

Writing the Hamatsa

Ethnography, Colonialism,
and the Cannibal Dance

AARON GLASS



Contents

List of Illustrations / x

Foreword / xii

Chief William Cranmer/Tłakwagila ('Namgis Nation)

Acknowledgments / xiv

Note on Terminology / xviii

Maps / xix

Prologue: Points of Arrival and Departure / 3

Introduction: From Writing Culture to the Intercultural History
of Ethnography / 15

1 A COMPLEX CANNIBAL: COLONIALISM, MODERNITY, AND THE HAMATSA / 41

The Hamatsa in the Nineteenth Century / 46

The Cannibal as Other (and Self) in Imperial Consciousness / 57

2 DISCURSIVE CANNIBALS: THE TEXTUAL DYNAMICS OF SETTLER COLONIALISM, 1786–1893 / 62

From the Maritime to the Land-Based Fur Trade / 65

Missionary Discourse and the Justification for Conversion / 73

- Selling the Colonies to Investors and Settlers / 83
 Nonacademic Ethnographers / 90
 Colonial Anxiety in the Popular Press / 105
 Indian Agents and the Administration of the Anthropophagists / 111
 Conjuring the Hamatsa / 124
- 3 THE FOUNDATIONS OF ALL FUTURE RESEARCHES: THE WORK OF FRANZ BOAS AND GEORGE HUNT, 1886–1966 / 132**
- Writing “The Kwakiutl” / 135
 First Contacts in Berlin and British Columbia / 140
 Toward a Theory of Diffusion in the Earliest Publications / 144
 “The Book with the Many Illustrations” / 159
 The Jesup Years and the Shift toward Texts / 174
 The Five-Foot Shelf / 181
 Posthumous Publications / 192
 A Conflicted Legacy / 197
- 4 READING, REWRITING, AND WRITING AGAINST: CHANGING ANTHROPOLOGICAL THEORY, 1896–1997 / 201**
- The Department of Indian Affairs and the Expanding Potlatch Prohibition / 202
 Students of Boas and the “Northwest Coast” as Culture Area / 211
 Other Scribes/Other Tribes / 218
 Acculturation Studies and Ceremonial Transformation / 234
 Cultural Materialism, or the Hamatsa as Ideology / 248
 Systems of Cosmic (M)orality, or the Hamatsa as Symbol / 252
 The Reality of Cannibalism? / 266
- 5 FROM INDEX TO ICON: (AUTO)BIOGRAPHY AND POPULAR CULTURE, 1941–2012 / 275**
- Life History, (Auto)Biography, and Autoethnography / 278
 The Lure of the Cannibal (and Its Ethnography) in Poetry and Prose / 298
 Conspicuous Citation and Anthropophagous Authors / 309
 The Legacy of the Icon / 317

6 SHAKING THE ARCHIVE: ON READING CULTURE AND CONSUMING ETHNOGRAPHY / 322

Bringing out the Hamátsa, Recuperating the Archive / 324

Recycling Anthropology and Its Products / 336

Colonialism, Ethnography, and Indigenous Modernities / 343

The Ambivalence of Anthropology / 349

Kwakwaka'wakw Strategies of Reading (and Not Reading) / 355

The Hamátsa Then and Now and ... / 366

Afterword: Between This World and That / 368

Andy Everson/Tanis (K'ómoks Nation)

Appendices / 376

Appendix 1 Kwakwaka'wakw bands and villages / 376

Appendix 2 Northwest Coast ceremonies with man- or dog-eating symbolism / 377

Appendix 3 “Canonical versions” of the Baxwbakwalanukwiwe' tale in Boas's publications / 379

Appendix 4 The 1894–95 Winter Ceremonial at Fort Rupert / 381

Appendix 5 George Hunt's reports of Hamátsa activity / 383

Appendix 6 Material from unpublished Curtis manuscripts / 385

Appendix 7 Notes on the cannibalistic dances of the northern Wakashan-speakers / 386

Glossary / 391

Notes / 396

References / 427

Index / 464

Foreword

On behalf of the U'mista Cultural Centre, I congratulate Aaron Glass on the tremendous amount of work he did to complete this ambitious project. There have been so many things written about the Hamatsa by anthropologists and others, including government and church officials.

In 1876, the Indian Act was legislated and became Canadian law. The Indian Act was the government of Canada's way to legally steal our lands. The revised Indian Act of 1884 made our ceremonies illegal. John A. Macdonald, the prime minister, misled (lied to) members of Parliament in order to get support for the passage of the revised Indian Act. He said we were "savages" and that we would remain savages until we became Christians. He was supported by lies from Indian agents and missionaries working in British Columbia. He told MPs that we ate human flesh and gave away our women in our Potlatch ceremonies – all lies! When Canada made our Potlatch ceremonies illegal, Canada basically took away the wealth of our Chiefs and our people. Prime Minister John A. Macdonald was a liar and a thief.

Being poor meant having poor physical health. Not being able to perform our ceremonies took away our spiritual health. Prime Minister

John A. Macdonald knew that would be the result of the Potlatch prohibition. We still have unfinished business! We are engaged in a process of Umatagila – “making things right” – to counter the effects of the Potlatch prohibition. This is a legal claim against the Government of Canada. To make our claim, we need to explain the history of Canada’s misunderstandings and lies about us. This book contributes to that process.

As a result of being initiated twice as a member of the Hamat̓sa society (sometimes referred to as the Cannibal Society), I have a different view of what the Hamat̓sa ceremony means. It demonstrates the ability of our people to bring human beings together with our spiritual beings in ceremony. The Hamat̓sa helps address the questions of physical and spiritual health through its symbolism of cleansing and purification. You have to believe!

Gilakas’la (Thank You), Aaron Glass

*Chief William Cranmer
T̓l̓akwagila
'Namgis Nation*

PROLOGUE

Points of Arrival and Departure

In the late 1870s, a recently ordained Anglican reverend named Alfred Hall was assigned by the Church Missionary Society to a new post at Fort Rupert, British Columbia, near the north end of Vancouver Island. One day in February 1880, he set off by canoe with a crew of five paddlers to conduct a survey of nearby villages for the purpose of expanding his small flock of Indigenous congregants among the Kwakwaka'wakw people of the area.¹ Winter in this territory is the time for Tseka, the sacred Red Cedar Bark ceremonials, and Hall's effort to spread the gospel was limited by intense ritual activity at many of his destinations. He and his crew were fed and allowed to witness ceremonial dances, but in one house his attempts to offer a hymn were rebuked by a Chief as anathema to the proceedings. Following the journey, Hall wrote to his church supervisors about one particularly harrowing experience:

Whistling and growling were heard and then followed a terrible scratching at the door. It opened and in sprang a man naked, leaping on his hands and legs and tied round the waist with a long rope held by six men. After jumping across the fire two or three times he attempted to grasp all present as if to bite them. He clutched hold of my coat but soon left the house. In a few minutes another medicine-man held by five men in the same way went through the same performance. All in the house were frightened and ran away, and I learned afterwards that two men were bitten that Evening.²

Without knowing quite what he had witnessed, and without having actually observed any biting of audience members, Hall became among the first people ever to commit to paper a description of the Kwakwaka'wakw Hamatsa dance, one of the most prestigious initiation rites within their ranked system of hereditary prerogatives. Thanks in part to Hall's own missionizing efforts and his subsequent cooperation with government agents, the Hamatsa and the larger ceremonial Potlatch in which it is embedded would be outlawed only four years later under a new provision in the Canadian Indian Act. Almost as soon as the dance was inscribed in the colonial archive, its enactment became prohibited despite a clear lack of comprehension on the part of federal authorities as to its true nature or purpose – or even its name.

In the summer of 1886, only two years after the Indian Act was revised, a young German scholar named Franz Boas first ventured to British Columbia to begin his ethnographic studies of First Nations languages, ritual, and art in a cultural zone that came to be known as the Northwest Coast. He quickly decided to focus on the Kwakwaka'wakw, whom he called “Kwakiutl” following the parlance of colonial administrators, as they appeared to be less assimilated than some of their coastal neighbours despite the presence of missionaries, settlers, merchants, and Indian agents in their territories. With this trip, Boas initiated a lifetime of research into the Hamatsa in the colonial context of its prohibition, although the social, cultural, and political reality of this condition rarely animated his otherwise detailed ethnographic descriptions. Partly as a result of his numerous museum exhibits and voluminous publications, as well as his significant influence on the nascent field of professional anthropology in North America and beyond, the world would soon come to know the Hamatsa as the “Cannibal Dance” and come to read about it, again and again, in every generation of anthropological scholarship. And the rest is history – or, put another way, a history of ethnography. But it is also the history of a ritual performance and its survival despite prohibition and persecution – a story of Kwakwaka'wakw resilience in the face of colonial assimilation policy and rampant ethnographic representation.

Just over a century after Boas's arrival in British Columbia, prospective visitors were offered an intriguing glimpse into the natural and cultural wonders awaiting them. In May 1992, the government of Canada (billing itself as “The World Next Door”) ran a two-page advertisement in the *New York Times Magazine* with the tag line: “Only

in God's country could you meet such interesting souls."³ (Figure P1) The focal point of the ad is a sweeping scene on a West Coast beach in which three (presumably) Indigenous people are engaged in a dramatic ceremonial display: a central standing figure dons the regalia of a northern Chief, while two seated dancers wear the distinctive avian masks (called *hamsamł*) used during a particular sequence (the *Hamsa'mala* or "Dance of the *hamsamł*") of the larger *Hamatsa* ritual cycle. In a rhetorical move that encapsulates the colonial penchant for paternalist appropriation, semiotic contradiction, and imperialist nostalgia, the text suggests that "Our Native peoples have been entertaining visitors for centuries," thereby decontextualizing the specific figures (which are never identified), neutralizing the ceremonial source of the scene, and ignoring the history of a Potlatch ban that persisted until 1951. At the same time, the visible activity is promised to be deeply spiritual in nature, a purportedly traditional or timeless ritual set in semantic opposition to the modern cityscape of Vancouver juxtaposed below. Though it misidentifies the particular masks pictured, the ad claims that "the most revered of spirits and master of ceremonies, the Raven embodies what this land is today... Magic. For here the supernatural abides in all that is living." While this vaguely animist characterization of both the land and its inhabitants was precisely what Reverend Hall and his government allies fought to replace with bounded reserves and membership in the Anglican Church, here it is both recuperated and reconciled – bridged, as another image in the ad implies – with a Western fantasy of divinely charged landscape. What was once persecuted in British Columbia as a display of savagery unfit for the nascent Christian colony is now used to tease potential tourists with the promise of Indigenous spirituality and aesthetic drama. Illegal in Canada under federal policy meant to hasten the assimilation of its Indigenous people, the *Hamatsa* is now adopted by the state as a picturesque exemplar of national heritage.

Although not prompted by the newspaper advertisement in question, my own entrance into Kwakwaka'wakw territory took place the following year. I did not initially set out to "do fieldwork" among them. I decided to balance my early training in anthropology with some exposure to contemporary Indigenous life, and a series of casual travels and social contacts landed me at the north end of Vancouver Island.⁴ In June 1993, I arrived in Alert Bay to begin a summer of volunteer work at the U'mista Cultural Centre, the globally renowned museum, library, archive, and cultural resource centre that houses Potlatch regalia illegally confiscated under the 1884 Indian Act and repatriated

Only in God's country could you meet such interesting souls.



White Canada's Pacific coast is still unfurrowed by many of this world, our native peoples have been entertaining visitors for centuries.

The Raven had his wings, its perfect diphthong, would he had formed our world out of nothing at all. And marked the beginning of life as we know it.

The most revered of spirits and master of ceremonies, the Raven embodies what this land is today. Magic.

For here the supernatural abides in all that is living.

The mountains and salmon streams. The night ceremonies. The towering cedars, their serenity and subtle scent of blossoms.

The fires, the loas, the real—the customs that are the Ancestored People. And our link to another world.

Taking wing with what seemed to be a small berry in his beak, Raven soared into the thick forest, shy. With but a quick flick of his head he cut out the sun, smothering all he had created in a sense of delight.

Surely, it's for these very good reasons so many of our native peoples, like the Tsimshian, the Tlingit, the Haida, all chose to settle here.

And still the haunting rhythms of unchanged rituals pay tribute to everything that made it a reality.

Experience the strength of our heritage in the tavern poles that have long stood the test of time.

Or in museums and galleries thousands of years in the making.

Moreover, Canada's third largest urban centre, makes its mark with a park the size of some cities.

Architectural designs—like "Canada Place"—also its magnificent backdrop. While our many cultures add their own variations on the performing arts.

And thank heaven for the ocean.

Yes, the Whale, the Sea Otter and the like still play, but in harmony with entire ships, totes, sailboats, seaplanes—and our floating symphony.

On Canada's west coast. Because, when life itself is inspiration, you never know when you might meet.

And from high overhead, the Raven smiles.

For a free Canada guide call 1-800-VISIT-92.



Canada¹⁰¹
The World Next Door

Figure P.1 Government of Canada advertisement featuring two *Hamatsa* dancers on a West Coast beach | *New York Times Magazine*, part 2, May 17, 1992

since the early 1980s. In preparation for this experience, I read many of the classic ethnographies of the Kwakwaka'wakw. However, nothing could have prepared me for the contemporary ubiquity of the “Cannibal Dance” in daily life.

Within my first two weeks on the *'Namgis* Reserve, I witnessed numerous *Hamatsa* performances in a variety of cultural and intercultural settings: a huge two-day Potlatch; a “cultural celebration” held by young children from the local band-run school; a large intertribal gathering as part of a canoe journey with participants from First Nations along the entire Coast; and dances staged for visiting summer tourists. Each performance was of a different length and entailed divergent discursive explanations, as well as variable use of the iconic bird masks, but they all featured the dance of “initiates” dressed in the characteristic regalia of cedar-bark headrings, neckrings, and aprons (generally worn over track shorts). After cycling through a series of similar but not identical choreographic routines, the main dancers inevitably “went wild” and had to be restrained by attendants – just as Hall had witnessed over a century before – although there were no attempts to bite audience members.

Having only read of the once outlawed “secret society,” I was surprised by its regularity and public visibility. I also became increasingly aware of the presence of a vast amount of ethnographic materials throughout Alert Bay and other neighbouring communities: Boas

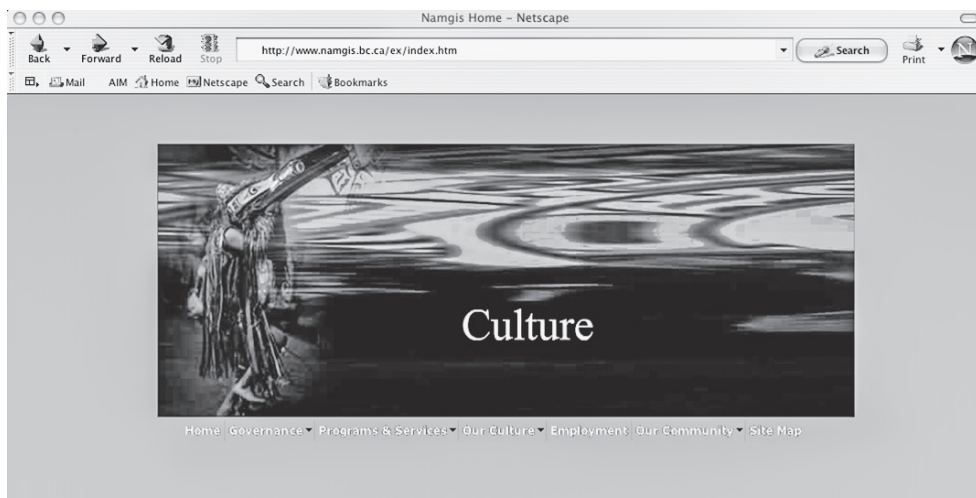


Figure P.2 Homepage of the 'Namgis First Nation, featuring a Hamsa'mala dancer, 2006 | <http://www.namgis.bc.ca/ex/index.htm>

publications in institutional and domestic libraries; iconic photographic portraits by Edward Curtis hanging in homes and gift shops; mid-twentieth-century cassette recordings of ceremonial songs playing on stereos; bootleg VHS tapes of early documentary films being shown on living room television sets. As one anthropologist working in Kwakwaka'wakw communities has recently observed, “The canon is impossible to avoid” (Robertson with the Kwagu'ł Gixsam Clan 2012, 19). I was repeatedly struck by Kwakwaka'wakw modes of objectifying “culture” in intra- and intercultural discourse, by the status of the Hama'sa as a cultural emblem and badge of pride, and by the invocation of “tradition” – in some cases, with direct reference to ethnographic media – during negotiations over current cultural production and political claims to sovereignty.⁵ (Figure P2)



These four arrival scenes punctuate the remarkable – and at times circuitous, ironic, and contentious – story of the Hama'sa over the past two hundred years, and this book explores a number of aspects of its paradoxical history and cultural transformation. How is it that the Hama'sa dance, the most secretive nineteenth-century Kwakwaka'wakw initiation ritual – banned by the Canadian government for its association with cannibalism – is now routinely performed for tourists and at museum openings? By what linguistic legerdemain did

an Indigenous expression of *overcoming* nonhuman (and inhumane) anthropophagal urges get branded the “Cannibal Dance” in both anthropological and Kwakwaka’wakw parlance? How did this highly restricted hereditary prerogative, introduced to the Kwakwaka’wakw in the nineteenth century and ceremonially available only to the chiefly elite, come to be taught in many band-run schools as a kind of ethnonational emblem? And what role, if any, did highly selective, recursive, and objectifying written accounts play in both its suppression and its survival? The dramatic choreography of the dance, the magnificent bird masks, and the aura of cannibalism have all contributed to its allure among non-Native observers. Yet these same features have also encouraged exaggeration, misconstrual, and outright spectacle in the resulting descriptions, whether made in the context of colonial assimilation policy, anthropological analysis, or commercial enticement. This book tracks the Hamatsa and its dramatic inscriptions – as well as their reception, interpretation, and use – across international scholarly and popular texts and back into First Nations communities over four centuries. I ask how different modes and media of ethnographic representation are constructed, circulated, and consumed and how they contribute to the formation of both colonialist stereotypes and Indigenous subjectivities over time.

My interest in such academic questions did not lead me to the Kwakwaka’wakw; rather, it emerged from time spent among them as “probably the most highly anthropologized group of Native people in the world,” in the words of Gloria Cranmer Webster (in Olin 1983), a ’Namgis scholar and founding director of the U’mista Cultural Centre. The admittedly informal observations I made in 1993 shaped later research on the discursive role of “tradition” in managing current controversies over transmission of the Hamatsa to women and to non-Kwakwaka’wakw dance troupes (Glass 2004a). I was struck by how both critics and defenders of such apparently unorthodox transfers of rights justified their opinions through recourse to the past as precedent. My choice to study the Hamatsa in this regard was dictated by its ceremonial rank, centrality in daily life and local talk, and emblematic status for both Kwakwaka’wakw and non-Native people, not because of its utilization of iconic bird masks or its association with cannibalism – the two features that have garnered it so much attention. Though the Kwakwaka’wakw are justifiably famous for their enormous range of dramatic mask and dance forms, they tend to monitor the circulation of the Hamatsa more closely than other dances,

and I became interested in the particular ways in which they go about this in the wake of its history of hyper-representation. In attending to the considerable presence of ethnographic materials in their midst, and in observing how the Kwakwaka'wakw engage critically with them, I realized that to properly contextualize the current debates about the Hamatsa, I would need to understand its history of ceremonial performance, colonial persecution, intercultural display, and ethnographic mediation.

This became the focus of my doctoral work, which brought me back to Alert Bay in 2003 after months of archival research.⁶ As befits a visitor to a Potlatch culture, I brought gifts: hundreds of digital images of Hamatsa regalia from museums across the continent; reams of photocopied notes and reports from libraries and archives; copies of photographs, films, and sound recordings from decades back. This time, I paid particular attention to people's use of the library at U'mista. I watched as people sat down on couches with old Boas texts, flipping through them to find examples of narratives, speeches, songs, dances, and masks relating to kin-group histories; some were seeking inspiration for new artworks or developing school curricula, while others were preparing for family reunions or Potlatches by looking for traces of their specific ceremonial inheritance (Robertson with the Kwagu'ł Gixsam Clan 2012). I frequently exchanged notes, photographs, documents, and stories with a regular visitor who is a direct descendant of George Hunt, Boas's long-time Indigenous collaborator among the Kwakwaka'wakw and an important ethnographer in his own right. One day, I pulled out a Boas volume (Boas 1921) rich in family histories so that we could try to triangulate some early census data the man had found with the genealogies recorded by Hunt. "I have one of those Boas books at home," he said. "You can debate all you want about what happened, but you got to go back to the book. Because he was there, my grandfather." As we shall see, the utility of such archival and ethnographic resources is vigorously debated in Kwakwaka'wakw communities, as people evaluate their contexts of production to determine the conditions of their present and future reception.

While much of my research focuses on the recursivity of ethnographic mediation in the visual realms of art, museum display, photography, film, and dance performance, in this book I focus on the history of written ethnography. I recognize the limitations inherent in fracturing the history of ethnographic representation according to media type, especially given that many of the key players (such as

Franz Boas, Edward Curtis, and George Hunt) utilized multiple media; however, there are several rationales for this decision. Because of their basis in written language and their particular materiality as printed objects, texts have unique discursive qualities and modes of both inscription and circulation. Whether published books or archival manuscripts, scholarly tomes or popular magazine articles, government reports or band-run websites, texts share fundamental qualities of form and reproducibility (through citation, plagiarism, photocopying, and scanning) across diverse rhetorical or epistemological conventions. Moreover, they represent the primary medium of knowledge transmission in Western (and many other) cultures and are the forms of ethnography most widely consulted by scholars, students, government administrators, and the general public alike. As such, they have a privileged and hegemonic, if somewhat dubious and now contested, place as a mechanism of representation under colonialism. However, precisely because of their portability and aura of cultural authority (whether valid or not), texts are also likely to be the most frequently consulted ethnographic media within literate communities, such as the Kwakwaka'wakw, interested in establishing their own libraries and archives as one strategy, among many, of cultural "survival" under conditions of modernity (Vizenor 1994).

Different representational media limit and shape which aspects of cultural forms can be re-presented (presented again), thus focusing analytical or interpretive attention on particular elements while neglecting others. Whereas most visual depictions of the Hamatsa present viewers with dramatic pictures and little discussion of cultural meaning or context, written ethnographies have largely construed the ritual as a set of beliefs or "meanings" (literary allusions, symbols, metaphors) grounded in textual hermeneutics while conveying little sense of it as a bodily practice. In addition, the visual mediation of the Hamatsa in photography, film, and museum display has, since the early twentieth century, increasingly privileged the distinguishing *hamsamł* masks while textual accounts for the most part focus on the activity and significance of the unmasked initiate. So, while visual media (especially illustration and photography) are deeply implicated in some texts, the conditions of their own production, circulation, and content are different enough that I largely bracket them here and focus instead on modes of discursive representation.⁷

My primary goals in writing this book are threefold. By attempting a comprehensive survey of written ethnography about the Hamatsa, I provide a kind of critical road map for contemporary readers in

overlapping popular, scholarly, and Kwakwaka'wakw communities, each of which may engage with the material in unique and situated ways. By revealing the highly recursive mechanisms of much ethnographic knowledge production, I hope to disrupt the long pattern of unreflexive citation that has led to the enshrinement of certain errors and misrepresentations in the literature on the dance. At the same time, a critical rendering of previous work, once properly historicized and contextualized (both in terms of the political and epistemological conditions of its production and in terms of its relation to the cultural reality it purportedly describes) should give readers a more solid foundation for using the literature to understand not only the history of anthropological and colonial discourse but also the history of the Hamatsa itself. Aside from what this literature might tell us about the history of claims to non-Native discursive authority, how might we also attempt to understand the history of Kwakwaka'wakw participation with ethnographers – their role in contributing to if not (co)authoring cultural descriptions? How did the Kwakwaka'wakw transition from being the subjects of salvage ethnography to being consumers of ethnographic texts? What do such participation and subsequent textual resignification tell us about how Kwakwaka'wakw negotiate identities and manage cultural properties in the context of modernity, colonialism, and current claims for sovereignty? In this book, I argue that to maintain and assert cultural integrity in the face of a dominant state, Kwakwaka'wakw have had to negotiate the legacy of anthropological – or, more broadly, ethnographic – depiction, a powerful form of knowledge production that conditions colonial relations with Indigenous peoples everywhere (Dyck and Waldram 1993; Povinelli 2002).

The key theoretical argument in the book, which I explicate in the Introduction, is that the literature on the Hamatsa – and by extension, other ethnographic literature – is a result of two deeply intertwined but asymmetrical processes: on the one hand, collaborative coproduction with First Nations interlocutors (informants, translators, culture brokers, coauthors of “autobiography,” and so on) and, on the other hand, conspicuous intertextual practices of selective citation and reiteration. The first process is key to understanding Indigenous agency in the historical production of ethnographic knowledge and also to understanding specific Indigenous modes of “reading” (reception, criticism, re-evaluation, and, in some cases, recuperation) in the present. The second process is key to understanding how ethnographic representation – in this case, through textual mediation – can turn

highly complex cultural practices into icons or emblems through simplification and decontextualization as descriptions become highly removed from the Indigenous reality they purport to present. While the second insight is characteristic of other critiques of colonial representation, fusing it with an emphasis on Indigenous participation and agency complicates our understanding of the epistemological status of representations as well as their active social lives within and beyond Indigenous communities. I argue that the Hamatsa has long mediated Kwakwaka'wakw experience of colonialism, in part through intercultural display and depiction as well as through outright defiance, and that such experience in turn has been mediated, although not overdetermined, by the representational processes and products of the ethnographic encounter. Reflecting the long history of collaborative research on the Northwest Coast, my fundamental status as an outsider to Kwakwaka'wakw ceremony, and my theoretical and ethical commitment to shared ethnographic authority, I invited Andy Everson (Tanis) to contribute to this book. He is a respected artist of K'ómoks and Kwagu'ł heritage, an initiated Hamatsa, a scholar, and a descendant of George Hunt.

Making this argument involves negotiating a tension in the theoretical literature about colonial discourse and ethnography. Postcolonial critique has convincingly revealed how deeply imbricated the structures of power are with their expression in (if not constitution by) forms of knowledge, particularly ethnographic or anthropological knowledge about colonized peoples. At the same time, parallel strains in poststructuralism call into question the unified logic and coherence of all discursive formations, even (if not especially) dominant or hegemonic ones. While I critique the colonial and ethnographic literature for conjuring a picture of the Hamatsa frequently removed from its cultural reality, I also want to open a space for challenging the monolithic hegemony of such discourse by attending to both historical Kwakwaka'wakw contributions to its creation and their contemporary strategies of reading, writing, and resignification. This entails the recovery of Indigenous participation and agency in the ethnographic encounter over the whole lifespan of texts, not as an apology for colonial domination or anthropological reification, but as a corrective to the second-order erasure of Indigenous presence and practice in many critiques of colonial representation (Glass 2009a, 2010a; Evans and Glass 2014). Many of my ongoing collaborative projects with Indigenous people are designed to help recuperate the ethnographic archive for their own present use, as well as for the

historiographic insight it provides into the complicated legacies of anthropology in North America and beyond (Glass 2018).⁸

This case study of the Hamatsa helps illuminate the larger colonial dynamic under which “representation” (in political, semiotic, and epistemological senses) has been the primary mode of managing intercultural relations between Indigenous peoples and settler states and scientists. I locate the production and circulation of cultural knowledge in specific institutional locations, textual genres, and frameworks (such as salvage ethnography, commercial exploitation, and aesthetic and nationalist appropriation) in order to complicate our understanding of these variegated colonial practices. More to the point, I stress Kwakwaka’wakw participation in projects of ethnographic mediation, and I trace the implications of this participation for the ultimate return of such knowledge into Indigenous communities. Anthropologist Dara Culhane (2000) has reflected on some of the Canadian political contexts – specifically treaties and claims to Indigenous land title – in which we do our work: “These arenas of political and popular struggle constitute the conditions of possibility for ethnographic research in contemporary British Columbia, and the context of academic and public interpretation when ethnographic research is disseminated beyond the local First Nations communities in which it is produced.” Discussing the work of Métis activist, filmmaker, and scholar Loretta Todd (1992, 1993), Culhane continues, “Todd argues that cultural knowledge, including that produced in everyday life, should be considered – like lands, forests, and fish – to be a resource owned by Indigenous peoples under Aboriginal Title ... Taking the materiality of Todd’s analysis seriously, representation of Aboriginal cultures must be understood in part as a resource and a real or potential means of livelihood.” Acknowledging the co-constructed nature of ethnographic knowledge, and the complicated and contested impact it has had on the human subjects of its analysis, we are in a better position to approach anthropological records as a form of Indigenous patrimony, as *material resources* that not only represent and objectify but that can also inform and enrich current Indigenous cultural production and social reproduction, even if through a dialogic practice of engaged critique.

I recognize my deeply embedded position within the history of ethnographic mediation and the dangers of perpetuating a tradition of reification and reiteration; of influencing the development of the communities I describe; of implicating myself and my work in local debates and negotiations. I am sensitive to what Mieke Bal (1996,

195) calls “the complicity of critique ... the impossibility of showing and saying ‘no’ to the object in the very gesture that shows it.” How does one “gesture” to the iconicity of the Hamatsa, and to the erroneous representations that helped secure its global reputation, without either repeating the errors themselves or undermining current local claims to its status? At the broadest level, I attempt to historicize the canonical descriptions of the Hamatsa so that they can be evaluated more self-consciously and critically. I also want to make available some overlooked and previously unpublished material, to resurrect a lost archive of noncanonical knowledge in order to complicate and expand understanding of Kwakwaka’wakw cultural history. Furthermore, all of this material should be made available to the Kwakwaka’wakw as an essential aspect of their cultural patrimony, regardless of – or rather, precisely because of – the colonial and often compromised conditions of its production. They should have the opportunity to openly and critically debate the utility and veracity of past ethnographic knowledge (Glass 2009a; Glass and Berman 2012). Unlike some scholars and curators, it is not my intention to encourage a particular historicism on the part of the Kwakwaka’wakw, to stimulate a “return to the old ways,” though some Kwakwaka’wakw suggest such return as a strategy of decolonial revitalization. In the final chapter, I directly examine my complicity in this book’s long story of intercultural exchange and knowledge production, as I retrieve and return archival materials to communities and produce my own ethnographic mediations of the contemporary Hamatsa and its entangled and contested history of description.

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