience.

Although non-Indigenous travellers and missionaries had been describing Indigenous cultures for various audiences since the days of Columbus, anthropology did not develop into a scholarly discipline until the nineteenth century. This development was the result of several interrelated factors. During this century, the growth of worldwide colonialism meant that more and more non-Indigenous people were settling on the lands of Indigenous Peoples. This increased contact created a renewed interest in understanding Indigenous Peoples, especially since they were perceived to be an obstacle to imperial ambitions. Those interested in pursuing the study of Indigenous Peoples were aided by the security of person and ease of travel ensured (for non-Indigenous people) by a colonial infrastructure. Further ramifications of this colonial structure and its influence on anthropology and collection will be discussed in Chapter Five. Suffice it to note here that colonialism provided opportunities for anthropology to develop.

Anthropology was given a new organizing principle by theories of evolution, which became dominant in the nineteenth century. Theories which dealt primarily with biology or geology were soon applied to the study of

² Helen Codere, introduction, *Kwakiutl Ethnography*, by Franz Boas (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1966) xi.

human societies and cultures, with profound implications.³ Races were viewed in an evolutionary hierarchy with white Europeans as the fittest and most highly evolved. If Darwin's work could be used to prove that human beings were the end result of a long process of evolution, then it was a small step to see "the history of human cultures and institutions . . . in the [same] terms of genesis and growth, of transformations from step to step in a sequence of development."⁴ Evolutionary anthropology established an arbitrary timeline along which different cultures were situated. Indigenous cultures were viewed as representing earlier stages of development through which the superior European culture had already passed. They were seen as living examples of European society's early stages of development, and were considered technologically, socially and morally inferior to contemporary Europeans and non-Indigenous North Americans.⁵ This analysis of cultural development was based on several assumptions which ensured that Indigenous Peoples were always found wanting, according to any standards. Belief in the

uniformity of human mental characteristics
and abilities over space and time [which]
allowed the comparison of peoples regardless
of geography and history; similarity of stages
in the course of cultural evolution of all
peoples; and the use of European standards

³ Berkhofer 51.

⁴ Berkhofer 51.

⁵ Trigger, *Natives* 17.

and the idea of progress to measure the direction and the amount of development,⁶

ensured that the culture and society of the European and North American scholars would always be the paragon of cultural development.

In addition to the cultural ideas of evolutionary anthropology, there was a very strong racial aspect. Robert Berkhofer describes "scientific racism . . . [as] equating the cultural hierarchy assumed under the idea of progress with the physical and mental differences popularly believed to exist among human groups."⁷ Not only were Indigenous cultures seen as fragments of living pre-history, but racial theory asserted that they could not be "raised" from this state.

Natural selection was seen as operating to adapt human beings intellectually and emotionally to their social environment; hence primitive groups lacked the selection to enable them to cope with civilized life.⁸

The reluctance of Indigenous Peoples in North America to accept Christianity and non-Indigenous customs was not seen as a rational decision to reject these intrusions, but was perceived by evolutionists as stemming from a basic biological inability to adapt.⁹ Acceptance of the racist doctrine that Indigenous

⁶ Berkhofer 52.

⁷ Berkhofer 57.

⁸ Trigger, *Natives* 16.

⁹ Bruce Trigger, "The Past as Power: Anthropology and the American Indian," *Who Owns the Past?: Papers from the Annual Symposium of the Australian Academy of the Humanities*, ed. Isabel McBryde. (Melbourne: Oxford UP, 1985) 14.

Peoples were incapable of being civilized and could not survive the harsh reality of the "survival of the fittest," was a convenient scientific justification for the cultural genocide practised by successive governments in North America. According to this doctrine, they were only obeying the law of natural selection.

Although the theory of evolution stressed that humanity was always changing and advancing, paradoxically, evolutionary anthropology implied that Indigenous cultures were static. Indigenous Peoples represented one stage of cultural development, and because their abilities were racially based, they could not advance. Belief that Indigenous Peoples were incapable of future change and development, led nineteenth century scientists to deduce that their past was also without cultural change. A dichotomy was established between "history as the study of rapidly evolving peoples and anthropology as the study of static ones."¹⁰ Anthropology developed as the study of "geographically or temporally more remote people who did not have their own history."¹¹ Since Indigenous Peoples were viewed as having no history, and having a culture which was inferior to that of the dominant non-Indigenous culture, it was implied by this anthropological study that they

were more akin to the natural world than to civilized humanity. Moreover, like bison and virgin forests, they were a part of nature that had to be swept aside

¹⁰ Trigger, *Natives* 17.

¹¹ Trigger, "Past" 17.

if the manifest destiny of the white
Americans [and Canadians] was to be
realized.¹²

It is significant that the first ethnological research conducted in Canada was done by the staff of the GSC while they were studying Canada's natural resources and that their material culture were exhibited in a natural history museum. Nineteenth century anthropology was unabashedly a celebration of western European civilization. The study of "primitive" peoples was of great value only because it was supposed to reveal a great deal about the distant past of the world's "advanced" civilizations. Anthropology continued along these lines until the rise of Franz Boas and his principle of cultural relativism.

Boas has been called "the most important single force in shaping American anthropology in the first half of the twentieth century,"¹³ and since Edward Sapir developed the Division of Anthropology according to Boasian principles, it is worthwhile to examine Boas' ideas in some depth. He rejected the evolutionary and racist assumptions of his predecessors and stressed a cultural relativity which supported the worth of all cultures. He recognized that no culture was static, and explored changes within Indigenous cultures before contact and trade with non-Indigenous people. Despite these positive movements away from an anthropology which emphasized the inferiority of

¹² Trigger, "Past" 21.

¹³ Stocking, "Basic Assumptions of Boasian Anthropology," introduction, *The Shaping of American Anthropology, 1883-1911: a Franz Boas Reader*. Ed. Stocking (New York: Basic Books, 1974) 1.

Indigenous Peoples, Boasian anthropology still had its limitations, not the least of which was the fact that non-Indigenous People continued to dominate the discourse on Indigenous culture.

Boas rejected the rigidity of the evolutionary hierarchy by which cultures were evaluated and ranked. Instead of one line of continuous, uniform human development, Boas saw a "multiplicity of converging and diverging lines. . . [whose] striking feature seems to be diversity."¹⁴ He felt that anthropology should teach "the relative value of all forms of culture,"¹⁵ and that technological development should not be used to rank societies according to an arbitrary hierarchy. The change toward cultural relativism was signalled by the adoption of the plural form, "cultures," in place of the singular "culture." The former stresses the diversity of human groups, and rejects the hierarchical ranking that comes from equating "culture" with "civilization."¹⁶ Boas rejected comparison of cultures in favour of "ethnographic description in terms of the interrelationship of the parts of one culture."¹⁷

Boasians felt that in order for anthropologists to achieve an objective study of a culture group, they must evaluate it according to its own terms. Edward Sapir wrote that

¹⁴ Boas, "The History of Anthropology," *The Shaping of American Anthropology, 1883-1911: a Franz Boas Reader*. Ed. George Stocking. (New York: Basic Books, 1974) 34.

¹⁵ Boas, "History" 36.

¹⁶ Berkhofer 64.

¹⁷ Berkhofer 64.

the genuine culture is not of necessity either high or low; it is merely inherently harmonious, balanced, self-satisfactory. It is the expression of a richly varied and yet somehow unified and consistent attitude toward life, an attitude which sees the significance of any one element of civilization in its relation to all others.¹⁸

Sapir insisted that this notion of a successful culture had nothing to do with conventional European ideas of efficiency or civilization. He compared the alienated and unfulfilled worker of industrial society with the Indigenous hunter-gatherer.

The Indian's salmon-spearing is a culturally higher type of activity than that of the telephone girl [sic] or mill hand simply because there is normally no sense of spiritual frustration during its prosecution, no feeling of subservience to tyrannous yet largely inchoate demands, because it works in naturally with all the rest of the Indian's activities instead of standing out as a desert patch of merely economic effort in the whole of life.¹⁹

The measure of a "genuine" or successful culture was the emotional fulfilment of its members. "The major activities of the individual must directly satisfy his [sic] own creative and emotional impulses."²⁰ Although anthropologists in this era were always outsiders studying other cultures, Boas felt that "the whole

¹⁸ Edward Sapir, "Culture, Genuine and Spurious," *Selected Writings of Edward Sapir in Language, Culture and Personality*, ed. David G. Mandelbaum (Berkeley: U of California P, 1968) 314.

¹⁹ Sapir, "Culture" 316.

²⁰ Sapir, "Culture" 316.

analysis of experience must be based on their concepts, not ours."²¹ As long as customs or traditions made sense according to the culture's values, they were justifiable and not to be condemned by more "civilized" cultures.

In an effort to understand a culture in its totality, Boas rejected any study of anthropology which examined only one aspect of a culture in isolation.

By regarding a single implement outside of its surroundings, outside of other inventions of the people to whom it belongs, and outside of other phenomena affecting that people and its productions, we cannot understand its meaning.²²

Boas felt that ethnological classification which traced the development of a particular technology in several different societies over several generations taught very little about an individual culture. This method would view a rattle as the outcome of the idea of making a noise, and of the technology required to make it. It would perhaps miss the other cultural bases for its invention, such as religious convictions which require a rattle to invoke or drive away spirits, or the ornamentation which may be characteristic of the people who made it.²³ Boas saw "culture" as more than just the sum of its material parts: it was

²¹ Boas quoted in Codere xviii.

²² Franz Boas, "The Principles of Ethnological Classification," *The Shaping of American Anthropology, 1883-1911: a Franz Boas Reader*, ed. George W. Stocking (New York: Basic Books, 1974) 62.

²³ Boas, "Principles" 65.

the totality of the mental and physical reactions and activities that characterize the behaviour of the individuals composing a social group collectively and individually in relation to their natural environment, to other groups, to members of the group itself and of each individual to himself (sic).²⁴

Study of material culture was meaningless when divorced from its cultural milieu.

This desire to study cultures in their totality meant that anthropology had to embody more than a mere description of cultural activities or of material culture. The "domain" of anthropology, according to Boas included physical anthropology, "the biological history of mankind (sic) in all its varieties; linguistics applied to people without written languages; the ethnology of people without historic records, and prehistoric archaeology."²⁵ As Sapir illustrated in his work "Time Perspective in Aboriginal American Culture: a Study in Method," archaeological evidence could provide the "direct chronological testimony"²⁶ necessary to properly date cultures being studied. The other three branches provided what Sapir called "inferential evidence"²⁷ which could be combined so that a "'reconstructed culture-history' based on one

²⁴ Codere xiii.

²⁵ Boas, "History" 35.

²⁶ Edward Sapir, "Time Perspective in Aboriginal American Culture: a Study in Method," *Selected Writings of Edward Sapir in Language, Culture and Personality*, ed. David G. Mandelbaum (Berkeley: U of California P, 1968) 397.

²⁷ Sapir, "Time" 398.

kind of evidence could be 'strengthened and even reduced to certainty' by evidence from one or more of the others."²⁸

When the Anthropology Division within the Geological Survey of Canada was formed, Sapir followed these Boasian sub-fields with his selection of staff. Sapir's expertise was in linguistics and ethnology.²⁹ Marius Barbeau was his ethnological assistant and Harlan Smith was an archaeologist.³⁰ In 1914 F.H.S. Knowles was hired as a physical anthropologist. The staff was expanded with permanent and contract people as financial resources were made available, and this permitted the Division to cover these fields more thoroughly. Boas had established "a model of multifaceted research competence that influenced a number of his students and did much to maintain the embrative conception of anthropology."³¹ Sapir was one of Boas' students and thus brought his anthropological structure to Canada and entrenched it in the Division of Anthropology.

Another break with evolutionary anthropology was the refusal of the Boasians to accept the immutability of Indigenous cultures before European contact and influence. Boasian anthropologists studied the many ways in

²⁸ Regna Darnell, *Edward Sapir: Linguist, Anthropologist, Humanist* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1990) 50.

²⁹ In this paper I will keep with the practice of the National Museum in using the term "ethnologist," rather than social anthropologist. I will use the term "anthropologist" when discussing the ideas or methods which affect all branches of anthropology.

³⁰ Darnell 49.

³¹ Stocking, introduction 14.

which Indigenous cultures changed before European contact. They stressed the role of diffusion, the geographical distribution of cultural elements in bringing about cultural change.³³ Some scientists still believed that Indigenous Peoples were incapable of inventing anything significant, but could adopt the inventions of others.³³ Boas recognized the importance of the accretion of foreign material (both from other Indigenous groups and from Europeans), but he recognized that this material was "adopted and changed in form according to the genius of the people who borrowed it;"³⁴ Indigenous Peoples were not just passively accepting the inventions of others. If Indigenous cultures seemed static to non-Indigenous observers, it was only because they were stable, having achieved a successful adaptation of people to their natural environment.³⁵

Examination of evidence which proved geographical distribution of cultural material and established cultural change disproved the hypotheses of the evolutionary anthropologists who asserted that Indigenous cultures were static. Boas stressed the importance of inductive reasoning, studying observable data to induce scientific laws, rather than starting with a rigid hypothesis and selecting data to prove it.³⁶ Archaeology, physical anthropology

³² Trigger, "Past" 22.

³³ Trigger, "Past" 23.

³⁴ Stocking, "Assumptions" 5.

³⁵ Trigger, *Natives* 115.

³⁶ Stocking, "Assumptions" 12.

and linguistics all could contribute empirical evidence to these studies. However, ethnology, the study and interpretation of ethnographic description,³⁷ is not so easily measured in empirical terms.

Boas and his students attempted to make the ethnological study of Indigenous cultures as scientific and objective as possible. In an effort to record the "meaning of the culture in its various aspects to the individual members of the culture,"³⁸ they made extensive use of Indigenous "informants." In order to make his information as complete as possible, Boas interviewed several people on the same topics and collected information from people on the same topic at different times. The collection of texts, material dictated by an Indigenous person in his or her own language,³⁹ was another method used to strive for objectivity. In this way, the anthropologist's voice was not as intrusive, and

the points that seem important to [the Indigenous person] are emphasized, and the almost unavoidable distortion contained in the descriptions given by the casual visitor and student is eliminated.⁴⁰

With the use of extensive textual material taken directly from the Indigenous Peoples being studied, Helen Codere asserts that "the aim of obtaining

³⁷ Duff 7.

³⁸ Codere xi.

³⁹ Codere xiv.

⁴⁰ Codere xv.

A resolution test chart featuring various patterns of horizontal and vertical lines of different thicknesses and spacings. Each pattern is accompanied by a numerical value indicating the resolution level. The values include 1.0, 1.1, 1.25, 1.4, 1.6, 1.8, 2.0, 2.2, 2.5, 2.8, 3.0, 3.2, 3.6, 4.0, 4.5, and 5.0. The patterns are arranged in a grid-like fashion, with some patterns having multiple line orientations.

MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART
NATIONAL BUREAU OF STANDARDS
STANDARD REFERENCE MATERIAL 1010a
(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)

unbiased ethnographic data is as nearly achieved as it could ever be."⁴¹ By the standards of the time, Boas and his students were careful to acknowledge their sources, but authorship was considered to be entirely the anthropologist's, with the Indigenous collaborator as a "passive instrument for the recording of supposedly objective information."⁴²

Boasian anthropology represented a significant break with evolutionary anthropology which stressed a linear progression of cultures from the most "primitive" (usually Indigenous Peoples) to the most "civilized" (usually white Europeans). Boas established the ideal of objective research, based on inductive reasoning, empirical evidence and the use of "informants" from the cultures being studied. This, of course, remained an ideal of study. Despite honest efforts at the accurate recording of the ways of a people, research was still being conducted by outsiders and shaped by their ideas and assumptions.

⁴¹ Codere xv.

⁴² Darnell 78.

CHAPTER IV: THE SALVAGE PARADIGM

Despite the faith of the early twentieth century Boasian anthropologists in various forms of empirical evidence, an objective examination of another culture is impossible. Even the most faithful recording of interviews with Indigenous Peoples was influenced and limited by the questions asked by the anthropologists. Despite Boas' insistence on inductive methods which relied on observable facts, rather than on the "'premature' or 'arbitrary' classification"¹ systems of his evolutionary predecessors, objective analysis of another culture was and is virtually impossible. The decisions about which Indigenous cultures to study, which Indigenous people to interview, and which objects of material culture to collect were all influenced by the anthropologist's particular narrative. Edward Bruner sees ethnography, the branch of anthropology which describes Indigenous cultures based on observation and the testimony of Indigenous Peoples,² as discourse, as a genre of storytelling.³ All the information gathered is consciously or unconsciously shaped to fit the story which the anthropologist intends to tell. Whether the story is one of cultural hierarchy or cultural relativism, the process is the same.

¹ Stocking, "Assumptions" 3.

² Duff 7.

³ Edward M. Bruner, "Ethnography as Narrative," *The Anthropology of Experience*, eds. Victor W. Turner and Bruner (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1986) 139.

Bruner describes the dominant ethnographic narrative of the early twentieth century as one which saw contemporary Indigenous cultures in disarray, having declined from a "glorious, pre-contact" past. The future only promised assimilation into the dominant non-Indigenous society.⁴ This belief (which was not incompatible with the state religion's acceptance of the necessary demise of Indigenous Peoples) lent a certain urgency to anthropological research. Research consisted of "reconstructing culture areas, tracing the distribution of traits and describing the institutions of long-past cultures,"⁵ which was done at the expense of any study of contemporary Indigenous Peoples. This placed "genuine" Indigenous cultures firmly in the past, where they remained distant, exotic and marginalized "others."

This narrative created what has been called the "salvage paradigm,... a desire to rescue 'authenticity' out of destructive historical change."⁶ Jacob Gruber describes how "this tradition and the concepts and methodology that flowed from it imbued anthropology with much of its early character."⁷ An important part of this paradigm was a sense of urgency. The knowledge that the spread of non-Indigenous culture across North America was causing

⁴ Bruner 139.

⁵ Tom McFeat, *Three Hundred Years of Anthropology in Canada*, Occasional Papers in Anthropology, No. 7. (Halifax: Dept. of Anthropology, 1980) n pagination.

⁶ James Clifford, "Of Other Peoples: Beyond the 'Salvage' Paradigm," *Discussions in Contemporary Culture*, No. 1 Ed. Hal Foster. (Seattle: Bay Press, 1987) 121.

⁷ Jacob W. Gruber, "Ethnographic Salvage and the Shaping of Anthropology," *American Anthropologist* 12.6 (1970): 1290.

tremendous and irreversible changes in Indigenous cultures was not a new idea, but by the end of the nineteenth century, the destruction of Indigenous cultures and the demise of Indigenous Peoples, themselves, seemed imminent. "The obligation of both scientist and humanist was clear: he [sic] must collect and preserve the information and the products of human activity and genius so rapidly being destroyed."⁸ This desire to preserve the past affected what was researched and collected. The ethnographic narrative of disappearance was so strong, that even though the Indigenous population was on the rise by the 1920's, the belief that they were disappearing continued unabated.⁹

It was this sense of urgency which finally encouraged the Canadian federal government to establish a permanent Division of Anthropology within the Geological Survey in 1910. The British Association for the Advancement of Science had been lobbying the government intermittently since 1897 and in 1909 passed a resolution in favour of systematic anthropological study of the Indigenous Peoples in Canada which voiced the salvage ideas of the day. They resolved

that with the rapid development of the country,
the native population is inevitably losing its
separate existence and characteristics; that
it is therefore of urgent importance to initiate,
without delay, systematic observations and records
of native physical types, languages, beliefs
and customs, and to provide for the preservation

⁸ Gruber 1293.

⁹ Francis 57.

of a complete collection of examples of native arts and industries in some central institution.¹⁰

The Ottawa Association of the Archaeological Institute of America passed a resolution approving of the government's decision to establish the Division of Anthropology. They echoed the sentiment, "before it is too late," which Gruber calls the theme of salvage anthropology.¹¹ Information about and material culture of Indigenous Peoples

must be collected now or be forever lost...
it must be regarded as the duty of the present generation of Canadians to collect and preserve such information and such illustrative material for future generations, who will be unable to secure it for themselves.¹²

These statements contain many of the key ideas of the salvage paradigm. The loss of the "separate existence and characteristics" of Indigenous Peoples was "inevitable," and it was the "duty of the present generation" of non-Indigenous people to preserve them for the future. This preservation must take the form of a "complete collection," representing Boas' ideas of culture in its totality, not just isolated elements. Anthropologists were on a mission to preserve parts of a rapidly disappearing past.

¹⁰ CMC Ethnology Division (I-A-221M) Box 231 Folder 6 Anthropology Section of the British Association for the Advancement of Science "Resolution" Winnipeg 1909.

¹¹ Gruber 1296.

¹² CMC Ethnology Division (I-A-221M) Box 231 Folder 6. Ottawa Society of the Archaeological Institute of America.

The work of Sapir and his staff was also situated within the salvage paradigm. In his "Anthropological Survey of Canada," one of his first articles as Director of the new Division of Anthropology, Sapir established the challenges facing him and his staff. He cautioned that "in some cases a tribe has already practically given up its aboriginal culture and what can be obtained is merely that which the older men [sic] still remember and care to impart."¹³ The Geological Survey's *Summary Report* for 1910 declared that anthropological work must be carried out more vigorously than in the past because unless material culture was collected it would "be lost forever, and the succeeding generations of Canadians [would] search in vain for authentic information concerning the native races of their country."¹⁴ It should be noted that in this case, and in the quotations above, knowledge was being preserved for future generations of non-Indigenous Canadians, not for Indigenous Peoples to preserve and protect their customs. As in the case of the totem poles, Indigenous cultures now seemed part of Canada's heritage; the study of them was intended to educate and inspire non-Indigenous Canadians and had little to do with the Indigenous Peoples, themselves.

These excerpts reveal some of the assumptions of the salvage paradigm. Sapir mentioned Indigenous communities who had given up their "aboriginal culture." This stressed that the standard of what was to be considered genuine

¹³ Edward Sapir, "An Anthropological Survey of Canada," *Science* 34 (1911): 793.

¹⁴ *Summary Report, 1910* 7.

Indigenous culture was set by non-Indigenous anthropologists, and the benchmark was based on the ideal of the "pre-contact" past. Sapir, himself, admitted that this past was difficult to document, with research being based on the memories of people, rather than on the present way they lived their lives. Since salvage was concerned with loss and extinction, contemporary Indigenous societies were only studied in these terms. The "pathology of culture loss"¹⁵ ensured that disorganization of contemporary societies would be stressed over positive characteristics like a strong sense of community, or survival and adaption of traditions in the face of oppression. An impossible standard of the idealized "pre-contact" past was established, and all contemporary Indigenous cultures were found wanting by the anthropologists studying them. The work of Sapir's staff, and that of anthropologists in general during this period, focused on "reconstructing culture areas, tracing the distribution of traits and describing the institutions of long-past cultures."¹⁶ This was done at the expense of any study of contemporary cultures, because they were considered acculturated and indelibly marked with non-Indigenous customs. James Clifford cites one reason for this obsession with documenting the past. Since "our dominant temporal sense is historical, assumed to be linear and non-repeatable,"¹⁷ we make great efforts through museums, archives and other

¹⁵ Gruber 1297.

¹⁶ McFeat, "Three Hundred" np.

¹⁷ Clifford, "Other" 121.

organizations to redeem and preserve an authentic past. The concern that Indigenous cultures were disappearing altogether accentuated this tendency to focus on the past.

Deborah Doxtator discusses the different ideas of the past expressed by non-Indigenous curators and Indigenous Peoples. She says that for non-Indigenous Peoples, the past is separate from the present, and "there is a notion of progression, and an idea that certain things have been left behind forever, as if as a result of time they belong now to a different world or culture."¹⁸ Museums reflect this, with the past presented in isolation from the present. To Indigenous Peoples, the past is not as distinct. Although the outward expression of traditions may change, "the relevancy and usefulness of Native philosophies and ways of relating to the world are not dependant upon chronological time."¹⁹ This focus by anthropologists on a linear past denied Indigenous cultures the right to change and develop without losing their "authenticity."

The salvage paradigm was also based on the assumption that Indigenous Peoples were unable or unwilling to protect and preserve their own culture. It was the "duty of the present generation of Canadians" (read educated, non-Indigenous Canadians) to collect and preserve information and material culture for future (educated and non-Indigenous) generations. There was no

¹⁸ Deborah Doxtator, "The Home of Indian Culture and Other Stories in the Museum," *Muse* 6.3 (1988): 27.

¹⁹ Doxtator 27.

discussion of future generations of Indigenous Peoples and what their interest in this cultural material may be. Anthropologists felt that since contemporary Indigenous Peoples had given up their "aboriginal culture" anyway, they certainly had no need for the objects of material culture. Virginia Dominguez states that an assumption of superiority is inherent in the idea of salvage.

When we assert the need to salvage, rescue, save, preserve a series of objects or forms, we announce our fear of its destruction, our inability to trust others to take appropriate actions and our sense of entitlement over the fate of the objects.²⁰

This assumption was the basis for removal of important cultural material from Indigenous communities into the museums.

The publications and collection practices of the Division of Anthropology staff exhibited the influence of the salvage paradigm in their work. T.F. McIlwraith, one of the Museum's ethnologists, saw as his task "the careful recording of all aspects of the *traditional* culture of a 'primitive' people with a minimum of comparison to traits elsewhere and a minimum of attention to theoretical concerns"(emphasis added).²¹ He was not going to study and document the Nuxalk as he saw them, but as they had lived in the past. In 1922 he discussed staying in Bella Coola long enough to see the winter dances. He considered them "only degenerate survivals of the old dances, but they

²⁰ Virginia R. Dominguez, "Of Other Peoples: Beyond the Salvage Paradigm," *Discussions in Contemporary Culture, No.1*, ed. Hal Foster (Seattle: Bay Press, 1987) 131.

²¹ Barker, "Publication" 3.

would form a jumping-off-place for studying the old."²² The conclusion to his work *The Bella Coola Indians* explicitly states the assumptions of the salvage paradigm.

Too often the white man [sic] . . .
fails to realize that progress, as he
sees it, is wiping out valuable elements
of civilizations other than his own
instead of seeking the good in them and
preserving it for the benefit of himself
and the native alike.²³

McIlwraith saw the demise of Nuxalk culture as inevitable, and perhaps not undesirable in the interests of progress²⁴ and he considered it the duty of non-Indigenous people to realize this and take action to record it. This is quite clearly the salvage paradigm at work.

The collection of material culture was also strongly influenced by the salvage paradigm. The assumption that only "pre-contact" material was authentic created an urgency to collect what little remained. In 1912, F.W. Waugh complained that "genuine" articles of material culture were not available at Caughnawaga. His opinion that "some of the scarcity of material, or rather the scarcity of material of certain kinds is no doubt due to contact with the Whites and desertion of Indian customs," showed that he was looking for material which did not exhibit any non-Indigenous influence. A few years

²² SAPIR PAPERS McIlwraith to Sapir, 27 May 1922.

²³ T.F. McIlwraith, *The Bella Coola Indians* (1948; Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1992) 532.

²⁴ McIlwraith 532.

later in Masset, British Columbia, Harlan Smith expressed the same concern that "there are not many specimens among the Indians as they are more than modern."²⁵ Later in the month he wrote "I am anxious to hear from you. 1st about buying ethnological specimens for you. There are not many left to buy."²⁶ The perception that pure artifacts of material culture were running out increased competition between collectors from different museums to collect what was left.

There are not many explicit references to collecting desiderata in the correspondence of Sapir and his staff. However, the value placed on old and unacculturated specimens was occasionally specified. There is a revealing exchange of letters between Sapir and Waugh, who was beginning his relationship with the Museum in 1911, which outlined what Sapir felt was worthy of collection. Waugh wrote to Sapir listing some of the areas of technology and manufacture which he had researched among the Mohawk community in Brant County, Ontario. He had collected implements, materials used to make them, and some photographs of Indigenous People involved in such industries as woodworking, basketry, leather, straw hat making and metal work.²⁷ Sapir's advice to Waugh is significant and merits being quoted at length.

²⁵ SAPIR PAPERS Smith to Sapir, 1 July 1919.

²⁶ SAPIR PAPERS Smith to Sapir, 29 July 1919.

²⁷ SAPIR PAPERS Waugh to Sapir, 28 August 1911.

It seems important to me to keep very clearly distinct that part of Iroquois material culture which may with no degree of certainty be called aboriginal, and that part which has grown up only secondary through contact with whites. I do not for a moment deny the right to be interested in such handicrafts as modern wooden butter bowls, hammer handles, axe handles, straw hats, and so forth, but such objects are hardly what our museum would be particularly interested in. While a technological study of the Iroquois might well be merely descriptive in character, nevertheless, the aboriginal element should always be carefully [peeled] out. I admit that this is not always an easy task, and that in many cases even the older indians are not quite clear in their minds as to what is merely comparatively old and what is thoroughly aboriginal.²⁸

Once again the distinction is made between "thoroughly aboriginal" practices and specimens, and "secondary" ones, which bear the marks of contact with non-Indigenous people. Waugh had "the right" to be interested in the contemporary forms of manufacture, but Sapir was clear that they were not worthy of the Museum's attention. Furthermore, the distinction between what was "aboriginal" and what was "secondary" was to be made by trained anthropologists who must sift through material to find the aboriginal element. Indigenous informants could not be trusted because even they are "not quite clear in their minds" as to what was "aboriginal." Although Boasian anthropology intended to be objective, clearly choices were being made as to

²⁸ SAPIR PAPERS Sapir to Waugh, 3 October 1911.

what was worthy of study and what could be displayed in the Museum. These choices were informed by the ethnographic narrative of salvage.

The focus of salvage ethnology on the cultures of the past left Indigenous Peoples in a temporal limbo. Since anthropology no longer followed rigidly evolutionary lines, Indigenous cultures were not placed in the past, but were given a "special, ambiguous temporal status: call it the 'ethnographic present.'"²⁹ It was considered that since all cultures, regardless of when they existed, were a testament to human diversity, it was appropriate to discuss them in the present tense.³⁰ In anthropological research and museum display, Indigenous Peoples were essentially out of time; they were "neither of antiquity nor of the twentieth century but rather representing the 'authentic' context of the collected objects."³¹ It reinforced the idea that contemporary Indigenous Peoples were somehow inauthentic in comparison to their "glorious," "uncorrupted" ancestors. The result of this use of the ethnographic present was the permanent placement of Indigenous cultures in the distant, "pre-contact" past, and, by implication, the delegitimation of contemporary Indigenous Peoples.

Despite the priority placed by Boasian anthropologists on empirical evidence, some critics maintain that salvage anthropology was based on shaky

²⁹ Clifford, "Other" 122.

³⁰ Trigger, *Natives* 115.

³¹ James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnology, Literature and Art* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1988) 228.

scientific grounds. The reconstruction of "pre-contact" Indigenous cultures meant the reliance on memories of the distant past, rather than on description of contemporary customs. "The result was a description of native cultures that focused on recording rules and ideal situations rather than observing how life was actually lived."³² Indigenous cultures were not seen as groups of individuals interacting with each other and the environment, but as "a distinctive pattern of norms which governed the behaviour of its members."³³ Anthropologists recorded the rules of behaviour from older Indigenous people, but they did not record any individual alterations or variations of the traditions. The result was a view of Indigenous cultures which was idealist, with traditional cultures "understood apart from the histories and creative energies of their people."³⁴ Although Boasian anthropologists rejected the evolutionary concept that the cultures of Indigenous Peoples were static, this idealized view of their customs did imply immutability.

John Barker discusses the limitations of McIlwraith's research on the Nuxalk. He was in Beila Coola in 1922, 1923 and 1924, recording the memories of elderly Nuxalk people on traditional Nuxalk culture. Barker points out that at this time, the oldest informants could only remember as far back as the 1860's when there had already been decades of contact with

³² Trigger, *Natives* 18.

³³ Trigger, *Natives* 115.

³⁴ Barker, introduction, xx.

outsiders.³⁵ It was impossible for McIlwraith's informants to remember a time before the influx of new trade goods and ideas, and the demise of many of their people through disease. Barker asserts that salvage anthropology relied "less on careful historic reconstructions and more upon simply ignoring historic influences."³⁶ The accurate recording of current cultural practices was rejected in favour of an uncertain reconstruction of an idealized past.

The reliance on memory was also present in the commission of examples of material culture by Museum staff. In an effort to avoid acculturated material, occasionally ethnologists would commission works based solely on memory. In 1922, Sapir commissioned a model of a meat tray from a Sarcee woman named Mrs. Two Guns. Two Guns made the object from descriptions she heard from older people; she had never seen these vessels used, herself, as they dated from before her grandmother's time.³⁷ According to Sapir's notes the proper material for such a vessel was limestone, but this specimen was clay; also, the method for smoothing it had been forgotten. In 1924, Waugh commissioned a pump drill from Jos. Andre, of the Naskapi nation. A note added to the acquisition information reads. "It appears that this model was made for Mr. Waugh after he had suggested the possibility of the occurrence

³⁵ Barker, introduction xx.

³⁶ Barker, introduction xx.

³⁷ CMC Catalogue number V-D-317.

of such a type. Its authentic occurrence here is doubtful."³⁸ In both cases, there was no way for the ethnologist or the Indigenous craftsman to verify if the specimen was an accurate historical reconstruction. Two Guns was working from the memories of others, and Andre was working from Waugh's hypothesis.

Ruth Phillips cites a similar example of a commission from 1912. Sapir was asking James Paul, a Malecite from New Brunswick to make a birch bark canoe for a Russian ethnographic museum in St. Petersburg with "no nails or other white man's materials used in the canoe, but. . . it is to be made exactly of the style that the Indians used long ago before they knew anything about white men's ways."³⁹ By 1911, the Malecite had been in regular contact with non-Indigenous people for over two hundred years. Phillips calls this sort of commission (as well as the ones mentioned above) "one of the fictions of premodernity typical of the Museum Age--the reinvention of an object that both of them [the ethnologist and the Indigenous craftsman] could only imagine."⁴⁰ This reinforces Barker's assertion that salvage ethnology was sometimes based on questionable research.

³⁸ CMC Catalogue number III-B-672 a-c.

³⁹ quoted in Ruth Phillips, "Why Not Tourist Art?: Significant Silences in Native American Museum Representations." (Ottawa: School for Studies in Art and Culture: Art History, Carleton University. Used with permission. 16.

⁴⁰ Phillips, "Tourist" 16.

The preoccupation of salvage ethnology was with culture loss and extinction, and this greatly affected the way in which contemporary cultures were viewed. The "pathology of culture loss"⁴¹ allowed the abnormal, the culture in a state of disorganization, to set the norm of investigation.⁴² The ethnographic narrative which saw assimilation as inevitable was so pervasive that anthropologists ignored the evidence of cultural activity all around them.⁴³ McIlwraith saw the Nuxalk winter ceremonials as "faded vestiges of a rapidly receding past. It never occurred to him that they might signify an adaptation of Nuxalk culture to new traditions."⁴⁴ Anthropologists denied Indigenous Peoples the right all cultures have of adapting and developing. If they strictly adhered to their old ways, then they were considered backward and incapable of change by the government which was trying to assimilate them; if they adapted their ceremonies and products of material culture to new economic and social situations, they were no longer considered "thoroughly aboriginal" by the anthropologists--the only recognized experts in Indigenous cultures. Just as the *Indian Act* allowed the government to decide who was a "status Indian," academic stature allowed the anthropologists to evaluate who was a

⁴¹ Gruber 1297.

⁴² Gruber 1297.

⁴³ Bruner 142.

⁴⁴ Barker, introduction xxi.

"genuine Indian." Either way, Indigenous Peoples were being evaluated according to non-Indigenous frameworks, and either way they could not win.

Just as the Museum's desire to collect old and "genuine" objects of material culture revealed its ethnographic narrative, so did its reluctance to collect objects considered too modern. Ruth Phillips has examined some of the "silences" in museum collection and their meanings.⁴⁵ Although Phillips' paper does not focus on the National Museum of Canada, many of her arguments about the exclusion of tourist art from colonial museums do apply. Phillips notes that the exclusion of tourist art "from formal programs of collecting and exhibiting was central to the standard museum representation of Native Americans as other, as marginalized and as premodern."⁴⁶ The silence surrounding tourist art provides vital evidence of the ethnographic narrative of the period.

One reason for the exclusion of tourist art was that it did not fit easily into the taxonomy of ethnographic collection. Anthropologists had a "conceptual framework"⁴⁷ which structured those aspects of culture they intended to study and collect. They divided cultural activity into categories like transportation, industry, religion and art, and attempted to get what they considered to be a representative set for each people studied. When the

⁴⁵ Phillips, "Tourist."

⁴⁶ Phillips, "Tourist" 4.

⁴⁷ Phillips, "Tourist" 12.

genuine, "pre-contact" examples were not available, newer items or replicas could be used.⁴⁸ According to Sapir,

part of the purpose of a scientific museum is to house a considerable number of duplicates of any type of object in order to make it possible to determine the range of variation of that type, also the extent to which it is truly typical.⁴⁹

When Sapir wrote to Waugh in 1911, he described the Museum's Haudenosaunee collection as small, but containing the "more important classes of objects."⁵⁰ He expressed interest in Waugh's work, if he could make "as complete collections as [he could] of industrial objects, that is, of implements employed in the making of various objects."⁵¹ Clearly, manufacture was one of the categories which needed to be filled in the new Museum.

The difficulty with tourist art was that it did not fit neatly into any of these taxonomic categories. These objects blurred the distinction of Indigenous Peoples as pre-modern "other," and they challenged the perceptions of the salvage paradigm. Clearly Indigenous Peoples were capable of change, in their traditions and in their material culture, and clearly they were adapting to the market economy of the dominant, non-Indigenous society. It was the blend of Indigenous and non-Indigenous design and materials, whether in art to be

⁴⁸ Phillips, "Tourist" 19.

⁴⁹ SAPIR PAPERS Sapir to C.F. Newcombe, 21 December 1912.

⁵⁰ SAPIR PAPERS Sapir to Waugh, 3 October 1911.

⁵¹ SAPIR PAPERS Sapir to Waugh, 3 October 1911.

sold, or in works which remained in the Indigenous communities, which challenged the tidy categories of the ethnologists. Waugh described some Mohawk longhouses which he had photographed in Brant County, as

very largely an adaptation of the white-man's ideas, but there are odd touches here and there which suggest the Indian. These touches are sometimes shown in the surroundings of the dwellings, sometimes in some idiosyncrasy of architecture.⁵²

It was the mixed nature of this sort of artifact which made it impossible to categorize according to the ideas of the day. Phillips says that acculturated objects tell "an intercultural story that the ethnologist's paradigm of race and exclusive ethnicity could not easily narrate."⁵³ The objects' "form and content [are] shaped by the expectations of the tourist market"⁵⁴ that will consume them; however, they are manufactured by Indigenous Peoples, so they bear the characteristics of contact with both peoples. In fact, Phillips calls tourist art "the product of a careful, anthropological study of the material culture and aesthetics of the Western other by Native artists and craftspeople."⁵⁵ Perhaps the non-Indigenous ethnologists were uncomfortable with the idea that their culture could also come under outside scrutiny.

⁵² SAPIR PAPERS Waugh to Sapir, 5 November 1911.

⁵³ Phillips, "Tourist" 23.

⁵⁴ Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives on the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1984) 149.

⁵⁵ Phillips, "Tourist" 29.

The other characteristic of tourist art which ethnologists were unable to accept was its economic nature. The fact that it was made as a commodity made it worthless in the collectors' eyes. Waugh described the occupation of the silversmith as "one of the most picturesque, but both the tools used and the designs executed are very largely white. Nearly everything they make nowadays, in fact, is to sell to the whites."⁵⁶ This dismissal of anything made with profit in mind shows a refusal on the part of ethnologists to recognize the economic realities of Indigenous Peoples.⁵⁷ Removed from their lands, prevented by the government from pursuing their traditional livelihoods, Indigenous Peoples had to find other ways to survive. The narrative of the salvage paradigm dictated that this activity in the market economy and commoditization of Indigenous art be seen as a sign of decline, not as the successful adaptation of Indigenous Peoples to harsh new economic situations. The transition from traditional systems of craft production and trade to participation in the dominant market economy showed a versatility which proved that Indigenous cultures were not being swept away in the great flood of non-Indigenous society.⁵⁸ However, as long as the situation was being described by ethnologists imbued with the salvage paradigm, tourist art would

⁵⁶ SAPIR PAPERS Waugh to Sapir, 5 November 1911.

⁵⁷ Phillips, "Tourist" 7.

⁵⁸ Phillips, "Tourist" 24.

be ignored and interpreted as evidence of the inevitable demise of Indigenous cultures.

Although Boasian anthropology represented an important break with the evolutionary anthropology which preceded it, both disciplines did have a fundamental element in common. Johannes Fabian calls this the "fundamental contradiction of anthropology."⁵⁹ Anthropologists

dogmatically insist that anthropology rests on ethnographic research involving personal, prolonged interaction with the other. But... pronounce upon the knowledge gained from such research a discourse which construes the other in terms of distance, spatial and temporal.⁶⁰

Despite the experience of ethnologists in "the field," where they had fruitful and, in some cases, lasting collaborative relationships with Indigenous assistants; where they witnessed the many ways in which Indigenous society was coping with the changes brought by non-Indigenous settlement; where they purchased objects of tourist art for themselves and their families,⁶¹ they still categorized Indigenous Peoples as distant in time and space. Virginia Dominguez calls this perception of otherness inherently hierarchical and says that it invites "appropriative representation."⁶² Like the guardian-keepers of

⁵⁹ Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (New York: Columbia UP, 1983) xi.

⁶⁰ Fabian xi.

⁶¹ SAPIR PAPERS Sapir to Smith, 3 September 1918.

⁶² Dominguez 131.

the Dragon Principle, they could construct whatever story they wished to explain and interpret the Indigenous other. The narrative of the Boasian anthropologists of the Canadian Division of Anthropology has had a lasting effect on the perception of Indigenous Peoples in this country.

No matter how sensitively Indigenous cultures were studied, no matter the focus on cultural relativism, the fact remained, that Indigenous Peoples were an object to be studied. Indigenous people were hired as "informants," but they were expected to describe their customs completely factually, without analysis. Their words became texts to be studied, just as archaeological artifacts were studied. Evidence which showed that Indigenous Peoples were participating in modern structures like the market economy, or were utilizing non-Indigenous aesthetics in their art was ignored because it did not fit the dominant ethnographic narrative.

CHAPTER V: THE COMPROMISED COLLECTION: ANTHROPOLOGY AND COLONIALISM

None of the anthropological research carried out by Sapir and his staff can be divorced from the situation of the colonization of Indigenous Peoples in Canada. The first section of this paper illustrated the ways in which the federal government and its policies influenced the work of the Geological Survey and the Museum. There are many less direct ways, however, in which the dynamics of power in a colonial situation affected anthropological work. Anthropologists have been described as "reluctant imperialists"¹ because in the first half of this century they were in the ambiguous position of benefitting from state institutions which funded their research, while at the same time occasionally taking the part of Indigenous Peoples against oppressive state policies.² We also cannot lose sight of the fact that the collection of material culture by Museum ethnologists was carried out within this colonial context, and was a transaction between trading partners with vastly different positions of power in Canadian society.

Talal Asad suggests that anthropology was not particularly vital in maintaining the structures of imperial domination, but that it was undoubtedly

¹ Wendy James, "The Anthropologist as Reluctant Imperialist," *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter*, ed. Talal Asad (London: Ithaca, 1973)

² Wendy James 42.

affected by them.³ Colonialism allowed for proximity between Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous people, including anthropologists. The colonial infrastructure including a government which was willing to fund research, a transportation system which made Indigenous communities more accessible, and military and police forces which ensured the safety of non-Indigenous travellers and settlers, all made the anthropologists' task easier. These benefits also made it difficult for the anthropologists to criticize the structure which aided their work.

In the Canadian situation the most obvious way in which Canadian anthropology was supported by colonialism was the funding which the National Museum of Canada and the Division of Anthropology received from the federal government. They also benefitted from local administrative structures. While in "the field," anthropologists had the support of the local Indian Agents. In 1921, D.C. Scott wrote letters of introduction for Harlan Smith and F.W. Waugh to present to Indian Agents in the areas in which they planned to conduct their research.⁴ The Indian Agents had control over virtually every aspect of Indigenous Peoples' lives on reserves, and with their sanction, the anthropologist was assured at least some degree of cooperation. Anthropologists also took advantage of the new lines of transportation which

³ Talal Asad, "From the History of Colonial Anthropology to the Anthropology of Western Hegemony," afterward, *Colonial Situations: Essays on the Contextualization of Ethnographic Knowledge*, ed. George W. Stocking Jr. (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1991) 315.

⁴ SAPIR PAPERS D.C. Scott to Sapir, 10 Mar 1921, 11 June 1921.

connected distant parts of the country together, by travelling extensively by railway. Without the development of this mode of transportation, many communities of Indigenous Peoples would have remained inaccessible to non-Indigenous travellers for years.

Apart from the benefits which came from their role as government employees, anthropologists also enjoyed the status of being white men in a colonial society in which very different rights were afforded to Indigenous Peoples and whites. They enjoyed freedom of movement, freedom to practice their religions, and freedom to participate in society as full citizens of Canada. None of these basic rights were enjoyed by Indigenous Peoples at the time. Despite the fact that they sometimes took the part of Indigenous Peoples against the government, with regard to individual policies, the anthropologists were still participants in the colonial system by virtue of the privileges they enjoyed.⁵ This basic difference could not but influence the way anthropologists viewed their "subjects." Although Boasian anthropology stressed the relative value and dignity of all cultures, the vast differences in status did reinforce a tendency to be condescending to Indigenous Peoples.

This participation in the system left anthropologists with less room to criticize the workings of colonialism. As discussed above, Sapir and his colleagues lobbied D.C. Scott to rescind the law against the Potlatch. They were unsuccessful, and when the Potlatch material was confiscated in 1922,

⁵ Wendy James 403.

Sapir had little choice but to accept it. Furthermore, their criticism focused only on the Potlatch law, and not on the wider problem of repression of Indigenous Peoples by the federal government. As members of the dominant race and class of colonial society, they were unable to see the wider picture and condemn it. Nor did their fieldwork assist them in seeing the effects of the colonial context. They studied change within societies according to ideas of acculturation, a gradual adopting of another culture's ideas, and not taking into account the effects of force, suffering and exploitation--the results of colonialism.⁶ Individual fieldwork which constituted factual descriptive accounts carried out on a small scale among one People allowed anthropologists to ignore the macrocosm of colonial domination.⁷ Both their position in society and their academic methods obscured their vision of colonialism.

This power relationship affected how Indigenous Peoples were studied and it also affected the collection of material culture. Although the instances of theft or coercion in the collection of material culture by staff of the National Museum of Canada were rare, the fact remains that collection took place within a colonial context, which can be seen as coercive in itself. The Potlatch Collection is the most obvious example of the use of a position of power in

⁶ Kathleen Gough, "Ethnographic Salvage and the Shaping of Anthropology. *Current Anthropology*. 9.5 (1968): 406.

⁷ Gough 406.

collecting. There were many other ways, however, in which the power dynamic affected collection.

Douglas Cole recounts the "scramble" for artifacts on the Northwest Coast of British Columbia during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He notes that the collectors' work was assisted by the advance of non-Indigenous culture which came with colonization. The decline in population as a result of the spread of foreign diseases and imposed poverty, created a surplus of material culture, and the increased availability of European goods made some utilitarian objects obsolete.⁸ Both these factors made Indigenous owners more likely to part with their possessions. The spread of Christianity, and the pressure of missionaries and Indian Agents to give up the old ways also encouraged the surrender of some objects. In 1901, C. F. Newcombe, a Northwest coast collector, headed to Alaska as soon as he heard that two villages there had recently converted to Christianity and were selling off their ceremonial property.⁹

Agents of the state were occasionally directly involved in collection, as some of the material for the National Museum was actually purchased by Indian Agents and RCMP officers. In 1913, Harlan Smith mentioned receiving artifacts from RCMP and Indian Agents for the Museum's collection. In 1925, Sapir wrote to L.L. Bolton, Assistant Deputy Minister of Mines, about giving

⁸ Cole, *Captured* 295.

⁹ Cole, *Captured* 299.

an instructional course to RCMP who would be patrolling the North. He advised them of the "location of ancient Eskimo ruins, and [gave] them a few suggestions concerning the best methods of excavating them."¹⁰ Sapir noted to Bolton that the Museum's extensive collection of material from the north was "obtained largely through the excavations of Inspector Wilcox, Sergeant Joy, and other members of the RCMP."¹¹ Regardless of how these artifacts were obtained, whether they were excavated from deserted areas or bought at a fair price, there is still a clear inequity in any collection of this nature. The people collecting the objects had the power of the state behind them and could enforce foreign laws and punish those from whom they were collecting.

Certainly one of the most pressing factors assisting museum collectors was the indigence of several Indigenous communities. Removed from their traditional hunting and fishing areas and forced into farming and wage labour, many Indigenous people were facing severe economic privation during the years of the most extensive collection. According to Cole,

the experienced field collector took measure both of the seasonal employment and of the years when the salmon fishery failed. There was a strong *schadenfreude*, the pleasure at someone else's misfortune, inherent in the collector's craft.¹²

¹⁰ SAPIR PAPERS Sapir to L.L. Bolton, 28 April 1925.

¹¹ SAPIR PAPERS Sapir to Bolton, 28 April 1925.

¹² Cole, *Captured* 297.

Museum collectors benefitted from the poverty of Indigenous Peoples. Cole quotes a letter from Lucy Roberts, a woman from Skidegate to C. F. Newcombe. She had no source of income except for two poles she wished to sell. She wrote: "I would like to sell as I am very much in need of money. I will leave it to you to say what the poles are worth."¹³ There can be no question that Roberts and hundreds of other Indigenous people approached collectors about selling their property, and were not forced into parting with it. The force of poverty cannot be denied, however, and it must be questioned how many Indigenous people would have sold their treasures if they had not been in economic need. Museum anthropologists did not create the colonial structure which outlawed the traditional Indigenous way of life, and which created economic hardship; however, they certainly benefitted from it in their collections.

Although the majority of National Museum acquisitions were purchased according to collecting ethics of the day, some Museum collectors stole artifacts. Harlan Smith wrote to Sapir in 1920 about some collecting he had done in Bella Coola. Joe Sanders, his Nuxalk assistant, took him to a burial cave, but told him "the people would feel bad if [Smith] took the bones but [he] might take a whistle."¹⁴ Smith did not follow his colleague's advice and returned the next day, writing to Sapir that he

¹³ Cole, *Captured* 298.

¹⁴ SAPIR PAPERS Smith to Sapir, 9 July 1920.

got not only the whistle but found more and got them and some other things. [He] also got the four skulls without in any way disturbing the burial boxes, and only [his] two white companions know of it.¹⁵

Smith did not express any worry that his actions might offend the Nuxalk, whose burial cave it was. He felt justified because he "had secured enough to pay for about a week's worth of work."¹⁶ Smith also excavated a grave site near Spencerville, Ontario, where he took fifty-one human skeletons as well as objects of material culture. F.H.S. Knowles excavated a grave site near the Six Nations reserve in Brantford, and took twenty-nine skulls to provide a "valuable foundation for the study of physical anthropology."¹⁷ Despite the fact that Boasian anthropology adhered to the creed of cultural relativism, it is clear that in these cases, the needs of one culture (ie: the retrieval of material for research and exhibit) was privileged over the needs of another: the need to honour and respect the dead.

Harlan Smith also showed a lack of respect for the wishes of Indigenous People while taking some of his photographic records. While in Bella Coola, he was trying to film a woman on a horse. Her husband had given Smith permission, but clearly the woman objected. Smith described to Sapir what happened:

¹⁵ SAPIR PAPERS Smith to Sapir, 9 July 1920.

¹⁶ SAPIR PAPERS Smith to Sapir, 9 July 1920.

¹⁷ Canada, House of Commons, *Summary Report of the Geological Survey Branch of the Department of Mines for the Calendar Year 1912* (Ottawa: C.H. Parmelee, 1914) 505.

The woman tried to run me down when I
 took movie of the [illegible]. . .
 But her horse refused to come close
 enough so she could slash me with her
 'reins.' It was great fun. Two of
 my white friends tried to carry the
 Chilcotin wife of one of them out of
 her tent so I could movie her face
 but the woman clubbed hard and drove
 the men off. I was too distant
 to get a movie of the clubbing but
 when I appeared got I suppose the men
 running and the woman fleeing from
 the camera.¹⁸

Despite the image of anthropology as an unintrusive method of learning through interviews and participant observation, this incident is evidence that the interest of anthropologists was sometimes quite offensive to the Indigenous Peoples involved. Despite the women's objections, Smith had the power of race, gender, position and technology (with the camera) and used it to film them against their will. Although Boasian anthropology stressed the dignity of all races and cultures, clearly this dignity could be insulted in the interests of science.

Collection of information, photographs and objects of material culture cannot be considered outside of its colonial context. Douglas Cole sums up his study of museum collectors on the Northwest Coast by calling the collecting process a "traditional trading relationship affected by normal economic factors of supply and demand, competition, accessibility, costs of transportation, by

¹⁸ SAPIR PAPERS Smith to Sapir, 30 May 1924.

wars and trade cycles, by ethnological fashion and museum budgets."¹⁹ This is the most comfortable way for a contemporary museum goer to think of the process which brought all the items on display to the museum. Indigenous Peoples may have parted with objects of great value, but they did so freely, and were paid well for them. Besides, the conventional thinking asserts, all the objects were preserved in museums for everyone to enjoy, instead of being left with people who would not have cared for them.

Consideration of collection must not stop there. Cole does admit an alternate view, that

the whole process can also be viewed as an unequal trading relationship, the product of a colonial encounter in which, in the long run, the terms of trade were stacked in favour of those who were part of the dominant economic system.²⁰

He seems to present this view of collection almost as an option, as if both views are equal, and the reader can select the one which he or she finds most satisfactory. This simply cannot be the case. There can be no equal trading relationship when one party enjoys the official sanction of the government, through funding and direct support from local representatives, like Indian Agents; has economic superiority, and can bargain without the pressure of poverty; and has the status which comes from being a member of the dominant race, class and gender in colonial society. This is not intended to portray

¹⁹ Cole, *Captured* 310.

²⁰ Cole, *Captured* 311.

Indigenous Peoples as passive people who were acted upon by clever and ruthless white collectors. Indigenous Peoples saw the situation they were in, with their culture assailed on all sides by social, economic and political forces, and they struggled against these in an effort to survive as individuals and as a culture. In some cases, the best option was to sell material, and try to bargain for a fair price. Although Indigenous Peoples were usually willing to participate in the trade, the exchange could never be an equitable one. Anthropologists were taking advantage of the economic, social and political pressures experienced by Indigenous Peoples, and, in turn, they were applying even more.

Cole begins his book on Northwest Coast collecting with the often repeated anecdote told by Franz Boas about a Potlatch he attended in 1930. The host chief was distributing meat and saying "This bowl in the shape of a bear is for you," describing a different bowl for each group. Boas had heard this same speech as Potlatches forty-five years earlier when he first visited the Northwest Coast; however, now there were no more bowls because they were in museums in New York and Berlin.²¹ This anecdote has a self-congratulatory tone to it, remarking on the thoroughness with which collectors combed Indigenous communities for material culture. Conventional thought of museum professionals today echoes the salvage paradigm: they are responsible

²¹ Cole, *Captured* xiii.

for the preservation of Indigenous cultures, because they saved all this material from neglect and decay.²²

Sapir and his Boasian colleagues were determined to rescue articles of "genuine" Indigenous cultures and preserve them from change and destruction in the National Museum. There, they would tell the story of Indigenous Peoples as the anthropologists told it, according to their narrative of cultural decline and ultimate assimilation. Their discourse could have become a self-fulfilling prophecy. As more material left the Indigenous communities, there were fewer objects to use in the ceremonies, fewer objects to instruct a new generation of artists, fewer objects to pass on the histories and beliefs of different Peoples. Despite this, however, the old ways were passed on, and Indigenous cultures did not die out or assimilate. Indigenous Peoples are alive today and practising their own form of the salvage paradigm: through repatriation, they are rescuing their material culture from the confining narratives of non-Indigenous museums. Boas felt that it was the power of anthropology

to impress us with the relative value of all forms of culture, and thus serve as a check to an exaggerated valuation of the standpoint of our own period, which we are only too liable to consider the ultimate goal of human evolution.²³

²² Cole, *Captured* 311 and Michael Ames, "Free Indians from their Ethnological Fate: The Emergence of the Indian Point of View in Exhibitions of Indians" *Muse* 5.2. (1987): 14.

²³ Boas, "History" 36.

Although the study of Indigenous Peoples according to the Boasian model stressed the coherence and value of their cultures, it was still carried out within an ethnocentric paradigm which continued to see "authentic" Indigenous cultures as existing only in the past, and reinforced the position of Indigenous Peoples as distant in time and place, as "other."

CHAPTER VI: THE "STRIKING SPECIMEN?"

DISPLAY IN THE MUSEUM

The Museum's government connection and the ethnographic narrative of Boasian anthropology affected the content and tone of its exhibits. Influences affecting the perception of objects by museum-goers does not end, however, when material culture is accessioned to a museum. Once artifacts are exhibited in the glass cases which were common until fairly recently, objects take on new meanings and new contexts derived from their role as museum artifacts. Museums give "spatial expression and objective, concrete form to abstract schemes for the organization of knowledge;"¹ in the display case the object becomes the physical manifestation, not of the culture being exhibited, but of the political and scientific rationalities at work behind the museum.

Despite the efforts of Sapir and other Boasians to research and attempt to understand cultures in their totality, their efforts to convey this to the public through museum exhibits were limited by the physical nature of the museum, itself. While they could explore the non-material aspects of culture in their publications, subjects like kinship, myth, performance and political structures could not be adequately presented to the public in the object

¹ Ruth Phillips, "How Museums Marginalize: Naming Domains of Inclusion and Exclusion" (Ottawa: School for Studies in Art and Culture: Art History, Carleton University, 1992) 11. Used with permission.

oriented museum. The result was that technology and art were privileged over other aspects of a culture which did not yield handy artifacts for display. Material culture which was intimately linked to non-material expression, like masks and musical instruments which were used in performance and sacred ceremony, were divorced from this context in the museum. Their technological or aesthetic characteristics were emphasized and they were exhibited in isolation without the music, dance and performance which may have accompanied them. The ethnological taxonomies used to organize the exhibits altered the nature of the object. According to Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett,

objects become ethnographic by virtue of being defined, segmented, detached and carried away by ethnographers. Such objects are ethnographic not because they were found in a . . . Kwakiutl village. . . , but by virtue of the manner in which they have been detached, for disciplines make their objects and in the process make themselves.²

Exhibits were arranged according to non-Indigenous categories (which may or may not have been accepted by Indigenous Peoples), like "household utensils, weapons, and musical instruments; clothing and basketry; articles of transportation; [and] ornaments."³ The establishment of scientific taxonomies became a way to express intellectual possession of objects as well as their

² Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Objects of Ethnography," *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, eds. Ivan Karp and Stephen D. Levine. (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991) 387.

³ Canada, House of Commons, *Summary Report of the Geological Survey Branch of the Department of Mines for the Calendar Year 1913* (Ottawa: J. de L. Taché, 1914) 357.

physical possession. The guardian-keepers discussed in Willmot's Dragon Principle guard the objects physically by placing them in locked cases, and guard interpretation of them through narrowly defined systems of classification. The seemingly straightforward act of placing an object in a case with an explanatory label is actually informed by the political rationality of the museum as a whole.

Franz Boas explicitly outlined his views on the organization of museums, and many of these principles were carried out by Sapir at the National Museum of Canada.⁴ Boas believed that a museum must meet the needs of its various publics: the uneducated visitor who wanted "healthy entertainment,"⁵ the student who needed instruction and the specialist conducting research. Boas recognized that the majority of visitors belonged to the first category, and wanted "to admire, to be impressed by something great and wonderful."⁶ They would not be attracted to long, explanatory labels, but by what Boas called "the striking specimen."⁷

It was this reliance on the "striking specimen," however, which made the relationship between ethnology and the museum an uneasy one. Although the

⁴ Darnell 62.

⁵ Franz Boas, "Some Principles of Museum Administration," *Science* 25.650 (1907): 921.

⁶ Boas, "Museum" 922.

⁷ Boas, "Museum" 924.

ideal of Boasian anthropology was to omit "no essential"⁸ in the study of a culture, only aspects of a culture which had material manifestations could be included in a museum. Boas realized the limitations of the object-oriented exhibit and conceded that "any array of objects is always only an exceedingly fragmentary presentation of the true life of a people."⁹ He did believe that while an attempt to present the entirety of a culture would fail, with careful organization, the museum anthropologist could bring out "one salient point here, another salient point there."¹⁰ Ethnologists may have been able to illustrate selected ideas of their particular narrative with carefully selected objects, but this reliance on material culture established another filter which stood between Indigenous cultures and the public. The collection of objects was influenced by the anthropological paradigm of the collectors, as well as by external factors like availability. Once in the museum, the physical nature of the objects limited which would be considered "striking" enough for display. All these forces were at work before the museum-goer stepped into the exhibition hall.

The limitations of object-oriented museum display in interpreting ethnological research for the public can be illustrated by the exhibitions of the National Museum when it opened in the new Victoria Memorial Museum

⁸ Codere xi.

⁹ Boas, "Museum" 928.

¹⁰ Boas, "Museum" 928.

building in 1913. From 1911 to 1914, Alexander Goldenweiser conducted ethnological research for the National Museum among the Mohawk community of Grand River. In a letter to Sapir, he listed some of the areas which he was studying:

Individual names, grouped according to tribes
and clans.
The system of relationship (in the five languages)
and correlational topics.
The family chiefs and their election.
The functions of women.
Genealogical records and whatever can be obtained
through them.
Myths relating to the various social units of
the Iroquois.¹¹

Although this research considered the complex social and political organization of Mohawk society, none of this information could be displayed satisfactorily in the Museum. The material culture which Goldenweiser collected at this time included brooches, cradleboards, tools, masks, rattles and a headdress.¹² Some of these objects may have been linked to his areas of study, but none could effectively illustrate the complex political and social organizations of the Mohawk community.

In Sapir's summary of the Museum exhibits which were opened to the public in 1913, there was nothing listed which related to the social and family structures or mythologies which Goldenweiser had studied. Sapir proudly

¹¹ SAPIR PAPERS Alexander Goldenweiser to Sapir, 14 January 1912.

¹² CMC Catalogue numbers III-I-106--115; III-I-132, 412,413,414; III-I-121; III-I-124--131; III-I-116--120; III-I-746.

listed the extent of the collection classified as "Iroquois" "which [was] believed to be one of the fullest to be found in any American museum."¹³ It contained material collected by Goldenweiser and other ethnologists and consisted of

masks, other ceremonial objects, and musical instruments; clothing; basketry; household utensils and articles of transportation; games and weapons; implements and medicinal articles; and ornaments, wampum and beadwork.¹⁴

With the exception of medicinal objects, none of the above categories related in any way to the research which Goldenweiser was doing for the Museum. This sort of object-oriented display emphasizes technologies like "articles of transportation" and weapons, and the aesthetic, like ornaments and beadwork, and denies other aspects of Mohawk culture which do not have easily exhibited material manifestations.

A similar example of the object bias of the Museum's displays can be found with the exhibits for the Wyandot. From 1911 to 1913, C. Marius Barbeau was doing research among the Wyandot in Lorette, Quebec and Amherstberg, Ontario. His work included study of the social dynamics of Wyandot society: "functions of phratries, clans and individuals, customs and laws connected therewith, rituals, ceremonies and other practices, mythology and folklore [and] language."¹⁵ None of these areas were included in Sapir's

¹³ *Summary Report, 1913, 357.*

¹⁴ *Summary Report, 1913 357.*

¹⁵ Canada, House of Commons, *Summary Report of the Geological Survey Branch of the Department of Mines for the Calendar Year 1911.* (Ottawa: C.H. Parmelee, 1912). 383.

description of the Wyandot exhibit cases in 1913. Wyandot material culture was grouped into

household utensils, weapons, and musical instruments; clothing and basketry; articles of transportation; house models and food implements; ornaments, silver-work, bead-work and moose-hair embroidery; and various implements connected with basket making and other industries.¹⁴

As with the Mohawk, a complex culture was reduced to the products of utility: household items, weapons and modes of transportation; and decorative arts: ornaments, silver-work and bead-work. All of these objects are important aspects of cultural expression, however, they represent only a portion of it, and in traditional museum display, they are exhibited out of proportion to their significance. All the aspects of a culture which do not have material manifestations are excluded. For the non-Indigenous museum-goer, the picture of a People is only a partial one.

Sapir's description of the Museum's exhibits in 1913 (when the new Victoria Memorial Museum opened its doors) reveals that the object-orientation of the Mohawk and Wyandot displays was not an aberration. Due to lack of exhibition space in the new building, Sapir selected "such material as seemed most calculated to give the public a general idea of the culture of the more important tribes of Canada, and of the range of implements and other objects

¹⁴ *Summary Report, 1913* 357.

in use among the natives."¹⁷ Hence, the Peoples of the West coast, the North and the Eastern Woodlands were featured, while material from Peoples of other areas was placed in storage. Artifacts were displayed in upright and table cases, with explanatory labels.

The content of the cases shows that the necessity of display had caused "culture" to be reduced to its physical manifestations only. The exhibits of the Nuu-chah-nulth were divided into three cases dealing with fishing and hunting implements, basketry and clothing, and ceremonial objects. The Kwakwa ka'wakw exhibit contained basketry, weapons, "implements of various kinds," ceremonial objects, games, ornaments, carvings and men's and women's implements.¹⁸ Although the essentially non-material aspects of life like ceremonies were mentioned, they could only be expressed through the objects which were used, rather than through songs, dances or stories, and therefore understanding of these ceremonies would be limited. Museum-goers would see masks, headdresses, musical instruments and other ceremonial objects completely divorced from the context in which they belonged. Their essentially fragmentary nature could not be overcome with a few small labels. The museum-goer was not exposed to the non-physical aspects of the ceremonies: the spiritual meaning, the elements of performance, the story-telling, or the participation of the Indigenous community.

¹⁷ *Summary Report, 1913* 358.

¹⁸ *Summary Report, 1913* 356.

In these cases, the museum-goer would be left with a mainly utilitarian impression of a society which seemed to consist of nothing more sophisticated than basic subsistence activities, like hunting and farming, and basic artisanship. This type of object-oriented display painted a picture of Indigenous life which was familiar and non-threatening to the museum-going public. The popular image of Indigenous Peoples at this time was one of quaint, exotic, but essentially anachronistic, societies which would die out in the face of progress. The seemingly "primitive" and "exotic" utensils and ceremonial objects displayed in museums reinforced this. A thorough understanding of the complex political and social institutions of Indigenous cultures would challenge these tenets of the Canadian state religion. Although ethnologists studied some of these social and political relationships, their findings were limited to scholarly publications and were not featured as "salient points" to be addressed in the accessible, object-oriented museum exhibit. Furthermore, since they were adherents to the state religion, themselves, their understanding of complex Indigenous institutions like the Potlatch was placed within the context of the decline of Indigenous cultures.

This problem of representation is not restricted to the National Museum, or even to this time period. All museums are limited by what it is physically possible to house within their walls. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett asks "what happens to the intangible, the ephemeral, the immovable, and the

animate?"¹⁹ These cannot be isolated, collected or exhibited. The social structures, performance and sacred ceremonies studied by Goldenweiser, Barbeau and many other National Museum ethnologists could not be explained in the Museum's cases. What cannot be physically carried away is symbolically collected through field notes, recordings and photographs.

Like ethnographic objects, these documents are also artifacts of ethnography, but--true to what I would call the fetish-of-the-true-cross approach--ethnographic objects, those material fragments that we can carry away, are accorded a higher quotient of realness.²⁰

The faith in the object, that which can be seen and touched, assigns any other type of ethnographic documentation a minor importance in the museum setting. Boas observed that "the necessity of accumulating collections practically excludes important aspects of anthropological work from the field of museum activity."²¹

Although the accessibility of the physical form is one of the deciding factors in an object's inclusion in a collection, once it is on display, other characteristics also become significant. George Stocking argues that the three physical dimensions of the object are just the beginning. He suggests that the material culture in museums has seven dimensions: the first three of

¹⁹ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 394.

²⁰ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 394.

²¹ Boas, "Museum" 931.

materiality, then the added dimensions of time, power, ownership and the aesthetic.²² The museum-goer can travel through the dimension of time by viewing objects from the past. The ethnologist exerts control over time by preserving the actual artifact from the decaying effects of time. In the case of Indigenous Peoples, the ethnologist further controls time by placing them in the ethnographic present, a temporal limbo where one culture is considered "authentic," and the fact that cultures change over time is denied.

The dimension of power is a complex one, with the power relation implicit in the

expropriation (not only in the abstract etymological sense, but sometimes in the dirty sense of theft or pillage) of objects from actors in a particular context of space, time and meaning and their appropriation (or making one's own) by observers in another.²³

The power relation is particularly significant in a colonial situation, as discussed above, where the trade of cultural material takes place within an unequal power relationship. Furthermore, when those who are collecting objects are participants in a colonial power structure, they can interpret other cultures to suit their political and social aims. It suits the needs of the national religion to portray Indigenous Peoples as a primitive, dying race whose disappearance was imperative for progress. The objects on display are

²² George W. Stocking Jr., "Essays on Museums and Material Culture," introduction, *Objects and Others: Essays in Museums and Material Culture* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1985)

²³ Stocking, "Museums" 5.

then used to relate these ideas. The collector makes the decisions "in relation to space, time, and visibility; in other words as to what may be viewed, how it should be seen, and when this is possible."²⁴ In the object-oriented museum exhibit, the materiality of the object lends authenticity to the particular exhibitor's narrative.

Closely linked to the dimension of power is that of ownership. The material culture of a People becomes "cultural property"²⁵ once it has been collected by a museum. It is removed from its original context and becomes a commodity to be sold and traded. The availability and cost of artifacts can have a direct effect on their acquisition for museums. The dimension of ownership is of particular importance today as Indigenous Peoples try to repatriate their lost material culture. Concepts of community ownership and spiritual ownership are now being considered as important as western ideas of private property, in the debate surrounding repatriation.

The last dimension of the museum object, according to Stocking, is that of the aesthetic. Objects which had many uses and many meanings within their culture of origin are selected for museums on the basis of what Svetlana Alpers calls "visual interest."²⁶ Although there are considerations of relating

²⁴ Hooper-Greenhill 7.

²⁵ Stocking, "Museums" 5.

²⁶ Svetlana Alpers, "The Museum as a Way of Seeing," *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, eds. Ivan Karp and Steven Levine (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991) 26.

the exhibitor's narrative and completing a taxonomy, the consideration of the exhibit's visual effect is paramount. "The taste for isolating this kind of attentive looking at crafted objects is as peculiar to our culture as is the museum as the space or institution where the activity takes place."²⁷ Museums are based on the assumption that there is a direct link between viewing objects and acquiring knowledge about them and the cultures from which they came.²⁸ This is difficult, however, because, as discussed above, the physical object must be removed from its context and placed in a museum in order to be seen.

According to Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, since the artifact is excised from its context, the discourse of the museum exhibit is one of detachment. "The artfulness of the ethnographic object is an art of excision, of detachment, an art of the excerpt."²⁹ These objects are the fragments of a culture, taken from their original surroundings, and placed in the artificial one of the museum. While it may be seen as natural to evaluate artifacts according to aesthetic values, it must not be forgotten that they had other, more significant values within their own cultures. Susan Vogel points out that

almost nothing displayed in museums was made to be seen in them. Museums provide an experience of most of the world's art and artifacts that does not bear even the remotest resemblance to

²⁷ Alpers 26.

²⁸ Ludmilla Jordanova, "Objects of Knowledge: A Historical Perspective on Museums," *The New Museology*, ed. Peter Vergo (London: Reaktion Books, 1989) 22.

²⁹ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 388.

what their makers intended."³⁰

Since material culture is not being seen in its proper milieu, the museum must create a new context for it.

One context which museums provide for artifacts is to "turn cultural materials into art objects."³¹ Museums "attribute to the art or artifacts of all times the qualities of our own: that its purpose is to be contemplated, that its main qualities can be apprehended visually."³² This of course relates to Stocking's seventh dimension of the aesthetic. Museum-goers cannot understand the culture from which the material came; however, they can appreciate the aesthetic value of the objects in view. They are exhibited in ways which facilitate "attentive looking" and which "elevate" ethnographic objects to the level of fine art. In the western hierarchy of culture, this can be considered the ultimate achievement. According to this criterion, this acceptance as fine art represents the apex of appreciation for Indigenous material culture: it is no longer relegated to natural history museums where it is little removed from flora and fauna; it is no longer in ethnographic museums where it is exhibited as the craft of a "primitive" people; it is judged

³⁰ Susan Vogel, "Always True to the Object, in Our Fashion," *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, eds. Ivan Karp and Steven Levine (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991) 191.

³¹ Alpers 31.

³² Vogel 192.

according to "universal aesthetic criteria"³³ and accepted. Curators who accept the idea of a universal aesthetic believe that the museum-goer can relate directly to the material on display without the intrusion of descriptive labels or other didactic methods. There is no "intimidating mediation between viewer and object:"³⁴ the object is freed from the label.³⁵

There are problems, however, with establishing a purely aesthetic context for the display of the cultural material of other cultures. There is a difference between appreciation on an artistic level, and understanding on a cultural level. Can we "legitimately understand or appreciate art from a culture we do not thoroughly know?"³⁶ Are there "universal aesthetic criteria," or are aesthetics "culture-bound?"³⁷ It is incorrect to believe that the object is "speaking for itself" in an exhibit based on artistic rather than on ethnographic criteria. Museum-goers only see the artifacts which have been carefully selected for collection, and then chosen for exhibit. As illustrated above, material is "filtered through the tastes, interests, politics, and state of knowledge of particular presenters at a particular moment in time."³⁸

³³ Vogel 194.

³⁴ Alpers 30.

³⁵ Marjorie M. Halpin, "Anthropology as Artifact," *Consciousness and Inquiry: Ethnology and Canadian Realities*. National Museum of Man, Mercury Series, Canadian Ethnology Service Paper No. 891. Ed. Frank Manning. (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1983) 268.

³⁶ Vogel 194.

³⁷ Vogel 194.

³⁸ Vogel 201.

Furthermore, in traditional museum representations the public does not have access to the material which was excluded from exhibit.³⁹

An aesthetic focus in the display of material culture does not address the fact that the object has been detached from its original context. It implies that the cultural context is not as important as the artistic one, so its absence from the museum setting is not significant. An exhibit which sees the cultural discourse as paramount must address the fragmentary nature of the artifact and somehow strive to complete it. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett describes two means which exhibit-builders have to confront this loss: through *in situ* representation, which enhances the partiality of the object through the "mimetic evocation of what was left behind;"⁴⁰ and *in context* representation, which provides a frame of reference for the object with more didactic methods of arrangement and explanation.⁴¹ Both these methods had their place in Boasian exhibit techniques, with the second being dominant at the National Museum.

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett includes "period rooms, ethnographic villages, recreated environments, reenacted rituals, [and] photomurals"⁴² among *in situ* representations. They expand the boundaries of the detached artifact, by

³⁹ Gaby Porter, "Putting Your House in Order: Representations of Women and Domestic Life," *The Museum Time Machine: Putting Cultures on Display*, ed. Robert Lumley (London: Comedia/Routledge, 1988) 104.

⁴⁰ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 389.

⁴¹ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 390.

⁴² Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 389.

providing a replica physical, social and/or environmental setting for it.⁴³ This type of display reflects the cultural relativist argument that cultures are coherent wholes and should be interpreted as such in museums. Artifacts were exhibited in association with related artifacts, in functional or contextual settings.⁴⁴ Boas did not make wide use of the "life groups" during his tenure at the American Museum, although they were popular with the public and in tune with his anthropological principles. He advocated their limited use because he found that the verisimilitude of the figures was limited by the fact that they were unavoidably in a museum setting.

It is an avowed object of a large group to transport the visitor into foreign surroundings. . . the surroundings of a Museum are not favourable to an impression of this sort. The cases, the walls, the contents of other cases, the columns, the stairways, all remind us that we are *not* viewing an actual village and the contrast between the attempted realism of the group and the inappropriate surroundings spoils the whole effect.⁴⁵

If the "life groups" were not realistic enough to be evocative, they were realistic enough to distract the visitor from the ethnographic message of the exhibition. Boas found that museum-goers were preoccupied with the technical perfection of the figures and background and miss the information which the curator

⁴³ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 389.

⁴⁴ Ira Jacknis, "Franz Boas and Exhibits: On the Limitations of the Museum Method of Anthropology," *Objects and Others: Essays on Museums and Material Culture* ed. George W. Stocking Jr. (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1985) 82.

⁴⁵ Boas quoted in Jacknis 101.

wished to convey.⁴⁶ Boas recommended that a few such exhibits of "rare beauty and excellence"⁴⁷ be used to attract the attention of the public, while the bulk of the exhibits would serve as an "indifferent background. . . "elucidat[ing] the vastness of the problem dealt with [in the more striking display]."⁴⁸ For Boas, the limit of *in situ* display was its inability to convey complex ethnographic ideas.

Another limitation to such *in situ* reconstructions is the blurring of artifact and replica. While museum-goers may not believe that a diorama is real, they have heightened confidence in its accuracy.⁴⁹ If the ethnographic artifact is more real than the ethnographic document, then the artifact *in situ* seems more real, still. As with an aesthetic representation, the objects seem to be speaking for themselves, without the mediation of explanatory material. With this apparent silence of the curator, the public is lulled into seeing the exhibit as "real," into accepting the "illusion of unmediated vision."⁵⁰ As Kirshenblatt-Gimblett asserts, however, *in situ* exhibits are far from neutral.

They are not a slice of life lifted from the everyday world and inserted into the museum gallery, though this is the rhetoric of the mimetic mode. . . On the contrary, those who construct the display also constitute

⁴⁶ Boas, "Museum" 923.

⁴⁷ Boas, "Museum" 923.

⁴⁸ Boas, "Museum" 923.

⁴⁹ Jordanova 31.

⁵⁰ Jordanova 35.

the subject. . . [Cultural] "wholes" are not given but constituted, and often they are hotly contested.⁵¹

In situ representation addresses the fragmentary nature of the artifact by filling in the cultural background for the public. The cultural milieu, however authentic in appearance, is defined and designed by the ethnographers, who do so according to representational conventions and ethnographic narratives.

An *in context* arrangement does not use reconstruction to complete the fragmentary nature of the objects, but establishes an interpretive context through techniques of arrangement and explanation.⁵² This was the interpretive method primarily employed by the National Museum during the Sapir years. With these methods, an object is set in context by means of explanatory labels and texts, as well as through its relation to other objects. An arrangement based on anthropological taxonomies, geographic areas, or historical relationships reveals the theoretical framework supporting a particular exhibit. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett argues that *in context* approaches

exert strong cognitive control over the objects, asserting the power of classification and arrangement to order large numbers of artifacts from diverse cultural and historical settings and to position them in relation to one another.⁵³

⁵¹ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 389.

⁵² Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 390.

⁵³ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 390.

An object's placement in a complex classification system reveals much about an ethnologist's interpretation of that object. It is not the restoration of the original meaning, however, but the creation of a new one. The objects are reframed within a "world of attention and manipulation of context."⁵⁴

Eilean Hooper-Greenhill argues that the exhibitor's taxonomies found in museums are socially constructed, and cannot be accepted as simply based on reason or logic. She asks some challenging questions:

Do the existing systems of classification enable some ways of knowing, but prevent others? Are the exclusions, inclusions, and priorities that determine whether objects become part of collections, also creating systems of knowledge?⁵⁵

It appears that the exhibition techniques and taxonomic classifications of the National Museum were as strongly influenced by political, colonial and social factors as were the Museum's policies and its collection practices. Its exhibits were designed and arranged from a particular point of view and intended to relate a particular ethnographic narrative. They reflected and reinforced the salvage paradigm and other Boerian ideas as well as the beliefs of the state religion. Imposing non-Indigenous categories of classification on objects from Indigenous cultures served to simultaneously exoticize and render non-threatening the Indigenous Peoples whom many non-Indigenous Canadians viewed with apprehension and fear of the "other."

⁵⁴ Stewart 151.

⁵⁵ Hooper-Greenhill 5.

Considering the idea that systems of classification are linked to philosophies, it is not surprising that Boas rejected the conventional ideas of museum exhibit just as he rejected the conventional anthropological assumptions of his day. Evolutionary anthropologists stressed system and unity in their arrangements of artifacts. These ideas were epitomized in the typological displays of Otis T. Mason, curator of ethnology at the United States National Museum. Mason's 1886 exhibit of Inuit artifacts was arranged according to a checkerboard design. The visitor viewed a variety of inventions belonging to one cultural area by travelling along one axis, while the other axis allowed the comparison of a single invention as it developed in different cultural areas.⁵⁶ Mason hypothesized that there was a connection between ethnological phenomena of Peoples in different geographic areas.⁵⁷ In his synoptic display, the object was paramount and technologies and materials were privileged over cultural groups.

Boas rejected this typological organization of a museum for both practical and philosophical reasons. He felt that a fully schematized museum did not address the needs of either the uneducated visitor seeking entertainment, or the educated visitor seeking scientific knowledge. According to Boas, the first group would stroll through the museum and examine cases at random, thus missing the curator's classification scheme. Systematic

⁵⁶ Curtis M. Hinsley, *Savages and Scientists: The Smithsonian Institution and the Development of American Anthropology*, (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1981) 97.

⁵⁷ Boas, "Principles" 61.

information might be of interest to the educated visitors, but it would be difficult to provide a system to suit each visitor's interest. Boas argued that "if every justifiable point of view [was] included, the complexity of the system [would] become so great that the usefulness of the whole series [would] become very doubtful."⁵⁸

Apart from the practical concerns of how to disseminate ethnological information, Boas was concerned with the sort of message being sent by a fully schematized museum display. He felt that a museum which purported to be a comprehensive look at ethnography presented itself as a finished exhibit, as a closed book. This would "fail to bring home the complexity of nature and an appreciation of the efforts required for a mastery of its secrets."⁵⁹ Since museums must rely primarily on objects, and since "any array of objects is always only an exceedingly fragmentary presentation of the true life of a people,"⁶⁰ then it is misleading and artificial to insist that the arrangement of these objects could explain the totality of a human culture. When these objects, which represent "so small a portion of the manifestation of ethnic life,"⁶¹ are further detached from their culture through a systematic display,

⁵⁸ Boas, "Museum" 926.

⁵⁹ Boas, "Museum" 927.

⁶⁰ Boas, "Museum" 928.

⁶¹ Boas, "Museum" 928.

any hope of understanding their meaning is lost. Classification cannot take the place of explanation.⁶²

More fundamentally, Boas rejected a typological scheme because of his belief in the diversity of human societies. Two inventions may appear to be similar, "yet their immanent qualities may be altogether different."⁶³ Boas dismissed comparative classifications in favour of ones which stressed cultural relativism.

The main object of ethnological collections should be the dissemination of the fact that civilization is not something absolute, but that it is relative, and that our ideas and conceptions are true only so far as our civilization goes.⁶⁴

Arbitrary evolutionary classifications evaluated all cultures according to fixed categories and assumed that they all developed along the same lines. Boas felt that by grouping artifacts according to the cultural group from which they came taught more about the culture, and about the specimen, itself, because objects receive their significance "only through the thoughts that cluster around them."⁶⁵ Since the whole of a culture could not be understood by its physical manifestations alone, only "salient points"⁶⁶ should be addressed by

⁶² Boas, "Principles" 62.

⁶³ Boas quoted in Jacknis 77.

⁶⁴ Boas, "Principles" 66.

⁶⁵ Boas, "Museum" 927.

⁶⁶ Boas, "Museum" 928.

the museum ethnologist. The context necessary to complete the fragmentary nature of the artifact should be established with instructive labels and the grouping of similar objects together.

Although Boas rejected the rigid classification systems of his predecessors, it was impossible to reject classification altogether. An examination of the early exhibits established by Sapir at the National Museum of Canada illustrates the Boasian criteria according to which specimens were arranged. Sapir's 1911 Report discusses the year's work of unpacking and carefully sorting the Museum's ethnological material "according to culture areas and tribes."⁶⁷ Sapir was dissatisfied with the somewhat haphazard way in which the specimens had been catalogued, so he decided to renumber the whole collection "according to a definitely established scheme."⁶⁸ Numbers I and II were reserved for specimens of physical anthropology; III to VII were for the ethnological material from the cultural areas of Eastern Woodlands, Arctic or "Eskimo," Plains, Plateau and Mackenzie Valley, and West Coast; VIII to XII were for archaeological material. Within these numerical categories, individual Peoples were classified by an initial (V.B. refers to Blackfeet, one of the Peoples of the Plains, which was area V).⁶⁹

⁶⁷ *Summary Report, 1911* 379.

⁶⁸ *Summary Report, 1911* 379.

⁶⁹ *Summary Report, 1911* 379.

To non-Indigenous Canadians who are familiar with this geographical grouping from their elementary school history textbooks, this sort of classification scheme seems obvious and logical. Hooper-Greenhill warns, however, that "classification in the museum has taken place within an ethos of obviousness. The selection and ordering processes of museums are rarely understood as historically and geographically specific."⁷⁰ Sapir's groupings, while seeming obvious to those familiar with them, stress the priorities of Boasian anthropology. Objects of material culture were only considered significant because they could shed light on the workings of a culture, and they could only teach this if they were grouped with other objects from the same culture, hence the categories of culture areas. Boas considered the physical surroundings of a culture to be influential in the "ethnological phenomena"⁷¹ of that group. This also influenced Sapir's use of geographical divisions as the primary ones in his numerical classification. Since anthropology which supported cultural relativism did not emphasize comparison of inventions across cultural lines, Sapir's primary classification was not according to technology and material. These would be secondary divisions within the culture group categories.

⁷⁰ Hooper-Greenhill 5.

⁷¹ Boas, "Principles" 63.

Ruth Phillips writes that this sort of taxonomy establishes a "large conceptual framework into which objects were inserted."⁷² The numerical system assisted Sapir in getting an accurate inventory of the Museum's acquisitions, and it also allowed him to establish desiderata for future collection. According to his scheme, a complete collection of specimens would have an example of all functional categories for all cultural groups.⁷³ Sapir concluded that the Museum was "relatively rich in West Coast. . . material. . . but not at all well represented as yet in other ethnological regions of Canada."⁷⁴ He wrote in 1911 that "systematic efforts"⁷⁵ were being made to fill in the needed material from Eastern Canada. In 1912, the Summary Report was optimistic that the collections were becoming "widely representative of the native races of Canada."⁷⁶

As with all these taxonomies, it must be emphasized that these collections were representative according to non-Indigenous, anthropological criteria, and told the ethnologist's story, not that of the Peoples from whom the objects came. The creation of a taxonomy changes the role of the individual object; it now "works toward the creation of a new whole that is the context of

⁷² Phillips, "Tourist" 12.

⁷³ Phillips, "Tourist" 12.

⁷⁴ *Summary Report, 1911* 379.

⁷⁵ *Summary Report, 1911* 379.

⁷⁶ *Summary Report, 1912* 7.

the collection, itself."⁷⁷ "Exhibition classifications. . . shift the grounds of singularity from the object to a category within a particular taxonomy."⁷⁸ The object now derives its significance from its position as being representative of a particular category. The most basic problem with these classifications is their inability to deal with objects which span more than one tidy category.

According to Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, the fragmentation which occurs when an artifact is separated from its culture, is augmented by the "fragmentation of sensory apprehension in conventional museum exhibitions."⁷⁹ In the traditional museum exhibit, drums and rattles are silent, dancers' masks are still and objects which should be accompanied by stories, songs and sacred ceremonies stand alone. Museums "reduce the sensory complexity of the events they represent and . . . offer them up for visual delectation alone."⁸⁰ Alpers' "attentive looking" is the only way to understand the artifacts. Just as the museum's rigid classifications isolate the sensory nature of objects, they also destroy "the fragile webs of interconnectedness"⁸¹ which link objects. Boas wrote that "a vast field of thought may be expressed by a single object or by no object whatsoever."⁸² Problems arise for the curator of an ethnological

⁷⁷ Stewart 152.

⁷⁸ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 392.

⁷⁹ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 416.

⁸⁰ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 417.

⁸¹ Phillips, "Museums" 8.

⁸² Boas, "Museums" 927.

exhibit, when the "vast thought" expressed by an artifact spans several areas of classification. An excellent example of an object of Indigenous material culture defying the non-Indigenous taxonomies of the museum can be found in the False Face masks of the Haudenosaunee. They are part of an important and complex part of the cultures of the Haudenosaunee, and do not fit easily into the classification systems of museum ethnologists like Sapir.

Offering a concise description of False Face masks is as problematic as finding a simple category for them in a museum. False Face masks are made by and belong to members of False Face Societies, medicine societies among the Haudenosaunee, whose members have the power to cause and cure disease and control adverse weather conditions.⁸³ The masks are worn by members of the Society at ceremonies which exorcise disease and treat the sick. The masks, themselves, are not intended as objects of concealment, but as portraits of supernatural beings: the leader of the False Face Society, who is called different names by different Peoples (the Seneca call him *s agodyowe'hgo wa*, our great defender, the doctor), and his followers, the Common Faces.⁸⁴ The mask is a symbol of the supernatural beings, but its existence and its power are inextricably linked to the performance which goes with it: the wearer's dramatic behaviour, manner of speech and movements.⁸⁵ Traditionally, the

⁸³ Zena Pearlstone Mathews, *The Relation of Seneca False Face Masks to Seneca and Ontario Archaeology* (New York: Garland Publishing 1978) 64.

⁸⁴ Mathews 47.

⁸⁵ Mathews 52.

masks were carved on living basswood trees after an offering of tobacco had been made.⁸⁶

Ethnologists from the National Museum, particularly Goldenweiser, studied the False Face Societies and recorded the stories of their origins. They were aware of the complexity of the masks and their roles in Haudenosaunee cultures; however, it was difficult to express these in the object-oriented museum. Which of Sapir's listed areas would be suitable? The Haudenosaunee collection contained displays of "masks, other ceremonial objects, and musical instruments. . . implements and medicinal articles."⁸⁷ Should the masks be linked to their accompanying ceremony, or should they be classified according to their connection with healing and medicine? According to Goldenweiser's report the masks were "of considerable interest from the artistic point of view."⁸⁸ Waugh included the False Face masks he collected under "woodworking"⁸⁹ in his report, and discussed their merits as pieces of carving. All of these classifications are unsatisfactory and illustrate the limitations inherent in one culture attempting to define and classify another according to its own taxonomy. William Fenton concedes that the "overnice taxonomic distinctions [of museums] fail to find confirmation in

⁸⁶ Mathews 55.

⁸⁷ *Summary Report, 1913* 357.

⁸⁸ *Summary Report, 1913* 474.

⁸⁹ *Summary Report, 1913* 480.

Iroquois culture."⁹⁰ False Face masks are only one example reminding the museum-goer that classifications are arbitrary and are informed by the exhibitor's beliefs and values.

The False Face masks present a much more important issue for the critic of museums than that of the difficulty of expressing their complexity in an object-oriented museum. There is strong objection from the Indigenous Peoples from whom they were collected over their display in any context. The masks have spiritual power and must be treated in prescribed ways. When not in use, the mask should be laid face down, and wrapped in a cloth head cover, or, if left unwrapped, hung facing a wall.⁹¹ The open exhibit techniques of museums are considered a sacrilege by many Haudenosaunee People today. Rick Hill, a contemporary Mohawk curator asks whether the non-Indigenous public has "a right to know all, to see that which another culture considers too sacred to show, to possess another's cultural\spiritual legacy?"⁹² These issues were not being considered by ethnologists in Sapir's day, but it is appropriate to mention them here, because ethnologists' rejection of the spiritual life and power of an object further fragments it and detaches it from its proper context. The display of False Face masks despite their sacred nature is symptomatic of

⁹⁰ William N. Fenton, *The False Faces of the Iroquois*. (Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 1987) 29. Despite this concession, Fenton does go on to spend much of his 507 pages establishing a classification of masks based on morphological features which he admits "may have small meaning to the Iroquois themselves"(p 502).

⁹¹ Mathews 54.

⁹² Rick Hill, "Sacred Trust: Cultural Obligation of Museums to Native People" *Muse* 6.3 (1988): 33.

the paradigm of colonial domination surrounding all museum collection at this time.

Ludmilla Jordanova sees a theme of mastery in the exhibition of any object. Mastery over nature and over humans produces artifacts which are displayed as trophies, simultaneously expressing "victory, ownership, control and domination."⁹³ Susan Stewart says that "the collection marks the space of nexus for all narratives, the place where history is transformed into space, into property."⁹⁴ Museum-goers can symbolically possess Indigenous Peoples by visually appropriating them. The material culture of Indigenous Peoples became trophies, both of travels to remote and "exotic" places in Canada and of conquest. By 1913, Indigenous Peoples were no longer seen as a menacing obstacle to settlement; they were disappearing "curiosities" to most non-Indigenous Canadians. The fact that objects which were considered "representative" of their cultures could be collected and placed in a museum made them less threatening still to non-Indigenous people. The national religion which stressed that Indigenous Peoples must remain "other"--temporally, geographically and politically--was reinforced by the narrative of the Museum's display.

The taxonomic systems mentioned above also served to make the "exotic" seem familiar, safe and non-threatening. Something as powerful and as

⁹³ Jordanova 32.

⁹⁴ Stewart xii.

challenging to non-Indigenous European beliefs about medicine as a False Face mask is immediately weakened when classified as "woodworking" or as a "ceremonial object." Its inherent power is removed because it is taken from its context and given a new meaning and identity in its exhibited form. The same process happens with all objects from "other" cultures. The viewer is relieved of "uncertainty by [the exhibition of] the unknown objects in the context of familiar and thus more friendly categories,"⁹⁶ like Sapir's fishing and hunting implements, ornaments and games, matting and basketry and medicinal articles.⁹⁶ Non-Indigenous people need not be disturbed by challenges to their accepted ideas, by Indigenous Peoples, because museum taxonomies imply that they are almost like us, but a little more quaint.

As mentioned above, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett writes that objects do not become "ethnographic" until they are declared so by ethnographers.⁹⁷ Similarly, they do not become part of a museum's particular ethnographic narrative until they are put in their "proper" context. In this case, the context is not one which addresses the fragmentary nature of the artifact and fills in its cultural background; it is the curator's context. The artifacts become significant as "elements of a narrative, forming part of a thread of discourse

⁹⁶ Patrick T. Houlihan, "The Poetic Image and Native American Art," *Exhibiting Cultures: the Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, eds. Ivan Karp and Steven Levine (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991) 207.

⁹⁶ *Summary Report, 1913* 356,357.

⁹⁷ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 387.

which is itself one element in a more complex web of meanings."⁹⁸ In the case of the National Museum, the narrative is one which stresses the beliefs of Boasian anthropology: cultural relativism and the usefulness of material culture to explain Indigenous cultures. Part of the narrative was also the emphasis on salvaging the "authentic" past of Indigenous Peoples compared to their contemporary situation of decline and acculturation. (The fact that the archaeological exhibits were kept separate from the ethnological ones reinforced this division between Indigenous Peoples of the distant past and the ones which the ethnologists were currently studying.⁹⁹) Artifacts that were collected and exhibited were the old and unacculturated, thus reinforcing the idea that contemporary Indigenous cultures were not worthy of academic study. The collection creates "a dialectic of inside and outside, public and private."¹⁰⁰ The museum declares the value of the objects in its possession, while tacitly communicating the worthlessness of the objects it has rejected.

As the *National* Museum, it could not avoid having a patriotic tone which supported the national religion of the period. As discussed earlier, the faith of non-Indigenous Canadians in the industrialization and non-Indigenous settlement of Canada was coupled with a belief that Indigenous Peoples would slowly assimilate or disappear. The artifacts proudly on display in the

⁹⁸ Vergo 46.

⁹⁹ *Summary Report*, 1913 356 and 497.

¹⁰⁰ Stewart 154.

National Museum were rescued from that oblivion and offered up as part of *Canada's* cultural heritage. Their relation to their People of origin becomes almost incidental to their roles as trophies. Museum labels which described the "Tribes of Canada"¹⁰¹ clearly did not recognize the autonomy of Indigenous Peoples, and posited them as another aspect of Canada of which patriotic museum-goers could be proud.

There is much more between the museum-goer and the artifact than a pane of glass. The limits of object-orientation, the fragmented nature of an object taken from its cultural milieu and the construction of a system of classification all serve as filters, isolating the viewer from the Indigenous cultures being exhibited. As Kirshenblatt-Gimblett stresses, the discourse of the museum is one of detachment. Any attempt to fill in the blanks surrounding the object\fragment must be read as critically as any text. Despite Boas' concern that a museum exhibit impress the visitor with the vast amount of knowledge yet to be attained, most exhibits present themselves as closed and complete, offering the "last word" on a subject. Any collection creates a dynamic of inclusion and exclusion where some objects are worthy of display because of their age, "representativeness," or visual interest, and others are excluded according to the same criteria. Despite the efforts of Sapir and his colleagues to present Indigenous cultures in a context of cultural relativism where Peoples would be understood according to their own values and beliefs,

¹⁰¹ CMC negative 78191, reproduced in Ruth Phillips, "Indian Art: where do You Put It?" *Muse* 6.3 (1988): 65.

the National Museum offered yet another example of Indigenous Peoples being interpreted according to the values of the colonial power which was oppressing them. The academic prestige and government support of the National Museum ensured that their narrative would remain the dominant one for many years.

CONCLUSION

This paper has examined the specific structure of rationality which informed the National Museum of Canada and its practices between 1910 and 1925. Analysis of the political, social and academic conditions surrounding the establishment of the Division of Anthropology and the opening of the new Victoria Memorial Museum, offers insight into the "truths" in which Sapir and his colleagues placed their belief. In the case of the National Museum, the structure of rationality was built on the hegemony of the Canadian state over the Indigenous Peoples in Canada. Although the Museum's policies and practices had scientific or political justifications which were considered logical and reasonable at the time, they were all influenced by the overall context of colonial power. All of the Museum's activities and exhibits, whether consciously or otherwise, served to reinforce the hegemonic position of non-Indigenous people in relation to Indigenous Peoples.

The overt influence of the federal government on the operations of the Museum is the most obvious illustration of the role of colonial domination in the Museum's structure of rationality. The "filters" discussed above provide examples of how the government kept the Museum from straying from what it considered to be the "national interest." Whether it was focusing on the exploitation of mineral resources, refraining from publishing "offensive" documents, or ensuring that the Canadian tourist trade benefitted from totem

pole preservation, the Museum was responding to the wishes of the government. Its role of interpreting Canada to Canadians (and the world, at international expositions) ensured the dissemination of the state religion of nation-building.

As privileged members of colonial society who had the advantages of race, gender, education and position within a government institution, it is not surprising that the staff of the National Museum adhered to the state religion. To them, the possibilities of the Canadian state seemed boundless, and their work reflected this faith. The interpretation of Indigenous Peoples as fascinating "curiosities" who were disappearing in the face of a "superior" society lent a scientific authority to the belief that non-Indigenous people were the rightful heirs to the continent. By focusing on the country's geological history and the antiquities of Indigenous cultures the Museum's work effectively gave Canada a past which far exceeded the period of time in which non-Indigenous people had been living here. Although these ideas seemed obvious and scientifically accurate to Sapir and his colleagues, they were only obvious because they were "socially constructed"¹ by the colonial reality of the period.

"Power relations within museums and galleries are skewed towards the collecting subject who makes decisions in relation to space, time, and

¹ Hooper-Greenhill 4.

visibility."² As illustrated above, the Museum was able to define and interpret Indigenous Peoples according to its own criteria. This control of discourse was based on the Museum's role as guardian-keeper of both information and the state's version of history. Although Boasian anthropology made a break with the hierarchical evolutionary anthropology of earlier scientists, it was still based on the description of Indigenous cultures by non-Indigenous people. Just as the *Indian Act* legislated who was a "status" Indian and who was not, the Museum's anthropology defined what was "authentic" "Indian" culture and what was a "faded vestige" of the real thing. In both instances, self-definition, the basis of self-determination, was denied to Indigenous Peoples.

The collection of material culture, intended to complete well-established anthropological taxonomies, was also strongly affected by the colonial paradigm. The inequalities of economic and political power in colonial society were at the root of collection, whether material culture was excavated from grave yards, confiscated by the RCMP, or purchased at what was considered a "fair price" by museum collectors. The economic superiority of the Museum collectors allowed them to possess the material culture of Indigenous Peoples, just as their ability to control academic discourse allowed them to effectively possess their past. The power of the "collecting subject" is quite tangible in this case as well.

² Hooper-Greenhill 7.

Hooper-Greenhill asks: "what does 'knowing' in museums mean?"³ "Do the existing systems of classification enable some ways of knowing, but prevent others?"⁴ In the object-oriented museum, there is a "taken for granted link between viewing items in a museum and the acquisition of knowledge."⁵ Museum-goers look at objects and read their labels to learn about the artifact and the culture from which it came. However, since objects must be excised from their culture in order to be included in the museum setting, it is debatable what the museum-goer is learning. Objects are further fragmented through their division among different systems of classification which separate them from some objects and create new relationships and associations with other objects.⁶ As we have seen, the identity of the Indigenous Peoples in the museum is an artificial construction, created according to the narrative of non-Indigenous curators and anthropologists.

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett calls the artfulness of the ethnographic object, the art of detachment.⁷ This detachment does not only encompass the separation of the object from its original setting, but the separation of the museum-goer from the object and, ultimately, from the originating Indigenous cultures.

³ Hooper-Greenhill 3.

⁴ Hooper-Greenhill 5.

⁵ Jordanova 22.

⁶ Hooper-Greenhill 6.

⁷ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 388.

Museum-goers are encouraged to learn through "attentive looking,"⁸ but what they are seeing is mediated by non-Indigenous curators. This inter-cultural communication is done by proxy, and it is shaped by the colonial paradigm. Curators intend to describe and interpret Indigenous cultures to non-Indigenous visitors; however, Indigenous Peoples are not involved in the museum exhibit, except as producers of material culture. Their identity is created for them through the ethnographic narrative, and their own voices are silenced. In the museum, then, silent objects look out of cases at silent observers.

In the museum, the only interaction between different Peoples is through the medium of the descriptive label. This relationship serves to alienate Indigenous Peoples even more from non-Indigenous Canadian society. Already marginalized by political machinations and geographic distance, Indigenous cultures are now reduced to their "essential" elements: objects of material culture. Indigenous cultures are seen to exist only in glass cases; the narrative is presented as a closed one, with no room for contemporary Indigenous Peoples to express themselves. Museum-goers cannot talk to Indigenous Peoples in the museum, nor can they see performances or hear stories. In many ways, the object-oriented display of the National Museum can be seen as the final separation between Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous people in Canada.

⁸ Alpers 27.

The internment of Indigenous material culture has led to an uneasy relationship between museums and Indigenous Peoples. Recent efforts, by groups of Indigenous Peoples who feel mis- or under-represented by museums, to change the current context of museum interpretation are often charged with censorship or the politicization of an apolitical institution. In an article written in the wake of the controversy surrounding the 1988, *The Spirit Sings: Artistic Traditions of Canada's First Peoples*, exhibit at the Glenbow Museum, Michael Ames, director of the University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology, voiced an opinion common in the museum community (as well as the academic community at large).

Museums are expected to inform the public about the truths of history through the preservation and interpretation of collections. . . It is contrary to their purpose as public educational institutions to use their programs for other peoples' political declarations. . . ⁹

Ames clearly believes that there are "truths of history" which can be stated and understood objectively, and that the museum is "expected" to pass these truths on to the public. People who may object to these "truths" are making "political declarations." Julia Harrison, co-ordinating curator of *The Spirit Sings* said that museums "must remain independent of external political pressures. . . [and not] become forums for special interest groups who wish to

⁹ Michael Ames, "Boycott the Politics of Suppression!" *Muse* 6.3 (1988): 15.

make political mileage."¹⁰ These statements assume the objectivity and non-political nature of museums.

A "rational" history of the National Museum can be a valuable addition to the current debate surrounding museums and Indigenous Peoples in Canada. An analysis of the structures of knowledge in a museum illustrates that no museum can be free of political and social pressures. Sapir and his colleagues believed that they were expressing an objective truth when they spoke of the inevitable demise of Indigenous cultures, even though demographic statistics of the time showed an increasing birth rate, and history has proven them wrong. Too often groups who question the *status quo* are accused of being "political," while those who are working to defend it are not. Certainly the government has made "political mileage" from the role of the National Museum in constructing and defending a version of Canada's history which leaves Indigenous Peoples on the margins, where their customs can be studied and discussed, but their political rights and their contributions to Canadian society are denied. Anthropological study which stresses that contemporary Indigenous Peoples are only a vestige of a "once-glorious" civilization allows the government to dismiss treaty and other obligations as belonging to the distant past. Clearly this role of the Museum is as political as the actions of any protest group.

¹⁰ Julia Harrison, "Co-ordinating Curator's Statement," *Muse* 6.3 (1988): 12.

Furthermore, even where there is a recognition of the complaints Indigenous Peoples have about traditional museum practices and a new awareness of the obligations museums have to the Peoples whose material culture they display, museums are still limited by their collections. Museums who wish to work with Indigenous Peoples and create new narratives for their exhibits remain tied to collections made in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The basic materials of exhibits are those artifacts collected according to the values of the salvage paradigm. It is vital to understand the rationality behind these collections, because they are the raw materials with which contemporary curators have to work.

It is difficult to evaluate how instrumental the National Museum of Canada was in shaping the views non-Indigenous Peoples held of Indigenous Peoples. The Museum did not operate in a vacuum. There were many historians, fiction writers, artists and agents of the government who were also guardian-keepers, reinforcing the narrative of inferiority and decline. What remains clear, however, is that the Museum's role was not an apolitical one which could claim to present the empirical "truths of history" to the public. Influenced by its relation to the state, and as both product and agent of the state religion of nation-building, the Museum developed and propagated a colonized version of Indigenous history. That the process of colonization continues in Canada is due, in part, to the discourse represented by the National Museum of Canada in this period.

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