CULTURALLY MODIFIED CAPITALISM

The Native Northwest Coast Artware Industry

by

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Abstract

In the Pacific Northwest, Aboriginal designs adorn private spaces and public places, as well as clothing worn and objects owned by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples alike. In addition to Northwest Coast art being increasingly treated as a form of fine art, Northwest Coast designs are now also being mechanically reproduced on many decorative and utilitarian objects, such as mugs, tote bags, T-shirts, and fridge magnets. Since the early 20th century, scholars, educators, artists, entrepreneurs, and government officials have been putting forward the idea that this market could, and indeed should, be developed to the benefit of Aboriginal individuals and communities, in addition to being used to strengthen Canada’s national identity and industry. Over the decades, the art and artware market’s expansions have also continuously raised questions about the effects and ethics of cultural commodification, in particular with respect to the often unequal distribution of risks and benefits among the market’s stakeholders. This dissertation examines how Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal individuals who are currently participating in the Native Northwest Coast artware industry of Vancouver (BC) view this market’s present configuration and envision its future. It argues that the artware industry is being progressively shaped into a form of Culturally Modified Capitalism in relation to enduring concerns about levels of Aboriginal involvement, different conceptions of authenticity and collaboration, as well as tensions between democratization and exclusion, deterritorialization and localization, individual and collective interests, and development and sustainability. As in any capitalism system, the resulting commodityscapes rely on the extraction of wealth from natural and cultural resources; however, Culturally Modified Capitalism is also an economic model built upon the premise that capitalist systems of production, distribution, and consumption may be harnessed to sustain Aboriginal ways of life, on the crucially important condition that Aboriginal stakeholders are able to bring their worldviews, values, and interests to bear on the market’s configuration. In the Native Northwest Coast artware industry, this translates into the expectation that companies not only sell goods, but also “do good” while “making their name good” by engaging in practices of redistribution reflecting the system of generalized reciprocity that characterizes the potlatch economy.
Preface

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À ma famille toute entière,
et tout particulièrement, à feu Mamie-Gozh et à Mamie.
Note on “Northwest Coast Art”

The expression “Northwest Coast art” is usually used in reference to works, both historical and contemporary, that make use of or reference the “objects and... stylistic conventions known from the analysis of native antiquities” from the Pacific Northwest.\(^1\) However, because of the variety represented by its multiple referents, this label can be criticized for glossing over the particularities of the different styles it encompasses, and with these, the particularities of the peoples who developed them. To take the Coast Salish example, I have heard several artists reject the inclusion of their work under the umbrella category of “Northwest Coast art,” arguing that the stylistic differences between theirs and that of their northern neighbours are too important for their art to be subsumed into a category initially developed largely in disregard to Salish aesthetic standards. In addition, the “coastal” demarcation of this overarching category works to downplay connections with groups whose territories do not encompass direct access to the Pacific, and even more so connections to those whose territories are situated east of the Coastal Mountain Range altogether. In brief, even though it remains the expression of reference in both scholarly and popular publications on the topic, the expression “Northwest Coast art” is problematic in more than one way.

In the artware industry, designs tend to be labeled generically “Native,” “First Nation” or “Northwest Coast” (and on occasion, improbably “Haida”). Some artware companies, however, have been identifying artists and the specifics of their affiliation(s) on labels and other marketing materials, making a point to acknowledge the existence of a variety of groups within this region. I will myself use the expression “Northwest Coast art” when discussing the region in general terms, but I do so self-consciously in relation to the ideas that have come to be associated with it over decades of study, analysis, commentary, and practice.\(^2\) However, when discussing particular artists’ work, I will as much as possible refer to the specific nation(s) of the artists about whom I am writing, unless I feel it might jeopardize an artist’s request to keep her or his identity confidential.

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Figure 1: Collection of artware on display in a ferry terminal gift shop in Bellingham (WA).
With designs by Tsimshian artist Terry Starr, Haisla/Heiltsuk artist Paul Windsor, and Namgis artist Ryan Cranmer.

Photo by the author, July 15, 2009.


Introduction

In the Pacific Northwest, one can find depictions of Native art motifs throughout urban and rural landscapes, adorning private spaces and public places, on clothing worn and objects owned by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples alike. In parallel to the valuation of a segment of Northwest Coast cultural productions as ‘fine art’ and in relation to the growth of the tourism industry in British Columbia, the market for mass-produced Aboriginal-themed objects has drastically increased in volume over the last three decades. In addition to handcrafted objects made in series for sale, Northwest Coast designs are now also mechanically reproduced on many decorative and utilitarian objects: mugs, coasters, tote bags, T-shirts, scarves, jewellery, fridge magnets, chocolate wrapping, blankets and pillow covers..., spanning a wide range of materials, techniques and prices. These objects are primarily sold in retail stores and galleries as personal gifts and souvenirs, but are also distributed in bulk as corporate gifts or as potlatch goods. These series of objects that are adorned with Native Northwest Coast designs – hereinafter referred to as ‘Native Northwest Coast artware’ – are at the center of this dissertation.

In this introduction, I begin by contextualizing my research in the Aboriginal territories within which I conducted my fieldwork. I then provide a brief overview of the arguments I will be putting forward over the course of the eight chapters that form the body of this dissertation.

Vancouver, BC: A Coast Salish Place

I conducted all of my fieldwork in the Greater Vancouver area, with the exception of two interviews, most of my archival research, and observations made on the fly in several North American gift shops and airports. It is therefore on the territories of the Musqueam, the Squamish, and the Tsleil-Waututh that I conducted the majority of this research, spending most of my time either in Vancouver itself or in North Vancouver. That said, my research also encompasses the experiences of Aboriginal individuals – business owners and artists in particular – who are from none of these three nations, nor even from one of the seven other nations located in what is now Greater Vancouver.¹ Since the 1960s, urban areas have indeed attracted a great

¹ Metro Vancouver encompasses the territories of the following nations: Katzie First Nation, Kwantlen First Nation, Kwikwetlem First Nation, Matsqui First Nation, Musqueam Indian Band, Qayqayt First Nation, Semiahmoo First Nation, Squamish Nation, Tsawwassen First Nation, and Tsleil-Waututh Nation.
number of Aboriginal individuals and families from across British Columbia and Canada, with a population of close to twelve thousand people in Vancouver alone, and a little over forty thousand in Metro Vancouver as a whole. In addition, Vancouver has long been one of the primary hubs of the Northwest Coast art market, giving artists who did not already live in Vancouver reasons to regularly visit and, in some cases, more permanently settle in the city.

'Namgis artist Doug Cranmer, Haida artists Bill Reid and Robert Davidson, and countless other artists who have lived and worked in Vancouver have all directly contributed to the growth of the Northwest Coast art market in the city. This market was almost non-existent when the above-mentioned artists began their respective careers in the 1950s and 1960s; comparatively, today’s market is prosperous, even after it suffered from the recession that began in 2008. Although faster modes of transportation, improved postal and other delivery services, and the development of virtual means of communication now make it easier for artists to remain reserve- or rural-based if that is their wish, Vancouver currently remains the market’s primary hub. Many of the most prominent Northwest Coast art galleries and artware companies are based in the Greater Vancouver Area.

In 2011, the city of Vancouver celebrated one-hundred-and-twenty-five years of existence with art commissions, conferences, festivals, and concerts of all kinds. For the Musqueam, the Tsleil-Waututh, and the Squamish, this also marked as many years of urban development on their unceded traditional territories, following thousands of years of Aboriginal inhabitation. Neither many visitors nor many residents of Vancouver are aware of even the most striking episodes of this altogether recent history of urbanization. However, a recent event involving a Musqueam

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3 Although there are now several-generation Aboriginal urbanites living in Metro Vancouver, this does not necessarily mean lack of connections to friends and relatives living on reserves or other rural areas, in or near their ancestral territories. To give but one example, 'Namgis artist Doug Cranmer moved back-and-forth between Vancouver and his home town of Alert Bay for years before moving back to the Bay in 1976 after close to two decades spent primarily in and around Vancouver. Jennifer Kramer, *Kesu*: *The Art and Life of Doug Cranmer* (Vancouver; Seattle, WA: Douglas & McIntyre; Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia; University of Washington Press, 2012).

4 For instance, as a sessional instructor, I was witness to fourth-year undergraduate History, First Nations Studies, and Anthropology students at the University of British Columbia learning for the first time about the removal of Aboriginal (and other) residents from Vancouver’s Stanley Park in the early 20th century, to be almost immediately replaced by the “sanitized” indigeneity of totem poles. Jean Barman, “Erasing Indigenous Indigeneity in Vancouver,” *BC Studies* no. 155 (Autumn 2007): 3–30,167.

5 Historian Coll Thrush has produced a thorough and deep history of Seattle, illuminating the role played by Aboriginal people in urbanization processes from the very early stages of settlement. Coll-Peter Thrush, *Native Seattle: histories from the crossing-over place* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007). However, a similar history of Vancouver remains to be written. It is indeed only in the last ten years or so that social scientists have
burial ground located in South Vancouver did show that there is some awareness, including among some artware company owners, of the implications of urbanization for the Coast Salish.⁶

In early 2012, an archaeological permit was delivered by the Provincial Archaeological Branch to the owners and condominium developers of a piece of property in Marpole located atop an ancient village and burial site known to the Musqueam as cəsnaʔəm, and to archaeologists as part of the so-called “Marpole Midden”. When in January 2012 the archaeology team contracted to do the work uncovered the remains of an adult, the Musqueam requested that all excavations on the site be suspended. Work resumed on the site after an inconclusive round of discussion, and the crisis further intensified in March after the uncovering of the remains of two infants.

During this time, two artware companies donated products that were custom-designed for the protestors who participated in the twenty-four hour vigil of the site and other Musqueam supporters. On March 14, Larry Garfinkel, owner of Native Northwest – Art by Native artists, had delivered boxes of beige and brown t-shirts bearing an eye design executed in Coast Salish style and the slogan “Stop the desecration and destruction of cəsnaʔəm. niʔ xii̓x?ɬəmət kʷə syəwenəɬ čt. We are protecting our ancestors”.⁷ The company announced this donation on its Facebook page with the statement: “Native Northwest is on Musqueam Territory and honours the Musqueam people by gifting 100 t-shirts with “protect the site of cəsnaʔəm” on them.” As for Shain Jackson, owner of Spirit Works Ltd, soon after he joined the Musqueam for their May 4 procession down Granville Street to show their determination to protect the site, he donated dozens of paddle-shaped clothing pins made of cedar and abalone, bearing the words “Protect

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⁶ One of the ironies of Vancouver’s important role in the Northwest Coast art and artware market is that the city was built over Coast Salish land but this market for a long time tended to primarily promote the arts of the Northern and Central Northwest Coast.

⁷ I have been told that the company contacted a Musqueam spokesperson to offer the t-shirts and ask them what designs and slogans they thought the shirts should bear.
cọsnaʔəm”. Separately, both Garfinkel and Jackson visited the site during the following weeks, as a long waiting period ensued before preliminary negotiations finally began in early June of 2012.⁸

This example illustrates well not only how artware companies can publicly acknowledge their relationship to those whose lands they tread, but also how two individuals, one non-Aboriginal and one Coast Salish himself, whose companies are in competition with one another and have adopted vastly different business models, can nonetheless support the same cause and exhibit concerns about the treatment of Aboriginal ancestors in the thorny context of land disputes. This kind of convergence, even if only momentary and focused on one particular issue, helps dispel preconceived notions that cultural difference – including differences of business culture – creates rifts that are unbridgeable, no matter the circumstances. To me, the pins and the t-shirts donated to and worn by Musqueam community members and supporters is a perfect illustration of how much more complex the debates that animate the artware industry can be than oppositions based strictly on differences of cultural affiliation. It is the complexity of these debates that I strive to highlight in this dissertation.

**Overview**

The region which anthropologists and others commonly refer to as the “Northwest Coast” corresponds to a segment of the Pacific Northwest Coast of North America, stretching South to northern California and north to southern Alaska. It is bordered by the Pacific Ocean to the West, and by the Coastal Mountain Range to the East. These delimitations are not entirely arbitrary, since they are determined in relation to cultural differences and physical geography. Still, the designation of this space as an “ethnographic area” is also the result of intellectual and social processes to which anthropological studies have contributed considerably over the course of a century-and-a-half of academic research.

The Pacific Northwest is indeed one of the most thoroughly anthropologized regions of the world. Much of this scholarly work has focused on the institution of the potlatch and has involved discussions about the material culture involved in these ceremonial exchanges. The present dissertation contributes to this body of literature in at least three ways. 1) It examines the relationship between the development of the artware industry and the age-old practice of

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⁸ As of August 22, the negotiations to resolve the dispute between the property owners, the developers, the Province, and the city of Vancouver were still ongoing.
Aboriginal Pacific Northwest peoples to artistically adorn functional objects. 2) It probes the link between the continued practice of potlatching and the development of an industry that enables the production, distribution, and consumption of large series of the same objects and images. 3) It demonstrates that, in the artware industry, the capitalist model is shaped in significant ways by the potlatch economy. Given its focus on one particular region and a particular network within it, this dissertation is more ethnographic than it is anthropological in the comparative sense. In fact, the analysis I present here stands to be improved with comparisons between this ethnographic material and examples from other regions that would highlight the specificities and the commonalities of artware markets around the world – comparative work I hope to conduct in the future.

At the same time, my dissertation also differs from classic examples of Northwest Coast ethnography, in that a) I conducted most of my research in an urban area; b) I did not focus my attention on one specific group among the many Aboriginal cultural groups of the region, but rather on networks of relations that include Aboriginal individuals who are affiliated with a variety of these different groups; and c) I focused my attention as much on the involvement of non-Aboriginal individuals in these networks as I did on that of Aboriginal individuals. In this sense, from the point of view of “ethnographic areas”, the present work is situated at the intersection of urban anthropological research and Northwest Coast anthropology. From the point of view of theory, however, I have primarily drawn on the ideas of anthropologists and other scholars whose works focus on art, material culture, and economics (see Chapter 1).

The premise of my argument is that the Native Northwest Coast artware industry is shaped by three different but interrelated economic systems: the Pacific Northwest potlatch economy, British Columbia’s mixed economy, and globalized capitalism. However, the core of my analysis focuses primarily on the relationship between Indigenous and global models of the economy, examining how the interplay between them is progressively making the artware industry into a form of Culturally Modified Capitalism. I define the latter as an economic model that is designed according to the idea that, under certain conditions and limitations, capitalist systems of production, distribution, and consumption can be used to sustain Aboriginal ways of life. Although the general concept of Culturally Modified Capitalism is applicable to economic models that exist elsewhere than in the Pacific Northwest, I argue that the model I discuss here is
characterized by modifications that are specifically related to the values, worldviews, and practices of the Aboriginal peoples of the Pacific Northwest.

As discussed in this dissertation, in addition to its undeniably capitalist program, the artware industry has also grown directly out of the two related Aboriginal practices that are the adornment of functional objects and the distribution of large quantities of objects through potlatching. Thus, potlatching may have been banned under the Indian Act in part because it was perceived to reflect an essentially anti-capitalist conception of economics, but the development of the artware industry has arguably been facilitated by the fact that, through potlatching, Pacific Northwest peoples were not foreign to the idea of producing and exchanging design-adorned items in large series.

If anthropologists have debated the particular social function that is attributed to potlatch goods and if this function can vary depending on the cultural group, one thing is certain: it is a common feature of potlatches that series of the same or very similar items be given away in large quantities to those present, warranting the kind of mass-buying that not even Christmas shopping can rival. Whether they are considered “gifts” or “payments,” the items that are distributed to potlatch witnesses and guests span a wide array of goods that are the contemporary equivalents to the stacks of silver bracelets and piles of wool blankets pictured in late 19th century-early 20th century photography. In some cases, alongside locally harvested foods, blankets, jewellery, unmarked comforters, towels, cookware, and plastic containers, the artware items that are at the

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10 Gloria Cranmer-Webster, “The Contemporary Potlatch,” in Chiefly Feasts. The Enduring Kwakiutl Potlatch, ed. Jonaitis, Aldona (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1992), 229. Some supermarkets or department stores located near First Nations communities are becoming accustomed to being informed of upcoming feasts and ceremonies so that they can stock up in time for the mass purchases that will be made in preparation for these events. For Kwakwaka’wakw examples of such images, see figures 2.15 2.48, 2.53, 3.12, 3.23, 3.24, and 3.35 in Chiefly Feasts: The Enduring Kwakiutl Potlatch (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1991). For examples of very similar images taken in contemporary potlatches, see figure 5.19 in Chiefly Feasts by Aldona Jonaitis Ibid., and photographs taken by Ulli Steltzer of a potlatch held in Masset by Robert Davidson in 1981, in Ulli Steltzer, A Haida Potlatch (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1984), 73–74.

11 Cranmer-Webster, “The Contemporary Potlatch,” 229. Christopher Roth also lists the potlatch gifts he received in a 1996 Wolf-clan feast in Kistumkalum as follows: “one souvenir cloth calendar, three tea towels, four drinking glasses, one bottle of bath salts, one wax candle, two plastic baggies of dried seaweed, two chocolate bars, one pair of socks, three ballpoint pens including two souvenir pens with the date and particulars of the feast printed on the side, one pencil, one elastic hair tie, one plastic water bottle, one uninflated black party balloon ... and one specially printed school folder featuring a Northwest Coast design” Christopher F. Roth, “Goods, Names, and Selves: Rethinking the Tsimshian Potlatch,” American Ethnologist 29, no. 1 (February 1, 2002): 131.
center of this dissertation are also distributed. These can be customized specifically for the event, or simply chosen among the already available products distributed by artware companies. Thus, although the artware industry is typically imagined to produce souvenirs allowing non-Aboriginal tourists to hold onto a material token of their experiences of travel, this industry also provides potlatch gifts that can later function as “souvenirs” for potlatch attendees, working as mnemonic indexes for specific events and affiliations. The essentially capitalist enterprise that is the artware market is now also partly sustained by the need for large series of items to distribute in the context of non-capitalist exchanges of potlatches. Indeed, even though artware products are not all destined to potlatch redistribution, the fact that some of them are contributes to both supporting and justifying the existence of an industry that, like most, relies heavily on the flows of goods on which the contemporary global capitalist system thrives.

In addition to this intersection of potlatching and capitalism, several important parallels can be drawn between developments in the artware industry and in British Columbia’s economy. In the early days of so-called “discovery” and colonization, explorers, tradesmen, and later settlers, acquired objects from Aboriginal peoples that had been made by them from local raw materials; this was an economy of resource extraction and manufacture, the products of which were exported out to other locations. Today, many of the Aboriginal-themed objects that are acquired by residents and visitors of British Columbia are most often either imported goods or products made from imported goods, even when they are locally designed. Thus the economy of Aboriginal-themed products has undergone a similar transformation to British Columbia’s economy, shifting its focus from primary industries to services. And yet, many see the artware industry as relying on an essentially extractive activity not so different from the mining or logging that also occurs in Aboriginal territories. If raw materials are still required for the

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14 The latter can be described as a ‘mixed economy’ in that its natural resources are both privately and publicly managed, and private entities provide a certain number of goods and services along with those provided by the government. Not so long ago focused on primary resource industries such as forestry, mining, and fishing, the Province’s economy has undergone a shift in past decades towards service-sector employment, which now represents close to four fifths of overall employment in the province. Thus, contrary to commonly held views, primary industries are no longer the dominant forces in BC’s economy. In the Mainland/Southwest region of British Columbia, where I conducted the majority of my fieldwork and where the city of Vancouver is situated, the weight of the service sector is even higher than average (approximately 80% of all jobs, compared to 78% province-wide). B.C. STATS and B.C. Ministry of Jobs, Tourism and Innovation, *Guide to the BC Economy and Labour Market*, January 2010.
production of plain wares, at least the local segment of the industry has become primarily an industry of cultural resource extraction. As with natural resources, such extraction can be done more or less respectfully of the integrity and renewability of the resources in question. For instance, uses of designs without any form of Aboriginal consent, compensation, or control is likely to be much differently received and will have different implications than previously negotiated, remunerated, and monitored uses of such designs.

Another interesting parallel between British Columbia’s economy and the Northwest Coast artware industry concerns shifting levels of reliance on Aboriginal labour over time. Initially, Aboriginal peoples played a crucial role in the development of British Columbia’s resource industry. However, throughout the 20th century, through a variety of land dispossession processes and discriminatory labour laws, Aboriginal workers became increasingly marginalized in these economies, and wage-labour employment and incomes declined steadily. In the artware industry, despite the variety of business approaches that can be observed across Vancouver and British Columbia’s artware companies, many of them have one particular feature in common: when Aboriginal individuals are involved in their activities (which is far from always being the case), this involvement is almost always limited to one-time or short-term contracts for design work. Compared to the configuration of the market for Aboriginal art made for sale as souvenirs in the late 19th and early 20th century, this represents a striking decrease of Aboriginal involvement in production processes. A case in point in this respect is the exclusively Haida production of argillite sculptures in comparison to the very minimal involvement of Haida individuals in the industry of faux-argillite casts (Chapter 7). In general, the variously limited levels of Aboriginal involvement in the artware industry has not only raised doubts as to the “authenticity” of the Aboriginal-themed products that circulate on the market, but has also initiated debates with respect to the value of “collaboration” between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in this particular field of business (Chapter 4).

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17 Lutz, Makuk, 223–231.
This change is in great part due to the fact that the globalized labour market has generally reduced manufacturing activities in Canada and other so-called “industrialized countries” to a minimum. Thus, if from the point of view of mass-consumption the artware industry plays to the ideology of freedom and equality before the market (Chapter 6), at the local level this ideology also functions as an exclusionary force in the matter of production: it tends to place serious limitations on Aboriginal participation in the industry outside of design work. Indeed, in order to fulfill its promise to continuously expand access to Northwest Coast art by assuring low prices and large volumes, the artware industry finds itself increasingly involved in global commodityscapes that lead to a deterritorialization of production. Such deterritorialization does not necessarily extend to the Native Northwest Coast artware’s distribution and consumption, as both remain largely circumscribed to the Pacific Northwest. This is due to the market’s development in relation to local place promotion strategies, as well as to a desire (among Aboriginal stakeholders in particular) to maintain a certain level of control over the market, which would be even more difficult to do if the market were to become more deterritorialized than it already is (Chapter 3). These localization efforts are also related to the idea that the market should benefit its Aboriginal stakeholders at a more collective level, beyond the payment of artists for their designs. Such considerations re-inscribe the market not only in the “territories” but also in the “communities” from which they originate. The issues of whether artists should be paid with flat fees or royalties, and the level of returns they should expect in relation to those of artware companies, are only one aspect of the thorny question of what constitutes “just compensation” for cultural commodification (Chapter 5). 18 Following from this, the concerted efforts of some industry participants to build Pacific Northwest redistribution and resource management models into this market represent another important phenomenon (Chapter 8). These efforts are related to an overall feeling that a ‘new and improved’ artware industry is possible (Chapter 1), and could ultimately better reflect the collective nature of Northwest Coast art’s development not only as a style, but also as a resource on which much hope has been placed for and by Aboriginal peoples over the last century (see Chapter 2).

The collection of chapters that I have produced around each of the issues outlined above is intended to provide perspective on the ways in which concerns about varying levels of

involvement of Aboriginal peoples, different conceptions of authenticity and collaboration, as well as tensions between democratization and exclusion, deterritorialization and localization, individual and collective interests, and the ideologies of “development” and “sustainability” are all contributing to progressively shape the artware industry into what I call Culturally Modified Capitalism. This concept is a reference to the designation of Culturally Modified Tree or CMT, which describes a tree altered by Indigenous uses of the forest via harvesting methods that purposely keep the tree alive. A CMT is a testament to the idea that treating something as a resource does not necessarily mean to disregard its preservation. Culturally Modified Capitalism is not an alternative to capitalism per se, nor does it really go against its focus on the extraction of natural and cultural resources; rather, it is an economic model built upon the premise that Aboriginal ways of life can be sustained through capitalist systems of production, distribution, and consumption on the crucially important condition that the industry’s Aboriginal stakeholders are able to bring their worldviews, values, and interests to bear on the market’s configuration. I do not argue that the Native Northwest Coast artware industry is already a fully-realized example of Culturally Modified Capitalism. Rather, this dissertation examines the discourses and practices that illustrate what continues to separate the artware industry from this model, and show how eager some of its participants are to change the industry’s current configuration so as to come closer to achieving this model.

For the sake of clarity, each of the chapters of this dissertation prioritizes the analysis of a key issue that shapes the industry as it currently stands: establishing cross-cultural trust in a postcolonial context (Chapter 1); overcoming the power dynamics inherited from a history of theft (Chapter 2); asserting local means of control in a globalized economy (Chapter 3); marketing particular criteria of value (e.g. “authenticity”) and certain kinds of practices (e.g. “collaboration”) without depreciating them (Chapter 4); evaluating the fairness of a business relationships according to competing ethical and economic models (Chapter 5); avoiding the trap of standardization in mass-production (Chapter 6); shielding culturally valued materials from the threat posed by their imitations (Chapter 7); and modifying capitalism using Indigenous economic models in the hopes that the market will help reinforce rather than threaten the cultural resources it commodifies (Chapter 8). The format of dissertations – which stems from the material constraints of printed matter – required that I order these chapters linearly. However, as the constant cross-referencing of chapters will make clear, each chapter was written with the
many overlaps of these key issues in mind. In addition, many of my ideas are the product of dialectical thinking, which means that the propositions that make up this dissertation often represent a snapshot taken in one particular moment in an oscillation – between subjectivism and objectivism, and between relativism and positivism, for instance. That said, I believe that both the overlaps and the oscillations that are present in my analysis not only result from my thought process but also reflect that which I encountered in the field.
Figure 2: Scene from the “field”.
The Aboriginal Artisan Village, set up in downtown Vancouver during the 2010 Olympics. Photo by the author, February 19, 2010.
Research Methods: Producing a “Field” of Embodied and Discursive Practices

The methodology I employed and my personal experience of fieldwork were both shaped significantly by the particularities of conducting anthropological research ‘at home’ when the ‘community’ studied is a network of partners and competitors, and the ‘field’ is primarily made of a myriad of temporally circumscribed events and encounters in spatially disconnected micro-sites. Anthropological research has been undergoing such transformations that its practitioners have no choice but to acknowledge that “fieldwork” takes many forms and implies various methods.¹ Today, the “tent-in-the-village” model is hardly the only kind of accepted fieldwork. Still, the trope of “real fieldwork” continues to haunt graduate students like myself because, whatever is considered to make fieldwork “real,” the experience of fieldwork remains the “disciplining process” that allows us into the profession of anthropology.² It is with this in mind that I have decided to present my methodology from both the self-reflexive and the epistemological aspects that have shaped it.

In the first part of this chapter, I discuss tropes of anthropological fieldwork and how they informed the ways in which I experienced my own doctoral research. In the second part of this chapter, I explain how my “field” was constituted by my embodied practices as a researcher. In the third part of this chapter, I consider the set of discursive practices on which my analysis draws, focusing primarily on those of artware industry participants and stakeholders. In the fourth and final part of this chapter, I present my interpretive and grounded approach to the analysis of the material I was able to gather.

The “Field” Beyond Tropes

The experience of doing anthropological research in the city that had already by then become my “home” did not correspond to the experience of fieldwork I had envisioned, even after having read not-so-classic “postexotic, decolonizing” ethnographies.³ I had not “displaced” myself into a “cleared place of work” and non-fieldwork relationships and social events could

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² James Clifford, Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1997), 64.
³ Ibid., 53.
easily steer me away from the “focused, disciplined attention” of fieldwork.⁴ I also did not always feel that I could frame my fieldwork as being in sharp contrast with my everyday life, conducted in a field that is “discrete” and “out there”, as classic tropes of “being in the field” suggest.⁵ To be clear, it is not that I was concerned about a lack of “exotism” in my work: on the contrary, I had very consciously opted for research pertaining to a society of which I am a part, and during which I would encounter, among others, people of very similar socio-economic and cultural backgrounds to mine. With this choice came a few obvious advantages: I knew my way around Vancouver; even though it is my second language, I already read, spoke, and wrote English fluently; I did not experience social isolation; I did not have to change much in the way of my eating, sleeping, and other personal habits. However, in some sense, these advantages are also what, at times, made it difficult to pull myself outside of my comfort zone to practice “the exercise of systematic astonishment” that is the landmark of anthropological fieldwork, even when conducted in familiar settings.⁶ Still, I was from the start confident in the value of fieldwork conducted “at home” as a form of anthropological research.⁷

I also knew that, to most if not all of my interlocutors, I was perhaps doing research “at home” but I was never going to be considered as being “from here” – something that would protect my work against dismissals by detractors of “native” anthropology.⁸ As a second-generation Canadian of European ancestry who had grown up in Ottawa and spent the ten preceding years living in France, and as an anthropology student conducting fieldwork in Vancouver for the first time, I was not surprised when one of my interviewees said I could be considered a “tourist” of sorts, at least when compared to herself and her family, on whose unceded territory I was standing. In fact, I strove to remind myself of this status of visitor and guest, including with respect to the position from which I approached my interlocutors and later wrote this dissertation. In other words, even though as a member of Canadian society I have a stake in, and opinions about, the ways in which our economic and legal systems treat Aboriginal cultural resources, I am also very much aware of the fact that my gaze and my voice are that of an outsider to these resources’ communities of origin. This awareness informed my decision to be

⁴ Ibid.
⁵ Ibid., 57.
⁶ Marc Augé and Jean-Paul Colleyn, The world of the anthropologist (Oxford: Berg, 2006), 12.
for the most part analytical and descriptive rather than moralizing and prescriptive, even as I hope my work will be useful to those who wish to make changes to the ways in which the industry operates and is configured in order for it to benefit its Aboriginal stakeholders more than it currently does.

More than the fact that a portion of my research was dedicated to studying “my own” in “my own city”, my concerns regarding the validity of my methodology stemmed from the fragmented spatiality and temporality of my fieldwork experience. Especially at first, the times between events and interviews very much resembled the life I had in Vancouver prior to officially starting my doctoral research. At times, this caused me to worry that I was not conducting my research properly, bothered by the fact that every moment of every day did not feel like “total immersion.” Going to exhibit openings, lectures, and other events related to the Aboriginal art scene was an important part of my experience of Vancouver since I had first moved there. Therefore, “being in the field” felt like an intensification of these activities rather than a fieldwork-specific experience. When a few days passed without being able to attend an event or schedule an interview, it felt like I could not claim those days as “fieldwork” even though I was still “in the field”. If I spent a number of days working from my apartment, a coffee shop, or from an office, could I still say that I had done fieldwork “over a continuous period of at least a year,” as predicated by the “norm against which other practices [of fieldwork] are judged” ⁹? Given the rhythm of my work as a field researcher, it was not always obvious to me that it was indeed of an anthropological nature, and thus suitable to my being “recognized as [an] anthropologist” ¹⁰.

In the times when I was feeling uncertain of my approach, I knew that I was not the first researcher to have conducted fieldwork in a familiar urban area, working her way through networks rather than focusing on a set of fixed physical sites each regularly frequented by the same group of people. Yet I still struggled to remember examples from the anthropological literature that could remind me of this fact – such is the power that Boasian and Malinowskian exemplars of fieldwork continue to have over anthropology’s contemporary practitioners, even

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⁹ Clifford, *Routes*, 55.
¹⁰ Ibid.; see also Gupta and Ferguson, *Anthropological Locations*, 1.
those who like myself are not nostalgic for the “real anthropology” of yore. More importantly, I had trouble finding resources to help me better adapt my methodology to the particulars of my fieldwork and research questions. Although the discipline is generally seen to have moved beyond “village anthropology”, much work remains to be done with respect to developing methodological approaches to match these new terrains. In this respect, all the guidance I could find were such things as epistemological but not methodological suggestions to “follow the thing”, vague notions that “the effectiveness of field research undoubtedly lies more in a sort of spontaneous learning process than in the conscious and active side of the project”, and the reassuring assertion that “for ethnographic research… improvisation is indispensable”. As a result, I often asked myself whether I was doing my fieldwork “right”.

As time passed, however, I eventually grew less concerned with ensuring that my methods would be considered to lie strictly within the disciplinary boundaries of “real anthropology”, as defined by the trope of “real fieldwork”. Instead, I hope that my work can show that anthropological knowledge can be produced through a cross-disciplinary methodological approach, which includes ethnographic fieldwork and interviewing, but also archival research, surveys, and other forms of documentation. As this assortment of methods makes evident, the disciplinary boundary I cross most often is the one that separates anthropology from sociology. Having received formal sociological training, I do this quite self-consciously and, I hope, effectively. As a first-year M.A. student in sociology who was told her approach was too anthropological, and a second-year M.A. student in anthropology who was told her approach was too sociological, I have come to believe that there is more value in this border crossing than there is in the defense of disciplinary boundaries. I am obviously not alone in thinking this: Marc Augé and Jean-Paul Colleyn reckon that this tendency is observable across anthropology more generally, as its “external frontiers… are becoming blurred, especially where they touch on sociology”. In this respect, anthropological and qualitative sociological research can both be

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13 Augé and Colleyn, The world of the anthropologist, 82.
15 Gupta and Ferguson, Anthropological Locations, 4.
16 Augé and Colleyn, The world of the anthropologist, 4.
pursued through a variety of method combinations. However, if compared to sociology
anthropology traditionally places more emphasis on participant observation than interviews, I
found that interviews actually helped me address the limitations I encountered with respect to
conducting participant observation. Thus, as I explain further below, in addition to experiencing
fieldwork as an embodied practice, the adaptation of my methods to the particular circumstances
of the field meant that my research came to increasingly focus on discourses, discourses about
practices, and discursive practices.

The “Field” as Embodied Practice

James Clifford argues that “there is nothing given about a ‘field’” and that “it must be
worked, turned into a discrete social space, by embodied practices of interactive travel”.
My own embodied practices and interactions with artware industry participants are what created the
social space of my fieldwork. However, this “field” was by no means a continuous physical
space, and in some respects only tenuously a discrete social space. Although the various people I
encountered were involved in the same market, they were not all connected to each other via
direct social interaction. In many ways, it felt as though I physically embodied my “field” by
spatially tracing these connections with each of my movements between people and the places
they occupy. None of these places functioned as the “home base” of my fieldwork: as much as
Vancouver as a whole is a hub of activity for the Native Northwest Coast art and artware market,
there is neither one continuous area (such as a district or a neighborhood) in which its activities
are condensed, nor any discrete site that serves as this market’s center. The only site to which I
consistently returned, day after day, was that of my actual home – the backstage of my research,
from which I made phone calls, wrote emails, took notes, transcribed interviews, etc. This home
was not contiguous to the various sites I visited during the day; my so-called “tent” was not set
up in the middle of a “village”, partly because there was no such “village” in which I could
pitch it. As historian James Clifford describes, I had to create the social space of my research

17 Clifford, Routes, 54.
18 Once, on my way out from an art sale, I bumped into an artist and company owner whom I had previously
interviewed. He asked me how my research was coming along, and how many people I thought I would end up
interviewing. When I answered “about fifty”, he gave me a somewhat bewildered look: “Huh! So you’ll probably
have talked to a bunch of people that I’ve never even talked to, then!”
19 In reference to Malinowski, Clifford, Routes, 60.
through embodiment and interaction. However, much like the chapters of this dissertation are not a continuous plane of knowledge now covering an identified knowledge “gap”, but rather a trellis across which to travel an under-examined area of study, what results from my research travels and practices are less a “field” than a “mesh” that can cover a large network of people and places that are all linked to each other through the Native Northwest Coast industry. The following sections are self-reflexive descriptions of this mesh-weaving process and some of its implications for my overall methodological approach.

**Participation Observation Ltd.**

When I officially began my doctoral fieldwork in 2009, I had moved to Vancouver over two years before. By the time I defend this dissertation, I will have lived there continuously for over six years. During this entire period, I have collected notes, images, documents, thoughts, and experiences relating to Aboriginal representations in the city generally, and to Northwest Coast art and artware in particular. However, my doctoral fieldwork itself spanned a little over a year-and-a-half, from January 2009 to August 2010. The Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games were held in Vancouver in February and March 2010, dividing my fieldwork into pre-Olympic, Olympic, and post-Olympic periods. In the pre-Olympic period, many artists, artware companies, and retail stores (including galleries) speculated on the impact the Games would have on the market, many of them actively preparing for them. A few were even officially involved through commissions and other contracts. The two weeks of Olympics in February 2010 (and to a lesser extent, the two weeks of Paralympics in March 2010) stand out in my fieldwork for several reasons. First, the city was unusually bustling, thousands of locals and visitors circulating through the downtown core, primarily on foot – unusual in an area which, on a normal day, would be a relatively quiet and a primarily car-oriented zone. Second, I was able to conduct fieldwork alongside my friend and colleague Natalie Baloy, whose doctoral research was also situated in Vancouver and was related to the Olympics. This experience contrasted greatly with what had been a mainly solitary experience of fieldwork until then. Third, and most importantly, many of the artists and some of the business owners I had come to know in the preceding year were, for

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20 Ibid., 54.
21 On occasion, I was able to convince friends to come with me to some of the events I was attending as part of my research, such as festivals, exhibit openings, and one pow-wow. At these public events, I also often bumped into people I knew from UBC, including my supervisors and other graduate students.
the first time of my fieldwork, going to frequent the same space on a regular basis. Many of them were indeed going to have a table in the Aboriginal Artisan Village, set up in the Vancouver Community College at the corner of Pender and Hamilton, not far from the Aboriginal Pavilion.22

Once the Games were over, both the city and my fieldwork resumed their normal pace: relatively slow days and fairly early nights, with few opportunities of fortuitous or spontaneous encounters. The lack of such opportunities was one of the primary challenges I encountered in the field with respect to building a network of people from whom I could learn about the artware industry. As I have already explained, the two-week-long Aboriginal Artisan Village notwithstanding, there was no single space I could visit on a regularly basis, or in which I could conduct participant observation day after day in the hopes of meeting individuals involved in the artware industry. These individuals are dispersed between their homes, private studios, offices, and warehouses – all of which are spaces private enough that most people would not visit them unless specifically invited to do so. I for one certainly thought that getting in touch beforehand would be the approach most respectful of these individuals’ professional and private lives.

From weaving networks to collecting discourses

At the beginning, having few contacts but knowing some of the names of artists or companies I wished to get in touch with, I searched for their contact on the internet, and used email messages to break the ice. In some cases, I was also able to find telephone numbers, which also allowed me to make a few “cold-calls”. While neither are the most personal means of contact, in the absence of a physical meeting place, these seemed like the best strategy, at least to begin. In a number of cases, email revealed itself an effective approach, particularly with those who are intensive social-media and/or smart phone users. In other cases, I was left wondering if the addresses I had gleaned from the internet were correct. I had hoped that introducing myself via short messages would lead to what I was really after: in-person conversations, and in some cases interviews. However, it quickly became clear that this approach was going to lead to long periods of waiting with no certainty of a response, let alone a positive outcome. Also, calling more than once or sending more than one email and perhaps one reminder-email per person already made me feel pushy, as these individuals had never heard of me before. I also had little

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22 Both the Aboriginal Artisan Village and the Aboriginal Pavilion were VANOC- and FHFN-sanctioned spaces designed to showcase Aboriginal arts and culture during the Olympics.
way of knowing whether not receiving a reply meant “no”, “maybe”, or that the message had been buried under a pile of other non-urgent messages by a recipient who would be quite willing to meet with me had they remembered to reply to my query. Feeling discouraged by the slow-coming replies, I changed my strategy.

By then, it had become clear to me that “deep hanging out” 23 or “intensive dwelling” 24 in particular physical spaces were not going to be my entry points into the field. I was not going to be conducting my fieldwork in the form of “village anthropology” – not even in the sense of “villages” that are urban neighborhoods, institutions such as museums, or as Kath Weston put it, “village-as-corporate-boardroom” or “village-as-scientific-lab”. 25 However, a week does not pass in Vancouver without an event related in some way to Aboriginal histories, arts, cultures, politics, and peoples. I looked out for event announcements, and even opened a Facebook account in order to receive invitations that many social-media users no longer bother to send via personal email or regular mailing lists.

Given the topic of my research and the individuals I hoped to meet, I initially focused my efforts on exhibit openings, lectures, artist talks, and public discussions specifically about Northwest Coast art. I also went to arts and crafts sales held at the Vancouver Friendship Center, on the Musqueam reserve, at the Squamish Capilano reserve, and at the Chilliwack Pow-wow. It is by attending these events and introducing myself to the people I met there that I slowly began to build a list of contacts. Many of these in-person encounters eventually led to interviews later on. However, the nature of these events meant that I did not meet as many artware company owners as I did individual artists. I therefore started to visit trade shows that involved some Aboriginal art and artware, including the Vancouver Gift Show, Interior Design Show West, and One-of-a-Kind, which were respectively held at BC Place and Canada Place in downtown Vancouver. There were several festivals I was able to attend as well, including the Indian Summer Festival held at Robson Square by the Aboriginal Tourism Association of British Columbia, and West Vancouver’s Harmony Arts Festival and Art Market. Given the timing of my research, I was also able to attend both 2009 and 2010 celebrations of National Aboriginal Day on June 21, which usually include several different arts and crafts sales. In specific relation to the Olympics, I went to the VANOC Aboriginal Art Auction that was held in 2009 at Canada

23 Renato Rosaldo, reported in Clifford, Routes, 56.
24 Ibid., 58.
25 Weston, “‘Real Anthropology’ and Other Nostalgias,” 136.
Place, and the FHFN Aboriginal Fashion Showcases that occurred during the Olympics themselves. On a few occasions, I attended events that included Aboriginal ceremonies and were open to the public, including a pole-raising in Stanley Park, the Cultural Journey inauguration at the Squamish-Lil’wat Cultural Center, and the Tom Lee Music/Steinway/BC Lions Society unveiling of a Coast Salish piano by Jody Broomfield.26

The initial impetus to attend many of these events was to meet artware industry participants in person. However it is also at these events – which all in all had very little spatial overlap with each other – that I was primarily able to conduct participant observation. Admittedly, as far as my research is concerned, the kinds of observations I could make during these events were almost all focused on the distribution of artware rather than its production. Still, it is there – and there, and there… – that I met many of the artware producers who I was eventually able to speak to and, in some cases, interview.

Although I did visit several studios and I was toured around one company’s warehouse and another company’s warehouse and manufacturing space, I was not able to conduct much participant observation of production processes. This is in part due to the fact that is common for much of the production to actually occur elsewhere than at the headquarters of Vancouver-based artware companies and, in a number of cases, overseas. I also suspect that my not being invited to spend any length of time visiting those production spaces that are indeed local had at least in part to do with the fact that I was going to be speaking with competitors, and writing a public document (this dissertation). Even without intending to do so, I could have inadvertently shared trade secrets or information not intended for public consumption. A company does not need to have anything to hide in order to worry that such circulation of information might harm their business commercially, with consumers changing their perspective on a product, or competitors taking inspiration from their practices, for example. Although I would have liked to be able to gain more insight into production processes from direct participant observation, I chose not to pressure my interlocutors into giving me more behind-the-scenes access than they were comfortable giving me, preferring instead to focus my efforts on being able to interview them. Arguably, this means that much of the information I collected about production takes the form of discourse, rather than observed practices – something I have taken into consideration in my

26 Friendships developed outside of my fieldwork also gave me the privilege of being invited to more private ceremonies. Although I do not consider these private events to be part of my fieldwork – I attended them as a friend and not as a researcher – they nonetheless enhanced my overall understanding of gift-giving in potlatches.
analysis. In fact, I eventually came to see the various kinds of discourses I was collecting and recording not as empirical data about practices I could not access otherwise, but rather as practices themselves – discursive practices that I was indeed able to access. I elaborate on this point in the next section, in which I present my interview corpus as well as the various other methods I employed as part of my fieldwork.

The “Field” of Discursive Practices

As literary theorist Sara Mills has observed, “the term ‘discourse’ has become common currency in a variety of disciplines… so much so that it is frequently left undefined, as if its usage was simply common knowledge”. 27 My own use of the word combines two approaches: discourse as representation, and discourse as practice.

Linguist Roger Fowler defines discourse as “speech or writing seen from the point of view of the beliefs, values and categories which it embodies; these beliefs, etc. constitute a way of looking at the world, an organization or representation of experience”. 28 Furthermore, in Fowler’s view, “the source of these representations is the communicative context within which the discourse is embedded”. 29 This definition highlights the importance of interpreting discourses in relation to the wider ideological context in which they circulate, but also to the specific interactions in which they are produced. When producing interpretations of my material, I have kept these two levels of context in mind. However, what is missing from this definition of discourse is any reference to the effects of discourse on its object.

Beyond their representational dimension, I approach discourses as practices – not only practices of self-presentation, social differentiation, political positioning, etc. but also practices that produce the “world” in “worldview”. What Michel Foucault calls “discursive practices” 30 have social force: far from merely being attempts at description or interpretation, they also create the objects to which these descriptions and interpretations relate. 31 Or, as stated in the field of

29 Ibid.
31 To be clear, this does not mean that I narrowed my focus to what John Searle termed “speech acts” – language used not to describe or make statements about the world, but to perform actions. John R. Searle, Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language (London: Cambridge U.P, 1969). Speech acts are only one kind of reality-constitutive discursive practice.
critical discourse analysis (as led by sociolinguist Norman Fairclough, who draws on Foucault), any discourse is “socially constitutive as well as socially conditioned”. Thus, in addition to the pragmatic question of access, my approach is also epistemologically informed by the idea of “reality-constitutive discourses”, according to which discourses should not only be interpreted within their context of reference, but also be considered as constitutive of this context. This idea was already present in Foucault’s argument that discourses are “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak”. Drawing on a dialogical objectivist/constructivist perspective, Shi-xu argues that “Language and communication do not merely provide descriptions of reality: they also perform actions at the same time, which bring about changes to states of affairs”.

To illustrate this with an example from my fieldwork, when certain kinds of statements were repeatedly made by my interlocutors, such as “I do business in this way, whereas my competitor does it in this other way”, I took them not only as indicative of differences in practices between businesses, but also as discursive practices that are constitutive of these businesses’ differences and the tensions that can arise between them, sometimes precisely because of these sorts of discourses’ circulation. Thus, my interpretation of the discourses I collected focused less on their correspondence to reality (i.e. how “accurate” they are), and more on how these discourses shape the reality of the artware industry – or, put slightly differently, how these discourses not only reflect the industry’s current “order”, but also how, through them, both permanence in, and change to, this order are continuously being articulated and rearticulated.

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33 Shi Xu, A Cultural Approach to Discourse (Palgrave MacMillan, 2009).
34 Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge, 49.
35 Xu, A Cultural Approach to Discourse, 21. For instance, in the artware industry, the promotion of particular kinds of business practices, such as the expectation that non-Aboriginal companies redistribute some of their profits to Aboriginal stakeholders, have to be understood in relation to the history of Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relations. However, this promotion has also led some non-Aboriginal businesses to comply with this expectation, not only denoting but also effecting changes in Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relations (see Chapter 8).
36 Blommaert and Bulcaen, “Critical Discourse Analysis,” 449. To give but one example of this, having listened to an artware company owner describe a competitor’s tendency to create products very similar to his own, I later asked if I could have a copy of his company’s old catalogues so that I could establish a chronology of the kinds of products it had released over the years. My request seemed to come as a surprise, as if it showed that I was contesting his version of the facts instead of seeking to confirm them. Although I was ultimately unable to access the catalogues, this interaction nonetheless enabled me to identify product design as a source of inter-competitor tensions. Finding out whether or not what this company owner had said about another company imitating his products was true became secondary to understanding how such insinuations about others’ practices formed an important part of the discourses I was collecting, and how these discourses are shaping the reality of the artware industry.
In sum, I understand discursive practices as constitutive of the network I studied, of the nature and tone of the relationships that form this network, and of the debates that create tensions across it. This network, as well as these relationships and tensions, became the focal points of this dissertation, making discourses – collected through interviews, archival research, surveys, and other documentation – one of the major empirical sources of my analysis.

**Interviews**

In addition to numerous informal conversations ranging from a few minutes to several hours, I conducted a total of fifty-one formal interviews varying between approximately half-an-hour (a phone interview with a bad connection) and two-and-a-half hours. All but two interviews were conducted with only one individual, for a total of fifty-four interviewees. Before each interview, I prepared notes in relationship to the person I was about to meet so as to make sure I had an idea of the themes I thought would be most relevant. However, during the interview itself, I always began with a very general question about the person’s personal trajectory into the artware industry, and let the interviewee take the reins until they turned to me for additional questions or cues. Usually, this resulted in a rather open ended interaction, though some interviews were more structured by my questions than others, depending on how talkative and comfortable the interviewee had been. On three separate occasions, having let the direction of the interview emerge from what was being said to me, my interlocutors interrupted the process and asked me to clarify what I was after, or what my “angle” on the topics they were discussing was going to be. The tone in which these questions were posed suggested that my interlocutors were not absolutely certain that they trusted that the issues I had said I was interested in, on the one hand, and what I was really intending to report in my dissertation, on the other, were one and the same. As I will explain further in Chapter 1, issues of trust are at the heart of some of the tensions that traverse the artware industry, and my interactions were no exception in this regard.

A little over a third of these interviews took place in public spaces such as coffee shops (8), restaurants (6), and other public spaces (on a public bench (3), sitting on the outdoor staircase of Robson Square (1), or walking around the neighborhoods of Kitsilano and Point Grey (1)). A little over half were conducted in the more closed settings of studios (4), retail stores (1), galleries (3), warehouses (1), offices (8), and the interviewee’s private homes (10). Out of necessity, some

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37 I once interviewed a couple, and another time three members of the same family.
interviews were conducted over the phone (5). With permission from the interviewees, most of
the interviews were recorded. However, for nine interviews, I was asked not to record and take
hand-written notes instead. I later transcribed or typed up each interview, and sent the
transcriptions or notes to the interviewees for review, as I had indicated I would do on the
consent form I had presented to them prior to the interview.

All interviewees could indicate on this consent form whether or not they wanted me to keep
their names confidential, and could change their mind one way or the other after they had read
the transcripts or notes. Only a few of them came back to me with requests or suggestions of
edits, usually regarding form or clarifications of the content. One interviewee chose to withdraw
from the study after reading the notes I had sent, feeling that the content of the interview meant
that anonymity could not be guaranteed even if I kept names confidential. This, too, highlights
how trust can come into play in this particular market and in the politics of research more
generally. My awareness of this issue has caused me to give serious thought to whether or not I
was even going to use the names of those who had agreed to be identified in my work. After
careful consideration, I have opted to use those names only when what I was writing about did
not also relate to or implicate other artware industry participants who themselves had not agreed
to be identified. For the latter, I opted not to use pseudonyms, but rather general descriptors such
as their gender and professional activity, for example.

Many of my interviewees have more than one role in the artware industry, such as artists
who are also fashion designers as well as the owners of their own artware company. Taking these
multiple roles into consideration, I interviewed thirteen (13) artware company owners, two (2)
artware company sales representatives, three (3) gallery owners and two (2) former gallery
owners, seven (7) retail store managers, eight (8) fashion designers, six (6) artware designers, and
one (1) art collector. Nine of my interviews were also “expert interviews” in the sense that my
interlocutors were knowledgeable about the general history of the art and artware market, and
shared some of this knowledge with me in addition to their experiences and thoughts regarding
the current configuration of the market.

Among my interviewees, twenty-one (21) were women, and thirty-three (33) were men.38
Twenty-eight (28) were of Aboriginal descent, which means that very close to half of my
interviewees were non-Aboriginal. I interviewed a total of twenty-six (26) Aboriginal artists.

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38 I did not record my interviewees’ ages, but do discuss the question of experience in the market in Chapter 5.
They are each affiliated to one or more of the many different nations of the Coast Salish, Kwakwaka'wakw, Heiltsuk, Nuu-chah-nulth, Haisla, Tahltan, Haida, Tsimshian, and Tlingit. These artists were primarily men (26, for 6 women). Six (6) of these artists were also the producers of their own artware. The remaining seven (7) company owners were non-Aboriginal individuals, including two (2) female fashion designers.

When selecting my interviewees, I made a special effort to ensure that I was able to interview individuals who could discuss the Vancouver 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Games with me, given the potential importance of this event for the Native Northwest Coast artware market. Thus, twenty-three (23) of my interviewees were directly involved in the Vancouver 2010 Olympics: sixteen (16) of them were directly involved (with jobs, commissions, and other contracts with VANOC and the FHFN), while seven (7) others were involved more indirectly (working with Olympic partner organizations or having a table at the Aboriginal Artisan Village during the Games). Usually, those who were not themselves involved in the Olympics nonetheless had something to say about the Games’ potential impact, or lack thereof, on their business and the market more generally.

Archival research

In order to better understand the historical development of the Native Northwest Coast artware industry in relation to policies and organizations, I conducted archival research in three institutions: the university archives at the University of British Columbia (UBC Archives, and Museum of Anthropology Library and Archives, both in Vancouver); the provincial British Columbia Archives (Victoria); and the national Library and Archives of Canada (Ottawa).

Most of this archival research examined fonds related to government policies and organizations that had directly affected the development of the Native Northwest Coast artware industry (or at least

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39 Unfortunately, four groups of British Columbia’s Pacific Northwest, the Wuikinuxv, the Nuxalk, the Nisga’a, and the Gitxsan, are not represented among my interviewees, although I did have conversations with artists of the two latter groups.

40 It should be noted that the number of Aboriginal company owners I interviewed is a statistical over-representation in comparison to non-Aboriginal company owners. This is partly due to their also being artists, as well as my interest in Aboriginal business owners’ involvement in and experiences of the artware industry. My estimation is that, Canada-wide, there are a little over forty artware companies (including fashion designers) that carry at least one line of products referencing Northwest Coast art. About half of these companies are based in British Columbia. Approximately fifteen companies are non-Aboriginal companies that work with Aboriginal artists.

41 For a complete list of the fonds I was able to consult, see appendix a.
attempted to), including with respect to Aboriginal education and training, support for artists, and Aboriginal art labeling programs. As I analyzed the content of the material I had found, I tightened my focus on how these policies and organizations framed Northwest Coast art as a “resource” with much potential, suitable for the development of a market but also requiring protection (see Chapter 2).

**Survey**

As part of my fieldwork, I conducted a small-scale survey of the UBC Museum of Anthropology gift shop. This customer survey was conducted February 8, 2010 – February 14, 2010. I developed the questionnaire in consultation with Museum Shop manager Deborah Tibbel (see questionnaire, appendix b). It was approved by the Museum of Anthropology management committee on August 24, 2009. The survey was administered over the course of a week at various times of the day to customers exiting the Museum Shop, for a total of one hundred participants.

The survey had two primary purposes: a) to generate knowledge about the Shop’s customer demographics and experience, for use by the staff of the Museum Shop, and b) to provide insight about the consumption of Aboriginal art and artware, for inclusion in the present dissertation. The information collected from the customers had primarily to do with basic demographics, UBC Museum of Anthropology and Museum Shop frequentation, and customer experience in the Museum Shop. Other questions included in the questionnaire pertained to the notion of ‘authenticity’ and the importance afforded by customers to certain criteria (e.g. affordability, self-representation, fair trade...) when shopping for Aboriginal art and artware in retail stores such as the Museum Shop.

While the small size of the sample did not allow for a full blown statistical analysis, this survey did allow me to identify trends in the responses collected. My analysis of the results of the survey were therefore primarily qualitative, but drew on quantitative indicators when appropriate. While most of my interview data concerns the production and distribution of Native Northwest Coast artware, this survey revealed interesting information about the experiences and expectations of consumers.
**Additional documentation**

During fieldwork, I used a digital camera to keep records of documents, labels, designs, artware items, shop displays, and other displays of artware. I have primarily used this visual record to confirm what I described in my notes or that I remembered from my experience in the field. Some of these images are included in this dissertation.

In addition, I collected enough brochures, cards, labels, newspaper articles, advertisements, and other printed matter to fill five large binders. At the end of my fieldwork, I organized them and selected those that would be most useful to my analysis.

My time in the field also generated a small collection of artware items. Most of these were gifted to me by the artware industry participants I met or by friends and acquaintances who were aware of my research focus. I also purchased a few additional items during my innumerable trips to gift shops and other retail stores. These objects are not themselves examples of discourses but, along with their labels and other packaging, they do constitute statements from their producers and distributors.

**Grounded Interpretation**

The analysis I propose in this dissertation was produced through a combination of interpretative analysis and grounded theory. According to Clifford Geertz, with an interpretive approach, knowledge progresses not through “a perfection of consensus” but rather through “a refinement of debate”.42 The role of anthropologists would then be to convey a plausible and comprehensible impression of the reality they were confronted with in the field, and to produce a coherent interpretation of this reality.43 Furthermore, Geertz considered that being aware of the anthropologist’s role as a thinking subject interacting with other thinking subjects while in the field, helps rather than hinders the production of knowledge. In the spirit of interpretive anthropology, I hope that the analysis I propose will be understood as the product of my interactions in the field, as well as a contribution to a debate rather than an attempt to create a consensus.

However, like others who see value in interpretive analysis, I do not follow Geertz when he argues that “culture” can be read as an ensemble of “text” and that the purpose of research is to

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uncover the “meaning” of the practices observed. As William Roseberry has remarked, the “culture as text” approach looks at culture as a product rather than as a process of production.\textsuperscript{44} With this in mind, in this dissertation, my goal is not to provide a description of the artware industry as if it were a static entity, but rather to examine what I call its “current configuration”: the networks that constitute this industry and the social, cultural, political, and economic dynamics that animate these networks. I understand this configuration to be in constant production, shaped by both the history of this industry’s development and yearnings for changes to the present state of affairs. One of the ways in which I was able to research this current configuration was through the discourses of this industry’s participants; however, I did not so much seek to uncover the meanings embedded in these discourses as I examined what they reveal about how they shape the “culture” of this industry, as predicated by the idea that discourses themselves can be practices constitutive of the reality they seek to describe.

Like any other, the “culture” of the artware industry is continuously shifting. I have attempted to give these shifts due consideration, so as to avoid reifying certain practices by ignoring that some of their features have unfolded over time and continue to change.\textsuperscript{45} This is even reflected in the fact that my analysis changed over the course of my research in relation to various events and encounters that shed light on the transformations the market was undergoing over the course of my fieldwork.\textsuperscript{46} Thus, the analyses I present in this dissertation both take into account the industry’s dynamics, and are the product of “grounded theory”, characterized by a “simultaneous involvement in data collection and analysis”.\textsuperscript{47}

Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss were the first to delineate the research protocols of grounded theory.\textsuperscript{48} These were later re-summarized by Kathy Charmaz as the researcher “tacking” back and forth between collecting data, coding, memo-writing, and analysis.\textsuperscript{49} Although I have myself used a looser form of coding than that suggested by the above authors,
my research process was nonetheless inspired by the idea of theory emerging in a constant dialogue with the empirical, which itself is only accessible via human experience. For instance, it was during fieldwork that I began to tease out analytical themes from my interpretation of the discourses and practices of my interlocutors. I then drew on theory to make sense of the trends and tensions I had been able to identify, refining my initial interpretations as a result. I also changed my methodological strategy as I went, adapting my approach to the growing importance of discursive practices in my analysis. As time passed, I paid increasing attention to specific questions when their importance to my interlocutors became more obvious. My fieldnotes also reflect this, mixing description, interpretation, and threads of analysis, as well as re-interpretations of previous material in light of new events and developments in my thinking. This constant “memo-writing”\textsuperscript{50} was particularly helpful when the time came to “write up” my findings, as I was able to retrace the steps of my own thinking and even, on occasion, make this process explicit in the body of my dissertation.

The final thematic “coding”\textsuperscript{51} that resulted in the organization of my dissertation grew organically out of the experience of fieldwork, writing notes, transcribing interviews, as well as reading, re-reading, and writing about them. It is from this process that emerged the identification of the collection of issues that significantly shape the Native Northwest Coast artware industry and to which I have dedicated each of my chapters.

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 347.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 341.
Figure 3: Display of pewter, copper, and enamel pendants, pins, key-chains, and bracelets.

Photo by the author, September 2, 2009.
1 Introducing “Native Northwest Coast Artware”: Terminology and Theoretical Approach

My encounter with Native Northwest Coast artware dates back to my years as a teenager living in Ottawa, Canada’s capital city. One day when I was about thirteen, I came in first place in a local cross-country skiing race. In reward, I received a pewter necklace that was engraved with an Aboriginal design, in Northwest Coast style. Though the materiality of the necklace made it evident that it had been mass-produced, for years I did not pay attention to this, and I cherished the pendant as if it were unique in its kind. It formed a part of the images and material objects that referenced “Aboriginal cultures” in the very generic sense the expression took for me at the time, as a teenager interested in, but largely ignorant, of Aboriginal peoples and history.

In 2006, shortly after I moved to Vancouver to pursue a PhD in anthropology and as I was beginning to define the topic of my doctoral research, I walked into a gift shop and found an entire shelf of necklaces, earrings, and key-chains of the very same design as the one I had received ten years earlier. I learned that these were manufactured by a company situated in the Greater Vancouver area, and soon began to see these products in almost every gift shop in the city. Had the revelation that my pendant was this far from being unique occurred a few years prior, I would probably have felt betrayed by my own positive feelings towards the “impostor” object. But, having at that point already started my reflection on Native Northwest Coast artware, I was instead intellectually stimulated by this discovery. It indeed allowed me to understand firsthand how singular values can be attached to an object despite the fact that it exists in multiple identical copies. However, along with this excitement came the feeling that my owning such an object was a marker of my “non-Aboriginality”. I indeed assumed that objects such as this mass-produced pendant could only be owned and valued by outsiders to the culture it referenced such as myself. I was able to think myself out of this assumption when, approximately two years later, I met an Aboriginal man who was wearing a pewter necklace identical to mine. Admittedly, he likely does not ascribe the same value or meaning to it as those I do; still, the existence of this pendant in more than one example created a connection between us, rather than signal our difference.

This anecdote, as trivial as it may be, has been helpful to me as I developed my thinking about the debates surrounding cultural commodification, allowing me to develop a more nuanced
view of the relationship between mass-production and value. Such a story does not call for an acritical view of the risks associated with Native Northwest Coast artware industry, but it does help in thinking both about and past some of the assumptions that inform common discourses about the objects it produces. For instance, it shows that mass-production does not necessarily drain value from objects, nor does it prevent an object from garnering sincere interest and being given meaning. It also suggests that, although the aesthetic experiences of individuals can be informed by their respective socio-cultural background, the latter does not always draw a clear line of separation between cultural groups when it comes to the objects they own and appreciate. It further points to the fact that, contrary to the idea that mass-produced objects can only lead to superficial knowledge and misunderstandings, they can also serve as the point of departure for much more significant and in-depth learning experiences such as the one that has resulted in this dissertation.

Informed by this experience, the way in which I approach Native Northwest Coast artware is in line with the anthropology of material culture advocated by anthropologist Fred Myers. It is a study of ‘culture making’ that focuses on “‘intercultural’ objects and activities, on cultural forms and practices that circulate across boundaries”. Indeed, the characteristics and uses of Northwest Coast artware cut across a number of conceptual dichotomies that anthropology is still struggling to deconstruct, such as that which distinguishes the “traditional” from the “modern”, the “gift” from the “commodity”, the “indigenous” from the “non-indigenous”, and “art” from “non-art”. For instance, the mass-produced pewter pendant I describe above was made using what might be called “modern technologies” and is adorned with what is often described as “traditional Native art”; it was gifted to me, but can also be purchased in a store; it is made by a non-Aboriginal company, but features a design made by an Aboriginal individual; the object of the pendant itself is not marketed as “art” but the design itself is the work of an artist. This kind of material culture, as anthropologist Anthony Shelton remarks, leaves us with questions that “seriously mitigate against the view of objects as simple portals to other cultural worlds”. Thus, when I say that owning and valuing this pewter pendant was for me one of the starting points for learning more about Native Northwest Coast art, it is not that this object was itself the “portal”

that opened onto this knowledge. It is rather that it functioned as an eye-opener, presenting me with a counterpoint to some of the assumptions I had made, including with respect to the validity of the aforementioned dichotomies. Further, this pendant did not lead me to “other cultural worlds” but instead encouraged me to look at the very society I live in, and how relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples shape an industry that is not the product of “two worlds” colliding, but rather the product of one world that encompasses a variety of worldviews and values that cannot always be attributed to individuals only according to their cultural affiliation. That is not to say that no distinction can be made between material culture that is “Aboriginal” and that which is not, or between what is “art” and what is not. Rather, it is to acknowledge that the lines that are drawn between the two are the subjects of tension and friction. Also of importance is that, among the various dimensions of social location – i.e. the position an individual occupies in society in relation to such factors as gender, age, or class – cultural affiliation factors into but does not go so far as to determine the positions individuals take within these debates.

In this chapter, I outline some of the key aspects of how I have approached the subject matter of this dissertation, what I call the “Native Northwest Coast artware industry”. In section 1.1, I begin by examining the contours of the category of objects I call “artware” in relation to other terms that are commonly used to describe what these objects are supposedly not (i.e. “art”), as well as terms used to describe what they supposedly are (i.e. nouns like “souvenirs” and “commodities”, and adjectives like “kitschy” and “touristy”). I will then explain why “artware” is more accurately defined in relative, rather than absolute, terms vis-à-vis “art”. In section 1.2, I will discuss how Howard Becker’s analysis of art-making as a collective activity applies to the “world” of artware. I will also present the vocabulary I use to describe the different roles played by various individuals and groups in what Robert J. Foster calls the “commoditiescape” of objects such as artware. Finally, in section 1.3, I will also discuss some of the features of this milieu and the kinds of cross-cultural relationships that create and animate it, including with respect to improving the industry’s ability to tend to Aboriginal interests. All of the above will provide important elements of context to the arguments I will be making in the subsequent chapters of this dissertation.

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1.1 Art, Wares, and Defining “Artware”

The contours of the category of “art” are highly contested, even within the art world and among art historians. In this dissertation, I primarily use the terms “art” as it is used in the industry I studied, which is to say in reference to designs and objects created in Northwest Coast style by individuals who derive income and/or status from this work. I recognize that this emic definition of “art” is somewhat self-referential, if not tautological, and that it does not distinguish “art” from “non-art” and “artists” from “non-artists” based on such criteria as skill, imaginativeness, or the kind and intensity of the aesthetic experience works provoke, or fail to provoke, in others. Even though some do continue to voice the concern that the term “art” is an eminently Western category, the once ground-breaking idea that examples of Northwest Coast visual and material culture should be exhibited as “high art, not ethnography” has largely become mainstream; during my fieldwork, I witnessed little if any contest over the idea that the term “art” and the label “artist” do indeed apply. With this observation in mind, I have decided not to re-engage the definitional debates that surround the concepts of “art” and the label of “artist”, and instead have opted to pay close attention to what (and who) is (and is not) designated as such by my various interlocutors. In this respect, I have observed that, contrary to the designs that adorn them, the unlimited series of functional and decorative objects on which they are reproduced are not usually referred to as “art”. It is for this reason that I have coined the expression “artware”. I recognize that not all functional objects are considered “wares” and not all designs are considered “art”, depending on how these two terms are defined. Nonetheless, the term “artware” does capture the nature of these objects better than any of the other terms that are commonly used in reference to them.

The word “ware” is commonly used in reference to ceramics, and is a common suffix for different ceramic types classified according to variations in clay and manufacturing (e.g. earthenware, stoneware), as well as surface modifications such as glaze and decorative motifs (e.g. printware, lusterware). Beyond this specific usage, the word “ware” is also used in reference to a wide range of products, from computer programs to wine glasses. Used as a suffix, it can also be used to identify objects of the same type, grouped in relation to the word to which it is affixed.

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6 I am indebted to my friend Adriane Lake for suggesting this term during one of our conversations about my work.
(e.g. “kitchenware” groups items that are of use in the kitchen). Keeping these various uses of the term “ware” in mind, I define “artware” as a group of products that have a kind of artistic modification in common. Thus, I group all wares that are decorated with Native Northwest Coast art motifs under the category of “Native Northwest Coast artware”.

This expression helps avoid the use of other already existing terms and their respective inadequacies. For instance, the term “crafts” usually evokes items that are made by hand, which is often not the case for the objects with which I am concerned here. “Souvenirs” only describes one of these objects’ uses (as tokens of experiences past), while “trinkets” and “knickknacks” have a distinctively pejorative connotation from which I prefer to steer clear. I also avoid the adjectives “touristy” and “kitschy” not only because they are depreciative, but also because they do not adequately convey how varied their consumers and aesthetics can be. Although the expressions “gift products” and “giftware” present the distinct advantage of being the terms typically used in the industry that produces and distributes these objects, they tend to suggest that these objects’ purpose is to be given away, which can be but is not always the case. Finally, on the opposite end of the gift-commodity spectrum the expression “commercial art” puts the emphasis on the fact that these objects are made for sale, without really differentiating them from any other “art” that circulate on the market.

There is no denying that “art” and “artware” are not one and the same; however, in section 1.1.1, I focus my attention not on what distinguishes them, but on the relation that exists between them, showing that the two exhibit relative rather than absolute differences. After having done so, in sections 1.1.2 to 1.1.4 I will consider how, as is the case for many other terms, “artware” can be more easily defined in relation to what it is not – not necessarily, not always, or not only.

1.1.1 Between art and artware: a relative difference

It is easily assumed that the difference between art and artware can be described in a few simple words about their modes of production, distribution, and consumption. For instance, I recently described my doctoral research to someone I had met only minutes before, stating that I studied the “Aboriginal art market” and “more specifically, when designs are reproduced on mugs, t-shirts and other similar items”. To this description, he replied: “But surely, a clear distinction can be made between these mugs and t-shirts on the one hand, and Aboriginal art, on the other”. Although there are indeed differences between the two, to say that the distinction is as
clear-cut as it appears would be misleading. All the while recognizing the significance of the fact that art and artware are often considered to stand in opposition to one another, my own approach does not privilege defining art “against” artware. Instead, I examine what the two have in common, recognizing that the artware industry is by no means impermeably separated from the art market, as the following points will illustrate:

1) **Artists:** Most renowned Northwest Coast artists – from Ellen Neel to Bill Reid, from Douglas Cranmer to Robert Davidson, from Tony Hunt to Susan Point – have participated in the artware industry, and often still do years after they were heralded to be among the best in their field.7

2) **Technology:** Northwest Coast art is made using technologies that are also used in the artware industry: etching, laser cutting, printing, casting, to name a few.

3) **Materials:** Many of the materials used in artware are also among those used in contemporary Northwest Coast art: e.g. cedar, abalone, copper and other metals, as well as glass, paper and, more recently, plastic.8

4) **Market:** Most Northwest Coast art galleries carry a selection of artware items, while stores that call themselves ‘gift shops’ often carry a selection of one-of-a-kind works. Also, in Vancouver, there is not a clearly marked spatial division between the sale of artworks and the sale of artware. For instance, the neighbourhood of Gastown, known to be one of Vancouver’s key tourism sites, is home to at least a dozen gift shops, but also several of the most reputable Northwest Coast art galleries.9

5) **Consumers:** Contrary to common belief, the consumers of art and the consumers of artware cannot be divided neatly into distinct categories (e.g. “art collectors” and “tourists”).10

In other words, there are not two parallel markets, one for Native Northwest Coast artware, and one for Native Northwest Coast art. There is enough overlap between them to say that there

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7 One might say that the fact that the production of mugs and t-shirts is often outsourced means that such items are not technically ‘made’ by these artists. However, this is hardly a distinguishing element: much of contemporary art, as was the art of the Renaissance, is executed not by the artist but by a crew or an outside contractor (see Arthur C. Danto, *Andy Warhol*, Icons of America (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 55.). The field of Northwest Coast art is no exception to this trend. Even though it has for long been standard practice for Northwest Coast artists to hire crews to work on large commissions, a 1999 article by Maclean’s reporter Jane O’Hara created a controversy because it described iconic Haida artist Bill Reid’s reliance on other artists to create the works he designed. Jane O’Hara, “Trade secrets: Haida artist Bill Reid was a national icon. But from 1980 on, suffering from the debilitating effects of disease, he relied on others to produce his work,” *Maclean’s*, October 18, 1999.

8 A 1978 report commissioned by NIACC about marketing “Indian Arts and Crafts” shows that this is not a new phenomenon, stating that “distribution channels were not selected in any organized way… Souvenirs, crafts, and Art are often sold through the same retailers”. Department of Supply and Services Bureau of Management Consulting, *Approaches to Marketing Strategies for Indian Arts and Crafts*, January 1978, xi, MG 30 D 387 - Modest Cmoc fonds [NIACC] Volume 8, File 21, Library and Archives Canada.

9 See Chapter 7.

10 See Chapter 6.
exists one common market in which both art and artware circulate, in which the same artists partake, and in which the same buyers have the opportunity to consume both.

The challenges I encountered in the early stages of my research, when I was still trying to trace a clear delimitation between the material objects that would be part of my study and those that would not, stemmed in part from this deep intertwining of production, distribution, and consumption of “art” and what I would later come to call “artware.” Keeping this intertwining in mind, I was struck by the efforts of some of my interlocutors to affirm a clear distinction between the two, efforts that were sometimes thwarted by their own experiences and practices. For instance, one artist explained that he has a line of artware under one brand name and sells his art under his own name as a way to keep the two markets separate. However, he also said that he is proud of his artware and would ideally like to use it to promote his art. Another example is when a gallery owner called artware ‘touristy’ compared to art, but soon afterwards explained that he primarily sells artware to returning local customers, including art collectors. One can relate these sorts of apparent contradictions to the difficulty that can be encountered by those attempting to pin down cultural identity in the ‘borderland’.\footnote{Renato Rosaldo, \textit{Culture & Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis: With a New Introduction} (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), 196–216.}

In the example that concerns us here, the borderland between art and artware is not defined in space and/or by ethnicity, but through a hierarchy of values that is difficult to unsettle, especially when it is actively being strengthened by those who hope to be rewarded for doing so with gains in status and/or market shares. For instance a designer explained the importance she attributed to the maintenance of unequivocal hierarchies between her work and that of others with the following remark: “Armani and Valentino are among the best designers in the world; would they ever let their products be compared to Wal-Mart? No.”

And yet, as I have already begun to demonstrate, it is not always possible to distinguish art from artware solely through describing such things as who made them, how they are made, what they are made out of, who distributes them, and where. For instance, consider works described as “a series of ceramic pieces by a known individual artist, the production of which was outsourced, and which were sold in Gastown.” These could very well be the 2009 \textit{S'igeika'awu: Ghost} series by Tlingit/Aleut artist Nicholas Galanin presented at the \textit{Trench} gallery in Gastown. However, they could just as well be a line-up of ceramic mugs on a shelf at the \textit{Steam Clock T-shirts and
Souvenirs store a few blocks down the street. A more detailed comparison would indeed highlight the differences between them, such as Galanin’s work being more expensive and produced in a significantly smaller number than the mugs. Also, his work is a commentary on the market of Aboriginal art as exemplified by such things as mugs, whereas the mugs themselves are not produced as a commentary on contemporary Aboriginal art. However, succinct information of the kind that typically appears on art gallery labels would not have clearly communicated these differences. In contrast, comparisons of these works would shed light on their differences, revealing that what I call “artware” tends to be more affordable, portable, standardized, serialized, and one-size-fits-all than artworks.

It would be tempting to argue that artware tends towards these attributes more than artworks primarily because of the criteria of those who are believed to be its primary buyers, namely tourists.\(^\text{12}\) The latter are imagined to want to be able to choose items without having to worry about budget (affordable), taking the object home in a suitcase (portable), sometimes giving them to other people without having been able to do a fitting (one-size-fits-all), etc. That being said, given the popularity of artware among locals, artware arguably also tends towards these attributes because it helps this industry reach an audience irrespective of where people live or where they are “from”. The industry is adapted to contemporary modes of consumption, which includes but is not restricted to those instigated by global tourism. I indeed argue that these relative differences are in part due to their respective intended audiences, not in their specificity (e.g. “tourists”/ “art collectors” – see Chapter 6), but in their breadth. Generally speaking, the artware industry thrives on reaching as wide an audience as possible, while the art world thrives on maintaining some sense of exclusiveness. As art critic Julian Stallabrass has argued, “Contemporary art still defines itself against mass culture, and necessarily so because of its shunning of mass production”.\(^\text{13}\) Furthermore, for a long time academia supported the art world in this shunning since, as Fredric Jameson has noted, it had “a vested interest in preserving a realm of high or elite culture against the surrounding environment of philistinism, of schlock and kitsch”.\(^\text{14}\) As I will discuss below, it appears that it is also the degree of serialization and correlated levels of accessibility that usually lie at the heart of the distancing of art from

\(^{12}\) See section 1.3 of the present chapter and Chapter 6.
This distance is recurrently asserted through the use of a variety of (often pejorative) nouns and adjectives to differentiate the latter from the former. It is to some of this vocabulary that I now turn.

1.1.2 Not necessarily “souvenirs”

The French noun ‘souvenir’ translates to English into two separate meanings: as the tangible souvenir object, and as the intangible ‘memory’ of something past. In French, then, the same word designates both a memory, and the material embodiment of this memory. In English, the word ‘souvenir’ only designates the object, and not the memory itself. However, especially in everyday conversation, but also in some scholarly work, the word ‘souvenir’ has two meanings that tend to be conflated with one another even though they are in fact of a different nature. The first of these understandings is definitional: a souvenir is an object that serves as a reminder of experiences past. In the words of literary critic Susan Stewart, it is a sample of “the now-distanced experience,” which “is not an object arising out of need or use value” but rather “an object arising out of the necessarily insatiable demands of nostalgia”. The second understanding is not, strictly speaking, a definition, but rather a description that tends to restrict and reduce the word’s material referents to a caricature of the objects that are sold and acquired as souvenirs. This use is usually recognizable by the use of adjectives such as “cheap”, “plastic”, “trinket”, “touristy” and others, conjuring up the image of floaty pens and snow globes.

One example of the conflation of these two meanings can be found on the popular web-based and user-generated encyclopaedia, Wikipedia. I choose the example of Wikipedia precisely because, as noted on the website itself, the article dedicated to souvenirs “does not cite any references or sources”, which I take to mean that the proposed definition is a good approximation of a commonsensical use of the word. According to the contributors of Wikipedia, then, a souvenir:

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16 See Chapter 6.

... is an object a traveler brings home for the memories associated with it. Souvenirs include clothing such as T-shirts or hats, and household items such as mugs and bowls, ashtrays, egg timers, spoons and notepads. They may be marked to indicate their origin: “A Souvenir from Clacton-on-Sea”. Souvenirs frequently have a reputation for being tasteless.  

Nothing in the definition of a souvenir as an object taken home “for the memories associated with it” necessarily implies the enumeration of (potentially “tasteless”) mass-produced articles of clothing or household items. The only material characteristic that is indeed implied by the above definition is transportability: in order for a traveller to be able to bring home an object, this object needs to be transportable. A pebble picked up on a beach, a piece of scrap paper saved from a magazine, a t-shirt or a magnet bought in a gift shop, but also an antique vase inherited from a loved one, or an artwork bought in a gallery or during an auction, etc: all of these items can potentially become souvenirs, whether by destination or by metamorphosis. Susan Stewart specifically locates the “authenticity” of the souvenir at a distance from the present space and time, which in turn places value not only on the exotic, but also on the antique. And yet, the word ‘souvenir’ tends to be used to the exclusion of the antique, as well as the rare and the expensive.

Another example of the conflation of the definitional and descriptive understandings of the term “souvenir” can be found in anthropologist Nelson Graburn’s pioneering Ethnic and Tourist Arts. In the introduction to this seminal volume, Graburn wrote:

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19 For instance, Jean and John Comaroff discuss how a Tswana potter began to make her clay beer-pots twice as small so that they could fit in airplane overhead compartments (Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, Ethnicity, Inc. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 147.).
21 Stewart, On Longing.
As “civilized societies” come to depend more and more upon standardized mass-produced artifacts, the distinctiveness of classes, families, and individuals disappears, and the importation of foreign exotic arts increases to meet the demand of distinctiveness, especially for the snob or status market. One gains prestige by association with these objects, whether they are souvenirs or expensive imports; there is a cachet connected with international travel, exploration, multiculturalism, etc. that these arts symbolize; at the same time, there is the nostalgic input of the handmade in a “plastic world”.

By opposing “souvenirs” to “expensive imports,” Graburn seems to suggest that “souvenirs” are necessarily inexpensive. Yet, if souvenirs are objects cherished as mementos of lived experiences, it is unclear why price would define which objects can become souvenirs and which cannot. When used to name objects that stand in contrast with “expensive imports”, the word “souvenir” conjures up images of cheaply made and cheaply sold objects. Definitionally, however, souvenirs can encompass “expensive imports,” what Graburn calls “tourist art,” and what I call “artware”. As a matter of definition, artware is no more “souvenir” material than are artworks. If price does play a role, it is not in defining what a souvenir can be and what it cannot be, but rather in determining the ability of consumers to purchase an artwork rather than artware. In other words, the conflation between mnemonic objects and inexpensive ones is essentially a reflection of the unequal and roughly pyramidal distribution of wealth among consumers wishing to purchase objects that will become their souvenirs. This helps explain why artware items tend to be considered typical examples of “souvenirs”: most cannot afford to bring artworks home from their trips, but most can afford artware, making the latter a statistically more probable souvenir than the former.

Even so, it is important to note this does not imply that artware items are always purchased and/or subsequently treated as souvenirs. Although some artware is marketed as souvenir material, especially when sold in the gift shops of tourism sites, the ways in which objects are marketed and the ways in which they are consumed do not necessarily coincide. Native Northwest Coast artware is a case in point. Many locals who purchase Native Northwest Coast artware for themselves are likely not doing so to remind themselves of the very place where they live and that they experience every day. In sum, some artware may be “souvenirs by destination”, in particular when they bear indications like “Vancouver, BC” or “2010 Olympics”; however,  

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23 Ibid., 2.
many artware items end up being treated as something other than souvenirs. I now turn to the words “kitsch” and “touristy”, which are regularly affixed to the word “souvenir”, but are not always accurate descriptors of artware.

1.1.3 Not always “kitsch” and not only for “tourists”

In art critic Clement Greenberg’s now classic perspective, avant-garde artists are those who stand firmly in opposition to the ‘rear-guard’ and the “popular commercial art” of “kitsch.” Greenberg used this opposition to affirm the existence of a dichotomy between “true culture” and the “spurious”. Despite the deployment of scholarly work to counteract this view, this dichotomy has maintained currency in popular discourses about Aboriginal art, in particular when it is made for sale to outsiders. Considering that many continue to see “popular commercial art” as a “spurious” form of culture, as Greenberg did, those Native Northwest Coast artists who embrace the production of both art and artware and do not consider these practices to be antithetical, could be considered at least as much vanguard vis-à-vis the modernist canon as those who refuse to do so because they see it as a threat on their careers as artists. The former are indeed blatantly ignoring the modernist codes of the art world that dictate that, if they are to be ‘real artists’, they should not be involved in such a market as the artware industry. By giving permission to “turn out” their work “mechanically”, they have ‘pushed the boundaries’ – to use an ever-popular expression – of what artists are expected to do and not to do. Discussing German

24 In some cases, the purchase will have been made for a special occasion – a wedding anniversary, a graduation, a retirement party. In those situations, artware can indeed be considered souvenirs of these events and the experiences that have led up to them. In contrast, when one of my friends – who has been a Vancouverite for close to two decades, and since age twelve – was considering buying a mass-produced Northwest Coast ceramic vase for her home, it was to complement the modernist aesthetics of her home, and not as a token of her experience in the city. Also, I have seen silk scarves that are made by artware companies and can be purchased in gift shops (and therefore could potentially be purchased as souvenirs) also be integrated into ceremonial regalia, serving a very different purpose than that of souvenir.


26 Ibid., 32.


28 In a sense, these artists’ attitude towards mass-production confirm what Fredric Jameson says about art in the post-modern age of “consumer capitalism”, which is that art is no longer subversive and contestatory of the economic order (as modernist art was), but instead reproduces and reinforces the logics of consumerism. Jameson, “Postmodernism and Consumer Society,” 125.

art critic Peter Bürger’s view of avant-gardism as that which seeks to “destroy the institution of autonomous art to reconnect art and life” 30 (via such things as the “embrace of everyday objects” and “the use of industrial materials” 31). Hal Foster pointedly remarks that “a reconnection of art and life has occurred, but under the terms of the culture industry, not the avant-garde”. 32 However, this assumes that the so-called “culture industry” provokes this reconnection irrespective of artists’ desires, interests, and drive; when artists not only consent to such a reconnection, but indeed see the connection of their art to everyday life as crucial to their work – as in the case of many of the Aboriginal artists I spoke to – there can arguably be a stronger relationship between the “culture industry” and the “avant-garde” than is typically imagined.

In relation to this, I argue that it is possible to dissociate the category of artware as a whole from “kitsch” as defined by modernists like Greenberg as the commercial and popular products of the ‘rear-guard.’ Instead, I reserve the word “kitsch” to those pieces of art and artware that share a particular kind of aesthetics, which postmodernists refer to as “camp”, after Susan Sontag’s 1964 essay on camp sensibility. 33 Susan Sontag defines the kitsch as a mix of exaggeration, artifice, and extravagance taken so seriously as to dethrone seriousness. 34 Interestingly, although mass-produced reproductions of Native Northwest Coast artworks (such as the plush version of a Bill Reid bear sculpture) have been described as the “kitsch mirror” of art, 35 many of the objects I call “artware” do not exhibit a kitsch aesthetic. If some items of artware do indeed pertain to the kitsch, it is not because these are examples of artware and not art, it is because like some art – Jeff Koons’s works come to mind – their aesthetics appeal to some consumers’ camp sensibilities. And yet, without having examined examples of what I call artware, many assume that if items are mass-produced and inexpensive, they are not only likely to be “kitsch” but also to be purchased by “tourists”. Such assumptions echo Anthony Gidden’s notion that, with modernity, tradition “is drained of its content, and commercialized,
becomes either heritage or kitsch – the trinkets bought in the airport store”.  

As Dean MacCannell put it, “tourists are reproached for being satisfied with superficial experiences”.  

That is perhaps also why I have heard ‘touristy’ and ‘kitschy’ be used as synonyms. The kitsch would be to art what tourism is to travel: a cheap imitation of the ‘real’ thing. As discussed by anthropologist Robert Shepherd, “tourists have the dubious distinction of serving as a target of derision for almost everyone”:

Scholars of tourism have more often than not begun their studies with a notion of tourism as something that is inherently ‘bad’, due to the cultural degradation it is claimed to cause… The story is familiar to us all: once there was a pristine and natural place outside the West; then tourism arrived; now what was once pure and authentic has become spoiled and commodified.  

In this respect, it was for me a revelatory moment when Musqueam weaver Debra Sparrow pointed out that even though I am a resident of Vancouver, a Canadian citizen, and a graduate student whose research relates to Aboriginal arts and cultures, I could be compared to a tourist. In contrast to individuals like Sparrow, I can be seen as a visitor, both in the physical space of unceded Aboriginal territory, and in the field of knowledge about Aboriginal art. Although I spend more time in the Pacific Northwest than most tourists, I regularly come and go between here and the places I call “home”; also, although over the years I have acquired much more knowledge about Northwest Coast arts and cultures than what might be gleaned from coffee table books and brief museum visits alone, I still have much more to learn. That said, as Sparrow made sure to point out: “You know, tourists are human beings.” And, I would add, there is no a priori reason to pin the word ‘tacky’ onto the word ‘tourist’.

This perspective helps move beyond the common assumption relayed in both scholarly and journalistic writing that “tourist arts and traditional arts exist in separate paradigms of production and consumption”.  

For instance, journalist Peter Scowen wrote a review of the 2009 exhibition Challenging Traditions at the McMichael for the Globe and Mail, from which I have excerpted an interesting example of discourse in which art is defined in opposition to that which is thought to be consumed by tourists:

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39 Bunten, “Commodities of Authenticity. When Native People Consume Their Own ‘Tourist Art’,,” 323.
When many Canadians think of First Nations art, their minds sadly wander to the “mean body of work produced solely for tourist consumption,” as Ian M. Thom puts it in his new book, *Challenging Traditions: Contemporary First Nations Art of the Northwest Coast*. Thom, a Senior Curator at the Vancouver Art Gallery, has nothing personal against the sweetgrass baskets, soapstone carvings and miniature totem poles available across the country in airports and stores that spell “shop” with two Ps and an E. But his point is that there is a vibrant arts scene happening in Canada's Pacific Northwest, where new and established artists are using traditional materials and techniques to produce works that are clearly the product of a contemporary mind.

Such a marked opposition between what is made “solely for tourist consumption” in airports and gift shops, on the one hand, to the products of the contemporary minds of the “vibrant art scene” of “new and established artists” on the other, ignores a certain number of aspects of the Native Northwest Coast art and artware market.

Art historian Julian Stallabrass has argued that “The [contemporary] art market is still dependent upon the buying and selling of rare or unique objects far removed from the mass-produced commodities found in ordinary shops”. However, in the Native Northwest Coast art market, this kind of purposeful separation is much less marked. As already mentioned, many of the most renowned “new and established artists” of the Northwest Coast have been and often still are involved in the artware industry. Also, as far as airports go, Vancouver’s airport (YVR) does at least as much to showcase work from the Pacific Northwest’s “vibrant art scene” as it does to sell souvenirs, giving the expression “airport art” a whole new meaning. As also noted earlier, so-called “tourist art” is also purchased by locals, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. For instance, a former employee of the YVR “Gifts of the Raven” gift shop told me that, contrary to common assumption, the store – conveniently situated in the international wing of the airport next to Bill Reid’s *Jade Canoe* – has many local customers who come specifically to the airport to shop there. The association of airports with tourist consumption to the exclusion of locals thus does not hold, suggesting that the figure of the “tourist” bears in fact little relationship to physical travel, and is rather related to familiarity with the figurative space of the art world, and knowledge about Northwest Coast art in particular (see Chapter 6).

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41 Stallabrass, *Art Incorporated*, 90.
42 The expression “airport art” is usually used to reference objects that are made explicitly for the purpose of selling them to foreigners, of which examples would normally be found in or near their points of departure and arrival – airports, but also bus and train stations, ferry terminals, etc.
Furthermore, the opposition of “sweetgrass baskets, soapstone carvings and miniature totem poles” to the works produced by “artists using traditional materials and techniques to produce works that are clearly the product of a contemporary mind,” also bears little relation with the current reality of the Northwest Coast art market. Renowned artists make the former kinds of items, and galleries sell them for thousands of dollars. There are examples of baskets, carvings, and totem poles that are sold in “shoppes”; however, this does not make these categories of objects good examples to use in an effort to distinguish art from “the mean body of work” consumed by so-called tourists. This is again not to say that there is no difference between artware and art, but that these differences have only little to do with whether or not they are found in airports and/or purchased by tourists.

1.1.4 Not as “commercial” as it appears

Another common misconception is that what distinguishes art and artware would be the fact that, even if both can be made for sale, only the latter would be distinctly “commercial”. However, perceived levels of “commercialism” have in fact little to do with the yielding of monetary profits, and are instead related to the quantities in which the same work or design is produced. Indeed, artists who on occasion do not limit the quantities in which they reproduce the same artwork are unlikely to have greater personal incomes than artists who always do place such limits. The size of a series is also not always proportional to the profits it generates, contrary to what is suggested when it is affirmed that artists who work with artware companies are supposedly “selling out” to a greater degree than artists who do not, precisely because their designs are reproduced in larger numbers than those who only do limited editions.

And yet, it is onto the production of artware that the label “commercial” most easily falls, at least in part because this industry tends to be perceived as having only one “bottom line”, that of profit. However, whereas there are Aboriginal artists who make more than a comfortable living

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43 For a thorough study of baskets sold both to tourists and to collectors, see Marvin Cohodas, _Basket Weavers for the California Curio Trade: Elizabeth and Louise Hickox_ (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1997).
44 An artist making a limited edition of 5 bronze castings sold for $5000 dollars each, if working through a gallery, would be paid 50% of the sale price, or $12500. Conceding that the cost of having the pieces made might have represented 50% of that amount, the artist would make a little over $6000 of profit. Another artist whose designs are reproduced on mugs that would have received royalties of 5% on the retail price of 2500 mugs sold for $10 each would make a profit of $1250. Neither of these two hypothetical examples illustrates the extremes of how much an artist can make from limited edition bronze (much more than $6000) castings nor of how little an artist can make from an unlimited numbers of mugs (much less than $1250), and yet, the first artist still earns almost five times as much money as the second one.
through selling their art, I have yet to meet an Aboriginal artist who has made a fortune solely through the selling or the licensing designs in the artware industry. This suggests that an artist being considered “too commercial” has therefore little to do with income level, and more to do with perceptions of the effort, time, and imagination they put in their works in comparison to others. For instance, discussing the various artists with whom she works, one artware company owner identified the “more commercial ones” as those who are the most easy-going with respect to the company’s ability to reproduce the details of their designs. She also had experience dealing with artists who would rather not create artware at all than seeing their designs more than minimally altered by the technical process of reproduction. In a separate part of the conversation, I learned that the latter artists also tend to be the ones who earn higher royalties than the former, confirming that the label “commercial” is not a reference to monetary gain.

I argue that the misconceived notion that making artware is a sure sign of carelessness and a penchant for materialist values lies in a widespread suspicion toward processes of serialization and the belief they necessarily result in devaluation and standardization (see Chapter 6). This argument is supported by Stalla-brass’s contention that, even after Warhol, the contemporary art market has continued to assert its difference from “mass culture” by shunning mass production. A century after Marcel Duchamp and his ready-made reconfigured what is considered ‘art’ and what is not to include objects of everyday life, and many decades after Andy Warhol and the Pop art movement did the same via the serialization of these objects, there are still artists and galleries intent on making clear that art and artware are inherently different from one another, and are neither purchased nor held in esteem by the same people. Drawing on art historian Heinrich Wolfflin’s point that “not everything is possible at all times,” art critic and philosopher Arthur Danto has argued that “The history of art opens up new possibilities all the time”. For at least a century now, there exists the possibility for the same mass-produced object to be regarded as ‘art’ or as ‘not art.’ Still, mass-production continues to be generally ill-perceived as a sign of crass commercialism when it is not presented as serving a specific conceptual purpose.

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46 An example from the Aboriginal art scene in which serialization would escape a critique of commercialism, and in fact serves the purpose of a critique of consumerism, is Sonny Assu’s clever use of 67 identical ‘grande’ sized copper cups in *1884/1951* (2009) to comment on the potlatch ban, consumer culture, and the disposal of wealth.
This kind of shunning of serialization also exists in the Native Northwest Coast art market. Few celebrate pieces as ‘mass-produced overseas’ rather than ‘made locally by hand’ as a means to turn the accepted values of the art world on their head. There remain barriers to putting the values of rarity and exclusivity to the test of unlimited serialization, even when the mode of production requires this exclusiveness to be artificially produced by the creation of limited editions. This is well illustrated by the history of the introduction of printmaking in the field of Northwest Coast Art. At first, the artists who experimented with printing techniques did not sign them or number each item, and were not particularly worried about how many of one design they ended up printing. In the early 1960s, Doug Cranmer printed on paper, cotton, and burlap, even entering in a royalty contract from 1964 to 1967 with a burlap bag company called Industrial Bags that reproduced his designs in exchange for royalties of 15% on gross sales. This arrangement between an Aboriginal artist and a local company, likely the first of its kind in the Northwest Coast art market, did not turn out to be particularly lucrative for either party. However, it allowed Cranmer to provide his Granville Street gallery, the Talking Stick, with affordable items that would help pay the rent, and still focus the greater part of his energy on other more lucrative projects, such as large-scale commissions. In 1964, Kwakwaka’wakw artist Henry Speck had issued twelve silkscreen prints that were produced by a company called B.C. Indian Designs Ltd and were exhibited at the New Design Gallery in Vancouver alongside forty of his original paintings on paper. However, as Marcia Crosby remarks, despite such public exhibits, Speck and his contemporaries had “yet to establish a sustained, commercial market for their work”. Another pioneer in print-making, Robert Davidson, recalls that “even though there was no market” for his first series of prints, he felt seduced by the “instant gratification” of printmaking. “You pulled the squeegee once, and you had this instant print!” he explained to me, pointing out that, for years, he gave away more prints than he sold. Like for Speck and Cranmer, opportunities to profit monetarily from the production of multiples were limited, but that did not

47 However, this shunning is counterbalanced with the more positive spin that can be put on mass-production considered as a means of art promotion and democratization (see Chapter 6).
48 One exception in this respect can be found in Nicholas Galanin’s work. With his use of Indonesian-made Tlingit-style masks in his Imaginary Indian (2009) and S'Igeika'awu: Ghost Series (Blue) (2009) series, as well as the outsourcing to a chainsaw artist the production of his Raven and the First Immigrants (2009), Nicholas Galanin has made a foray into making artistic statements out of the very assumptions that are used to define what is a suitable production process for ‘Native art.’
49 Kramer, “Kesu”, 43.
50 Ibid.
stop Robertson from making it an integral part of his creative process. In other words, engaging in mass-production in this way was not a sign of these artists’ “commercialism”, or at least no more than any of their other activities as artists and businessmen.

However, by the time the Northwest Coast print market took off in the 1970s, artists had begun making numbered limited editions. Henry Speck has been credited as the “first Kwakwaka’wakw artist to produce a limited edition print, thus foreshadowing the important role this medium would play within the Northwest Coast art market.” With the creation of the Northwest Coast Indian Artists’ Guild, which focused on the promotion of silkscreen printing, a technique that was initially used as a means of experimentation became increasingly treated as a medium of “fine art”, with all of the standards of quality and the prestige associated with this expression. In those early days, artists usually learned to pull their own silkscreen prints. Today, artists now tend to either commission master printers to produce the prints they design, or in a few rare cases use digital technologies and ink-jet printers to create giclées in their own studios. More commonly, they work with one of the printing companies that specialize in Native and particularly Northwest Coast art, including Canadian Art Prints Inc. (established by Bill Ellis in 1964 as Canadian Native Prints), Pacific Editions Ltd. (established in 1971), and Island Art Publishers (established in the mid-1980s). Today, many of these printing companies also reproduce artists’ works on unnumbered art cards as well as other paper products that are sold as less expensive alternatives to limited edition prints. This offers yet another probing example of what connects the categories of art and artware, even in the context of efforts to distinguish the two.

52 Vancouver Gallery of Tribal Art, Chief Henry Speck; an Exhibition of Paintings, C.1958-1964 (Vancouver: Gallery of Tribal Art, 1995).
54 As former gallery owner Leona Lattimer recalls, some artists even hung their freshly printed design to dry with clothing pins on lines running across their living room, taking the prints to the stores themselves once they were ready to be sold.
55 The company Garfinkel Publications, now operating under the name Native Northwest - Art by Native Artists, illustrates particularly well the relationship between the print market and the artware industry. Created in 1982 around a modest production of twelve postcards, the company later became one of the foremost companies in the Native Northwest Coast artware industry. Although the company’s output now goes far beyond the medium of paper, the owner refers to it as a Native art “publisher”, and much of the merchandise it produces displays influence from the company’s experience in the field of printing. For instance, the company uses similar printing technology to publish the same design on lines of paper products (e.g. art cards and booklets), soft products (e.g. t-shirts and blankets), and hard products (e.g. mugs and trivets).
In this respect, one of the things that make some artists hesitate to engage in artware production is the prospect of seeing their work exist in unlimited quantities. For instance, I spoke to an artist who was not particularly inclined to participate in the artware industry, but was trying to find ways of making his art less exclusive. He explained that even though he prefers not to have his designs reproduced on gift products, he would perhaps consider producing a special line of t-shirts. He would want to maintain the art status of his design by limiting the edition and signing the shirts (in the fashion of a silkscreen print), but could still sell them at much more affordable prices than his regular work. Artists such as him have built their career around their aspiration to be recognized in the contemporary art market and their work fetches prices that reflect the advancement of their career in that direction. Still, troubled by the realization that such prices could be alienating for some of their closest supporters, limited editions become a way for them to be less exclusive while remaining within the boundaries established by the contemporary art market (see Chapter 6).

Contrary to what may have been the case only a few decades ago, with today’s technologies of reproduction, nothing dictates that artware should look as ‘cheap’ as its price. For instance, Haida artist Jim Hart insists that designing for artware and making ‘junk’ are two very different things.

If I do “non serious” stuff, meaning a piece for production, I still believe that it should be a nice thing, a nice thing to own, to hang on to, to feel, to look at, to wear, whatever. I believe that it should be done well, I don’t believe in the junk, this foolish junk, I can’t stand it.

High quality reproduction cannot make up for poor design, but today, technological limitations are more rarely the reason for poor reproductions than choices of technology and budget considerations. Still, if it is possible to make Native Northwest Coast artware without sacrificing artistic integrity on the altar of serialization, it nonetheless remains difficult to do so without being accused of forfeiting the aura of uniqueness – hence the association of mass-production with the crossing over from ‘art’ to ‘not art.’ However, technological limitations do
not dictate this – it is value systems that do. As noted by Stallabrass, artists who make art in reproducible media could “try to achieve wide ownership of their work” but instead, “the great majority of them produce tiny editions, each piece being accompanied by a certificate of authentication, for very high prices”. Stallabrass goes on to argue that “This is the defining characteristic of art as against other areas of high culture”:

Drama, the concert, or opera achieve exclusivity through requiring that an audience be present at a live performance ... ; other forms – novels, poetry, and film – produce objects that are industrially fabricated in large numbers and are widely owned. Only in high art is the core business the production or rare or unique objects that can only be owned by the very wealthy.

However, despite Benjamin’s prediction in his 1936 essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” that the advent of new technologies would challenge the auratic value of originality, uniqueness, and subjectivity, much of the promotion of today’s mass-produced consumer goods calls on the idea that despite their widespread accessibility, these goods are fit for individual expressions of ... originality, uniqueness, and subjectivity. In this respect, according to Jean and John Comaroff, since the value of identity appears to be bolstered rather than diminished by commodification processes, cultural products and practices are particularly well suited to an analysis of how an “auratic quality” can endure “in the face of their mass marketing”.

On the one hand, serialization has in theory potential for counteracting the creation of value that is brought about through exclusivities of all kinds. However, on the other end, mass-consumption is the equivalent neither of ‘levelled’ nor of ‘uniform’ consumption. The existence of products made to be accessible to all in no way renders socially and economically irrelevant the existence of products which are not, as shown by Northwest Coast artists who make both artware and art, alternatively placing limits on serialization to remain in the realm of art, and unleashing its power to increase access to be more democratic. This makes artware a particularly interesting vantage point from which to examine contemporary consumption and through it the

cards out of paper-thin sheets of wood, making each card unique because of differences in the wood grain. However, the company appears to struggle with the expectation that mass-produced items should all be identical: each card reads in the fashion of a disclaimer that “Imperfections are intentional and add to the individuality of each card”.


Ibid., 102.


tension between, on the one hand, the assertion of an egalitarian program and on the other, the
reiteration of social hierarchies (see Chapter 6). It is made even more interesting by the fact that,
the so-called ‘masses’ that consume Native Northwest Coast artware include those who make,
distribute, and/or consume Native Northwest Coast art, contrary to the assumption that true
artists, art galleries, and art collectors distinguish themselves from would-be artists, tourists, and
gift shops specifically by not brushing against that which is available to ‘all.’ As all of the above
demonstrates, these clear-cut distinctions are in fact untenable. This has led me to define the
frame of my study as the world of Native Northwest Coast art and artware, which encompasses
both the art market and the artware industry. If the artware industry is clearly the focal point of
my dissertation, excluding the art market from my study would have been like extracting a
photographic subject from the setting in which it was captured.

1.2 The Native Northwest Coast Art and Artware World

1.2.1 World of friction

All artistic work, like all human activity, involves the joint activity of a number, often a
large number, of people. Through their cooperation, the art work we eventually see or
hear comes to be and continues to be. The work always shows signs of that cooperation.
The forms of cooperation may be ephemeral, but often become more or less routine,
producing patterns of collective activity we can call an art world.

- Howard S. Becker62

It is in reference to sociologist Howard S. Becker’s notion of “art worlds” that I speak of a
“world” to describe the networks constitutive of the Native Northwest Coast artware industry. As
Becker explains, such worlds “do not have boundaries around them, so that we can say that these
people belong to a particular art world while those people do not”.63 I am therefore not concerned
with drawing a line between the “world” of artware and the rest of society. Instead, I am
interested in the networks that form the artware industry, situated within larger social, political,
economic, and cultural contexts.

In his discussion of the concept of “art worlds”, Becker remarks that “participants in the
making of art works, and members of society generally, regard some of the activities necessary to

62 Becker, Art Worlds, 1.
63 Ibid., 35.
the production of a form of art as “artistic,” requiring the special gifts or sensibility of an artist.”  

However, Becker also emphasises that there is a relationship of dependence between the artist and other participants in the art world. He thus defines an “art world” as “an established network of cooperative links among participants.”  

Therefore, works of art “are not the products of individual makers,” even though artists constitute a “sub-group of the world’s participants who, by common agreement, possess a special gift, therefore make a unique and indispensable contribution to the work.”  

This positioning of artists at the core of art worlds, not in isolation but in direct and indirect connection with all of its other participants, resonates with the role of artists in the Northwest Coast artware world as it was presented to me: as indispensable to the industry, but also dependent on the work performed by others. However, although Becker discusses the potential for conflict between artists and other participants in a given art world, he calls these other participants “support personnel”, therefore positioning artists in a situation of relative authority over them. Thus Becker shows that artists are dependent on others to create artworks, but ultimately says little about how power differentials may shape the division of labour and the distribution of benefits between the various parties involved. In the context of the artware industry, such power differentials are important to take into consideration. In what follows, I will illustrate this by focusing on the asymmetry of the relationships of interdependence that can exist between artists and artware companies.

During my fieldwork, I often heard concerns expressed by artists and by others on their behalf about the ways in which they are treated by other participants in the industry. The persistence of such concerns begs the question: if artists indeed make unique and essential contributions to the artware world, why are they also perceived to be the front-line victims of potential abuse within the industry? Could the recognition that they make crucial contributions to the market not shield them from mistreatment by those who rely on these contributions? The relevance of these questions notwithstanding, it is important to note that Canada’s history is in fact ripe with examples of relationships of interdependence turning awry. Eva Mackey notes that “in the early years of the colonial project... the main goal was resource extraction through the fur-trade, and economic activity that absolutely depended on Native people’s labour and

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64 Ibid.
65 Ibid., 35 emphasis mine.
66 Ibid., 35.
knowledge”. As John Sutton Lutz reports, in 1889 Franz Boas wrote that Aboriginal people had become “indispensable on the labor market” and that “without them the province would suffer a great economic damage”. However, this undeniable dependence did not preclude relationships between Aboriginal people and settlers to progressively deteriorate, primarily to the detriment of the Aboriginal peoples whose employment in the industries they had helped build became more precarious and less remunerative over time. Similarly, the fact that the Native Northwest Coast artware industry would not exist without Aboriginal artists’ development of an art style over centuries did not preclude this market from eventually coming largely under the control of non-Aboriginal entrepreneurs.

As I will explain in more detail in Chapter 5, in the artware industry artists are usually free agents, rarely if ever being locked in (or having the security of) long-term contracts to work with particular companies. Therefore, they are actually in competition with one another (not to mention that, in certain companies at least, they are also in competition with non-Aboriginal artists). Companies may find Northwest Coast designs to be indispensable to their business, but not necessarily the designs of one particular artist. There are exceptions, such as when a) the company brand is built around a particular artist, as is the case when artists develop their personal line of merchandise or b) an artist is well-enough known to the public so that losing this artist would greatly affect sales and company image. In general, however, companies depend on their ability to access designs, but not necessarily on maintaining relationships with each artist with whom they have ever done business.

That said, there are of course both objective and subjective reasons for companies to treat artists well: building stable business relationships, nurturing friendships, upholding ethical principles, maintaining a positive reputation among Native Northwest Coast artists, saving on the time-consuming activity of establishing working relationships with new artists, etc. Still, the power dynamics tend to be in favour of artware companies, for two simple reasons: 1) there are far fewer companies than there are artists, and 2) these companies can run their business with designs from a few artists, whereas artists who wish to generate a regular income through artware often need to regularly sell or license several of their designs, year after year.

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68 Lutz, Makuk, 192.
In other words, even though companies often work with more than one artist and use more than one of their designs, the offer of Native Northwest Coast designs still largely outweighs demand. This in no way dictates that companies will treat artists unfairly; however, it does imply that, with perhaps the exception of deals involving extremely well-known artists, the stakes of each company-to-artist negotiation tends to be higher for the artist than for the company. Given these power dynamics, I believe that relationships between artists and artware companies are better described as ‘arrangements’ than as ‘agreements’ (unless the latter is used in the technical sense of contracts, such as in the expression “royalty agreements”). Both terms evoke consent of the parties involved, and arrangements can take the form of consensual agreements. However, the term ‘arrangement’ has the advantage of not necessarily implying equal levels of satisfaction on the part of each of the implicated parties.

Furthermore, with respect to the ways in which various participants of the artware world engage with one another, I prefer the term “friction” to Becker’s notion of “cooperative link”. “Friction” is not exclusive of cooperation and does not necessarily imply conflict, but it too has the advantage of evoking the potential for divergent interests and unequal power relations, even between people who are working towards a common goal. I borrow the term from anthropologist Anna L. Tsing, who uses “friction” not to imply the existence of open conflicts and tensions but to evoke the engagement of parties with one another, creating the points of contact that are necessary to the initiation of movement, the direction of which is at least in part determined by the varying levels of pressure being exerted by the various different parties involved. Friction, according to Tsing, is the “awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnections across difference.” Depending on a number of other factors, these interconnections “can be compromising or empowering”. For Tsing, who writes about environmentalists’ efforts to protect Indonesia’s rainforests against capitalist interests, friction is not in and of itself a means of resistance of the former against the latter. However, she argues that friction does have the potential to create inflection, motion, and mobilization. Instead, friction exists when and where a spinning wheel encounters the surface it is about to travel. “Spinning in the air [the wheel] goes

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70 Ibid., 6.
nowhere”; it is only when “the rubber hits the road” that it can provoke movement. Still, as Tsing remarks, a wheel does spin more easily in the air, unimpeded, than when it grips onto the pavement. Thus, friction both moderates and generates motion.

A similar argument can be made about social relations and the moderation/generation of markets. It has indeed long been recognized by sociologists and anthropologists that markets do not exist independently of social relations. Karl Marx’s notion of “relations of production” (or the sum of the social relationships in which humans have to engage in order to ensure their own reproduction, as made possible within the structures of any given economic system) already made this quite clear. Later, the idea that markets are in fact ‘embedded’ in social relations was coined after Karl Polanyi’s work on the economic systems of so-called ‘archaic’ societies, pointing to the close ties between markets and society. Polanyi initially used the term to describe a change from strong society-economy relations of dependence in ‘archaic’ societies to the dissolution of these relations in ‘modern’ societies. In more recent scholarship, however, the notion of ‘embeddedness’ has been extended to describe the intertwining of systems of exchange and social networks in all economic systems, including capitalism. This approach has greatly contributed to the development of a socio-cultural approach of economics that counters the notion that social relations are residual circumstances unnecessary to consider in the examination of the market, unless as merely “a frictional drag that impedes competitive markets”. This view can be debunked by considering “friction” as what makes movement possible, beyond drag. For this reason, this dissertation examines the Native Northwest Coast artware world and the inflections, both tempering and stimulating, of this market by the friction of social relations that shape the artware market. These social relations have taken me beyond the activities of production that occur in the artist studio and the company warehouse, so as to produce a more comprehensive understanding of Native Northwest Coast artware’s

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71 Ibid., 5. Here, I modify Tsing’s metaphor slightly. Tsing had written that “A wheel turns because of its encounter with the surface of the road” Ibid., but this metaphor is incorrect: it is not that the wheel turns because of its contact with another surface, it is that a turning wheel goes nowhere until it grips onto another surface.

72 Tsing, Friction, 6.


commodit scape, i.e. the various people, things, and activities that need to link up (cooperatively and not, momentarily and more enduringly) in order to make artware and its market exist.\textsuperscript{76}

1.2.2 The artware world as “commodit scape”

If by 1995 Daniel Miller could situate the study of consumption at the vanguard of anthropological thought,\textsuperscript{77} it is clear that consumption was not always a focal point of anthropological inquiry. One of the legacies of Marx to the early developments of economic anthropology,\textsuperscript{78} and of Polanyi as one of his commentators,\textsuperscript{79} was a tendency to analyze economic systems from the point of view of production.\textsuperscript{80} The other focus of early economic anthropology was exchange and circulation, with Marcel Mauss’s analysis of gift exchange as a ‘total social phenomenon’\textsuperscript{81} spurring commentary and counter-commentaries for decades, and into the present.\textsuperscript{82}

More recently, however, economic anthropology has tended to move away from these two legacies, with many of its practitioners shifting their focus from production and distribution to consumption. Anthropologists have become increasingly aware that consumption, long considered the passive last stage of the production-circulation-consumption triptych, is in fact partly what produces the conditions and strategies of production and circulation.\textsuperscript{83} Daniel Miller pushes the importance of consumption even further, asserting that it has become the privileged site of the production of meaning and identity.\textsuperscript{84} In this view, the focus on consumption would

\textsuperscript{76} Foster, “Tracking Globalization: Commodities and Value in Motion.”
\textsuperscript{78} Marx, Capital.
\textsuperscript{79} See Dalton, “Primitive, Archaic, and Modern Economies: Karl Polanyi’s Contribution to Economic Anthropology and Comparative Economy.”
\textsuperscript{81} The Gift; Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies (New York: W.W. Norton, 1967) [1924].
\textsuperscript{84} Miller, “Consumption Studies as the Transformation of Anthropology.”
not only be a theoretical shift premised on a change in intellectual interest, but one that mirrors the changes occurring in society as a whole. Miller believes that there has been a “historical shift in the relative importance of consumption as against production and distribution in the constitution of society and culture. Consumption has become the main arena in which and through which people have to struggle towards control over the definition of themselves and their values”.

A number of earlier academic commentators of consumption’s increasing importance in contemporary society were rather critical of this development. For instance, Jean Baudrillard contended that the advent of “consumer society” was an entrance into “the age of radical alienation”.

Similarly, Cornelius Castoriadis argued that capitalism has led to an essentially bureaucratic society in which constantly manipulated consumers are trained to absorb an ever-increasing amount of goods independently of whether or not such consumption is in their interest. In contrast, Miller has tended to retreat from such critique, focusing instead on adapting his approach to this societal change by placing consumption at the center of (most) of his analyses.

My own fieldwork provided me with opportunities to engage with consumers, but my research was primarily focused on interactions with artware producers and distributors. Considering the current emphasis in material culture studies and economic anthropology on consumption, giving more weight to production and distribution than to consumption may seem an outdated approach. However, I believe there is value in paying close attention to production and distribution, especially in the case of an industry that is politicized specifically in relation to the identity of the producers and distributors who are seen to profit from the consumption of this industry’s products. Indeed, even in the era of so-called ‘consumerism’, production and distribution maintain a place of crucial importance in contemporary society. As noted by Anthony Galbraith, production is what makes consumption possible: it cannot occur without the production of those very goods and services that are consumed, and so the importance placed on consumption encourages always more production. Also, for many, paid work – whereby one produces such goods and services – remains the way to acquire the pecuniary means to partake in

85 Ibid., 277. This echoes Baudrillard’s earlier argument that in modern times consumption and not production is “how our society speaks itself”. Jean Baudrillard, The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures (London: Sage, 1998) [1970], 193.
87 Cornelius Castoriadis, 1979.
consumption. Writing specifically about the art world’s current obsession with consumption, Stallabrass reminds us that even Marx believed production and consumption were tightly bound to each other, stating that:

Not only does one depend upon and complete the other, but production always involves consumption (for instance, of raw materials), and consumption production (for instance, eating sustains the laboring body). The exclusive focus on consumption in much of the art world is an ideological matter, one that flows from the prominence of advertising and other corporate propaganda, for which the less consumers think about production (who labours and for what pay, in what circumstances and at what risk, under what form of coercion, with what environmental consequences?), the better. 89

A similar argument can be made about the continued importance of circulation: with the market of most consumer goods having ‘gone global,’ activities of distribution have intensified and expanded, 89 playing a critical role in making the raw materials and imported wares available where and when they are needed by producers, in addition to making available finished products to consumers. Thus, even though the artware industry can be seen to focus on making Native Northwest Coast art more accessible to an ever greater number of consumers by producing items in large quantities and at affordable prices, it can only do so by also mobilizing various networks of distribution – from shipping and delivery, to import and export, not to mention human travel over short and long distances. However, in particular when it comes to objects such as Native Northwest Coast artware, which continues to be marketed in relation to connections to local sites, peoples, and cultures, there is also a tendency to gloss over the various global circuits that are usually involved in rendering these objects accessible for purchase in a particular place (see Chapter 3).

In sum, studies overly focused on consumption fail to give a comprehensive understanding of contemporary society just as overly production-centered studies failed to provide the full picture of early capitalist societies. For this reason, I approach the Native Northwest Coast artware industry as a complex interplay of production, distribution, and consumption activities, or what Robert J. Foster calls a “commodityscape”. Contrary to the idea of a “commodity-chain” defined as a series of unidirectional labor and production processes resulting in finished commodities, the concept of “commodityscape” draws on Arjun Appadurai’s use of the suffix “-scape” to highlight the shifting values and meaning of commodities along the non-linear linkages

89 Stallabrass, Art Incorporated, 98.

of various processes of production, distribution, and consumption. Although the “commodityscape” approach usually places special emphasis on consumption, my own research combines economic anthropology’s traditional concern for production and distribution with a concern for consumption, as advocated by Miller. In addition, although the reference to Appadurai suggests that my focus will be on the global dimensions of artware’s commodityscape, my fieldwork has primarily enabled me to focus on the roles and perspectives of local industry participants in this global commodityscape (see Chapter 3).

1.2.3 Producers, distributors, consumers

Among the various individuals who are involved in the artware world, I use the word ‘producer’ to refer to individuals whose main activity is to oversee and/or partake in design and manufacturing activities, including company owners and artists. The individuals I refer to as ‘distributors’ oversee and/or partake in sales and marketing activities, including sales people working for artware companies, and retail store employees and owner. With the word ‘consumer’, I point not only to individuals who have personally purchased artware items, but also to those who own, use, and/or interact with such items – using the notion of consumption in its broadest sense rather than only as the act of purchase.

Although it may seem as though I write about ‘producers’, ‘distributors’, and ‘consumers’ as if these labels corresponded to distinct groups of individuals, it should be noted that it is not uncommon for a person to be at once producer, distributor, and consumer. During my fieldwork, I would quite frequently meet someone who designed a product, is involved in its sale, and also owns it. This was most obvious to me in the case of fashion products, because they could be worn by their designer in the context of the sales events at which I met them. To give one example: I once approached a fashion designer at her sales booth, and in between conversations with her customers, she agreed to a short interview during which she wore her latest scarf design. Just as she is obviously not the sole consumer of her products, she is also not the only one to be involved in their distribution and their production; but, during our interaction, she simultaneously endorsed...
all three roles. As the interview proceeded and the topic of these scarves came up, I was at once speaking to its designer, its promoter, and its wearer.\textsuperscript{92}

One person can thus take part in all three so-called “sectors” of activity not only over the course of their lifetime for various products, but also at one given time for a single product. Here I am not solely speaking of companies that are run like a ‘one-man-show’ where everything is done by one individual, but also in cases where the involvement in a commodityscape of various individuals blurs distinctions between their respective assigned roles as producer, as distributors, or as consumers. However, this blurring of clear distinctions does not exclude the possibility of a person partaking more intensely and more purposefully in only one of these activities. In the previous example, although this person may also consume and distribute artware, her public persona is that of a fashion designer. And so, when I describe someone like her as a ‘producer’ (or, other people as ‘distributors’ or as ‘consumers’), I mean that production (or distribution or consumption) is the realm of activity that is primarily associated with this person’s position within the market, but not necessarily that this person participates exclusively in this realm of activity.

My schematic division of the industry into ‘producers’, ‘distributors’, and ‘consumers’ should also not be misinterpreted as suggesting that they each constitute an interest group pulling on a different edge of the same blanket. Retail store owners, sales people, company owners, company employees, artists, art collectors, and consumers, although respectively clearly having common activities, were not presented to me as categories of people that each have common interests on behalf of which they could be considered a collective of stakeholders. Instead, it is in the linkages across these groups, between specific producers, distributors, and consumers that networks and business relationships are formed. To give one simple example, it can be much more in the interest of an artware company to build relationships across the artware commodityscape – with providers of blank wares, artists, retailers, and organizations that buy artware in bulk, for instance – than to attempt the same with other artware companies. Indeed, the latter conduct the same activities as them, and are thus their direct competitors in the industry.

Interestingly, the only group that has been presented to me as forming anything like an interest group in the artware industry are Aboriginal artists (see Chapter 5) – those whom Becker

\textsuperscript{92} Conceptually, commoditescapes exist at a macro-social level, much beyond the individuals that animate them; but, as illustrated in this example, individuals’ multiple roles shows that production, distribution, and consumption can be tightly bound even at the micro-social level.
says are singled out in the art world as having a “special gift”, but who as I explained are believed to be vulnerable to potential abuse in the artware industry. This exception is not only explained by the fact that Aboriginal artists represent the largest contingent of Aboriginal individuals involved in the industry, but also by the existence of unresolved tensions and power imbalances between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples, especially with respect to the use of Aboriginal resources such as Northwest Coast art. It is to these tensions and how they shape the artware industry that I turn in the third and final part of this chapter.

1.3 Cross-Cultural Friction

1.3.1 Participants and stakeholders

I refer to individuals involved in the production, distribution, and/or consumption of Native Northwest Coast artware as ‘participants’ of the industry. There are, undoubtedly, individuals participating in the industry in a more passive fashion (e.g. politicians, lawmakers, scholars, for instance), and their effects on the industry should not be ignored. However, for the purpose of clarity, I reserve the word ‘participant’ for those who purposefully and actively engage in the activities of the industry. However, the industry does affect and concern more people than just those individuals who partake in its activities. I call ‘stakeholders’ those who affect or are affected by the industry, whether or not they directly participate in its activities. In the broadest sense, a stakeholder is anyone or any group whose interests are in some way related to the industry. Stakeholders do not need to have invested themselves or their resources in the industry to stand to gain or lose from the industry’s activities. As such, their perspectives on what participants in the industry do and how they do it are also relevant to this study.

In this respect, considering that the very existence of a Native Northwest Coast artware industry is directly tied to the commodification of Native Northwest Coast cultural expression, Aboriginal individuals and groups of the Northwest Coast need not be participants in the industry to feel that they are among its stakeholders. Those who feel that the designs that are being used in the artware industry are part of their heritage also tend to consider themselves de facto stakeholders of the industry because the latter’s activities affect them both directly and indirectly. Indeed, when a cultural product or practice is treated as a source of value, it is often treated as “inseparable from the being-and-bodies of their owner-producers”.93 In relation to this, a number

93 Comaroff and Comaroff, Ethnicity, Inc., 51.
of industry participants and stakeholders hold the view that the industry’s focus on Native Northwest Coast art should automatically warrant various forms of direct and indirect benefits for the art’s various communities of origin (see Chapter 8). This argument draws not only on the idea that Native Northwest Coast peoples “have a stake” in the artware industry, but also on the fact that they hold rights to their cultural heritage. In this sense, the term “rightsholders” also applies. However, in the Pacific Northwest, property rights to the representation of figures, crests, stories, etc are not necessarily or even usually held collectively at the scale of nations or communities, let alone entire Pacific Northwest networks. Instead, such rights are usually held within particular lineages, and families, and in some cases are held by individuals who embody particular names. Therefore, at the scale of the artware industry, the term “stakeholders” seems more appropriate than the term “rightsholders”, unless discussing specific cases for which property rights can be more directly delineated.

It is in reference to the stakes specifically affecting Native Northwest Coast peoples that I differentiate between the industry’s “Aboriginal stakeholders” and “non-Aboriginal stakeholders”. When I employ these expressions, it is not to signal the existence of two opposed and organized interest groups, the membership of which would be defined along cultural lines. Rather, I do this to acknowledge that certain practices affect the industry’s various stakeholders differently depending on whether or not they claim a direct connection to and responsibility towards the cultural expressions that are being commodified. That is not to say that all Native Northwest Coast participants and stakeholders always speak with one united voice, working jointly and “against” other participants and stakeholders. However, it is to recognize that the stakes that are tied to the Native Northwest Coast artware industry are different and in many ways higher for Native Northwest Coast peoples than they are for others. In view of this, the overwhelming representation of non-Aboriginal individuals among artware industry participants understandably creates tensions in the artware world.

1.3.2 Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relations

Anthropologists working in the Pacific Northwest have greatly contributed to the study of relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in Canada. Focusing primarily on public arenas, they have for example shed light on the various tensions that complicate
relationships between museums and originating communities, the troubled relationships of non-recognized groups with nation-states, and the power dynamics between researchers and indigenous communities. Others have examined relationship-building and transformation at the intersection of public and private arenas of value, such as the art market, "art claims," and repatriation. Researchers are also becoming increasingly interested in the relationships directly engaged by resource extraction companies with First Nations (i.e. the private sector consulting and negotiating with Aboriginal governments), noting drastic changes in power dynamics since the early days of trade. Such research became all the more relevant in the context of British Columbia’s province-wide treaty negotiations and the “uncertain” economic environment it seeks to stabilize.

The making and unmaking of interpersonal relationships, when neither party claims to officially represent a collective entity but on which collective experiences and histories nonetheless bear, have remained under-examined by anthropologists, perhaps because the discipline of sociology is better suited to the study of these micro-social interactions than is anthropology. However, in the context of the artware industry, relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal individuals are also often specially affected by tensions that have grown from and crystallized around socio-cultural difference as part of Canada’s colonial history. As an anthropologist, I seek to bring to bear this wider intercultural context and history of colonial

100 James. R. Miller, Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens: a History of Indian-white Relations in Canada, 3rd ed (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000); Lutz, Makak.
encounters in my analyses of interpersonal relationships among artware industry participants, without however always resorting to culturalist readings of individuals’ behaviors, i.e. interpretations in which cultural difference is taken to be the primary cause of divergences in practices and views.\textsuperscript{102} In other words, I do not take ‘culture’ to be the cause of one’s position in a debate but, when relevant, I do examine these positions on their particular cultural terms so as to understand “the logic of a given process in its own specific setting, rather than forced into a preconceived mould”.\textsuperscript{103}

1.3.3 Trust and culturally-coded criticism

It is important to note that, generally speaking, the kinds of interpersonal and inter-competitor tensions that exist in the Native Northwest Coast artware industry also exist in most if not all industries and markets. That said, none of my interlocutors were oblivious to the industry’s potential for tension between and across its Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal stakeholders. I have been told that, regardless of colour, a “thick” skin is required to survive in this market, as assessments of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal industry participants and their practices tend to be made in relation to their cultural affiliation. One non-Aboriginal company owner explained to me with regret that it seemed impossible to celebrate successes in the industry without resorting to a culturally-coded analysis – non-Aboriginal successes necessarily seen as made on the backs of Aboriginal people, Aboriginal successes necessarily seen as a feat in the face of non-Aboriginal adversity. This could be seen as the kind of inevitable tension that afflicts all inter-cultural milieus. However, in the context of the artware industry, this kind of culturally coded criticism can also be understood as resistance on the part of Aboriginal stakeholders against the adoption of a ‘divide and conquer’ strategy in their disfavour. In the context of the Vancouver 2010 Olympic, for instance, this translated into cautious stances towards the Aboriginal organization that liaised with the Olympic organizing committee, the Four Host First Nations. For instance, Arthur Manuel, spokesperson for the Indigenous Network on Economies and Trade, remarked that:

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{102} Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz, \textit{Culture Troubles: Politics and the Interpretation of Meaning} (Chicago, Ill: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 171.
\textsuperscript{103} Ibid., 189.
\end{flushleft}
Canada ... used the Four Host First Nations to divide and rule over indigenous peoples in Canada. It is important not to pick on the Four Host First Nations, because it is Canada that is the real culprit in this human rights travesty. 104

During my fieldwork, some were understandably anxious not to provide fodder for a potentially damaging portrayal of divergent opinions among Aboriginal business people as “infighting”, especially when they believed solidarity could play a key role in achieving their overarching goals. This cautious attitude partly explains why, although I did hear criticism from non-Aboriginal individuals and companies about other non-Aboriginal individuals and companies, I rarely heard criticism from Aboriginal industry participants about other specific Aboriginal industry participants. This or that practice by an Aboriginal colleague may not be “their thing”, they would explain, but their support of other Aboriginal business people – bar overtly unethical behaviour – ran deeper than their differences of view and business models. Even when the topic under discussion seemed to draw a clear line of conflict – whether or not it is desirable for Aboriginal companies to have their merchandise produced by foreign companies, for example – I was asked to remember that this question was being posed in the first place because of some non-Aboriginal competitors’ practices – in this case, outsourcing labour and importing goods in order to reduce costs.

As I met people in the field, my own allegiances – intellectual, political, and ethical – were also scrutinized; as a researcher, and more specifically as a non-Aboriginal anthropologist, I knew my work could be perceived as condoning, if not itself perpetuating, theft – of knowledge, voice, cultural heritage, and resources. This awareness clearly coloured the attitude of some of its participants towards me; although the majority of those I approached were keen to help me with my project, there were times when my interest and questions were met with a range of strongly felt responses, from belligerence to defensiveness, and from provocation to overt caution. 105

Research interactions and business relationships are not so different in this regard. Although it can be assumed that business partnerships are created on the basis of overlap in the


105 On one particular occasion, half an hour into a conversation, I was suddenly asked by my interlocutor to assure her that I was not hiding a recorder. This question came at the moment in our conversation when she was beginning to be more openly critical in her remarks. Such occasions made me realize that those who accepted to talk to me were not necessarily signaling that they trusted that my interests were in accordance with theirs, but only that they felt that they were in a position to protect their interests against me, if need be.
interests of the parties involved, those interests that are not in convergence also significantly shape these relationships. For example, the visibility of Northwest Coast imagery created by the proliferation of artware items has different implications depending on whether the priority is to enhance the income provided by this market, promote individual Aboriginal artists, or assert a visible presence of Aboriginal people as a means to enhance their cultural and political weight. Each of these goals implies a conspicuous visibility of Native Northwest Coast objects and images, and as such they are not necessarily incompatible. However, the gains for which this conspicuousness is produced can significantly vary, and power differentials between the parties involved can affect the order of priority given to these goals. For instance, a company owner may be committed to promoting artists’ work, but at the same time consider that commercial viability should take precedence over such promotion; artists may be motivated by getting a regional style better recognized by the public and getting their community better known, but also favour modes of dissemination for their work that publicize their individual names and guarantee them some personal income; and political leaders may feel it is important for the art of their community to circulate in as many forms as possible, but feel strongly about limiting the co-optation that could emerge in the process of such proliferation. Beyond common goals and apparently successful business partnerships, all of these competing approaches and interests, significantly shape the artware industry.

1.3.4 Structural inequalities

My intent is not to paint a picture of incessant, open, and direct conflicts running through the industry between its various stakeholders. Rather, I wish to point to the differences of interests its participants are forced to consider when building trust and establishing business relationships with each other (and with researchers such as myself). Further, these differences of interests come into play via power dynamics that often reflect the unequal social locations of those who bring these differences forward. In the artware industry, business relationships do not imply encounters only between various interests but also between variably empowered bearers of these interests (see Chapter 5).

Such inequality is striking when it translates into overtly discriminatory attitudes, especially when their perpetrators do not seem to fear repercussions. In the art and artware market, it is not uncommon for assumptions to be made about artists’ behaviours and skills based on the fact that
they are Aboriginal. For instance, an artist explained to me how, as he was being paid for one of his works the gallery owner told him not to “go drink the money away,” despite the fact that he has never struggled with addiction. Another example of discrimination is when an artware company owner told me that he does not hire Aboriginal employees because it would make things in his business “just too complicated,” revealing his barely veiled negative perception of Aboriginal workers.

However, assumptions of the existence of inequalities can also be made visible by attitudes meant to be socially progressive. For instance, a non-Aboriginal retail manager explained to me that she bought from a particular Aboriginal company despite the low quality of its products because she felt obligated to honour their relationship as a non-Aboriginal business situated on the land of the company owners’ Nation. Another retail manager similarly explained that, although she normally only meets jewellers by appointment, she makes exceptions for Aboriginal artists who show up unannounced because she feels it is important to take the time to meet with them to acknowledge their work. Whether interpreted as sincere expressions of respect or patronizing assumptions of inequality, the practices described above show that there is some awareness that being non-Aboriginal exposes to accusations of disrespect and power abuse, and that this awareness can trigger attempts to pre-empt such criticism. These practices not only signify a commitment to counter structural inequalities, they can also work pre-emptively against criticism of these business people based on their cultural affiliation. In some ways, they can be seen as examples of what Eva Mackey describes as “recognizing difference” as a means to also “manage” potentially tense relationships all the while appearing well-intended. As a result, some Aboriginal industry participants are quite skeptical, even towards those who have apparently supportive attitudes towards them. This is illustrated by the following artist comment with regard to the support non-Aboriginal individuals had expressed towards his career plans:

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106 Mackey, The House of Difference, 75.
There are a couple companies that really support what I’m doing. They make millions of dollars in First Nations art, and there are no First Nations people working for them, but they say “Yes, I support you, ... all I want to see is you being successful!” So I have a couple companies that say that, but really, talk is cheap.\footnote{Commenting on the denial of support for the Aboriginal art market by the Indian Affairs Branch in the 1960s, Ojibway intellectual and activist Art Solomon expressed similar sentiments: “I have met some good people in Indian Affairs but they were in positions where they could do very little of real value, they always gave me their good wishes. I fed my dog on good wishes once when I was a boy; and he died”. Arthur Solomon, “Craft Development, Human Development, Community Development.,” May 29, 1969, MG 28 - I 222, Canadian Craftsmen Association fonds. 1964-1977. Volume 16, Library and Archives Canada.}

In addition to classic tensions inherent to any market competition, the colonial “history of theft”\footnote{Kramer, \textit{Switchbacks}, 23.} in the Pacific Northwest – from land and resource dispossession and the scramble for objects and cultural knowledge, to the theft of people through disease, and of children through Residential School system and the Sixties Scoop – contribute significantly to the challenges of building cross-cultural relationships of trust between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal business partners. Any practice that is or can be construed as a perpetuation of this legacy of theft is usually ill-received among Aboriginal stakeholders and their supporters. To be sure, the use of designs created by Aboriginal artists (as opposed to designs made in Northwest Coast style by non-Aboriginal artists) plays a crucially important role in the garnering of support of particular artware companies from Aboriginal stakeholders.

Interestingly, when I have had the opportunity to present my research as a guest speaker in undergraduate classes, one of the most common assumptions that they voiced has been that my research is focused on the outright appropriation of Aboriginal designs by non-Aboriginal companies. Possibly as a result of their own discomfort with and disapproval of appropriative practices as compounded by their training in critical thinking, these students also tend to be themselves rather suspicious of the artware industry as a whole, usually preferring to assume theft rather than what they would consider fair compensation. Thus, as potential consumers, they effectively put the onus on the companies to prove their “good faith” and “good practices” to them rather than giving them the benefit of the doubt. I believe this attitude is in part due to the common conflation of two related, but nonetheless different, processes of “appropriation” and “commodification”.\footnote{Kramer, \textit{Switchbacks}, 23.}
1.3.5 Disentangling “appropriation” and “commodification”

“Commodification” is the process by which tangibles and intangibles are, at least for a time, made to be treated as goods that can be bought and sold. Commodification is considered a form of “appropriation” when it is instigated without the consent and/or without adequate compensation of the owners of that which has been turned into commodities. Due to global power dynamics and the less favourable positions Indigenous peoples tend to occupy within them, the commodification of cultural heritage has often been discussed as if it were always instigated from the outside.\(^\text{109}\) For this reason, “appropriation” and “commodification” are sometimes used concomitantly, and in some cases, interchangeably.

With respect to Aboriginal resources in British Columbia, the frequent conflation of “commodification” and “appropriation” is closely related to the colonial history of theft that has characterized relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Canada.\(^\text{110}\) Nonetheless, such conflation glosses over the complexity of the relationships between these two processes, implying that market relations are inevitably instigated from outside Aboriginal groups, by and for “others”. With respect to the artware industry, this assumption not only obscures the existence of a variety of arrangements between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal business partners, it can also be detrimental to companies that are Aboriginal-owned and operated and strive to develop markets around Aboriginal natural or cultural resources as a means to sustain their families and communities.\(^\text{111}\)

For this dissertation, I have purposefully chosen to focus on business initiatives that are instigated by or involve Aboriginal participants, so as to offer a more complicated view of commodification processes, which certainly can but do not always include appropriative practices. Therefore, although I will certainly discuss the existence of protectionist stances against the commodification of Native Northwest Coast art, I will also be focusing on how commodification is being harnessed by Aboriginal artware industry participants to reinforce their peoples’ cultural, economic, and political autonomy.


\(^{110}\) For an overview of this history as experienced specifically by the Nuxalk and how it has affected the sale of Nuxalk art, see Chapter 2 of Kramer, \textit{Switchbacks}.

From this perspective, the ways in which lines are drawn between “appropriation” and “commodification” is closely related to competing conceptions of social justice and conflicting models for the redistribution of economic and political power. Such redistribution (or lack thereof) directly affects various industry stakeholders’ evaluation of business initiatives as “fair” or “ethical”, and as “appropriative” or not. In this view, the morality of commodification is not inherent, but rather contingent on “the context and manner in which it is pursued”.112 Therefore, instead of asking whether or not commodification is in and of itself ethical, I will be discussing the economic models, social and cultural values, and ideological yearnings that inform various stakeholders’ evaluation of particular business models and practices within the artware industry (see Chapter 5 and Chapter 8).

1.3.6 Yearning for a “new and improved” industry

During my fieldwork, one particular issue that was recurrently brought to my attention was the importance of making the artware industry better tend to the interests of its Aboriginal stakeholders. None of the industry participants I spoke to described their involvement in the artware industry as being motivated solely by the desire to serve non-Aboriginal interests; in contrast, all of them made a point to explain to me what kinds of Aboriginal interests their activities served, whether marginally or centrally, from expanding the appreciation of Northwest Coast art by non-Aboriginal consumers to contributing to the well-being of Aboriginal communities, for example. Despite this apparent concern for Aboriginal interests, I heard many industry participants state that the industry is a long way from benefiting its Aboriginal stakeholders as much as it could. This was for example clearly expressed by Tahlitan artist, designer, and business man Alano Edzerza:

It would be best that the money that the market creates stays within the Aboriginal community. ... Whatever formula needs to be established for that to happen would be the ideal way to go. ... We need to find whatever model it is to achieve our end goal which is to keep the money in the community.

This particular comment by Edzerza was focused on economic benefits, but a similar feeling was expressed by Coast Salish artist lessLIE with respect to ascertaining more control over the market, drawing a parallel between politics and the art market:

It’s almost like band office politics, where these positions of power are given to people who are from outside of the community, whereas what we need for our community is to have people from within the community to be in the positions of power and make the decisions. The same can be applied to the art scene, for contemporary Northwest Coast artists.

Although these kinds of statements were expressed most strongly to me by the industry’s Aboriginal participants, the latter are not alone in thinking that the artware industry is overall seriously lacking in Aboriginal involvement, as well as under-serving the interests of Aboriginal communities. Contrary to what could be assumed, opinions on this issue do not map onto networks divided along strict cultural lines, this despite the fact that it revolves around the question of Aboriginal stakeholders’ interests. For example, most of those to whom I spoke recognized that economically, the scale is generally tipped in favour of artware companies, which are usually owned and operated by non-Aboriginal individuals, and not the Aboriginal artists these companies work with, as illustrated in the following comment, by a gallery owner who knows the industry well:

There are pros and cons to working with those companies on those reproduction pieces. You’re able to get your name out there as an artist on a broad scale and very quickly, and then start working on commissions right away. But at the same time, it's obvious that the companies who are reproducing these pieces are making the bulk of the profits in comparison to the artists.

This gallery owner did not vilify artware companies for this imbalance. He encouraged young artists to work with them as a way to give their careers an early boost, but also felt strongly that they should know exactly what to expect in return. His comment points to the complex weighing of profits against other benefits which artists have to make when they consider taking part in the artware market (see Chapter 5). Such considerations can make the difference between artists (especially inexperienced ones) feeling like they might be at a disadvantage in the negotiation process, and feeling like they are being taken advantage of by those with whom they are negotiating. Neither situation is ideal as they both imply inequality; however, inequality does not always have to lead to inequitable treatment.

Many of those I spoke to would like to see changes to the industry that would reduce imbalances between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal participants, so that both real and perceived cases of abuse would cease to play such an important role in shaping the industry and the relationships that develop within it. In this dissertation, I use the phrase ‘new and improved’
industry to evoke the circulation within the industry of this desire to transform the artware market, with the underlying idea that such changes are improvements only when they make the industry benefit its Aboriginal stakeholders more than it currently does. The expression ‘new and improved’ purposefully leaves undefined the specifics of the transformations that would lead to this state, for even where there is an agreement on the importance of this goal, there is not always consensus on what means and alliances – or as Edzerza put it, what “formula” or “model” – are best suited to this end. Different analyses and orders of priority are represented among the proponents of such changes in the industry.

For instance, as I detail further in Chapter 3, there are Aboriginal artware companies that outsource production to companies that are based overseas because it can help enhance their market shares and profit margins, which can translate into a greater ability for them to support social and cultural initiatives in their community. However, there are also companies that consider that keeping production local is the best way to feed back into the well-being of Aboriginal communities, through such things as training and employing community members, who can support their families and become role models for others. I describe these contrasting positions not to suggest that they are irreconcilable: to be sure, I did witness alliances in favour of a “new and improved industry” form across these very divergences of view. I present these examples only to highlight the fact that the notion that changes should be made to the current configuration of the artware market can evoke certain shared goals, such as increased benefits for its Aboriginal stakeholders, and at the same time not determine the strategy that is adopted to achieve them.

Another point of contention among proponents of change concerns the role non-Aboriginal participants can play in it, and what their involvement would become in the ‘new and improved’ industry created by these transformations. Some prefer to ensure that the money spent and made by the company be paid as directly as possible to Aboriginal stakeholders, which on one level means striving to employ only Aboriginal individuals. Others find that employing whoever is most qualified for a particular job, independently of cultural affiliation, can mean increased profitability and, ultimately, a higher dollar amount landing in Aboriginal pockets even if some of the profits are collected by non-Aboriginal industry participants. One non-Aboriginal distributor who spoke quite passionately in favour of improving the degree to which the industry benefits Aboriginal stakeholders explained to me that she tells company representatives upfront
that she would not hesitate to replace their products with new ones, if these are made with a higher level of Aboriginal involvement than theirs, this even if it came at a cost for her business. Although she told me she did not believe that the industry would better thrive without any involvement of non-Aboriginal individuals at all, she also felt that it was part of her responsibility, as one of its many non-Aboriginal participants, to ensure that increased Aboriginal involvement was encouraged and rewarded through her business decisions. Her vision for a ‘new and improved’ industry is thus one that is characterized by deeper Aboriginal involvement but is nonetheless inclusive of non-Aboriginal participants like herself.

In contrast, an artist discussed with me his profound respect for a non-Aboriginal company owner he worked with and even considered a friend. I asked him if, all other things being equal, he would prefer to work with an Aboriginal company owner. He replied that, even though he felt there was nothing wrong with the way this non-Aboriginal company owner was running his business and their relationship, yes, in the long run he would prefer that the industry be run by Aboriginal individuals. An Aboriginal company owner I interviewed took an even more radical stance. Referring to the same non-Aboriginal company owner, he stated:

> The [name of company owner]s of the world should not be able to participate in Aboriginal art, even though they buy the designs. That’s the extent of the Indianness in it, it’s that [the owner] bought the design from a Native. Nowhere in that business is anything else done by a Native person.

To make matters even more complex, some of the industry participants who consider themselves proponents of an industry that more greatly benefits its Aboriginal stakeholders were specifically those whose practices were targeted by proponents of a ‘new and improved’ industry. To give but one example, I have many times heard a particular non-Aboriginal company be praised as pioneering in its relationships with Aboriginal artists, having significantly increased the market’s connections to Aboriginal people, as well as having improved artists’ recognition and promotion within the industry. In particular, I have heard such praise from artists who have been working with this company for years. From their perspective, the company has long been involved in changing the industry for the better. And yet, in contrast, I have also heard critics of this company say that artists working with it do not always receive satisfactory returns for their work in comparison to the returns yielded by the sale of the products on which their work is reproduced; other critics complain that the company’s reliance on off-shore labour undermines the ability of others to keep their production local and still be competitive. Thus, while its owner
and artists working with it see the company as instigating positive change, to its critics, the company is among those that would require transformation to suit the reconfiguration of the industry into a ‘new and improved’ version of itself.

Coda

All of the previous considerations are not meant to invite the kind of relativism that makes ‘complexity’ reason enough to colour all issues in shades of grey, making it impossible for observers and participants to take a stance without being accused of inaccurately simplifying the situation at hand. For instance, a company misrepresenting the outcomes of a contract to an artist who is in a vulnerable socio-economic situation can easily be identified as an unethical business practice, in the Native Northwest Coast artware industry as in any other field of business. Similarly, artists who do not respect the terms of their arrangements with artware companies on no other grounds than that they believe it is in their personal interest to do so, will likely be identified as unscrupulous business partners. What the above discussion does show, however, is that it is against a complex backdrop of intertwined interests and goals that participants evaluate, critique, and promote certain practices, discourses, and measures over others – this even among those who have interests and goals in common. It is also with this backdrop in mind that they decide to instigate, nurture, modify, or terminate relationships with other participants in the industry. I argue that it is because of this complexity that it is more difficult than it may appear for stakeholders who agree in principle with the idea of a ‘new and improved’ industry to effectively make the “rubber hit the road”, to again use Anna Tsing’s expression, by coming together and generating the friction necessary to put the idea of these transformations in motion. I have sought to shed light on this complexity by focusing each of the seven remaining chapters on one of the many interrelated issues that shape the Native Northwest Coast industry.
Figure 4: A large cedar log set aside by a logging company to be carved into a totem pole.

Photo by the author, July 21, 2010.
2 Toward the Contemporary Art and Artware Market: A Century of Cultural Resource Development and Protection

In 1917, writing about “prehistoric Canadian motives” – by which he meant the designs of the Aboriginal peoples of Canada – anthropologist Harlan I. Smith suggested that:

These motives may be used as they are, or may be conventionalized, or dissected, or multiplied, or developed in several of these ways. Designers may use them as inspiration for designs which may be applied to fronts of buildings, gargoyles, fountains, terra cotta, pottery, china, ornamental work, cast-iron railings, stoves, carpets, rugs, linoleum, wall paper, stencils, dress fabrics, lace, embroidery, neckwear, umbrella, handles, belt-buckles, hat pins, book covers, tail pieces, toys, souvenirs, trademarks, and many other lines of work.¹

Although Smith’s advice does not appear to have been followed at the time, close to a century later, it is safe to say that his vision for how and on what kinds of objects these designs could be used has since then been realized – except for gargoyles, perhaps. Although it must not be overlooked that the adornment of objects of everyday life is an Indigenous practice in the Pacific Northwest, the artware industry as it currently exists is largely a product of the 20th century.

In this chapter, I examine various private and public initiatives, including Smith’s, which foreshadowed the development of a Native Northwest Coast artware industry over the last century. In the first half of the 20th century, at the same time as many kinds of restrictions were being placed on Aboriginal cultural practices, some individuals and organizations were attempting to encourage the government to consider Aboriginal “arts”, “crafts”, and “motifs” as (economically) valuable not only to Aboriginal peoples, but also to the Nation. Thus, while Indigenous ceremonial practices were being purposefully targeted by repressive legislation (in particular through the 1884 amendment to the Indian Act, which banned the practice of potlatching until the act was revised in 1951), there was also a push to further develop the already existing market for Aboriginal objects directed toward non-Aboriginal consumption. In the second half of the 20th century, overt repression of Aboriginal culture diminished, which meant that practices regained visibility after decades of having been driven underground. Because of

this, the 1960s and 1970s have been controversially described as a period of artistic “renaissance” on the Northwest Coast, commentators having mistaken lessened public visibility with complete disappearance.² By then, marketers had already begun establishing Aboriginal imagery as a distinctive marker of British Columbia, largely without the consent of those whose images and symbols were being used. The lift of the potlatch ban only worked to reinforce this use of Aboriginal imagery, but this time Aboriginal stakeholders could more easily seek involvement in and control over such marketing strategies.

By the late 20th century, it was by and large not Aboriginal peoples practicing their culture that was considered reprehensible in the public eye, but rather others imitating these cultures and – even more severely criticized – profiting from them. Indeed, the various resources of which Aboriginal peoples have been dispossessed through the colonial policies of Canada have led their “cultural resources” to be considered all the more valuable, including from an economic point of view. In this context, any capitalization on these resources by outsiders is now often experienced by Aboriginal people as yet another act of theft. As I have already begun to explain in Chapter 1, this sentiment and the debates that surround it significantly shape the contemporary Native Northwest Coast industry. This prompts many of this industry’s stakeholders to hope for a ‘new and improved’ industry that would benefit Aboriginal peoples to the largest extent possible, which is to say more than it currently does. This chapter sheds light not only on the history of the artware market, but also on the history of this hope, from the early 20th century belief that “Indian arts and crafts” could constitute an opportunity for “economic development” for Aboriginal peoples, to the early 21st-century statement that Aboriginal artworks are “Economically, nationwide the most important means by which [Aboriginal people] are able to sustain [them]selves”.³ Thus, through this history, this chapter also tells the story of how Aboriginal art came to be framed as a “resource” of not only cultural but also economic value.

With the exception of a few quotes drawn from interviews I conducted during my fieldwork, the sources from which I draw in this chapter are archival and consist primarily of correspondence and reports. Because I will be describing and discussing the particular points of view of those whose written records I accessed, what I provide here is a very incomplete picture

of their initiatives and the ways in which they were received – not to mention my inability to report on those initiatives that are not recorded in the archival material I examined. Still, as I studied the material that I did find in the archives, I was struck with the persistence with which certain themes returned, again and again, in the discourses recorded in these documents. The most prominent of these themes are 1) the importance of promoting interest in Aboriginal art and artware; 2) the need for a more systematically organized Aboriginal art and artware market; 3) the necessity of ensuring protection against appropriation and non-Aboriginal competition; and 4) the great potential of the Aboriginal art and artware market as an opportunity for economic development, in particular for Aboriginal people, but only on the condition that the three previous points be addressed. Variations on these four themes are interwoven into the sections of this chapter, which examines the discourses of individuals and organizations concerned with the fate of the Aboriginal art and artware market over the last century.

It is perhaps not surprising that I would find overlap in these different organizations’ and individual’s materials, precisely because of their common interest in this market. However, what is interesting is that their respective analyses of the situation, the issues they identified, and the solutions they suggested changed only slightly over the years. The primary development over time – and one of crucial importance – is that, both in the content and in the tone of these documents, Aboriginal stakeholders become increasingly portrayed as themselves competent agents of the proposed changes, as opposed to requiring “assistance” from the government and non-governmental organizations. In fact, as my research moved through the decades, the records I was studying began to count more and more Aboriginal voices. This can be explained by the fact that over time Aboriginal individuals came to play increasing important roles in the management of government-supported programs, non-governmental organizations became more pro-active in increasing their Aboriginal membership, and Aboriginal organizations gained prominence in the field. However, this does not reflect an increase of interest in the issues discussed on the part of Aboriginal stakeholders, but rather merely shows that their opinions and initiatives became part of archival records only once they became part of the kinds of organizations that deposit their files in provincial, federal, and other archives. In this respect, the

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4 Although the expression “Aboriginal art and artware” is my own and is therefore not to be found in the archival record, I use it here to avoid choosing one of the many different other expressions that are used across the various sources I draw on. Elsewhere in this chapter, however, I will usually use the expression used in the documents I am citing.
account I provide and the leitmotifs I have identified both largely pertain to the socio-political bureaucracy of the Aboriginal art and artware market’s development, rather than to the field of grassroots activism or private-interest corporatism. Still, by exploring the themes that are reiterated throughout this particular archival material, I will shed light on some of the initiatives that have led to the current configuration of the artware industry and on the debates this configuration continues to generate.

2.1 The Market Under the Potlatch Ban

2.1.1 1900s-1930s: Arguing for the industrial potential of Northwest Coast art

The explicit project of producing Northwest Coast art at a semi-industrial or industrial scale dates back at least a century. Douglas Cole reports that collector George T. Emmons discovered a “Skagway ‘manufactory’ of Tlingit objects” as early as 1905, which could be one of the first instances of production-line organization of Northwest Coast art. However, not much is known about this enterprise, except that it was “organized by an Alaska-California dealer” (which Cole believes might be B.A. Whalen of Alaska Indian Curios) and that it produced “masks, rattles, knives, pipes, and spoons”.

However, the promotion of the use of Northwest Coast forms as elements of fashion and design outside of Aboriginal communities appears to have begun only about a decade later, when anthropologist Harlan I. Smith published an article in the magazine Industrial Canada titled “Distinctive Canadian Designs. How Manufacturers May Profit by Introducing Native Designs Into their Products”. Smith wrote this article at a time when World War I was limiting the supply to Canadian manufacturers of new designs, which would normally come from Europe. In his article, he proposed that what he called “prehistoric Canadian motives”, which he considered were “unsurpassed in [national] distinctiveness,” and should be used by manufacturers to renew their design stock and develop Canadian trade. Although apparently unsuccessful in convincing

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6 Ibid., 294.
7 Smith, “Distinctive Canadian Designs: How Canadian Manufacturers May Profit by Introducing Native Designs into Their Products.”
8 The dubbing of Northwest Coast designs as “distinctively Canadian” continues to this day. For instance, one Vancouver-based company chose Aboriginal art as one of its primary themes as evidence of its Canadian-ness, since in the owners’ view, “there was only one culture specific to Canada, that of the Native people.” A similar association is illustrated by another company’s decision to develop Aboriginal-themed products to attract business from
Canadian industrialists of the value of this opportunity, Smith continued to advocate for such uses of Aboriginal designs. In 1923, he published An Album of Prehistoric Canadian Art under the auspices of the Department of Mines and the Victoria Memorial Museum. In this album, he reproduced a series of 84 plates with images drawn from museum objects, of which 40 depicted figures from British Columbia (33 plates for the Coast, 7 for the Interior). Edward Sapir, then chief ethnologist in the Geological Survey of Canada (Division of Anthropology, Department of Mines), wrote a “prefatory note” to Smith’s album in which he stated:

Primitive motives have already yielded gratifying results in the field of industrial application though the possibilities of their utilization have as yet been barely tapped. This is due not so much to the inaccessibility of suitable material (museums and ethnological publications are crowded with valuable aesthetic suggestions) as to sheer inertia on the part of the industrial world and its failure to realize the fruitful possibilities that are inherent in so much of primitive art.9

Sapir followed his invitation to Canadian industrialists and designers to mine ‘primitive’ Aboriginal art for inspiration by the remark that “an even greater wealth of artistic material lie[d] ready to hand in the decorated handicrafts of the living Indians”, which he noted were “readily capable of industrial utilization.”10

In the introduction he wrote for his own Album, Smith reiterated the need created by the war for Canadian manufacturers to imagine new sources for designs, enjoining them to look to “Prehistoric Canadian art”, which had “been so little applied to modern commercial uses that almost all of it is new to the trades and useful to commercial artists”.11 He remarked that “The designs that have been used are almost all based upon Greek, Roman, and other European art, and consequently are not distinctively Canadian”.12 In his opinion, in order to repay the country’s war debt, Canada would have to “offer for export products of purely Canadian design”.13 He further insisted on the “distinctiveness” of the designs presented in the album, stating that they cannot

corporate companies that held events in Canada and wanted to purchase merchandise they considered to be “Canadiana.”

10 Ibid., iii. Sapir went on to announce that, if there was interest in other publications of the kind, the next issue would this time be dedicated to “living art”.
12 Ibid., 1.
13 Ibid.
“be mistaken for the art of distant neighbouring regions, such as Mexico or Japan”.

He also invited designers to consult publications by John R. Swanton, Franz Boas, and George T. Emmons (among others) for images of “modern Indian specimens”.

The model put forward by Smith for the industrialization of Aboriginal arts was clearly one that would be led by Canadian industrialists and designers, to their own benefit and to that of the Nation. Smith approached Aboriginal arts from a slightly different angle than that typical of efforts to “save” styles, techniques, and know-how that some feared were “disappearing” or being “corrupted” by contact with settlers: even though he called them “prehistoric”, in this instance he did not present them as relics that should be “preserved” by being left intact, but rather highlighted their adaptability in the hope of demonstrating their contemporary relevance, from both an economic and a nationalist point of view. However, Smith’s call was also effectively an invitation to appropriate Aboriginal arts, with little consideration for the socio-economic and cultural implications a positive response to this call would have represented for Aboriginal people.

Smith’s vision for the industrial use of Aboriginal designs found one of its most fervent supporters in Alice Ravenhill, a British educator retired in Victoria B.C. In 1927, Ravenhill received a request from her “old friends at the Women’s Institute” seeking help to adapt “suitable native tribal designs for reproduction on hooked rugs”. Ravenhill was also encouraged to research these designs by an English couple Frank and Sylvia Holland, architects recently arrived in Canada who had expressed interest in “the possibility of developing original native designs

14 Ibid., 3.
15 Ibid., 6.
16 During the 1920s Smith was also involved in the Federal Government’s project to “restore” Gitxsan totem poles and display them along the Pacific Railway for nationalist and touristic purposes. As part of this initiative, Smith apparently encouraged the production of Aboriginal “souvenirs” (such as model totem poles and small items of jewellery), which could have yielded income for their makers, in addition to boosting the profits of the railway. Although Smith requested a list of names of Aboriginal carvers and weavers, it appears that this idea did not at the time generate any government-sponsored souvenir production. (See Leslie Allan Dawn, National Visions, National Blindness: Canadian Art and Identities in the 1920s (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006), 204–205.) However, concerns about the distribution of wealth between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal individuals were already emerging. To give but one example related to the government-funded “salvage” initiative of the railway, when portraitist Langdon Kihn and anthropologist Marius Barbeau approached Aboriginal residents of Kitwancool about creating ethnographic and artistic records of their people, the latter were very resistant to participating in the endeavour, arguing that “[their] people would receive no benefit from this activity, whereas the artist and ethnographer stood to profit handsomely” Ibid., 158–159.
17 In this task, Ravenhill asked for assistance from ethnologist W.A. Newcombe, son of C.F. Newcombe. Alice Ravenhill, “Highlights in Over Twenty Year’s Service for the Uplift of the Native Tribes of British Columbia (copy of Material Collected July 1948 by C.B.C and Sent to Toronto),” 1948, 2, Alice Ravenhill Papers [microform], UBC Rare Books and Special Collections.
commercially”. To this end, Ravenhill “reproduced designs, accurate in details and colorings, on objects in constant demand; such as bags, book covers, purses, cushions, rugs, etc.”, selling them for a modest sum.

Around the same time, another notable resident of Victoria, Emily Carr, was also drawing attention to Northwest Coast art through textile work and other wares. Not as often discussed as her paintings, a series of Carr’s hooked rugs and pottery featuring Northwest Coast designs were exhibited at the 1927 Exhibition of Canadian West Coast Art, Native and Modern at the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. Had these hooked rugs and wares been made by a different artist, even an Aboriginal one, they may very well have been rejected from an exhibition of this kind as merely “tourist art” because of the medium in which they were executed. Instead, along with Carr’s paintings, they were hailed by Eric Brown, then director of the National Gallery, as “one of the most interesting features of the exhibition”. Commenting on the claim made by Brown that Northwest Coast motifs were for Canada’s industry “an invaluable mine of decorative design” with the “unique quality of being entirely national in its origin and character”, art historian Leslie Dawn writes that:

...the use of Native materials as a basis for nationally distinct commodities became an affirmation of capitalism and industry – that is, of Western economic values – rather than

18 Ravenhill reports that Frank’s premature death in 1928 put a stop to this project. Alice Ravenhill, The Memoirs of an Educational Pioneer (Canada: J.M. Dent, 1951), 209.
19 Ravenhill, “Highlights in Over Twenty Year’s Service for the Uplift of the Native Tribes of British Columbia (copy of Material Collected July 1948 by C.B.C and Sent to Toronto),” 2.
20 National Gallery of Canada, Exhibition of Canadian West Coast Art, Native and Modern (Ottawa, Ont: National Gallery, 1927); Dawn, National Visions, National Blindness, 248. This exhibition’s non-Aboriginal nationalist agenda is summarized by Leslie Dawn as follows: “Like any other national natural resource, Native art belonged to no one since it was assumed tacitly that no Natives existed who had a valid and singular claim to it. In its absence, the art could be colonized, claimed and “mined” at will by “Canadians”” Ibid., 257.
21 In this connection, in 1939, Ravenhill offered Queen Elizabeth a “reproduction in needlework of a large original Kwakiutl design of the mythical Raven”. Alice Ravenhill, “Letter to Anthony Walsh,” October 13, 1939, Alice Ravenhill Papers [microform], UBC Rare Books and Special Collections. The Queen reportedly “admired” Ravenhill’s work, sending a photograph of herself “as an expression of gratitude” for the gift. Katharine Seymour, “Letter to Alice Ravenhill,” November 15, 1939, F 1 R 19: Alice Ravenhill Collection, Volume 1, File 1, B.C. Archives. Interestingly enough, a decade later, when a Cowichan sweater knitted by “Mrs Patrick Charley” was offered via the BCIAWS to King George VI, the gift was refused on his behalf. The Assistant Secretary to the Governor General of Canada, who had to recommend the gift, explained that it did “not come within the category of articles which His Excellency would feel free to recommend to His Majesty the King for Acceptance”. J.F Delaute, “Letter to Ellen Hart, BCIAWS,” December 31, 1948, MS 2720 [A01662 Microfilm]: BCIAWS 1943-1954, B.C. Archives. In other words, in the late 1930s, a reproduction of a Native Northwest Coast design by an English woman was deemed ‘fit for the Queen’, but in the 1940s, an article of clothing made by an Aboriginal woman was rejected on behalf of the King.
22 National Gallery of Canada, Exhibition of Canadian West Coast Art, Native and Modern, 2.
23 Ibid.
a potential critique. But it also assumed that the Natives, who were not cast as Canadians, owned neither their own culture nor their own lands.24

One of the exhibition’s newspaper reviews indeed reiterated that “industrial leaders” should look to Northwest Coast art for “purely Canadian designs”, paradoxically identifying industrialists as being “responsible for the death of the art” but also encouraging them to “profit from its demise”.25

Ironically, although the pottery and rugs presented by Carr in this 1927 exhibition foreshadowed the use that would later be made of Northwest Coast designs in the artware industry, Carr was in fact not supportive of the idea that such designs be used “for ornamentation only” after having been “re-hash[ed] for the sake of decoration”.26 In fact, she considered it an “indignity”. She said she felt that she had been “guilty” of having done so herself when she had “put Indian designs on pottery where they do not belong”; however, a decade and a half later, she would advise to “let Indian art… stop right there, rather than [turning it] into meaningless ornamentation”.27

Taking quite a different approach to Carr’s, in the midst of the Great Depression, Reverend George H. Raley put out a similar call to that of Harlan Smith in favour of the industrialization of Aboriginal art. In comparison to Smith, Raley’s call put much more emphasis on the idea that such an initiative might be to the benefit of Aboriginal peoples, in addition to being in the interest of the Nation. Using the patronizing language of the times, he wrote that:

Inasmuch as the Indians are the wards of the people of Canada, we are responsible for their welfare, economically as well as otherwise. The very fact that they are not free agents but living on Reserves carries with it the responsibility to provide them with a livelihood. We have a double responsibility to these, Nature’s children, whom we have disposessed of their aboriginal heritage.28

Although, like Smith, he referred to Aboriginal art as “distinctively Canadian”, his interest in what he called “Indian industries” was that he thought they could help solve what he described

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24 Dawn, National Visions, National Blindness, 257.
25 Ibid., 264–265.
26 Emily Carr, “Letter to Alice Ravenhill,” March 14, 1942, MS 2720 [Microfilm A01661]: BCIAWS 1940-1954 (Correspondence), B.C. Archives.
27 Ibid. It is in this spirit that, in 1942, Carr declined the offer made by Alice Ravenhill to make her the Honorary President of the SFIACS, much to Ravenhill’s disappointment as she felt Carr’s decision was based on a “complete misunderstanding of [the Society’s] aims”. Alice Ravenhill, “Letter to Mrs Thornton,” March 26, 1942, MS 2720 [Microfilm A01661]: BCIAWS 1940-1954 (Correspondence), B.C. Archives.
as an “economic problem.” He felt that the art could be “capitalized and given a commercial value by means of a permanent market for tourists” as well as “linked with ordinary commercial industries and manufactures, and applied to many commodities of trade both ornamental and useful.” Raley further argued that:

Until he [the Indian] is able to compete with the white man on equal terms and in the white man’s industries, his thought should be of earning through his own peculiar and particular crafts. His opportunities for a living are becoming more restricted and he must be aroused to the possibilities of the industries of his fathers, which otherwise, although primitive and natural, will be lost to him in the near future and perhaps appropriated by other races as a means of livelihood.

In other words, Raley hoped that if Aboriginal people were in a position to develop this industry themselves, they would have greater chances of curtailing attempts of appropriation. Raley had hoped that this industrialization of Native art would be primarily made by and for Aboriginal communities. He hoped their enthusiasm to “produc[e] in such quantities as a growing market would demand” could be aroused through the prospect of adequate remuneration and the holding of “inspirational meetings” co-organized by Indian agents and “prominent chiefs” in order to garner “the cordial support and assistance of the whole community”. However, Raley also believed that this could only be achieved with “government advocacy and assistance”, not differing in that from most other paternalist commentators on the subject. That said, Raley did consider that such initiatives were not to be regarded as acts of benevolence but rather as efforts that were owed to Aboriginal people. In support of this idea, he stated financial reports showing that Canadians had “made thirty billion dollars… off the country since Confederation, a country over which the Indian had undisputed right for thousands of years”. Still, as art historian Ronald Hawker has remarked, Raley’s proposed “solution” to the poverty of Aboriginal peoples was “confined by the colonial vision of First Nations people as lower-class labourers”. Indeed, as Hawker shows, “the reform he called for was limited, coming from within the ideological system

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29 Ibid., 993.
30 Ibid., 995.
31 Ibid. This proposition contrasts sharply with what occurs today, with most initiatives to participate in the artware industry taken at the individual level, with companies approaching or being approached by independent artists.
of the mainstream society”; furthermore, “the pressures he applied in his attempt to promote change were structured by the bureaucracy of the DIA”. 35

Indeed, Raley had trouble convincing bureaucrats of the interest of supporting arts and culture in a province focused on primary industries, especially since industrial training had been one of Indian Affairs’ goals since the late 19th century. 36 For instance, while Raley was working as an Indian Residential School principal, A. O’N. Daunt, the Indian Agent for New Westminster, refused to fund the teaching of “native handicrafts” in his school. This prompted Raley to write Daunt back a lengthy letter in which he reiterated his case, explaining that his use of the term “handicraft arts” had been “unfortunate”:

The meaning would have been obvious if I had used the term “Indian industrial arts” generally expressed to me, when applied to the Indians of the Pacific Coast, the whole range of cultural activities and industries. In other words, the washing, carding, spinning, knitting, weaving, carving, and bead work, with symbolic designs are “Indian industrial arts.” 37

Raley argued that one of the main reasons for which these “industrial arts” should be “revived and continued” was that they could become “a commercial asset and a means of livelihood to many people who, while not in danger of starvation, have to draw continuous relief from the Government of the country”. 38

It is thus not by chance that, in order to convince government officials, Raley chose to emphasize the industrial and commercial dimension of his undertaking. He indeed felt that what he called the “Indian problem” was essentially an economic one, and that “Indian industries” could help solve it. 39 It is in this spirit that Raley helped write a resolution for the British Columbia Conference of the United Church of Canada recommending that Indian Affairs establish a “Canadian Indian Art and Handicrafts League”, to the above-mentioned ends. 40 My

35 Ibid.
36 Ibid., 76.
38 “We owe it to these children and to the country to revive industries which indirectly we have deprived the Indian of” Raley also stated, here also emphasizing responsibility over benevolence. Ibid.
39 Raley, “Canadian Indian Art and Industries. An Economic Problem of Today (Draft).”
40 In Raley’s mind, such a league should, among other things: “save from extinction Canadian Indian arts and handicrafts”; “advise the native people to offer for sale only their best work, inasmuch as only good work, at as reasonable a price as possible, can establish a permanent market”; “foster the making of small attractive novelties and souvenirs of Indian designs as a means to capture a fair share of the tourist trade; “by all legitimate propaganda to suggest that tourists purchase guaranteed Indian handicraft instead of spurious Oriental imitations”; “press for legislation which will protect Indian designs and artifex (sic) for commercial purposes by other than Indians”; but
research does not permit to say whether this resolution was adopted, but I was not able to find any indication that such a “League” was created by Indian Affairs at the time. However, one volunteer-run organization would soon be created by education pioneer Alice Ravenhill, to ends very similar to those outlined in Raley’s proposal.

2.1.2 1940s: Art as education and economics

In late 1939, Alice Ravenhill founded the Society for the Furtherance of B.C. Indian Arts and Crafts, in Victoria (to be renamed the B.C. Indians Arts and Welfare Society in 1946). This organization, herein referred to as “the Society”, not only sought to promote the teaching of arts and crafts to Aboriginal school children, but also encouraged the industrialization of Aboriginal designs – the former in hopes that it would increase Aboriginal incomes, and the latter as a means to promote Canadian identity internationally. A craftswoman herself, Alice Ravenhill was associated with the Arts and Crafts movement and worked closely with the Canadian Handicraft Guild, then headed by another supporter of ‘Indian Arts and Crafts’, Alice Lighthall. The goals Ravenhill assigned her newly founded Society were the following (emphases mine):

1) To arouse more interest in the Arts and Crafts formerly brought to great perfection by the Indian Tribes of B.C., which constitutes a valuable background to Canadian Culture.

2) The utilisation of these noteworthy designs for Commercial purposes, and to promote their use for Tourist “Souvenirs” in place of the inaccurate articles now offered.

3) The encouragement in Indian Schools and among certain Tribal experts in the revival of their latent gifts of Art, Crafts, and Drama, with a view of improving their economic position, of restoring their self respect and inducing more sympathetic relations between them and their fellow Canadians.

Ravenhill was aware of the efforts of both Smith and Raley in these regards. Like Smith, Ravenhill argued in favour of the dual artistic/commercial value of Aboriginal designs. She

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42 SFIAC, “The Society for the Furtherance of Indian Arts and Crafts,” n.d., Alice Ravenhill Papers [microform], UBC Rare Books and Special Collections emphasis mine.

43 In a letter to Inkameep school teacher and Society co-founder and member Anthony Walsh, she wrote that she would like to show him “Smith’s invaluable introduction on the right way to utilise our treasure of Indian art on the commercial as well as the artistic side”. “Letter to Anthony Walsh,” December 5, 1940, Alice Ravenhill Papers
specifically referenced Smith’s *Album* in a letter to the Honourable Senator Barnard in which she stressed her interest in “relieving among a few of our Indian fellow members of our Commonwealth their unsatisfactory conditions of unemployment and of reviving something of their former skill in certain handicrafts.” Also turning this government official’s attention to more expressly national interests, she further noted that Smith had listed “about one hundred purposes to which the myriad designs could be applied, and points out that 175 Canadian Industries use designs in their output”.44 This emphasis on both the interests of Canada and on the interests of Aboriginal peoples (the latter often presented by her as a responsibility of the government) is quite characteristic of Ravenhill’s many other letters to government officials encouraging them to support the Society’s initiatives, regularly citing Smith’s *Album* as evidence of these initiatives’ relevance. Also, having heard of Raley’s efforts to develop the “Indian arts and crafts” market, Ravenhill had hoped that he might help form a Vancouver committee of the Society.45 However, for reasons I was unable to discover, Raley chose not to be directly associated with the Society.

In 1940, with support from Captain Gerald Barry (then Inspector of Indian Schools in B.C.), Ravenhill was commissioned from Indian Affairs to prepare twenty large colour charts, accompanied by an explanatory handbook, and showing examples of the “many forms of B.C. native arts and crafts for use in B.C. native schools”.46 Ravenhill selected the designs primarily from objects in British Columbia’s Provincial Museum, with a few additions from private collections, including some from the Newcombe family collection. The designs were reproduced by Victoria artist Betty Newton, based on sketches by Ravenhill. Although Ravenhill sent the completed commission to Ottawa in early 1941, the charts’ reproduction was stalled, apparently due to changes in priorities since Canada’s involvement in World War II. However, Ravenhill took it upon herself to circulate them among Canadian universities, colleges, and libraries, (also

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44 Alice Ravenhill, “Letter to Senator Barnard,” May 17, 1940, MS 2720 A01661 [Microfilm]: BCIAWS 1940-1954 (Correspondence), B.C. Archives.
45 Canadian artist Mildred Valley Thornton was leading the efforts to create this Vancouver committee.
46 Ravenhill, “Highlights in Over Twenty Year’s Service for the Uplift of the Native Tribes of British Columbia (copy of Material Collected July 1948 by C.B.C and Sent to Toronto),” 4.
sending a few copies in the U.S.A. and in England).\textsuperscript{47} It is in 1944 that an updated version of these Charts was finally published as \textit{A Cornerstone of Canadian Culture} by the British Columbia Provincial Museum, which was where the Society was housed.\textsuperscript{48}

By circulating these designs in Indian Residential and Day Schools, one of Ravenhill’s hopes was that Aboriginal school children’s “art experience [would] be the demonstrable and initiative ‘key stones’ in their indigenous development”, hoping that “some contagion from visual examples [would] trickle through to other subject phases of his education”.\textsuperscript{49} Initially, Ravenhill had wanted to “prepare portfolios for each school showing the line of former achievements by their own tribes”,\textsuperscript{50} but what was funded through Indian Affairs was the production of one set of images, intended to be circulated to all schools across the Province.\textsuperscript{51}

If Ravenhill was aware of the atrocities that were occurring in many of these schools across the Province, her correspondence with school and government officials did not let this knowledge seep through. However naïve this may seem from a contemporary perspective, Ravenhill was apparently sincere in her belief that these schools provided an environment in which students could benefit from receiving art education, particularly in the arts of their own people, albeit associated with non-indigenous techniques. In this respect, Ravenhill believed that “There is no reason why adaptation of crafts should not be made to modern demands if meanwhile characteristic Indian designs are utilized for their decoration”,\textsuperscript{52} and was intent on promoting this approach across the Province. In 1942, the Society wrote a circular to send to schools across the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{47}Ibid., 5.
\item \textsuperscript{48}Alice Ravenhill, \textit{A Corner Stone of Canadian Culture: An Outline of the Arts and Crafts of the Indian Tribes of British Columbia}, Occasional Papers of the British Columbia Provincial Museum no. 5 (Victoria, B.C: British Columbia Provincial Museum, 1944).
\item \textsuperscript{49}Alice Ravenhill, “Letter to Anthony Walsh,” August 3, 1940, Alice Ravenhill Papers [microform], UBC Rare Books and Special Collections.
\item \textsuperscript{50}Alice Ravenhill, “Letter to Noel Stewart,” December 18, 1940, MS 1116 Society for the Furtherance of Indian Arts and Crafts. Volume 1, File 1, B.C. Archives.
\item \textsuperscript{51}However, \textit{A Cornerstone of Canadian Culture} ended up being reproduced in too small a number to be sent around to each school. Subsequently, when requests came to her from teachers or principals, Ravenhill usually tried to provide examples of designs originating from the general region to which they were being sent, as “each Tribe has its own methods in forms, details, and subtle variations from those of others”. Society for Indian Arts and Crafts, “Suggestions on the Encouragement of Arts and Crafts in the Indian Schools of British Columbia,” 1942, MS 2720 [Microfilm A01661]: BCIAWS 1940-1954 (Correspondence), B.C. Archives. To give but one example, in September 1942, she sent the Kuper Island Residential School photographs of Salish spinning whorls and weaving designs, at a time where Salish art was not well recognized. As she often did, Ravenhill suggested such designs be used “either in needle craft applied to house furnishing or aprons, dresses, etc., or reproduced in other forms”. Alice Ravenhill, “Letter to Reverend H. Seguin,” September 13, 1942, MS 2720 [Microfilm A01661]: BCIAWS 1940-1954 (Correspondence), B.C. Archives.
\item \textsuperscript{52}Alice Ravenhill, “Letter to Reverend Alex R. Simpson,” October 29, 1942, MS 2720 [Microfilm A01661]: BCIAWS 1940-1954 (Correspondence), B.C. Archives.
\end{itemize}
province, encouraging art education, including the “reproduction of tribal designs in needlework, knitting, weaving or rug making”. Acknowledging that there were Indigenous precedents to such practices, the circular stated that it was “desirable to acquire some insight into the past cultures… of these people”, including with respect to the “ornamentation of clothing, weapons, implements, utensils, etc”. The circular also lamented that children were “adopt[ing] what they believe to be “white man’s” ideals, and need more encouragement to express their own ideas or to take pride in the former skill of their ancestors”. Here too, the circular stressed that such efforts would be beneficial not only to the students and their communities, but also to Canada as a whole, arguing that it would eventually contribute to “future self-support [of Indian individuals] and to the national welfare”.

Some of the Society’s interlocutors, however, were clearly concerned that Aboriginal art education, even in the Home Economics-inspired form proposed by Ravenhill, could go against the assimilationist agenda of Indian Affairs. This was still the era of the potlatch ban, and the Society’s suggestion that pupils should be taught not only visual but also performative arts prompted the following response from D.M. MacKay, Indian Commissioner for B.C.:

I should perhaps observe that there has been considerable trouble on Vancouver Island and elsewhere in connection with Indian dances which are destroying the health and morale of the young people, and are, in any event, merely a disgraceful variety of the old Indian dances. Consequently, great care has to be exercised in giving them anything that may be construed as official encouragement of these affairs.

Also, when Ravenhill had written R.A. Hoey, Indian Affairs Superintendent of Welfare and Training, about arts and crafts education, Hoey’s response was unenthusiastic. Much to Ravenhill’s dismay, Hoey explained that he had recently spoken with anthropologist Diamond Jenness about this, and that although Jenness was interested in “promoting Indian arts and crafts” he was also:

55 Ibid., 2.
56 Ibid., 1. This, the circular explained, could be achieved by also providing technical training to the youth who graduated from school as a means to “introduce them to commercial requirements and openings”, “enable them to support themselves”, as well as “contribute to national advancement and prosperity” Ibid., 3.
...definitely of the opinion that our Indian day and residential schools should provide instruction in practical subjects such as boat-building, auto-mechanics, carpenter work and elementary agriculture for boys and sewing, dressmaking, crochet work, fruit preserving and elementary domestic science for girls.\textsuperscript{58}

In addition, some school teachers were skeptical of their students’ interest in learning Indigenous arts and crafts, while other teachers were altogether opposed to the idea. For instance, Anthony Walsh wrote Ravenhill about his disappointment with the reaction of one of his colleagues who was unsupportive of the Society’s efforts:

...the new head of the Alert Bay School... expressed great indignation... He thought we were advocating a return to Paganism by encouraging Indian art and handicrafts. It is a tragedy that such a man is head of an Indian residential school... If you get the opportunity of speaking with your Bishop on this matter, I hope you’ll stress how important it is, that principals of Indian schools should have some understanding of present day conditions of the Indians of B.C.\textsuperscript{59}

As art historian Scott Watson has remarked, even though the “emancipatory goal” of initiatives such as those of the Society was progressive for their time, they were also entangled with “more patronizing and assimilationist ideas”.\textsuperscript{60} However ahead of their times Ravenhill, Walsh, and other members of the Society may have been on the question of art education for Aboriginal children, their “good intentions” were clearly tainted with paternalism, and in some instances, the kinds of discriminatory stereotypes that have lived on to this day. For example, the Society wrote a brief to the 1946 Royal Commission on the Affairs of Canadian Indians suggesting instruction of Aboriginal schoolchildren “in decoration and commercial designs in textiles, metals, plastics, etc”;\textsuperscript{61} however, the same brief included the mention that there would be “difficulties” in “stimulating certain types of Indian youth to be keen on acquiring a high degree of skill in the productions of typical Tribal handicrafts”, stating that:

\begin{footnotes}
\item[58] R.A. Hoey, “Letter to Alice Ravenhill,” October 21, 1941, MS 1116 Society for the Furtherance of Indian Arts and Crafts. Volume 1, File 5, B.C. Archives.
\item[59] Anthony Walsh, “Letter to Alice Ravenhill,” April 9, 1948, Alice Ravenhill Papers [microform], UBC Rare Books and Special Collections.
\item[60] Watson, “Two Bears,” 211.
\item[61] B.C. Indian Arts and Welfare Society, “Addressed to the Royal Commission of Senators and Members of the House of Commons Appointed to Inquire Into All Phases of the Affairs of Canadian Indians in May and October, 1946,” 1946, 7, Alice Ravenhill Papers [microform], UBC Rare Books and Special Collections.
\end{footnotes}
Like most of the population they are attracted by and regrettably satisfied with the cheap, tasteless, paltry imitations which flood today’s markets; and are infected with the craze to slip into blind alley employment, which by easy earnings encourage easy spending on tempting forms of amusements. 62

In addition, rather than framing Aboriginal art as the property of Aboriginal people, themselves entitled to decide how to put them to use, the Society treated them as the public heritage of the British Dominion. For instance, the above-mentioned brief discussed “Commercial Openings for Indian art” in the following terms:

England also is desirous to secure original native designs from all the Dominion suitable for all forms of textiles. Specimens of B.C. art were sent in response to this invitation early in the recent war and were received with great approval as “opening up a whole new line of art”. 63

Ravenhill had indeed learned from an article in London’s Times Weekly that English textiles companies were eager to keep innovating and producing new designs despite World War II, so that the industry could remain competitive at war’s end. 64 The self-congratulatory tone of the above note about the “great approval” with which it was received in England says little about whether English manufacturers taking advantage of such an “opening” would have found the approval of the designs’ Aboriginal owners, especially when British Columbia was so clearly framed as remaining part of a colonial empire. This imperial connection is made even more apparent by the fact that Ravenhill explicitly referenced West African designs that were published in the Times Weekly when arguing for the potential relevance of Northwest Coast designs to the British textile industry. In this respect, even decades after British Columbia had become part of Canada, for some the Pacific Northwest remained part of a colonial imaginary that spanned territories across the world, along with regions that had not yet gained their independence such as India and the British West African Settlements.

Interestingly, it appears Ravenhill sought permission to use designs from at least one school teacher, Mary Winter, of the Seton Lake Indian School. Winter wrote Ravenhill saying that the children of the school were “delighted” to “give their consent… that their designs be sent to England to be utilized in the manufacture of textiles and fabrics”, further stating that:

The children are very pleased and proud to make a free gift of their designs to Great Britain. If, after the war, a commercial return were made, I’m sure the Indians would be

62 Ibid., 7–8.
63 Ibid., 7.
64 “New Styles in the Cotton Industry. Evidence of Lancashire’s War-Time Enterprise.”
gratified – but they do not ask for this. They are proud to stand by the side of the Motherland and assist in any little way they can. One favour we would appreciate would be to receive from the firm a little sample of each fabric or textile using the designs, so that the children may see how designs are applied and adapted. This would be education as well as interesting. 65

As Winter’s letter is dated May 8 1942 and Ravenhill had begun corresponding with England about the designs well before then, it seems unlikely that Ravenhill sought consent from the pupils in advance of sending the samples to Manchester. 66 With or without their consent, Ravenhill did send reproductions of B.C. Aboriginal designs to Cleveland Bell, Director of the Style and Art Committee of the Manchester Cotton Board, in hopes that textile companies would use them in their products. The Board responded with interest, asking for additional coloured photographs in 1942. 67 However, when the demands of World War II became too pressing, the Board decided that it was no longer in a position to develop new products, and the idea to use the Northwest Coast designs sent by Ravenhill was dropped. 68

Meanwhile, some fashion designers were not waiting upon organizations such as the Society to find inspiration from the Pacific Northwest. For instance, in 1941, Clifford P. Wilson of the Hudson’s Bay Company informed Ravenhill of the existence of “a ski windbreaker designed by the well-known maker, Gerhard Kennedy, which showed totem pole designs on the sleeves”. Remarking that “the designs were anything but correct” he nonetheless noted that it showed “an interest in the use of native designs… by people who make such things [as sport

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65 Mary Winter, “Letter to Alice Ravenhill, BCIAWS,” May 8, 1942, MS 2720 [Microfilm A01661]: BCIAWS 1940-1954 (Correspondence), B.C. Archives.
66 In the absence of any other source, it is also difficult to assess the sincerity of Winter’s letter, in particular regarding the consent supposedly given by children to send their designs to an English firm without promise of economic or other returns. Even if the children did indeed give their consent as Winter’s letter suggests, from their parents’ and their larger community’s point of view, it is doubtful that children of this age would have been considered the ultimate authority with respect to what should or should not be done with the designs, and for what returns. As an authority figure within the school, it is also possible Winter knowingly or unknowingly induced the response she was hoping to obtain from the children, if and when she did ask her students their opinion.
67 Alice Ravenhill, “Letter to Cleveland Bell, Colour, Design and Style Centre, Cotton Board,” April 15, 1942, MS 2720 [Microfilm A01661]: BCIAWS 1940-1954 (Correspondence), B.C. Archives.
68 Alice Ravenhill, “Letter to Mrs Thornton,” November 11, 1941, MS 2720 [Microfilm A01661]: BCIAWS 1940-1954 (Correspondence), B.C. Archives. It appears the designs Ravenhill had sent out to the Manchester Cotton Board were, on her suggestion, subsequently transferred to the Royal College of Arts, then located in Ambleside after evacuation to Westmoreland due to the war. It appears these designs were then transferred again, this time to the Parents’ Union School 68, also in Ambleside, only to be returned to Ravenhill a year later on her request. Kathleen G., “Letter to E. Kitching, Esq., The Parents’ Union School,” June 18, 1947, MS 2720 A01662 [Microfilm]: BCIAWS 1943-1954, B.C. Archives.; E. Kitching, “Letter to Dr. Clifford Carl, BCIAWS,” February 23, 1948, GR-0111: BC Provincial Museum – Correspondence inward/outward. Volume 16, File 36, B.C. Archives.
attire]. Other textile companies took the initiative of contacting the Society directly. For instance, in 1944, the Montreal-based company of the Regent Knitting Mills contacted the Society, eventually selecting four designs from a sample apparently sent to her by the Society on Ravenhill’s request. Arthur E. Pickford, honorary secretary of the Society at the time, had written Ravenhill about this request, stating that:

We place upon your shoulders the responsibility of deciding whether the placing of these designs in the hands of such a firm as the Regent Knitting Mills is in the best interests of the Indian [Cowichan] Sweater Industry of Vancouver Island in which our own Indians have so much at stake.

This seems to indicate that, although under Ravenhill’s impulse the Society had always gone to great lengths to see Northwest Coast designs be used in the textile industry, at least Pickford wondered if the line should not be drawn at the kinds of products that would be in direct competition with items made by Aboriginal people themselves. In this respect, the reasoning seems to have been that knitted wear would represent a much more direct form of competition vis-à-vis Cowichan sweaters than would industrial textiles decorated with Indigenous designs vis-à-vis textiles of Indigenous design and make.

The above notwithstanding, generally speaking the Society took pride in the interest it was able to arouse in Aboriginal designs from various textile companies. However, Ravenhill liked to emphasize that she regretted this interest seemed to be strongest outside of British Columbia.

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69 Clifford F. Wilson, “Letter to Alice Ravenhill, BCIAWS,” December 30, 1941, MS 2720 [Microfilm A01661]: BCIAWS 1940-1954 (Correspondence), B.C. Archives.
70 These were described as the “Kwakiutl Beaver and Raven” and the “Haida Whale and Mythic Raven”. Jennifer M.L. Hobbs, “Letter to A.E. Pickford, SFIAC,” October 19, 1944, MS 2720 [Microfilm A01661]: BCIAWS 1940-1954 (Correspondence), B.C. Archives.
71 Ibid.
72 Arthur E. Pickford, “Letter to Alice Ravenhill,” October 20, 1944, MS 2720 [Microfilm A01661]: BCIAWS 1940-1954 (Correspondence), B.C. Archives.
73 In response to Pickford, Ravenhill explained that she had thought the person who had contacted her, Jennifer L. Hobbs, was going to make personal use of the designs and she had not understood that Hobbs was intending to send them to the Regent Knitting Mills. Alice Ravenhill, “Letter to A.E. Pickford,” October 21, 1944, MS 1116 Society for the Furtherance of Indian Arts and Crafts. Volume 1, File 11, B.C. Archives.
75 In a 1947 newspaper article about the BCIAWS’s efforts to send designs to various textile companies, an “eastern Canadian designer” was cited saying that “British Columbians were passing up $1,000,000 industry by ignoring the Indian’s ability for designing”. (This reference comes from a newspaper clipping dated October 17, 1947 that unfortunately does not indicate the name of the author nor that of the newspaper “Indian Designs Interest Large New York Firm,” Times, October 17, 1947.)
She was intent on finding opportunities locally, sending images of her Charts to Vancouver-based artist Jack Shadbolt, for example. Shadbolt replied with some enthusiasm, suggesting that Ravenhill get in touch with Grace Melvin, in charge of Design and Crafts at the Vancouver School of Art. Contrary to Emily Carr (who had recently refused to become part of the Society), Melvin was enthusiastic about the idea of asking students to create “art designs” based on “West Coast Indian motifs” for the purpose of decorating textiles. In September 1945, works made by students of the School featuring such designs (apparently under Melvin’s instruction) were showcased at the Vancouver Art Gallery. Having seen these works, Pickford was personally enthusiastic about what he described as “Indian Motifs as applied to Modern Goods”. In his letter to the School’s director, he remarked that most members of the public appeared to be of the opinion that these designs could be “blended… into the stream of modern art developments”.

Initially so adamant that Aboriginal designs were valuable to Canada (and, by extension, to the British Dominion), Ravenhill nevertheless ended up circulating designs in the U.S.A. In 1942, Ravenhill sent samples of designs to artist Truman Bailey hoping that he would find them “worthy of [his] consideration and employment” in his work for the New York company of Everfast Fabric Co. Inc. The firm had previously used Quebec Habitant designs in what Ravenhill considered “modern fashion”, and she hoped it would be interested in doing the same with designs from the Northwest Coast. In 1947, B.C.’s Provincial Librarian and Archivist William E. Ireland also received a request from a man named Don Adams to send “suggestions of Northwest Indian patterns and designs which could be adapted to fabric designs” to Henry Rose of the F. Schumacker Co. Inc.. The latter was a New York textile company dubbed by Adams “the largest manufacturer and jobber of high grade drapery and upholstery materials in the United States”. Adams complained that “the only Indian designs now available are those of the Navajo and Pueblo Indians”, remarking that “fabrics with [Northwest Indian] designs would be of great

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76 Grace Melvin, “Letter to Alice Ravenhill,” January 20, 1942, MS 2720 [Microfilm A01661]: BCIAWS 1940-1954 (Correspondence), B.C. Archives.
77 Arthur E. Pickford, “Letter to Mr Chas. H. Scott, The Vancouver School of Art”, June 15, 1946, MS 2720 [Microfilm A01661]: BCIAWS 1940-1954 (Correspondence), B.C. Archives.
value to the decorators in British Columbia and the Northwest States of America for use in clubs, hotels, cafes as well as private homes”.  

By sending design samples to such companies, the Society was taking a paradoxical stance. On the one hand, the Society insisted on teaching Aboriginal children to create designs and manufacture objects as a means of promoting economic growth in Aboriginal communities. However, on the other hand, the Society was also sending examples of designs to non-Aboriginal manufacturers making the kinds of products that would eventually compete with the products made by Aboriginal people themselves. Also, the Society cautioned that “The unique characteristics which distinguish our provincial Indian arts... can never be reproduced by “white” carvers and artists, however skilled in these arts”. At the same time, the Society apparently saw no difficulty in non-Aboriginal manufacturers reproducing designs created by Aboriginal individuals, once these designs were provided to them.

Another line of tension in the Society’s activities stemmed from its paradoxical relationship to mass-production and reproduction. For instance, in the Society’s 1948 album *Native Designs of British Columbia*, which contained a selection of images silkscreened by a Victoria artist named Ray Garside, Anthony Walsh expressed the opinion that in the preceding quarter century “the high standard of craftsmanship [in Northwest Coast art]... had fallen to a low level.” He attributed this decline to two causes: school teachers working in Indian Residential and Day Schools devaluing the art to the detriment of the children’s interest in it, and the methods of “dealers” catering to “the tourist trade”:

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80 Ibid. The fact that these designs were being requested specifically for fabrics that would be “used in the Pacific Northwest” points to Northwest Coast art’s regional market, even when its production is being delocalized (see Chapter 3).

81 B.C. Indian Arts and Welfare Society, “Addressed to the Royal Commission of Senators and Members of the House of Commons Appointed to Inquire Into All Phases of the Affairs of Canadian Indians in May and October, 1946,” 8. This feeling was reiterated in a June 30 1948 letter in which Ellen Hart of the BCIAWS explains to the Chairman of the Vancouver Parks Commission that “Genuine Indian crafts cannot be revived [via the instruction of Indian carvers by white men], because native craftsmanship arises from this culture and traditions of the people”. Hart goes on to urge the Chairman to hire “Indian carvers” as instructors instead. Ellen Hart, “Letter to the Chairman of the Vancouver Parks Commission,” June 30, 1948, MS 2720 [A01662 Microfilm]: BCIAWS 1943-1954, B.C. Archives. It appears this exchange was based on an erroneous news report indicating that the Parks Commission was to hire non-Aboriginal carving instructors, when in fact it was helping Kwakwaka’wakw artist Ellen Neel and her family establish a studio at Ferguson Point, in Stanley Park. The Neels, the Parks Commission replied, were “not going to produce cheap souvenirs to flood the market”. Rowe Holland, “Letter to Ellen Hart, BCIAWS,” July 6, 1948, MS 2720 [A01662 Microfilm]: BCIAWS 1943-1954, B.C. Archives.
They have insisted that the workers turn out great quantities of articles, with little thought being given to the right colouring and detail. This has meant that, instead of work of beauty and quality being produced, it is merely cheap and tawdry.\(^82\)

Walsh explained that the purpose of *Native Designs of British Columbia* was to help “remedy” the situation, reproducing “authentic Indian designs, in the hope that they may assist the craftspeople to regain the skill of their forebears”, in particular if these designs were to be used in schools to inspire creative work from the children. However, there is some irony in the fact that, if the market’s demand for large series was partly to blame for the art’s supposed “decline”, the Society could nonetheless counter it with the help of technologies of serialization such as printing and silk screening. It is also ironic that the Society had been sending designs for use by manufacturing companies that, to an ever greater extent than the aforementioned “tourist art” dealers, could use technologies of mass-reproduction to “turn out great quantities of articles” – the very kinds of products that, due to the quantity in which they could be produced at a limited cost, would encourage the production of large quantities of quickly made and inexpensive products that made Walsh so upset.

Finally, running through the Society’s archival record is another clear line of tension: that between the desire to encourage the production of high quality (hand-made) goods on the one hand, and the observation that, all in all, inexpensive (machine-made) items are what tended to sell best and thus were the most likely to represent a real opportunity of economic development, on the other. For instance, in a letter to artist Nellie Jacobson of Ahousat about the kinds of items the Society was interested in proposing for sale, Anthony E. Pickford remarked that:

> It is better that you send us some of the smaller articles which will sell for a few dollars or even buttons which will sell for less. The people come and they look at the goods but unless they are rich they have not the money to spend on your best articles and they go away without buying, so we like to have a range of prices to suit everybody’s purse.\(^83\)

Thus, at the same time as the Society wanted to see the production of “Indian arts and crafts” develop into a viable market, the organization worried that artists being able to “support

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themselves by their craft” would mean resorting to “factory methods of production”.

Such an approach was contrary to their objective to encourage Aboriginal children and youth to acquire “skills and artistry” by learning their ancestors’ techniques, steering clear of what they considered “cheap souvenirs”. This is perhaps why Ravenhill had insisted so diligently on encouraging schools to present their pupils not only with examples of objects but also of designs that could be “of commercial value” – if not directly to these pupils, perhaps to industrialists. Indeed creating such designs did not necessarily require of students that they use “factory methods of production” – even if the companies that would later be encouraged to use these designs might do exactly that. In any case, all of the above lines of tensions foreshadow what decades later became one of the standards in the contemporary Native Northwest Coast artware industry: Aboriginal artists providing designs to non-Aboriginal artware companies reproducing them in large quantities (see Chapter 3, Chapter 4, and Chapter 5).

One of the Society’s contentions was that the economic field of “arts and craft” could be developed into more than merely a way for Aboriginal individuals to occasionally generate supplementary income, as it was being treated by Indian Affairs at the time (and for at least another decade). It is on this premise that, in 1948, the University of British Columbia (UBC), the British Columbia Provincial Museum (BCPM) and the Society held a conference on UBC’s campus on the topic of “Native Indian Affairs”. Addressing the conferences’ Aboriginal participants in his introductory remarks, one of the organizers, anthropologist Harry Hawthorn said that “It is from you, the Indians of B.C. that the best statement of your needs can come, and the others are gathered in the expectation of hearing this”. Still, during the session on “Arts and Handicrafts”, it was the Society’s president, A.J. Tullis, UBC anthropologist Arthur E. Pickford, Vancouver artist Mildred Valley Thornton, and Society member J. Godman (all non-Aboriginal individuals) who were invited to speak first, finally followed by Kwakwaka’wakw artist Ellen Neel.

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84 Hart, “Letter to the Chairman of the Vancouver Parks Commission.”
85 Ibid.
86 E.g. Alice Ravenhill, “Letter to Professor Topping,” December 3, 1941, MS 2720 [Microfilm A01661]: BCIAWS 1940-1954 (Correspondence), B.C. Archives.
88 Ibid., 1.
In her talk, Neel stated: “If the art of my people is to take its rightful place alongside other Canadian art, it must be a living medium of expression”.⁸⁹ For this, Neel asked that her people “be allowed new and modern techniques … new and modern tools … new and modern materials” without being accused of not being true to their culture.⁹⁰ Neel said she saw potential for “applying this art to everyday living” by using it “to stunning effect on tapestry, textiles, sportswear and in jewellery” as well as “pieces of furniture,” “public buildings,” “large restaurants and halls”.⁹¹

The conference proceedings make it clear that, even though Hawthorn claimed that the non-Aboriginal participants were primarily there to listen to what the Aboriginal participants had to say, many of them had not listened carefully to Neel’s remarks. Neel delivered an ode to innovation; Godman explained that she discouraged producers from exploring new designs.⁹² Neel stated that she was a full-time artist and hoped more individuals would be trained to do the same; anthropologist Erna Gunther explained that she felt that “Indian art” was “a leisure time activity” and a man could not really “depend on his art for his main support”.⁹³ Neel spoke of working as a team of carvers, using new technologies as a means to ease and quicken production, and using designs on a variety of daily-life commodities as a means to develop the market; Indian Agent H.E. Taylor warned against “mass production”, using the example of one individual hand carving one hundred items on his own, and making no money from his work.⁹⁴

In addition to being a well-recognized carver, Neel is often credited as the first to have reproduced Northwest Coast designs for commercial purposes. In her Stanley Park studio in Vancouver, she and her family not only employed a line production system to create model totem poles, she also experimented with serigraphy to reproduce her designs on textiles such as scarves. I argue that one of the reasons printing became so central in the development of the Northwest Coast art and artware market in the following years is that it is a kind of technology that allows for multiple reproductions of two-dimensional linear designs at a reasonable cost and, when done well, without reducing the graphic quality of the initial design. Thus, although the

⁸⁹ Ibid., 13.
⁹⁰ Ibid.
⁹¹ Ibid., 14.
⁹² One conference participant did point out this difference of approach between Neel and Godman, stating that the BCAW’s “definition of authentic art would stop at a particular time, whereas according to Mrs. Neel’s statement it must be living in order to be art. Can it not move up the present time and have other forms included in it?” Ibid., 18.
⁹³ Ibid., 17.
⁹⁴ Ibid.
1948 conference attendees failed to hear what Neel was really saying about where she saw the market going, and although Neel’s pioneering efforts in this regard were not rewarded by substantial financial success, she was undoubtedly a trail blazer for what would later become a booming Northwest Coast silk screening market (see Chapter 1).

Beyond the 1948 conference, but in resonance with the difficulties faced by Neel, many of those who commented during the 1940s on the idea that the arts and crafts market had much untapped economic potential pointed to one of the two following challenges, when not both: 1) finding ways to ensure returns were significant for Aboriginal producers;95 and 2) fostering interest in art-making as a form of employment when other fields provided more lucrative opportunities.

1) Firstly, many pointed to the mark-ups practiced by dealers, retailers, and other middle-men, which they saw as depriving producers from their due and/or inducing such high prices as to deter the consumer.96 Actor, director, and drama teacher Llewellyn Bullock-Webster, also member of the Society, told Ravenhill that he had “never been in favour of the sale of Indian work by white people, unless there is clear proof that such are conducted solely for the benefit of the Indians concerned,” as he had noticed that “there ha[d] been regrettable exploitation… in the province”.97 In 1944, the Society wrote to the director of the Indian Affairs Branch asking for support for the creation of a Cowichan sweater cooperative in Duncan, stating that “at present this industry is so poorly organized that the knitting is being done under very unsatisfactory conditions, and the profit on the product is going mostly into the pockets of people who are not Indians”.98 Also, when the Society created what it called a “Distribution Center” for the “promotion of Sales in Indian Arts and Crafts”, it was wary of being itself perceived as profiting unduly from these sales. Pickford wrote a memorandum to “Indian Artists and Craftsmen” announcing that the Society would “receive consignments from any part of the Province of

95 This continues to be a major point of concern to this day, as already mentioned in the introduction and as examined more closely in Chapter 5 and Chapter 8.
96 For instance, in 1941 Alice Ravenhill remarked that “the larger Department stores… add 33% to that asked by the producers, which either makes the sale price prohibitive in these days of cheap and trashy souvenirs or deprives the producers of a fair return for their work”. Society for Indian Arts and Crafts, “Letter to R.A. Hoey, Indian Affairs,” 1941, MS 2720 [Microfilm A01661]: BCIAWS 1940-1954 (Correspondence), B.C. Archives.
97 Llewellyn Bullock-Webster, “Letter to Alice Ravenhill,” June 4, 1943, MS 1116 Society for the Furtherance of Indian Arts and Crafts. Volume 1, File 10, B.C. Archives.
98 Society for Indian Arts and Crafts, “Letter to the Director of the Indian Affairs Branch,” October 10, 1944, MS 2720 [Microfilm A01661]: BCIAWS 1940-1954 (Correspondence), B.C. Archives.
British Columbia,” stating that “every effort should be made at the start to set a fair price which will not change, and one which will bring a good living wage to the manufacturer”. The memorandum ended with the following message, typed entirely in upper-case for emphasis: “THE SOCIETY WILL NOT MAKE A PENNY OF PROFIT ON ANY TRANSACTION UNDER THIS DISTRIBUTION CENTER SCHEME. OUR DESIRE IS TO SEE THE INDIANS PROFIT BY THEIR WORK IN THE ARTS AND CRAFTS”.99 This note is a clear indication that the existence of concerns about unequal wealth distribution in this market encouraged the Society to make its motives and interests clear to the artists it was contacting. In a 1948 letter in which she comments about the “great discrepancy in prices of Indian goods”, the Society’s Honorary Secretary of the time, Ellen Hart, noted that “Some dealers have a conscience but many have not”.100 Clearly, the Society wanted to be perceived as belonging to the former category.

In relation to its effort to develop the market while improving its own reputation, the Society begun attaching its organization seal to products it considered authentic.101 Enquiring about this seal and its use, Ruth M. Smith, editor of the newspaper The Native Voice (official organ of the Native Brotherhood of British Columbia) stressed the need for the seal also being used “to protect the Indian designs”, stating that such protection was “sorely needed”.102 However, apparently the Society’s seal was in fact used to tag “the better pieces… thus serving as a guarantee to the producer and setting a standard for the worker”,103 and not to protect the designs themselves. The only form of so-called “protection” of designs that was being performed with the Society’s tags can also be described as the coercion of producers into refraining from innovation: the Society would generally refuse to place its tags on items using designs that were not considered to be “truly Indian”.104 For instance, “If [a basket] comes in with a rose or a

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99 Arthur E. Pickford, “Distribution Center for Promotion of Sales in Indian Arts and Crafts,” December 1945, MS 2720 [Microfilm A01661]: BCIAWS 1940-1954 (Correspondence), B.C. Archives.
101 In Ravenhill’s words, the seal represented “one of the North West Coast Chief’s highly valued “coppers” accurately copied in form with a native “eye” in place occupied by each Chief; crest to suggest the Society’s look into the future when we see the reestablishment of our fellow Canadians in their rightful position”. Ravenhill quoted in Ruth M. Smith, “Letter to Ellen Hart, Honorary Secretary, BCIAWS,” December 9, 1947, MS 2720 A01662 [Microfilm]: BCIAWS 1943-1954, B.C. Archives.
102 Ibid.
103 Ibid.
104 B.C. Indian Arts and Welfare Society, Report of Conference on Native Indian Affairs at Acadia Camp, 15.
butterfly, or some bird I’ve never seen, I do not put the trade mark on it”, explained Godman, who was in charge of marketing the works received by the Society.\textsuperscript{105}

However, the Society did have the desire to counter the sale of Aboriginal-themed products made by non-Aboriginal artists and companies. For instance, the Society applauded the Vancouver Tourist Association’s “protest over the sale of Indian totem pole souvenirs that had been made in Japan”, noting that it had itself been trying to promote the sale of “legitimate Indian handicrafts” but had had “little success” in doing so.\textsuperscript{106} As a means to counter this, Baker had also suggested that the Society coordinate its efforts with those of the Vancouver Tourist Association to create a trademark for all souvenirs made in B.C., but I was not able to find a trace of such a joint initiative.

2) Secondly, many of those interested in the “Indian arts and crafts” market in the 1940s also commented on the attractiveness of employment in other, better remunerated, fields of work. Often, both the market’s lack of protection and a higher remuneration of work in other fields were interwoven in the argument that, although there might be potential in the Aboriginal art market, it would be difficult if not impossible to achieve. Reverend R.C. Scott, principal of the Alberni Residential School, wrote to Ravenhill stating that “Our Coast Indians are used to such quick and fairly large returns from fishing and trapping that they do not easily make good in the more tedious and less remunerative work in such fields as handicrafts”.\textsuperscript{107} F.J.C. Ball, Indian Agent for the district of Vancouver, also noted that, in his agency, “Indians … are scarcely an indigent people”. He pointed out that he knows “many Indians … earn from $1500.00 to

\textsuperscript{105} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{106} Willard E. Ireland, “Letter to H.D. Baker, Esq. Manager, Vancouver Tourist Association,” February 16, 1949, MS 2720 [A01662 Microfilm]: BCIAWS 1943-1954, B.C. Archives. The response to this letter from R.H. Baker, manager of the Vancouver Tourist Association, noted that in fact, “the newspaper story was a little misleading as the reference to Japanese totem poles referred to a pre-war situation, and I do not know of any such products being marketed at the present time”. H.D. Baker, “Letter to Willard E. Ireland, Corresponding Secretary, BCIAWS”, February 18, 1949, MS 2720 [A01662 Microfilm]: BCIAWS 1943-1954, B.C. Archives and see Chapter 3.

\textsuperscript{107} R.C. Scott, “Letter to Alice Ravenhill, BCIAWS,” April 25, 1941, MS 2720 [Microfilm A01661]: BCIAWS 1940-1954 (Correspondence), B.C. Archives. Other Indian Agents made similar comments, such as Alfred H. Barber (posted in Vernon), who explained that his difficulty getting “some of the best workers to make small novelties such as miniature gloves, purses, etc. which I find have ready sale” stemmed from the fact that “all our Indians in this Agency are economically well off through environment and education”. Alfred H. Barber, “Letter to Alice Ravenhill, BCIAWS,” May 14, 1941, MS 2720 [Microfilm A01661]: BCIAWS 1940-1954 (Correspondence), B.C. Archives.
$3500.00 a year longshoring… [and] from $4.00 to $7.00 a day as loggers … many of the fishermen return[ing] with substantial sums at the end of the season”.108 “It is useless to encourage Indians to spend weeks and months in weaving a beautiful basket, carving a magnificent argolite [sic] or wooden totem”, argued Ball, until there would be more buyers for these products. His own efforts, Ball explained, were focused on “trying to sell for the Indians all they care to make so that they can earn a living”,109 and in his experience, “there is practically no sale for [finer work], unless the article is one in common use”.110

Also writing to Ravenhill, West Coast Indian Agent P.B. Ashbridge wrote that:

I should be very glad if it were possible to market totems, basketry, etc., but as you truly remark there are many difficulties. First, there is the excess profit the retailer demands. When you consider that a really good small totem takes a whole day to make, and the price offered by a retailer is 50 to 75 c, you must agree that it is a waste of time for the Indian, as in that time he can catch $5.00 worth of fish.111

In specific reference to sheep raising for the purpose of gathering wool for knitting, Indian Agent R.H. Moore posted in Duncan remarked that:

…when more remunerative jobs are available, such as long-shoring, logging, etc., the Indians do not bother a great deal with sheep-raising. When jobs are not numerous, they return to the job of raising sheep, and the women knit a larger number of sweaters in order to obtain extra cash.112

Some of Ravenhill’s interlocutors were more optimistic, however.113 The Indian Agent posted in Bella Coola also emphasized the economic value of arts and crafts production, reiterating the well-known refrain that “the old Indian Arts and Crafts are unfortunately dying out

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109 Ibid. Ball wrote that, in his experience, “Indians can make much more money carving 50c totem poles… than in concentrating on one article worth $50.00 to $100.00’’ because “the purchasers of the former are numerous, but only the occasional collector (who will not be a tourist usually)… will buy the latter” Ibid. For a discussion of the tourist/collector (false) dichotomy, see Chapter 6.
110 F.J.C. Ball, “Letter to Alice Ravenhill, BCIAWS,” October 7, 1941, MS 2720 [Microfilm A01661]: BCIAWS 1940-1954 (Correspondence), B.C. Archives.
111 P.B. Ashbridge, “Letter to Alice Ravenhill,” August 4, 1941, MS-2710, [Microfilm A01661]: B.C. Indian Arts and Welfare Society 1940-1954 (Correspondence), B.C. Archives.
112 R.H. Moore, “Letter to A.E. Pickford, SFIAC,” April 12, 1945, MS 2720 [Microfilm A01661]: BCIAWS 1940-1954 (Correspondence), B.C. Archives.
113 For instance, the director of the Pemberton Indian Day School emphasized the economic implications of teaching art-making to school children, stating that “the economic conditions of the Indians being what it is, monetary gain proves to be the real incentive to revive this art” and that two objectives should be pursued hand in hand: “preserving” the art, and “improving the economic conditions of the Indians”. Pemberton Indian Day School, “Letter to Alice Ravenhill, BCIAWS,” May 14, 1941, MS 2720 [Microfilm A01661]: BCIAWS 1940-1954 (Correspondence), B.C. Archives.
fast in this Agency”, but also noting that “there is no lack of a market for anything they turn out and a novelty shop in Bella Coola run by C.R. Kopas can not [sic] get a supply to meet their demands”. Similarly pointing to the existence of a market, Frank Morrison of the Saint Catherine’s Indian Day School in Duncan wrote Pickford in 1946, stating that “if it were possible to establish a community arts and crafts center, we would be giving the Indians a new opportunity to make a good living through the commercial application of their talents”.115

Among its lobbying efforts, the Society repeatedly encouraged Indian Affairs to assign one of their staff to the promotion of “Indian arts and crafts” in the Western Provinces, hoping that governmental intervention might help address the above challenges. At the time, the Handicrafts section of Indian Affairs Branch in Ottawa was headed by Kathleen Moodie, but she worked primarily in Eastern Canada.116 Describing her assignment, Moodie once wrote Audrey Hawthorn (then honorary curator at the UBC Museum of Anthropology in Vancouver) that the activities she was supervising through the Department did not “come properly under the heading of Handicraft – but is more ‘Reserve Industries’” and were primarily aimed at “keeping as many Indians as possible off relief”.117 Commenting on the list of goods being promoted by the Department – which includes photo frames, miniature canoes, pin cushions, and woven wastebaskets – Moodie wrote that “Although these materials are ‘hand made’ [sic] they are really produced in commercial quantities, and through improved methods, the Indians who work steadily earn from $25. to $50. a week, depending on their skill”.118 The “improved methods” she went on to describe bear similarities with the Taylorist model of dividing labour into a chain of tasks so as to improve productivity.

According to Moodie, Indian Affairs encouraged Aboriginal individuals to focus solely on production,119 distribution activities being left to Indian Affairs. The latter would purchase the

114 William Christie, “Letter to Alice Ravenhill, BCIAWS,” July 5, 1941, MS 2720 [Microfilm A01661]: BCIAWS 1940-1954 (Correspondence), B.C. Archives.
118 Ibid.
119 Although this was the case because Moodie felt they often lost a lot of time going door-to-door selling their pieces one by one, one of the implications of discouraging Aboriginal individuals from engaging in distribution would have
works from their makers at wholesale prices and distribute them through department stores (including Eaton’s and the Hudson’s Bay Stores), gift shops, and other stores in “tourist centres” across Canada”. In a presentation she had given earlier that year, Moodie had explained that Indian Affairs generally considered this market to represent only “subsidiary employment” providing the “‘butter and egg money’ of the women in farming communities”, a statement that echoed what Ravenhill had heard from Indian Agents and school principals in previous years. Finally, Moodie had explained to Hawthorn that, although she felt that “it may not be possible to curtail the sale of cheap articles, sometimes of very poor design,” she would support the creation of “something of the nature of a ‘quality stamp’ for fine work”. She suggested calling upon the Industrial and Standards Divisions of the Department of Trade and Commerce to help in this task. However, as with the similar suggestion made a year earlier by Baker of the Vancouver Tourism Association, I was not able to find any record of this having been undertaken at this time.

For arts and culture in Canada, 1951 was a pivotal year for at least two reasons. First, it is that year that the ban on the potlatch was lifted through an amendment to the Indian Act. Second, it is also that year that the Royal Commission on the Arts, Letters and Sciences finished conducting its nation-wide investigation, led by Chairman Vincent Massey. The Commission heard from many organizations, including the Society and its affiliate, the Fraser Canyon Indian Arts and Crafts Society (FCIACS). Invited by the FCIACS to speak at the Commission’s hearings, Nuu-chah-nulth artist George Clutesi told the commissioners that, in his view:

…the Art of the Indians of British Columbia including the natives of the West Coast of Vancouver Island is something that... should be kept. It should be preserved for future reference. It should be... put where all the people can see it. It should be made so that all

been the maintenance of a space in which middle-men could insert themselves (at least in the segment of the market that was not organized through Indian Affairs).

In 1943, George Clutesi was asked to become an Honorary Member of the SFIAC, an offer which he accepted.
lay-men, together with a few people who take the trouble to delve into the means of this Art, could understand it.\textsuperscript{125}

Clutesi’s call for preservation and visibility was all the more important that it was addressed to government representatives, after years of assimilationist laws driving Aboriginal practices and cultural expression underground. This statement also provides a frame of reference for Clutesi’s subsequent exchange with commissioner Norman A.M. MacKenzie (then president of the University of British Columbia), in which MacKenzie probed the link between training and education on the one hand, and the development of the arts and crafts market, on the other:

Dr. MacKenzie: Would the Indians be interested in producing or reproducing Indian Art on a commercial basis if it were saleable, or would they prefer to do it for its interest alone?

Mr. Clutesi: It is just dawning in our minds – that is the Indian minds – that we must subsist on dollars. We can no longer shoot what we want in the woods. We can no longer pick what fish we want from the rivers. Therefore, it is only fair to say that he would be intensely interested if his efforts in the field of Art can be rewarded financially because he buys his bread and butter like the white brother.

Dr. MacKenzie: So that if schools could be developed in which young Indians could be trained to produce these items for sale, there would be no objection to that from the point of view of the Indians?

Mr. Clutesi: Absolutely none.\textsuperscript{126}

Both Clutesi’s reference to buying “bread and butter” and Kathleen Moodie’s comment a year earlier about the income generated through “the craft work of Indians” as comparable to “butter and egg money” underline how, after decades of the Indian Act’s repressive legislation, Aboriginal art had – at least in its public and government-sanctioned form – come to be seen as largely the field of secularized income-generation. However, neither Moodie nor Clutesi were framing the production and sale of Aboriginal art as a source of economic prosperity in the form of a long-term, sustainable, market. Rather, the language they used was that of making a living,

\textsuperscript{125} Fraser Canyon Indian Arts and Crafts Society, \textit{Fraser Canyon Indian Arts and Crafts Society Hearing Transcript}, n.d 1951, 48, RG 33/28 - Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences. Reel C-2008 (Volume 19, Brief 210), Library and Archives Canada.

\textsuperscript{126} Ibid., 50–51. The commission’s Chairman, Vincent Massey, had just previously discussed the relationship between education and the market with the Fraser Canyon Indian Arts and Crafts Society’s honorary secretary, A. J. Tullis.
However, the hopes expressed by Raley, Ravenhill, Neel, and others that the market could be developed to a much greater extent – and to a much greater effect on the economic situation of Aboriginal people – were to persist and even grow in the post-potlatch ban era.

### 2.2 The Market Post Potlatch-ban

#### 2.2.1 1950s-1960s: From secondary income to “economic development”

It is up until the 1960s that the production and sale of “Indian arts and crafts” continued to be approached as a source of additional income, rather than a primary occupation. For instance, a 1955 report to the Department of Citizenship and Immigration written by a team of UBC researchers that included UBC anthropologist Harry Hawthorn noted that the employment of Aboriginal people was at the time “confined almost entirely to a few primary industries, particularly fishing, logging, trapping, farming and farm labour” but that soon, they would need to seek jobs in such fields as manufacturing and services. Indeed, employment in the primary industries was declining due to “mechanization” and the “depletion of resources”.  

The authors explained that “arts and crafts” currently represented “important supplementary support”; however, they also felt that arts and crafts had much greater potential, not only in terms of individual employment, but also as a means to “foster community development”. However, they identified several challenges to attaining this potential, including difficulties accessing raw materials. In other words, not only were primary industry jobs decreasing in numbers due to the “depletion of resources”, the expansion of the arts and crafts market as an alternative

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127 In this respect, it is important to note that the hearing transcripts show that, although Clutesi was being highly praised for his artistic successes, it was also noted that he made a living as a fisherman and not as an artist.


129 Ibid., 257.

economic activity was also limited by a lack of availability of raw materials. Therefore, the report advocated training not only in “traditional craft” but also in “shop work” and “graphic arts”, as a means for students to “experiment” and perhaps “discover new interests”. The authors recommended that an instructional programme “explore the possibilities of increasing the efficiency of manufacturing techniques”, and even went as far as to suggest “the installation of small factories in suitable communities”. However, they also cautioned that such factories could be disruptive (and even end up “displacing the housewife entirely from the industry”). Thus, they thought it preferable that they be installed “experimentally” and under close surveillance in order to monitor their unwanted effects. In other words, all in all, the report was cautiously optimistic about the idea that, if the lessened availability of resources and the “mechanization” of the primary industries was costing jobs, perhaps the mechanization of arts and crafts production would be able to create employment and at the same time curtail the need to locally harvest raw materials via bulk purchases from a more central source.

In a review of its own activities the next year, Indian Affairs did not seem to have taken note of the suggestions the report had put forth, as it stated that:

> It has been generally recognized that under present conditions handicraft production as a full-time occupation seldom provides an adequate income to a family. Under the circumstances, it has been the policy of the Department to encourage craft projects more as a means of supplementing earnings, providing employment for elderly and physically handicapped Indians and perpetuating skills, than as a major source of employment for Indians.

If the limitations of the market were generally “recognized” under the “conditions” of the time, not everyone was content with Indian Affairs doing nothing to address these limitations in anticipation of, or even to change, these “conditions”. In 1958, the Society helped organize a two-day “Conference of Indian Business Men”. Like the 1948 conference on “Native Indian Affairs”, it took place on the campus of the University of British Columbia; also like in 1948, Ellen Neel was one of the conference’s invited speakers.

If in the 1948 conference report, Neel had been referred to as “skilled woodcarver”, in the 1958 list of speakers kept in the files of the BCIAWS, Neel was listed as an “Indian curio carver and manufacturer”, while in the conference’s official report her name was followed by the mention “Commercial Handicrafts”. The summary of
the Indian in business”, including the difficulty of finding skilled workers in a trade like carving that “is learned rather slowly”. Neel explained that even those who are well-trained carvers often eventually chose other more remunerative activities such as fishing. For this reason, there were few hireable individuals in her field of business, explaining that she felt this represented a “real cultural loss”. Another problem identified by Neel was the by then well-known issue of having to compete with “cheap and rather shoddy imitations from abroad”. Neel suggested that legislation be passed to counter this, including “the levying of a tax on all articles bearing an Indian design”:

The amount of the tax could be rebated on genuine articles produced by Indian craftsmen, and the remainder of the tax proceeds could be used to help our Indian welfare and development funds. These Indian designs are popular and they deserve to be popular. They are morally the common property of the Indian people, and some of the profit from the exploitation of these designs should be used for the benefit of the Indians.

Neel also praised the Society’s initiative to create a “co-operative marketing agency that would dispose of Indian handicrafts at the narrowest possible margin” instead of the minimum 100% markup being practiced by most retailers. Once again, it appears Neel’s opinion was not perceived to be as valuable as two invitations to speak at a Society conference might have suggested.

Although by this time the Society had supported the creation of co-operatives and other means of selling arts and crafts – an effort that has been praised by Neel at the conference – the Society’s President, C.S. Burchill, seemed to align himself more closely with the position of Indian Affairs that these could only be a “temporary measure for supplementing income”, and that the “ultimate solution to the economic problem of the Indian” was “full integration into the

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Neel’s talk provided in the conference’s report suggests that she referred to herself as a producer of “curios of Indian design”, but as the report is not a verbatim transcription, it is unclear that those were the precise words of Neel, rather than those of the summary’s author.

137 Ibid., 14.
138 Ibid.
139 Ibid.
140 Ibid.
141 As I will explain in Chapter 8, the idea that anyone using designs should redistribute at least some of their profits to Aboriginal communities is still one of the driving forces behind the hope for a “new and improved” artware industry.
142 B.C. Indian Arts and Welfare Society, Report of the Second Decennial Conference on Native Indian Affairs at the Library, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, B.C., April 1st and 2nd, 1958, 14.
industrial and professional life of the Canadian community”. For this reason, Burchill recommended that the Society’s aim shift, refocusing its efforts on fostering a “climate of opinion that will welcome the Indian as a neighbor, as an employee, and, in the not far distant future as an employer”. Although the Society would remain in existence for over two decades after that, from this point on it began to play a significantly less prominent role in lobbying for the development of the market. Ironically, as market analysts would later acknowledge, it is precisely during the 1960s that the “Canadian Indian arts and crafts industry” came to be “acknowledged as a viable conduit for employment and economic development of Canada’s indigenous people”, a point that the Society had been trying to make for the two previous decades. This question would continue to be a dominant theme of discussion in the following years.

In 1964, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration asked Harry Hawthorn and a team of scholars from UBC and other universities to undertake a study of the “social, educational and economic situation of the Indians of Canada”, this time nation-wide. The 1966 report that came out of this research only made cursory mention of arts and crafts. With respect to what it called “cultural revival”, the report stated that “various tourist attractions, ranging from colourful pageants down to the sale of handicrafts provide a variable source of extra income”. However, it also added that “A revival and expansion of such art might well be a supplement of economic development of a band that had other main sources of income”. Although the language used here does frame arts and crafts as a secondary economic activity, the idea that this field could serve the goal of “economic development” at the scale of communities, rather than simply generating income for individual producers, is a nuance well worth noting. This point extended to Canada as a whole what Hawthorn and his team had begun to suggest ten years earlier.

[144] Ibid.
[147] Via a survey of employment and earnings conducted in a sample of thirty-five Bands across Canada, the report estimated that “handicrafts” represented 4.1% of total jobs but only 0.64% of total earnings among the Aboriginal population Ibid., 47.
[148] Ibid., 121.
specifically about British Columbia, and would be echoed in other studies conducted during the 1960s.

For instance, another 1966 study commissioned by the Department of Forestry titled *A Proposed Program for Developing Indian Arts and Crafts in Canada* suggested that a company run by and for Aboriginal “craftsmen” be created under the proposed name of “Canadian Indian Crafts Limited”. Beginning their report by describing the current state of the market, the authors identified five categories among the various products available: *artifacts, souvenirs, imitations, adaptations, and functional items*. Here I focus on the latter two categories, as the definitions provided by the report authors indicates that these types of objects are the ones that relate most closely to the items I call “artware”. On the topic of the category of *adaptations* (i.e. “traditional Indian designs” used “on articles which are not from the Indian’s culture”) the authors stated that “Many adaptations have beauty and many do not; many more could, and therein lies an opportunity”. They also described how the retailers they visited were frustrated that the “craftsmen” would not produce the products they knew would sell well, including “items belonging to the white man’s culture which could be sold if they were designed with Indian motifs”. About *functional items* (i.e. “substitutes for white-man-made articles” such as footwear and fashion items), they stated that “The market for Indian-made clothing appears to have much more potential than is being realized and an increase in production is about all that is required to capitalize on this opportunity”.

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149 The way in which the authors classified the different products available on the market is attention-worthy. They made a distinction between *artifacts* (i.e. objects used by “Indians in their daily lives, including ceremonial and religious occasion”); *souvenirs* (i.e. “any object sold at a low price… which is bought either as a keepsake… or as a gift”); *imitations* (i.e. “machine-made (occasionally hand-made) articles which are copies of Indian artifacts”, explaining that “many of these [souvenir] articles come from Japanese and Hong Kong suppliers” Canadian Consociates Limited, “Canadian Indian Crafts Limited”: A Proposed Program for Developing Indian Arts and Crafts in Canada Submitted to the Agricultural Rehabilitation and Development Act, Department of Forestry, Ottawa, Ontario (Toronto, Ontario, June 1966), 8, MG 30 D 387 - Modest Cmoc fonds [NIACC] Volume 6, File 4, Library and Archives Canada, and that “Much of the low-priced souvenir market is served from the Orient” Ibid., 27. (See Chapter 3 for a discussion of the politics and economics of this off-shore competition); *adaptations* (i.e. “traditional Indian designs…used… on articles which are not from the Indian’s culture…tie bars, wall hangings, book marks, napkin rings…”); and *functional items* (i.e. “Footwear, jackets, sweaters, jewellery, baskets, etc., … essentially substitutes for white-man-made articles”) Ibid., 7–9.

150 In other words, although the terms “artifacts”, “souvenirs”, “imitations”, “adaptations”, and “functional items” could all be used in everyday language in reference to what I call “artware”, in the context of this report, the definitions provided for “adaptations” and “functional items” are those that correspond most closely to my own definition of “artware”.


152 Ibid., 22.

153 Ibid., 28.
directions that would later be taken in the artware industry. With respect to the creation of “Canadian Indian Crafts Limited”, the report recommended the implementation of a craft development program so as “to provide an additional opportunity for social and economic self-development by the Canadian Indian”;\footnote{Ibid., 66.} importantly, it also recommended that the program should “involve Indian people in [its] operation and management”.\footnote{Ibid.} The authors also wrote that they saw “no reason at all why it cannot some day [sic] be a program requiring the advice and assistance of no white man whatsoever”.\footnote{Ibid., 68.}

However, during the same period, some still stood by the paradigm of arts and crafts as merely a source of supplementary income. This is for example illustrated in a memorandum written in 1967 by R.J. McInnes, director of the Indian Advisory Act of B.C., in which he wrote that “very few Indian residents of this Province enjoy a steady annual income and consequently supplementary earnings are most important to them. The sale of handicrafts offers an excellent source of much needed additional income”.\footnote{R.J. McInnes, “Letter to L.J. Wallace, Deputy Provincial Secretary”, 1967, GR-1661: BC Provincial Secretary. Volume 37, File 2 - Survey Indian Handicraft Program 1967-1970, B.C. Archives.} Suggesting that a survey of the market be conducted “to determine where and what help is needed”, McInnes suggested that be developed “a programme to assist the Indian craftsmen in the production and the retailing of their products.” He framed such an initiative not only as an opportunity to “improve [the] position [of Indian people] by involving them in any financial enterprise which has every chance for success” but also as a way to reduce the “strain upon [B.C’s]s economy”.\footnote{Ibid., 68.} Much like the discourses of Raley and Ravenhill several decades earlier, McInnes’s discourse was not only couched in the paternalist language of “help” and “assistance” but also saw a direct connection between the interests of Aboriginal people and those of the Province, and thus, the State – perhaps as a way to convince his governmental interlocutors of the worthiness of the initiative he was suggesting.

In any case, the 1969 survey of the “British Columbia Native Indian Arts and Handicrafts” market that was conducted on McInnes’s recommendation was slightly more optimistic than he had himself been, stating that “Excellent supplementary income is represented by the sale of
handicrafts. Such income is important to the total family earnings.”.159 That said, the report also included such remarks as that:

Many Native Indians are upset about the commercially produced material now in circulation. Trying to explain to the Native Indian that, if he would only produce he would not have the outside competition, has not met with much success.160

Such patronizing discourses, especially published in reports commissioned by the government, would have been fodder for the discouragement of such individuals as Anishinabe poet and educator Arthur Solomon. Solomon was indeed among those who had been hired on contract by Canadian Consociates Limited, the firm of consultants that had just a year before recommended the creation of “Canadian Indian Crafts Limited” in the above-mentioned report. In a 1969 paper, Solomon stated his disappointment with Indian Affairs not implementing the 1966 report’s recommendations. He noted that the “shopkeepers and the buying public” who were looking for “dependable supplies of Indian crafts of good quality” were not acquiring them “from the Indian craftsworkers”, lamenting that the market was still a “chaotic mess”.161 In Solomon’s view, this disorganization could be remedied only by “working hand in hand with the craftsmen, using their ingenuity and their initiative as the driving force”.162 Also, he estimated that, of the “40 million dollars worth of gifts and souvenirs” that had been sold in Ontario in 1968, “80% of it [had been] imported”. With respect to these imports, he argued that what should be done is “help the craftsmen to produce high quality handmade things (not necessarily high priced) but of a quality and nature that will take the craftsmen out of the senseless competition with foreign machine made junk”.163

Solomon believed that, if the recommendations presented in the 1966 report he had helped produce had largely been ignored by Indian Affairs, it was at least in part because the report suggested organizing the market on the terms of Aboriginal people, rather than those of the government. He argued that “Indian people are entitled to an opportunity on their terms which

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161 Solomon, “Craft Development, Human Development, Community Development.,” 5. In this respect, he was echoing the 1966 report to which he had contributed and which stated that “If one drew on a map of Canada a series of lines which showed the nature of product movement from producer through to retailer, the result would be an incredible maze of zig-zags, cross hauling, duplication, and inefficiency” Canadian Consociates Limited, “Canadian Indian Crafts Limited”: A Proposed Program for Developing Indian Arts and Crafts in Canada, 23.
163 Ibid.
befits their dignity as human beings; they are entitled to an investment in them as the original
owners of this country who have been robbed of their land and even their identity”.  

Furthermore, he stated that “Handcraftsmanship... is the most natural and least troublesome
means of economic development for these people who have almost no other way to earn
money”. In this respect, Solomon’s discourse is similar to that of some of the previously cited
non-Aboriginal supporters of the Aboriginal art market’s development, but with the crucial
difference that Solomon believed that this potential would be realized only when Aboriginal
individuals would be leading the charge, the government only initially playing the roles of funder
and facilitator.

Also of note is that, as in previous decades, 1960s discourses about the fate of “Indian arts
and crafts” often sought to bring attention to the competition represented by the works of non-
Aboriginal individuals and companies. For instance, an April 1964 article published in the
*Imperial Oil Review* reports that:

> With the increasing popularity of Indian crafts, *enterprising fakers have appeared*, much
> the way in which they have appeared in the field of early Canadian antiques. Several
> white men have produced pottery, fabrics and jewelry with Indian designs; one man is
> mass producing reproductions of argillite totems; another is lithographing the Speck’s
> family’s paintings. *Not all storekeepers take the trouble to point out which of their items
> are genuinely Indian-made.*

From this, the article concluded that “Some form of trademark similar to the labels which
identify Eskimo art would clearly benefit both the Indian artists and the buying public”. The
previously mentioned 1966 report promoting the creation of “Canadian Indian Crafts Limited”
to which Solomon had contributed) had also claimed that the yearly growth of “the sale of
imitation Indian artifacts” was a “real problem”. However, the authors felt that “overcoming it by
non-Fascist procedures” would be “virtually impossible”, concluding that “the only avenue which
appears to exist is educating the public with respect to what is and what is not authentic”.

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164 Ibid., 5.
165 Ibid.
166 Renate Wilson and Thelma Dickman, “They’re Giving the Culture Back to the Indians. International Art
167 Ibid.
168 Canadian Consociates Limited, “Canadian Indian Crafts Limited”: *A Proposed Program for Developing Indian
Arts and Crafts in Canada*, 28.
the report did suggest that an “Indian Affairs Branch tag could be used as a device for quality control over both the craftsmen and the resellers”.  

By then, the idea of implementing protective measures had reached the government’s agenda, and a report on this very topic was commissioned by the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development the same year. Titled “Legal Protection of Indian and Eskimo Arts and Crafts in Canada”, the report remarked that Canadian laws were currently failing to provide such protection. Among other things, it suggested that marks be registered under the Trade Marks Act on behalf of the Crown, and that the federal government could write legislation prohibiting both the production and the importation of imitations within Canada. Although I was not able to find any evidence of such a tag indicating “quality” and/or “authenticity” being created at the time, on August 28 1968, Indian Affairs did register a “Stretched Beaver Pelt” trademark, which would a few years later be used for the purpose of identifying “handcraft products and fine art made by Indians in Canada”. The 1970s would mark a new era in the government’s involvement in the market with mixed results.

2.2.2 1970s: Centralization and its discontent

In 1970, a national “Indian Arts and Crafts” program was created by the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, including a distribution system first called the “Central Marketing Services” and later called the “Canadian Indian Marketing Services” (CIMS). Located in Ottawa, the CIMS acted as the promoter and wholesaler of the products it received from across the country. The idea was that such centralized service would help put order and create standards in a market that was considered disorganized and unreliable. However, the CIMS

169 Ibid., 30.
172 Tuscarora, Algonquin and Mohawk artist Simon Brascoupé, teamed with writer Susan Hallet and graphic artist Sandra Callaghan, worked on the CIMS’s development and advertisement campaigns, including the campaign promoting the Stretched Beaver Pelt trademark, by then used to help consumers identify authentic Indian arts and crafts. Brascoupé had met Hallett while they were both working for an Ottawa department store, respectively as art director and copywriter, and recruited her to work with him when he was hired to work for the CIMS. Their hope was that the CIMS and its campaigns would help upgrade the image of Aboriginal art, feeling that it was neither well known nor well respected by the public.
was apparently not able to significantly alter the ways in which the market functioned, as similar criticism continued to be voiced in the years following its creation.

For instance, a 1975 report about the CIMS and the Indian Craftsmen’s Assistance Program explained that the industry was “chaotic”, that there was no “organized collective action”, and that there was little communication among “artists and craftsmen” and even less with retailers and customers. However, as with other reports before it, its authors still expressed optimism with respect to the market’s potential. For instance, they believed that “traditional crafts” had “vast potential for Indian participation in a number of contemporary manufacturing industries, i.e., footwear, garment, jewellery, textiles and other fields such as advertising, interior decoration, and industrial design”, echoing in that Ellen Neel’s vision almost thirty years earlier, and Harlan Smith’s call thirty years before that. “The possibilities in the future are unlimited”, the 1975 report stated, stressing that this potential should be attainable given the demographic and cultural “resources” of the “Indian population”.

Indeed, from its beginning in 1970, one of the stated goals of the Indian Arts and Crafts Program, including the CIMS, was that it be “turned over to Indian ownership” within five years. Over time, various reports stressed this point, such as a 1978 report reviewing the Indian Arts and Crafts Program, which strongly advocated that the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs maintain as minimal as possible an involvement in the CIMS’s business if the transfer of control to Aboriginal managers was ever to be successfully achieved. However, it is only in

173 Indian Arts and Crafts Development Board (B.C.), British Columbia Region Indian Craftsmen’s Assistance Program, 1975-1981, August 1975, 8–9, MG 30 D 387 - Modest Cmoc fpecs [NIACC]. Volume 6, File 8: British Columbia Region - Indian Craftsmen’s Assistance Program, 1975-1978 (Fifth Revision), August 1975, Library and Archives Canada.

174 The report classified the kinds of products it was interested in promoting as follows: “artifacts” (“such as ceremonial and religious objects”); “giftware” (i.e. “moderately priced items such as footwear, garments, jewellery, book-marks, etc.”); and “souvenirs or keepsake items” (described as “generally unsophisticated, low-prices (sic) items principally appealing to the tourist market”). Thus, by the mid-1970s, the term “arts and crafts” was inching towards encompassing what I have called “art and artware”.

175 Indian Arts and Crafts Development Board (B.C.), British Columbia Region Indian Craftsmen’s Assistance Program, 1975-1981, 9. Although by 2012 most of the avenues mentioned have indeed been explored, the roles played by Aboriginal participants in these initiatives are apparently not as prominent as the authors of this report had hoped it would be (see Chapter 5).


1978 that the Arts and Crafts Program was officially turned over to the National Indian Arts and Crafts Corporation (NIACC). Also based in Ottawa, the NIACC was an Aboriginal-run and government-funded organization meant to “act as wholesalers, distributors, and dealers in works of native Indian artists and craftsmen of Canada for the purpose of encouraging the development of native Indian arts, crafts and industries in Canada.” However, by then the operations of the CIMS had been terminated, and therefore were never turned over to NIACC. According to a 1981 report evaluating NIACC, the termination of the CIMS by Indian Affairs just around the time that the Indian Arts and Crafts program was being transferred to NIACC “seriously hampered andinked the development of NIACC”.

One of the primary criticisms that had been levelled against the Indian Arts and Crafts Program was that it was too centralized and was not adapted to the needs and interests of each of the regions it was meant to serve. The relevance of a national wholesaler was altogether questioned in a 1978 market survey, stating that “at present… the market conditions are simply not sufficient to support such an enterprise”, adding that in their view “it is no wonder… that

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178 Anonymous, *Indian Arts and Crafts Development Program, 1976*, 7, MG 30 D 387 - Modest Cmoc fonds [NIACC] Volume 6, File 18, Library and Archives Canada. It also had a mandate “To adopt and use trade and certification marks and secure registration thereof under the laws of Canada, and apply certification and trademarks to identify and indicate the approval of the Corporation of works of native Indian artists and craftsmen” Ibid.

179 An inventory sale of the CIMS’s stock was organized by the Crown Assets Disposal Corporation, taking place from October 16th to 21st 1979 at the Victoria Memorial Building in Ottawa. The sale included the works of Northwest Coast artists such as argillite pendants, silver jewellery (many of it made by artist Tony Hunt, as well as by artists from ’Ksan (not individually identified in the inventory list), and limited edition prints (by Tony Hunt, Ron Hamilton, Mark Henderson, Ken Mowatt, Robert Davidson, Stan Greene, and Noll Derrickson (the latter having been the director of the Indian Arts and Crafts Society of British Columbia)). Although I have not been able to ascertain whether or not these guidelines were followed, R.D. Brown, then Assistant Deputy Minister of Programs at the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, suggested that a number of measures be taken to protect “Indian producers, wholesalers and retailers of Indian arts and crafts” against the “possible dumping of the sale items on the market place at grossly reduced prices”, and that Aboriginal buyers be afforded preferential access to, and prices for, the goods. R.D. Brown, “Letter to Crown Assets Disposal Corporation,” April 18, 1979, RG 10 B-3-e-xiv: Economic Development - Project Assignment. Canadian Indian Marketing Services. Headquarters. 1979. Volume 1217, Library and Archives Canada.


181 Bureau of Management Consulting, *Evaluating the Indian Arts and Crafts Program: 1975-1977 and the Future*, 48. This critique was apparently voiced particularly strongly by the NIACC’s regional branch of the Indian Arts and Crafts Society of British Columbia (incorporated in 1976). Several of the art gallery owners I spoke to noted that the idea of shipping large quantities of Northwest Coast art to a supposedly “central” location such as Ottawa made little sense given how much of the market for Northwest Coast art is actually to be found in British Columbia (see Chapter 3).
CIMS has failed as a national wholesaler; it could not have expected to succeed". The report explained that “around 70% of all production in each province is sold within that province and as such the demand by most producers for national distribution is non-existent since there are markets close at hand for their production”. Furthermore, the report noted that one of the barriers to the wholesaling of handmade goods was that, due to the amount and cost of labour required for their production, “by the time wholesaler margins (average 33%) and retail margins (average 100%) have been added... the prices tend to be non-competitive in relation to volume produced items”. Finally, a number of retailers who wished to purchase products from wholesalers had grown wary of the CIMS, which they perceived to be an inefficiently bureaucratic and ultimately unreliable entity. In addition to all of this, the report found that despite the existence of the CIMS, standards and regularity had yet to replace “unstable” production, “uneven” quality, “inconsistent” pricing, and “ anarchic” distribution. And yet, despite all of these challenges, the report still stood by the idea expressed in “every report on the sector” that “arts and crafts offer an attractive opportunity for Indian economic development”.

To take the example of British Columbia, a consulting firm estimated that, as of 1978, the yearly market for “Indian arts and crafts” in the Province was of approximately four million dollars, most of the sales occurring in Vancouver (approximately two million) and Victoria (a little over one million). The Indian Arts and Crafts Development Board of British Columbia (IACSBC) had been created a few years earlier to guide the creation and implementation of a local Indian Craftsmen’s Assistance Program, with the central goal of increasing “the earning potential and income of Indian artists and craftsmen”. This Aboriginal-run organization felt that by developing this market, they would be able to “assist the Indian people of B.C. to achieve...
a greater degree of economic benefit and increased income opportunities”.

The IACSBC conceived the program as being intended both to those who wanted to make arts and crafts their “sole source of income” and those who saw it as a “major supplement” to their income, emphasizing the need to support both “those who demonstrate unusual talent in the arts”, and “those who have no other means of obtaining an independent, self-reliant, livelihood”. Thus, the IACSBC not only saw arts and crafts as much more than a secondary source of income, it also framed it as a way to foster excellence in select individuals.

The idea that arts and crafts could and even should be a full-time occupation, at least for some individuals, was beginning to find increasing support, to the point that some observers even grew concerned that governmental policies focused on other employment opportunities would drive talented individuals away from art-making. For instance, Peter Weinrich of the Canadian Crafts Council wrote a governmental official to express his organization’s “concern over the probable impact of the future of industrial expansion of the North on the crafts of the native peoples”. Weinrich explained that, since “many of the native people presently produce crafts from economic necessity, they will inevitably stop making them when a much higher income is available to them”. He therefore recommended that “some form of action will be taken to ensure that the best craftsmen are not enticed away from their craft because a better standard of living will be available to them as a truck driver, for example”.

In the 1970s, as previously, those reporting to the government about the market reiterated the concern that “Indian Craftsmen generally do not receive enough in return for the amount of item spent on their products”. Additionally, they expressed their “doubt[s] concerning the extent of legal protection to prevent either copying of Indian Art Handicrafts or to prevent the importation of reasonable facsimiles”. They made recommendations that “Legislation should be supported to prohibit the importation and restrict domestic manufacture of non-authentic

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190 Indian Arts and Crafts Development Board (B.C.), British Columbia Region Indian Craftsmen’s Assistance Program, 1975-1981, 3. In order to meet its goals, the program would include a system of short-term loans, the creation of crafts centers, apprenticeship programs, and professional assistance to the individuals involved.
191 Ibid., 4.
192 This government official was J.P. Anglin, Chief of Policy Planning Board, at Indian Affairs.
194 Ibid.
195 Ibid.
196 Ibid.
197 Bureau of Management Consulting, Canadian Indian Marketing Services, 19.
Indian products and to provide Federal Sales Tax exemption for authentically produced Arts and Crafts”, a measure reminiscent of the suggestion made by Ellen Neel in the late 1950s (and which I have also heard voiced in 2011). The use of tags was also again brought up in a 1978 report about marketing strategies for “Indian Arts and Crafts”, which suggested that “souvenirs could carry a special tag highlighting the work of Canadian Indians”, stressing that it should be “different from the one that might be used on crafts, the same way that the latter should probably differ from one that might be used for art, if any”.  

A tag that did exist in the 1970s was the government’s Stretched Beaver Pelt Tag (known as the “Beaver tag”), which was supposed to play a similar role for First Nations art as the Igloo Tag had for Inuit art, i.e. be perceived by consumers as a governmentally-sanctioned guarantee that any piece bearing the tag was made by “a Canadian Indian”. The tags existed in three different colours to designate “three levels of quality: mass-volume souvenirs, intermediate quality crafts, and one-of-a-kind art forms”. As a means of controlling their use, printed tags would only be distributed to organizations having entered a formal agreement with Indian Affairs, namely the CIMS, the NIACC, and all of the latter’s regional affiliations (including the IASBC). 

Although a 1976 report deemed the trademark “successful” and “one of the best marketing tools developed to promote authenticity”, the same report also stressed that it should continue to “be promoted to keep the tag in the consumer’s eye and catch new consumers as they come into the target market”. In a 1977 report, it was explained that the Stretched Beaver Pelt mark was not being used as effectively as had been hoped, illustrating this point with the following comments:

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198 Ibid.
199 Bureau of Management Consulting, Approaches to Marketing Strategies for Indian Arts and Crafts, 42. A 1978 report on the activities of the CIMS mentions a similar concern for limiting the import of imitations into Canada, the authors stating that their impression is that “foreign imitations of Indian handicrafts are still a major source of competition”. Bureau of Management Consulting, Evaluating the Indian Arts and Crafts Program: 1975-1977 and the Future, 40. The report also speaks of the Northwest Coast Indian Artists Guild and their initiative to create a “quality control committee to set and control the standards of art prints”, including by the application of a seal to “prints whose reproduction and original copy” would have been controlled by the CIMS; however, this initiative apparently lasted only long enough for the seal to be applied to “a few series of prints” Ibid., 42; see also Karen Duffek, “‘Authenticity’ and the Contemporary Northwest Coast Indian Art Market,” BC Studies: The British Columbian Quarterly 0, no. 57 (1983): 101.
200 Anonymous, Indian Arts and Crafts Development Program, 45.
201 Duffek, “‘Authenticity’ and the Contemporary Northwest Coast Indian Art Market,” 100.
202 Anonymous, Indian Arts and Crafts Development Program, 46.
We have found Indian Arts and Crafts selling for over $200 and less than $1.00, both carrying the Beaver tag. We have seen articles of questionable quality and close to being classified as ‘junk articles’ carrying the Beaver tag. We have seen article [sic] partly, or mostly machine-made, carrying the Beaver tag. The inconsistency in the product line and its promotion is quite obvious.\(^{203}\)

The authors concluded that:

…failure to define ‘Indian’ arts and crafts has resulted in a proliferation of products, quality and methods of creating and promoting these products. This could be one major reason for the Department and government-funded wholesalers failing to tie in the certification process for what is Indian Arts and Crafts and to communicate it to the marketplace.\(^{204}\)

A 1978 report also remarked that “use of the stretched beaver pelt tag does not appear to have any significant impact on quality control; its main application is seen as guaranteeing the authenticity of Indian craft products”.\(^{205}\) The same report included complaints from retailers that, in addition to the bureaucracy surrounding authorized uses of the mark by retailers, the use of the Beaver tag on objects of poor quality had detrimental effects. For the authors, this helped explain the proliferation of alternative tags of authenticity despite the advantages they saw in a nationally recognized tag.\(^{206}\)

One of the challenges that remained was that the market included different tiers of products that each warranted different technologies and modes of production (and might be identified via the different colours of the Beaver tags), but would still be seen to compete with one another – not to mention the ever present competition of products not made by Aboriginal people. For example, the 1978 market survey reported that, in the field of pottery, “competition is provided by mass produced [items] such as the Blue Mountain line which uses Indian designs on volume produced plates, bowls, etc.”\(^{207}\) Noting that many purchasers were “unable to distinguish between the two types,”\(^{208}\) the report went on to suggest that one way to counter such competition


\(^{204}\) Ibid., 52.

\(^{205}\) Woods, Gordon & Co., *NIACC National Marketing Service. Phase I Market Survey*, 30. The same report noted that “wholesalers who want to carry lines of Indian products are now looking to Hong Kong and Taiwan for supplies of imitation products (although, without exception, they say they would prefer to buy in Canada if they could find a supplier who could deliver large enough quantities, at the right price)”. Ibid., 33.


\(^{207}\) Ibid., 19.

\(^{208}\) Ibid.
would be for Aboriginal producers to engage in “volume production using Indian designs” – remarking that this would however not be of any help to the market for “hand crafted Indian pottery”. 209 The report ultimately suggested that, in order for the market for “Indian arts and crafts” to reach its potential “new and efficient producing units” would be required. 210 Such production could be focused on the development of new products that “would give the producer better margins than current products and could be produced in high quantities”, 211 and which could easily be distributed through existing private wholesalers. 212

Similarly, the 1978 report on the CIMS also mentioned the idea that “factory type production” might be a useful approach for the development of the market, if coordinated and organized by a centralized system such as the CIMS. 213 Yet another 1978 report, commissioned by NIACC and focused on marketing strategies for “Indian Arts and Crafts” suggested that producers wishing to focus more on commercial viability than cultural value consider organizing themselves “for the machine-made market”. 214 This report argued that – at the scale of communities – the sale of “machine-made crafts” and “souvenirs” would generate greater economic returns than the sale of “hand-made handicrafts”, and much greater than the sale of “art”. 215 According to the authors of this report, the market for machine-made items had the “greatest growth potential”, 216 but also the greatest competition from “countries with low labour rates and/or highly productive workers”. 217 Consequently, it was advised that “in the long run… even more mechanization will be required if Indian semi-crafts are to remain competitive”. 218

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209 Ibid.
210 Ibid., 51. The report estimated a national growth from an estimated $15-20 million of retail sales to $30 million.
211 Ibid., 58.
212 Likely in relation to this suggestion, the NIACC published a handbook for producers providing “production flow” instructions for the “day-to-day, step-by-step operations required to complete articles for the market”, including Cowichan sweaters and miniature cedar totems. NIACC, “NIACC Production and Training Handbook,” n.d., MG 30 D 387 - Modest Cmoc fonds [NIACC] Volume 9, File 6, Library and Archives Canada. Producers were also encouraged to compare their processes to those suggested in the manual to see if their “own production is as simple and efficient as it could be”. Ibid. In a Taylorist fashion, the handbook suggested producers “measure the way in which various tasks are performed and the time it takes to perform these tasks” (stop watch and clipboard in hand), so as to ensure that “human and material resources are used in the best way to accomplish the desired goals – more money for producers and more products”. Ibid.
214 Bureau of Management Consulting, Approaches to Marketing Strategies for Indian Arts and Crafts, xii.
215 Ibid., 6. It is interesting to note that the “souvenirs” and “machine-made crafts” were not originally within the scope of the commissioned report, but that the authors chose to include them, judging that this segment of the market “is substantial and not to be overlooked while developing options for the future”. Ibid., 38.
216 Bureau of Management Consulting, Approaches to Marketing Strategies for Indian Arts and Crafts, 18.
217 Ibid.
218 Ibid.
was also stated that consumers “tend to repeat their purchases of functional products, but not of souvenirs”\(^{219}\) and that, if such functional products were to be developed, “the potential markets… would be significantly larger and offer great opportunities”.\(^{220}\) Finally, the report mentioned the possibility of making design files available to “Interior design consultants and architects” who would “be encouraged to use Indian art in homes and offices”.\(^{221}\)

At the same time as the adoption of new modes of production were gaining support, there is evidence that efforts were also being made to maintain handmade items apart from machine-made items. For instance, it was suggested that the CIMS “develop an action plan to get out of the souvenir market” and instead perhaps transfer “production of such products to someone else, perhaps retaining design control or taking back some royalty payments”\(^{222}\) – a suggestion that is reminiscent of what artists and artware companies currently do. To give another example, on the one hand, the 1978 market survey report encouraged the development of new machine-made products to be made in large unlimited series, including by “arranging for use of Indian motifs, designs, etc. by other Canadian craftsmen and manufacturers”; on the other hand, however, the same report also mentioned the need for a national promotional program that would help consumers “differentiate clearly between arts and crafts, and manufactured gifts and souvenirs”.\(^{223}\)

All of the above suggestions not only echo and actualize the ideas expressed by Smith, Raley, Ravenhill, and Neel in previous decades, but also foreshadow some of the developments that have led to the current configuration of the Aboriginal art and artware market, i.e. artists creating designs and companies reproducing them on an ever-increasing number and types of objects, as well as a more liberal use of technologies of mass-production. Also, industry participants have continued pursuing efforts to protect the market from “outside” competition and

\(^{219}\) Ibid., 17. A similar suggestion was also made for souvenirs, with the idea that adding a “utilitarian aspect” to “Indian-made souvenirs” would “offer a plus factor”. The example provided was that of a “headband that could be used in sports”. Ibid., 43.

\(^{220}\) Bureau of Management Consulting, *Approaches to Marketing Strategies for Indian Arts and Crafts*, 18. This idea was illustrated with the example of “moccasins developed as functional footwear and/or as accessories to sophisticated wardrobes”. Ibid. The report also included the suggestion that “successful artists’ designs” be applied to “everyday items” – using as a (somewhat surprising) example “Bill Reid designs on moccasins”. Ibid., 124.

\(^{222}\) Ibid., 125.

uphold certain standards, including the maintenance of “art” at a distance from other works (such as “crafts”, “gifts”, and “souvenirs”) despite the absence of clear boundaries between their various markets (see Chapter 1 and Chapter 6).

2.2.3 The market post-1982 Constitution Act: Aboriginalizing the industry

In early 1982, after more than four decades of existence, the page was turned on Ravenhill’s and her followers’ B.C Indian Arts Society (the word “Welfare” having been dropped from the Society’s name in 1972). On March 1st, during what appears to be the Society’s last executive meeting, two primary points were discussed. The first point was the Society’s express support of “the entrenchment of aboriginal rights” in what would become the Constitutional Act of 1982. The second point was the members’ decision to “terminate the Society as such, due to lack of interest and attendance at meetings, and the diminishing needs of the native people for our assistance”. Although it is unlikely that the termination of the Society was intentionally scheduled to coincide with the 1982 Constitution Act, it is also not merely coincidental that such a Society, with its unmistakeably philanthropic and paternalistic flavour, would question its relevance in the face of Section 35, which affirmed pre-existing Aboriginal rights and title and announced (but did not in fact guarantee) drastic changes in the treatment of Aboriginal affairs by Canada’s federal government. This period saw an exponential growth of the polymorphous movement of reclamation that had already begun to develop since the early decades of the century, whereby Aboriginal peoples attempted to exercise these pre-existent but newly acknowledged rights. They did this most manifestly through participation – or refusal thereof – in land treaty processes (initiated province-wide in British Columbia in 1993), the repatriation of cultural belongings, both physical and figurative, and an increasing pressure to protect Aboriginal cultural heritage from appropriation. It is in this social and political climate that the production of Native Northwest Coast artware began to increase exponentially, continuing to

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224 B.C. Indian Arts Society, *Executive Meeting March 1 1982*, March 1982, MS 2720 - Parker, G. Macrina. File 3, B.C. Archives. The Constitution Act of 1982 is the act through which the Constitution was patriated to Canada from the United Kingdom. The process included the inscription of amendments to the Constitution, including the addition of Section 35 in which Aboriginal and treaty rights in Canada are affirmed.
225 Ibid.
227 Kramer, *Switchbacks*.
raise questions about how to protect Aboriginal art from misuse, the extent to which technologies of mass-production could be used, and how to increase the levels of involvement of and returns for Aboriginal participants.

Contrary to the Society, the Aboriginal-run NIACC remained in activity in the 1980s, and even considered its activities more relevant than ever. In a 1985 report, it stated that:

Native communities have been particularly affected by the recession and high unemployment. An increasing number of Native skilled and semi-skilled workers, artists and craftspeople are turning to the arts and crafts sector for viable economic and employment opportunities.\(^{229}\)

In the same report, it was argued that “High unemployment in Native communities places a responsibility on NIACC... to provide community program support services and related opportunities via their arts and crafts programs”.\(^{230}\) In other words, according to the NIACC, by the mid-1980s the arts and crafts industry’s relevance for economic development was seen as increasing, rather than diminishing.

This idea had been clearly expressed in 1983 to the Standing Committee on Indian Affairs and Northern Development by Adélard Cayer, a consultant who had been hired by Indian Affairs to review the management by the NIACC of the Indian Arts and Crafts Program between 1981 and 1982.\(^{231}\) Describing the sector as “rather unique”, Cayer indeed stated that “the Indian arts and crafts program was the only economic activity undertaken by people on reserve right across this country”; that “it was really the only economic development activity that had links going back to Indian culture”; and that “it was one of the few economic activities that otherwise unemployable Indian populations in isolated communities could, in fact, get involved in”.\(^{232}\) Following from this, Cayer’s report encouraged the NIACC to maintain its primary goal of

\(^{229}\) NIACC, *Operational Plan and Budget 1985/86 National Indian Arts and Crafts Corporation*, 2.

\(^{230}\) Ibid., 3. It also remarked that “the accelerated migration of Native people to urban centres in search of employment has created a need for NIACC and its Regional Offices to co-operate with other Native organizations (for example, Friendship Centres) in providing arts and crafts programs leading to employment opportunity”. Ibid.


“maximiz[ing] the socio-economic impact of the arts and crafts sector on Canadian Aboriginals”.

In this context, the need for protection continued to be felt. One of the long-term goals of the NIACC identified for the 1985-1990 period was thus to develop “a comprehensive, media-based public awareness campaign to educate consumers regarding how to distinguish between authentic and imitation Indian arts and crafts”.

In preparation for this, the NIACC proposed to conduct thorough market research in order to determine the most appropriate avenues for such legal protection. The authors of the proposal to fund this research argued that, since the government-commissioned report of 1966 almost two decades earlier (see above), the situation regarding imitations “remain[d] largely unchanged and continue[d] to debilitate the development of the Canadian Native arts and crafts industry”. According to them, in the absence of any legal obligation to label goods, “small, mass-produced, totem poles can flood the Canadian market without any visible sign indicating whether or not they are authentic”. For them, it would only be through legal means that “Native Indian artists and craftspeople” could be afforded protection “from the opportunists who intrude upon their rightful market and heritage for financial gains”.

The funding proposal was approved by the Board of Directors of the NIACC on January 8, 1985, but a letter from the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, David Crombie suggests that the government refused to provide the funding requested to research such legal means of protection. In this letter, Crombie encouraged the NIACC to simply use a “trademark campaign to certify authentic Indian arts and crafts” and use already existing legislation to protect them “against copyright and other infringements”. This approach was clearly felt to be insufficient, as ten years later, artists participating in the Aboriginal Artist Project were still

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234 NIACC, Operational Plan and Budget 1985/86 National Indian Arts and Crafts Corporation.
236 Ibid., 3.
237 Ibid.
239 The Aboriginal Artists Project is described as “a cooperative effort between B.C. aboriginal artists, aboriginal organizations, representatives of the industry, B.C. Trade Development Corporation, and the Ministry of Small Business, Tourism and Culture”. It sought to “encourage ongoing dialogue amongst industry participants”, which
enunciating deep concerns about the “growing number of cheaper, imitation [A]boriginal art”. 240 Whether the number of these imitations was indeed still growing or had continued to circulate on the market with such troubling persistence so as to give this impression, these artists felt that these imitations negatively impacted their ability to participate in various international markets, including the “gift market” and the “tourism market”. 241 Yet again, the need for “public and buyer education” was asserted, as was the idea that “market opportunities for the industry had not yet been fully explored”. 242

In its recommendations to support the development of Aboriginal businesses as part of a strategy for “economic development”, the 1996 Report on the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples listed three examples of “niche markets” believed to be worth promoting and pursuing on the specific basis that Aboriginal people had “a competitive advantage arising from factors such as land claims settlements, the location and natural resources of communities, jurisdictional advantages, and cultural understanding and values”. 243 The examples of such “niche markets” it provided were a) “eco-tourism”, b) “clothing designed and made by Aboriginal people”, and c) “Aboriginal arts and entertainment” 244 – three fields that are related to the Aboriginal art and artware market. Also, the report encouraged the creation of a “Buy Aboriginal” marketing strategy to identify and advertise “products made by Aboriginal companies and entrepreneurs”, 245 thereby emulating federal “Buy Canadian” programs that use red maple leaf tags to encourage the purchase of Canadian-made products (see Chapter 3). As far as I am aware, such a federal “Buy Aboriginal” program was not put in place, which seems to indicate that this idea – as most other recommendations of the Royal Commission 246 – did not come to fruition.

As will transpire in the remainder of this dissertation, both hopes for the development of the Aboriginal art and artware market and concerns about this market’s protection persist to this day, and a number of organizations continue to seek ways to address them at various scales. Two of

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240 Ibid., 13.
241 Ibid., 14.
242 Ibid., 6.
244 Ibid.
245 Ibid.
246 Alan Cairns, Citizens Plus: Aboriginal Peoples and the Canadian State (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2000); Miller, Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens, 384–389; Lutz, Makuk, 298.
the most recent examples that are local to Vancouver are the Siyamin Artist Cooperative and the “Authentic Aboriginal” program of the Aboriginal Tourism Association of British Columbia (AtBC).

Created in 2009, the Siyamin Artist Cooperative has a kiosk at the North Vancouver Park Royal Mall, on leased Squamish reserve land, and seeks to “provide a cooperative structure for Squamish Nation artists to sell their authentic art, crafts and services at fair market value in a respectful way”. It is considered a means “to foster the self-reliance of the Squamish People by celebrating [their] distinct traditional culture”, to be operated in the context of one specific nation. The “Authentic Aboriginal” program, conceived for a more provincial scale, was launched in 2010 by the Aboriginal Tourism Association of British Columbia (AtBC). Initially designed to certify tourism experiences provided by Aboriginal companies, this Aboriginal-run organization is now in the process of establishing a program for Aboriginal cultural products as well. This “Authentic Aboriginal Artisan Program” is framed as a “response to the serious concerns of Aboriginal artists about the issue of Authenticity in the Aboriginal art market”. Its aim is to protect “the integrity of [Aboriginal] artworks while ensuring the resources from the sales find their way largely back to where pieces originated from, [Aboriginal] people and [Aboriginal] communities”. AtBC’s hope is that a multi-tiered system of certification will help “redirect millions of dollars of much needed funds back to our people and communities, while protecting the integrity of our artworks and therefore our culture”.

Although it is too early to say exactly how these initiatives and others like them will affect the market in the long run, their existence clearly shows that questions very similar to those posed over the several last decades continue to animate the Native Northwest Coast art and artware industry of the early 21st century. It is to these questions – as shaped by this history and as they are currently being posed and addressed – that the remainder of this dissertation is dedicated.

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249 Ibid.
251 Ibid.
Coda

In sum, the archival material I have examined tells the story of Aboriginal art and artware being framed as a resource with great potential that is neither exploited nor protected enough. Although the association of exploitation with protection may seem paradoxical, what transpires in the history I have presented in this chapter, as well as in what I will describe about the contemporary market in the rest of this dissertation, is that they can be two sides of the same coin. Throughout this chapter I have described efforts to develop the Aboriginal art market that were accompanied by initiatives, more or less successful, to preserve this market from abuses.

Over the course of the last century, the most striking change in discourses about this issue has been an increasing emphasis on the interests of Aboriginal stakeholders (increasingly conceived as distinct from those of the State over the decades), as well as on the importance of Aboriginal involvement and leadership in this market, both in its expansion and in the creation of protective barriers. Such shifts are for instance illustrated by the succession of different labelling programs developed by organizations promoting the expansion of the market, such as the Society tag (designed and utilized by a non-Aboriginal organization), the Beaver tag (designed and utilized by the government and its Aboriginal-run affiliates), and AtBC’s Authentic Aboriginal tag (designed and to be managed by an Aboriginal organization).

Another noticeable change has been a transfer in emphasis from the need for development to the need of protection, with a shift towards more balance between the two. For instance, in the very early twentieth century, Harlan Smith said little about the need to protect Aboriginal designs from appropriative practices, and even encouraged their use by non-Aboriginal manufacturers in the name of the Canadian nation’s interest. In the mid-twentieth century, when Ravenhill and the Society were promoting the market’s development, they did the same but were also growing more conscious of the adverse effects such outside uses could have, as illustrated by the hesitation to send designs to a company that would produce products in direct competition with Cowichan sweaters (see above). By the mid-1980s, an organization like the NIACC continued to promote the development of the market, considering options for the use of designs in factory-made products, but also made protective legal measures one of its primary goals.

As I will further explain in Chapter 8, there are parallels between this shift in emphasis from “development” to “protection” and the increase in public support for the idea of “sustainable” natural resource extraction (i.e. striking a balance between use and preservation).
this respect, the link between resource extraction and Aboriginal art is more direct than it may appear. For instance, it is important to note that the field of Northwest Coast art has long had a relationship with resource extraction companies. To give but one example, the timber companies that make the region “as beautiful only as devastation is – as beautiful as a battlefield” occasionally also donate logs to artists. As Jonathan Meuli has remarked, this relationship is not necessarily regarded as compromising insofar as resource extraction has also been an important source of employment for Aboriginal people, including artists, as illustrated in this chapter. Thus, Meuli remarks that, “Most, if not all principal Native creators, commissioners and users of Northwest Coast art objects were employed for considerable periods in the fishing industry,” thereby demonstrating that industrial life and art-making are much more intertwined than is usually realized. This is even more evident when focusing on the relationship between Northwest Coast art and the availability of raw materials. For instance, Snuneymuxw lawyer Douglas White has commented on the critically important role played by access to Aboriginal territories and resources in the creation of Northwest Coast art. “How can a drum be made, if there is no access to deer?” he asks.

Ironically, it is both the exploitation of natural resources and its protection that have reduced this access over time. Perhaps even more ironically, some of the individuals promoting the protection of “nature” were also in part responsible for the production of Aboriginal-themed products in industrial quantities. This is made evident by the work of historian Michael Dawson about the rise of tourism in British Columbia between the late 19th century and the mid 20th century. He recounts how, at the turn of the 19th century when the Vancouver Tourism Association solicited items to exhibit in the association’s headquarter, it not only received mineral and agricultural specimens, but also a sample of material culture, including Aboriginal objects. Dawson sees the inclusion of Aboriginal material culture as “selling points” of British Columbia – among such commodities as mineral and agricultural products – as an early indication that “Native culture could eventually be appropriated as a natural resource and tourist attraction”.

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253 Ibid., 314.
254 White, “‘Where Mere Words Failed’: Northwest Coast Art and the Law.”
Especially initially, tourism promotion in British Columbia has tended to rely on the promotion of encounters with supposedly untamed and unpopulated natural landscapes, as had for example been illustrated in the nationalist works of the Group of Seven.\textsuperscript{256} Therefore, one of the agendas of the provincial government’s 1945 Tourism Camp Act, which sought to protect the interests of the tourism industry, was to preserve the region’s natural resources to the benefit of public, rather than private use.\textsuperscript{257} Such “preservation” included the creation of protected parks and would greatly affect Aboriginal peoples’ access to their territories and associated resources – which would, as White points out, also greatly affect art production.\textsuperscript{258} Dawson shows how, in the first half of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, tourism promoters were indeed clearly much less concerned with the fate of Aboriginal peoples than with the conservation of BC’s “natural resources”.\textsuperscript{259} At the time, tourism increasingly came to be seen as incompatible with other industries, such as forestry and manufacturing. Simultaneously, Aboriginal peoples were finding employment in the primary industries, but symbols of Aboriginality were being used in association with depictions of the “great outdoors” in touristic promotional materials. Thus, by the 1960s, “Native culture was... eagerly employed to boost souvenir sales”,\textsuperscript{260} but the tourism industry was no more of an employer of Aboriginal individuals than it had been before.\textsuperscript{261}

The treatment of Indigenous arts and cultures as resources, in particular in the tourism industry, is of course not confined to the Pacific Northwest. In 1977, anthropologist Davydd J. Greenwood wrote about how tourism was an industry dedicated to selling culture “by the pound”, arguing that it treats culture as a “natural resource” transformed into a “service” offered to anyone able to pay.\textsuperscript{262} Greenwood also explained that the literature on tourism “generally points out that tourism provides a considerable stimulus to the local and national economy”, failing to

\textsuperscript{256} Mackey, \textit{The House of Difference}, 53–58.
\textsuperscript{257} Dawson, \textit{Selling British Columbia}, 134.
\textsuperscript{258} Even in urban areas, the creation of parks intended for public and touristic use resulted in the displacement of the areas’ Aboriginal inhabitants, including from what had been set aside for them as reserve land. Mawani, “Genealogies of the Land”; Barman, “Erasing Indigenous Indigeneity in Vancouver”; Stanger-Ross, “Municipal Colonialism in Vancouver.”.
\textsuperscript{259} Dawson, \textit{Selling British Columbia}, 136.
\textsuperscript{260} Ibid., 165.
\textsuperscript{261} Vancouver would also become known as “Totem Land”, a title promoted by a society of the same name that claimed one of its goals was to “Foster and Protect Indian arts” but seemed to primarily encourage the use of Aboriginal imagery for the purpose of distinguishing the region from the rest of the world. Ibid., 166–175.
note that “it also results in an increasingly unequal distribution of wealth”. Thus, for Greenwood to treat such things as “culture” as a “natural resource” that can be commodified would be yet another example of unjust capitalist exploitation, and even a “violation of peoples’ cultural rights”. Such an argument resonates with many of the objections currently being made to the commodification of Aboriginal culture, including in the form of artware (see Chapter 5 and Chapter 8). However, it is important to note that Greenwood was speaking about commodification that is conducted without the consent of those whose culture is being commodified. This is evidently not the case of all commodification processes, as the existence of AtBC and other Aboriginal tourism ventures suggest. Still, some commentators remain skeptical of the idea that marketing cultural identity and cultural products can be a sustainable means of generating income. This stance is for instance illustrated by anthropologists Jean and John Comaroff, and what they describe as an “all too concrete reality”:

In many desperately poor parts of the world, the attenuation of other modes of producing incomes has left the sale of cultural products, and of the simulacra of ethnicized selfhood, one of the only viable means of survival. Whether or not this is turned, imaginatively, into an act of positive choice, into a positive assertion of identity – let alone into a sustainable basis of communal life – is another matter entirely.

For the Comaroffs, the advent of such sustainability would merely be a matter of “historical contingency”. However, in consideration of the archival material I have reviewed above, I would argue that this remark only applies in a very relative manner to the Native Northwest Coast art and artware market. As I have endeavoured to show in this chapter, it is undeniable that some of the issues that were identified decades ago about the Aboriginal art and artware market remain the objects of concerns today. This would seem to indicate that their resolution is possible, but not certain. However, perhaps even more notable than the persistence of these concerns is the remarkable resilience with which hope has been placed in this market and in its improvement to the benefit of Aboriginal peoples. In fact, this is one of the major themes of the present dissertation. To me, this resilience indicates that, if this market ever does become “a

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263 Ibid., 129.
264 Ibid., 137.
266 Ethnicity, Inc., 139.
267 Ibid.
sustainable basis of communal life” it would be rather surprising if it were not due to deliberate efforts expended to this end, rather than merely the result of chance.
Figure 5: Large country-of-origin sticker.

Posted outside the Canamade market that was held in Gastown during the Vancouver 2010 Olympics.

Photo by the author, February 25, 2010.
Wrapping the ‘Over There and Everywhere’ in the ‘Right Here and Nowhere Else’: The Native Northwest Coast Artware Commodityscape

Compared to other household and fashion goods, the specificity of Native Northwest Coast artware is that it capitalizes on the singularization of wares through the reproduction of Aboriginal designs on their surface. Without this transformation, these products would be indistinguishable from other mugs, t-shirts, blankets, and other objects of everyday life. Given the quasi inexistence of factories based locally that produce plain wares of this kind various processes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization¹ have been shaping in the industry, entangling the marketing appeal of local singularity with the economic advantage of delocalized production. In part due to delocalization, even though the industrialization of Northwest Coast art was initially promoted as a means to increase economic prosperity among Aboriginal peoples (see Chapter 2), this industry has in effect become a sector characterized by a heavy involvement of non-Aboriginal businesses that rely on relationships with a small number of Aboriginal individuals on the one hand, and on its involvement with global commodityscapes, on the other.

That said, as I will show in this chapter, Aboriginal stakeholders are slowly but surely becoming more involved in the industry, in some cases pushing against and in others actively shaping commodityscapes that link the Pacific Northwest to other regions of the world. In this context, there exist some means of control against the unauthorized circulation of Aboriginal designs and other references to Aboriginal cultures in the form of artware, such as face-to-face interaction, carefully built relationships of trust, contractual clauses, or pressures exerted via interpersonal networks. However, these are not enough to substantially appease the various concerns surrounding the commodification of Northwest Coast art, whether instigated locally, globally, in domestic or international contexts, by non-Aboriginal or Aboriginal companies. I argue that the tension between aspirations to expand the market and desires for its protection has, among other things, tended to result in the necessary passage of Northwest Coast artware through the Pacific Northwest. This passage represents a moment of relocalization in which often translocally produced artware is within reach of being lassoed, more or less tightly, to the

¹ Appadurai, Modernity at Large, A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).
territories it references. It is primarily from these localities of the Pacific Northwest that the aforementioned forms of control are being exercised, so that artware produced elsewhere precisely to ease a wider circulation ‘over there and everywhere’ continues to be recognized as indexing the ‘right here and nowhere else’. This chapter examines the connections between the local hub of the Pacific Northwest and the global economy, and discusses the perspectives of industry participants on these global connections, ranging from serious concern to cautious enthusiasm.

According to William Roseberry, anthropology’s major contribution to the study of political economies has been its acknowledgement of the theoretical and methodological tension that exists between the determination of capitalism and the ‘cultural freedom’ of anthropological subjects. Roseberry believes that it is this tension that “defines anthropological political economy, its preoccupations, projects, and promise”. Following Immanuel Wallerstein’s highly influential ‘World-systems’ theory, political economy has tended to stress the impact of the ‘core’ on the ‘periphery’; in contrast, anthropologists such as Eric Wolf and Sydney Mintz have insisted on examining the intersections of global and local histories and the production of communities over “centuries of social, political, economic and cultural processes” including, but not limited to, a larger history of “colonialism, empire-building, international trade, and state formation”. Writing against the idea that “the global expansion of Western capitalism... has made the colonized and ‘peripheral’ peoples the passive objects of their own history and not its authors”, Marshall Sahlins has also argued that “the World system is not a physics of proportionate relationships between economic ‘impacts’ and cultural ‘reactions.’ The specific effects of the global-material forces depend on the various ways they are mediated in local cultural schemes.” Although Wolf, Sydney, and Sahlins deployed this approach on historical

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2 “Over there and everywhere” and “right here and nowhere else” are not direct quotes from artware industry participants, but rather expressions that I use to evoke the two recurrent tropes of the ‘global’ and the ‘local’ in all of their over-stated force.
6 Roseberry, “Political Economy,” 163.
8 Ibid., 418.
examples, the importance of examining the local mediation of global processes has also informed much of the work conducted by anthropologists on contemporary questions of globalization.

For instance, as anthropologist Robert J. Foster has shown, people everywhere make “worldly thing[s] part of their world”, re-imagining Coca-Cola cans into soccer balls and candle holders, to take a popular example. The transformation operated by the Native Northwest Coast artware industry is slightly different in that it does not significantly alter the materiality or function of globally ubiquitous objects but rather places on their surface a visual indication of their passage through Aboriginal territories in the Pacific Northwest. The artware industry momentarily interrupts a flow of ‘worldly things’ such as mugs and t-shirts to stamp them with a distinct visual reference to the Pacific Northwest before putting them back into global circulation through hundreds of local retail outlets. Even when this process of branding occurs elsewhere and before the object’s arrival in the Pacific Northwest, only a very small proportion of these items will end up skipping the region it references prior to arriving in the hands of consumers.

Jean and John Comaroff write that the culture of neoliberalism “re-visions persons not as producers from a particular community, but as consumers in a planetary marketplace”. In this chapter, I will examine one of the important ways in which the Native Northwest Coast artware industry has been refracting neoliberal capitalism: the entwinement of its production with a planetary commodityscale, while its own marketplace has remained largely local – in something of an inversion of the statement made by the Comaroffs. I will also discuss how, if given the choice, a number of those involved in the industry (its Aboriginal stakeholders in particular) would prefer that it were the contrary – that production could remain local, and consumption would become more global – so that expanding the market would not be done at the expense of taking the risk to lose all local control over it.

As discussed by Foster, for a time now researchers have been tracing ‘the movement of everyday things through diverse contexts and phases of circulation” often with the “aim of demonstrating how such movement links geographically separate locales.” Such work has helped demonstrate that “the meaning of things shifts as a function of use by human agents in

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11 Foster, “Tracking Globalization: Commodities and Value in Motion,” 285.
different social situations”. In order to reflect this, instead of linear commodity chains, Foster proposes the concept of the “commodityscape” to envision the production, circulation, and consumption of commodities not as a neatly orchestrated and ordered chain of events, but as nonlinear shifts in value that trace the movements of commodities through the nodes of complex and unfixed networks. Although Appadurai, unlike Deleuze and Guattari, did not explicitly couple deterritorialization with its mirror of reterritorialization, he does examine the “nature of locality” and its “production” in the context of a “globalized, deterritorialized world”. Similarly, I examine the relationship between the existence of global commoditescapes and the deterritorialization of production on the one hand, and processes through which locality is reasserted and consumption reterritorialized, on the other.

Extending Howard Becker’s view of art-making as a collective rather than an individual activity, I have sought to make my analysis encompass not just the work that is accomplished in Vancouver by Aboriginal artists, but also their relationships with artware companies, as well as these companies’ relationships with those who manufacture the plain wares on which their artworks are reproduced. It is likely that many workers involved in the former production “neither intend to cooperate in the production of [Northwest Coast artware] nor know that they are doing so”. However, ignoring their work on the basis of the absence of intentionality or awareness would be to fail to acknowledge the realities of most contemporary commoditescapes, thereby naturalizing the distance that capitalist organizations of labour establish between wage labourers and the product of their work. Arguably, the internationalization of market forces has “put such distance between sites of production and consumption that their articulation becomes all but unfathomable, save in fantasy”. This has led to what Arjun Appadurai, revisiting Marx, has called “production fetishism” whereby “locality” serves to disguise the global forces that now orchestrate production, therefore sustaining the illusion that production still takes ‘place’ in

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12 Ibid.
13 As discussed in Chapter 1, Foster coined the term “commodityscape” after Arjun Appadurai’s use of the suffix “-scape” to signal the fluidity and irregularity of global cultural flows in what Appadurai considers to be an increasingly deterritorialized world. See Appadurai, Modernity at Large, 33–38.
14 Foster, “Tracking Globalization: Commodities and Value in Motion,” 289.
15 Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus.
16 Appadurai, Modernity at Large, 52; 178–199.
17 Becker, Art Worlds.
18 Ibid., 37.
20 Comaroff and Comaroff, Millennial Capitalism and the Culture of Neoliberalism, 9.
particular sites rather than across transnational networks.\textsuperscript{21} And indeed, in the Northwest Coast artware industry, a similar disjunction to the one that often separates producers and consumers also separates different groups of producers – most notably, the workers who manufacture the plain wares, on the one hand, and the Aboriginal artists who design the artwork that is reproduced on these wares, on the other. Unfortunately, my fieldwork in Vancouver does not enable me to speak to the experience of factory workers,\textsuperscript{22} but it is clear that the artists I spoke to are well aware of the global connections of the industry. Some worry about finding ways to keep these connections to a minimum, but others are anxious to harness them to their advantage. Also, some try to downplay these connections (thus feeding into the production fetishism described by Appadurai), but others are tired of having to apologize for these connections’ existence, eager to rid the field of Northwest Coast art and artware from what they consider to be unrealistic expectations of localization in the context of such a globalized economy.

Although this chapter is primarily dedicated to the Native Northwest Coast artware industry’s global connections, it is necessary to underline what is not so ‘global’ about this market, i.e. the sites where the artware is sold and purchased. Northwest Coast art is of course known well beyond the Pacific Northwest, but the market for Northwest Coast art and artware has remained largely local, concentrated along the coast of Alaska, British Columbia, Washington State, and Oregon. The hundreds of thousands of objects that missionaries, Indian Agents, researchers, and others took, received, or purchased when they came to the Pacific Northwest over the course of three centuries have fed prominent collections of Northwest Coast material culture in Europe and North America. Where these collections are kept and displayed, one is never far from a store that sells Northwest Coast artware. However, outside of the Pacific Northwest, such artware can be found almost exclusively in the retail stores of those museums and other cultural institutions that have important Northwest Coast collections and exhibitions – the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington D.C. and New York, the American

\textsuperscript{21} Appadurai, \textit{Modernity at Large}, 42.
\textsuperscript{22} I had initially hoped to dedicate a portion of my fieldwork to tracing the commoditiescape of one or two items of artware, physically “following the object” from the extraction of the raw materials that are used to make it, to the product as it is consumed by its buyer. My hope was that such an ethnography would help me trace along human experience what Appadurai calls “disjunctures” between the various “scapes” of global cultural flows. However, there turned out to be already so much to do simply to understand the organization and implications of the industry in Vancouver that I decided to adjust my project to more spatially modest ambitions. Still, if I was unable to physically follow threads of the commoditiescape of Native Northwest Coast artware, I have let the idea of these complex networks and circuits inform my analysis.
Museum of Natural History in New York, the Fenimore Art Museum in Cooperstown, the National Gallery of Canada and the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Ottawa, or the McCord Museum in Montreal, to name a few examples. However, apart from these very precise locations that function figuratively as ‘satellites’ of the Pacific Northwest, the market for Native Northwest Coast artware has a minimal presence east of the Pacific Coast Range.

When the Northwest Coast art market is presented with pride as “international”, it is in reference to individual international buyers (a good number of them from the US), specific commissions ordered by or for government representatives and institutions (often for explicit or implicit diplomatic purposes), individual artists presenting in biennales, and sales held by international auction houses (mostly focused on historical pieces). Although their combination effectively amounts to the existence of an international market, my understanding is that there is currently little in the way of a global network of galleries specializing in Northwest Coast, beyond North America. This is even truer of artware, which may have some international buyers (i.e. those yielded by global tourism) but has a very limited international market with respect to sales occurring outside of the Pacific Northwest.

When I asked the owner of one of the major artware companies where he sold his products outside of Canada, he responded that, apart from the United States, barely anywhere at all, adding that even as close as Seattle the market was significantly more limited than in Vancouver. He did distribute his products outside of the Pacific Northwest, on the East Coast of Canada and the United States, and in the Southwest of the United States, but even there, the interest existed in select cities, in a few venues each. In his experience, the market in Europe was practically nonexistent. This was confirmed to me by the sales manager of another company, who said that “when it comes to West Coast First Nations designs, we find it difficult to distribute them in Toronto or even in Alberta. ... I don’t mean that we don’t sell anything at all, we do... but not on a scale to talk about.” A sales representative I met at a trade show made a similar comment, explaining that Northwest Coast designs are a “real hit” in Vancouver, but “drop off the map”, so to speak, as soon as one reaches Kelowna. “Tourists love them on the Coast,” she said “but the flocks of tourists that go to Osoyoos don’t care for them.” A retailer in charge of buying for a store in North Vancouver and a store in Banff also explained that, in the Rockies, she found that the interest for Native art was minimal, with buyers looking instead for designs on the theme of “the outdoors, a bear, a moose, etc”. When I asked about future developments in the industry,
none of these individuals foresaw any radical geographical expansion of the popularity of their Northwest Coast-themed products.\textsuperscript{23}

It may not seem particularly surprising that the geographic contours of the market for Northwest Coast artware follow quite closely those of the Pacific Northwest, since that is the region that its imagery references: whatever the figure, symbol, or abstract design, the style in which it is executed comes from this region’s territories. However, the maintenance of such a relationship to territory is not true of all regional art styles: there are many examples of markets for imagery originating from other regions around the world that have been deterritorialized to a much wider extent. To take but one example, Paul Stoller has shown that there is a vibrant market for ‘African textiles’ in New York city, made possible by transnational networks that link African American consumers to West African vendors, who themselves deal with Korean and Chinese wholesalers who in turn source their product from Chinese factories.\textsuperscript{24} The Northwest Coast artware industry also exhibits a certain level of transnationalism at the level of its production. However, with the notable exception of the ubiquitous form of the totem pole that has been borrowed from the Northwest Coast by producers around the world, often to re-create it in a different style,\textsuperscript{25} Northwest Coast art has largely retained its association with cultural and geographic affiliations. Retaining more culturally and regionally distinct reference points, this art has not become generically “exotic”, at least not to the degree that products like “African-style textiles” have. In addition, the Native Northwest Coast artware industry has not relied on a diasporic network of Pacific Northwest peoples or otherwise affiliated groups to enable a global circulation and consumption of Northwest Coast products. In fact, during my fieldwork I did not hear anyone comment on the existence of such a diaspora. Companies distribute their merchandise through relatively small networks of sales representatives and distributors, following a much different model than the less formal, and sometimes illegal, circuits of trade described by Stoller that make African-style textiles land on the streets of New York to be sold to African American consumers. This sharp contrast shows that the deterritorialization of the production of

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item However, some hoped to see a little “bump” in sales with the promise of increased global visibility for Aboriginal arts and British Columbia in the Olympic moment (a point to which I will return later in this chapter).
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goods, especially those that are marketed for their cultural and regional singularity, does not necessarily lead to a concomitant deterritorialization of their marketplace.

3.1 Northwest Coast Designs as “Domestic” Value Added on Plain Wares

In the ‘satellites’ of the Pacific Northwest and in the Pacific Northwest itself, Native Northwest Coast artware indexes the region it comes from, or to be more exact – the region where the artwork adorning it originates. The great majority of the wares on which these artworks are reproduced are indeed made in places very distant from the Pacific Northwest where the artware is purchased to take home to Sydney, Tokyo, or Paris, but also…Vancouver, Victoria, and other parts of British Columbia. Indeed, contrary to the common assumption that such products are only consumed by tourists, locals – non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal – represent a significant share of Native Northwest Coast artware consumers (see Chapter 1 and Chapter 6). Even by the time of artware items’ purchase, the plain wares “underneath” the designs usually remain associated, if with any place at all, with an elusive “China” or a general “overseas” or “off-shore,” the specificity of their place of production becoming relatively secondary to their association with the place to which the artwork refers. In this sense, the Native Northwest Coast artware industry wraps the “over there and everywhere” in a layer of “right here and nowhere else” – and hopes that it is the latter that will dominate consumers’ attention.

Still, some artware producers, distributors, and consumers struggle with this surface transformation of global commodities into manifestations of local cultural expression. Not so long ago, the biggest concern was that most Aboriginal-themed merchandise was produced without any involvement of Aboriginal people at all. Although such practices continue to worry industry participants, now that more and more companies do work with Aboriginal artists and several Aboriginal-owned companies have come into existence, new concerns are taking the center stage. The focus is now less on the origin of the designs that distinguish Native Northwest Coast artware, and more on the ubiquity of the wares on which this distinctiveness is made to circulate.

Today, most companies of the Native Northwest Coast artware industry import wares, and/or outsource a large proportion of the manufacturing process to other companies, which are more often than not based outside of Canada. Even if, as some Aboriginal artists do, one pays a company in Vancouver to print designs on t-shirts, for example, it is extremely likely that the t-
shirts themselves will have been made outside of Canada. Thus, when products are made locally, their producers and distributors make this fact known – not only to consumers, but also to researchers like myself. Artists will also often point out the fact that they have chosen to work with a company that manufactures goods in Canada. The fact that locally made items tend to be the exception heightens the stakes of being able to market products as such without being in contravention of the law, or seeming to be making false claims to this effect.

In Canada, three pieces of legislation directly pertain to the regulation of country-of-origin claims. First, the *Competition Act* (CA) prohibits the use of “materially false or misleading representation” for the purpose of promoting a product.26 Second, the *Consumer Packaging and Labelling Act* (CPLA) requires product labelling to provide “accurate and meaningful information” so that consumers can make informed decisions, and also prohibits false or misleading representations, including those related to the product’s country of origin.27 Third, the *Textile Labelling Act* (TLA) similarly prohibits “false or misleading” country of origin claims.28 Together, these laws currently regulate the use of two labels as follows: “Product of Canada,” which requires a minimum of 98% “Canadian content”; and “Made in Canada”, which requires a minimum of 51% “Canadian content” but should be “accompanied by a qualifying statement indicating that the product contains imported content”. In this context, the percentage of “Canadian content” is calculated on the basis of the percentage of the total price represented by Canadian goods and services involved in the production of a good. In addition, the Competition Bureau of Canada states that, for both “Made in Canada” and “Product of Canada” labels, “the last substantial transformation of the product must have occurred in Canada”.29 Moreover, the *Enforcement Guidelines* (written by the Competition Bureau of Canada to explain the application of the three acts) also state that the laws apply to pictorial representations that could be misinterpreted as meaning that a product has been made in Canada. However, the guidelines also note that the use of the expression “Designed in Canada” or any other expression that is unlikely to be understood as synonymous with “Made in Canada” or “Product of Canada” is not prohibited by the law, as long as the expression describes something that is true of the product in

27 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid.
question. For instance, the RBCM shop has created a label called “Classic BC” as part of its effort to signal that it was shifting away from the “heavy-heavy-heavy produced off shore” to try to better “reflect the BC experience”, as the shop manager put it. The label does not refer to a strict, legally defined category, but the store’s policy is to use it to signal products that are “original” and made in the Province, and not products that are simply distributed by a BC company.

3.1.1 Interpreting the localities of production

Considering the many nation-building discourses in which Aboriginal arts are portrayed as being part of Canadian culture (as was already reflected in Smith, Raley, and Ravenhill’s idea that Aboriginal designs are “distinctively Canadian” – see Chapter 2), ‘country of origin’ claims such as “Made in Canada” or “Product of Canada” – but also less strictly regulated labels such as “Designed in Canada” – can arguably help promote certain examples of Aboriginal artware as symbolically and materially superior to other Aboriginal-themed products. For this reason, companies are eager to seize opportunities to use such labels, sometimes organizing their circuits of production specifically to be able to do so – importing some raw or transformed materials but ensuring that the last substantive transformation occurs in Canada, and that the overall level of “Canadian content” meets the minimum requirements. But even when labels referencing Canada cannot legally be used, domestic legislation does not “require that the country of origin be identified”. For instance, a young woman who worked for a local company contracted to sandblast Aboriginal designs on ceramic mugs explained to me that she was instructed to take the small “Made in China” sticker off each mug before she did anything else. A sales representative told me about companies that take out “Made in China” labels to put their own labels, which they can do at a minimal cost. One of the problems he saw with this practice, even when it is not in contravention of the law, is that it puts the onus on the sales person to answer questions from consumers about where the product was made. However, since Canadian law does not require indications of country of origin, such practices of erasure are legal, as long as it does not modify the “general impression” created by the product and its packaging to mislead consumers into thinking that it was made in Canada. As cited in the Enforcement Guidelines:

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30 Ibid. The law differs slightly in the case of imported textiles and a few other specific cases.
A representation may be made by either express or implied claims. Depending on the context, pictorial representations (e.g., logos, pictures, or symbols such as the Canadian flag or maple leaf) may by themselves be just as forceful as an explicit “Made in Canada” written representation. Any text that attempts to qualify a pictorial representation must be sufficiently prominent to ensure that consumers notice it and understand the significance.\(^{31}\)

With this in mind, especially in cases where it is not unreasonable to believe that the wares (on which Northwest Coast designs were later reproduced) could have been produced in Canada, the legal requirement to guard consumers against misinterpretation (e.g. inferences made about country of origin based on the reading of an Aboriginal design as a symbol ‘of Canada’) would arguably require explicit indications of the actual country of origin. As Salish language artist Bonny Graham-Krulicki who works with local paper companies remarked: given that there is a strong paper industry in Canada. “Can [consumers] differentiate [my work] from the card that has been produced in China and yet has an Aboriginal design on it?” Pewter jewellery is another case in point. There exist at least two companies that reproduce Northwest Coast designs on cast pewter jewellery in the Greater Vancouver area. It would therefore not be surprising for a consumer to imagine that similar Northwest Coast pewter jewellery was made in Canada in cases where it is not, this even in the absence of an explicit claim to that effect.

Even in the case of cotton t-shirts, which tend not to have been produced in Canada, risks of confusion are possible. On several occasions during the Vancouver 2010 Olympics I visited the “Canamade Winter Market” that was set up in Gastown on Cordova Street, on a private initiative independent of VANOC. At a time when the controversy around the country of origin of the official Olympic merchandise was raging (see Chapter 4), the market boasted “I Am Made in Canada” on large white stickers stamped with a red maple leaf. As reported on *Straight.com*, the organizer of Canamade wanted…

\(^{31}\) Ibid.
…out-of-town visitors to see more than just Olympics-sanctioned, five-ring-emblazoned fashion and art. She wants them to see, meet, and buy from genuine Canadian artisants who handcraft pieces on their home turf without the aid of overseas factories or multinational marketing campaigns.³²

Inside, Aboriginal art had a noticeable presence in the market, with two rooms specifically reserved to Aboriginal artists, in addition to a few other booths that also sold Aboriginal-themed items. In other parts of the market, several booths sold t-shirts and other clothing items decorated with designs that were clever riffs on common representations of Canadian identity. For instance, one fashion designer was proposing American Apparel brand t-shirts printed with ironic caricatures of Canadiana iconography, such as images of moose, curling stones, snow shoes, and Mounties. In another display, one particular item caught my attention: a white t-shirt emblazoned with a red maple leaf designed in formline style, as well as the words “2010”, “Vancouver”, “British Columbia”, and “Canada”. This t-shirt caught my attention for several reasons. First, it was clear to me that its designer was thumbing her or his nose at the Olympic and Paralympic Marks Act. Voted into law in 2007, it strictly regulated the use in commercial context of certain expressions like “Vancouver 2010” and “Canada 2010”, as well as the association of words like “2010” and “Vancouver” (this, until December 30, 2010). Second, what caught my attention was how this assemblage of, on the one hand, references to the Canadian nation and, on the other, Northwest Coast design elements –especially in the context of a market like Canamade – showed consumers that it was possible to find Northwest Coast t-shirts for which made-in-Canada claims are put forward by their producers.

This t-shirt challenged a personal inclination to assume, based on what I had been told about the textile industry, that such items as t-shirts are nowadays rarely if ever up to “Made in Canada” labelling standards. For this reason, I had difficulties believing that Olympic visitors would imagine their official Olympic t-shirts to have been made in Canada, this even though they were sold in Canada, as souvenirs of an event taking place in Canada, using Canadian or Aboriginal imagery. I assumed that consumers would not think so unless specifically told otherwise. However, if clothing like the ironic Canadiana line and the formline maple leaf t-shirt presented at Canamade are indeed fit to be promoted as made-in-Canada products, I could not as readily assume that Olympic visitors did not believe it to be also true of Olympic merchandise.

which also abounded in iconic and otherwise iconographic references to Canadian identity. Could words relating to place such as “Canada”, “Vancouver”, “Whistler”, when associated with imagery associated with Canadian-ness, (including Aboriginal designs), create the kind of “general impression” that could mislead buyers to think they were buying “Made in Canada” products? Or was it only in contexts like the Canamade Winter Market that such interpretations would be made?

Interestingly, when the Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC) became Canada’s official retailer and athlete clothing supplier for the Vancouver 2010 Olympics, it used this opportunity to reinforce, or rather rekindle, its image as an intrinsically Canadian business despite it being owned by a US firm since 2008. Drawing on its history as the oldest corporation in North America and the largest private landowner at the time of the Dominion of Canada’s creation in 1867, the HBC created a particularly patriotic, pioneer and settler themed advertising campaign called “Outfitting the Nation”. The campaign made no reference to Canada’s First Peoples or HBC’s encounters and trade with them, neither did it mention the company’s role in colonial government. Instead, it offered images of seemingly uninhabited and unchartered territories being ‘discovered’ by the companies’ fur-traders and trappers. During the Olympics, the HBC’s flagship store in downtown Vancouver flaunted this particular sanitized version of the company’s role in Canadian history as well as its contributions to Canadian symbolism through elaborate displays of canoes, deer antlers, fur, Canadian flag, and its famous point blankets. Here, references to Aboriginal people were made via postcards depicting Indigenous wearers of the aforementioned blankets, as well as via the Cowichan knitwear that the HBC agreed to sell in the store in response to protests against its Cowichan-style sweaters.  

My experience of this highly curated environment was that the heavy-handed use of references to Canadian history and identity implied a similar message to the “I am Made in Canada” of Canamade, raising a number of questions. To what do consumers pay closest attention when interpreting the country of origin of merchandise: the tags that are tied to specific items, or the atmosphere and symbolism of the spaces in which they are sold? Also, does a

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company that runs advertisements in which it asserts that it has “outfitted [the] Nation” for 340 years not create certain expectations about where the products it sells might have been produced? Or have consumers become so accustomed to purchasing goods made outside of Canada that this was also what they expected to do when they bought 2010 Olympic merchandise bearing myriad local and national symbols? It is difficult for me to say with certainty what consumers’ impressions and assumptions might have been, having not had the opportunity to speak to many of them outside my circle of friends and acquaintances (not a representative sample, to say the least). What is sure is that very similar questions to those I pose here were also raised publicly during the Olympics, in particular with respect to “Vancouver 2010 Authentic Aboriginal Products” (see Chapter 4). The fact that only some of these products were made in Canada, while many others were not, was at the time pinpointed as a source of unacceptable confusion by the opponents to VANOC’s branding strategy. For some artware industry participants, the Olympics were “contributing to the promotion of made-in-China products as acceptable,” as one Northwest Coast clothing sales representative regretfully explained, making the industry reach for what he considered to be the “bottom of the spiral.” Similar sentiments prompted over twelve hundred people to sign the online petition “Keep Olympics Authentic and Accountable”, which asked that VANOC cease its use of the expression “Authentic Aboriginal Products” to describe licensed products with Aboriginal graphics but produced for non-Aboriginal companies outside of Canada. The petition thus stressed the relationship between domestic sites of production and the value and even the authenticity of Aboriginal products (for more about this example, see Chapter 4).34

3.1.2 “Canadian Content”: Place, standards… and colonialism

Generally speaking, one of the advantages to being able to explicitly merchandise as “Made in Canada” or “Product of Canada” is that these expressions imply a certain level of quality in relation to Canadian manufacturers’ overall positive reputation. The Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters association invites its members to order “Made in Canada” labels, quoting in

encouragement Nicolas Papadopolous, Professor at Carleton University's Sprott School of Business:

What foreign buyers are saying is, ‘We don’t know what you make, but we have such a great image of you that whatever you make is probably going to be good.’ Canadians are trusted and liked more than practically any nation in the world with the possible exception of Australia - this is an incredible selling tool.35

In the Native Northwest Coast artware industry, “Made in Canada” labels not only perform as claims of quality, they also reinforce the notion that this artware is effectively from the place to which the designs are thought to refer. As already explained, in most cases, these designs are indeed the only thing that distinguishes these products from their competition of plain or otherwise decorated wares. “Made in Canada” labels can be used to reinforce this distinction, and even shield consumer appreciation of the designs from the negative associations that are often made in relation to imported goods, especially when these are sold as souvenirs of a different region than where they were produced. Indeed, when associated with imported wares, Aboriginal designs may be erroneously discounted as imitations due to the lack of “Canadian-ness” of the overall product.

However, it can also be strongly objected that, in and of itself, the expression “made in Canada” misconstrues a crucial aspect of the overall social and historical context. For instance, while one Squamish/Kwakwaka’wakw artist told me he favors products that are made locally, he dislikes the “Made in Canada” label because its wording blatantly disregards the fact that the land of his people is unceded Aboriginal territory under the country’s own Constitutional laws. Also, the very idea of counting designs created by Aboriginal artists towards the percentage of “Canadian content” of a particular product can easily be interpreted as yet another attempt to co-opt Aboriginal cultural expressions on behalf of a nation-building agenda.

Still, a number of the Aboriginal artists I interviewed explicitly expressed their preference for working with Canadian businesses, which they variously defined as having their administration offices and/or their production factories in Canada (usually preferring ‘and’ but sometimes settling for ‘or’). Explaining such a preference in the face of their often very critical stances toward Canadian history and nationalism, a number of them were quick to evoke the negative trope of merchandise that is “Made in China”. As weaver and fashion designer Debra

Sparrow told me, “Why would I want to get it from there when we should be getting it from our own people?” she asked. Artist Corrine Hunt expressed a similar feeling, recognizing that it is not only difficult for companies to keep every aspect of production local, it is also not always easy for her as a consumer to buy locally made products:

It’s really difficult not to buy anything that has “China” on it. It’s so hard… Everybody is manufacturing in China, now. And then you have people who say “Well, the [workers’ labour] conditions are much better!” Well, I don’t think so. Not in Tibet. Not in Burma. And, you know, they’re all connected for me.

Others mentioned the safety and health risks associated with made-in-China products, such as the artist who remarked: “The main problem is that there is no way to control that from here. The only thing that is sure is that the products will be cheap.” As we will see in the next section, this combined issue of control, on the one hand, and price, on the other, is central to how participants in the Native Northwest Coast artware industry approach its global connections and these connections’ geographical shifts over time.

3.2 Protectionist Discourses and the Articulation of Place and Culture

I cannot count the number of times I saw or heard stories of customers picking up an Aboriginal-themed souvenir and putting it back down, amused or bemused by the country of origin labels they found on them. Interestingly, these stories never concerned the “Made in Italy” Native Northwest Coast textiles, likely because the positive reputation of this country’s textile industry renders it easier to overlook the fact that there is little more reason to associate Aboriginal art with a country like Italy than with Indonesia or Taiwan. In contrast, the expression “Made in China” has not only become erroneously and problematically synonymous with “neither made in the ‘West’ nor where this product is being sold”, its negative connotation is now such that some companies elect to label their products with the more discrete “Made in PRC”, made in the People’s Republic of China.36 However, not so long ago, it was not China that was targeted by such discourses, but Japan. In both cases, concerns about specific countries are to an extent rooted in the realities of the global political economy of the time; however, they are also reinforced through processes of stereotyping that result in the production of a synecdoche in

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36 To counteract this phenomenon, an image rehabilitation campaign was launched in 2009 called “Made in China. Made with the World”, recasting made-in-China products as examples of worldwide collaborations.
which the reference to a variety of “Others” is made by invoking one particular “Other” among them.

What anthropologist Jennifer Kramer calls “a history of theft” – appropriations made under the auspices of Canadian authorities not only of arts and culture, but also of land, resources, and even children through Residential Schools and the foster care system – are to this day the object of much concern among Aboriginal people. In addition, there have also been processes of appropriation instigated not from within the “white” settler nation but from without it, whether it be from the distance of another continent, or through newly arrived or long established so-called “visible minorities”.

Generally speaking, with the Greater Vancouver Area’s very prominent Asian and Asian-Canadian population, border and market-share protectionism often go hand in hand with the stereotyping of Asian peoples, from off-handed remarks to more blatant expressions of racism. The Native Northwest Coast artware industry is not exempt from those kinds of attitudes, and Asian and Asian-Canadian individuals tend to be the ones most explicitly targeted by accusations of misunderstanding and misconduct. A few different industry participants said or implied that they believed “Asians”, including those living in Canada, were particularly inclined to engage in activities of unauthorized reproduction. Their association with countries known to harbour counterfeiting activities produces the expectation that individuals of Asian ancestry involved in the industry, both “over there” and “right here”, would show less respect than other “non-Natives” for the intellectual property of artists under Canadian and International law, as well as Aboriginal cultural property in Indigenous legal terms. In the case of individuals who speak English as a second language, some also pointed to the challenge posed by language barriers and cross-cultural communication to the transmission of knowledge about the appropriate treatment of this intellectual and cultural property. A few times, I heard comments about how individuals of Asian ancestry either “don’t understand” or “don’t care” about Aboriginal history and cultures. In these commentators’ opinion, this ignorance or indifference would compound the problem of appropriation. One assumption being made by those who made these comments was that, at least

in the case of recent immigrants, they would generally lack knowledge about and experience interacting with Aboriginal people. This would among other things mean that they would be less familiar with local Indigenous proprietary regimes and moral imperatives that are called upon to place limitations on the use of Northwest Coast art by non-Aboriginal businesses, beyond what Canadian and International laws have to say. In contrast, Canadians of several generations were presented to me as having less of an excuse not to have the necessary knowledge and experience to give these legal-moral frameworks due consideration, and therefore conduct business in line with them.

Here, the implied mapping of the categories of multi-generational Canadians (and to be more precise, those who tend to consider themselves “Canadian-Canadians”) and new immigrants onto the categories of “European” and “Asian” individuals respectively ignores both the many first generation Euro-Canadians and the many multi-generational Asian-Canadians. It also obscures the long history of interaction, intermarriage, and commerce between Aboriginal peoples and generations of Asian and Asian-Canadian peoples. However, specific racial categories aside, these comments reveal that a greater familiarity with local history and its inflection of the cultural appropriation debate can be thought to make certain industry participants easier to hold accountable than others. In contrast, those who are either involved in the industry from a (geographic) distance, and those more recently arrived in the country are imagined to be less familiar with the “laws of the land,” not only Canadian but also Aboriginal. In a sense, to call upon an old adage according to which “better the devil you know than the devil you don’t”, appropriations perpetrated by multi-generational Canadians tend to be imagined as easier to address than those perpetrated by other non-Aboriginal peoples in Canada and elsewhere, because their contours and underlying tactics would be more familiar to those wishing

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38 Such claims silence the fact that many immigrants to Canada come from countries in which local Indigenous populations have endured similar histories of dispossession and been targeted with comparable assimilationist policies than have Aboriginal peoples in Canada, which would suggest that these immigrants are as likely to be aware of the ethical and political implications of colonialism as are Canadians.

39 Mackey, *The House of Difference*. Eva Mackey describes how some Canadians consider themselves “Canadian-Canadian” in opposition to both Aboriginal people and people of “other cultures”, whom they are thought to “accept” and “tolerate” in their constructed role of the “unmarked, unhyphenated, and hence normative… authentic and real Canadian people”. Ibid., 102.

40 For instance, one artware company works with an Eastern-European designer recently established in Canada, but I have never heard his particular cultural origins identified as an explanation for his behaviour. That said, although I have not heard such criticism first hand (perhaps because my last name tends to be interpreted as Jewish in origin), several people reported to me that Jewish industry participants are on occasion criticized in anti-Semitic terms.

to counter them. This idea feeds into the belief that control over what happens in the artware industry will be easier to assert as long as the Pacific Northwest remains its central hub despite its relative deterritorialization, as I further explain later in this chapter. Before I turn to this, it is useful to retrace back the origins of contemporary protectionist discourses to those of the early-to-mid 20th century, including their shifts in focus from one group of ‘others’ to another.

3.2.1 The shifting targets of protectionist discourses

As I briefly mentioned earlier, although racialized concerns over inappropriate practices in the artware industry now tend to focus specifically on China, similar criticism was for a long time centered on Japan. In a 1933 letter to anthropologist W.A. Newcombe, Society for the Furtherance of Indian Arts and Crafts founder Alice Ravenhill (see Chapter 2) was already reporting efforts to curb the competition represented by Japanese model totem poles, relaying the feeling of the Treasurer of the Canadian Handicraft Guild in Vancouver that “These things are entirely destroying any market for the Natives”. In a 1934 letter to New Westminster Indian Agent A. O.’N. Daunt in which he lengthily argued in favour of teaching school children “Indian industrial arts”, Reverend George Raley also wrote that “The Japanese find it worth their while to manufacture and flood the curio stores of cities in Canada with spurious imitations of the Indian totem.” Raley made a similar point in his 1935 Canadian Indian Art and Industries, disapprovingly noting that:

Unfortunately, the totemic designs of the northern coast of the Pacific are being manufactured outside Canada in brass, bone, ivory and plaster, and sold to tourists as Indian curios. The Japanese in particular are developing their trade with tourists in Canada in this way, at the expense of our Canadian wards. They have imitated Indian designs, developed them commercially, flooded Canadian stores with thousands of articles and used them to increase their trade results.

He then went on to explain that:

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42 Alice Ravenhill, “Letter to W.A. Newcombe,” April 23, 1933, MS-1077 (A01753 Microfilm), Newcombe Family papers, Volume 14 folder 95, BC Archives. There is certainly irony in the fact that, although Ravenhill was relaying this concern about the effects of Japanese imports on the Native art market, she was going to publish Cornerstone in the hope that it would not only be used to teach Aboriginal school children about Northwest Coast design, but also help renew the design stock of Commonwealth industrialists such as the Manchester Cotton Mills.

43 Raley, “Letter to Mr A. O’N. Daunt, Indian Agent, New Westminster, B.C.”

44 Raley, Canadian Indian Art and Industries: an Economic Problem of To-Day, 999. It is unclear from what sources of information Raley is drawing when describing these Japanese-made items, but his description is rather typical of other references to them, which rarely if ever mention the names of specific individuals, companies, or locations in Japan that were yielding these imitations.
The law of supply and demand has a bearing on this question. The Indians have not been able to produce a supply at the price of the sweated labour which can be obtained in Japan, nor have they met the demand of the market for such things. Indians can do the work as well as the Japanese but, unlike the Japanese, they are not organized for marketing and production.45

As art historian Ronald Hawker aptly remarks, at a historical distance it is difficult to distinguish the effects of increasing fear of eastern Asia as Japan in Canada at the time from what was observable in the marketplace.46 For instance, R.H. Baker, manager of the Vancouver Tourist Association in the early 1950s, noted that Japanese totem poles were a problem before World War 2, but were in much less wider circulation after that.47 Nonetheless, Raley advocated measures attesting to what Hawker calls “Canadian cultural protectionism”.48 Most notably, he suggested that the government a) consider applying a tax designed to prevent the importation of such goods; b) find ways to speed up production so that the tourist market become supplied by “the Canadian Indians”; c) ensure that, when copyright of designs were used by large commercial industries, “the Indian interest should be guarded and the Indian should reap the benefit”.49

Such concerns were also voiced by Aboriginal artists themselves. In 1953, Indian Time (the official organ of the Pan-American Indian League) published a note about Ellen Neel – then in direct contact with Ravenhill’s BCIAWS – reporting that she was requesting protection by the Canadian government against Japanese imports:

… thousands of Japanese-carved totem poles are being dumped in B.C. [Neel] believes native crafts should have a greater measure of government protection. She explains that native carvers are not seeking to bar these imports but consider they should bear the stamp of their place of production.50

This note prompted an exchange of letters between the BCIAWS Honorary Vice-President Mary E. Allan, and the organization’s Corresponding Secretary, Helen Baird, illustrating the organization’s continued concern about Japanese-made items. Baird had been contacted by Neel about this issue, and one of the members of the organization spoke with the manager at the

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45 Ibid., 999.
47 H.D. Baker, “Letter to Willard E. Ireland, Corresponding Secretary, BCIAWS”, February 18, 1949, MS 2720 [A01662 Microfilm]: BCIAWS 1943-1954, B.C. Archives.
49 Raley, Canadian Indian Art and Industries; an Economic Problem of To-Day, 999.
Woodwards department stores, who reportedly said that “he had no idea that they were not Indian made as they are not marked in any way”. As discussed in Chapter 2, thirty years later, the desire for protection against Japanese imports was still present. For instance, a 1983 account of the National Native Indian Artists’ Symposium reports that: “there was a strong consensus that the Federal Government departments responsible for international trade and for consumer protection should bar Japanese reproductions of native art”.

Close to thirty years after that, what I was told about Japan’s role in the contemporary market, contrasts significantly with what I found reported in the archive: in these new narratives, Japan’s role has shifted from producer of goods exported to Canada to that of importer of Aboriginal art to Japan, in addition to being the country of origin for tourists who visit Canada and purchase Aboriginal art during their stay. Thus, when discussing the current situation, my interlocutors did not speak of the competition of Japanese-made items, when Japan was mentioned, it was in relationship to buying, not producing. For instance, Tsimshian artist Bill Helin explained to me that a Japanese store has been buying products directly from him for eleven years. One company owner also commented that he worked with a retailer in Japan who found that hummingbird designs were particularly popular there.

The figure of the tourist qualified as “Japanese” was also many times called upon to illustrate the existence of a market of consumers travelling to the Pacific Northwest from far away. One company owner remarked that the industry took a big hit with the economic crisis that affected Japan throughout the 1990s, citing that it had rendered fewer Japanese able to afford travelling internationally. A 2006 Tourism Sector Monitor report concurs, showing that visits from Japan “plunged” by 28.8% between 1996 and 2005, due not only to the Asian economic crisis, but also following the attacks of September 11 2001, and the Sever Acute Respiratory

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53 There has been an influx of made-in-Indonesia Northwest-Coast style masks, but this phenomenon seems to be for the most part confined to the market in the United States. Although there might be the odd store selling them in Canada (a store that specializes in the intriguing combination of doors and masks on 4th avenue in Vancouver is perhaps among them), these masks are primarily sold in Alaska. Tlingit/Aleut artist Nicholas Galanin’s The Imaginary Indian (2009) and The Curtis Legacy (2009) makes use of, and comments on, these masks.
54 The exception was when it was reported to me that an elderly weaver who had many times demonstrated Chilkat weaving to North American audiences refused to make such a demonstration for a Japanese audience, stating that she felt they were “too smart” and was concerned that they would not only attempt but also succeed in mechanically-producing these highly technical weavings.
Syndrome (SARS) scare in 2003. However, the report also states that “The decline in visitor entries from Japan to BC since 1997 is quite significant, especially compared to other major Asian markets”. Most notably, “visits from South Korea increased 44.1%” and “entries from Mainland China more than tripled”. Still, today Japanese visitors outnumber Chinese visitors almost three times over (34% vs. 12% of Asian visits) and discourses about avid consumption of Northwest Coast artware do not portray the figure of the Chinese tourist as having upstaged that of the Japanese. Conversely, as we have seen, the contrary is true of made-in-China products vis-à-vis their made-in-Japan counterparts. Thus, on the one hand, Japanese producers have for the most part exited the anti-appropriation imaginary, while the relative exit of Japanese visitors (and potential consumers) has become a preoccupation for retailers. On the other hand, China has entered the scene as a source of goods, but has yet to make a real entrance on the scene of consumers of Native Northwest Coast artware.

The nature of my research enables me neither to confirm that Japanese-made totem poles no longer represent competition for locally produced items, nor to compare levels of interest for Northwest Coast art and artware between Chinese and Japanese consumers. What I can say is that from a discursive standpoint, China has not been made to simply step into the role previously held by Japan as the far-flung territory from which threats on the commercial viability of Aboriginal-made items were sprung. Former concerns relating to Japan had mostly to do with products imitating Northwest Coast art (e.g. “plastic totem poles”) that were directly imported from there into Canada, whereas recent concerns relating to China are for the most part centered on flows of wares (e.g. mugs, tumblers, fleece blankets) transformed into Northwest Coast artware by (or on behalf of) companies based in Canada (with embroidered, etched, printed designs provided by these companies, for instance). In other words, those who rallied against the threat of an infiltration by ‘outsiders’ of a market they would prefer was kept ‘domestic’ are now rallying against the threat of a ‘domestic’ invitation made to ‘outsiders’ to partake in this same market. To some, the latter is in fact more insidious and thus more worrying than the former; to others, the latter presents the significant advantage of giving the ‘host’ a greater say on the rules of engagement. In other words, a commodityscale that does not remain entirely domestic could still be to a certain extent domesticated.

56 Ibid., 5.
3.2.2 The price of locality

In sum, the commodification of Aboriginal arts tends to be experienced as posing a different kind of threat when it occurs within Canada than when it occurs outside of it. This sentiment not only builds on decades of nation-building discourses in which references to Northwest Coast art have long been prominent, but also stems from strongly felt concerns that what happens “off-shore” ineluctably and irreparably escapes the social, political (and to a certain extent legal) systems that can be used locally to safeguard Northwest Coast art against some blatant appropriative practices. I argue that, in addition to the fact that the market for Northwest Coast art has remained relatively local, concerns about the specific risks of appropriation processes occurring at a global scale helps explain the almost obligatory passage of Native Northwest Coast artware through the Pacific Northwest. It is not that local protectionist measures are always particularly effective – calls are continuously being made for their reinforcement and adaptation to the realities of contemporary political economies, the Olympic controversy being a case in point. However, even moderately successful safeguards – such as the unwritten rule that currently enjoins galleries in Canada to refrain from selling works by non-Aboriginal artist working in Aboriginal style – can be seen as advantageous compared to what otherwise may seem like a free-for-all, under-regulated global economy. But where early protectionist discourses were directed against supposedly unmistakable “Others”, the picture is complicated by the fact that there are now Canadian companies, in some cases Aboriginal-owned, that outsource, import, and otherwise deterritorialize the production of Native Northwest Coast artware. In this context, all other things being equal, labelling a product “Made in Canada” undoubtedly provides an edge on the competition – but perhaps only if ‘price point’ figures among the things that are otherwise ‘equal’, or close to it.

Several artware company owners and retailers I spoke to remarked that it was unreasonable for consumers to expect more than a few select products to be made in Canada, especially when, as one company owner put it, “they want made-in-Canada products at made-in-China prices.” As one retailer explained:
There will always be offshore product. That is just the nature [of the business]. ... The reality is that if we are actually going to do the volume [we need] and sell what we sell, we have got to ensure that we are getting the best pricing, and not all things beautiful are made in BC. And sure as heck not made in Canada!

Even so, she explained that she tried to support the economy of BC and Canada by giving priority to wholesalers that are based in the Province when possible, and otherwise preferring those that are based in Canada over those that are not. However, efforts to supply consumers with made-in-Canada products are not always rewarded to the extent that retailers would like. One of them remarked:

I get yelled at daily for things made in China. And it’s like, ‘okay, well then here’s a two hundred dollar vase that’s made here.’ But then they say, ‘No, I’m not paying!’ … I buy local as much as I can, but, half the time the price point is just not [low enough], especially in today’s economic situation...

A company owner also described how one retailer was looking to carry Canadian-made caps. He had to explain that this would require the store to pay a wholesale price of $15 instead of $9, not only as a result of differences in the cost of the plain cap, but also because the cost of embroidering the design onto it could vary from as little as 25 cents overseas to as much as $2.75 in Canada. “The preference for Canadian-made products that some distributors uphold in principle does not always correspond to a possible or viable commercial practice,” he remarked. This kind of conundrum is of course far from being confined to the Native Northwest Coast artware market. What is specific about this market, however, is the effect that the fastening of social representations of “Aboriginal people” onto that of “local economies” has had on the propensity of the public to imagine Aboriginal people themselves participating in global commoditescapes. For instance, one Aboriginal artware producer who chose to work with Chinese companies to become more competitive in the market was constantly being confronted with the intimation that she, as an Aboriginal woman, should refuse to contract overseas producers. To her, such attitudes are a symptom of deeply rooted stereotypes concerning the ways in which Aboriginal business people engage the market, ignoring the long history of Indigenous peoples’ involvement in global circuits of trade.57

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57 Wolf, *Europe and the People Without History.*
Jean and John Comaroff argue that the material and cultural forces of capitalism are always “in some measure, refracted, redeployed, domesticated, or resisted wherever they come to rest”.\textsuperscript{58} As anthropologist Brent Luvaas has noted, such a process of “localization” tends to be read by anthropologists “as a nearly heroic act of refusal”\textsuperscript{59} on the part of those who do the refracting, redeploying, domesticating, or resisting. Discussing the example of indie pop groups from Bandung that aspire to seeing their music circulate world-wide (but not as ‘world music’), Luvaas explains that this is far from always being how localization “is experienced on the ground”.\textsuperscript{60} As Luvaas notes, to these indie bands hoping for international success, “the “local” of the nation-state often feels like a trap, a barrier between Indonesia and the rest of the world”.\textsuperscript{61}

In particular when the territorial point of reference for the “local” is the nation-state of Canada (or one of its Provinces), rather than partaking in localization processes that would reinforce these territories, Aboriginal artware producers can assert their engagement in \textit{determinational processes} as acts of refusal of the colonial order to which they are subjected. In many ways, it is in order to further assert Aboriginal rights and title that First Nations have been deciding to engage in negotiations directly with Chinese resource extraction companies, by-passing federal and provincial levels of governments. In other words, contracting resource extraction ‘out’ – not only outside of Canada but also outside of the First Nation on whose land the extraction is to take place – is a dual process of determinational and reterritorialization in Deleuze and Guattari’s sense of delimitations (in this case territorial boarders) being lifted so that different ones can be re-inscribed. Despite such initiatives, it remains easier for some companies than for others to proudly claim their global dimension without being told that they are by the same token losing any claim to locality. In a context where being “multinational” and ensuring “worldwide” availability remains one of the measuring sticks of neoliberal success, the belief that indigeneity is incompatible with determinational can be used to stigmatize certain kinds of Aboriginal entrepreneurship as the repudiation of Aboriginal specificity, especially insofar as Indigenous sovereignty continues to hinge on the question of territory.\textsuperscript{62}

\textsuperscript{58} Comaroff and Comaroff, \textit{Millennial Capitalism and the Culture of Neoliberalism}, 14.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid.
A striking example of the global and the local being celebrated as working together rather	han antithetically is offered by a recent advertising campaign by the Hong Kong and Shanghai
Banking Corporation (HSBC). The campaign emphasizes the value of the bank’s global
networks: an image of a lemonade stand with prices listed in multiple currencies captioned “In
the future, even the smallest business will be multinational”, or a car-shaped assemblage of
shipping boxes captioned “In the future, it will take many imports to make an export”. But even
HSBC knows the importance of using clever rhetoric to give a sense that its global networks rely
on the existence of local nodes, as illustrated in the case of its slogan claiming that it is “The
world’s local bank” (emphasis mine). In particular in markets focused on material goods (e.g. art,
food) or geographic places and spaces (e.g. tourism), the “ethical consumption” movement has
indeed rendered the flaunting of strong ties to a specific locality or country increasingly
fashionable and profitable.63 Even so, emphasizing the local can sometimes contradict the
expansionist logic that makes certain companies successful at a global scale. For instance, an
acquaintance of mine who works for a well-known French luxury company complained about
some consumers’ expectations that the handbags they sold would all be “Made in France”. “We
are a large multinational corporation with offices, warehouses, and stores all over the world!” she
exclaimed, “Why would it matter that some of our bags are made in Portugal?” Yet, when later in
our conversation I discussed my research, she contrasted her earlier comment by explaining that,
in the case of Aboriginal art, she understood that consumers would give importance to local
production.

This person is of course certainly not alone in more readily associating Aboriginal products
with the local than with the global. For instance, a retail manager says that her “number one
criterion is [to] try to find items that are made in Canada, or [by] a Canadian-based company –
something that has a link to Canada”, noting that these are “not the easiest to find these days.” To
explain this priority, she evoked customers’ disappointment with things that are “Made in China
or Made in Mexico”. “They don’t want that,” she explained “They want to remember it’s from
Canada.” She went on to single out art made by Aboriginal artists as “guaranteed 100% made in
BC or made in Canada,” drawing a direct relation of cause and effect between being of First

63 James G Carrier, “Ethical Consumption,” *Anthropology Today* 23, no. 4 (August 1, 2007): 1–2,
doi:10.1111/j.1467-8322.2007.00520.x; Geert De Neve et al., eds., *Hidden Hands in the Market* (Bingley: JAI,
2008).
Nation ancestry and working within that nation’s ancestral territory or not far from it (e.g. within the settler nation-state).

In another instance, a gallery owner discussed with me the case of an Aboriginal jeweler who has been living in Southeast Asia for a number of years, in part because of the low cost of living there compared to Canada. The location where he works, although not kept secret from buyers, is not usually put forward as a selling point for his jewelry. This is not surprising in view of the prominence of negative discourses about “off-shore” production in Aboriginal art, in contrast with non-Aboriginal artists who are more easily positively cast as cosmopolitan when they make similar life choices. As James Clifford has discussed, “the varieties of Indigenous experiences proliferate between the poles of autochthony… and diaspora”\(^\text{64}\). However, the very fact that Clifford finds it important to show that “indigenous and diasporic multiple attachments are not mutually exclusive”\(^\text{65}\) is a good indication that what he calls the “borderland between diasporic and indigenous paradigms” has been difficult to open up, even as there are many potent examples at our disposal to revisit and contradict the common opposition of “indigenous” and “diasporic” forms of life.\(^\text{66}\)

Notwithstanding the common assumption that indigeneity and diaspora are incompatible, a number of retailers and producers of Native Northwest Coast art are beginning to worry that consumers are becoming more and more blasé about the location of production, especially as they become increasingly accustomed to the idea that global networks of production, distribution, and consumption are becoming ineluctable, including for the last ‘frontier’ of globalization that Indigenous products would have come to represent. In a context where HSBC can sell the idea of future multinational lemonade stands as something positive (in the dual sense of “certain” and “desirable”), it is interesting to think about what consumers do indeed expect and/or accept when it comes to the commodityscape of products like Native Northwest Coast artware. This is one of the questions that prompted me to study customers’ attitudes towards Aboriginal art and the location of its production, as discussed in the following section.


\(^\text{65}\) Ibid., 206.

\(^\text{66}\) Ibid., 199.
3.3 Questions of Priority, Issues of Control

As I describe in more detail in Chapter 8, some artware companies have placed the idea of “sustainability” at the heart of their business model (of production and/or promotion), including through placing emphasis on the local production of their goods. Although the latter practice can be rather expensive, their hope is that local ties can help harness public support and capture market shares. Yet, not all of these company owners are convinced that individual consumers care about where artware is made enough to make up for the costs incurred by keeping production local. Some stand by this practice as a matter of principle, more concerned by the impact of this practice on their surrounding than this practice’s impact on their company. As we will see later in this section, the decisions of artware producers – keeping production local vs. outsourcing, for example – are not driven solely by the grail of “customer satisfaction”; these decisions are at least as much informed by questions of control and how it is inflected by processes of deterritorialization. Still, learning through my fieldwork about industry participants’ variable takes on values such as ‘sustainability’ and its corollary of ‘local production’ it became important to see whether the views of producers vis-à-vis their own social responsibility intersected (or not) with the order of priorities espoused by consumers seeking to purchase Aboriginal-themed products.

Although my research focuses on producers and distributors, I was able to gain insight into consumers’ expectations by conducting a study with one hundred customers of the UBC Museum of Anthropology Shop, which is known for its selection of Aboriginal art and artware. As part of this study, I asked customers to rate the importance of various criteria in relationship to what they were interested in purchasing from the store, on a scale from “1 – not important at all” to “10 – very important”. The criteria they were asked to rate concerned the items being affordable, handmade, locally designed, locally produced, designed by a person of the culture represented, produced by a business of the culture represented, fairly traded, and environmentally friendly. Respondents gave mean ratings for these criteria ranging between 7.1 and 8.4; in other words, 67

67 The criteria of affordability and being produced by a business of the culture represented both received the lowest median rating of 7, while being fairly traded, designed by a person of the culture represented, and environmentally friendly received the highest median rating of 9.
all of the criteria listed were considered relatively “important”\textsuperscript{68}, but respondents nonetheless clearly expressed an order of priority between them (see Figure 6).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Mean Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fairly traded</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Designed by a person of the culture represented</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locally designed</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmentally friendly</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locally produced</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handmade</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Produced by a business of the culture represented</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affordability</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 6: Importance attributed by customers to various criteria of product selection**

*Ratings on a scale from “1 - Not important at all” to “10 - Very important”.*

Although the results cannot be considered statistically significant (due to the relatively small sample of respondents), my qualitative analysis of the results did show that consumers are well aware of the global dimension of most contemporary commoditescapes, *contra* Appadurai’s notion that late capitalism is characterized by a localizing fetishism of production that obscure global flows and transnational connections\textsuperscript{69}. For example, the respondents cared more about a product being designed by a person of the culture represented than about this product being made locally (8.1 versus 7.8). In other words, for them, the value of self-representation superseded whether or not what they purchased was produced in the place that it references. This is an indication that these customers are very much aware of the prominence of global connections in the current political economy. Although they did express a general preference for supporting local artists and businesses, they are nonetheless not under the illusion that this is easy for them to stand by this principle, and adapt their criteria’s order of priority accordingly. Thus, overall,

\textsuperscript{68} For all criteria the mode rating was either 8 (for the four criteria ranked lowest) or 10 (for the four criteria ranked highest).

\textsuperscript{69} Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, 42.
they deemed local *design* by a person of the culture represented to be more important than local *production* by a company owned by people of the culture represented. This can be worrisome for Aboriginal-owned companies that want to keep production local, and count on active support from consumers to make up for the additional costs this business model represents.70

Another interesting result of the study was that, although its respondents rated the criteria of being “fair trade” highest in importance (at 8.4, it was tied with the design being by a person of the culture represented), ownership of the business by people of the culture represented was rated significantly lower (7.2), relegated among the least important criteria (second only to “affordability,” rated at 7.1). Paradoxically, supporting businesses owned by members of the cultural group represented in the products can be a factor in the realization of the ideals of fair trade – with fewer middle-men, potentially more returns flow back to the originators of a product. The fact that respondents found it important to buy fairly traded items but were less concerned with buying from a company of the culture represented shows that they tend to think specifically of the concept of “fair trade” as ethical business relationships between outside local producers and distributors operating at a global scale, rather than consumers purchasing directly from producers at a more local scale. This is likely related to the use of the expression “fair trade” as part of labelling systems for products such as coffee, chocolate, and crafts imported from so-called “Third World” countries. This use has yet to be extended to members of Aboriginal communities that George Manuel described as “Fourth Worlds” within “First World” countries71 and to the art these peoples produce.72

While the study respondents rated “affordability” lowest among the proposed criteria (7.1), almost all customers were hoping to spend less than two hundred dollars in the Museum Shop, more than half of them citing a maximum price below fifty dollars, and half of them (a quarter of the total sample of participants) citing a maximum price below twenty-five dollars. Although certain artware items fetch prices quite a bit higher than fifty dollars, in the context of the Museum Shop and the Northwest Coast art market generally, the fifty dollar limit almost necessarily excludes being able to purchase one-of-a-kind pieces. Again, I believe the

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70 In another part of the study, only one out of ten respondents explicitly discussed the ‘local’ as a condition of the authenticity of a First Nations product. However, I suspect that more implied “local production” when they said that an authentic Aboriginal product is one that is made by a person of Aboriginal ancestry (included in 32 responses), with the underlying false assumption that Aboriginal individuals always live where they are from.


72 Graburn, *Ethnic and Tourist Arts*. 
respondents’ criteria of importance reflected a certain awareness of the limits their budget placed on what they could expect to purchase. For instance, comparatively to other criteria, they rated relatively low the fact that the item be “handmade” (7.5) as well as, as already discussed, that the item be locally produced (7.8). This is in accordance with a retailer’s experience that, when it comes to anything inexpensive and mass-produced, the place where a product is made becomes much less important to the consumer than in the case of a ten thousand dollar mask. In the latter case, “you’d better be real clear about where it came from,” she noted, implying that such investments should come with firmer guarantees about the origin of the product than a dozen or even a few dozen dollars’ worth of purchase.

3.3.1 The geographies of expansion and protection

With more and more retailers claiming it is impossible to run their business effectively while excluding products made overseas from their store, some Aboriginal artists and business people have come to believe that they have no choice but to be themselves the providers of these products. Squamish fashion designer Pam Baker is among them. Committed to using her business not only to support her family, but also to support her community (youth in particular), she feels that there is no reason not to challenge the double standard that makes it less acceptable for her as an Aboriginal woman to work with Chinese companies than for her non-Aboriginal competitors. Her business decisions can indeed be interpreted as an assertion of Aboriginal cultural and economic sovereignty.\footnote{For a discussion of the relationship between sovereignty and commodification, see Bunten, “Sharing Culture or Selling Out?”}. When customers ask why the products that she designs and distributes are made in China, she responds that it helps her ensure that a greater proportion of the revenue generated by the artware market goes to Aboriginal businesses, and in turn, benefit more Aboriginal people. As for her Chinese business partners, she explains that over the course of her several visits to China, she has come to see their relationship as mutual support of two local people partnering up in order to prosper across cultural difference and geographic distance.

Another reason some decide to have products made outside of Canada is their desire to substantially expand the market geographically, which as I explained, has remained largely local. For example, after developing a market for her garments in British Columbia and among Aboriginal art collectors, another designer has begun to “think globally”, as she puts it. As part of
this strategy, she now works both with textile companies in Italy and in China. In doing so, she has encountered two hurdles: external criticism of this new direction (having mainly to do with the working conditions in China); and her own concerns relating to her ability to build relationships of trust and sustain quality control when her business partners are so geographically distant. These challenges notwithstanding, she stands by her decision, and does not like to waste her time arguing with critics whom she feels only know China via biased media reports, whereas she has spent time building relationships with carefully chosen companies.

These two designers’ efforts to challenge the idea that the value of Aboriginal products is more intrinsically tied to local production than other products are applauded by some as indicative of their business savvy and forward-thinking. One Aboriginal retailer is even willing to change her policy of not carrying made-in-China products to show her support of Aboriginal businesses gaining control of that part of the market. However, these designers’ business model also causes dismay among those who feel that this places further risk on Northwest Coast art by not only undermining the competitiveness of other Aboriginal-owned companies that wish to keep their activities local, but also potentially facilitating unauthorized processes of commodification taking place abroad, out of sight. As the Comaroffs argue, “the distanciation from place and its sociomoral pressures is an autonomic impulse of capitalism at the millennium... ; bosses live in enclaved communities a world away, beyond political or legal reach”.74 Because they are themselves the bosses who personally build relationships with companies overseas, these Aboriginal designers feel that they have as much knowledge and control on what happens with their artwork “over there” than if they worked with someone else’s company “over here”. But not all artists exhibit such confidence, and many prefer to privilege relationships with local companies, feeling that they are able to keep them within closer reach of the various modes of pressure and control they have at their disposal.

Artists who have chosen to work independently from artware companies often do so because they want as much control on the product as they can. Most of them do not work at a scale that would make working with companies overseas worthwhile (the latter’s low prices usually come only at the cost of very high volumes), and instead work with local companies specializing in the customization of wares and clothing at a relatively small scale. For instance Squamish artist Jody Broomfield works with a t-shirt printing company located in the Greater

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Vancouver area. His choice was predicated not only on the fact that that “nobody could match their prices locally” but also on the ability to “sit down with them in person”.

They see how you feel, and you communicate with them about how things should look, and you go over there and do the first layout with them, and do the colours, and that’s the relationship that I want with a local company. ... If I did the stuff out of town, they might do a totally different design, or different colours. That’s why I chose to do it locally.

Thus Broomfield not only enjoys in-person interactions, he also feels that it grants him greater control over the process and its final outcome. This resonates with Tahltan artist Alano Edzerza’s decision to work with local printers:

It is important for me to be working with someone that has a strong sense of communication. Unfortunately, I can only speak my own language, which is English, so I need to work with someone who also has a strong sense of English too. That way I can make sure that I can have the most control possible, that I can get my point and my directions across as strongly as possible without having to physically pull the squeegee.

Salish artist Bonny Graham-Krulicki also prefers to work with a local printer for her “Aboriginal language art” paper products. “I did not want to have it where I have to send something off and have it shipped to me. I definitely wanted that face to face, walk right into the business and deal with someone, that’s for sure.” It also meant that she could feel the paper, which was very important for her – so important, in fact, that when she picked up an order that was printed on the wrong paper, she had the order immediately redone. Had she been dealing with a company abroad, this process would have been significantly more complicated.

Similarly, even artists who work with Vancouver companies that specialize in Native Northwest Coast artware (that may or may not outsource production to companies overseas) tend to feel that their own geographic proximity to these local companies affords them some control. For instance, one artist explained to me that the royalty contract he signed with a Vancouver-based company stipulates his right to audit its factory, warehouse, and accounting service, to ensure that he is not being short-changed. Although the impression I gleaned was that his relationship with them is now such that he does not make active use of this clause, the ease with which he could travel to this company to conduct such audits provided him with a feeling of control that he would lack with companies located overseas, which have occasionally used his designs without permission. “They steal and you can’t do anything to stop them,” he explained to me, saying that the letters and emails he sent were simply ignored. However, teamed up with the Canadian artware company he works with, which has its own interests in keeping these products
off the market, they have at least been able to convince the retailers through which they distribute their own merchandise to stop carrying these unauthorized reproductions.

3.3.2 Global connections beyond reach

As much as what I describe above indicates that the artware industry is shaped by an attachment to territory and processes of localization that counter the seemingly hegemonic forces of globalization, there are also aspects of the market’s global dimension that are simply beyond the control of any participant in the Native Northwest Coast artware industry. Certain risks are engrained in the culture of neoliberal capitalism, to a large extent unrelated to the specific decisions and practices of the artware industry participants they affect. In this respect, the Comaroffs remark that we live in a world that rewards risk-taking as “crucial to the growth of capitalism”75 and in which the once ‘morally suspect’ activity of gambling has been positively rebranded as a normal part of everyday life, “routinized in a wide-spread infatuation with, and popular participation in, high-risk dealings in stocks, bonds, and funds whose fortunes are governed largely by chance”.76 In this context, it is interesting to note that that when it comes to the Native Northwest Coast artware industry, I have found that the discourses that dominate are those promoting caution and protection against risk; for some, cultural commodification is in and of itself risky enough that those who are involved in the process should not take unnecessary chances. Thus, it may seem that the industry has little to do with “casino capitalism”, since its own economy is not directly tied to the speculative activities of high risk/high return financial investment. Although superficially tied to gambling via the gift shops of Native-owned casinos, Northwest Coast art is not listed on the stock exchange market and therefore might seem sheltered from the effects of Wall Street-scale financial gambling.

And yet, the 2008 (and ongoing) economic crisis did not go unnoticed in the Northwest Coast art and artware market. The crisis has not only significantly reduced the availability of money to be publicly and privately invested in the arts; it has also heavily impacted tourism, in particular from the United States. Tourism had already been heavily affected by 9/11 and since 2008 even those who still do travel tend to spend little during their stay compared to what they would have spent only a few years back, as one gallery owner remarked. The rise of the Canadian

75 Ibid., 5.
76 Ibid.
dollar well above parity with the US dollar at the height of the 2008 crisis, as well as the levels close to or above parity that it attained in the following years, have taken a toll on the usually advantageous purchasing power of visitors travelling from the United States. As a result of the crisis and this correlated change in exchange rates, some artists are finding it more difficult to find buyers than in the past, even as their career path was steadily leading to increasing recognition and commercial success. For some of them, in comparison to the sale of artworks, income from artware design has reverted from the merely supplementary “icing on the cake” to the more crucially needed “bread-and-butter”.

This economic crisis also had the effect of thwarting some businesses’ hopes for a “bump” in sales during the 2010 Olympics. Some galleries had stocked up in anticipation of the Games and were left with much more inventory than usual and little capital to acquire new pieces from artists during the rest of the year. Although the downtown area was peopled by incomparably larger crowds during the Olympics than normal, only few of those who walked into galleries and boutiques selling Northwest Coast artware ended up making purchases of substance. They treated these spaces “more like tourism sites than retail stores,” one retailer told me. A number of the retailers I spoke to explained this by the fact that Olympic visitors simply did not shop much outside of official Olympic shopping spaces. One of my interlocutors explained to me that this was entirely foreseeable, stating that not only is tourism organized around sport events not known to attract art buyers, Olympics are also not particularly known to bolster non-Olympic retail sales. For instance, an economic analysis of sales during the 2002 Salt Lake City Winter Olympics suggest that, while the hospitality sector increased its sales, sales in the retail sector were down.\(^77\)

That said, when I spoke to artware companies that were Official Olympic licensees just prior to the Games, they were optimistic about the effects of having obtained a license on their business. As producers of Olympic merchandise, they felt that any decreases in sales through their regular networks of stores would likely be compensated for by sales in Olympic retail spaces. With less money available for the consumption of non-essential goods since the crisis began in 2008, these former Olympic licensees are likely to try to make the most of any competitive advantage they may have gained as a result of this experience – partnerships with

artists highly publicized during the Olympics, new relationships with retailers, or new corporate accounts with companies that were Olympic sponsors, to name a few.

Coda

When companies focus their activities on the reproduction of Northwest Coast designs on imported wares, the wrapping of the ‘over there and everywhere’ in a layer of the ‘right here and nowhere else’ creates a tension in the Native Northwest Coast artware industry. As argued by Foster, the notion of ‘product’ implies “an economy in which tradable goods are defined by the qualities attributed to them in successive qualification and requalifications”. In the case of global commoditYscapes, such qualifications/requalifications not only occur in various points in time, they also occur in various places in space, as deterritorialization/reterritorialization. The market for Native Northwest Coast artware industry capitalizes on the practice of rendering visible one particular moment in this constant process of re/qualification and re/de-territorialization: the wrapping of ubiquitous wares with Northwest Coast singularity, marking a deterritorialized object’s transition through a particular place, thereby reterritorializing it. Even when this requalification does not materially occur within the Pacific Northwest (a design can be printed or sewn on before the wares are shipped to Vancouver, for example), these marked wares almost always eventually come to traverse its territory. At the very least, they will have stood in packing boxes in Vancouver, Victoria, Bellingham, or Seattle warehouses before being shipped to a point of sale outside of the Pacific Northwest, most often in or near one of the region’s institutional satellites.

The market for Northwest Coast artware is indeed largely predicated on the industry’s strong relation to its hub of the Pacific Northwest. It has made a business of reproducing designs that have for a century now been identified as “distinctively Canadian” (see Chapter 2), but are actually unique to this region and to peoples who, through various forms of protectionism, have continually asserted that they consider much of their cultural expression in proprietary terms, asserting the right to prioritized access to the markets associated with them. In this respect, the artware industry illustrates well Jean and John Comaroff’s argument that “ethnic business” has to “keep its distance, and its distinctiveness, from mainstream venture capitalism” because “business based on cultural difference that succeeds in the competitive fray of global markets and

78 Foster, Coca-globalization, 8.
does so unmarked by otherness, is open to the charge that it does not require, nor does it warrant, sovereign exclusion, protection, or preference”.79

At the same time, the Native Northwest Coast artware industry has undeniable global dimensions: it relies on the global market of labour and goods; it sends products travelling around the world with their buyers; its economy is inflected by the global economy, including its crises (e.g. Japan’s “lost decade,” the SARS and H1N1 epidemics, the 9/11 attacks, and the ongoing economic crisis since 2008), as well as international events (most recently, the 2010 Olympic Games). Some participants in the artware industry, non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal, see a more direct engagement with the market’s global connections as an opportunity of great economic, social, and cultural value – at least for those who undertake it. Yet even they usually concede that this should not lead to a total liberalization of the market, feeling variably confident that the means of control they have had at their disposal until now will suffice to jam a potential deregulated circulation of Northwest Coast designs.

In other words, the Native Northwest Coast artware market is shaped by a dual tension: its connection to global networks and the limits that some participants attempt to place on this entanglement; its ties to a particular locality, and the independence that some participants would like it to gain from this locality. To be sure, those who see opportunities in globalization can also defend the need for protection, and vice versa. Indeed, both imply some level of risk-taking, of which industry participants are well aware: the risk that the wares will not be competitively priced if produced locally; the risk that outsourcing will facilitate unauthorized commodification in places that are largely out-of-reach from still localized means of control; the risk that consumers will barely take note of efforts of some companies to keep production local; the risk that consumers will be rebuffed by products’ foreign country-of-origin; the risk of being considered economically unrealistic or even backwards; the risk of being accused of disregarding social responsibilities or even human rights. I argue that it is in the space created by these various risks that the industry has undergone a relative deterritorialization of its production, but has seen its distribution and consumption remain largely tied to a central hub from which certain means of control can be exercised – a form of reterritorialization that occurs with the artware’s passage through the Pacific Northwest.

79 Comaroff and Comaroff, Ethnicity, Inc., 73–74.
In sum, the market’s current configuration is thus shaped by the productive tension between, on the one hand, aspirations to expand the Northwest Coast artware commodityscape beyond the local and, on the other hand, desires for protection of Northwest Coast art from national and extra-national appropriations. Industry participants do not necessarily see expansion and protection as inherently antithetical, but instead often approach them as two elements with which they are always required to compose, inflected by the social and geographic scale at which they operate. Finally, I argue that particularly in the case of Aboriginal artists and company owners, decisions with respect to moving towards a greater or lesser entanglement with global networks and towards greater or lesser emphasis on locality are in great part made in relation to the control that they feel will be lost or gained as a result, including in relation to the assertion of territorial and other forms of sovereignty.
Figure 7: Luggage tag produced as part of the Vancouver 2010 Aboriginal Merchandising and Licensing Program.

With graphics by Xwalacktun. The label reads in the upper-left corner “Vancouver 2010 Authentic Aboriginal Product” and in the bottom “Made in China”.

Photos by the author, September 2, 2012.
4 Collaboration, Authenticity, and the Politics of Marketing Relationships and Objects

In the post-colony [empowerment] connotes privileged access to markets, money, and material enrichment. In the case of ethnic groups, it is frankly associated with finding something essentially their own and theirs alone, something of their essence, to sell. In other words, a brand.

- Jean and John Comaroff

In marketing strategies and discourses, some words that have elusive meanings but evocative power can be transformed into ‘concept brands’. Such brands refer to ideas, processes, and values rather than a specific product, but can also be used to sell that with which they are associated. This chapter focuses on two concept brands that are currently in use in the Native Northwest Coast artware industry (and related fields), “collaboration” and “authenticity.” Both words do not necessarily have exactly the same meaning for everyone, but they are nonetheless both associated with strong images and values. In great part because of their combined elusiveness and evocativeness, they have been used to promote certain products and practices over others. I argue that they have in fact become so commonly used that they are losing the aspirational quality that made them attractive to promoters in the first place. Used liberally in marketing and other forms of promotion, their ability to distinguish particular products and practices from others is eroded, as are the ideas, values, and processes that made their aspirational potency. In marketing terms, from “aspirational brands” they are turning into less attractive and potentially less remunerative “commodity brands”.

As Jean and John Comaroff have argued, in markets focused on brands marked by “cultural difference”, successful marketing can eventually lead to diminishing whatever set apart the very difference being marketed – this from the point of view of both classic economics and critical theory. Here, two approaches that usually do not lead to the same conclusions have a point of convergence. Classic economics’ “laws of supply, demand, and diminishing marginal returns” and critical theory’s idea that cultural products made “available for mass consumption” lose their

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1 Ibid., 15.
2 When a large segment of the exposure audience aspires to consume a product, but only a small segment of this audience does in fact consume it – usually because of limited production or high prices – this product is marketed as what I discuss here as an “aspirational brand”. In contrast, when the segment of the audience that consumes a product roughly corresponds to the segment of the audience that is exposed to it and desires it, its aspirational quality is weak, and I will discuss it a “commodity brand.”
“aura” both associate an excess of availability to a loss of value.³ I argue that even recursive discourses that produce the illusion that something is more common than it actually is can also be detrimental to the value – not only economic, but also social – of what these recursive discourses appear to be promoting.

What I have observed is that discourses surrounding the “brands” of “collaboration” and “authenticity” have been proliferating as part of marketing strategies for Native Northwest Coast artware. In this context, those who promote specific criteria of authenticity and a specific idea of collaboration as a means to promote more involvement and benefits for Aboriginal people in the art market, as well as more equal relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, are finding it more difficult to assert that their products and practices are worth supporting because they are indeed different from those commonly available and conducted. In this market as in other fields, especially when dealing with terms of reference that appear to be straightforward, individuals tend to believe that their “own meanings” represent “common sense” and are therefore shared by their interlocutors.⁴ When instead there are conflicting meanings at play, and especially when those conflicts are left unspoken, it is usually the interpretations of the most powerful parties that become the norm and, in some cases, get written into contracts or even law.⁵

At the time that I was developing my research project, my attention had already been caught by the terms ‘authenticity’ and ‘collaboration,’ but for different reasons and with different results. On the one hand, I had no intention of addressing questions of authenticity as part of my dissertation, as I had seen this term be used to measure the value of peoples, their practices, and their products against outdated ideas of culture.⁶ On the other hand, I did intend to discuss the

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³ Comaroff and Comaroff, Ethnicity, Inc., 19–20. However, the authors do acknowledge, as I also do in Chapter 6, that “ethno-commodities” often actually “resist ordinary economic rationality” because their “‘raw material’ is not depleted by mass-circulation” and that their duplication can in fact generate aura rather than diminish it (Ibid., 20.).
⁵ Ibid.
⁶ To give but one example, in the so-called ‘Primitive Art’ market in Paris that I studied in my M. A. thesis about processes of authentification in that milieu, the definition of authenticity in use by most collectors, dealers, and auction houses was that an object must have been made by a non-Western individual, for this individual’s cultural group, and have been used by this cultural group, all of this in a ‘traditional’ context and with means not reflecting contact with the West. Thus, in this market, contemporary objects and object made for sale to outsiders were almost always considered inauthentic. Solen Roth, “De L’oeil Et Du Goût. Histoires De Connaissances Et De Reconnaissance Sur Le Marché De L’art Primitif.” (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Université Pierre Mendès-France, 2005); About this market, see also Marie Mauzé and Marine Degli, Les Arts Premiers: Le Temps De La Reconnaissance (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 2000); Rolande Bonnain, L’Empire Des Masques (Stock, 2001); Brigitte
ethics and politics of collaboration, as I had been accustomed to discussing collaborative processes as part of my field research and museology training. Once in the field, ‘collaboration’ is a word that I often inserted into my interactions, in particular when discussing relationships between artists and artware companies. In contrast, I had decided early on that I would refrain from broaching the topic of authenticity, unless it was taken up by my interlocutors. For a time, both of those approaches made sense: my framing of business relationships as collaborations was not put in question, and rarely if ever did the theme of authenticity come up in conversation and interviews.

After several months of fieldwork, however, things changed: first, it became more and more evident that I was forcing the concept of ‘collaboration’ onto the relationships that were described to me; second, a controversy on the issue of ‘authenticity’ that broke out in relation to the Vancouver Olympic Games emphasized the close link between the concept of collaboration and the concept of authenticity. This in turn made the politics of authenticity an issue simply impossible to ignore. As a result, on the one hand, I became more suspicious of the use of the word ‘collaboration’ than I had previously been (including with respect to my own use of it); on the other hand, I welcomed discussions about ‘authenticity’ back into my scope of research. As my fieldwork taught me, both the inclusion of the idea of collaboration into my conceptual framework and the exclusion of the idea of authenticity from the same were to a large extent the artificial result of my own theoretical and axiological orientations. That is not to say that processes of collaboration were completely absent from the relationships I learned about, nor that there are no conceptual grounds for pushing against the temptation to always discuss Aboriginal cultural production from the perspective of authenticity. However, it had become clear that both terms could neither be embraced nor dismissed as prematurely as I had. The following sections unpack the interrelated use of these terms in two general contexts (section 4.1) – exhibition and research in North American museum anthropology (section 4.1.1), and product development in the artware industry (section 4.1.2) – and the Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympics (section 4.2).

4.1 Managing Aspirations and Marketing Practices and Commodities

In reaction to the new political climate of “political partnership,” it is significant that provincial ministries and administrators of many public institutions (schools, universities and museums) used the concept of “partnership” to negotiate new program and policy changes with First Nations. While the term “partnership” suggests that all of the stakeholders have similar goals and rationales, the fact is, no true partnership can take place where a federal or provincial institution is owned and administratively operated by Canadian government staff.

- Marcia Crosby

A decade and a half after the publication of her seminal 1997 essay “The Construction of the Imaginary Indian”, Marcia Crosby’s commentary about the widespread use of the term “partnership” also now applies to the term “collaboration”. Both words are used to imply mutually beneficial relationships, in contrast with less celebratory alternatives (such as ‘negotiation’ or ‘transaction’, for example), particularly in the institutional discourses – governmental, academic, corporate – that are designed to convey the idea of improving relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. The extent to which improvements leading to partnerships are impossible when undertaken at the governmental level (as Crosby suggests) is an important question to which my fieldwork does not provide an answer. What I do argue, however, is that early uses of the rhetoric of ‘collaboration’ were meant to be programmatic and aspirational, but its current uses do not always reflect the improvements that such programs were announcing. In a sense, this rhetoric functions similarly to the idea that Canada is founded on “‘positive’, ‘generous’ and ‘tolerant’ treatment... of Native people”: as demonstrated by Eva Mackey, it tends to both “hide inequalities and oppression” and contribute

9 For a much more in-depth study of collaborative museum practices (and their limitations) in the post-Turning the Page era, see Sharon Fortney’s work on the perspectives of museum-community liaisons of Coast Salish ancestry Sharon Michelle Fortney, “Forging new partnerships: Coast Salish communities and museums” (2009), https://circle.ubc.ca/handle/2429/13625.
to a “mythology” of “innocence”.

Although, in some ways, the constant reiteration of the idea that relationships are improving does help solidify an “ideal” for which it is possible to reach, such rhetoric can also become a foil to these very efforts when it gives the false impression that this “ideal” has in fact already been realized. In Canada, there is a long history of narratives of inclusion and generosity serving to mask processes of dispossession and appropriation. I argue that, for all the potential of collaborative relationships, there is a risk that an overzealous use of the language of collaboration, whether well-intended or not, might end up serving similar masking purposes.

4.1.1 “Collaboration” in museums

In the museum anthropology of the late 1980s and early 1990s, the concept of ‘collaboration’ emerged as a way to describe a model for relationship-building between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples that was promoted as socially and politically progressive. One of the more negative connotations of the word – where a “collaborator” is someone working with an invader – does not make it a unanimously popular term. There is understandably some resistance to using this term to describe relationships between parties often conceptualized as not only distinct (culturally, socially, etc) but also as standing on opposing sides of a violent colonial history. Nevertheless, over the past two decades, in museum anthropology the idea of ‘collaboration’ has been widely promoted as helping form mutually beneficial relationships between parties now re-imagined as allies (in a sense mirroring the formation of Franco-German alliances in the aftermath of their WWII enmity as a way to move past the latter’s disastrous effects).

In Canada, it was the report Turning the Page: Forging New Partnerships Between Museums and First Peoples published in 1992 by the Task Force on Museums and Indigenous Peoples that most clearly outlined the desire for building new relationships, and on what

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11 Ibid., 92.
13 This Task Force was created after a controversy broke in relation to the exhibit The Spirit Sings, which was to open at the Glenbow Museum to coincide with the 1988 Winter Olympics in Calgary. One of the points of contention was that the exhibit was sponsored by Shell Oil, which the Lubicon Cree held responsible for environmental destruction on their territory. Julia D. Harrison and Bruce Trigger, “‘The Spirit Sings’ and the Future of Anthropology,” Anthropology Today 4, no. 6 (December 1, 1988): 6–10, doi:10.2307/3032945; Ruth B Phillips.
principles. The principles outlined in this document (correcting inequities, self-representation, equal partnerships, mutual appreciation and common interests, co-management and co-responsibility, full involvement of First Peoples in projects relating to their culture) were subsequently placed at the heart of contemporary collaborative museology’s ideals, which were posited as marking an unmistakable move away from a previous model of absence, or merely consultative participation, of Indigenous peoples in museological practice. As implied in its title, *Turning the Page* was meant to mark a historical turn in museological practice, and the idea that collaborative practices were the socially and politically progressive way to conduct research and produce exhibitions indeed became widespread, in Canada and elsewhere.

By the time I became a graduate student at the University of British Columbia in the fall of 2006, the collaborative model – its principles, its practice, its challenges, its outcomes – remained one of the major foci of contemporary museum anthropology, especially that of the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. This shift was described by Laura Peers and Alison K. Brown as “one of the most important developments in the history of museums”. For Ruth B. Phillips, it marked the beginning of a “Second Museum Age”. But, as these authors are well aware, change is never quite as linear as grand narratives suggest, and a combination of factors continues to come in the way of reaching the goals associated with collaborative museology. These factors include ideological and epistemological resistance as well as practical challenges

14 The text of *Turning the Page* describes the basis for these relationships as follows:

1. Museums and First Peoples will work together to correct inequities that have characterized their relationships in the past. In particular the desire and authority of First Peoples to speak for themselves should be recognized and affirmed by museums.
2. An equal partnership involves mutual appreciation of the conceptual knowledge and approaches characteristic of First Peoples, and the empirical knowledge and approaches of academically-trained workers.
3. First Peoples and museums recognize mutual interests in the cultural materials and knowledge of the past, along with the contemporary existence of First Peoples.
4. First Peoples and museums must accept the philosophy of co-management and co-responsibility as the ethical basis for principles and procedures pertaining to collections related to Aboriginal cultures contained in museums.
5. Appropriate representatives of First Peoples will be involved as equal partners in any museum exhibition, program or project dealing with Aboriginal heritage, history or culture.
6. First Peoples and museums must recognize a commonality of interest in the research, documentation, presentation, promotion and education of various publics, including museum professionals and academics, in the richness, variety and validity of Aboriginal heritage, history and culture.
7. First Peoples must be fully involved in the development of policies and funding programs related to Aboriginal heritage, history and culture.


16 Phillips, “Re-placing Objects.”
and institutionalized barriers, but also, I suggest, the tendency to label ‘collaborative’ any and all relationships involving Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal individuals, seemingly no matter whether the relationships in question effectively challenged the power dynamics collaborative museology was set out to transform. I further argue that this has in turn undermined the aspirational appeal of collaborative practices, because the latter were made to appear more common than they actually are.

Recently, critical museology has begun to examine what I would call “the Idea of the Collaborative Museum”, just as it had previously unpacked “the Idea of the Museum”.\(^{17}\) Collaborative museology has been, among other things, tasked with challenging the Idea of the Museum and its corollary principles “that collections are vital to the understanding of heritage, thus they should form the focus of museum work,” and that “this work is a moral good every community should respect and desire”\(^{18}\). Since the 1990s, anthropologists and museum professionals have significantly challenged these premises, including by practicing collaborative museology and developing the field of critical museology\(^{19}\). However, this has not meant that museums have ceased infusing their technical procedures with what Michael Ames calls “moral imperatives”.\(^{20}\) Instead, the moral imperatives associated with the Idea of the Collaborative Museum now often stand in place of those associated with the Idea of the Museum, playing a similar role in training museum professionals to believe certain principles placed at the heart of their practice should remain unquestioned. In museums that herald collaborative museology, the cultural preservation of museum objects, polyvocality and self-representation, community-driven exhibition programs have gained ground relative to the imperatives of physical preservation of museum objects, the authoritative curatorial voice, and public-driven exhibition programs. Such changes are what warrant the celebratory commentaries that interleave many publications about


collaborative museology, placing the emphasis on the benefits of collaborative projects in an effort to strengthen their aspirational qualities.

However, the moral imperatives associated with the collaborative model have also had the unintended effect of encouraging the use of the word “collaboration” to qualify relationships considered desirable by their initiator (often, still, the Museum), no matter whether these relationships have much in common with the principles initially set forth by the proponents of collaborative museology. This inflated use of the term ‘collaboration’ tends to place a veneer of generalized improvement on the surface of a situation that leaves much to be desired but need not be addressed always and in all circumstances by following the moral imperatives of the Idea of the Collaborative Museum. It is for example significant that in the last article Michael Ames wrote before his passing, this prominent scholar of the field of collaborative anthropology proposed alternatives to the classic model of collaboration where museums find Aboriginal representatives to work with them on projects related to Aboriginal arts and cultures. In his posthumous article “Counterfeit Museology”, Ames discussed the possibility of museums engaging with community-based partners in what he describes as professional-client relationships, where museums are contracted to carry out projects commissioned by Aboriginal partners, rather than the other way around. He places such contractual relationships within the realm of what he calls “co-participatory partnerships in community development” and argues that they are compatible with museum professionals’ “commitment to cultural wellbeing and (one would hope) to social justice”.

I further argue that many of the goals set forth by proponents of collaborative museology – increased trust, more equitable power balances, and mutually beneficial outcomes – might be better served if the moral imperatives associated with the Idea of the Collaborative Museum did not inadvertently encourage the use of the word ‘collaboration’ as a shield against accusations of colonialism, even when other descriptors would be more adapted to the relationships in question.

In Foucault’s terms, the time-spaces of collaborative relationships and practices can be regarded as heterotopias – moments in places where the utopia of balanced and respectful relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples is approximated, contrasting with what normally occurs in the world. In more prosaic terms, there is an idealism embedded in the

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21 Ibid., 179.
principles behind collaboration suggesting that its goals are by no means easy to attain, but are worth the effort. Given this, marketing specialists might describe “collaboration” as an “aspirational concept.” Collaboration between non-Aboriginal institutions and Aboriginal groups is promoted as something that should be done, but its very process means that it is only achieved by some of the many who aspire to its model. Moreover, if collaboration was initially promoted as a matter of social equity, it also became a matter of reputation and publicity. As anthropologist Ann McMullen remarks about collaborative museology:

To some extent, improving the museum’s image may be an explicit goal: Ames (1994) and Ruth B. Phillips (2003) acknowledge that collaborative museum projects with indigenous people can be used in museums’ self-promotions, and Cornel West (1994) suggests that individuals and organizations align themselves with the disadvantaged to feel better about themselves and their own privileged social position.

In addition, with the concept of collaboration museums can communicate to their audience that the representations they present to them stem directly from their source. As conveyed by the expressions “source community” and even “originating community”, both widely used in collaborative museology, relationships with Indigenous people are presented as a means for the production of authenticity; if not the level of authenticity promised by Indigenous-run museums, “collaboration” at least promises a mediated authenticity where the museum is the link between visitors and the “original” (people, culture, etc) that it seeks to reproduce for its visitors. Incidentally, both the morality and the authenticity associated with collaborative work are to the advantage of the museum. That is not to say that museum professionals are not sincere in their desire to work against inequality and power imbalances, but only that their aspirations are more likely to be supported when it is also in the interest of the institutions for which they work.

Given the (self-)promotional role the word “collaboration” can play, it is usually used with a positive connotation. And yet, as anthropologist Aaron Glass remarks, the word ‘collaboration’ can be used in a way that conveys a sense of ambivalence and ambiguity, not just a casual celebration of shared power, this especially when it comes to Indigenous attitudes toward members of their own community who choose to work with anthropologists, museums, or

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commercial enterprises. However, currently, it tends to be a more straightforwardly celebratory connotation of ‘collaboration’ that dominates academic, governmental, and corporate discourses, where it is increasingly being used to describe a variety of relationships, past and present, to the extent that it sometimes makes it difficult to distinguish collaboration from other forms of interaction. As I will show in the next section, a similar phenomenon is occurring in the artware industry as the idea of ‘collaboration’ is increasingly being used to describe any and all forms of involvement of Aboriginal individuals in the production and distribution of artware.

4.1.2 “Collaboration” in the artware market

One of the main concerns I have heard voiced about the artware industry relates to situations where artists feel that they are not in a position to ask for anything different from what they are offered by artware producers in terms of control over the use of their designs, as well as the kinds of monetary and other benefits they receive in exchange. As discussed in more detail in Chapter 5, this is felt to be particularly the case when there is an immediate need for income on the part of artists as well as a real or perceived power differential in favour of the company they approach. In such cases, the concern is that some producers might take advantage of the situation to pay less than market price or not involve the artist in any further discussion once the design has been purchased. These concerns are very similar to those expressed in relation to the nature of relationships developed under the label of “collaboration” in museums, where imbalances of power can impact decision processes during a project and the distribution of benefits that results from it, even despite the objective of working as equal partners.

Yet it is important to note that the common assumption that, in such relationships, non-Aboriginal “partners” always have the upper hand on their Aboriginal “partners” is far from always holding true. As discussed in more detail in Chapter 5, there are situations in the artware industry where artists do have leverage and use it to ensure the relationship develops on terms they deem appropriate. When they occur on relatively levelled playing fields, negotiations around such things as modes of compensation, choices of materials, colours, and layout, as well as other aspects of decision-making are more likely to be hard-fought – which is not necessarily to say that they will be conflictual, but only that both parties feel they are able to defend their interests. In fact, anthropologist Anna Tsing discusses how rearrangements of power occur precisely

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26 Personal communication, August 31, 2011.
through such “frictions of collaboration”. In relation to collaboration, Tsing uses the word “friction” not necessarily in reference to conflicts leading to breakdowns in relationships, but to bring attention to the fact that in order for parties with potentially divergent interests to create movement, there requires points of contact where they exercise pressure on one another. In other words, if what Ruth Phillips considers to be “one of the key ethical principles” of collaboration is “that both sides should be able to define and gain the benefits they deem appropriate,” then collaborations are unlikely to progress entirely without friction. The latter need not result in an open conflict, but can slow down decision-making processes, make apparent socio-cultural differences, and require the development of new protocols. Absence of such friction is thus not necessarily a good indicator of the existence of a collaborative process, nor does it always announce any significant shifts in the power dynamics at play.

This point was made clear to me during an interview with Kwakwaka’wakw artist Steve Smith, who discussed with me his experience of creating designs for a variety of products. Two examples of product development stood out. In the first case, he described a very smooth process and a positive outcome. In the second case, he described a much bumpier process, eventually leading to the termination of the business relationship. In neither case did he express dissatisfaction with the payments he received for his work. Later in the interview, I asked if he thought the word “collaboration” would accurately describe his experience of the first product development processes. He answered that no, he saw it more as a business partnership. However, his experience of the second development process, he then added, he would call “a collaboration.” In the first case, he was given the specific task of creating a design and received royalties for its use. In the second case, the design process was much more dialogical, and the pieces were authored as “[name of co-designer] with Steve Smith.”

I was at first surprised by Smith’s answer because I expected him to associate the more conciliatory process with collaboration rather than the more conflictual of the two. I now think the line Smith draws between business partnerships and collaborations is extremely useful in making clear that a straightforward, conciliatory process and a positive outcome do not necessarily a collaboration make. In some cases, it might on the contrary signal a different kind

27 Tsing, *Friction*, 249.
29 John Sutton Lutz makes a very similar point about the word “dialogue” when he writes that “dialogue does not mean that both parties speak from the same position of power” and ““dia-logue” is sometimes no more than “double talk”.” Lutz, *Makuk*, 298.
of engagement where there is nothing to negotiate and thus nothing to potentially disagree on. This is not to say that all collaborations are conflictual, but only to say that non-conflictual relationships are not all collaborations. However, I am quite certain that when I asked producers and artists if they would discuss with me their ‘collaboration,’ none of them were under the impression that I was asking them to focus on their disagreements and points of contention. I would even speculate that when they wanted to portray their relationships as collaborative, they emphasized the smooth segments of the road, not its rough patches. This underlines the promotional dimension of portraying relationships as “collaborations” because the term conjures up images of cordiality, equality, and fairness.

In order to further unpack the idea of collaboration in the context of product development, I will now draw on examples of artware items that are sold in the gift shop of the University of British Columbia’s Museum Anthropology (or MOA). Some of them are developed by the Museum itself, while some of them are developed by other producers but selected to be sold in the shop. As one of the early promoters of collaboration as a transformative model for research and exhibition development with Aboriginal peoples, MOA’s well known commitment to collaborative museology has direct implications for the ways in which the shop is operated and the kinds of products and practices it promotes in the artware industry.

The Shop’s philosophy was laid out in a document that was drafted to argue in favour of the shop’s expansion at a time when the Museum was undergoing its large-scale renewal project, titled “A Partnership of Peoples”. Among them was the shop’s dedication to reflect the museum’s “exhibits, programs, and philosophy,” and to offer “ethically selected merchandise.” This document further stated that “merchandise is selected within some very strict parameters - it must be respectful of First Nations and provide accurate representation of the people involved; stock is purchased either directly from individual artists, or from vendors who pay… artists to use their images on manufactured goods. Similarly, the development of MOA products involves working with individual artists and paying royalties on their designs.” In the following paragraphs, I discuss two kinds of products sold in the Museum shop that are considered to conform to these parameters and are the fruit of quite different processes and relationships.

1) The first example concerns the products of a large Vancouver artware company. The artists who work with this company and with whom I spoke described a rather simple process: they offered designs to the company, signed the rights over in exchange for a fee, and the
company then developed a variety of products with the design. A few said that if they noticed the reproduction was not to their liking, they had told the company owner and usually the problem was rectified if at all possible, showing that there was a willingness to ensure reproductions were executed in a way that artists considered satisfying. However, in the examples that were described to me, when such back-and-forth occurred, it usually took place after the copyright had been sold, and once mock-ups or samples of the product were presented by the company to the artist, and generally consisted of slight adjustments rather than a full process of re-design. The descriptions I heard from artists of this process gave me the impression that they were overall pleased with their relationship with the company and the products it developed with their designs. However, satisfaction with such a process does not make it collaborative. It only shows that arrangements that are not collaborative can in certain circumstances nonetheless be cordial and be considered satisfactory.

2) I draw a second example from the lines of products MOA has developed with Haisla artist Lyle Wilson. Their relationship started in the late 1980s while Wilson was an artist-in-residence at the Museum. Rather than directly applying a previously existing design directly onto new objects, Wilson worked on designs that would fit the specific space of each product. Wilson was first approached by the shop to design a t-shirt, and later to design other products such as ceramics and glassware. For the t-shirts, he created and proposed several designs, took part in discussions about which ones would work and sell best, and showed the team how to change the structure of a design for it to show on different colours of t-shirts, down to such details as choosing the adequate shade of white for printing. He explained to me that he did not always have the final word in these discussions but that, although he would have done certain things differently, he respected the decisions that were made and felt there was no point in having an “artistic hissy fit”.

The development of a ceramic plate was particularly involved. Wilson initially designed three different versions before one met his own approval and that of the others working on the

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30 In some cases, artists become aware of details they would have wanted to change only after a product was put on the market. For instance, a gallery owner told me about an artist who noticed that a zone of his design had been compromised (likely during the digital vectorizing process) only once the product had reached the shelves. It is quite possible that corrections would have been made had they been brought to the attention of the company earlier, but for reasons that are unknown to me, the problem was not addressed in time. One artist explained to me that he chose not to work with a particular company because of a similar problem; however, I also spoke to a number of artists who had clearly become accustomed to and comfortable with having only a consultative role during the product development phase.
project. Translating his designs to ceramics presented a challenge, which meant spending time experimenting with various techniques, from sandblasting a glass plate, carving an unfired and thus fragile ceramic plate, to finally deciding to carve the model out of wood. This creative process took many hours of production, as well as meetings with members of the team to work out various aspects of the product along the way. Wilson estimates that the equivalent of six thousand plates would have to be sold in order for him to recover his hours through royalty payments. That said, as Wilson explained to me, his interest in participating at such a level of involvement in the development of products for the Museum shop was never primarily monetary. Among his other interests were, first, his desire to develop a body of work in painting to which he could maintain the rights while earning returns through a royalty system; second, his desire to learn and explore new techniques and new ways of looking at design for his own artistic growth; and third, his desire to use the Museum to raise the artware industry’s standards both in terms of quality and in terms of Aboriginal involvement. In turn, from MOA’s standpoint, Wilson’s level of involvement meant being able to propose products reflecting both the quality of the Museum and its collaborative philosophy.

Although the Museum Shop may not actively monitor other companies’ practices and their collaborative nature, by demonstrating that working closely with Aboriginal artists for product development was possible and making such an involvement one of its criteria of product selection, the Shop has helped promote a greater involvement of Aboriginal artists in the industry. It has indeed been described to me by several company owners and artists as a trend setter in the market, and many pride themselves on the Museum Shop carrying their merchandise, making a point to have it mentioned on their website or in newspaper articles featuring their products. In a way, the Shop was hoping to provide the market with an aspiration model of collaborative product development.

However, not all companies that work with Aboriginal artists would be described by these artists as employing collaborative methods. For instance, Corrine Hunt contrasts “a real collaboration in product development,” with situations where “people are taking First Nations art

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31 As I also discuss in Chapter 6, Wilson explained to me that one of the reasons for doing so despite the time commitment it represented was to demonstrate to other players in the market “that all these images can rest comfortably on each item, whether it be a t-shirt or an oven mitt” and that designs could be transferred onto a particular space “without losing any of the integrity.” This time-consuming work stands in sharp contrast with the common practice in the artware industry of transferring designs on new products with little consideration for the relationship of the design to space, and aimed to encourage more companies to move away from this practice.
and saying they are collaborating, and they are not really... They are getting all of the recognition for it [even though] it was the artist who created the beauty of the piece.” In her view, a collaboration is “different than selling a design to somebody”: it includes creating designs and co-developing the product (down to such things as colour palette, shapes, and sizes) and being remunerated for both. However, there are still much fewer examples of this kind of relationship than there are artware companies that work with artists following a much less involved process.

This is the case for a number of reasons, not the least of which being that, in museum work like in the artware industry, collaboration can be costly for both parties, both in time and money. Also, not all artists hope to make their involvement with artware producers worthwhile beyond a punctual business arrangement that helps get their work out to a wider audience. Some of them are happy to let artware companies develop products using their designs while they dedicate their own time and energy to other projects they have at heart. Second, from the point of view of artware companies, collaboratively developed products are not particularly likely to result in bigger profit margins, as the range of price point for such things as mugs and t-shirts remains relatively tight. Therefore, companies likely hope that their investment in collaborative processes will bring them other kinds of non-monetary benefits. For instance, in the Northwest Coast art world, the reputation of a company is constantly subject to re-evaluation in relation to its practices and in particular those related to relationships with artists (see Chapter 5). Referring to products as the result of “collaboration” can improve this reputation, in particular among those retailers and consumers who are concerned about supporting artists and/or purchasing works that they consider authentic because of the involvement of these artists.

To be sure, one of the ways producers promote these products is indeed to publicize their practices as collaborative. However, similarly to what has happened in museum anthropology, as the potential benefits of being associated with the idea of collaboration became more apparent, more and more companies have been placing emphasis on their partnerships with Aboriginal artists, whether or not they explicitly call them “collaborations”. For instance, the website of the company Native Northwest states that “Ultimately, we are grateful to the artists who continue to commit to our aspiration to have their work recognized. Without their talent and energy, none of this would be possible and we thank them with the utmost respect.”

submissions from artists, explaining that “Our goal is to support Native art and culture and we strive to be a vehicle for artists to make their art accessible to a wider audience.” On the page presenting the “featured artists” of Panabo Sales, the company explains that it “has developed strong working relationships with a number of Canadian artists reflecting the great diversity of our country. A royalty is paid to all First Nations artists.” The description of products featuring designs by specific artists state that the art is “reproduced in collaboration with the artist and royalties are paid to the artist on each item sold.” The page dedicated to the “Spirit Wrap” on fashion designer Chloe Angus’s website declares that “This collection is in collaboration with world renowned Haida Artist Clarence Mills and is the union between fashion and art”. The company Oscardo explains that it is “partnered with some very talented Canadian Native Artists to... expose more people internationally to the beauty and diversity of Canadian art”, explaining that the company includes artist biographies with its products in order to make these artists’ work “recognized in the rest of the world.” Some companies are less explicit when describing their relationships with artist. For instance, Frederick Design states that it is “working with... Pacific Coast native artists”, or the company Claudia Alan, which explains that its eyewear designs were “commissioned” from Corrine Hunt. Even so, the inclusion of this information suggests that, when artists are involved, it is in the interest of companies to make it known using the vocabulary of collaboration, partnerships, and other indicators of mutually beneficial relationships. I argue that this is a strong indication that working with Aboriginal artists is slowly becoming a moral imperative in the artware industry, much like it has become a moral imperative of museums to work with Aboriginal community members.

33 Ibid. accessed August 27 2012 at 5:24pm.
36 Chloe Angus Design, “Chloe Angus Design,” accessed August 28, 2012, http://chloeangus.moonfruit.com accessed August 27 2012 at 5:33pm. The website further states that “In an attempt to unite, embrace and respect the cultures and artists that we work with, we will donate a percentage of each Spirit piece to the Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Center Society”. For a further discussion of such practices of “giving back”, see Chapter 8.
Overall, the language that is used in labels and other marketing materials makes it difficult to differentiate products in relation to the level of involvement of artists and the kinds of benefits they receive in exchange. Of the various companies cited above, some fully co-develop products with artists and some simply apply designs to its wares; some pay royalties and some play flat fees; some have been working with the same artists for years and some have only worked with them on one product. In all cases, the language being used suggests more or less explicitly that the relationships in question are conciliatory and beneficial to both parties. Discourses suggesting otherwise would admittedly be surprising to find in the context of promotional material; yet, having a business relationship considered successful by both parties does not always mean that there has been a ‘collaboration’, since various modes of engagement satisfy different needs.

For example, there are Aboriginal owned and operated businesses and individual artists who choose to create their own business, hiring non-Aboriginal labour for certain tasks or paying other companies to make the products they design and distribute, a model very similar to what Ames described in terms of professional-client relationships where museums are contracted to carry out projects commissioned by Aboriginal partners, rather than the other way around. These business relationships were not described to me as ‘collaborations’ by these Aboriginal business owners and artists, which suggests that they have less to gain from using this language than non-Aboriginal businesses. Another example of a non-collaborative form of engagement that is nonetheless considered satisfactory by the parties involved is when, as described earlier, artists who do work with artware companies prefer to remain only superficially involved in the product development process for lack of time or interest beyond the creation of their own design. Therefore, in principle, the existence of opportunities to willingly engage in non-collaborative relationships does not necessarily go against the equitable treatment of Aboriginal artists in the artware industry. However, in order for this to be the case in practice, the difference between various kinds and levels of engagement between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal industry participants would need to be made more obvious. Otherwise, all relationships – equitable and not – can be equally rewarded by the possibility of being marketed as collaborative. Unfortunately, once words like “collaboration” or “partnership” lose their aspirational quality and begin to function as common commodity brands, it becomes nearly impossible to know whether or not they are solely used to gloss over unequal power dynamics: cynics are free to imagine that
it is the case, while hopefuls can continue to imagine that it is not. As I will discuss in the next section, a similar remark applies to the reception of the promotion of the Vancouver 2010 Olympics as resulting from a collaboration of its organizing committee with the Four Host First Nations.

4.2 The Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympics and Paralympic Games

“If it hadn't been for the full support of the Four Host First Nations in our bid, we likely wouldn't be talking about Vancouver 2010 today,” said Jack Poole, VANOC Board Chairman. “Inclusive Aboriginal participation makes us stronger and in formalizing this relationship, we again show the importance that both parties attach to recognizing and respecting the role of Canada's Aboriginal peoples in the planning, staging and hosting of the 2010 Games.”

- VANOC News Release, November 30, 2005

The Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games were held on the unceded territories of the Squamish, Lil’wat, Tsleil-Waututh, and Musqueam Nations. When developing my doctoral research project in late 2008, one of the reasons I chose to focus on the Native Northwest Coast artware industry was the imminence of this mega-event. I believed that the artware market was bound to undergo important transformations as a result of the Olympic organizers’ promise to internationally showcase Aboriginal culture and art, including through its official Aboriginal Licensing and Merchandising Program. Almost three years after the 2010 Olympics were held, it is difficult to assess with any precision the long-term impacts of this program on the artware market. However, this program did generate a number of new business relationships that have since endured or were initiated in the wake of the Olympics. The Games

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40 In March 2012, I was invited to speak to a third-year Northwest Coast art history class. I distributed various artware items to the students, asking them to read the accompanying packaging and other marketing material, and later told them they could search for more information on the World Wide Web. I then asked them if, given what they were able to learn about the products, they would be inclined to purchase the items they had researched. Although they were given more time and more resources than most consumers have at their disposal when shopping for artware, the students were nearly unanimous: no, they would likely not buy these items. Many felt they simply did not know enough to ascertain whether the products represented a form of appropriation or not. I had not anticipated such a unified response, and although it might be said that this particular audience is by no means representative of artware consumers in general, it is nonetheless significant that, unable to be certain about the kinds of relationships at the root of these items’ production, these students did not give companies the benefit of the doubt. This suggests that, far from the idea that advertising successfully “brainwashes” consumers, the laudatory marketing materials circulating in the artware market encounters a rather critical and incredulous audience.

also triggered a number of controversies, including one in relation to the marketing of its Aboriginal-themed merchandise using the word “authentic”.

In 1999, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) had indeed adopted Agenda 21, which expanded the organization’s “sustainability” umbrella beyond environmental considerations to include other social implications of Olympic Games. Agenda 21 required of local and national Olympic Organizing Committees to demonstrate their commitment to improving local social conditions and strengthening the roles of minority stakeholders in the planning and hosting of the Games. Indigenous peoples were specifically mentioned in Agenda 21, which states that “in consideration of the importance of indigenous communities who represent a significant percentage of the global population and who also often suffer social exclusion, it is appropriate that the Olympic Movement pay adequate attention to them”. 42 Therefore, when the city of Vancouver was still applying to host the 2010 Winter Olympic Games, the organization in charge of Vancouver’s bid (the Vancouver 2010 Bid Corporation) was encouraged to carefully consider the implications of Agenda 21 with respect to local First Nations and their support of the bid. As illustrated in the above quote from Jack Poole, it had been made clear by the International Olympic Committee that support from First Nations would strengthen the city’s candidacy, and in fact be crucial to its success.

With a Province-wide treaty negotiations ongoing since 1993, it was important for Vancouver to give the IOC reason to believe that the hosting of Olympic Games would not trigger more than the usual dose of political unrest such events normally generate. The Bid Corporation developed its game delivery plan between 1998 (when Vancouver won the domestic bid to host the Games) and 2003 (when the city was awarded the Games by the IOC). Chief Joe Mathias of the Squamish Nation is credited with first approaching the Bid Corporation about Aboriginal participation during the domestic phase, and the city’s domestic bid application included a letter of support-in-principle from Harold Calla, then a Squamish Nation councillor. 43 During the international phase of the bidding process, more formal agreements were struck with the Bid Corporation, first with the Squamish and Lil’wat Nations in 2002, and with the Musqueam and Tsleil-Waututh Nations in 2003. However, in order to obtain this support, the

bidding corporation was urged to do more than just seek these Nations’ consent: the latter wanted to be full partners, with all of the opportunities – economic and otherwise – that they hoped would come with this status.

Once the 2010 Winter Games were awarded to Vancouver in late 2003, the four Nations formalized their mutual relationship with respect to Olympic affairs, and the relationship between them and the newly formed Vancouver Organizing Committee for the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games (VANOC). In 2004, the four Nations signed an agreement establishing the Four Host First Nations Society (FHFN).\textsuperscript{44} The Society would be the intermediary non-profit organization liaising with VANOC in the coordination of Olympic events and activities. The proposed goal of this partnership, as announced on the occasion of the signing of a protocol agreement on November 30\textsuperscript{th} 2005 was to “achieve unprecedented Aboriginal participation” in the planning and hosting of Olympic Games. This goal was to be carried out under the rubrics of “Partnership and Collaboration”, “Sport and Youth”, “Economic Development”, “Cultural Involvement”, and “Awareness and Education”.\textsuperscript{45} Given the implications of such a promise, this agreement, the relationships that developed from it, and their projected legacies became the center of public and academic attention.\textsuperscript{46}

As I will explain further, the relationship between FHFN and VANOC was overall positively portrayed in the media and well received by the public, but also drew serious doubts from various critics as to the relation between its stated goals and its actual outcomes. Some felt

\begin{footnotesize}
\item[46] Graduate students both at Simon Fraser University and at the University of British Columbia (both situated in the Greater Vancouver Area) were particularly active in conducting research relating to Aboriginal participation in the 2010 Olympic Games, with at least four Masters theses completed between 2007 and 2010 specifically addressing this topic, written by students in the fields of resource management, education, law, and geography, respectively. Dunn, “Aboriginal Partnerships for Sustainable 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games: a Framework for Cooperation” (MSc, School of Resource and Environmental Management, Simon Fraser University, 2007). Antonio Aragon Ruiz, “Learning from the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympic Games About Aboriginal Peoples of Canada” (MA Thesis, Department of Education, University of British Columbia, 2009). Robin Sidsworth, “Aboriginal Participation in the Vancouver/Whistler 2010 Olympic Games: Consultation, Reconciliation and the New Relationship” (LLM, Law School, University of British Columbia, 2010). Priya Vadi, “Rights, Rituals, and Repercussions: Aboriginal Participation in the 2010 Olympic Games Planning Process” (MA Thesis, Department of Geography, Simon Fraser University, 2010). One anthropology dissertation by Natalie Baloy, still in development, will also discuss the portrayal of Aboriginal peoples during the 2010 Olympics.
\end{footnotesize}
that it was merely window dressing, a veneer placed over unresolved political disputes between First Nations and various levels of settler government.47 Others accused the involved First Nations representatives of selling out to capitalist interests while overlooking grass-roots opinions within Vancouver’s larger Aboriginal community. In addition, some of the criticism against VANOC focused on how heavily it drew on images of Aboriginality to create its image of Vancouver as the host of the 2010 Games. Indigenous scholar Darren Godwell argues that it is a typical move on the part of Olympic place promoters to use elements of local and national culture to promote and distinguish their Games from others:

Every conceivable distinguishing feature is seized upon, repackaged, and subsequently launched as a unique quality peculiar to these particular games. Geography is co-opted, architecture symbolized, national values reframed to reinforce Olympic ideals, national politics suspended to fabricate nonpartisan support, cultures essentialized to serve every occasion.48

For the 2010 Winter Olympic Games, VANOC’s place promotion strategy drew not only on its partnership with the specific Nations represented by the FHFN in their role as the Games’ host communities, but also on other Indigenous images that branded the city of Vancouver as a more generically Aboriginal place. The regional breadth of the references to Aboriginality contained in the Games’ official “look” indeed stretched from the local to the national. VANOC selected as its official logo the figure of Ilanaaq (meaning ‘friend’ in Inuktitut), designed by a non-Aboriginal design firm after an Inuksuk created by Rankin Inlet artist Alvin Kanak.49 The logo of the FHFN was designed by Squamish artist Jody Broomfield, while designs by Xwalacktun, also of the Squamish Nation, were included in the official Olympic graphics; the mascots were developed by non-Aboriginal designers inspired by Coast Salish mythology; the

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47 See, for example Manuel, “Arthur Manuel: Vancouver Olympics Can’t Hide Canada’s Dismal Record on Indigenous Peoples” accessed October 17 2011 at 18:30 pm.
49 This sculpture was donated to Vancouver after Expo ’86, and has been standing in English Bay ever since. In what was likely not an entirely planned turn of events, Ilanaaq generated one of the most notable legacies of the 2010 Olympics for the marketing of its host city. Leading up to the Games and lingering long after the Olympic moment, Vancouver residents witnessed an impressive proliferation of Inukshuk figures not only in the physical and visual landscape of the city, but also in the form of commercial ventures. This contradicted the work that the FHFN was doing to draw public attention on the direct connections between the Olympic host city, its Aboriginal inhabitants, and their unceded territories. On Lil’wat, Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh lands, innumerable stores sold Inukshuk-branded products and chose to incorporate Inukshuks in the design of their window displays. Thousands of tourists brought home Inukshuks sculptures, t-shirts, baseball caps, travel mugs, and so on as souvenirs of the 2010 Olympics.
Olympic medals featured artwork by Komoyue/Tlingit artist Corrine Hunt; artworks were commissioned from Aboriginal artists across the country for various Olympic venues; the opening ceremonies featured dance performances by Aboriginal youth from communities in each of Canada’s provinces. However, beyond the Aboriginal imagery that helped brand Vancouver to the world, some hoped that the Olympics would be an opportunity to set precedents for the manners in which Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal parties can engage in business partnerships, as made clear in the language that was used to describe the relationship of the FHFN with VANOC.

4.2.1 Interpreting the language of collaboration and authenticity

The initial news releases published by FHFN and VANOC officialising the terms of their relationship, as well as their subsequent publications all make heavy use of the lexicological field of ‘participation’, ‘collaboration’, and ‘partnership’, as shown in the excerpts reproduced in Figure 8 and Figure 9 (emphases mine).

Under the heading “Aboriginal Participation”, and in particular on the page titled “Partnerships & Collaboration”, the FHFN website reiterated the main statements made in the news releases presented in Figures 1 and 2, making repetitive use of a number of expressions evocative of collaborative processes, such as “strong relationships”, “working closely with”, “mutual commitment to work in partnership”, “shared collaboration”, and “engagement”.50 The website also explains that, in order to fulfill its mandate, the FHFN “work[ed] closely with VANOC to reach out to Indigenous peoples across the country to encourage participation in the 2010 Winter Games”.51 The primary goal was to foster “engagement” on the part of “the national Aboriginal representative groups, as well as regional and local Aboriginal and other organizations”.52 Under the umbrella term of “partner”, the FHFN referred to Aboriginal political organizations with which it had Memoranda of Understanding (at the national level) and Memoranda of Intent (at the regional level), as well as non-political organizations that had signed “statement of cooperation”.53

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51 Ibid.
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid.
The Four Host First Nations - the Lil'wat, Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh - today signed a historic agreement... Through the protocol, the Nations agree to work in a cooperative and mutually supportive manner in order to participate fully in the Games and to take advantage of the social, sport, cultural and economic opportunities and legacies that will arise as a result of the Games. ... Chief Jacob said the protocol confirms the intent of all Four Host First Nations ... to work cooperatively to take advantage of all opportunities including economic, and establish a clear First Nation presence in the Games while protecting Aboriginal rights and title. The Four Host First Nations are pursuing economic opportunities designed to ensure their peoples can more fully participate in the regional economy while, at the same time, protecting one of the most dramatic and magnificent mountain and seascapes in the world. "The Lil'wat, Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh Nations have coexisted peacefully, occupying and using lands and waters within our respective traditional territories, since long before European contact," explained Lil'wat Chief Leonard Andrew. "This agreement is symbolic of that tradition." "The 2010 Games presents us with a significant opportunity to build new or enhance existing relationships, establish partnerships and showcase our diverse and extraordinary culture to the world," said Musqueam Chief Ernest Campbell. "By working together we will fully participate in 2010 and more fully contribute to the local, regional and national economy." "We are not only showing British Columbia that we are working together, we are showing the world that Four First Nations can come together to work toward a common goal," said Tsleil-Waututh Chief Maureen Thomas. "One of our most important objectives as we embark on this historic process is to establish a strong Four Host Nations Secretariat to coordinate our collective effort in support of 2010." The leadership from all Four Nations have agreed to establish the Four Host First Nations Secretariat to represent the interests of the Nations in 2010, and secure participation and benefits for the members of the four communities. ... “The Secretariat will work with our partners at VANOC to help identify opportunities for other First Nations, Métis, and Inuit to participate in and benefit from the Games," said Chief Maureen Thomas.54

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54 VANOC, “History Making Protocol Agreement Signed by the Four Host First Nations for the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games.”
Vancouver – [VANOC and FHFN] signed a historic Protocol today, defining the relationship and commitment to work in partnership to achieve successful 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games. The protocol is the first of its kind and follows up on an initial protocol agreement signed on November 24, 2004 among the Four Host First Nations, building on several years of relationships initiated during the 2010 Bid. The Protocol encompasses a number of areas in which the Four Host First Nations will work cooperatively with VANOC and its partners. Meaningful Aboriginal participation opportunities include:
- Increased showcasing of art, language, traditions, history and culture
- Skills development and training related to the Games
- Lasting social, cultural and economic opportunities and benefits
- Improved health, education and the strengthening of the communities through sport, economics and cultural development
- A youth sport legacy
- Arts Festivals and Events
- Medal Ceremonies and Opening and Closing Ceremonies

"If it hadn't been for the full support of the Four Host First Nations in our bid, we likely wouldn't be talking about Vancouver 2010 today," said Jack Poole, VANOC Board Chairman. "Inclusive Aboriginal participation makes us stronger and in formalizing this relationship, we again show the importance that both parties attach to recognizing and respecting the role of Canada's Aboriginal peoples in the planning, staging and hosting of the 2010 Games."  ...  Partnerships have been developed through the presence of Squamish Chief Gibby Jacob on VANOC's Board, participation by the Four Host First Nations in the Vancouver 2010 Olympic emblem launch and various IOC events.  ...  Both governmental levels support extensive Aboriginal participation and Hon.  ...  "This is a great opportunity for our children and our youth to be involved in the Olympic and Paralympic Games and beyond the Games," said Lil'wat Nation Chief Leonard Andrew.  ...  "It is important for our children to participate in sport so not only will we have taken part in the planning leading up to the Games, but hopefully our youth will participate as athletes in the Games," said Tsleil-Waututh Nation Chief Leah George Wilson.  ...  "This agreement sends a message that we are united and ready to welcome the world in 2010," said Tom Christensen, B.C. Minister of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation. "The level of Aboriginal involvement in the 2010 Winter Games is unprecedented and reflects the spirit of respect and trust of the New Relationship with First Nations in British Columbia." 55

Figure 9: Excerpts from news release announcing protocol agreement between VANOC and the FHFN

55 VANOC, “A Historic Protocol for the Four Host First Nations and VANOC.” It is important to note that these excerpts are press releases, which is a genre of writing precisely designed to help circulate simple and attractive messages in the media. The various individuals cited in these press releases undoubtedly have a more complex, and perhaps more nuanced, view of these agreements’ implications than these excerpts suggest. Nonetheless, these discourses are important examples of the perspectives that they chose to project to the public in these instances.
These agreements signalled a desire from the leadership of these Nations to find ways of working together and with VANOC, but did not necessarily mean that there would be no tensions whatsoever – within and between these four Nations, or within and between the FHFN and VANOC. As I have already argued, collaboration does not mean absence of disagreements. However, at least in part because collaborations and partnerships tend to be conceptualized or rather idealized as conflict-free, it is not surprising that there was little interest in publicizing tensions if and when they arose, as they do in any collective endeavour. The tensions that were made most visible in the media were those coming from outside of these official partnerships, and indeed against them. One particularly vocal group was the grassroots movement assembled under the slogan “No Olympics on Stolen Native Land”. Their analysis of the partnerships between VANOC and Aboriginal organizations, including FHFN, was less than celebratory, seeing it as an assuaging public branding exercise:

As part of its promotional work, VANOC has also begun sponsoring many Native events and seminars ... . John Furlong, VANOC president and CEO, praised this collaboration, stating that the 2010 Games will “raise the bar internationally for building partnerships between Organizing Committees & Indigenous peoples.” What he fails to mention is that these partnerships are the result of literally buying people off, to pacify and silence opposition.56

The movement held a variety of protests and forums before and during the Olympics, prompting the publication of an assertive news release from the FHFN Chiefs on February 15, 2011. In their view, the protestors had not “done their homework” and did not “realize just how much Indigenous Peoples have, and will benefit, directly and indirectly, from the Games”.57 Further, they asserted that:

Aboriginal peoples do not need to be reminded of the devastating social realities we see every day in our communities. But some protestors are making a terrible mistake. By disrespecting our culture and the decisions made in our Longhouses, by barging onto our traditional territories, they are playing into the politics of appropriation that put us into this situation in the first place.58

Although this statement portrays the “No Olympics on Stolen Native Land” movement as made entirely of outsiders to the four Nations, the reality is more complicated. As in any system

58 Ibid.
of political representation, leaders can make decisions or hold opinions that are not in accord with those of all of their constituents. While some of the more prominent participants of this movement were indeed from other First Nations, dissenting voices were also speaking up from within the four communities represented by the FHFN, some of them rallied to the movement, others expressing their concerns independently from it. 59 However, when compared to the energy and enthusiasm being publicly deployed by VANOC, the FHFN, and their supporters, these voices were seen to represent a minority, almost inevitably drowned out by the constant flow of success stories as featured in mainstream media (which included official Olympic partners). This example helps underscore the importance of paying attention both to discourses and to the conditions of their production, distribution, and consumption. 60 Here, what is notable is not only the existence of discrepant assessments of the same processes (here, the ways in which economic resources were going to be distributed via the Olympic enterprise), but also to the existence of important differences in the resources available and/or being allocated to producing and relaying each of these radically differing assessments. In other words, although concerns about inequality did receive media coverage leading up to and during the Games, it was not surprising that they were relayed in unequal measure to more positive perspectives on the effects of the Olympics that VANOC and its partners was working hard to highlight.

Generally speaking, the tone in which the relationship between FHFN and VANOC was represented in the local media was celebratory. However, there was also some coverage of prominent Aboriginal individuals supporting the anti-Olympic movement. For instance, an article by activist and former Neskonlith chief Arthur Manuel was published in the local free newspaper The Georgia Straight, in which he stated that “The economic initiatives accepted by the Four Host First Nations cannot override the human rights of indigenous peoples”. 61 Indeed, from the point of view of “No Olympics on Stolen Native Land”, the FHFN-VANOC partnership was one primarily centered on economics, something they critiqued from a decidedly anti-capitalist stance, as shown in the following online statement (published under the pseudonym of “Zig Zag”.

likely as a way to avoid the attention given to known members of the anti-Olympic movement by the police):

Most Native political leaders – those in government-funded organizations – support the Olympics. Overall, they also support the government’s plans to increase corporate access to lands and resources (neo-liberalism). This is because they are mostly capitalists who are themselves enriched through partnerships with government and corporations. Their promotion of 2010 is really an extension of their overall promotion of ‘economic development’, which is capitalism. Due to their ‘leadership’, as well as multi-million dollar Olympic propaganda, many Native people in general see the Olympics as a huge money-making opportunity (which is, after all, its real purpose). Some plan to mass-produce artwork, or t-shirts, or jewelry, or food, etc. for 2010 tourists.62

In contrast, there were also criticisms of the Olympics made from a standpoint that is in accordance with capitalist designs, such as those who expressed concerns that the Olympics were not going to be as great an economic opportunity for Aboriginal communities as it could. In other words, instead of lamenting the focus of Olympic activities on profit-making, for these critics it was the distribution of this profit that needed to be closely monitored. For instance, for some, it was not the adequacy of producing Aboriginal-themed goods for consumption during the Games that was in question, but the specific ways in which the Vancouver 2010 Aboriginal Licensing and Merchandising Program benefited (or did not benefit) Aboriginal artists, businesses, and in turn, communities. Given the fact that the FHFN-VANOC partnership was understood by its most outspoken opponents as prioritizing economics over other values, it is interesting that those who did not a priori criticize the economic motivation behind their relationship felt that the goal of economic development was in fact being met too poorly, in particular when it came to art-related programs. In this respect, one of the criticisms that were most forcefully voiced in this respect was the use of the expression “Authentic Aboriginal Products” in a merchandising program that was deemed to have insufficiently benefited Aboriginal people, as it featured the work of Aboriginal artists on a number of products developed by non-Aboriginal companies. These products were branded as “authentic” in virtue not only of the involvement of individual artists, but also of the existence of a partnership between FHFN and VANOC. Moreover, the use of this “authenticity” brand was not only encouraged by the evocativeness of this concept, but also enabled by the elusiveness of its meaning.

62 Zig Zag, “No Olympics on Stolen Native Land.”
In early February 2010, a few months after the controversy about VANOC’s use of the term “authentic” broke out in late 2009, I was able to look into this word’s use by consumers of Aboriginal art and artware. I was conducting a customer survey at MOA’s Museum Shop, which has a good reputation in the market, including with respect to the authenticity of its merchandise. I took this opportunity to ask the survey’s one hundred respondents in what cases they expected the word “authentic” to be used in reference to Aboriginal objects. This was an open-ended question (the questionnaire did not include a list of possible answers), and the content of the responses I collected was extremely varied. Some elements were cited repeatedly in the responses given by customers, while other elements were only cited by one person. The most commonly cited elements were that of ancestry (cited by 54 individuals), production (42), design (22), hand manufacture (15), as well as the local nature of the product (e.g. “by local people,” “not stamped ‘Made in China’”) (10). Cultural knowledge and/or strong community connection (7), materials (5), use in communities of origin/not being produced solely for outsiders (4), and signature (2) were other elements more rarely cited by customers as constitutive of authenticity. In addition, twelve of the responses did not include any of the previously cited elements and stood on their own (e.g. “not mass produced”, “quality and care as important than following direct lineage”, “you expect it for all cases marketed as that”, “true, real”, “historically significant”). Also, nine individuals indicated that they questioned the use of this word altogether (calling it “fluid and sliding,” “loaded”, “strange,” “trip-wire,” “a buzz word”, etc). Four of these individuals even decided not to attempt defining the word at all. Another ten respondents did not answer the question, some of them explicitly saying that they did not know how to define authenticity or that it was a “tricky” question.

The great variability in the responses combined with the hesitation of approximately one out of ten respondents to even suggest a possible definition is an indication that the notion of

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63 In a November 30 2011 USA Today article, the executive director of the Museum Store Association in Denver, Beverly Barsook, listed MOA’s shop as a standout, specifically with respect to authenticity. “Totem poles and other artifacts dominate this striking museum on the University of British Columbia campus, and the authenticity carries over to the gift shop. Visitors can choose from original artworks such as whalebone sculptures and bentwood boxes that cost thousands. ‘If people are buying crafts, they want something that’s authentic, and you can trust it’s authentic here,’ Barsook says.” Larry Bleiberg, “10 Great Places to Find Fine Gifts at a Museum,” USATODAY.COM, November 30, 2011, http://travel.usatoday.com/destinations/10great/story/2011-11-25/10-great-places-to-find-fine-gifts-at-a-museum/51376828/1 accessed December 19 2011 at 01:09 am.

64 In addition, several individuals listed specific types of objects either in addition to or instead of a definition (e.g. “paintings, carvings, jewellery”, “carvings, jewellery, prints”, “jewellery, art objects, prints”, “statues, vessels, blankets, scarves”).
authenticity does not correspond to a stable set of criteria for customers of this Aboriginal art retailer taken as a group. Still, the survey showed that “Made by individuals who are from the culture represented” can be considered the closest there is to a commonsensical understanding of authenticity in reference to Aboriginal objects. Arguably, such a definition leaves open-ended both what is covered by the expression “made by” (Does it necessarily include conception, or only execution? Does it imply specific kinds of techniques and technology?), as well as what constitutes cultural belonging (Is lineage a necessary condition of cultural belonging? If so, is it a sufficient condition of cultural belonging or are other things such as cultural knowledge required? If lineage is not a necessary condition, what are the necessary conditions that define cultural belonging?). The politics of identity are a particularly thorny and potentially divisive question. As Jean and John Comaroff have remarked in the case of Native American gaming and the distribution of its profits among community members, “The more that ethnically defined population move toward the model of the profit-seeking corporation, the more their terms of membership tend to become an object of concern, regulation, and contestation.”

As acknowledged by many of the artware industry participants I spoke to there are no commonly accepted answers to the kinds of questions outlined above. In fact, even those who were adamant that there should be strict regulations defining which objects should and should not be marketed as “authentic” recognized that policing the contours of legitimate Aboriginal identity and acceptable Aboriginal art could easily become reminiscent of colonial modes of subjugation.

These unresolved questions currently leave the market with a nebulous notion of authenticity, but a powerful one nonetheless. Indeed, what is interesting is that, despite the semantic fuzziness I have just described, the word “authentic” was clearly part of customers’ vocabulary, as it was spontaneously used by them in positive comments and descriptions relating to the Museum Shop, as well as descriptions of the items they sought to purchase. For instance, when asked what he was looking for in the shop, one respondent simply replied “something authentic”, while several others praised the shop as “more authentic” than other retail store they had recently visited in search for Aboriginal art. Thus it is not that this word is altogether meaningless and valueless to customers, but rather that it calls to mind a desirable quality that

65 This instability of meaning is not to be found in all contexts. For instance, as previously explained, in the ‘Primitive Art’ market in Paris, collectors and dealers have strict, agreed-upon, criteria (Roth, “De L’oeil Et Du Goût. Histoires De Connaissances Et De Reconnaissance Sur Le Marché De L’art Primitif.”, and see note (1) of this chapter.)
66 Comaroff and Comaroff, Ethnicity, Inc., 65.
escapes a fixed definition. This shows that, even in the specific context of ascribing it to Aboriginal objects during a survey about a museum gift shop, authenticity is evocative as a notion but is elusive as a concept. As we will see, this evocativeness/elusiveness makes its mobilization in marketing strategies at once powerful and problematic, time and again prompting efforts to turn a relatively vague notion into a more defined concept that can be used in the fashion of a brand, with all of the protected market shares and controlled labelling systems such branding implies.

Returning to the Olympic example, I will now show how, concomitantly with the sweeping reference to the idea of collaboration as a means to positively brand relationships, the elusive yet evocative concept of ‘authenticity’ was used to positively brand the products developed as part of the Vancouver 2010 Aboriginal Licensing and Merchandising Program.

### 4.2.2 The Vancouver 2010 Aboriginal Licensing and Merchandising Program

As I have already begun to explain, the FHFN was one of the Official Partners of the Vancouver 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games. This was acclaimed as an important first for an Indigenous organization in the history of the Olympics. Initially, this partnership limited the FHFN to non-commercial activities. Already itself a not-for-profit organization, FHFN could be publicly associated to VANOC but could not develop Olympics-related product for sale. Eager to see Aboriginal content be more fully integrated into the “look of the Games,” including in the form of merchandise, FHFN CEO Tewanee Joseph approached VANOC with the idea of developing a commercial licensing agreement. Negotiated over the better part of a year, the agreement that was announced in the spring of 2008 was heralded as another first in Olympic history. Some understood the agreement as foreshadowing a unique economic opportunity for artists and Aboriginal-owned artware businesses, especially in light of the fact that one of the pillars of the mandate for “unprecedented Aboriginal participation” was precisely “Economic Development.” However, as I will show, the Aboriginal component of VANOC’s merchandising program was essentially designed as a not-for-profit initiative meant to raise funds to the benefiting Aboriginal youth and sports, and ended up functioning only marginally as a profit-

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67 However, such product could be developed for “internal use”, e.g. free distribution of product to its employees.
making venture, at least as far as BC Aboriginal artware businesses were concerned.68 I did not hear any criticism of using this opportunity to support sport for Aboriginal youth. However, those who had understood Poole’s acknowledgement that local Aboriginal support had been key to Vancouver’s successful bid to host the Games as a promise that the growth of local Aboriginal businesses would be a priority in all fields, including the arts, this was a disappointing approach.

High expectations had indeed been fueled by the news release announcing the signing of the agreement between VANOC and the FHFN for the “Aboriginal Licensing and Merchandising Program.” It indeed explained that “Authentic Aboriginal art from Canada” would be “showcased to a worldwide audience” through four key areas of retail: 1) “authentic Aboriginal art and products”; 2) “the integration of Aboriginal graphics into Vancouver 2010 branded merchandise”; 3) “a series of products featuring the Four Host First Nations logo”; and 4) “numerous other products featuring Aboriginal themes and icons, such as canoes, paddles and drums”.69 Like most public communication from VANOC and FHFN, the description of the Aboriginal Licensing Merchandising Program was flush with the vocabulary of relationship-building: the agreement was to provide “the framework for the parties to cooperate on developing licensed retail products” and was celebrated by then Premier of British Columbia Gordon Campbell as “a wonderful example of collaboration”. This initial news release also stated that Aboriginal youth from across Canada would “directly benefit” from the agreement, with “one third of VANOC’s royalties from sales” being placed in the Aboriginal Youth Legacy Fund (AYLF) to support programs in sports, as well as education and culture. This fund was described as the program’s “monetary legacy”, whereas “rais[ing] awareness about the Aboriginal peoples of Canada and their cultures” was to be the program’s non-monetary legacy.70 This goal of awareness-raising is described as “one of a number of shared focus areas for both VANOC and the FHFN”.71 The release goes on to list “economic development” as one of the two organizations’ other shared areas of focus, implying that it was not a focus of the Licensing and Merchandising program itself. And indeed, as Tewanee Joseph later explained:

68 Here, I am leaving aside the involvement of the Nunavut Development Corporation in the handmade production of Olympic Inuksuks by Inuit artists, which is of importance but does not directly concern the production of Northwest Coast artware during the Olympics.
70 Ibid.
71 Ibid.
Our whole principle ... was that we wanted funds to go to the Aboriginal Youth Fund. We wanted the artists’ works to be recognized, and we wanted to build a brand. It wasn’t about making money or having one or two producers make a ton of money on it. That wasn’t our goal.

There is some irony in the necessity of obtaining a commercial license in order to support a program that would primarily result in legacies of the not-for-profit kind, albeit tied to a fund-raising effort. In contrast, the interests of the other partners involved – VANOC’s official retailers and its licensees – were primarily commercial. In the case of the Aboriginal partners, a lot of emphasis was placed on the non-commercial benefits of the operation: exposure for artists, showcasing the diversity of Aboriginal arts and culture to the world, supporting Aboriginal youth through the Legacy Fund, etc.

On the one hand, this approach is consistent with one of the trends I have observed in my research, which is that in the artware industry Aboriginal artists and businesses, while in no way denying their interest in economic benefits, also put much emphasis on the benefits of their activities beyond individual monetary gain. They underline their contributions at the community level, adopting a business model that has some of the characteristics of the potlatch economy, where accumulated wealth only confers status once it is redistributed (see Chapter 8). On the other hand, the emphasis on the extra-economic aspects of the program positions Aboriginal participants almost as volunteers working on behalf of collective interests, whereas the same level of selflessness was not expected from their non-Aboriginal partners. For instance, artists who displayed and sold their works at the Artisan Village during the Games were asked to pay a table fee, with proceeds going to the AYLF – in other words, Aboriginal stakeholders were supporting other Aboriginal stakeholders, resulting in circulation not unlike the redistribution of wealth in the Pacific Northwest. Similarly, from what I understand, paying royalties directly to the artists that contributed designs to official Olympic merchandise had never been on the negotiation table. Instead, the two Squamish artists who were selected to create the Aboriginal designs for this licensing and merchandising program, Xwalacktun and Jody Broomfield, agreed to be paid a flat fee for their work and were promised the advantage of international exposure, not only of their work as individual artists, but also of Coast Salish art. According to Tewanee Joseph,

Initially some of the artists were coming in and saying ‘no, we want a royalty,’ but we did an open call for proposals to the artists from the Four Host Nations for their artwork to
start the program. And then, when I talked to the artists they said ‘yes, we have no problem, if it goes to youth and helps young people then we have no problem with that.’

Likely at least in part because the images that were created by the artists were created specifically for use on merchandise, the particular debate I am describing here was never centered on whether or not the works were fit to be reproduced on commodities. Rather, the primary questions that were raised concerned how this use should be compensated, and to whose benefit. VANOC’s and the FHFN’s decision to pay a fee to the artist and to direct royalties to an Aboriginal Youth Fund seems to indicate that they ultimately considered that the art was the work of an individual artist, but that it reflected the cultural heritage of the wider community as represented by its youth.

Once the selection process was completed, the designs were made available to the companies selected to be Olympic licensees to develop merchandise with them. They were required to follow a set of strict guidelines set out by VANOC as to how the images could be used, so that the products would fit into the overall, purposefully homogenous, brand of the games. The guidelines provided specifications as to the colour combinations and sizes in which the designs could be reproduced, how they should be spaced, how they could be cropped or repeated to create patterns. In the introductory pages of these guidelines, it is explained that Xwalacktun was selected “based on his reputation, artwork, and experience working in creative collaborations.”

Xwalacktun was aware that the latter criteria had been important, as illustrated in his response to my question about why he thought he had been selected:

Well, one main part of it was a collaboration. We had to collaborate together, and I’m very open in collaborating. I don’t judge anybody’s work and I just do my work. It doesn’t matter if mine gets judged, I know what work my work is….That is what I shared, that I just love working with people, I like meeting new people and I like seeing us collaborate, so that there’s a connection.

Describing the process of working with VANOC’s designers, he also noted: “I’m easy to work with and I’m more than happy to make changes, because it’s not my project. It’s everybody’s project.”

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73 Here, I believe Xwalacktun was referring to the overall project of designing Olympic merchandise, including his contribution to this process. It is important to note that he had previous experience working with Olympic partners, as he had already worked a few years earlier on the design of the Bid Book presented by Vancouver to the IOC during the bidding phase. This experience would have made him familiar with the kind of creative processes entailed by such team work.
useful in his relationship with VANOC’s team of designers. However, the “collaboration” did not extend to the designers working for the companies that became Olympic licensees. As several of them explained to me, their use of the Aboriginal designs for the Olympic merchandise did not require them to be in contact with the artists themselves, as approvals were all made directly through VANOC’s design team. One of them explained that she thought that VANOC had done “the hardest part,” as they had done all the initial agreements with the Four Host First Nations: the art, the graphics standards manual, etc. “They did a lot of the work behind the scenes that made it easier for everyone involved in the process,” she stated, explaining that she felt that if she had had to do it herself, it would have been more challenging. For one thing, there would have been a lot “more one-on-one collaboration with First Nations people,” she explained, something which she had little previous experience doing herself. When I asked another licensee company designer if the artists were at any point part of the communication he had been involved in throughout the process, he answered: “No, no interaction whatsoever,” adding that this was likely a function of VANOC’s corporate identity and the negotiations they had with the artists upstream in an effort to seamlessly integrate their artwork into the Olympic brand. In this respect, working for the Olympic program was very different from his other experiences working with Aboriginal designs created by artists with whom he is in regular and direct contact. With respect to the Olympic work he felt that “the only thing Aboriginal about it was that it was an Aboriginal design. There was no interaction.” Neither Xwalacktun nor Jody Broomfield expressed to me any concerns about this process. Other observers, however, were more critical in their assessment, believing that the partnership could have been more thorough, especially since none of the companies making the products with these designs ended up being majority-Aboriginal owned businesses, despite what seems to have been the initial plan.

Indeed, in May 2009, an RFP specifically addressed to “qualified Aboriginal businesses” was issued. It called for applications to become a “Vancouver 2010 official licensee through the manufacture, sale and distribution of authentic Aboriginal products.” The document stated that:

For the purposes of this RFP, VANOC defines an “Authentic Aboriginal Product”, as one that is:
• designed and manufactured by an Aboriginal person or business; or
• designed by an Aboriginal person or business, and produced by others.  

Although Inuit inuksuit and later Métis sashes were included in the program, it is my understanding that no such license ended up being awarded to a majority Aboriginal-owned business. As a result, save for the FHFN logo placed on the sashes and inuksuit, all of the official Olympic merchandise featuring Xwalacktun and Jody Broomfield’s designs ended up being those produced by non-First Nation companies.

The case of the company Kootenay Knitting was exceptional in that, since 2007 the company is owned at 29% by Nisga’a Knit & Apparel Corp, the corporate body of the Laxgalts’ap Village Government. This relationship was heralded by VANOC as one example of “Winning Strategies for 2010”, and its “success story” was featured in a publication by the 2010 Winter Games Secretariat’s 2010 Commerce Center, titled “Using Sustainability and Partnerships to Give Your Business a Competitive Edge”. In this publication, Kootenay Knitting was presented as the example of a company that entered into a partnership with an Aboriginal company as a way to get a “competitive edge” all the while helping VANOC meet its “commitment to unprecedented Aboriginal participation in the Olympic Games”. Its relationship with Nisga’a Knit & Apparel Corp is described as follows:

How could the company quickly ramp up to attract meaningful aboriginal (sic) participation in the business, in time to be effective as a Vancouver 2010 Official Licensee? The answer came in 2007, when Kootenay Knitting established a partnership with the Nisga’a Knit & Apparel Corporation to integrate aboriginal (sic) designs into its

As pointed out by Jean and John L. Comaroff, corporate entities that define themselves as representing the business interests of an “ethno-nation” – the phenomenon they call “Ethnicity Inc.” – tend to raise the issue of who belongs to the nation in question (and thus who can benefit from the profits of its incorporated version), as well the question of the extent to which the boundaries defined and defended in the name of economic interests coincide with those defined and defended in the name of social, cultural, and political interests. In the case of Nisga’a Knit & Apparel’s partnership with Kootenay Knitting, these questions led the Nisga’a Nation to issue a formal statement to indicate that it was not itself a partner in the deal, but rather that it was “the Laxgalts'ap Village Government, one of the four Nisga'a Village Governments” that had “purchased those shares indirectly through its economic development corporation” Nisga’a Lisims Government, “Nisga’a Nation Clarifies Relationship with Nisga’a Knit & Apparel Corp. and Kootenay Knitting Company Ltd.,” November 21, 2007, http://www.newswire.ca/fr/story/150761/nisga-a-nation-clarifies-relationship-with-nisga-a-knit-apparel-corp-and-kootenay-knitting-company-ltd accessed August 3 2012 at 10:56 am..

2010 Winter Games Secretariat, “Winning Strategies for 2010. Using Sustainability and Partnerships to Give Your Business a Competitive Edge.,” November 6, 2008. Consistent with the classification by VANOC of Aboriginal Participation as a sub-category of its “Sustainability” agenda, this document explains that Aboriginal involvement would be taken into consideration in its evaluation of the sustainability of businesses applying to Olympic contracts. This evaluation process differentiates between companies that are of “Majority Aboriginal ownership (51% or greater),” those that are in “in a joint venture or strategic partnership with an Aboriginal-owned business or subcontract to one or more Aboriginal-owned businesses”, and those that are neither Aboriginal-owned nor affiliated with Aboriginal businesses. In the application process, the latter two categories were also asked to explain how their companies “support Aboriginal employment and progressive Aboriginal relations” Ibid., 51.

product lines, further enhancing its Canadian-made “True North” branding.\textsuperscript{78} ... In 2007, the Corporation cemented the relationship by buying shares in Kootenay Knitting.\textsuperscript{79}

As for this relationship’s outcomes, the document goes on to depict “the fit” between the two companies as “advantageous for both sides”:

For a small northern B.C. village with issues around economic wealth and employment, this represents an opportunity for entry into the mainstream Canadian economy and training for its people, particularly its female population. For its part, Kootenay Knitting saw an opportunity to do business with a progressive aboriginal (sic) leadership, allowing it to leverage aboriginal involvement into the operation. The Nisga’a investment also allows it to upgrade its knitting capabilities.\textsuperscript{80}

The document also addressed the issue of authenticity, stating that “the result is a product that is authentically Canadian.”\textsuperscript{81} The relationship between this authenticity, the partnership identified as its source, marketing strategies, and economic benefit could not have been made more explicit:

The Canadian marketplace is poised to be very receptive to this unique product offering. B.C.’s Olympic Games commitment to Aboriginal involvement reflects the growing awareness and pride in Canada’s aboriginal (sic) cultures exhibited by the Canadian business community, and a willing context in which the product can be marketed. The company has been able to use this differentiation to increase its market reach and sales.\textsuperscript{82}

Finally, this “winning strategy” was recapitulated in the following terms: “Kootenay Knitting is poised to be at the head of the pack in presenting itself as an Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal partnership, generating increased economic return for both it and its northern partner.”\textsuperscript{83} Through this success story, VANOC was advising its potential licensees to enter into relationships and adopt marketing strategies that would mirror its own presentation of the 2010 Olympics as a mutually beneficial Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal partnership that would apparently automatically result in the generation of authentic experiences and products. As I will discuss below, not everyone shared this view. Moreover, even if the economic benefits were mutual in the case of Kootenay Knitting and Nisga’a Knit & Apparel, the lack of licenses held by

\textsuperscript{78} For a discussion on the relationship between Northwest Coast designs and “Made in Canada” branding, see Chapter 3.
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{83} Ibid., 31.
companies of “Majority Aboriginal ownership” (i.e. 51% of shares or greater) created scepticism and disappointment in those who had hoped the Program would actively support and even boost the economic returns of Aboriginal-owned companies, which would have provided steadier ground on which to base the rhetoric of partnerships between equals. In part because of this, the program was at the center of one of the several controversies surrounding Aboriginal participation in the Games that broke out in the media in late 2009 and early 2010. The critiques of the Olympic merchandise that emerged at the time were only marginally about whether it was sound to commodify Aboriginal designs at an Olympic scale. Instead, they focused on two related issues: 1) the distribution of returns generated by the merchandise and 2) VANOC’s use of the word “Authentic” in its branding strategy.

Revenue distribution

With respect to benefiting Aboriginal stakeholders, the Program ended up focusing largely on raising funds for Aboriginal youth, effectively becoming a social initiative rather than a business venture. As previously mentioned, VANOC was to collect from all official licensees a royalty of “15% of net receipts, expressed as a percentage of the wholesale price to retailers” on the sales of Aboriginal-themed products, of which one third would be donated to the Aboriginal Youth Legacy Fund (AYFL). Referred to as the ‘monetary legacy’ of the Program, the royalties collected were estimated to have amounted to $190,000. If this figure is accurate, this means that the total royalties collected from the sale of Aboriginal products was about half a million dollars that, relative to a total operating budget of 1.884 billion dollars, is a very small amount. From a fundraising perspective, based on the numbers published by VANOC, the amount raised through official Olympic Aboriginal-themed merchandise was quite low; however, compared to

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84 Among the issues that raised controversies during the Olympics were Team Canada Olympic sweaters designed to resemble Cowichan sweaters and a Hudson’s Bay Company television advertisement that represented Canada as a previously uninhabited land ready to be explored by European newcomers.
83 VANOC, “RFP NO. 1248. License(s) for Authentic Aboriginal Products,” 8.
86 This arrangement was presented to me by Tewanee Joseph as somewhat of a tour-de-force, as this meant that VANOC had to agree to “relinquish a third of their royalties.”
87 VANOC, Vancouver 2010 Sustainability Report, 84. It should be noted that this number concerns only the funds raised through merchandise royalties. There were other sources of income for the Aboriginal Youth Fund, including a portion of the proceeds from an Aboriginal art auction and from the Aboriginal Coca-Cola bottle design program.
88 In comparison, the VANOC Final Financial Report lists the total of royalty revenues generated by the sale of all Olympic merchandise overall at $54.6 million.
89 A document released by 2010 Legacies Now states that it distributed grants of the amount of $1,000 to forty communities and organizations 2010 Legacies Now, “Aboriginal Youth Legacy Fund Backgrounder,” July 21, 2009.
the amount of royalties artists can usually hope to collect through royalty agreements with artware companies (rarely more than a few thousand dollars a year), the number is very high. Retroactively, at the scale of the Olympic budget, it would not have been particularly costly to VANOC to have arranged for royalties to be paid to the artists in addition to the royalties directed to the AYLF. Or, since the artists themselves did not tell me they regretted not receiving royalties, another possibility would have been for more than one-third of the royalties to have been paid to the AYLF.

In any case, for the critics of the Program, this issue of revenue distribution was seen as symptomatic of a weak collaborative process. They felt that, given that the licenses had been attributed to businesses that were not majority Aboriginal-owned, too little of the profits were ultimately being directed towards Aboriginal people. The artists who had created the designs had been paid a flat fee, but one incomparable to the profits made by the companies that reproduced their work on their Olympic products. In addition, the extent to which the artists who were selected to sell their art in person in the Artisan Village benefited from this opportunity was unclear, as a number of those I spoke to were surprised to find that sales were much lower than they had expected. As many retailers were also disappointed vis-à-vis their Olympic expectations (see Chapter 3), the causes for these dissatisfying experiences are not necessarily

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90 The report on the legacies of the 2010 Olympics that was commissioned by VANOC from the journalist Kate Zimmerman states: “There was also a great deal of Aboriginal art and crafts for sale, in the Artisan Village and elsewhere. The statistics on how much of it changed hands were not available at the time this report was written, but, anecdotally, it appeared that sales were brisk.” Kate Zimmerman, *Legacies of North American Olympic Winter Games, Volume 4: Vancouver 2010* (Vancouver, June 7, 2010), 106. The report goes on to describe anecdotes in support of this: an artist who sold out of his $5,000-$10,000 masks, another artist invited to showcase her work in Europe, a group who decided to stay in Vancouver for the Paralympics after having “sold enough work at the Olympic Games to keep them going for a year” Ibid. While I do not doubt the veracity of these examples, my fieldwork provides examples that contrast sharply with these success stories. Each time I visited the Artisan Village, amid some enthusiastic vendors, I also saw tired, disappointed faces. One basket maker I spoke to had reluctantly discounted her merchandise on her last day in the Village. She explained that she was left with too much product on her hands and was trying to off-load some of it before her flight home. She was now selling her small baskets for $20, much less than their normal market value. Another artist explained that only her least expensive products sold, but none of her jewellery. A carver told me that sales were considerably slower than he had expected, with many people browsing his table but very few making purchases. I was later told that one fashion designer found herself with thousands of dollars worth of merchandise on her hands, this unsold inventory severely threatening her previously healthy business. Anecdotal evidence (cited in the report) vs. anecdotal evidence (cited from my fieldwork) aside, the aforementioned report provides the estimate that “the Artisan Village alone generated $250,000 in sales”. Divided between the 150 artists the report says showed their work at the Village, this would mean an average of less than $1,700 dollars per artist. Given that in order to be able to sell their work artists that were not based locally had to pay out of pocket to travel to Vancouver (some from across the country), pay their own accommodation and meals, as well as a fee of $300-500 for a table (with proceeds going to the AYLF) it is possible that a number of them ended up losing money in the operation.
specific to the Artisan Village, and could be related to a more general problem of Olympic visitors’ spending allowances being more limited than usual due to the economic crisis, as well as being generally only marginally dedicated to the purchase of art.

Given this situation, what is remarkable – but is also perhaps predictable – is the absence of narratives relaying experiences of dissatisfaction and encounters of challenges in the reports published and commissioned by VANOC. With this noteworthy absence, these reports are reminiscent of celebratory accounts produced in the field of collaborative museology, where the positive experiences are given center stage in the name of the importance of noting improvements when they occur. There are obvious reasons for putting the emphasis on the successes of collaborative initiatives in public reports, not the least of which is to encourage continued efforts in this direction and not deter collaboration enthusiasts from attempting similar feats and thus potentially further progressive social agendas. These reports positively assess the noteworthy achievements of VANOC and the FHFN, and there certainly is value in underlining their successes. However, refraining from giving critical attention to the less celebration-worthy aspects of such partnerships means giving future partners little reason to reach any higher. By all accounts, it is true that VANOC and the FHFN achieved “Unprecedented Aboriginal Participation”. However, future Olympic Committees as well as the public could have been reminded – by learning from some of the failures of 2010, for instance – that “unprecedented” is not the same thing as “unsurpassable.” This remark takes me back to this chapter’s main argument, which is that profuse and celebratory uses of the language of “collaboration” can threaten to diminish the aspirational quality of collaborative initiatives.

**Defining authenticity**

With respect to the use of the expression “Authentic Aboriginal Products”, critics felt that the use of the powerful marketing term of “authentic” was inappropriate, as it implied that relationships between Aboriginal individuals and companies – however loose, mediated, and deterritorialized – still resulted in the generation of authenticity. Because it labelled as “authentic” products made by non-Aboriginal companies, some of them outsourcing production to off-shore sub-contractors, they felt the program undermined the efforts of Aboriginal artists and businesses to be competitive in the market and promote definitions of authenticity that clearly distinguish their work from that of non-Aboriginal artists and companies. FHFN’s
argument in favour of using the word “authentic” was that they considered authenticity to be essentially a question of control. Since the FHFN had a right of veto on the merchandise and they could ensure that the designs were created by Aboriginal artists, the products could be considered authentic no matter who produced the goods on which the designs were reproduced.

Also, the rationale was to enable consumers to take one look at the product description and immediately be able to decide whether or not they wanted to buy it. FHFN CEO Tewanee Joseph indeed explained to me that they needed “text or wording that would get people to support the program” and that, along with mention of the AYLF on the tags, the word “authenticity” was meant to play this role. In other words, the evocativeness of the notion of ‘authenticity’ was mobilized as part of a branding strategy to inspire customers to buy certain products and in turn to support Aboriginal youth. In this instance, it was not used to encourage producers to aspire to business models resulting in more involvement of Aboriginal individuals and communities. In fact, although the goal was to specifically market the Olympic merchandise as “authentic”, in a scenario where this word had also been used to market the great number of products already being produced in the industry through very similar arrangements between artists and artware companies outside of the Olympic program, the potency of this word to inspire support towards VANOC products in particular would have been significantly diminished. Artware companies seldom use the word “authentic” in labelling mugs, t-shirts, tea-towels and other manufactured wares, this even when the designs are made by Aboriginal artists. They usually use other devices to communicate cultural connectedness, such as artist photos, biographies, and signatures instead. Still, the controversy surrounding the Olympic program renewed already existing concerns about the regulation of authenticity claims in the art and artware market.

Before and during the Olympics, a social movement was spearheaded by Aboriginal artware producer and artist Shain Jackson, who was joined by other artists and business owners who had been similarly disappointed by missed Olympic opportunities. The petition to “Keep the Olympics Authentic and Accountable” that was drafted and circulated by Jackson collected over twelve hundred signatures over a short period of time. However, the challenge of fostering a wide enough social movement was somewhat of a David against Goliath scenario, with the Olympic machine already in motion by then. Still, in relation to the issues that this Olympic controversy brought to the fore once again, the Aboriginal Tourism Association of British Columbia (AtBC) is now in the process of creating an authenticity labelling program for cultural products, as
mentioned in Chapter 2. The latter program is meant to complement AtBC’s authenticity program for Aboriginal tourism experiences by promoting products designed, made, and distributed by Aboriginal individuals and companies, precisely as Shain Jackson had advocated during the Olympics. Interestingly, in the context of the Olympics AtBC had signed a “statement of cooperation” agreement with the FHFN, in which the parties state that they would “work together to develop… authentication and certification protocols” in 2007. Therefore, AtBC’s current initiative to develop an authenticity labelling program, though directly informed by the Olympic controversy, is now led by an alliance formed across what were formerly potential lines of division. This illustrates well how the prospect of generating a “new and improved” artware industry is a driving force in the dynamics of this market, beyond potential divergences of view on what exactly such a new configuration would look like.

Coda

As I learned both during my training and during my fieldwork, the terms ‘collaboration’ and ‘authenticity’ are usually used to point to something that is considered desirable from the point of view of the words’ users; and, although one might think that a relatively precise meanings would follow from this desirability (“This is what I want!” and “This is how things should be done!”), when compared to the various practices and products these two words are used to designate, their respective meanings become rather equivocal. It is barely a caricature to say that, considered across the field of my research, what constitutes a collaborative relationship and what constitutes an authentic product is often treated as a matter of point of view. However, what is interesting is that, even in the absence of stable and set meanings, the words ‘collaboration’ and ‘authenticity’ remain evocative of certain ideals, and as such maintain a strong marketing potential: when they are associated with a product, they can enhance its perceived value. This gives companies and institutions reasons to use these words to promote their practices and their products as soon as they are not the fruit of non-Aboriginal minds and labour only.

There is of course much to appreciate about the flexibility of language and the ability of words to each mean more than one thing, not to mention the possibility of using this ability to say

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more than one thing at the same time. But in the context of marketing, the fact that the same word can be used on various labels without signifying the same thing works in support of ‘brand parity’ (when consumers consider products made by different companies to be equivalent and thus interchangeable). In a competitive market, this is usually not considered a desirable state of affairs. In other words, the politics of marketing give stakeholders of the artware industry reasons to promote a brand of ‘collaboration’ that is different from other kinds of interaction, and a brand of ‘authenticity’ that is not considered viewpoint-dependent. One such reason is that terms that are very frequently used are like products that everyone can easily obtain – neither is very aspirational. Thus when it comes to promoting certain products and practices over others, using branding systems to manage aspirations – not just those of consumers, but also those of producers and distributors – could play an important role in the assertion of value.

However, not only do the words ‘collaboration’ and ‘authenticity’ have shifting meanings, their use for marketing purposes is not currently restricted in any particular way. If each of these words had one unambiguous meaning per given context, their use might be indirectly regulated in cases where truth-in-advertisement laws apply. But, as I have argued, in the fairly specific context of the artware industry such set meanings do not currently exist for the words “collaboration” and “authenticity”. In this market, they tend to be loosely tagged onto a variety of practices and products, retaining little power of differentiation. The sweeping use of the word ‘collaboration’ tends to undermine efforts to promote a more deep involvement of Aboriginal individuals in the artware industry, while the elusive meaning of the word ‘authenticity’ tends to undermine the efforts of those who would prefer that its marketing power be used to reward practices that prioritize the interests of the industry’s Aboriginal stakeholders. The appeal of ‘collaboration’ and ‘authenticity’ can indeed only diminish when they become unremarkable commodity brands that are incommensurate with the ideas and values that made them aspirational (and marketable) in the first place.

92 Article 1 “Accuracy and Clarity” of the Canadian Code in Advertisement Standards states that “In assessing the truthfulness and accuracy of a message, the concern is not with the intent of the sender or precise legality of the presentation. Rather, the focus is on the message as received or perceived, i.e. the general impression conveyed by the advertisement” Advertising Standards Canada, Canadian Code of Advertisement Standards Code (Advertising Standards Canada, April 2010), 3. It is unclear how the accuracy and clarity of advertising using a word that is very variably interpreted would be assessed under this code.
Figure 10: Label placed near artware items in a Vancouver gift shop.

Photo by the author, August 13, 2009.
Beyond That Which is Exchanged: The Morality of Economic Arrangements

In a 1995 *Public Interest* article, political scientist James Q. Wilson argued against the idea that capitalism is an amoral economic system. A proponent of capitalism himself, he wrote that “everyone here and abroad now recognizes that capitalism produces greater material abundance for more people than any other economic system invented”, also remarking that he believes capitalism is a necessary (if not sufficient) condition of democracy. Regarding the morality of capitalism, Wilson discussed “trust” as one of three key “capitalist virtues” (the others being “self-command” and “cosmopolitanism”). Wilson’s view of the role played by trust in capitalism is worth reproducing at length:

Capitalism requires some measure of trust. In any economic system, buying and selling occurs, but voluntary buying and selling on a large scale among strangers requires confidence in fair dealing that cannot depend on one party having much detailed knowledge about the other. Routinized exchanges present some of the same problems as the “Prisoner’s Dilemma” in which both participants have an incentive to cheat if they assume they will only play the game – or engage in the exchange – once. The solution to the dilemma lies in repeating the game in conformity with this rule: do to the other party what he has just done to you ..., but make your first move a “nice” one in order to encourage the other party to do the same. ... Capitalism takes advantage of this rule in order to create large, permanent markets among strangers that can operate without incessant recourse to retribution. In so doing, it strengthens conformity to the premise on which it depends: some minimum level of trust. This is a moralizing activity.

Wilson’s perspective on capitalism is inspired by the premise of the 1981 best-seller *Wealth and Poverty* in which American writer and politician George Gilder explains that, under capitalism, poverty could only be the result of “moral decay” (guided by such values as “collectivism” as opposed to individual “freedom”). Indeed, Gilder believes that capitalism, especially when focused on supply, is itself a morally superior economic system that “begins with giving” (an idea also reflected in Wilson’s idea of a first “nice” move) because “entrepreneurial activity” would be “inherently altruistic”. According to Gilder, capitalism would also require having “faith” in the ultimately beneficial effects of such “gifts” (a.k.a. investments that do not

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1 James Q. Wilson, “Capitalism and Morality,” *Public Interest* Fall, no. 121 (1995): 44.
2 Ibid., 43.
3 Ibid., 52.
4 E.C. Pasour, “On Gilder and Wealth and Poverty,” *Modern Age* 25, no. 4 (1981): 388. In this respect, both Gilder’s and Wilson’s approach differ from the classic interpretation of Adam Smith as that it is by pursuing self-interest that individuals contribute to the wealth of nations.
guarantee returns) – a faith to be placed in “neighbours”, “society”, and “the compensatory logic of the cosmos”.

This, the reasoning goes, would make capitalism encourage “moral” and “altruistic” behavior.

Counter-arguments to this analysis can be found in both more strictly libertarian and decidedly more critical views of capitalism. For instance, approaching the ethics of capitalism from quite a different angle than Wilson, anthropologist Peter Luetchford is critical of what is often believed to be the Euro-American model of the capitalist market, which he describes as follows:

The economy, it is thought, is impersonal and so precludes notions of moral responsibility; to function properly the only economic imperative is self-interest. In looking after ourselves and disregarding the needs of others we promote general economic growth and paradoxically, everyone benefits.

As Luetchford argues, this conception of economic behaviour has thoroughly infused the ways in which the economic systems of the so-called West have been run, in particular since the 1980s with the gain in prominence of the neoclassic paradigm dictating that “we should allow individuals to follow their self-serving nature, which in turn, will benefit all”. The ethic of this model, explains Luetchford, “is one of personal achievement and merit, and it has become synonymous with the profit motive”. In contrast, many anthropologists, including Luetchford, have insisted that “ethics does not derive from formal rationality or human nature” but that instead ethics is what “entails a social and cultural relation between persons”.

The Native Northwest Coast artware industry illustrates well the role played by morality and trust in the market, not as given features of capitalist transactions but rather as elements that shape these transactions and how they are evaluated by the parties involved. This industry has been described to me as traversed by feelings of distrust, and thus also by continuous efforts to find means to protect oneself against the abuses of others, as well as generate more trust between the various parties involved. These efforts to build trust might be interpreted as that the goal of developing a market has the “moralizing” effect Wilson believes is inherent to all capitalist enterprises. However, contrary to what Wilson argues, a ‘minimum level of trust’ was apparently

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5 Ibid., 389.
7 Ibid., 392.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
not a prerequisite to the artware industry’s development. Instead, as demonstrated in Chapter 2, this market grew amidst, and even despite, persistent concerns that abuses were taking place and would continue to take place unless legal protection against them was to be implemented. Trust is thus evidently not an *a priori* feature of this industry.

This is at least in part the case because this industry is small enough that its key participants know each other or at least know of each other. Even when they do not know each other personally, the various participants in this industry are not “strangers” in Wilson’s sense, as they belong to what is all-in-all a very circumscribed sub-segment of the local economy with an extremely specific area of specialization. This precludes the kind of blind trust “on a large scale among strangers” that Wilson describes as a requirement of capitalist enterprises. Instead, industry participants are constantly managing their relationships in connection to various indicators of trustworthiness. For artware companies in particular, the reputation of being trustworthy is a dearly sought-after quality, in great part because their “first move” (to use Wilson’s expression) was their decision to create a business focused on the commodification of Native Northwest Coast art. This can make onlookers feel wary, especially toward companies that are not Aboriginal-owned and are therefore perceived to have made a business out of “taking” that which does not belong to them, no matter whether it can be legally construed as theft under Canadian law. In this industry, a minimum level of trust is not the premise of market relations; it is rather a goal towards which many of its participants continuously have to strive. It is thus not surprising that the question of the ethics of this market (and the morality of its participants) figured prominently in my conversations with industry stakeholders. One topic in particular that came up very regularly was the question of whether or not artists were being fairly compensated for their work.

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10 Based on the products that are sold in Vancouver, my estimate is that, Canada-wide, there are a little over forty artware companies (including fashion designers) that carry at least one line of products referencing Northwest Coast art. About half of these companies are based in British Columbia. Approximately fifteen of these companies are non-Aboriginal companies that work with Aboriginal artists. It is the latter that are the focus of this chapter.

11 As I argue in Chapter 8, practices of redistribution are one of the ways in which relationships of trust are (re)built between participants in and stakeholders of this industry. Thus, it is also on the feature of a non-capitalist economic model that they draw in order to “moralize” the market, apparently not convinced that capitalism already provides the “minimum level of trust” required. This need for trust is one of the reasons why injunctions to engage in practices demonstrating a commitment to the values of sustainability and reciprocity do not fall flat, and cannot be analytically reduced to the “seduction” of consumers avid for means of redeeming their consumerism through acts of consumption (for a more detailed discussion of this, see Chapter 8).
As anthropologist and biologist Darrell Posey acknowledges, when Indigenous knowledge and other property is commodified, “the mechanisms of what is ‘just compensation’ and how such benefits would be distributed opens a Pandora’s Box”. The anthropological literature on third- and fourth-world peoples and the unequal distribution of wealth in late capitalism often posits the need for such “just compensation”, as well as “ethical” or “fair” agreements in partnerships, but rarely examine thoroughly these terms or define them with precision. Yet, what closer analyses of specific examples show is that the negotiation of agreements and market relations often involve competing conceptions of social justice, and conflicting models of wealth and power distribution. In this view, the morality of commodification is not inherent, but rather contingent on “the context and manner in which it is pursued”. Evaluations of businesses as “fair” (or not) are rarely if ever solely based on the features of the relationships and transactions that characterize them. Rather, these evaluations are always contingent on such things as the socially- and culturally-constituted moral frames of reference in which these relationships and transactions are pursued, developed, maintained, and terminated. In this chapter, I will be using the example of the Native Northwest Coast artware industry to open – ever so slightly – the allegorical Pandora’s box of “just compensation” and other related expressions commonly used to evoke the relationship between morality and economics, such as “fair payments” and “ethical business”. This will enable me to think through, as Luetchford suggests, the “morally-informed notions of the proper purpose of economic activity, political ideas about how the economy works and how different contributions are assessed and rewards divided”.

Ultimately, my analysis will show that, in the Native Northwest Coast artware industry, the economic and ethical dimensions of business transactions are related to both individual and collective stakes. Indeed, relationships between artists and artware companies tend to be assessed

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12 Darrell Posey was one of the main organizers of the 1988 International Congress of Ethnobiology in Belém that led to the “Declaration of Belém” outlining principles for the protection of Indigenous ethnobiological knowledge and the compensation of Indigenous peoples for corporations’ uses of this knowledge.
not only in terms of the power dynamics, division of labour, and distribution of benefits among those directly involved in the industry as individuals, but also in terms of power, labour, and benefits at a more collective level. On the one hand, a contract between an artist and an artware company does not technically bind anyone else (at least not under Canadian law). Thus, the respective social locations of the individuals involved play a key role in the negotiation process. On the other hand, these individual positions are closely related to wider social dynamics, and there are usually more than personal interests on the negotiation table, whether or not this is explicitly articulated. Not only did many of my conversations with participants in the industry address personal experiences and practices, as well as their effect on individual careers, many of these conversations also turned to collective histories and policies, and their implications for the interests of the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal stakeholders of the artware industry. Thus, even though my analysis is based on relationships as they occur at the individual level, I will also discuss how these relate to wider questions relating to relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in Canada.

Thus, this chapter is also an opportunity to draw parallels between contracts negotiated between individuals and relationships built between peoples. Indeed, the “fairness” of contracts negotiated between artists and company owners is often assessed not just as a question of fairly conducted business, but also as one of equity in the ways Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples treat their respective property, and by extension, each other. Economic arrangements as to the ownership and use rights of specific artworks do not by the same token settle the ownership and use rights of Aboriginal art, just as mutual respect between two individuals does not constitute a treaty between peoples. Still, the ways in which industry participants discuss the contracts that artists have with artware companies as well as the relationships they build with company owners show that these raise economic and ethical issues beyond the money (or lack thereof) and the respect (or lack thereof) that circulates between them. Thus, when companies are accused of misconduct and abuses of power, this may not mean that the prices they pay for designs are under “market value” (they may even occasionally be above it), but shows that expectations of compensation run higher than “business as usual” and extend much beyond paying for an individual’s labour. I believe this is the case not only because Northwest Coast art is often regarded as maintaining a collective dimension even when it takes the form of an individual’s work, but also because relationships between artists and companies tend to be seen as a
synecdoche of the state of Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relations in British Columbia and in Canada more broadly – a topic to which I will return at the end of this chapter.

Before I continue, a few words about methods. With interviews and conversations as my primary access point to information about relationships between artists and those who buy their work (or rights to the use of their work), providing an in-depth analysis of these interpersonal relations poses an empirical challenge, in the sense that one might question the reliability of what was said to me with respect to loose associations and occasional path crossing rather than about ongoing long-term relationships. For instance, I have heard cautiously doubtful and straightforwardly accusative comments made about certain participants in the industry by other participants who were not working with them and had seldom interacted with them. Such comments may say little about actual business relationships and, yet, they still do illustrate the kinds of issues that animate the industry – such questions as who should the industry benefit most (to take the larger picture) and how artists should be remunerated (to take a specific question). Thus, even if these kinds of discourses are not in and of themselves empirical evidence of relationships gone awry or even abuses, the many comments made by my interlocutors about others’ negative experiences in the industry have helped me identify important questions regarding the ways in which the artware industry functions and how its participants would like to see it change.

Indeed, these comments not only point to some of the concerns that shape relationships between participants who do engage in business relationships with one another, they are also part of the overall social atmosphere reigning in the industry. In particular, the relationships that take form in the artware industry are informed by unstable levels of trust between the various parties involved, precisely because of the many stories that circulate about company owners taking advantage of artists, artists being difficult to work with, retailers not showing enough support, as well as accounts of misunderstandings and disagreements more generally. To be sure, some of the artists and company owners I spoke with were also determined to emphasize the relationships they felt most enthusiastic about, discussing with me examples of unflagging supporters, fruitful alliances, and deep friendships that they had developed in the industry. In fact, some industry participants clearly worry about seeing a climate of distrust remain despite efforts to foster what they consider to be positive relationships. Still, negative stories form to a significant extent the
backdrop against which individuals in the industry approach and engage (or neither approach nor engage) each other, more or less trusting or suspicious of the other’s business approach and ethics depending on what they have heard and from whom. In this sense, the circulation of criticism (and to a lesser extent, the circulation of praise), whether publically or more privately expressed, is one of the platforms through which the market is subjected to a certain kind of social control.

Because so many of my interlocutors were critical, in at least some measure, of the current configuration of the industry, I asked them what kinds of changes they were hoping for. In discussions about what they might consider a ‘new and improved’ industry, I was regularly told about the need to rid the industry from companies that mistreat artists, by driving them to change their practices, outcompeting them, and perhaps even pushing them out of the industry altogether. However, depending on the individual I was talking to, the companies that were targeted by such discourses tended to change. I could hear a flattering account of one company from someone one day (e.g. that its owners “have their heart in the right spot” and are “good people”), and hear the same company described the next day in a much less flattering way by someone else (e.g. that they are “taking the lower road” and should “not be allowed to take part in the market”). It was at times difficult to know what to make of these conflicting accounts, rendering it tempting to interpret them as the result of misinformation or misrepresentation. This was particularly the case when the critiques I heard were indeed made by someone about the negative experiences of others with others, rather than their own. However, there were also instances when the same practice (for instance, a particular mode and amount of payment for designs) was reported to me as “fair” by one person and “unfair” by another. For instance, I was left wondering whose word I was to privilege when two artists who had worked with the same company would assess its practices differently, praising them in one case, criticizing them in the other. Such discrepant assessments suggested that very different approaches and standards were coming into play. Thus, while the commercial success of some companies does make them easy targets for ill-informed criticism, I believe that the recurrence of discrepancies in the portrayals of companies generally also points to the existence of varying stances in the industry with respect to the kinds of relationships and exchanges that are negotiated when Aboriginal art is placed at the heart of a non-Aboriginal business. With this in mind, in what follows I will not be discussing who does what and who dis/approves of whom, but will instead be unpacking the economic and ethical tensions to which such criticism points.
In section 5.1, I discuss how, beyond their cultural affiliation, it is the interlocking of various dimensions of social location (e.g. class, gender) that position Aboriginal artists more or less (dis)advantageously vis-a-vis those who buy their work. Then, in section 5.2, I discuss relationships between artists, gallery owners, and artware company owners in more specific terms, and show how differing perspectives on what exactly is being exchanged between them affect the ways in which they evaluate the “fairness” of their transactions. Finally, I will consider possible parallels between the ethics and economics of artist remuneration in the artware industry and that of relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples more generally.

5.1 Beyond Cultural Affiliation: Social Location and Interlocking Power Dynamics

5.1.1 Artists’ position in the artware world

Without these [Northwest Coast] artists, we have no galleries, we have no collectors, we have nothing. So the most important thing is to support and encourage the artist.

- A Northwest Coast art gallery owner

In the present configuration of the industry, it is very infrequent that companies that are not Aboriginal-owned but involve Aboriginal individuals do so in any other way than by paying artists for artwork. In other words, in this industry, Aboriginal individuals who participate in the activities of non-Aboriginal companies in any aspect other than providing designs are very rare. In fact, although a few non-Aboriginal companies explained that they had hired Aboriginal employees in the past or that they hoped to hire some in the future, I am not aware of any non-Aboriginal artware company that had Aboriginal artists as employees on board at the time of my fieldwork. Artists are rarely if ever working under long-term contracts with companies but are instead independents who are paid a flat fee per design or through a royalty system (two modes of payment I describe in more detail in section 5.2.3 of this chapter). Thus when a relationship between an artist and a company lasts, this longevity is usually not the result of legal obligations, but rather the product of commitments built at an interpersonal level. Artists rarely if ever have any official guarantee that companies will continue working with them beyond short-term contracts. Technically, this positions them as free agents, with the advantage of being able to work with whomever they want. However, this absence of guarantee can also cause some
vulnerability: with dozens of other artists able to sell designs on this ‘free’ market, what renders particular artists better able to assert the terms of their engagement with these companies is the value that companies place not only on their work, but also on their relationship with them. Indeed, the advantage artists do have, despite this potential vulnerability, is that the success of companies that work with Aboriginal artists is partly dependent on the quality of their relationships with artists and how these artists will portray the company to other artists, competitors, as well as potential customers (both retailers and individual consumers).

During my fieldwork, I was struck by the fact that, of the various kinds of industry participants, artists generally tended to be the most comfortable discussing their experience and opinions with me, as well as the least likely to be individually named by those who critiqued this or that aspect of the industry. In contrast, certain names of non-Aboriginal producers and distributors were routinely brought up as part of such critiques. I argue that this can be understood in the context of larger power dynamics that simultaneously place artists in the front-lines of abuses perpetrated in the industry and in the favourable situation of being increasingly indispensable to the artware industry since it is becoming less and less socially and politically acceptable for companies not to work with them. In other words, artists tend to be seen as needing protection from, but also having leverage on, the industry. I believe this duality of vulnerability and strength helps explain why they are the only collection of individuals that were explicitly presented to me as forming the likeness of an interest group. While I do not have a record of anyone suggesting that artware companies in general could or even should form a collective or alliance to defend their interests (likely because they are seen as competitors first and foremost), it was often suggested that artists (who are actually also each others’ competition) should band together and show solidarity.

When, on occasion, I heard criticism of decisions made by artists (regarding what they had agreed to or with what companies they chose to work, for example), such criticism was usually framed as unfortunate missteps rather than insidious wrong-doings: unintentionally detrimental decisions that could be avoided with better knowledge of the industry on their part, less pressing need to make ends meet, and/or less propensity on the part of others to take advantage of their naïveté and/or vulnerability. For instance, Debra Hoggan described the situation of one of her friends, wishing this artist had gone about things differently but seeing the negative consequences of his decision as the result of a company’s unsavoury practices.
He took his design to a company to do art cards for him. Why do these artists do this? I don’t know. It boggles me. But specifically this company used the design, started selling it, didn’t give him any royalties. He didn’t even know about it until one day he happened to see his cards in a shop, went over there and they just treated him like ‘pfff...’ He was so frustrated... He thought, ‘well, what can I do, I’m just one little artist?’ and just let it go. Let it be. Didn’t fight it.

Several industry participants discussed the personal responsibility of artists for their decisions, including fellow artists who felt it was important not to be always portrayed as victims. For instance, one of them told me that he heard different artists tell stories where “it appears that they are taken advantage of, but you know, they are the ones that are putting themselves in the position to be taken advantage of, and then complaining about it after.” Still, there is clearly awareness that there are interlocking power dynamics that can situate Aboriginal artists at intersections unfavourable to them in comparison to the social location of those they are made to negotiate with. For instance, one artist stated that,

It’s very tough for an artist to go in when they have bills to pay, and you know, they’ve got no money in their wallet, it’s near the end of the month and they have to pay rent and whatever other expenses they have, and they’ve got this piece [to sell]... I’ve been there myself. And it’s just like... it sucks. It’s a terrible position to be in.

In the same way that there is nothing automatic or necessary about artists being in a vulnerable position of negotiation (i.e. artists being at a disadvantage), there is nothing automatic or necessary about such a vulnerability being used to their detriment (i.e. buyers taking advantage of them). That said, the economic argument that an artist’s difficult personal situation should not be taken into consideration in the context of a business negotiation does not preclude the ethical argument that the industry has a role to play in addressing the structural inequalities that contribute to the production of such individual situations. In an artware industry that is focused on Aboriginal art, this issue is compounded by the unequal distribution of wealth and power between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples which makes trust more uncertain, and suspicions of abuse more prominent.

As discussed in Chapter 1, the industry’s Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal stakeholders are positioned differently vis-a-vis the industry for the simple fact that only the former are culturally affiliated to the art on which the industry draws its specificity. However, I have found that it is necessary to look beyond cultural affiliation to understand the power dynamics of the industry. In this, I follow sociologist Patricia Hill Collins when she argues in favour of analyses that, at the
macro-level, take such things as race, gender, and class as “distinctive yet interlocking structures of oppression”\footnote{Patricia Hill Collins, “Towards A New Vision: Race, Class and Gender as Categories of Analysis and Connection,” \textit{Race, Sex & Class: An Interdisciplinary Journal} 1, no. 1 (Fall 1993): 26.} and, at the micro-level, refer to the notion of “intersectionality” to describe “how each individual and group occupies a social position” within these interlocking structures.\footnote{Patricia Hill Collins, \textit{Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment}, Routledge Classics (New York: Routledge, 2009), 82.} I have found that, in the Native Northwest Coast artware industry, although cultural affiliation tends to be put forward as the primary line of division between its participants, it is in fact when this affiliation interlocks with class, gender, generation, and/or health that it produces unequal encounters between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal industry participants. It is at the intersection of these variables of social location that individual industry participants find themselves with more or less power compared to other participants with whom they form relationships and negotiate the terms of exchanges.

In other words, \textit{cultural difference} is not in and of itself at the root of imbalanced power dynamics in the Native Northwest Coast artware industry. However, colonial processes that occur at the macro-level do affect the various dimensions of the social location of Aboriginal individuals at the micro-level. This helps explain why culturalist explanations\footnote{Here, I use the word “culturalist” to refer to interpretations that rely almost exclusively on cultural identity to explain behaviours (similarly to how “rationalist” interpretations explain behaviours using the idea of “reason”, or “racist” interpretations, the idea of “race”). However, resorting to such explanations can also fit Appadurai’s idea of “culturalism” as the “conscious mobilization of cultural difference in the service of… politics”, except that in the context of the artware industry, this is not usually done at the scale of the “nation-state” or “transnational bodies” Appadurai, \textit{Modernity at Large}, 15.} do tend to appear in discourses about what makes the industry benefit Aboriginal stakeholders less than it could, relying on negative stereotypes such as that non-Aboriginal people are “greedy” or that Aboriginal people are “maladapted” to the so-called modern economic system, for instance. Such explanations not only fail to account for the socio-historical processes that have led to power imbalances, they also reinforce inequalities by locating their source \textit{within} each cultural group, in what supposedly defines them, rather than \textit{between} them, in what shapes their relationships. Hence, there is a tendency to imagine that an industry focused on Aboriginal art such as the Native Northwest Coast artware industry, would necessarily be divided along cultural lines. Jean and John Comaroff write that “Subject positions are multiply determined, shaped less by political expediency than by the compelling truths of sense and perception”,\footnote{Comaroff and Comaroff, \textit{Millennial Capitalism and the Culture of Neoliberalism}, 11.} pointing to the importance
of examining “how consciousness, sentiment, and attachment are constituted under prevailing conditions” to understand why groups mobilize around particular dimensions of social location rather than others. This line of enquiry applies to the Native Northwest Coast artware industry in that cultural affiliation is the dimension that is most commonly mobilized against the industry’s current configuration of power, even though class, gender, generation, and health also play a role in the creation of inequalities.

As mentioned earlier, the very fact that, among industry participants, some are culturally affiliated to Native Northwest Coast art and others are not is an obvious reason for the mobilization of this difference in legitimizing participation in and claiming benefits from this art’s commodification. It is nonetheless important not to take for granted that inequalities of power are mapped directly onto cultural groups and instead examine the interlocking of cultural affiliation with other dimensions of social location that affect the power dynamics currently animating the industry. Although the following paragraphs present each of these dimensions separately, my analysis will bear traces of the fact that I have only partially teased them out from their interlocked configuration.

5.1.2 Class

During my fieldwork, the figure of the struggling artist finding it difficult to make ends meet was often offered as a counterpoint to the well-off company owner making a fortune from the artware business. There are of course many artists that are in stable and even comfortable financial situations, and company owners are not always as rich as they are thought to be. However, a number of industry participants expressed the feeling that in the case of Aboriginal artists, art is usually the ladder that made upward mobility possible, when in the case of company owners it was more often than not the cement of an already favourable socio-economic situation. I did not collect the kind of systematic data that would prove or disprove these impressions, but the idea that artists usually begin their careers at less favourable social locations than those who buy their art from them was relayed to me through a variety of comments. For instance, several retailers and company owners discussed with me their awareness that some artists “live from piece to piece,” counting on each sale to pay rent or bills. This made business interactions with them difficult, especially in cases where it was not advantageous for the store or company to purchase the pieces proposed. In situations where the latter know artists are in a difficult
economic situation, some retailers and company owners find it challenging to straddle the line between being expected to purchase works to show their support and being expected not to treat artists in a patronizing way. Meeting the first expectation might translate into purchasing their work whenever materially possible, while meeting the second might translate into not purchasing the work when the sale would feel like an act of benevolence rather than a business transaction. In any case, the overall consensus was that taking advantage of a situation of hardship to pay less than what the artist asks for is a much more worrisome and, in the long run, more damaging practice than not purchasing a work at all.

The relationship between collective and individual situations and how they are taken into consideration in the negotiation of business relationships is not always straightforward. For instance, one company owner explained that it was not uncommon for artists to insert into the negotiation process elements relating to their difficult economic situation, but that he tried to ignore these arguments because he felt such personal information would not usually be considered a business matter. At the same time, he claimed to be sensitive to the collective socio-economic situation of Aboriginal people, and made various donations to Aboriginal organizations. This intertwinement of individual and collective interests was made even more explicit when Aboriginal participants spoke about how their business decisions were at least partially informed by their responsibility towards family, their nation, Aboriginal organizations, or Aboriginal people more generally (for a more detailed discussion, see Chapter 8).

Whether or not class differences and the correlated issue of need are explicitly taken into consideration in specific business interactions, the stakes for each party are affected by their respective socio-economic situations at the time. In this respect, it is worth pointing out that there are class differences not only between non-Aboriginal buyers on the one hand and Aboriginal artists on the other hand, but also among Aboriginal artists – some leading materially comfortable lives while others face serious economic hardship. With respect to the latter category, Alano Edzerza commented:

There are a lot of artists, whether they are Native or not Native, who are in a position where they are making decisions that they would not normally make… That gives the power to whoever has the money at the right time and the right place.

Although the economic situation of artists and buyers is in a relation of co-dependence, the latter is often an imbalanced one: in order to generate new income, artists need to continually produce and sell more work; in contrast, although artware companies surely experience budget
crunches that affect their ability to pay for designs from time to time, they always have the possibility to make do with the designs for which they already have negotiated payments. Furthermore, the purchase of designs or the payment of royalties represents a small portion of their overall budget compared to what these payments may represent for those artists who count on them to make ends meet. Of course, not all Aboriginal artists rely on such things as royalty payments to meet their basic needs, as was pointed out to me by a company owner about a very well known artist: “[he] is doing totem poles that he is selling for over a million dollars. He’s not thinking, ‘okay, well I need the royalties from selling these blankets.’ You know, he’s in a position where he doesn’t need that.” However, there are artists whose livelihood does depend on artware. For them, immediate economic considerations can clearly be detrimental to their ability to be firm during negotiation processes.

Difficult as it can be for some artists to stand their ground when they negotiate prices, I have been told that it can eventually improve the power differential in their favour to do so. For instance, former gallery owner Debra Hoggan often tells artists:

You go in there with your head high, that’s your price, and if they’re not prepared to pay it, don’t accept it. Do not accept it. What you have to teach them [the buyers], is that they need you, as much as you need them. Don’t go in there feeling that you’re at their mercy, because if you don’t sell that to them, they have nothing to sell.

Of course, the last part of this statement is truer at the collective scale than it is at the individual scale: if one artist refuses to downgrade prices during negotiations, it is likely that the buyer will be able to find another artist who will; but if the great majority of artists refuse to, it becomes much harder for buyers to negotiate lower prices and still build the inventory they need to run their business. This is perhaps why, although artists are effectively competing for the attention and money of the same buyers, they often advise each other on these matters. For instance, Corrine Hunt explained to me how, after having witnessed a store owner asking a basket weaver to make a better offer on an already low asking price, she helped this artist find a buyer who would give her the price for which she was originally hoping. In a similar effort to generate mutual support among artists, Maynard Johnny Jr. created a Facebook group where artists can share advice on how to market their work, pointing to the fact that some of the challenges facing artists in the Northwest Coast art market are more than simply an individual matter. Both the Siyamin Co-operative created for Squamish Nation artists and the “Authentic Aboriginal”
program of the Aboriginal Tourism Association of BC (briefly described in Chapter 2) are also intended to enable artists to approach the market in a more collective manner.

In general, it was many times pointed out to me that beyond individual success stories, the underlying stakes of the Northwest Coast art market are collective. Several industry participants evoked the living conditions of Aboriginal people on reserves and in urban ghettos, unflatteringly contrasting them with the average living conditions in Canada. Given this situation, they argued, there was no question that the artware industry should result in direct economic benefits for Aboriginal stakeholders, above and beyond individual artists’ payments. Thus an Aboriginal company owner mentioned his desire to help alleviate the “abject poverty” to which some Aboriginal families are subjected as one of the reasons for making his company as focused on Aboriginal interests as possible. One artist explained that First Nations people “get treated like second-class citizens in our own country, we’re peasants in our own country, putting our hands out.” In his view, it was not enough that buyers be supportive of him as an individual artist, it was crucial that they also understand their ability, and make it their responsibility, to contribute to the improvement of the socio-economic situation of Aboriginal people as directly as possible via their business practices. Although it may not necessarily be reasonable to expect one single artware company to be able to generate improvements at the scale of entire communities, the demand that each company at least aspire to contribute to such large-scale improvements reflect a broader yearning for an all-around ‘new and improved’ Native Northwest Coast artware industry.

5.1.3 Gender

During my fieldwork, gender differences were seldom discussed explicitly as bearing on negotiations in the artware industry specifically; however, it was difficult not to notice that the industry is organized following a gendered configuration of labour. The great majority of the Aboriginal artists are men. Almost all of the retail managers and employees are women. Company owners are relatively equally divided between men and women, in part due to the high representation of women heading companies specializing in fashion.

With respect to artists, gender differences reflect and reinforce the division of labour that is typical of art production in the Pacific Northwest. While the symbolic and monetary value attributed such items as basketry and weavings is undoubtedly on the rise, several of the women I spoke to remarked that, when it comes to large commissions, competing with men often requires
them to turn to mediums that are predominantly associated with the work of men. As Pam Baker explained, “the commissions that come out are always totem poles, carved doors, masks...” In the Pacific Northwest, carving and metal engraving tend to be male activities (although there are notable exceptions\textsuperscript{21}), as is the designing of images that are then reproduced in textile form by women, such as button blankets and Chilkat weavings (although in this case too there are notable exceptions\textsuperscript{22}).

In the artware industry, the gendered configuration of labour present in Northwest Coast art – men creating designs, women weaving or sewing them – is not only generally applied to “soft products” (i.e. scarves, tea towels, etc) but also tends to be extended to “hard products” (i.e. mugs, casts, etc). It is indeed most often men that create designs to be reproduced on both textiles and wares,\textsuperscript{23} which are produced in factories employing predominantly female labour. This configuration effectively accentuates the tendency to let women’s work go unremarked, relegated to the status of ‘blank canvas.’ Indeed, if recent exhibitions and publications of Northwest Coast art have made a point to bring attention to the artwork of women on which, in turn, men have applied their designs,\textsuperscript{24} in the artware market there is no such recognition: marketing materials unmistakably place the emphasis on the value of the design rather than on the object on which it is reproduced, and thus men’s work continues to attract more attention than that of women.

Although weaving commissions are on the rise in the art market, weaving patterns created by female Northwest Coast artists are not currently being adapted for use on ‘hard products,’ whereas male-designed Chilkat-inspired images are. One striking example of such differential treatment is when a female weaver who had been asked to propose a design for a women’s snowboard was told that her design, inspired by the typically female work of Raven’s Tail weaving, actually “too male” for the company’s taste because it included rectangular motifs. In general, the tendency to favour crest-style figure designs over weaving patterns shows that, so

\textsuperscript{21} Ellen Neel in the 1950s, and Freda Diesing from the late 1960s on, and Susan Point since the 1980s, have been pioneers in this regard.


\textsuperscript{23} At the time of writing, the two most prominent Vancouver artware companies featured the work of five women and that of twenty-three men.

\textsuperscript{24} As indicated by its title, the 2010-2011 UBC Museum of Anthropology exhibition, \textit{Signed Without A Signature: Works by Charles and Isabella Edenshaw} (curated by Bill McLennan) brings attention to Isabella Edenshaw’s work as well as that of her husband, Charles Edenshaw, and thus both to the object and the design.
far, the artware industry has maintained the sort of gender differentials that exist in the Northwest Coast art market in general, with the same general trends and similar kinds of exceptions.

Furthermore, it is generally not Aboriginal women who are employed to work in the factories that make the objects on which Aboriginal men’s designs are reproduced. The exceptions that were brought to my attention during my fieldwork are Aboriginal women working in Aboriginal-owned companies that have kept their production local; but for any of the production being done outside of Canada; it is the women of other regions of the world and not Aboriginal women whose labour is being employed. What, by the standards of the art world, could have resulted in a sort of “demotion” of female artists to factory work has actually resulted in even further exclusion of Aboriginal women from this industry.

Yet, some women are finding ways to assert their presence in the market, by inserting themselves in activities typically considered male, as well as through efforts to valorize what is typically considered female work as art both in the art and artware market. For instance, when Debra Sparrow negotiated the arrangement relating to the Hockey Canada Vancouver 2010 Jersey, she made sure that weaving patterns would be included in the design. Also, her gender does not appear to have gotten in the way of negotiating a contract to her satisfaction. As Nike designer Stuart Iwasaki explained, there was some back and forth, reflecting the fact that “she definitely was not going to just give away her artwork,” and that they [Nike] “were not going to take it either: we wanted to pay a fair price for it.” In Sparrow’s words, “we negotiated for a few months, and we got it to where I was comfortable and they were comfortable”.

The success in art like in artware of female artists like Debra Sparrow, but also Pam Baker, Corrine Hunt and others, shows that individual women’s work can be very well received and artists can be fairly remunerated in both markets; however, as they pointed out to me, that does not keep them from being aware of and being dissatisfied with the fact that women’s work still tends to be undervalued. In sum, although women’s art is present in the fields of textiles and fashion, given the kinds of designs currently favoured in the artware industry, women’s artistic work is underrepresented in the artware industry. In addition, due to the outsourcing of much artware production to foreign companies, including for textiles and fashion, the production labour that is employed is often female, but rarely Aboriginal.
5.1.4 Generation

The landscape of the Northwest Coast art market in the 1960s was much different than it is today, as pointed out by Robert Davidson:

In 1965, I came to Vancouver and there were only four shops, and they were curio shops. If I wanted to sell something to people, during that time period those were the only outlet stores for tourist items. In those days, there was no market for the art.\(^{25}\)

Over the course of half a century, the situation has changed quite radically, with many more places for artists to sell their work, but also many more artists with works to sell, including a great number of artists at early stages in their careers. The situation of the latter artists was many times discussed with me in relation to power differentials in negotiations between artists and buyers. For instance, an experienced artist was discussing the problem of those who are taken advantage of in the industry, stating that “a lot of artists who come into the art world do not have a good economic grasp of [the market]”. Commenting about his own negative experience with an artware company, another artist stated:

I wasn’t really well educated yet on the marketing scheme or the kind of value, or the kind of money the company would be pulling in from that one design, and so I was kind of naïve, I guess. ... I admit I made a mistake.

Artists who experience this kind of disillusionment are often referred to as “young artists” even though the analysis of such negative experiences usually points less to age than to issues of inexperience, recognition, and/or generation. For instance, for the current generation, inexperienced artists who wish to make a living from their art means selling their work to salespeople who are almost always more experienced than them, since owners and those in managerial positions are usually those leading negotiations on behalf of both galleries and retail stores. Thus even artists who consider themselves well trained (whether through mentorship, formal education, or other life teachings and experiences) explained to me that they had initially found it difficult to make a living from their art, as it might be expected in any artistic field. Difficulties with self-promotion, limited business acumen, a strong desire to get work circulating as quickly as possible on the market – all can further contribute to less seasoned artists

\(^{25}\) This is another example of “tourist items” and “art” being set apart, as discussed in Chapter 1 and Chapter 6. Interestingly, it is also around that time that artist Doug Cranmer and his partners (Richard Bird and Alfred Scow) opened the Talking Stick, one of the first Aboriginal-run galleries in Vancouver. It was open from 1962 to 1967 and marketed a wide range of works, which ranged from what Cranmer himself called the “junk that pays the rent” to large scale commissions purchased by private buyers, museums, and municipalities. Kramer, “Kesu.”
underselling their work, my interlocutors explained, adding that some buyers choose to take advantage of this inexperience.

But even without directly taking advantage of artists’ inexperience, career advancement and reputation is often taken into account in the negotiation of prices, including payments to artists by artware companies. “Young” or “inexperienced” artists tend to be paid less based on the assumption that products bearing their work will sell less easily than those bearing the work of artists more advanced in their career. For example, I was told that “If you are selling a Bill Reid or a Robert Davidson, they [consumers] know that name and they are more likely to buy it than a newer artist” – a statement that could have been made about art, but that was in fact made about artware. Thus the marketability of artists’ work, which is often dependent on recognition and experience, clearly has consequences in terms of the power dynamics of their relationships with artware companies.

For instance, having become one of the best known artists of a much expanded Northwest Coast art market, Robert Davidson appears to have no trouble asserting himself in his relationships with artware companies. To give one example, the blanket company Kanata was keen to work with him, understanding that this could only be possible if he was satisfied with the quality of the reproduction in its minute details. As was explained to me, together they had initially tried to create a wool blanket from one of his well-known paintings, but once reproduced “it didn’t have any ‘wow’ factor to it. So he [Davidson] said, ‘no, this one isn’t going to work.’” The company was still interested in working with him, so they discussed designs that could be recreated as embroideries. Still, there were technical difficulties and it took several attempts before they were able to attain high enough reproduction standards. As one of the owners of the company stated, “Some of our artists just say, ‘yes, whatever you can create, as close as possible, that’s good,’ whereas others say ‘no, this is the integrity of my image, and if you don’t have that then we won’t go ahead.’” Beyond possible differences in negotiation styles, there is undoubtedly a relationship between being in the position to assert oneself and having the experience and the confidence of an established artist. Having a standing in the art market enhances the chances that companies will be interested in making the relationship work. In contrast, artists who have yet to make a marketable name for themselves, not only have less leverage in standard business

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26 This assumption is of course not specific to the Native Northwest Coast artware market.
relationships, they are also potentially more exposed to the exploitative practices of unscrupulous buyers because they are more likely to depend on each sale to make a living.

5.1.5 Health

A number of industry participants commented on the relationship between their experiences of the art and artware market and questions of mental and physical health, substance abuse in particular. Coming from non-Aboriginal participants, these remarks focused specifically on the health of the artists with whom they interact, while artists themselves spoke not only of their own health as individuals, but also that of health of Aboriginal people at a more collective level.

A company owner told me that it is “no secret” that addiction is a severe problem for a number of artists, explaining how a First Nations store owner he knows ceased buying carved wood objects because she found it too difficult to be constantly approached by artists who were behaving in inappropriate ways because they were intoxicated. A non-Aboriginal store owner also explained to me that, counselled to do so by Aboriginal artists with whom he has long-standing relationships, he now refuses to buy from those he calls “addicts” (whom he tellingly opposed to “the real people”), stating that “by giving some money to certain people, you are not helping them, you are only feeding their addiction.” Giving them food, yes, he added, but not money. In other words, health concerns can mean that artists will not be able to make a sale with certain buyers who believe they are helping them by refusing to purchase their work, with the obvious catch-22 that such refusals might make these artists more vulnerable to unscrupulous buyers asking them to lower their price, taking advantage of their difficult situation. Moreover, as in the example of an artist being told not to “drink” the money he had just been paid for one of his works even though he has no history of alcoholism, Aboriginal artists are discriminated against on a regular basis because of mere assumptions made about their health.

That said, when artists’ health is indeed at issue, not all attitudes towards them are discriminatory and rooted in stereotype. Some industry participants expressed genuine concern about artists being exposed to misconduct because of their precarious health situation, also making sure not to generalize. For instance, a non-Aboriginal designer working for a clothing company told me the story of how one of the artists his company works with was facing near homelessness due to substance abuse problems. “You’re cringing that you’re using these people’s stuff, and you just hope you’re doing it in a correct manner. And that they’re getting their
money,” he commented, worried that the artists’ agent may be taking more than his fair share of the payment. He then contrasted this artist’s story by commenting on the situation of two other artists with whom he was in communication. They were very much “together,” not in a position of need or dependence, he explained. “They have their own thing going on, they don’t really need to do this [artware],” he said, hinting at the fact that this also made the artware business less risky for them and a future partnership potentially more comfortable for him.

The previous comment resonates with the analysis that was offered by a sales representative working for another clothing company, who thought that the remuneration of artists was affected by what he called their “lifestyle.” Artists facing economic difficulties or that have substance abuse problems, he explained, may more easily sell one design for $100 rather than negotiate the implementation of a more advantageous arrangement. Arguably, the amount or percentage negotiated can indeed have to do with health since it can not only affect artists’ socio-economic situation, but also influence how they are perceived by those with whom they negotiate. For instance, I once heard a non-Aboriginal academic describe how she was conflicted about discussing the past alcohol addiction problems of an artist she was writing about, ultimately deciding not to include it in her book after the artist’s manager had said that it would be “bad for business.”

Interestingly, what was discussed with me less often than the negative impact individual artists’ health problems can have on their socio-economic situation is how, conversely, art can be “good for health,” both at the individual level and at a more collective level. For some, becoming artists was an integral part of their trajectory to redress their own health, or as illustrated here by Tsimshian artist Corey Moraes, to address issues of health and well-being in Aboriginal communities:

One of the well travelled roads for people like me to try to give back to our community is in the form of a counselor, or a therapist; I took a course in drug and alcohol counselor training, got my university credits and started practicing in the field to see if I wanted to pursue this any further. I saw the dire need for health, I heard the devastating stories, I couldn’t separate myself from that, the lives of the people that came in. I had a profound moment with a counseling mentor of mine ... He said “well, there’s more than one way to give back to a community, if you’re artistically inclined, he said, you could be a role model for at the very least up-and-coming artists, or young Native people who are looking for a way out of the dire circumstances they get into.”

Moraes frames the change in his career path from counselling to art as a means to continue caring for the well-being of others, as well as care for his own.
I’ve had to learn to be responsible for my actions, learned to be responsible for my family, for myself, for my art. It’s by no means been an easy process coming out of an impoverished childhood with a single mother and alcoholism around me, and sexual abuse. A lot of us have been through [difficult situations]. And I think that you have to find some way to take responsibility for your life and your own happiness.

Squamish designer Pam Baker also entered the field of fashion as a means to tend to her community’s needs. When in 1988 she came home to Canada from the US where she had assisted in coordinating fashion shows, she decided to become the alcohol and drug counselor in her community: “Part of it was to build the self esteem of our Squamish Nation youth, so I started coordinating fashion shows and people really enjoyed them.” She later decided to go to fashion school and start her own business, continuing to mentor youth through a number of volunteer activities and by donating to their fundraising efforts. Thus, Baker sees artware as a means to care for herself and her family, as well as others in her community. Yet, artists’ social engagements in favour of health were not as often discussed by those I spoke to as “good for business” than were individual artists’ health problems presented as “bad for business”, suggesting that the position in the market of artists with poor health is more negatively affected than that of artists working to improve their own and others’ health is positively affected.

To argue that variables of social location such as class, gender, generation, and health, affect the micro power dynamics of market relations and negotiations may be stating the obvious. What is perhaps less self-evident is being able to link, on the one hand, the assessment of business relationships as “fair”/“unfair” or “ethical”/“unethical” at the collective level with, on the other hand, the power imbalances that make the industry benefit Aboriginal stakeholders less than it could. In the next section, I examine discourses in which money and morals are both put in the balance of participants’ evaluations of the industry and the kinds of accepted economic behaviour and appropriate ethical relationships the industry currently promotes, and might promote in its ‘new and improved’ version. As I will show, beyond the specifics of each arrangement between galleries or artware companies and artists, the fairness and ethics of the artware industry is evaluated by its participants very differently depending on whether the frame of reference is the sale of art, labour, or services.

In this discussion, I will show how industry participants frame the power they have in shaping these relationships both in terms of legal contracts and social obligations. One of the
issues that was often discussed with me by my interlocutors was artists’ ability to control their artwork, its use, and the amount paid to them in comparison to the amount collected by those selling or reproducing it. From a legal perspective, this control largely depends on whether or not these artists remain the works’ owners. However, the dependence of galleries and artware companies on having good working relationships with artists does create a number of socially sanctioned norms encouraging the former to respect the latter’s wishes beyond what the law warrants and prescribes. Nonetheless, during my fieldwork I was constantly being reminded of the worry that, where there is enough money to be made, social frames of reference that are not legally enforceable will ultimately fail as protection against abuse. This worry is particularly strong when need comes into play and even more when greed does too, for need creates conditions of dependence and greed provides the motivation for taking advantage of this dependence. In the remainder of this chapter, I will illustrate how, in the artware industry, moral evaluations of economic transactions often go beyond what is or is not legally prescribed or what might be considered standard business practices. I argue that this is the case in great part because of the particularity of this industry, namely its reliance on the works of individual artists in order to specialize in the art of an entire region and its Aboriginal peoples – all of this in a (post-) colonial context.

5.2 Artist Remuneration and the Ethics of Cultural Commodification

As I argue throughout this chapter, the economics and ethics of the relationships of artists and artware companies are governed by a number of things above and beyond the signing of contracts and the reception of cheques. Still, many of the discussions about these relationships revolve around the arrangements that are struck for the payments for Northwest Coast designs. Because they are one of the most basic and yet crucially important transactions to occur in the industry, I consider them to represent a kind of “baseline” of ethics and economics in the artware industry. However, as mentioned in Chapter 1, the markets for art and artware are very much intertwined: many artists create both, many retail outlets sell both, and the differences between the two kinds of products are relative rather than absolute. There are also parallels to be made between the relationships of artists with the retail stores and galleries who buy their works to sell them on the one hand, and the relationships of artists with the companies who pay for their designs to reproduce them on wares, on the other. The transactions that occur between them do
differ depending on whether the product is considered art or artware, but the fundamental questions that they raise are the same: How is power distributed between the parties involved? What exactly is being exchanged and remunerated? What makes a transaction “fair”? What kinds of relationships do such transactions signal and generate? These are not the kinds of questions that invite definitive answers, but examining them will help understand the debates that animate the industry beyond the more obvious concerns surrounding commodification as appropriation.

Indeed, much has been written about the complex politics of cultural appropriation and its various social and ethical implications. In the artware industry, some use Aboriginal images that they wrongly believe are in the public domain, for a variety of reasons. Situations leading to such reasoning might include that: a) they have heard that Aboriginal art is regarded as collective property, which they interpret as meaning that works are the property of no one in particular; b) they believe Aboriginal art can be considered “Canadian heritage” and as such can be used by any Canadian regardless of ancestry; c) the makers of particular works are no longer alive, and these works have existed for more than 50 years, which they interpret as making them public domain (as per Canadian law); d) they have seen works reproduced elsewhere without an artist attribution, leading them to think that no one will claim them as their own; e) they believe that works that are shown in public spaces (e.g. the now iconic totem poles that are located in Vancouver’s Stanley Park) escape copyright laws. As discussed in Chapter 2, Canadian law has generally provided only limited means to protect Aboriginal art (and knowledge) against uses based on such interpretations, in part because Canadian law relies on different conceptions of “property” and ownership rights than the various Aboriginal laws it does not recognize. Other companies use Aboriginal-style designs made by a non-Aboriginal designer working in-house or by contract. These appropriative practices – especially the former – can save companies money in comparison to working with an Aboriginal artist. However, I have more often heard them justified in ethical terms (i.e. explanations as to why they feel they are socially acceptable

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practices), and not in *economic* terms (i.e. explanations as to why it makes sense for them to conduct such practices from the point of view of business).

For instance, discussing the issue of cultural appropriation and whether a non-Aboriginal designer could legitimately produce a Northwest Coast design, one person argued that, although she recognized that it was considered a proprietary issue, it was always possible to “debate who owns a circle, who owns a square” and that, especially given the prominence of “fusion”, she felt that there remained a “murky area” as to what constituted appropriation and what did not. First, this argument puts in question the idea that, from the point of view of style, the visual specificity of Northwest Coast art does not stem just from individual forms but by particular combinations and arrangements of these forms. Second, it does not address the fact that, from the point of view of property, Northwest Coast cultural expression is governed by complex systems of inheritance that go much beyond the Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal division, despite the fact that even within a given community not all members are entitled to the reproduction and circulation of specific crest images. In another vein, a company owner I met at a trade show told me that they contracted a non-Aboriginal designer because working with Aboriginal artists had been the source of conflict within the company in the past. In other words, even if this company does not save money by paying their non-Aboriginal designer less than they would an Aboriginal artist, it was trying to save itself the “bother” of building a relationship of trust with an Aboriginal artist, estimating that this effort was not worth the (economic and ethical) value of seeking Aboriginal art rather than its imitation.

My own research having focused primarily on artware companies that *do* work with Aboriginal artists, my analysis will focus more specifically on the purchase of artworks and uses of Aboriginal designs that are not usually considered straightforward “appropriation” (in the sense of taking without any consideration whatsoever for property rights as recognized in Indigenous and non-Indigenous frameworks). That said, these practices nonetheless raise a certain number of issues, as the question of appropriation is not altogether pushed out of the picture by simple virtue of the fact that artists have consented to and are paid for the sale or use of their works.
5.2.1 Mark-up

Mark-up in the art market

During my fieldwork, I was told again and again that the Native Northwest Coast art market works differently from other art markets. The most striking characteristic that was described to me was that the purchase of Native Northwest Coast art is regulated by the unwritten but well-known and socially enforced rule of a) payments being made up front to the artist and b) a 100% mark-up. In other words, artists are paid on the spot an amount representing half of the price for which their work is being sold in the gallery.

Galleries that do not specialize in Aboriginal art usually take art on consignment rather than buying it outright, artists being paid a varying percentage of the price paid at the time of the sale, depending on the commission retained by the gallery. Such consignment arrangements are rare in the Northwest Coast art market.\(^{29}\) When artists are paid up front, as they usually are, it is expected that the piece will be sold for a price of twice the amount paid to the artists. Only those galleries that practice this 2:1 retail mark-up for artworks are considered reputable, to the point that some consider that those failing to respect this rule should not call themselves “galleries” but “souvenir stores” instead. It was many times explained to me that artists who sell works to buyers despite the fact that they are known not to respect this “50/50 rule” and practice mark-ups well over 100% only do so when they are in a rush to sell, or because they lack in experience or self-confidence.

A number of those I spoke to remarked that it should not fall solely on the shoulders of artists to ensure that they are paid prices consistent with the amount for which they will ultimately be sold. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, artists are often advised not to let others convince them to sell for less than they had hoped. Even more, some buyers consider that it is also their personal responsibility to ensure the prices they pay artists are not lower than they could be. For instance, former gallery owner Leona Lattimer recalls giving advice to artists not to lower their prices:

\(^{29}\) A gallery owner suggested to me that the payment of artists upon delivery of the item to the gallery rather than upon its sale by the gallery is a legacy of the Hudson Bay trading posts and the feeling that transactions had to be settled on the spot, given the uncertainty of the next encounter (due to distance, movement, and seasonality). I have not had the opportunity to follow up on this thread, but it could perhaps help explain why this particular art market works differently than others in that regard.
I’d ask [an artist] “Would you sell them cheaper if I buy them all?” and if they said “yes” I would say: “Ok, let’s start over. No, it took you just as long to make this, it’s art! You don’t let people do that to you.”

When the 50/50 rule is respected, a piece undervalued at the time of purchase from the artist will result in an equivalent loss for the gallery at the time of sale, providing an economic incentive not to underpay artists. When the 50/50 rule is not respected, however, there is no direct economic incentive to pay artists in relation to the highest possible market value. For instance, a gallery owner described how a store that used to be situated near the entertainment district was able to purchase pieces at discounted prices on evening weekends, having no qualms about selling them at what their estimated market prices instead of applying a 100% mark-up to the discounted price at which they had purchased the pieces. But even the 50/50 rule is dissatisfying to some, such as an artist who described how he had finally decided to sell all of his work in person after years of frustration for receiving half the market price of his pieces, even though he was their creator, and galleries were simply their seller. In his view, this meant that galleries were making a bigger profit than he was. He saw this as unfair as he could not conceive that they had created as much value through their activities of distribution as he had through his activities of production. This approach is an example of the idea, here described by anthropologist Peter Luetchford, that “Those who work the earth actually produce, intermediaries do not, at least not in the same way,” generating the “repeated complaint ... that the ability of merchants to appropriate wealth far exceeds their economic contribution and is therefore unjust”.30

However, another way artists and galleries consider the issue of profit distribution is by taking into account not the value created by the two parties, but rather the costs they each incurred. This is illustrated in the following remark by Musqueam artist and company owner Joe Becker:

I’ve been in business long enough to understand that everybody needs to make a living, and in order for me to make a living, they [the galleries] have to make a living. And for them to make a living, they have to have an outlet, and Vancouver rents are pretty high, depending on location, and they’ve got everything to pay that we have to pay [utilities, etc].

Similarly to the costs associated with the production of artworks beyond labour and time (such as the purchase of materials, the purchase and maintenance of tools, and in some cases the

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rental of a studio space), there are costs associated with the sale of artworks, beyond the salaries of gallery employees. For instance, a gallery owner gave the following approximation for the breakdown of costs when his gallery organizes an exhibit: “You take your 50% that goes to the artist. You can take 15% for catalogue, promotion and advertising. You can take another 10% and put it into what it costs in terms of retail space...” Ultimately, whether considered from the point of view of value created or costs incurred, the 50/50 rule does not guarantee a balanced distribution of profit between artists and buyers. Rather, it only ensures a balanced division of payment. Still, it is considered by many Northwest Coast art market participants as a minimum expectation in the building of a trust-worthy business relationship, symbolically establishing the parties as equal partners, if not guaranteeing an equal profit margin.

**Mark-up in the artware industry**

In the retail world, the markup practiced for artware from wholesale price to retail price is usually higher than the 100% practiced in the Northwest Coast art market. Typically, the retail price is 2.2 or 2.3 times the wholesale price, though some retail stores practice higher mark-ups, especially on inexpensive items (pencils, stickers, etc). Some fields of retail tend to function with higher margins, as in the case of clothing produced industrially. However, as Alano Edzerza explained, the specificity of the Northwest Coast market (and the small scale of Northwest Coast clothing operations relative to the clothing industry as a whole) makes it so that the markups for clothing bearing Northwest Coast designs by known artists tend to reflect the kinds of markups that are practiced by Native art galleries and stores for the rest of their retail products, rather than what might be practiced in a typical clothing store with brand name products.

There is a suggested retail price, and people follow that usually pretty well. Some people might add an extra 5 or 10% on it, however which way they are justifying it, whether it’s shipping, whether they are paying an extra tax for their state… [The mark-up] is actually way smaller than in retail clothing stores, in Western clothing stores [that] pay 30% of retail. And most stores will mark their stuff up two times over [200%], or one and a half [150%], whereas the Native t-shirt line, it’s one hundred percent. You mark it up times 2, whereas other stores it would be times 3.

Although this does not apply to all clothing items, in cases where artists market their art themselves, it is not uncommon for them to expect their artware to be treated like the rest of their

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31 In other words, if an item is sold for $1,000, both parties will receive $500; however, one party may have incurred costs amounting to $200 (thus making a $300 profit margin) while the other party only incurred costs of $50 (thus making a $450 profit margin).
artwork, using the 50/50 rule. For instance, when he wholesales his work, Joe Becker does not differentiate between carved wood pieces (which tend to be classified as “art”) and sandblasted glassware (which tends to be classified as “artware”)^32:

There is a given in the art industry, in this industry that we work in, except for when we are selling our own stuff [as retail]: anything that goes to a gallery or an arts and crafts store or any store, they buy it at a wholesale price. So if they buy that bowl for 50, they sell it for a 100. That’s a given. So when we do our work here, we look at basing it on a wholesale price first. So our margin always has to be within that.

As Becker points out, whatever the retail mark-up, the wholesaler’s margin is contained within the difference between wholesale price and cost of production. When developing new products, wholesalers can also work back from the retail price they believe buyers will be willing to spend on the product, knowing that the production cost will have to be less than 50% of that price in order for the product to be profitable for them. For Native Northwest Coast artware, a portion of the costs would normally be dedicated to paying for Aboriginal designs. As described above, there are companies that try to save themselves this expense by using designs without paying for them, usually copied from images found in books or on the World Wide Web. For those who do work with Aboriginal artists, however, the profitability of the wholesale mark-up is affected by the kind and amount of payment that is negotiated with artists, which in turn is tied to the complexity of the design, the reputation of the artist, and a host of other technical and commercial considerations.

5.2.2 Exclusivity and representation

Exclusivity and representation in the art market

Another particularity of the Native Northwest Coast art market that was pointed out to me is that galleries do not usually “represent” an artist as is often practiced in other markets, where galleries promote specific artists often in exchange for having exclusivity on the artist’s work for a given region. In the Native Northwest Coast art market, artists are free to work with any number of galleries, take on individual commissions, make direct sales, etc. However, this also means that galleries do not always have much interest in pushing the work of specific artists (by

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^32 This classification is debatable, as it relies on differentiating products based on materials and mode of production (carvings made with hand tools from a culturally valued material (see Chapter 7) versus designs being sandblasted onto pre-existing glassware) rather than such things as relative differences in prices, sizes, being made in series, etc (see Chapter 6)).
running solo shows, for instance), knowing that this kind of promotion could just as well lead buyers to purchase works from the other galleries that carry this artist’s work, or directly from the artist. This rarity of contracts stipulating exclusivity and representation was explained to me as partly predicated on the fact that Aboriginal artists are often solicited to create work by members of their communities, and that these artists could hardly ask them to deal with the gallery instead of directly with them. This would be difficult not only because inserting a third-party in a relation of social proximity such as that of artists and their family members could be awkward and even disrespectful, nor simply because Aboriginal communities are often geographically distant from the cities where the major galleries are situated. It would also be difficult because requests from fellow community members can be related to ceremony, sometimes taking the form of an exchange of service or the fulfilment of an obligation. Such cases do not conform to business transaction as usually practiced in the art market. The gallery owners I spoke to agreed that maintaining exclusivity was an unreasonable expectation to place on artists because of these community ties and obligations, making the contractual representation of artists not particularly adapted to this market.

That is not to deny that galleries do spend a significant amount of time and energy promoting artists, nor to ignore that some artists do privilege working with specific galleries. However, many of these relationships are managed interpersonally rather than legally. Although, as gallery owner remarked, breaches of exclusivity contracts are “not something that we have to deal with on the Northwest Coast art market”, the expectations laid out by the social norms of this market do come with their own sets of tensions. For instance, a gallery owner who spent time showing pieces of a specific artist to a buyer might feel cheated if this buyer ends up purchasing a piece directly through the artist. Similarly, artists can feel frustrated to learn that a gallery does not actively promote them only because they do not privilege sales through galleries over direct sales.

In the absence of exclusivity contracts, it is to the discretion of the galleries and of the artists to manage their relationship in the way they deem appropriate, with their respective interests in mind. For instance, although not legally bound to do so, artists who sell pieces directly to individual buyers in addition to selling through galleries are generally expected to price their work similarly to a gallery so as not to undercut them. Indeed, even though these would be different original works, in the long run, such a practice would make the pieces
galleries had already purchased from artists difficult to sell, discouraging them from buying more of their work in the future. Ultimately, what seems to be expected of both parties – but is ultimately difficult to enforce in the absence of legal or other official agreements – is that they ensure that their respective practices do not place undue limitations on the other’s ability to market the works. It is one thing for artists who make direct sales and the galleries that sell their work to recognize that they are inevitably to some extent in competition with one another; it is another thing for one of them to actively hinder sales that could be made by the other because it might cut into their own.33

**Exclusivity and representation in the artware industry**

With respect to artware, a potential source of conflict is the production of artware products with the designs of artists that represent a direct competition for their other artworks. For instance, lessLIE mentioned the case of an artist he knew whose career had been greatly affected by an exclusivity contract with an artware company:

> When he was creating work for [this company], having it marketed and published by [them] and getting royalties from that work, there was an agreement on his part that he wouldn’t create work for any gallery. That really impeded his career in the sense that he wasn’t able to market his work to galleries, and his name was mainly recognized through t-shirts and cards, and fridge magnets and whatever else.

Similarly to galleries taking the work of artists on consignment and negotiating to represent them in exchange for a certain level of exclusivity, artware companies that pay royalties do not acquire the copyright of the designs from artists but can negotiate with them particular exclusive uses of these designs (see below). Just as galleries can negotiate exclusivity worldwide or in relation to regional markets, artware companies can negotiate full exclusivity on a design for the given time of the contract, or only for specific uses of the design during that time. For instance, there is a garment company that pays artists royalties for the use of their designs on clothing, and these artists can use their designs on any other product except for garments. Similarly, a blanket company reproduces designs that artists agree not to reproduce on textile products that would

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33 For instance, I was once walking through a Vancouver gallery when I noticed that the labels placed near each piece included the cultural affiliation of artists, but did not indicate their names. When I inquired about this to the employee who was tending the gallery that day, she explained that they had begun omitting the names of artists when they realized that some buyers would spend time in the gallery, take note of names, and once returned home would run an Internet search, and buy directly from artists whose contact information they could find. When I mentioned this to a few artists and gallery owners, all of them said that this sort of practice goes against the kind of relationships they like to have with one another, despite there being no legal provision to keep this from happening.

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compete with theirs. Some contracts can be ambiguous, such as one that had been signed by a well-known artist that was worded in such a way that it was unclear if the design’s use was limited to being printed on paper products, or to being printed on any kind of product – the artist thought it was the former, but found out that from a legal standpoint it was the latter.

As with Northwest Coast art galleries that purchase works from artists upfront (i.e. before presenting them for sale), artware companies that purchase copyright do not gain exclusive access to artists’ work in general but only to the particular designs to which they acquire the rights. Companies can acquire copyright as a security that the artist will not use the design in other projects, but this exclusivity of sorts concerns each purchased design and does not technically extend to others. This does not keep some companies from expecting that artists will reserve their work to them, or conversely, some artists from expecting that companies will continuously purchase the works they have to offer. Both expectations usually stem from the relationship they have built together over time, but as one artist pointed out, neither request is reasonable without the other: artists have little reason not to sell to other companies if that company does not keep buying from them, and a company has little reason to continue buying from artists if their work can be found on other companies’ products. In a scenario where artists end up working exclusively for a specific company, one could imagine that they be paid otherwise than per design, with long-term contract or perhaps even be hired as employees dedicated to design work. Yet, as I have already explained, I did not encounter this situation during my fieldwork, with the exception of artists who have their own artware company.

5.2.3 Flat fees and royalties

In the artware industry, artists are usually remunerated in one of two ways: a flat fee with which the copyright of a design is purchased by the artware company, or royalties paid in exchange for the company’s use of a design to which the artist keeps the rights. Artware designs being purchased from the artist through a flat fee is similar to pieces being purchased by galleries from artists upfront: the transaction is essentially an ownership transfer from the artist to the gallery or company owner. Conversely, the use of designs paid through royalty arrangements is similar to the consignment of artworks in that ownership is not transferred from the artist to the gallery or company owner.
With respect to artware there is no equivalent to the unwritten but usually socially enforced rule of 50/50 that is practiced between Northwest Coast artists and the buyers of their individual artworks. In other words, there is currently no real standard as to the ratio between what is paid to the artist and what the company makes through the use of the designs these artists created. In the case of designs being purchased for a flat fee, the amount paid to the artist is set, but the profits made by the company depend on such things as their production cost/wholesale price margin and sales. Therefore, the ratio between the two largely depends on volume, the artist making proportionally less compared to the company until the design ceases to be used.

In the case of royalties, the percentage paid to the artist is set, and it is the total amount collected that varies according to the quantities that end up being produced or sold (depending on whether the royalties are paid according to sales or production). The ratio does not change over time, as a successful product benefits them both proportionally to the agreed royalty percentage. This percentage can vary substantially from one arrangement to the next. Not only did artists tell me so, but several producers also told me they initially had to ask other companies for advice, as they were not aware of particular standards. One company owner set a percentage based on what “felt right” to him, while another even turned to me, wondering if I had discovered such a standard through my research. Although I did ask artists and companies about percentages, the responses that were given to me were both often individually vague and overall wide-ranging. One artist said he didn’t remember what the percentage was, but joked that he knew he “could not retire on it”, while another was happy to report that his royalties were “a really good deal, a deal that no one else can get.” Some more precise percentages were given to me on cost of production (7%, 10%, 15%...), and others on wholesale price (3%, 5%, 6%, 7%, 10%, 20%...). Given the fact that wholesalers’ margins vary (I was given the approximation of anywhere between 20% and 60% of the wholesale price depending on the kind of item), it is difficult for me to make direct comparisons between these figures. I was told that “industry standards” for products developed with museums were between 7% and 10% of production cost. However, the many other figures I was given suggest that these are not yet the norm industry-wide.34

Because the amount received through royalty agreements accrue with sales, the revenues of artists who are paid royalties depend on how well products do on the market. Thus, over time,

34 Interestingly, several companies explained that they preferred to pay all of their artists either the same or at least very similar percentages so as not to create a hierarchy between them, while others stated that well-known artists tended to be paid higher percentages in virtue of the fact that their products could be more easily sold.
artware has become a less lucrative business for those individual artists who were involved early on, before the development of a number of new artware companies and the concomitant proliferation of products that are now in competition with theirs. For instance, one artist explained that his revenue from t-shirts has been divided by almost four since the early 1980s, when he was one of the few Northwest Coast artists to have t-shirts on the market. Today, with so many competitors, the same royalty arrangement has become less attractive financially. However, this artist also does not rely on t-shirts to make a living as he has become well known in the art market.

Ironically, those who do rely on artware to make a living are also less likely to be able to negotiate the high royalty percentages of those who do not, since they do not have the latter artists’ fame. However, since artists often sign royalty contracts on the basis of a limited term of one or more years, they can negotiate higher royalties if they have progressed in their career by the time of the renewal. Conversely, an artist can also decide not to continue working with the company at all after the end of the term, meaning that the company should not be able to continue using the design since the artist had retained copyright. As Bill Helin puts it, at the end of a term, “[If] I don’t like them, I just say, ‘Forget it!’” Such is the advantage of legal arrangements that have to be renewed by both parties to endure, as opposed to contracts in which copyright is signed over once and for all and are only revisited if the artware company agrees to do so.

On a few occasions, I have heard payments discussed as if a flat fee was interchangeable with or equivalent to royalties (e.g. so and so “pays a flat fee as a royalty”). This was done by several retailers who insisted that they only dealt with companies who paid “royalties” to artists, even though their store carried merchandise produced by companies that in fact purchase the design with a flat fee. Equating the two kinds of agreements is actually rather misleading. For instance, the most straightforward difference between the two arrangements concerns with whom, of the artist or the company, the copyright ultimately rests.

The relationship between being paid a flat fee and selling copyright does not appear to be automatic, as I am aware of at least three cases where an artist had been paid a specific agreed upon sum without giving up copyright, and only authorizing the use of their image under very specific conditions. Such exceptions notwithstanding, artists that are paid a flat fee generally do
so in exchange for the rights to their design.\textsuperscript{35} Even among those who agree to be paid in the form of flat fees, many artists expressed ambivalence about having to give up copyright as part of their arrangement with artware companies, saying that it was not what they had initially expected, or that they had agreed to it without having fully understood the implications, or even that they had done it out of necessity. For instance, at an exhibit opening, I met an artist whose name I recognized from one of the artware company websites I had recently visited, prompting an informal conversation about his experience in the industry. He described in positive terms his current relationship with a particular company that paid him royalties. However, he also told me about his very first experience selling a design (to a different company) for the particularly meagre sum of $25, not realizing that the company was acquiring the rights to it and intended to reproduce it on a wide range of products. He felt that he had fallen victim to his own naïveté and the company’s taking advantage of the same, stating that from that point on he never sold copyright to his work again.\textsuperscript{36}

As with royalty percentages, very few precise numbers as to flat fee payments were shared with me, and those that were given to me were very wide-ranging, from this particularly low amount of twenty-five dollars to over five thousand dollars, with several other figures in the hundreds of dollars, and a few others in the thousands of dollars. That said, even a sum an artist thought was reasonable at the time of the contract signing can become much less satisfying upon imagining the profits made by the company from the products on which their design ended up being reproduced. A fashion designer discussed as an example the figures of a $200 dollar flat fee compared to profits of $200,000 for the company, stating that artists would not sign such agreements if they were fully aware of this difference in profits, even relative to the capital companies require to run their business. For a number of artists, it was upon seeing the products lined up in store after store that they began to feel like what they obtained was probably not as good a deal as they had thought. One artist in particular felt cheated, aware that the contract he signed did not hide anything from him, but still feeling frustrated that such a contract would have been placed before him in the first place. “I didn’t think about it in the long run, you know,” he said. “Now, I don’t agree with that.”

\textsuperscript{35} Several artists explained that they were particularly inclined to sell copyright in the case of a business or organization logo, as they felt it would be unreasonable to ask for royalties on each use of a design created specifically to communicate the identity of the entity that had commissioned it from them.

\textsuperscript{36} This example is rather extreme, as most artists who sell copyright do so knowingly, and are usually paid substantially more than $25.
Kwakwaka’wakw artist Steve Smith spoke about how decisions made in the moment, especially when rushed by need, could be the source of regrettable situations and misunderstandings:

When somebody sells something outright, maybe on the odd time somebody is not forthcoming and telling them exactly what’s going to happen with it, but you know, in the Native art business, it seems there are a lot of artists who are struggling pay cheque to pay cheque: “I need some money now, so I’m going to sell myself now,” and not look at the long term. And it’s unfortunate, but we all make our decisions.

Moreover, Haida artist Jim Hart noted that individual decisions can have collective implications on the market. “They signed [copyright] away, that’s their fault, they lose control, that’s their [problem], but it makes it hard on others too,” he said, enjoining artists to do their best to take the bigger picture into consideration, and look for “trusted advice” from those who “know what the game is”. But even with all the cards in hand, artists’ preferences vary, and they do not all agree to the same things.

Underscoring the existence among artists of differences in expectations as to what constitutes fair business arrangements and contrasting them with negative comments about flat fees, I have met artists who have been in the business for years, and are content both with flat fees as a form of payment and with the amount of these fees. They pointed out that from a strictly economic point of view, royalties were not necessarily inherently more lucrative than flat fees. In the latter case, the total amount they were to receive was known and paid to them up front rather than dependent on how well the product was to do on the market, paid in fractions over time. For instance, a Haida artist who usually works with companies that pay flat fees explained that he did have one royalty agreement in place for a particular item, but had received a grand total of $50 over a period of two years, a sum that paled in comparison to what he normally receives for a similar design through flat fees. A Nuu-chah-nulth artist I spoke to explained that he was once asked by an artware company if he would let them use his work in exchange for royalties, to which he answered that he could not be bothered with anything else but a flat fee. Otherwise, he explained, he would have to eternally “chase [the company] down” to get his dues, something he was not prepared to do. In contrast, others were clearly in favour of royalties, such as Alano Edzerza:
I think royalties are the best as far as dealing with the artist. Flat fees, I think, take advantage of people who are not in the best position at times, and I think that’s really negative. That’s really, really negative.

Some artists were ambivalent, having themselves had the experience of accepting flat fees as payment, but stating that “in a perfect world”, they would prefer “being paid with royalties, instead of being paid a one time flat fee for the copyright.” Interestingly, one of the companies that pays royalties was hesitant to discuss this style of arrangement in terms of ethics, stating that it was a matter of artist preference more than anything:

It’s just a way of doing it, it’s not like this ongoing royalty is the only ethical way of doing it, there are other ways. … This is the irony. In European art, I can buy a bear [design], I can buy a fish, I can buy a maple leaf, and there’s never going to be an issue how I buy that design, how much money I made off of it, but with the First Nations, we’ve constructed it this way. Is it any more or less ethical than buying the art outright as we would with someone who made a flower or a maple leaf? I don’t know, I think that’s a good discussion. We happen to [pay royalties], but whether it’s the best program, ask the artist. Maybe the artist would prefer a front payment and that’s it.

In this respect, what industry participants stressed about the thorny question of “fairness” for arrangements between artists and companies was reminiscent of the complex idea of “free and informed consent” that is used in the language of research ethics. Researchers are considered responsible for outlining potential risks and advantages to research participants, just as artware companies are considered responsible for making sure artists know what they are buying into and/or signing away. This was reflected in the comment by a gallery owner who described companies that “are quite reputable” as those that make sure “the terms are laid out and there is a chance for [artists] to say, ‘yes’, ‘no’ and negotiate it.” Lyle Wilson made a similar point when he discussed his experience developing products with MOA: “The Museum is fairly fair about this, you know, they’ll say “ok, this is the deal, this is what we give you, this is what we give everybody else, if you don’t like it, that’s ok, no hard feelings.””

5.2.4 Trust and risk

Taking into consideration all of the above, flat fees and royalties are both associated with some economic risks for artists, and each require trust of companies’ practices on a different level. To sum up: on the one hand, when an artist receives a flat fee, this guarantees being paid a certain amount even if the product or the company turn out to be commercial flops; on the other hand, it is also to run the risk of receiving a lesser payment on the spot than might have been
collected over time had a royalty agreement been signed and the product been particularly successful. An artware company owner whose company pays flat fees discussed this very point with me, explaining how he addresses this issue with artists. Before creating a product or buying a design, he explained, one does not necessarily know how well it will do on the market. Thus an item might be produced for a certain amount of time after having been purchased for a flat fee negotiated on the basis of expected sales, but if the sales are significantly above the projected numbers or if an unexpected opportunity for the use of a design emerges, then the amount initially paid to the artist might be supplemented to ensure the artist does not feel like the company alone benefited of this unforeseen success. When I asked whether such additional payments stemmed from a legal obligation on his part (i.e. written into the contract they had signed), he said that no, it came from a moral obligation and his sincere desire to keep relationships with artists as good as possible.

While artists are likely to appreciate a company going above and beyond what a signed contract stipulates, this kind of practice could also be contractually mandated. For instance, it is conceivable to draft a hybrid contract, where a fee would be paid upfront and royalty payments would start being issued if and when this sum would have been reached under a royalty agreement.37 This would theoretically guarantee artists both a minimum payment (what they felt made the arrangement worth it for them no matter what) and the maximum payment (what they would receive if and when a royalty arrangement turns out to be more advantageous than a flat fee). The two practices closest to this system are when a company pays advances on royalties and when a company paying flat fees ends up issuing a new payment in recognition of the fact that a product did well on the market. In both cases, however, unless this is a condition written into the contract, it remains not a legal obligation but a courtesy of sorts. In these situations, artists have to count on the good will of the companies with whom they work, equipped with ethical arguments and the quality of their interpersonal relation as primary means to mobilize this good will in their favour.

37 Contracts that combine flat fees (paid to commission a particular design) and royalties (paid in exchange for its use) are also possible. Shane Greene describes an arrangement of this kind in the field of bioprospecting in South Africa, with the company paying a “collection payment” (for botanical samples) and “license fee” for the use of the indigenous medicinal know-how related to the samples. Shane Greene, “Indigenous People Incorporated? Culture as Politics, Culture as Property in Pharmaceutical Bioprospecting,” Current Anthropology 45, no. 2 (April 2004): 218, doi:10.1086/381047.) This example further suggests that the knowledge related to artists’ designs that they choose to share with artware companies (for reproduction on tags, for instance) could also be remunerated through a licensing agreement that would treat it as proprietary knowledge rather than part of the “commons.”
That said, even points that are covered by a legal contract can be the object of tensions when relationships continuously waver between trust and distrust. In this respect, no matter the nature of the economic exchange – flat fee, royalty, or another system – trust is a key component of relationship between artists and companies. Indeed, beyond the question of whether or not the terms of the arrangement are deemed “fair” by the parties involved, there is the question of whether or not these terms will ultimately be respected. This helps explains why the relationships that were described to me in the most positive terms had been built over years of business conducted jointly, sometimes having begun as a friendship or developing into one over time. For instance, Nuu-chah-nulth artist Ivan Thomas has a joint business venture with a glass company that is run by one of his close friends. Gallery manager Nicky McConnell, Thomas’s common-law partner, described it in the following terms:

With our friend – because he’s such a good friend – he basically just pays Ivan royalties, and this might seem naïve, but we take his word for it. He’ll say, ‘I went to a festival and sold twenty of your pieces’ and half the time we’ll just take it back in glass jewellery.

McConnell was not the only one to point out that a royalty arrangement requires artists either to trust that it is being honoured or to have the means to ensure that it is. Put simply, since artists are paid per number of items, they have to believe or be able to check that these numbers are being both accurately counted and honestly accounted for. As Joe Becker remarked, when an artist is paid royalties “you have to depend on the honesty of the person that you are dealing with” since “You would have to travel far and wide to check up on [a company’s] sales, in order to track your design!”

Artware companies are also very much aware of the importance of establishing trust with the artists with whom they work. I had been told early on in my research on the artware market by a sales representative that royalties were becoming more and more common in the industry. This had made me wrongly assume that companies that had decided to change their mode of payment over the years would have moved from flat fees to royalties. Surprised to learn that one company owner had made a change in the other direction (from royalties to flat fees), I learned that this was because royalties had created tensions in the company’s relationships with artists. When the company had paid royalties, it was regularly confronted with accusations from artists who had made their own estimations that the payments did not accurately reflect what they believed were the sales. The owner felt that, with flat fees, artists would always know that they
would be paid what they had negotiated at the start, in relation to such things as their individual standing in the market and the various uses of the image. He added that even though he could legally do so, he was not inclined to continue using an image against the will of an artist – whether because of a change of heart or, even more, because of a conflict between them: it was against his interest to upset artists, including those who no longer work with the company and could taint his reputation. As one fashion designer put it, “In this business, you cannot afford to do something wrong; the word gets out and your reputation is tainted.” The challenge, of course, is that not everyone agrees on what constitutes “something wrong” – and that includes artists’ opinions on the matter.38

A gallery owner who has experience developing artware suggested that it is much easier for artists to trust companies when royalty payments are made on production rather than on sales. In effect, the numbers are internal to the company and thus both more straightforward and easier to verify in case of doubt, especially in relatively small scale and local operations. He explained:

The way that I pay my royalties and the way I think royalties should be paid is on production. I think that when a piece is produced, when an artist’s design is printed, a royalty should be paid. There are companies out there where they may produce 100,000 products with an artist’s design on it, but they don’t pay until they’ve sold that product, and my belief is that the minute that the artist’s design is printed, the royalties should be made at that time. On production, not on sales. (...) Otherwise, the artist really doesn’t have control, and the trust that they have to have on the company selling their work is huge. (...) If the royalties are paid on production, then it’s easy. I can walk into your warehouse at any time, if you have ten thousands mugs, I know I was paid for those ten thousand mugs.

In such a scenario, the ease of access to and verification of inventory has a lot to do with scale, both of production and of geography (see Chapter 3). An artist living in British Columbia working with a company based in Ontario commented rather nonchalantly on the information he received in the mail with his royalty cheques: “They give me a breakdown... of which [products] are selling, and how good the quantities of sales are and everything, so I get a rough idea of that, but I haven’t really kept track.” Yet some artists who do want to keep track are not always enabled to do so by the companies with whom they work. After having had several bad experiences, including with a marketing representative who did not send him royalties and would

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38 The fact that some artists are satisfied with being paid with a flat fee while others only accept royalties, as discussed in this chapter, is a case in point.
not send him records, Bill Helin decided that from that point on he would put the law on his side by drafting contracts that allow him access to company records and facilities.

I get a lot of artists contacting me to find out how I do this work for the companies for royalties. And it’s really about the track record of the company; whether they pay the royalties on time, … if they’re transparent and open about their accounts. … They’re usually good people, but I mean anybody can be nice to anybody just up front just to get them on board. But with the follow up and the treatment overall, pretty much within a year you see how the relationship’s going to go. That means that I sign a one-year agreement with everybody and then we review it after a year.

Another way that Helin has decided to address the question of trust is by working with companies that also work with artists whom he knows have the means to retaliate legally and financially if need be, citing Robert Davidson as an example: “nobody screws around with him.” Artists of Davidson’s stature may indeed be less inclined to worry about being inadequately treated by artware companies as a) it is in these companies’ interest to keep well-known artists on board and b) the motivation of artists who are particularly successful in the art market to work with artware companies is usually only secondarily economic. In a different conversation, Davidson was indeed also taken as an example of an artist whose primary concern with respect to developing artware was not economic, but the more accessible distribution of his works through reproductions respecting the integrity of his designs. In fact, whether or not they worried about their mode and level of remuneration, most artists stressed the idea that the monetary transaction itself was only one aspect of the exchange. In other words, the balance of benefits between them and the company was not simply a question of balance in profits.

5.2.5 Other benefits

Much of the criticism of artware companies I heard is focused on the issue of imbalances in the distribution of profits between them and the artists whose designs they reproduce. At the same time, a number of artists pointed out that money was not the only thing that motivated them to participate in the artware industry. For instance, Tsimshian artist Corey Moraes made the following analysis:

It’s like when you’re starting a relationship with a gallery. The gallery owner has to learn to trust the artist and the artist has to learn to trust the gallery owner in terms of pricing, and representation. It’s no different in my opinion, when you’re dealing with a publisher [i.e. an artware company]. You have to understand and see that this publisher is respectful of your work and that they are in the long run doing the right thing. I think that one of the problems that I have encountered with Native artists is that they tend to micromanage
everything, and feel that they deserve more money for something and they get off track as to what the real goal is. And I’ve heard people complain that all that [the company I work with] does is “get rich off of us Indians,” [but] I understood from the beginning that I was getting paid more than just money with these pieces that I was selling the rights to reproduce. Because I also did that myself, before I started doing business with [them], I printed off and distributed t-shirts, and tote bags, and all of that, and it takes a lot of money, a lot of footwork, a lot of man hours to get these things out there… Product development, searching out suppliers, searching out service industry to print things out and get the right stitch count on embroideries, and getting samples and correcting things and shipping things out… It’s a tremendous amount of work, there’s a lot of overhead, and in my opinion, I’m getting more than money off of this and I’m also getting advertising. I understand how much it would cost for my products to get out there the way that he puts them out if I paid for it myself. I mean I found my product in the Yukon territories, it’s over in Japan, it’s over in Europe, it’s in Nature museums, it’s got name drops for the National Museum of Natural History, it’s in Juneau Alaska, it’s all over the house. It’s across the US. That’s a lot of money to consider spending on your own if you don’t want this so-called “white man” to get rich off of you. Like I said, I think at the same time that [the company] is making money, I’m getting exposure and that is just as valuable of a payment for me as it would be financially.

Moraes was not the only one to point out that artists having work reproduced on artware was a means of promotion for artists, especially early on in their career. For instance, a gallery owner explained that he has occasionally encouraged artists who are at the start of their career to work with artware companies.

If you are a new artist and are trying to break in, you basically have to get around those relationships that have already been formed. Unless you are an extremely good speaker when you go in and you can sell yourself to these dealers, it’s difficult to break through. If you go to a company that is producing cards and that gallery now sells your cards, when you walk in and say your name, they’ll say “oh, I know you, you made these cards.” It’s giving you that foot in the door. … That’s why I encourage some of the young artists to go ahead and work with a company like that because it just puts your name out there. Even if you haven’t met those dealers, if they know your name, it gives you a huge advantage.

The same gallery owner stressed that if artists considered it primarily a means to publicize their work, they would be less disappointed or frustrated by the difference between what they made and what the company made. In addition, by not thinking of artware in and of itself as a means to make a living, but rather as a means to gain name recognition in order to advance in their career to be able to make a living from their individual works, he thought that they could more easily avoid devaluing their more expensive pieces (“art”) by overexposing their less expensive counterparts (“artware”). This resonates with a comment made by the wife of an artist,
exceeded by those who suggested that artists should agree to low payments on the pretext that they are also being offered “exposure”: “You can die from exposure, you know!”

Finding a balance between getting known through artware and getting known as someone who makes artware (which often comes with the negative label of “commercial” artist (see Chapter 1)) was well illustrated by Coast Salish artist lessLIE:

It’s sort of strange because even though it’s a really commercial means for having my name out there as a contemporary Northwest Coast artist, it’s almost like my name precedes me, like people are aware of who I am even before we’ve met, so that’s… I don’t know exactly how to feel about that. I know that my work has been published on t-shirts and cards that are distributed all over British Columbia and different parts of North America, so I always try to view that from a humble perspective because I’m aware of financially how much I made from what’s being published and distributed, but also because I’m aware that it’s commercial.

In this respect, one specific product was on several occasions presented to me as particularly well suited to artist promotion but not “commercial” (neither in the detrimental sense, nor in the sense of a lucrative opportunity): The Gathering calendar, which has been published by Native Northwest (formerly Garfinkel Publications) for more than twenty consecutive years. “If you have a piece in the Garfinkel calendar, everybody sells that calendar, everybody knows that calendar: now they know your work,” commented a gallery owner. The artware equivalent of a yearly group exhibit, some of the artists who are ambivalent about artware set the calendar apart from other products. For instance, it was The Gathering that first brought lessLIE to artware, and the calendars remain one of his favorite products.

An artist who had recently chosen to stop selling his designs to artware companies also explained that despite the calendar not being a source of income, he saw value in it: “All of these people are going to see my mask! … They’ll be looking at this calendar in Ottawa, or in Sacramento California.” Another artist also commented that exposure was the reason he had participated in the calendar in the past. While he still saw it as a good opportunity for up-and-coming artists, as he progressed in his career, he felt that generally speaking exposure was no longer an agreeable replacement for more direct income.

Beyond the specific benefit of exposure, some artists see potential in artware as a means to support their other artistic activities. In this respect, Jim Hart referred to artware as a means for artists to “buy time” when working on a larger project that will only pay in the long run, stressing
that this was only true if the time spent on creating artware designs was well enough remunerated. Similarly, lessLIE explained:

On the one hand, especially in this recession, I know that there’s some way that I can sell my work if there are no galleries that are buying it. But at the same time, it’s really strange, because even if I had the means to make t-shirts myself and other commercial items, I wouldn’t want to put the energy in that kind of marketing because I prefer to focus more on the creativity.

In other words, for artists like him, creating for artware is not a substitute for creating generally. In fact, it is relatively common for artists to choose designs that they had previously sold as original paintings and/or turned into limited edition prints to be reproduced by artware companies. Artware then becomes a way to prolong the market life of their works while they work on new projects.³⁹

Also, several artists stressed that it was important for companies to understand and support artists’ implication in the Northwest Coast gifting economy. While artists usually receive no more than a few free samples of merchandise in addition to a flat fee or royalties, some ask to be paid in kind in anticipation of requests to contribute to upcoming potlatches or to make donations as part of fundraising efforts. In addition, some companies make their products available to individuals at prices they would normally reserve to wholesalers when they are purchased in large quantities to be given away at potlatches. For Corey Moraes, this is an important aspect of his relationship with the artware industry.

I was interested in [the company] reproducing my images on products that could be used in potlatches as gifts, something that is accessible to Native people to order in quantity. That was also very much a fundamental reason as to why I was dealing with [the owner] because I understood from him that he was wholly open to supplying potlatches. That was important to me.

Moraes also pointed out that, beyond the promotion of individual artists, artware has potential for cultural promotion, stating that “it wasn’t so much about making money as it was about getting name recognition out of it, not really for me, but the name ‘Tsimshian’ just didn’t seem to roll off people’s lips as easily as ‘Haida’ did.” The idea that artware can be used to make a particular region and style better known was reiterated to me by others, for example when

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³⁹ In such cases, it is not in artists’ interest to turn these designs into products that would directly compete with their prints. For instance, the art and artware market is indeed so intertwined that when a company expanded its line of products to canvas impressions (artworks reproduced as prints on canvas), an artist felt that these would directly compete with his prints of the same works and requested that they not put them on the market before the limited edition of each work had sold out.
Xwalacktun commented on his experience creating designs for the Vancouver 2010 Olympics, explaining that his decision to participate was not based on economic considerations, but on personal recognition, and even more, the promotion of Salish art.

In a sense, I’m helping out, and it’s not only helping me out, it’s helping out my community, helping bringing the focus through the artwork, bringing the people together. Just thinking of those ideas, just helping, it gives me a good feeling. ... Because we always hear of Haida and Kwagiulth work, you know. Why not Salish designs?

In fact, several of the Salish artists I spoke to were insistent on their commitment to making the style of their region better known through their work in general, and through artware in particular, with its ability to reach a very wide audience beyond museum visitors and art collectors. For instance, when I asked Musqueam artist Joe Becker what was most important for me to remember from our interview, he replied that his primary drive was to create a legacy for his family through his company. He then added that the second most important thing to him was “to make the public more aware of Coast Salish and Musqueam art.” “It’s getting there”, he commented, “it’s not there yet, but it’s getting there.” This illustrates well how, for many artists, participating in the artware industry is experienced as the pursuit of goals at both individual and more collective levels, with both material and symbolic results.

5.2.6 Division of labour/distribution of benefits

In the preceding paragraphs, I have focused on what artists get in exchange for working with artware companies, discussing both economic and non-economic benefits, as well as the role played by trust in their evaluation of the balance between these benefits and those collected by artware companies. In this section, I focus on what companies believe they are paying for, from economic and non-economic perspectives. I also show how different understandings of the nature of the transaction affect the ways in which the balance in the distribution of benefits between them, artists, and other stakeholders is perceived.

One of the primary questions surrounding the remuneration of artists is whether they are being paid for a creation, their labour, a service, and/or (copy- or use-) rights. In technical terms, the nature of the remuneration is framed differently depending on the kind of contract that is being signed. However, my overall impression is that, beyond the technical-legality of contracts, it is not always clear to either party what exactly is being paid for, as discourses easily shift from such things as the quality of a design to the time spent creating it, or from product development...
processes to questions of ownership. What follows is intended to illustrate these various interpretations, as well as slippages between them. Ultimately, I hope to show that the intertwining of different measures of value—such as products, productivity, service provision, and property—

is in part what generates different, and in some cases diametrically opposed, assessments of the “fairness” of artist remunerations in the artware industry.

In conversations about the fairness of arrangements between artists and companies, it was on several occasions pointed out to me that it was not uncommon for a company to find itself having to thoroughly rework an artist’s design. In a conversation with an Aboriginal fashion designer, I mentioned that I had been told that it can be tricky for artists to negotiate with artware companies. She responded by explaining that, beyond individuals’ position in the market, what they are able to obtain will depend on the kind of work they were prepared to deliver. She explained that as part of her contract with an artware company, she was involved in most decisions and had approval on everything physical: color, fabric, packaging, etc. She noted that, under such circumstances, she was also able to firmly negotiate the price of the products and the royalties she would receive from the company. In contrast, she described an artist drawing a design on a paper napkin, leaving it up to the company to work from this drawing, make it usable for reproduction, as well as develop and market the product. She said she would not be surprised if the royalties paid in such a scenario were lower than the ones she is able to negotiate. For her, it made sense that the amount of work delivered by artists be a factor in their ability to negotiate what they deemed appropriate fees or percentages.

During my fieldwork, this image of an artist delivering a rough sketch on a paper napkin (as well as the less extreme examples of designs drawn in a sketch book, on a piece of tracing paper, or recovered from a stash kept in the artist’s studio) was used on a few different occasions in support of the argument that division of labour was key in evaluating the fairness of the benefits reaped by each party. These examples were indeed often contrasted with situations where artists delivered polished designs, in some cases already digitized, and/or artists that were much more heavily involved in the product development process. The deeper involvement of

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40 Each of these plays an important role in contemporary capitalism, including when it takes a “culturally modified” form (see Chapter 8). As noted by Slavoj Žižek, it is no longer sufficient to consider commodities from the perspective of their “utility” or ability to function as “status symbols”. Slavoj Žižek, First as Tragedy, Then as Farce (London: Verso, 2009), 52. Although utility and status do maintain a certain level of importance, markets (including labour markets) are increasingly organized around the production, distribution, and consumption of services and “experiences” (both via immaterial products (e.g. tourism, entertainment…) and material ones (e.g. fair-trade coffee as a sensorial and ethical “good”).
these artists was usually presented to me as warranting greater returns for them, as it required more work on their part.

Following this view, some artists consider the fairness of their remuneration primarily in terms of labour. For instance, an artist made the following comment on the arrangement he had with a t-shirt company: “He gets paid more because he’s the one doing the work. He’s the one getting the bigger percentage, because all I'm doing is doing the design.” Others made similar analyses, such as when I asked an artist if he felt that the percentage he was paid was fair and he replied “yes”, explaining that

…just about everything that I’ve done is off of works that I had already created, so I mean… In a lot of cases they’re sold-out print editions, so there’s no work on my part. You hand them the design, you email it to them, I don’t do anything physical, and then they are able to work with that, and then I get royalties from it. So I think it’s kind of a good situation.

However, “fairness” can be evaluated not only on the basis of labour but also the basis of costs, profits, and so on. For instance, in addition to labour, some company owners also discussed how the use of Aboriginal designs affected both costs and value. Taking the example of a scarf on which a design is embroidered, one of them explained:

Everything really is, sadly, often governed by cost, because a Native embroidery is often very detailed, with such a high number of stitch count. You could be adding a five dollar cost to a product that costs two dollars, and making it very expensive… Suddenly you’ve got a scarf that might normally sell for five dollars, you put a Native design on it and it sells for twenty, because you’ve also got the royalty and the embroidery costs. So, often things like price point do govern what we do.41

In this scenario, from a strictly economic perspective, embroidering an Aboriginal design onto the scarf is only “worth it” for the company and its retailer if consumers are as willing to pay twenty dollars for it as they are to pay five dollars for a plain scarf, i.e. if they consider the Aboriginal design increased the value of the scarf four-fold. When that is indeed the case, the Aboriginal design did augment the cost of production, but it also augmented its market value more. It might be argued that in such a scenario, the artist should be paid in relation not only to the labour required from them to create the design, but in relation to how much the design they created enhances the perceived value of the item in the eyes of the consumer. However,

41 In this example, an item that costs $2, with a 20% wholesale margin (for a $2.4 wholesale price), sold in retail with a 2.2 mark-up will be priced just over $5. The same item, this time embroidered at the cost of $5, incurring a further 10% royalty payment of 70 cents, for a total cost of $7.70, with a 20% wholesale margin (for a $9.24 wholesale price), sold in retail with a 2.2 mark-up will be sold just over $20 dollars.
conversely, the latter value-added was generated precisely because of the costs expended by the company to reproduce the design, which would have been impossible without capital, and thus it is companies that should collect the rewards of this investment.

These contrasting perspectives were made clear by an artist who described his experience being paid a fee of $500 for design work he had created for products that generated approximately $60,000 dollars in sales (translating into an unknown, but lesser, amount of profit). It had taken him approximately two hours of work to create the design in question, and the fee had seemed very reasonable at the time. Later, he learned of the price of each item and projected sales, and began to feel that the fee may not have been as fair as he had thought. The two different assessments of the arrangement made the distinction between fairly remunerated labour and fairly redistributed profit. There is indeed a difference between being paid proportionally to the time spent working on a design, and being paid proportionally to the value the design contributed to the items. In the case of designs applied to a product specifically because of their ability to distinguish them from others, as in the case in the Native Northwest Coast artware industry, the value contributed to the item by each party is not merely related to the sum of their respective labour and expended costs, but is also a factor of their respective contribution to its ability to spark interest in the buying public – contributions that are not easy to measure in monetary terms.

Furthermore, analyses that take a labour- and cost-centric point of view usually have little currency in the contemporary art market, where the value of a piece is not merely a question of time, energy, and skill expended by its creator, but related to such things as its aesthetic, intellectual, or affective contribution. In other words, to make hours of labour bear on artist remuneration is to locate their activity on the side of paid labour rather than on the side of art making. This is particularly ironic if, as discussed above, working in the artware industry is presented as a way to promote the makers of the designs as artists not only in the eyes of artware buyers, but also in the eyes of the buyers working in art galleries.

Also, analyses centered on labour and market value tend to gloss over the fact that relationships between artists and artware companies are rarely considered to be straightforwardly of the “business is business” kind. Indeed, taking a step back from the interpersonal level to consider the wider context, what is at stake is not simply the distribution of the benefits produced by industry participants’ work and investment, but also the general terms under which they deem
the commodification of Northwest Coast cultural expression to be acceptable. In this respect, in particular for the proponents of a ‘new and improved’ industry, the risks associated with cultural commodification have to be balanced with efforts to ensure the industry sufficiently benefits its Aboriginal stakeholders – which includes but goes far beyond the fair remuneration of artists (see Chapter 8). This argument was powerfully illustrated by an artist who stated:

Of course I feel it’s only right that the artist gets royalties or collects payments from each individual sale that the product is used on. Why? Because art isn’t just art, it’s a lifestyle, it’s a way of life where it comes from. You know, it’s been practiced for ten thousand years easy!

It is with this statement in mind that I conclude this chapter by calling upon anthropologist Michael Asch’s distinction between “I-It” relations of “Self and Oppositional Other” and “I-Thou” relations of “Self and the Relational Other” to draw parallels between arrangements struck between artists and artware companies and the negotiation of property rights and resource use in the wider context of relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal governments.

**Coda**

In his discussion of relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in the context of treaties, Asch remarks that two kinds of framing tend to dominate: the “I-It” relation of “Self and Oppositional Other” or the “I-Thou” relation of “Self and the Relational Other”. Asch suggests that the former is defined by these two principles: “1) The Self has a will to be free to act politically without reference to Other; 2) The Self sees Other as a party against which Self is struggling for freedom.” In contrast, the latter is defined by the two following principles: “1) The Self has a will to be free to act politically, but it is expressed with reference to Other; 2) The Self sees Other as a party with which it has the responsibility to seek a political relationship.” Drawing on political thought of Western and Aboriginal intellectuals – focusing on the interpretation by Emmanuel Levinas of Martin Buber’s analysis of human relationships and the concept of Aboriginal land rights as presented by Blackfoot academic Leroy Little Bear – Asch shows that neither “I-It” nor “It-Thou” relationships are essentialized cultural perspectives, Western in the first case and Indigenous in the second. Instead, even though in the context of

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43 Ibid.
44 Ibid.
treaty negotiations the Canadian government has tended to adopt an “I-It” approach, and Aboriginal governments have tended to put forward an “I-Thou” approach, either of these approaches can be and have been adopted from an Aboriginal and a non-Aboriginal perspective. This echoes John Sutton Lutz’s work comparing the Lekwungen’s and the Tsilhqot’in’s very different responses to European arrival (overall welcoming in the first case, and overall hostile in the second). Lutz was able to show that there was not one “Aboriginal” manner of interacting with settlers, but rather a variety of relationships that have had varied effects “on the place of indigenous peoples in British Columbia, both historically and today”.45

Based on his theoretical understanding of the logics of both oppositional and relational approaches in their application to colonial relations, Asch underscores the potential of “I-Thou” perspectives in the creation of partnerships that outline ways of living together and sharing resources without extinguishing Aboriginal Rights and Title. Similarly, Lutz sees potential in a return to makūk through dialogue engaged from a “place of creative understanding”.47 Such relationships would mirror earlier forms of interactions in the Pacific Northwest where at least initially resources were exchanged between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal traders in the context of both parties overall feeling that such commerce could be to their advantage.48 In contrast, subsequently to roughly two centuries of changes in the local configurations of power, although the treaties negotiated as part of the current BC Treaty process are presented by the Treaty Commission as being mutually beneficial to “First Nations and their neighbours”,49 the reluctance of many First Nations to move forward in these negotiations shows that there are serious doubts as to this process being truly as balanced as it is claimed. Anthropologist Brian Noble echoes this feeling, stating that the treaties that are currently being negotiated

45 Lutz, Makuk, 280.
46 Asch refutes the idea that, due to the existence of a “cultural divide”, “Indigenous” and “Western” perspectives “speak past each other, not to each other”, precluding conversation. Neither rejecting what he calls “the fact of cultural difference” nor denying its importance, he nonetheless argues that “cultural difference does not play the decisive role in determining whether one adopts a position consistent with the voice advanced by First Nations or [the government of] Canada. To me, the fact of cultural difference invites, rather than precludes, conversation.” Asch, “Indigenous Self-determination and Applied Anthropology in Canada.”
47 Lutz, Makuk, 298–299.
48 Lutz, Makuk; See also Miller, Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens.
are not actually treaties between peoples in the true sense, they are contractual relations that commit the First Nations and the Crown to certain things, ... based on the legal concept of “certainty”, the premise that you aim in a contract to set out clear and unequivocal requirements that leave little doubt about who has power over what in regard to what has been negotiated.\(^5\)

In 1998, the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs (UBCIC) issued a publication opposing the treaty process in British Columbia precisely on these grounds. The UBCIC felt that the government sought to achieve this “certainty” and precluded re-negotiations of agreements in court even “if the Indigenous group in the future do not think that the Agreement was a fair deal”.\(^5\) Such agreements, the UBCIC argued, effectively result in the extinguishment of Aboriginal Rights and Title. As explained by a Nisga’a treaty negotiator to anthropologist Carole Blackburn, the Royal Proclamation of 1763 upon which the constitutional imperative of treaty negotiation is based was not about establishing “certainty” but about “entering into a relationship”.\(^5\) Exactly what kind of relationships the treaty process would generate if its primary focus was not to establish “certainty”\(^5\) is a question that falls well beyond the scope of my research. Still, there are interesting parallels to be made between these extremely high-stakes First Nation-to-Province-to-State negotiations and the smaller scale, lower stakes, and yet socially, culturally, politically, and economically consequential negotiations that occur in the artware industry.

Relationships between Aboriginal artists and non-Aboriginal buyers in the Native Northwest Coast art and artware market can be expressed in terms of “Self and the Oppositional Other” or “Self and the Relational Other,” in part depending on whether they are arrangements that set fixed contractual terms or create partnerships. Although the stakes surrounding the remuneration of artists for their designs by artware companies are not comparable in magnitude to those related to the negotiation of treaties between First Nations and Canadian governments, I argue that these stakes are similar in nature because, as the artist cited at the end of part 2.6 clearly stated, in the context of the art and artware market, “art” tends to be considered as a proxy for “way of life”. Without making the dubious claim that contracts signed in the artware industry

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\(^5\) Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, *Certainty: Canada’s Struggle to Extinguish Aboriginal Title*, 1998, http://www.ubcic.bc.ca/Resources/publications.htm#axzz1o62vJCBh.

\(^5\) For more about the treaty process and the concept of certainty, see Blackburn, “Searching for Guarantees in the Midst of Uncertainty,” 590.

\(^5\) Blackburn, “Searching for Guarantees in the Midst of Uncertainty.”
have commensurable implications to those of treaties, in both cases the two parties’ responsibilities are charted and their respective property rights outlined, including the wealth that they can expect to receive from the use of this property. Some arrangements create a separation between the interests of the parties, while others bind them together. Here, I quote at length a gallery owner who has experience with both art and artware, as his words exemplify well the distinction between “I-It” contracts and “I-Thou” partnerships.

If I was ever to produce anything for the market, I was going to want to make sure that it was done in a partnership with the artist. [An artist] brought me the designs, and originally he wanted to sell them to me for $750 each, and I could do whatever I wanted to do with them forever. And I said ... “If I sell a million vases, I win and you lose as an artist. If I sell zero vases, you win and I lose. If we’re partners, we should work together, and if we sell a million vases, we both win, and if we sell zero vases, we both lose. There’s no point pulling on separate ends of the stick, we should be on the same side and pull on the same side.” And he has probably made more than 1500 dollars on each design since we started doing it. So he’s already made more money than we would have if he had sold me his designs.54

Once again stepping back from the stakes of interpersonal relationships to see the wider picture, it is possible to understand that beyond such economic indicators as costs, profits, benefits, and risks, what such arrangements chart are ways for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal stakeholders of the industry to define the terms under which they engage in the political and ethical mine field of commodification: “pulling” on opposite ends or on the same end of the “stick” i.e. the crucial resource that art represents for Aboriginal people. Some believe that it is in the best interest of Aboriginal people to fight off non-Aboriginal stakeholders so that they will eventually lose their hold on this market entirely, essentially adopting an “I-It” approach to these relationships; others see more potential in building “I-Thou” relationships that would bind non-Aboriginal interests to those of Aboriginal stakeholders, so that when the former tighten their grip it also strengthens their Aboriginal partners’ position, and vice-versa. In both cases, the fact that so many of its participants and stakeholders yearn for a ‘new and improved’ Native Northwest Coast artware industry signals that there is more at stake in the signing of contracts between artist

54 The same gallery owner remarked that it was the very similar with the sale of artworks: “An artist comes in with a mask. Because we’re buying the mask as the dealers, it is the artist’s goal to get as much money for that mask that they possibly can. And in the history of the market, it has been the goal of the dealer to get the mask for as little money as they possibly can. We’re doing the same thing, it’s a tug-of-war where the artist is trying to get as much as they can, the dealer wants to pay as little as they can... In the end, we should probably be working together, because the more money we sell the piece for, as long as we work on the same unwritten rule of fifty/fifty, if the dealer sells it for more money, they make more money.”
and artware companies than an exchange of designs and cheques. As already explained, I use the phrase ‘new and improved’ industry to evoke the desire of some Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal industry participant to transform the industry, with the underlying idea that such changes are improvements only when they make the industry benefit its Aboriginal stakeholders more than it currently does. The expression ‘new and improved’ purposefully leaves undefined the specifics of the transformations that would lead to this state, for even where there is an agreement on the importance of this goal, there is not always consensus on what means and alliances are best suited to this end. For instance, opinions might differ on whether this new configuration should be developed on the basis of “I-It” or “I-Thou” relationships. Still, as I have demonstrated, the artware industry is a context in which the idea of “good business” is characterized not only on the basis of individual satisfaction with particular kinds of arrangements, but also on relationally defined ethical standards that are not given but instead are revealed and negotiated through these arrangements and their moral assessments.
Figure 11: Native Northwest Coast water bottles.
“Stamped” with designs by Ben Houstie, Eric Parnell, and Wayne Edenshaw (above); “stamped” with design by Maynard Johnny Jr and “wrapped” in designs by Terry Starr and Ryan Cranmer (below).
September 4, 2009. I am in Victoria, conducting research at the BC Archives. My hostel is situated downtown, a few blocks from the city center’s The Bay department store, which itself is located near where the Hudson’s Bay Company post had initially stood. One morning, I wander into the department store to visit its “souvenir” section. There, I immediately find what I am looking for: some Native Northwest Coast tattoos and decals, tea towels, mugs, bottles, and other kitchenware, some faux-argillite objects, as well as series of plastic totem poles all lined up, as they usually are. At the back of the store, near the entrance that faces the inside of the shopping mall, another type of line-up catches my attention. A four-tiered shelf is entirely dedicated to metal water bottles. The top and bottom shelves contain a line of identical plain stainless steel bottles, in two different sizes. The two shelves in between them also present lines of stainless steel water bottles, but these are of different colours – red, green, black, blue, pink – and are decorated with various Native Northwest Coast designs. These come in two sizes and shapes almost identical to the blank ones on the bottom shelf and top shelf, respectively. I notice that, with a mere five cents’ difference, the bottles are for all intents and purposes priced the same. I cannot help but wonder how consumers choose among these bottles when they do not have to worry about one costing more than the other, and when what differentiates them is not function, but what designs are or are not reproduced on their surface.

One of the criticisms of the artware industry I often hear is that by creating large unlimited series of the same image, it devalues specific designs and even Northwest Coast art as a whole. However, standing in front of this display, I am struck by the ability of the various reproduced designs to singularize the rather trivial product that is a metal water bottle. Contrasted with the uninterrupted lines of stainless steel above and below them, the aesthetic produced by the series of Native Northwest Coast water bottles was one of variety and singularity, not one of sameness and standardization. And yet, what I call “serialization” – the process by which particular designs or objects are made to become part of a series of designs or objects identical to themselves – is vigorously criticized by those who adopt the Frankfurt School standpoint that mass-production always cultivates conformity rather than creativity. In this chapter, I re-examine this perspective.

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1 Contrary to what one might expect, it was the blank bottles that were priced higher than the ones with the designs.
via the example of the Native Northwest Coast artware industry’s particular relationship to consumerism. I will argue that while processes of serialization can be accompanied by standardization of designs and products, serialization is not in and of itself the cause of such standardization.

As Henry J. Rutz and Benjamin S. Orlove have remarked, “a view of economic change which incorporates consumption provides a fuller and more accurate account than one which does not”. 2 Indeed, consumers are arguably not “merely the end-point” of processes of production and distribution who simply “‘choose’ to accept or reject what commerce has produced”. 3 Furthermore, as Daniel Miller has pointed out, producers and distributors acquire “dual personalities... through their being themselves consumers”, 4 echoed by Jean and John Comaroff who have also remarked that “the producers of culture are also its consumers, seeing and sensing and listening to themselves enact their identity” and that “consumers also become producers, complicit in that enactment”. 5 As does Miller, the Comaroffs invite a rethinking of Barthes’s contention that “the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author” 6 to acknowledge that production (authorship) and consumption (readership) can be performed by the same individuals and groups of people. These activities do not necessarily correspond to two entirely distinct moments in the ‘career’ of an object, 7 as producers and distributors can also position themselves as consumers of the products they design and sell. In this respect, what I have seen during my fieldwork is that some producers and distributors of Native Northwest Coast artware distance themselves from those whom they consider to be the target audience of the very artware they help produce and distribute. In particular, they tend to imagine those who buy artware to generally know less and understand less well Northwest Coast art than they do. This distance between artware consumers and those who have learned about and are familiar with Northwest Coast art is epitomized by references to two opposing figures: the ‘tourist’ and the ‘art

4 Ibid., 4.
7 This expression is from Arjun Appadurai’s idea that objects have a “social life” and go through various stages in their “career” as they traverse different contexts and are apprehended differently by their users. Arjun Appadurai, ed., The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986).
collector.' The first is seen as poorly if at all educated about Northwest Coast art, whereas the second is seen as having learned about this art to a much greater extent, through formal and/or informal study.

In order to shed light on this process of distancing and its consequences for artware design, it is useful to consider the relationship between the development of the artware industry and the roles consumption plays in contemporary society, both with respect to the egalitarian-emancipatory ideology of the consumerist movement, and from the standpoint of anti-consumerism critique. Thus, in section 6.1, I begin by reviewing several theoretical approaches that have been developed to understand contemporary consumption. I then go on to examining the artware industry’s relationship to ideologies of consumerism and its framing as an egalitarian-emancipatory project. I will argue that, in its combination of art with objects of everyday life, artware puts in tension serialization’s association with promotion on the one hand, and its association with trivialization on the other. In section 6.2, I discuss how the tendency to associate artware with the so-called ‘masses’ has affected the industry’s use of Northwest coast designs. In particular, I will discuss how the idea that ‘tourists’ have little to no knowledge about Northwest Coast art has lead the industry to privilege easy to identify crest-like figures as well as uses of space typical of logo branding. I dedicate section 6.3 to the description of other design approaches that are adopted when companies target other kinds of consumers, including Aboriginal women, sports fans, and youth. These examples will help demonstrate that, after artware production and distribution has been used to serve the egalitarian ideology of ‘access’ (in this case, access to Northwest Coast art, including to those who do not ‘know’ it), consumerism now also encourages artware producers and distributors to strive toward the emancipatory ideology of ‘choice’. From this, I will conclude that in the Native Northwest Coast artware industry, serialization can lead to standardization when combined with particular social representations of consumers on the part of producers and distributors, but does not automatically do so.

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8 The fact that tourism has been increasingly tied to a complex and lucrative knowledge economy is beyond the scope of this chapter. (For a critical examination of scholarship portraying tourists as lacking knowledge and critical distance toward their own experiences, E. Cohen, “Authenticity and Commodity in Tourism,” Annals of Tourism Research 15, no. 3 (1988): 371–386.)

9 Following the constructivist school of French sociology, I use the concept of “social representation” to refer to collections of ideas, beliefs, and values that tend to be associated with particular categories of people and things, developed in the context of certain social groups. According to Luc Boltanski, social representations are what make certain categories be treated as if they “went without saying” (“cela-va-de-soi”) even though they can in fact be
6.1 Contemporary Consumption and Consumerist Ideologies

In this section, I examine the relationship between consumerism and the democratic ideology of equality and freedom, re-imagined as equal access to goods and freedom of choice among these goods. This will help explain the fact that, even as the artware industry is criticized for trivializing Northwest Coast art because of its relationship to consumerism and its use of serialization, it is also attributed the redeeming quality of helping democratize it.

6.1.1 Artware and consumerism

Although ‘consumption’ can be understood in the technical sense of expenditure on goods and services, the term has taken on a negative connotation in relation to the critique of ‘consumerism’ as the ethos of the economy of contemporary capitalist societies. Although, as I will explain, ‘consumerism’ is also the social movement that seeks to protect consumers’ interest through regulation, standards, and information, in everyday conversations it is more often used to describe the ideology according to which progressively greater consumption is always economically beneficial. For those who oppose this ideology, consumption is the result of a human propensity towards materialism, vanity, and wastefulness.

However, when it emerged in the decades following World War II, consumerism was born out of the concern of consumer organizations with “creating a more equitable market place”. Then, consumerism was a social movement that “urged the creation of a world in which all – rather than the lucky few – can participate in the good life”. It is only later that this consumer-traced back to social processes of definition, delimitation, and objectivation. Luc Boltanski, Les cadres: la formation d’un groupe social (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1982), 52. French social psychologist Serge Moscovici, who coined the expression “social representations” after Emile Durkheim’s idea of “collective representations”, explains that they result from the “fusion and penetration of individual representations” and that they endow “an idea with an object, and an object with an idea”. Serge Moscovici, The invention of society: psychological explanations for social phenomena (Cambridge, UK; Cambridge, MA, USA: Polity Press, 1993), 108. Moscovici notes that “they possess a marvelously ethereal quality, yet nevertheless have something concrete about them that has always disconcerted English-speaking sociologists and anthropologists”.

For example, consider how, writing about cultural appropriation and rock art, archaeologist Thomas Heyd asserts that “in contemporary, consumption-oriented societies all aesthetic appreciation is increasingly being trained onto objects intended to tie us ever more into the reproduction of exploitative relationships with other human beings, nature, or even ourselves” Thomas Heyd, “Rock Art Aesthetics and Cultural Appropriation,” The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 61, no. 1 (January 1, 2003): 43..


Ibid., 3.

Ibid.
focused movement became more concerned with choice and the ability of the market to satisfy individual desire. As explained by social historian Matthew Hilton:

By the end of the millennium global consumer society had been reoriented so that the relatively greater weighting attached to social welfare over individual gain, or access over choice, had been reversed. Increasingly, consumer society has been geared to serve only those who can already afford it.\[14\]

Today, the consumerist movement is seen as failing to take into consideration those excluded from consumption, focusing instead on the interests of the middle-class.\[15\] The term ‘consumerism’ has itself taken on negative connotations by its association with excess, superficiality, and materialism. This particular shift in consumerism is directly related to gradual changes in the relative importance afforded to production, distribution, and consumption beginning more than a century ago. Classic liberal economists of the late 19\(^{th}\) and early 20\(^{th}\) century thought the economy was driven by production, not consumption. They centered political economy on the interests of producers, not those of consumers. As historian Kathleen G. Donohue explains, “Throughout much of the nineteenth century they remained convinced that consumption was little more than the destruction of wealth that could have been used to increase capital”.\[16\] Concerned about excessive consumption, these liberal economists struggled to define ‘luxury’ (as opposed to basic needs) across classes and thus tended to call “all consumption into question”.\[17\] However, by the 1930s, new consumer-centered models of liberal political economy had emerged, in particular in the United States. During Roosevelt’s first term, in response to the Great Depression, producerist and consumerist ideas were blended into the policies of the New Deal. In 1941, Roosevelt identified “freedom from want” as the fourth pillar of liberalism, along with freedom from fear, freedom of speech, and freedom of religion.

However, as Donohue remarks, “freedom from want had not been a defining principle of classic liberalism” since “classical liberals had been able to imagine few systems less liberal than one that would guarantee freedom from want”.\[18\] Still, American liberals did end up embracing this fourth pillar of freedom once they revised upward the role played in the economy by consumers as compared to producers. Around the same time, critics of the idea of ‘freedom from

\[14\] Ibid., 4.
\[17\] Ibid., 3.
\[18\] Ibid., 1.
want’ soon started to worry that it was being equated to ‘a right to plenty’ and that “material plenty was being treated as a precondition for democracy”.\footnote{Ibid., 277. It is indeed only a few years later that Richard Nixon would tell Nikita Khrushchev that “the United States was superior to the Soviet Union not because American citizens had a right to freedom from want – Soviet citizens had that – but because Americans had access to abundant consumer goods” Ibid.. And indeed, when the Iron Curtain fell in 1989, images of “East Germans on a frenetic, collective shopping spree” were used to assert that capitalism comes not only with access to more but also with more \textit{choice} than proposed under socialism. Daphne Berdhal, “Consumer Rites. The Politics of Consumption in Re-Unified Germany,” in \textit{On the Social Life of Postsocialism. Memory, Consumption, Germany.}, Indiana University Press (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 2010), 36.} This slippage of consumerism away from tending to basic standards of living and towards supporting always higher affluence did not go unnoticed. Commentators such as John Kenneth Galbraith\footnote{Galbraith, \textit{The Affluent Society} [1958].} denounced the new liberal celebration for profuse consumption by arguing that it essentially called for always more production and gave little consideration for the distribution of what was being produced among the various classes of consumers. While this kind of liberalism could keep up the appearance of freedom – that of consumers to choose and guide production via their choices – Galbraith believed it did not hold up the value of equality, the other key value of democratic idealism. Thus consumerism may have began as a social movement promoting universal access to consumption, but a shift of focus from ensuring access to consumption to promoting consumers’ freedom to choose is seen to have placed the satisfaction of individual desires above the satiating of societal needs. Thus, once considered a progressive democratic social movement, consumerism has now long been under fire for having the anti-democratic flavour of an alienating and individualist system.

In the current capitalist model, the role that was assigned consumption has been even further transformed. Aimed not only to commodities that meet ‘needs’ on account of their utility, but also those that render lives “pleasurable and meaningful”,\footnote{Žižek, \textit{First as Tragedy, Then as Farce}, 52.} consumption is no longer considered a mere question of survival, it is also “supposed to sustain the quality of life”.\footnote{Ibid., 53.} In this perspective, the principle of “freedom from want” would warrant that any given commodity should be made available to individuals in versions meeting their various desires. Thus, the role of producers and distributors would be to make it possible for all to partake in consumption, proposing commodities that are affordable enough and, in the case of material goods, available in
sufficient quantities and in enough sizes, shapes, and colours to reasonably suit any individual customer.

During my fieldwork, I often heard expressions of concern that the artware industry caters to a consumerist ideology, seeing it as pushing the commodification of Northwest Coast art to an undesirable level. That this particular critique tended to be levelled against the artware industry more often than against the art market is unsurprising because of artware’s association with serialization and the mass-consumption of Northwest Coast art. At the same time, precisely because of its relationship to ‘the masses’, artware is also equally associated with the democratic ideals of consumerism as a social movement, because it helps ensure ‘goods’ are made accessible to as many consumers as possible. Simply put, the artware industry renders Northwest Coast art more easily accessible and to a wider audience because it is available in large quantities and affordable. Few of the critics of the artware industry I encountered see a problem in the possibility of profiting from art-making in and of itself – money is not the ‘problem’, despite the misleading pejorative connotation of the label ‘commercial’ that they sometimes ascribe to artists who are known for creating designs that are reproduced on artware (see Chapter 1). However, many more of these critics adopt the Frankfort School approach and locate the heart of the problem in the process of serialization by which art becomes not only a ‘commodity’ but also one that is available almost anywhere and to almost anyone, thereby leading to certain kinds of standards instead of promoting original thought and creativity. Because it rarely places limits on numbers of reproductions, the artware industry is seen to constantly threaten crossing the line between promotion on the one hand, and trivialization on the other. In this context, it is not surprising that many of the artists who do participate in the artware industry present serialization as a means to democratize their work. In contrast to trivialization, democratization is indeed the other and less pejorative side of the consumerist coin.

Several artists were quite explicit about the relationship between serialization and democratizing access to their work as a means to create ceremonial and non-ceremonial witnesses to Aboriginal cultural productions and histories. This is reflected in Musqueam weaver Debra Sparrow’s decision to have a blanket company make reproductions of her weavings, which normally fetch prices in the several tens of thousands of dollars:

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Our idea was that not everyone can afford something for one thousand to ten thousand, to twenty thousand dollars, but they surely could afford 60 dollars, or a hundred, or two hundred, and they could still enjoy the beauty of the work. That was our goal. Our goal was not “Oh boy, let’s go for some money-making ventures!” but rather “Let’s go for educating everybody and sharing on a level that we can all afford”!

Such egalitarian ideals were also put forward by other artists when commenting on their desire to make their work available to those who cannot afford their originals, especially when this group includes their family and friends. For example, Squamish artist Jody Broomfield also attributes his desire to make a line of t-shirts to sell during community gatherings because these items would be, in his words, “a way of giving back to my family and to my friends, for the true blessings that I have in my life.” His friends and family are always eager to own some of his art, but as he advanced in his career, it became more difficult for them to afford it. Broomfield thus decided to make a line of shirts that they could buy or receive as gifts at feasts and other community events. By seeing serialization as being at the service of increased access, it can be framed as partaking in a project of democratization whereby those who would like to ‘vote’ for this art are afforded greater ability to do so. However, the relationship between citizenship and consumption goes beyond the question of mere access, as I will further discuss below.

6.1.2 Consumption and citizenship

The idea that consumption can be a democratic arena where egalitarian-emancipatory values are promoted has been developed and critically examined. One such critical analysis has been formulated by Jean Baudrillard about the system of consumption of the late 1960s and early 1970s, expresses the now classic concern for the lack of freedom created by material inequalities. Other critiques concern more recent developments in contemporary consumption. For instance, sociologist Zygmunt Bauman laments the lack of freedom not to choose in a society that produces the illusion of endless possibilities. Philosopher Slavoj Žižek also sees a danger in the equation of freedom with having a choice, even when consumers have seemingly little say in the choices that are presented to them. I will now examine more closely these critiques, showing how they put in question the relationship between consumption and democracy, being a consumer and being a citizen.

Liberal capitalism tends to be represented as the economic system best capable of making goods and services available – in abundance and in all their variety – to everyone who desires
them – understood as both ‘the people’ and as individuals as different as they come. Several prominent European sociologists are among the more severe critics of this view, arguing that consumerism and the egalitarian-emancipatory illusion that accompanies it has led to exclusivities and exclusions of all kinds. Jean Baudrillard’s *Consumer Society*[^24] is a classic example of this kind of critical stance towards contemporary consumption. For Baudrillard, the “conspicuousness of consumption and abundance” of his time represented “a fundamental mutation in the ecology of the human species”[^25] centered on consumption rather than production. In his view, consumption is an enforced collective behaviour, and this ‘order of consumption’ is formed by a manipulation of signs. Thus consumption has become a myth, “the way our society speaks itself”.[^26] To ensure its growth, consumer society both reproduces and controls its productive force, namely human labour. In turn, this growth produces and reproduces social inequality and privileges, building poverty into the socio-economic structure. In this scenario, argues Baudrillard, the ‘equality’ created by the ability in principle to participate in the consumption of the ‘same’ goods is entirely formal. Applied to the Northwest Coast art world, this would mean that being able to access and consume Northwest Coast *artware* only provides the illusion of equality with those who can access and consume Northwest Coast *artworks*.

Commenting on the relationship between consumption and citizenship in the 21st century, Zygmunt Bauman describes what he calls the “consumerist cultural syndrome,” which he feels is characterized by “speed, excess and waste”.[^27] In this system, the emancipation of consumers is believed to come with producers presenting them with myriads of different possibilities – presented to them as a sign of “flexibility” and even “fluidity” as against previously rigid consumption options,[^28] but ultimately causing these consumers’ further alienation. Indeed, according to Bauman, in this system, not only arises the possibility of choosing, but also the obligation to choose, disguised as ‘freedom of choice.’ Human melancholy is no longer generated by the profusion of prohibitions, but by a surfeit of possibilities and the accumulation of previously socialized responsibilities by the overwhelmed individual consumer, or “*homo eligens*”.[^29] The individual is pressured not so much to anticipate new needs, but rather to

[^25]: Ibid., 25.
[^26]: Ibid., 193.
[^27]: Bauman, *Consuming Life*, 86.
[^29]: Bauman, *Consuming Life*, 61.
constantly play down yesterday’s needs. Consumerism lives on an “economics of deception”, which thrives by rendering the non-satisfaction of its members perpetual. Thus, according to Bauman, consumer society profits more from the irrationality and the emotions of *Homo eligens*, than from the calculations and reason of *Homo œconomicus*. The ‘collateral victims’ of consumerism are what Bauman calls the ‘underclass.’ In a society living on the ideology of freedom of choice, the underclass is formed by those considered to have exerted their ‘freedom’ by choosing to live differently than what the consumer society deems acceptable, thereby becoming “failed consumers”, devoid of market value. The Native Northwest Coast artware industry can be seen as striving to make Northwest Coast art become one of the consumption choices available to all members of the *Homo eligens* species, rendering every individual ‘free’ to own a piece of this art because there is enough of it for everybody, and at a price affordable to most (if not to all). In this scenario, then, those who do not consume Northwest Coast art are not necessarily “failed consumers” (they may simply have purchased something similar but different), but can signal the failures of producers in their attempts to market these particular commodities to them.

Bauman’s point about the illusion of ‘freedom of choice’ is taken up in a slightly different guise by Slavoj Žižek. Žižek contends that, even though consumption has essentially become an obligation, consumers’ choices are increasingly presented as expressions of their individual freedom, and even expressions of their democratic right to vote. According to Žižek, post-modern capitalism has given rise to a new narrative about consumption to contrast with the anti-consumerism that rose during modern capitalism. According to this narrative,

> Consumption is supposed to sustain the quality of life, its time should be “quality time” – not the time of alienation, of imitating models imposed by society, of the fear of not being able to “keep up with the Joneses,” but the time of authentic fulfillment of my true Self, of the sensuous play of experience, and of caring for others, through becoming involved in charity or ecology etc. (...) This is how capitalism, at the level of consumption, integrated the legacy of ’68, the critique of alienated consumption: *authentic* experience matters.

In other words, with post-modernity, consumers would have become aware of the ‘order of consumption’ described by Baudrillard, creating a need for the illusion that buying power gives these consumers the means to challenge this order and render consumption meaningful again.

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30 Ibid., 47.
31 Ibid., 124.
32 Žižek, *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce*.
33 Ibid., 55.
This, Žižek also relates to the illusion of ‘freedom of choice,’ echoing both Baudrillard’s point about the illusion of formal equality by the consumption of the same goods and Bauman’s description of the anxiety-ridden Homo eligens\textsuperscript{34}: “Liberal economists emphasize freedom of choice as the key ingredient of the market economy: by buying things we are, in a certain way, continuously voting with our money.” Citing political philosopher John Gray’s contention that in contemporary times “We are forced to live as if we were free,” Žižek writes that there is a “terrorizing dimension of the pressure to choose”.\textsuperscript{35} The stakes of each act of consumption are raised to much more than simply obtaining a commodity, as every choice would express not only the personal identity of the consumer as a subject, but also its political will as a citizen. In this perspective, exclusivities in the marketplace – induced by high prices or rarity, for instance – can operate as exclusionary forces, not only because they can preclude individuals or even entire groups (Bauman’s ‘underclass’) to obtain what they desire, but also because it makes it more difficult for their true opinions to be heard: what they would choose \textit{if only they were given the option}.

Commenting on post-Wall East Germany, anthropologist Daphne Berdhal explains that images of mass-consumption “were structured by and contributed to a dominant narrative of “democratization” and national legitimacy in which access to consumer choice are defined as fundamental rights and democratic expressions of individualism”.\textsuperscript{36} This kind of consumption can be seen as a veneer placed on the surface of democratic participation, masking a much deeper process of disengagement and of depoliticization (this was already Alexis de Tocqueville’s take on the effects of taste for material goods on the state of democracy\textsuperscript{37}). In contrast, Nestor Garcia-Canclini sees consumption rather as an arena for the \textit{expansion} of the political notion of

\textsuperscript{34}Ibid., 63–64.
\textsuperscript{35}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{36}Berdhal, “Consumer Rites. The Politics of Consumption in Re-Unified Germany,” 121.
\textsuperscript{37}Democracy in America (Indianapolis, Ind: Hackett Pub, 2000) [1840]. From Tocqueville’s \textit{Democracy in America}, Volume II, chapter XIV (my translation, adapted from George Lawrence’s translation: “When the taste for physical pleasures has grown more rapidly than enlightenment and experience of freedom, the time comes when men are carried away and lose control of themselves at sight of the new goods they are ready to snatch. There is no need to drag their rights away from citizens of this type; they voluntarily let them go.” (“Lorsque le goût des jouissances matérielles se développe chez un de ces peuples plus rapidement que les lumières et que les habitudes de la liberté, il vient un moment où les hommes sont emportés, et comme hors d’eux-mêmes, à la vue de ces biens nouveaux qu’ils sont prêts à saisir. (…) Il n’est pas besoin d’arracher à de tels citoyens les droits qu’ils possèdent ; ils les laissent volontiers échapper eux-mêmes.”)
citizenship.\textsuperscript{38} He indeed feels that the questions specific to citizenship are now “answered more often than not through private consumption of commodities and media offerings than through the abstract rules of democracy”.\textsuperscript{39} That said, in his view, it is not an either/or situation: people express their opinion and exercise their rights not only through direct political action, but also through consumption practices. For this reason he sees consumption not as useless and irrational expenditure, but as a site “where a good part of economic, socio-political, and psychological rationality is organized”.\textsuperscript{40}

The problem in this scenario of consumer-citizens ‘voting with their money’ is that the ability to consume turns quickly into the duty to consume: not exercising the freedom of choice would be like not exercising the right to vote.\textsuperscript{41} However, unlike the citizens of a democratic society who each have the possibility of voting for whomever or whatever is proposed to them on the democratic ‘market,’ all consumers do not actually share the same range of consumption choices, if only due to prices that only some can afford. Even in the realm of politics, Žižek expresses scepticism towards the idea that citizens always vote for what they want, illustrating his point by evoking the re-elections of various extremely unpopular politicians, such as Tony Blair’s re-election in 2005 despite abysmally low approval rates prior to the election. In Žižek’s view, then, the relationship between democratic choice and the truth of democratic opinion is much fuzzier than it appears. “Elections are not per se an indication of Truth – on the contrary, as a rule they tend to reflect the predominant doxa”.\textsuperscript{42} In a similar vein, the relationship between trends as illustrated by sales numbers and consumer preferences can be put in question. For example, it is not clear what consumers would purchase if they were given a different set of choices. The notion that producers have a responsibility towards their consumers to give them “what they want” \textit{as expressed through these consumers’ previous purchases} effectively places the responsibility of what these producers put on the market on the consuming ‘masses.’ “Some of this is a bit ‘touristy,’ but I have to listen to my customers and carry what sells,” retailers would routinely tell me, at once showing a desire to respect their consumers’ ‘vote’ for certain products and, perhaps

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 5.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{41} This logic was pushed to an extreme when Bush asked US citizens to consider consumption as an act of war against terror, and banners in New York bore the injunction: “Fight Back New York: Go Shopping.” Berdhal, \textit{“Consumer Rites. The Politics of Consumption in Re-Unified Germany,”} 99.
\textsuperscript{42} Žižek, \textit{First as Tragedy, Then as Farce}, 138.
not quite as respectfully, placing the figure of the ‘tourist’ first in line of potential anti-consumerism wrath against these products.

In consideration of the fact that citizenship is said to be “measured increasingly by the capacity to transact and consume,” barriers to the consumption by Aboriginal people of art through which to assert their belonging, status, and lineage be experienced as a stripping of rights. In this context, when artists say that artware is a way for them to democratize their art, they do not only mean that it enhances the size of their audience in general; they also mean that they are widening participation in community-building, and even Aboriginal nation-building, via the consumption of their work by members of their Nation. Whether these community members have purchased them as commodities or received them as gifts, these items can serve as personal, social, and political indexes of Aboriginal identity. In the case of items emblazoned with particular crests or customized for particular places or events, they can signal more specific affiliations and lineages.

The addition of text to a product design is particularly common with t-shirts, which can be marked with slogans (e.g. “Native Pride”; “Paddle Your Own Canoe”; “Stop the desecration and destruction of cəsnaʔəm”), the names of villages, towns, cities, or regions (e.g. “Lach Klan”; “Bella Coola”; “Victoria”; “British Columbia”), as well as those of schools, canoe families, sports teams, or First Nations (e.g. “T’lisəl̓aʔl̓a’ləq School”; “Siyamin Stams”; “Kitkatla Warriors”; “Tsleil Waututh Nation”). T-shirts are also among the most commonly customized potlatch gifts (along with mugs), imprinted with family names, clans, and/or potlatch dates. As argued by anthropologist Aaron Glass, such items may be considered as ‘souvenirs’, but in this case not in the classic sense of items reserved to visitors seen as having superficial relations to the peoples and places they visit, but rather as “material forms that encourage individual memories for specific events, collective family and village commemorations, and public affiliations at varying levels of identification”. Thus mass-produced items emblazoned with crest designs

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43 Comaroff and Comaroff, Millennial Capitalism and the Culture of Neoliberalism, 306.
44 Here, I am referring to the political entity currently recognized in Canada as “First Nations” but which could take other forms and reflect a different approach to sovereignty.
45 As explained in the introduction, the site of cəsnaʔəm is an ancient Musqueam village site, also known as the Marpole Midden and the Great Fraser Midden. In March 2012, members of the Musqueam Nation rallied against development that would disturb a burial ground in this site. The nearby artware company Native Northwest offered to print and distribute free t-shirts in support of the protest.
46 Kramer, Switchbacks, 52–56; Glass, “Crests on Cotton.”
and/or text can perform a similar work of social identification and mobilization as regalia that is not mass-produced. However, unlike regalia that usually stays under the care of specific individuals and families, these items can end up circulating much farther and wider than originally intended.

In other words, t-shirts and other mass-produced items also support citizenship by roping in large numbers of community members in the building and consolidation of nationhood in a way that precious, rare, items could not. The latter obviously play crucial nation-building roles and are regularly referenced as ‘national treasures’ – in some cases as both those of a specific First Nation, and those of the settler nation of Canada. However, in particular in their communities of origin, their deployment is often associated with the specific privileges of select individuals or families, and thus does not invite general ‘democratic’ use and indiscriminate circulation. Artware does not disrupt this social organization and its associated hierarchies, and it can even be designed specifically to mirror and reassert them, with items visually encoded to reflect different levels of affiliation to the host family. As already touched upon and further developed in the next section, serialization does not automatically lead to leveled societies and uniform fields of consumable goods. This fact is reflected in some artists’ willing but cautious approach to the artware industry.

6.1.3 Serialization, anti-consumerism, and elitism

Some artists adopt an openly reflexive approach to the relationship between their work, its serialization, and their critique of consumerist ideology. For instance, in lessLIE’s 2006 piece Words of Wealth, a framed serigraph print inspired by a spindle whorl is “contained by text that speaks of both the insatiable appetite of Western society to consume material goods and the manner by which wealth is exchanged in Coast Salish culture through potlatching”. Each time the strategically placed spindle interrupts the flow of text, the reader is forced to acknowledge the

48 Kramer, Switchbacks, 53.
50 See, for example, D. G Ellis and Steven Clay Brown, Tsimshian treasures: the remarkable journey of the Dundas collection, ed. Donald Ellis Gallery (Dundas, Ont./New York; Vancouver, B.C./Toronto; Seattle: Donald Ellis Gallery; Douglas & McIntyre; University of Washington Press, 2007); Kramer, Switchbacks.
“cultural tool of the weavers and the Salish concepts of wealth it transmits”.53 Here, I reproduce an excerpt from the text in question to illustrate how lessLIE positions himself and the Coast Salish culture he comes from in contrast to what he considers to be a Western, and even more specifically Canadian, consumerist ideology.

As a contemporary Coast Salish artist who has relatively non-materialistic values, it is a contention of mine that the environmentally, socially and politically destructive consumer culture of Canada is the antithesis of traditional Coast Salish values. In traditional Coast Salish culture, wealth is not conspicuous consumption of the superficial status symbols of cars and clothes, etc. Wealth is not how much you can spend and accumulate. Although, through acculturation, the consumer culture of Canada has become inextricably interwoven with Coast Salish culture, it should not be overlooked that the consumer culture of Canada is antithetical to the potlatching traditions of Coast Salish culture.

As shown in this statement, lessLIE experiences discomfort from the tension between the values he aspires to and the values of consumerism that have infiltrated a culture, his own, which he believes is inherently anti-consumerist. lessLIE’s position is in line with a long history of artists critiquing art production’s relationship to consumerism, showing that the latter is not inherent to so-called ‘Western art’ either. For instance, resistance to the transformation of “the culture of capitalism from a producer to a consumer ethos” was at the root of the arts and crafts movement inspired by John Ruskins and led by William Morris in late 19th and early 20th century.54 Morris in particular was a harsh critic of art under capitalism, arguing that industrialization had led producers to being considered solely as “machines” and consumers solely as “purses,” putting art at risk of being corrupted by the pursuit of profit.55 To give but one example of responses to contemporary art’s relation to capitalism, starting in the early 1960s, artists affiliated with George Maciunas’s Fluxus movement also challenged institutional art and “commercialized culture,”56 albeit from quite a different angle. Maciunas conceived Fluxus as the creation of works that could be “grasped by all peoples, not only critics, dilettantes and professionals” and forwent “all pretensions towards” – among other things – “commodity value”.57 Art historian Julian Stallabrass has commented on the long history of “the issue of art’s separation from or mergence with commodity,” arguing that during the 1990s there was “an intensification of the forces involved – many of them old features of capitalism – that contributed

53 Ibid.
54 Boris, Art and Labor, xi.
55 Ibid., 7.
57 George Maciunas, Fluxiosity, 1966.
to the dominance of a triumphant consumer culture not just over art but over all other cultural production”.\textsuperscript{58} Stallabrass explains:

As commodities have become more cultural, art has become further commodified, as its market has expanded and it has become increasingly integrated into the general run of capitalist activity. ... The result is an attitude to art that is similar to people’s attitude to commodities that themselves pretend to be no less than art.\textsuperscript{59}

Thus lessLIE’s critique of consumerism and its effect on artists and their work can be read in relation to a history of such a critique, showing that it is a kind of discourse that is far from being reserved to Northwest Coast art.\textsuperscript{60} Yet, he gives a culturally specific flavour to this critique by basing it on a Coast Salish approach to wealth that informs his personal anti-consumerist stance. Furthermore, his reference to the potlatch detaches this stance from the critique of serialization that often goes hand in hand with the critique of mass consumption. Potlatches indeed require the production of items fit for mass-distribution, thus lessLIE is not rejecting serialization as such, but rather opposes it when it is conducted for the purpose of wealth accumulation, rather than its redistribution. This nuance is key to understanding how, as an individual, lessLIE can both participate in an industry of mass-production and work hard to maintain what he describes as his “non-materialistic values.” However, this can make it difficult for him to price his work at market value. “I just want to be able to pay my rent and be able to pay my bills and everything, that’s all I really want in the world. If I had more money, I just wouldn’t know what to do with it,” he told me during our interview.

In a somewhat ironic twist, lessLIE’s anti-consumerism is partly what provides the conditions for his partnership with an artware company to reproduce some of his designs on artware items. With his distaste for spending his energy on selling his work, it was relieving for him to know that this artware company could be a new outlet for the designs of which he had already exhausted the commercial potential in the form of originals and limited editions. This became even more important during the ongoing recession that began in 2008. In these more challenging economic times, the need to be pragmatic about how he could continue making a living from his art pushed him to think about equally pragmatic ways to uphold his ideals.

\textsuperscript{58} Stallabrass, \textit{Art Incorporated}, 75.  
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 81.  
\textsuperscript{60} To give but two other examples from very different contexts: in the middle ages, the ascetic life of Benedictine monks contrasted with the great wealth accumulated via donations and land rents that their monasteries came to manage; in the eighteenth century, the Quakers became known as a business-savvy and prosperous people even though they were also known for rejecting the ‘material pleasures’ of the world.
Prior to this recession, I found myself being really driven by consumerism and financial gain for a period of time. What I was doing, in some ways, is ... creating product to go out and create more product. ... But this recession has reminded me of the real reasons why I am an artist. It’s been difficult because one of the things that I want to do is do things that are different, and not necessarily marketable. I create works because I think that it’s important to create in the world, but I also don’t want to become a stereotypical starving artist.

In trying to strike a balance between being able to pay his bills and being able of focus on creativity, lessLIE welcomes the promotional and financial support provided by those who sell his work in all sectors of the market. Echoing other artists’ feelings in this respect, he explained: “Even if I had the means to make t-shirts myself and other commercial items, I wouldn’t want to put the energy in that kind of marketing because I prefer to focus more on the creativity”. Further, his feeling is that if he spent his time and energy on marketing his work himself, he would end up looking at his own work primarily “as a commodity”.

It is perhaps paradoxical that one of the ways artists can afford to avoid such a situation is by being able to count on the support of commercial galleries and artware companies. This is something of which lessLIE is well aware. The tension between his desire to maintain some independence from the market and his willingness to delegate the commercial viability of his work to other players in the market was evident throughout our interview. This can result in the apparent paradox of being anti-consumerist and making a living both from selling art to commercial galleries and from letting artware companies reproduce designs on consumer goods. However, rather than a paradox, this can also be seen as a strategy to dissipate the illusion that art only thrives when anti-consumerism translates into a refusal to make art accessible via its serialization.61

lessLIE is not alone in his effort to straddle the line between asserting the value of his work and questioning the structure of the market. For instance, one artist who has made the purposeful decision to go against the anti-mass-production grain and has gained even more respect from his followers for doing so, is Seattle-based mixed heritage artist Louie Gong. When his hand-drawn custom-designed Coast Salish shoes became too popular for him to keep up with orders, he decided he would give them away for free. While the success of his shoes likely comes from their

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61 Here too, there are parallels with the approach to mass-production by non-Aboriginal artists. For instance, although criticized by some as a sure sign of the artist’s corruption by the market, Fluxus movement’s Ben Vautier’s decision to have his works reproduced on paper products, as well as school and office supplies, can instead be interpreted as defiance of the art world’s own market logic of artificially sustained exclusivity and rarity.
custom, one-of-a kind nature, Gong is clearly not against mass-production in general, as demonstrated by the fact that he makes prints, t-shirts, and stickers of his designs. In fact, when Gong announced that his t-shirts were made available on his website, he wrote on his Facebook wall: “I'm glad I finally have something that most people can afford.” He also explained to his Facebook followers the fact that he does not sell his work in art galleries as follows: “I don’t think the people who I want to reach with my art/message buy or experience their art in galleries.” By deciding in early 2011 to make his shoes “gifts for people whose actions embody the Eighth Generation spirit – a barter for works, vision or courage already paid forward” Gong pushed this logic even further. Not long before, he partnered with the soda company Jones Sodas to design the label of three of their most popular drinks. “I’d rather see my work be available for $1.75 in the grocery store than for $1000 in a gallery and accessible to only a certain demographic,” Gong is quoted saying in the January/February 2011 issue of Natives People’s magazine. In other words, as his popularity grew, he went farther down the road of serialization and accessibility, like thumbing his nose at the expectation that his work should become increasingly expensive and exclusive.

Gong writes that his decision to give his shoes away for free was a way for him to “eliminat[e] money as the number one determinant of who owns my original art”. Of course it could be argued that by doing this, Gong created another kind of value for his custom shoes, justifying that he continues to call them his “Exclusive Custom shoes” even after the change: these shoes are something money cannot buy, but having “Eighth Generation spirit” can. In this value system, cash ranks lower than actions worthy of the seven generation that precede you (and come after you). Symbolically, the shoes are in this sense not less but more expensive than they were before, but economic capital is no longer a factor in who can and cannot afford them.

Together, the above examples show that working in both art and artware can be a way for artists to support their anti-consumerist aspirations. This helps deconstruct the notion that, contrary to making a living through art, participating in the artware industry would be the mark of

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62 Initially sold for less than US$100, Gong’s custom shoes were later priced US$ 150-250+.
64 One might wonder why, then, he could not also mass-produce his shoes instead of making them gifts to select individuals. The answer is at least in part that it would be technically challenging to achieve, short of a shoe company getting directly involved, which would radically change Gong’s business model.
65 Gong, “Spirit Awards - 88 Words for Eighth Generation Customs - Eighth Generation.”
those who bow down to ‘consumerism’ understood as the reinforcement of the already established logics of the market. However, as will be explained in the following section, the association of artware with promoting ‘access’ to Northwest Coast art, combined with the false notion that the audience artware is meant to reach are primarily composed of individuals with little knowledge of Northwest Coast art, has led to certain processes of standardization in the industry’s selection and uses of designs. Such social representations of consumers indeed tend to confuse the desire and ability to understand (cultural capital) with the desire and ability to consume it (economic capital) even though, as Pierre Bourdieu demonstrated, the two do not always go hand in hand.66

6.2 Of “Tourists” and “Accessible” Artware Design

Writing primarily about the radio and television of the 1940s, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer argued that the ‘culture industry’ robbed individuals of the possibility of contributing and reacting to cultural productions, training them to “accept what the culture manufacturers offer”.67 Mass-media consumers would thus lose their power of imagination, and the industry would engender “a constant reproduction of the same thing,” effectively excluding the introduction of anything new and untried: in other words “The machine rotates on the same spot”.68 In this model, it is the producer that is believed to be in the driver’s seat, manufacturing consumers’ desires. More recent developments in the anthropology of consumption suggest that production and distribution processes are in fact very much shaped by consumers who, as argued by Daniel Miller,69 are not merely the end-point of these processes. And indeed, I have often heard artware producers say that consumer expectations directly inform what they produce, and that ignoring these expectations would be risky from a commercial point of view. In other words, these producers see themselves as operating within a relatively consumer-centric political economy.

However, as I will explain, because producers have tended to imagine a rather homogenous group of consumers for their products, they have only recently begun to insert more variety in their approach to the reproduction and distribution of Northwest Coast designs. For years, even as

68 Ibid. [1944], 134.
69 Miller, Capitalism, 4.
its volume of production was exploding, the Native Northwest Coast artware industry has struggled to introduce new design concepts into the ever-growing number of product lines it was making available on the market: designs have been imprinted, etched, embroidered onto a greater and greater variety of goods, but at the same time, they were almost always positioned in the most obvious of ways, placed on the front and/or in the center of these goods. In other words, until recently the artware ‘machine’ has to a certain extent been ‘rotating on the same spot’, not just in the figurative sense of reproducing tropes, but also in the quite literal sense of the machine imprinting the same spaces, over and over again.

I argue that, in addition to the bottom line of reproduction costs, such a standardized approach to design was adopted in great part in relationship to the desire of producers and distributors to accommodate certain expectations on the part of artware consumers, which they imagined to be relatively ignorant about and/or unfamiliar with Northwest Coast art. In other words, in the context of the artware industry, mass-production and mass-distribution would be used to foster “customer satisfaction” among the “masses” – a rather different scenario than in the ‘culture industry’ solely focused on satisfying its own interests, as described by Adorno and Horkheimer. In addition, the concern on the part of producers and distributors for consumers’ aspirations (also a means to ensure ‘commercial success’) contributes to placing artware in a different category than art. Indeed, as Stallabrass remarks, “While ordinary commodities live or die by millions of indiv

Writing about the relationship between contemporary art and consumer goods, Stallabrass remarks that:

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70 Horkheimer and Adorno, “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception.”
71 Stallabrass, Art Incorporated, 91.
The companies that produce such items [consumer goods] financially support their research-and-recycling arm, the arts. ... Art may be imagined as consumerism’s dreaming, playfully recombining the elements of mass culture in promiscuous assemblages, and along the way happening upon items of use.\(^72\)

I argue that it is when the artware industry treats Northwest Coast artists as its “research arm” that it generates products that are more than yet another object on which designs can be reproduced. Not all of Northwest Coast artists’ stylistic and conceptual breakthroughs will be considered “items of use” fit for serialization, but those that are can be used to keep artware from continuing to “rotate on the same spot.” Such an argument counters the commonly held belief that the serialization required for mass-production and mass-distribution necessarily result in standardization. In contrast, it is compatible with the idea that such standardization does occur, but primarily when those who are being targeted are approached by producers and distributors as having homogenous expectations, tastes, and desires. The kind of standardization that has been occurring in the Northwest Coast artware industry has been driven by assumptions being made about those who consume artware and their ability to understand and appreciate an art they are believed to be not particularly familiar with and know relatively little about.

One of the reasons artware consumers are imagined to have very limited knowledge of Northwest Coast art is because items like mugs, t-shirts, and key-chains tend to be associated with the category of ‘souvenirs’ or ‘tourist art’. As I have explained in Chapter 1, many of those to whom I have provided a simple description of the objects of my research in casual conversation reformulated this description as the study of “things for tourists” and “touristy souvenirs” – this even though I had myself not mentioned tourism and tourists. The anthropological literature provides numerous examples of how the expression ‘tourist art’ has come to stand for objects that are available for purchase by outsiders, communicating an underlying assumption that it cannot also be consumed locally.\(^73\) Even when such literature aims to “heighten the cultural validity and scholarly significance of tourist art,”\(^74\) it often leaves unquestioned the idea that there is a kind of art that is for tourists, and a kind of art that is not. While this may prove to be true in certain contexts, that is not what I have observed during my

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\(^{72}\) Ibid., 77.


fieldwork. As also discussed in Chapter 1, Native Northwest Coast artware is no more the material culture of visitors than it is that of locals, including of the quintessential ‘non-tourists’ that are Aboriginal individuals. Yet, the common use of the expression ‘tourist art’ conveys the inaccurate idea that the serialization of designs assigns them a very particular kind of consumer.

As I will further explain, acknowledging the relationship between social and cultural difference and consumption practices need not lead to the essentialization of these differences to the point where, as has been the case during my fieldwork, one often assumes that artware is purchased by non-Aboriginal consumers visiting the region precisely because locals, and Aboriginal individuals in particular, would in a sense ‘know better’ than to purchase them precisely because they ‘know’ Northwest Coast art ‘well’. The similar assumption that class draws a dividing line between those who do and those who do not consume artware does not hold up, as it circulates both among the very wealthy and very poor. Indeed, if a divide does exist between those who can afford to purchase a ten thousand dollar mask and those who cannot, this divide does not create material limitations in the other direction. Mugs are ‘popular’ items not just in the sense that they are accessible to low-budget consumers, they are also popular in the sense that they are owned by an extremely wide variety of people. To be sure, they have a prominent presence in university offices, museum staff lunch rooms, artist studios, and private art gallery counters. In other words, the materiality of mugs (or other artware) says little about who does and who does not consume them, of outsiders or insiders, of elite or laypeople, of visitors or locals, etc.

In sum, my research encourages me to question the assumption that both consumers and what they consume can be easily divided in neat and distinct categories. Without claiming that there is no correspondence whatsoever between identity and consumption, my fieldwork provides many examples to suggest that if such a relationship exists, it does not always link particular categories of goods to identifiable ‘groups’ of consumers situated at discrete intersections of social location. In particular, Native Northwest Coast artware is consumed by a much greater variety of consumers than some producers’ and distributors have had in mind up until more recently. However, the presumption that artware consumers generally correspond to the figure of the ‘tourist’ has had repercussions on the kinds of products that have been developed for this market.
In part 2 of the present chapter, I begin by critically examining theoretical approaches to consumption’s relationship to identity and social location, including their limitations with respect to accounting for the wide range of individuals who consume Native Northwest Coast artware. I will suggest that processes of distanciation inform the social representations of consumers that artware producers and distributors have been working from when developing and marketing artware. I will argue that this had led to certain standard approaches and uses of Northwest Coast designs in the industry. This will lead into the third and final part of the chapter, in which I will discuss examples of artware items that illustrate the complexity of consumption’s relationship to identity and social location. I will use these examples to further demonstrate that, particularly when it is acknowledged that artware consumers are not a homogenous group, having recourse to serialization as a means to promote the mass-consumption of a particular art style does not automatically lead to its standardization.

6.2.1 Consumption and identity

Social scientists have helped forge analyses of consumption that challenge the economic determinism of neoclassicism, showing that market trends are harder to attribute to the logics of utility maximization when one textures consumption with social and cultural variability. However, as I will show, many of these analyses still posit strong relationships between social location and consumption practices, disputing economic determinism only to suggest (or leave unexamined) various forms of socio-cultural determinism.

Notably, armed with his concept of *habitus*, Pierre Bourdieu was one of the first to manage the tour-de-force of creating a theoretical model that is both an alternative to neoclassic economics, and capable of explaining the regularities that the latter takes for granted as the ‘truth’ of economic activity.\(^{75}\) In Bourdieu’s view, economic practices neither emerge from conscious, rational decisions, nor are they fully determined by external forces. Rather, they are ‘reasonable’ behaviours that are guided by practical intuitions and anticipations. Agents create the economic ‘field’ and shape the structures of the power dynamics that operate within this field. The power of each agent is determined by the volume and the structure of its ‘capital’ in its different dimensions (financial, cultural, technological, organizational, informational, commercial, social, symbolic, etc.). The structure of a given field and its innate tendency to reproduce itself limit the

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potential actions of each agent engaged in this field. Agentive strategies can take place within this structure, but they are limited by the direction that is assigned to them by unequally distributed capital and structural constraints. The economic practices of agents thus depend foremost on the social location that they occupy, and agents struggle to modify the power dynamics of this field to their advantage. Thus the individual is a socialized subjectivity whose preferences are the product of a collective and individual history. This fact, Bourdieu argues, helps understand why one can observe regularities in economic behaviour, without subscribing to the idea that this behaviour is predictable because humans always act in accordance with economic rationality.

Following Bourdieu’s model, it should be possible to imagine with relative accuracy an individual’s consumptive behaviour based on basic biographical and demographic information. Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus* breaks away from both mechanistic models (based on the idea of action as pure reaction) and finalistic models (in which action is determined by the reference to a specific end). It does not, however, do away with all determinism, as it creates the expectation that individuals occupying the same or similar social locations will exhibit roughly the same consumption practices. Bourdieu thus essentially proposed a social logic of consumption in lieu of a solely economic one; the former helps understand consumption regularities beyond utility maximization, but does not really shed light on how two similarly positioned agents might make radically different consumption choices, or conversely, how two differently positioned agents might make very similar consumption choices, beyond considering them as statistical anomalies. This model does little to help understand how the same Native Northwest Coast t-shirt can come to be worn by a resident of upper-middle class Kitsilano during a weekly run to the neighbourhood’s notably expensive farmers’ market, and by a resident of the lower class Downtown Eastside sitting on the sidewalk collecting small change in a baseball cap.

In this respect, one can find traces of Bourdieusian influence in much of the anthropology of consumption, even when their authors do not explicitly claim such an affiliation. In his work on the transformation of sugar from a luxury and a rarity into a commonplace necessity,76 Sydney Mintz differentiates the ‘symbolic importance’ of sugar [symbolic capital] from its potency as a source of profit [economic capital], the former diminishing as the latter was becoming apparent. Indeed, “Differences in quantity and in form of consumption expressed social and economic

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differences within the national population”. When they reposition the ‘rational consumer’ into the social life from which he is usually abstracted, Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood also postulate that goods are used as markers of rational categories with which visible statements are made about hierarchies of value. Goods are not only needed for subsistence and competitive display, “they are needed for making visible and stable the categories of culture”. Goods do not carry meaning separately from the other goods with which the consumer assembles them, argue these authors. Together these goods constitute a live information system through which the world is made intelligible by the consumer. In this view, the collection of goods assembled by consumers is a reflection of their worldview – and what have social scientists argued if not that worldviews need to be understood in relation to such social dimensions as age, class, gender, ethnicity, geography, and time? This suggests that individuals’ identities can be read directly from the goods that they consume, because these consumptive assemblages are derived, among other things, from socially and culturally informed experiences.

However, my fieldwork suggests that, in the Native Northwest Coast art and artware world, individuals of vastly different social locations can bring together extremely similar consumptive assemblages. There is no saying whether a collection that includes mugs and masks, t-shirts and totem poles, dream-catchers and drums belong to a young Aboriginal lawyer, or a retired non-Aboriginal diner owner. In addition, such assemblages are not easily translatable into hierarchical systems of value as defined by classic “high brow” and “low brow” divisions. In this respect, one of the most important contributions of anthropology to the study of consumption is the idea that values and meanings are not stable, and that over time and across space the same object can have a variety of meanings for a variety of different people.

For instance, Nicholas Thomas examined the mutual appropriation and unequal exchanges in the colonial peripheries of the Pacific. In his view, objects are ‘mutable’ in that they are “not what they were made to be but what they have become”. This approach is not unlike the ‘social

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77 Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*, 79.
78 Ibid., 60.
79 Fredric Jameson associates the dissolution of such distinctions between “high culture and so-called mass or popular culture” with postmodernism and the advent of consumer society (Jameson, “Postmodernism and Consumer Society,” 112.).
81 Ibid., 4.
life’ or ‘cultural biography’ approach proposed by Appadurai and Kopytoff respectively, in that it focuses on change through movement between people and places. Thomas addresses the role played by consumption in the production of new meanings and value. Indeed, he situates the transformation of an object into what it ‘becomes’ in the usage and interpretation made by the receiving party of a given transaction. In a similar vein, Fred Myers places the emphasis on circulation and recontextualization to avoid “reifying supposed ‘boundaries’”, at the same time leaving “open the possibility of [these boundaries’] construction in signifying practices around “difference””. Indeed, not only do objects ‘move’ through regimes of value, it is through their usage and interpretations by their consumers that they acquire meanings and value that can radically differ from those put forward by their producers. Although this is not an entirely new phenomenon, it is also now widely accepted within anthropology that it has been intensified under globalization, with more and more goods circulating ever more quickly and farther away than before. However, it is also important to recognize that things that circulate far and wide, acquiring new values and meanings in the process, can also find an important “consumer base” (to use marketing speak) in the very communities from which they originate.

For instance, recently published ethnographies re-evaluate the commonly held idea that objects destined to consumption by outsiders are not also consumed by those of the culture they are meant to represent. Jennifer Kramer discusses the consumption of Nuxalk art made for sale, including by the Nuxalkmc themselves, as an example of a “self-objectification” process whereby Indigenous peoples consume the items also consumed by non-Indigenous individuals as a means to “regain control of self-definition and self-display” Alexis Bunten also argues that “commercial Native art objects, often deemed “inauthentic” or regarded by collectors, curators, and academics simply as a by-product of cultural commodification, can become a tangible part of the contemporary Native cultural experience”. Using the particular example of Southeast

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85 Edward Said has famously made a very similar argument with respect to the effects on ideas and theories by their circulation through both time and space in his essay “Travelling Theory” (Edward Said, “Travelling Theory,” in The World, the Text and the Critic (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 226–247.).
86 Appadurai, Modernity at Large.
87 Kramer, Switchbacks, 48–51.
88 Bunten, “Commodities of Authenticity. When Native People Consume Their Own ‘Tourist Art’,” 319.
Alaska, Bunten describes how what she calls “commercial art” are received as gifts and purchased by Native Alaskan individuals. Often displayed at home and at work, “the meaning of the [commercial] art object – often regardless of workmanship and quality – holds personal significance for its owner,” writes Bunten. As she remarks, the assumption that commercial art is considered reserved to non-Native consumers is not founded, even though the ways in which a particular item is treated can vary depending on the cultural identity of its owner and user. For instance, she describes the example of a woman’s display of various mass-produced eagle-themed items in her office to “symbolize her identity through her moiety” noting that non-Native consumers “typically live and work outside of the clan system” and therefore are not expected to use crest designs in this way.

That said, the focus of anthropology on difference has relegated to a secondary plane the question of whether or not what Myers calls ‘slippages’ of meaning only occur across cultural difference. For instance, are meanings always only minimally altered when the change of hands occurs within the same ‘cultural group’? Anthropology generally focuses on what happens when objects cross cultural boundaries, following the assumption that there would be less to say about shifts in meanings when an object changes hands from one person to another of similar social location, including cultural ancestry. In this sense, the anthropology of consumption still struggles to escape the discipline’s classic conundrum of essentialism. Even within its least determinist of frameworks, the social and cultural nature of anthropological theories of consumption generates little attention to consumption practices that clash with individuals’ projected and perceived social location, or what Jonathan Friedman has described as “strategies of self-construction”.

In his 1994 *Consumption and Identity*, Friedman presses anthropologists to examine “the way in which social identities generate cultural strategies of consumption, the way in which

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89 Ibid., 328–330.
90 Ibid., 329.
91 Ibid., 322. Given my focus on the contemporary artware industry, I do not know exactly at what point Haida mantelpieces began to be decorated with argillite carvings, or when basketry began to be placed as ornaments on Nuu-chah-nulth sideboards, and would certainly not venture to say that this has always been the case. I have many times heard Aboriginal individuals insist on the difference between the decorative nature and the ceremonial function of their artwork and how a colonial frame of mind has tended to impose a blurring of this distinction. It would be problematic to ignore this. However, I contend that there would be value in extending the examination of self-objectification to historical examples, rather than framing it as an entirely contemporary phenomenon occurring subsequently to outsider objectification.
92 Friedman, *Consumption and Identity*. 

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consumption expresses the structures of desire in society, the way in which life worlds are constructed via the practice of consumption”. He explains that demand is not the simple aggregation of individual desires, but is instead structured by socially and culturally defined strategies of self-construction. According to Friedman, while in material terms consumption is seen as the passive last stage of the reproductive process, in social terms it is the origin of the structure of demand. Friedman indeed argues that this demand is constructed in relation to subjects’ ‘investment’ in voluntarily and socially determined projects of self-definition related to the desire for social and cultural distinction. This argument suggests that consumption strategies are guided by social and cultural principles and not only by economic ones. Thus, again it should be possible to map these strategies onto social, cultural, and economic identities. This approach also challenges economic behavioural determinism, but similarly to Bourdieu’s model, really only relocates the rationality and purpose of consumption from economics on its own to a more complex constellation of factors, socio-cultural ones figuring prominently among them.

However, arguably consumption does not only produce class stratification, it can also create links across socio-economic and cultural difference, a process to which objects that are produced and distributed en masse are particularly adapted. This idea is reflected in the art of Laich-kwil-tach contemporary artist Sonny Assu. As he explains in reference to his Personal Totems series, consumer items help their owners define their identity and bring them together into networks that cut across culturally, socially, and geographically defined ‘communities.’ By using the word ‘totem’ to describe this phenomenon, Assu wants to actualize a vocabulary typically associated with ‘tribal’ groups by using it to discuss how “regardless of race or culture,” we “use everyday consumer items and icons of pop culture to define our personal lineage” and “establish our relation to each other”. Through iPods and other massively popular goods, these connections and lineages are established across biographical and demographic differences. Of course, that is not to say that everyone can afford and/or desires to own an iPod, but only that, collectively, those who do represent a fairly representative cross section of the products’ worldwide exposure audience. Mass-consumption does not eliminate difference, but it occasionally draws lines of connections where none were thought to previously exist. Thus,

93 Ibid., 22.
contrary to what Georg Simmel could argue about fashion in the early 20th century, contemporary consumption habits do not always trickle down: they can also spread sideways, upwards, and through more rhizomatic networks.

For instance, National Museum of American History curator Shelley Nickles has shown that the taste for rosebud-adorned silverware did not follow the path expected by designers, in turn challenging and even turning on its head the idea that social mobility automatically leads to cultural uplift (i.e. ‘assimilation into upper-class culture’). To illustrate this, Nickles describes the continued success of silverware decorated with rosebuds among U.S. Americans who had experienced social mobility out of the working class that had popularized these designs. Nickles explains how 1950s designers of appliances, automobiles, and other mass-produced goods were stunned to find out that contrary to their assumption that “postwar prosperity should have brought an end to rosebuds,” the latter continued to be in as high demand as ever. Rosebuds aesthetics was indeed specifically associated by designers with a working class taste for exuberance. Thus, the persistence of this taste despite processes of socio-economic mobility did not mesh well with these designers’ hope that a “classless middle-class society” was being developed via mass-consumption.

However, in the consumption-centered political economy of the 1950s, American producers of household goods felt they had to satisfy any widespread demand for particular products, no matter in which regard they would themselves consider the taste of those who purchased them. Many Native Northwest Coast artware producers and distributors have adopted a similar attitude, claiming that they must produce and stock what sells, no matter whether it matches their personal taste or not. This enjoins them to cater to what they imagine the majority wants to consume but also to put some distance between those products and their own personal preferences. This self-conscious practice of “following the market” in turn enables them to be perceived as being part of a certain elite of those who know more than ‘tourists’ about Northwest Coast art, without however being labelled ‘elitist’ by reserving this art to themselves and this art’s connoisseurs.

However, as I have argued, many theories linking identity and consumption leave unexplored potential discrepancies between what individuals consume (or produce, or distribute)

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97 Ibid., 582.
and the kind of self they construct and project. For instance, what can be said about the fact that, contrary to expectations, designing for t-shirts and mugs does not preclude the use of the label of “master carver”? Similarly, what conclusions can be drawn from places referred to as “art galleries” by their owners that also sell t-shirts, cards, and sunglasses? Also, what is the significance of those Northwest Coast art buyers who also buy artware on a regular basis but minimize the latter kind of consumption’s bearing on their identity as art collectors? As I will detail in the next section, I argue that the concept of “distancing”, after Bourdieu’s idea of “distinction”\(^98\) can help answer these questions. This is the case not necessarily because there is a strict correspondence between social location and consumption practices, but because processes of distancing are at work in the formation of social representations of consumers. Indeed, this can help explain why I have been told by that Aboriginal individuals would not consume this or that ‘touristy’ product, even though there are Aboriginal individuals who do own those exact products.\(^99\) It similarly helps explain how I could be assured that only those who “know nothing about Northwest Coast art” would purchase this or that kind of item, and see that very kind of item in several Northwest Coast art scholars’ offices and homes.

### 6.2.2 Of distinction and distancing

In his seminal *Distinction*\(^100\), the model of cultural consumption proposed by Bourdieu suggests that consumption practices denote not only social location, but also the performance of judgments of taste as acts of social positioning to signal social aspirations and/or status. Thus, differences in taste are used to assert differences of class, and distinctions between classes are reinforced in daily life through consumption practices and judgements of the same. Incidentally, Andy Warhol contended that one of the hallmarks of American society is the consumption of the same things by individuals of radically different social positions (e.g. the consumption of Coke by US Presidents as well as the poor, those watching movies as well as the stars featured in those movies)\(^101\) – underlining that North American consumption represents a very different context than the one Bourdieu studies for *Distinction*. Still, what Bourdieu observed has some degree of currency in the way producers and distributors tend to divide consumers of Northwest Coast art.

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\(^98\) Bourdieu, *Distinction* [1979].
\(^99\) Bunten, “Commodities of Authenticity. When Native People Consume Their Own ‘Tourist Art’.”
\(^100\) Bourdieu, *Distinction* [1979].
\(^101\) Danto, *Andy Warhol*, 57.
into different categories according to their assumed level of knowledge of this art. This indicates that a process similar to what Bourdieu described in terms of “distinction” based on economic and cultural capital is also at work here. However, and this is key, such differences of capital cannot always be established at the level of actual consumption practices, but rather linger in (modernist) social representations (i.e. a certain assemblage of beliefs, values, and ideas) that are used to distance art from artware, and artware consumers from art buyers, despite what they have in common and what brings them together. I argue that the schematic division of consumers into distinct categories is part of a larger discursive process through which a distance between ‘art’ and ‘artware’ (as ‘not-quite-art’) is also being asserted, despite all that makes the two be closely related and perform what Fredric Jameson might call a “postmodern” effacement of one of modernism’s key boundaries.  

The process of distancing that I will be discussing in the remainder of this section concerns how one consumer figure is conceptually kept apart from another i.e. how the ‘tourist’ is kept separate from the ‘art collector’. Each term is used as a metonymy for a group of people that exceeds their particular referents. The former is commonly used by producers and distributors to refer to those who are believed to be unfamiliar or superficially familiar with Northwest Coast art. They use the latter when discussing the individuals they consider more knowledgeable about this art, sometimes also calling them ‘connoisseurs.’ As social constructs, the figure of the art collector stands in contrast with the figure of the tourist not because the two are separated by a natural difference in taste, but because the knowledge gap that is imagined to stand between them is thought to be responsible for a disparity in both desire and ability to be discriminating in their respective approach to Northwest Coast art. I argue that the centrality of knowledge in this process of distancing shows that the field of Native Northwest Coast art escapes what Julian

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102 Jameson, “Postmodernism and Consumer Society,” 112. In this respect, a fashion designer explained to me that buyers of artware may not always be able to tell the difference between what she would consider a well designed product and a product she would feel was poorly designed. Because of this, she put the onus on producers to use their own discernment, noting that not all producers seem to be able to do so. Thus from her point of view, not only are consumers not all equally endowed with discernment, the same could be said of producers: in other words, there would be ‘tourists’ among artware producers as well – or, just as there would be art and not-quite-art, there would be artists, and not-quite-artists.

103 Derived from the Latin verb “cognoscere” and the French verb “connaître” meaning “to know,” the word “connoisseur” is sometimes specifically used to describe those believed to have “discerning taste,” implying that this can be the inherent quality of an individual (or implying a critique of this idea, in which case it tends to be used in quotes). In this context, the term is primarily used to designate those who consider themselves knowledgeable, and who believe their knowledge plays a key role what they consume and what they do not.
Stallabrass calls the “continued insistence on the unknowability of art”. 104 I further argue that this affects the artware industry’s approach to the development of products that are believed to be fit for mass-consumption by so-called ‘tourists’ because designed to make Northwest Coast art seem ‘knowable’ to consumers thought *a priori* not be knowledgeable about it.

Although such things as class, ethnicity, and age are usually thought to factor into such things as familiarity with a particular area of knowledge, in the Northwest Coast art world the figures of the ‘tourist’ and the ‘art collector’ are not primarily defined by these dimensions of social location. In contrast, individuals tend to be identified as pertaining to one or the other category based on their consumption practices: not how much money they have, but how much money they are willing to spend (on Northwest Coast art); not by how old they are but about how wise they are about their choices (of Northwest Coast art); not by where they are from and who their family is but by what they have and have not learned there and from them (about Northwest Coast art). Thus, when producers and distributors talk about ‘tourists’ and the ‘touristy things’ they like to buy, they are not always talking about visitors to the region of the Pacific Northwest, but rather about visitors to the Northwest Coast art world. Similarly, when they talk about ‘art collectors’ this is not always a reference to individuals who have large numbers of Northwest Coast artworks in their possession, but rather to those who have selected what they consider corresponds to the category of ‘art.’

Furthermore, not all of the artists, museum curators, gallery owners, academics, elders, and all others who have acquired knowledge about Northwest Coast art as part of their formal, familial, and/or personal education are necessarily collectors of this art. However, when producers and distributors refer to them as consumers, it is usually the term ‘art collector’ that they use, perhaps because those of them who do collect are effectively more frequent consumers than the others. During my fieldwork, I noticed that many of these connoisseurs, whether or not they are collectors, are careful to distance themselves from artware and in turn distance art from artware. It is as if it were important to choose a side: art OR artware, but not both. It was even quite common for those who happen to ‘do’ both (as producers, distributors, and/or consumers) to coat their relationship to artware with just enough irony or lightness to position themselves at a comfortable distance from those they perceive to be exclusively on the artware side of things, i.e.

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‘tourists’. The latter are thus left standing on the other side of a one-way valve that would keep them from attaining art but would allow connoisseurs to occasionally reach for artware.

In addition to echoing Bourdieu’s notion of distinction, such purposeful distancing also resonates with Baudrillard’s idea that the social logic of consumption is essentially a process of classification and social differentiation. Objects are consumed “as signs which distinguish,” producing status stratification.\(^\text{105}\) From this Baudrillard had concluded that mass production occurs only when the object no longer needs to perform this distinction. And yet, in the case of Native Northwest Coast art, the advent of mass production over the last several decades has not been interpreted as a signal that this art form is no longer a means of social distinction – its rising importance in the art world as well as its uninterrupted use in the potlatch economy to assert status make that clear. In this context, if art is to continue playing a role in processes of social and individual self-construction, the reasoning might go, it is important to place it at a distance from that which could potentially challenge this role by making it accessible to all. For instance, one fashion designer noted that a great mask and a silk dress do not belong in the same category as a mug and an ashtray, and that it was important for her to maintain them unequivocally apart, even when all are adorned with Northwest Coast art. Or as one collector put it: “let’s not get confused, you know, with art and [art] cards.” In this respect, it was made quite clear to me by several producers and distributors that the risk of “confusion” was greater for some people than for others.

Indeed, even though I have many times heard the complaint that all consumers should ‘do their homework’ before entering the market and show interest in being educated as part of their buying experience, this responsibility was primarily expected to be fulfilled by art collectors. If the investment in Northwest Coast art of some collectors is only economic and not intellectual, the common assumption is that this is even truer of tourists, who are thought to be less invested in the art, both monetarily and intellectually. Setting aside the question of whether or not tourists are indeed too uninterested to really learn, or the stereotype that they are unable to understand in any depth what is explained to them, it is interesting to think about the consequences on artware design of believing artware consumers need to be provided with an \textit{Easy Button}\(^\text{106}\) approach to


\(^{106}\) In 2003, the office supply company Staples adopted “That was easy” as its slogan. In 2005, it turned the slogan into a product, the ‘Easy Button,’ a red push-button that, when pressed, plays an enthusiastic voice saying “That was easy!” suggesting that Staples makes (office) life less complicated.
Northwest Coast art, ensuring that little effort is required of them in order to be able to identify a design and understand what it represents.

6.2.3 Knowledge, recognition, and interpretation

Likely as a result of the emphasis on recognisability and understandability, one of the ways Northwest Coast designs have been described to me is as “logos.” However, even if some artists occasionally do design company logos and if there are parallels between the function of crest figures and that of logos, this does not dictate that designs representing these crests should necessarily tend towards a simple, clean-lined, minimalist aesthetic. In other words, the stylistic simplification of designs does not automatically follow from the “logo-ization” of Aboriginal identities, but it can be encouraged by a certain conception of the kinds of images consumers are able to process for rapid recognition. Furthermore, in the case of designs that are not meant to represent a particular brand, band, corporation, organization, or family, the term “logo” does not appropriately describe the function of these designs, since the items on which they are reproduced are not being purchased as examples of a specific entity’s ‘products’. Except in the case of artists making their own artware, artware companies rarely if ever bank primarily on their brand to attract consumers’ attention rather than on a variety of designs and, in some cases, the names of known artists. However, when brand recognition is not at play, recognisability can be achieved in other ways, including by the choice of designs that are easy to read as representations of crest animals and other figures. Thus, it is not serialization that in and of itself causes some companies to favour simple figurative designs, but certain assumptions about the role recognisability can play in making particular products be fit for mass-consumption. I argue that this reliance on recognisability as a marketing strategy has led a number of companies to treat crest animals (and other popular symbols such as peace signs, feathers, etc) as brand proxies: designs that catch consumers’ attention because they are reasonably easy to identify. Combined with the notion that artware consumers’ superficial knowledge of Northwest Coast art affords them only limited ability to recognize what is represented through its stylistic conventions, it is this approach that

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has led to a certain level of design simplification and placement standardization in the artware industry.\footnote{The fact that similar stylistic conventions are used to produce recognizable renditions of animal crests on one-of-a-kind regalia that is used to signal the belonging to specific clans (e.g. button blankets) further supports the idea that serialization is not in and of itself what prompts processes of stylistic logo-ization.}

As I have already begun to explain, one idea about artware consumers that I have heard many times during my fieldwork is that their understanding of Aboriginal arts and cultures is usually superficial at best. From this many producers and distributors conclude that designs presented to them, in particular in the form of artware – the ‘accessible’ form of Northwest Coast art – should be simple and easy to ‘read’ compared to what might be created for seasoned art collectors. As Jim Hart put it, “Buyers usually just don’t understand what’s going on. The serious art, they have a little bit more understanding, usually, because the serious art is totally different than the business market, (...) the trinket trade.” Alano Edzerza expressed a similar opinion in answer to my question about whether he would soon create new designs for his line of clothing:

In the market that those shirts target, I think you don’t need to have much. The people who shop for those things are entry level collectors. They are looking for something that is very easily recognizable. I think that at that time, I was able to accomplish that goal. I think that if I was to go and redesign, do new designs and redo my whole T-shirt market, I don’t know... it would definitely be better in my mind, but I don’t know how that would help increase the quality of the clothes in terms of the market that it is targeting and that it caters to. I think that the advance designs can go towards people that have a little bit more mature palate in Northwest Coast art.

Although nothing predicates that a complex design always has a complex meaning, nor that a simple design could not have a complex meaning, the tags provided with artware often seem to be produced under the assumption that consumers not only need recognizable designs but also want straightforward explanations of their meaning. As one producer told me, reproducing a thunderbird design on a mug to symbolize “courage” is not the same thing as creating regalia associated with days’ worth of stories and songs related to the thunderbird crest. However, to take one striking example, when Nisga’a artist Mike Dangeli designed a crest in honour of his engagement to Tsimshian art historian Mique’l Askren, it was reproduced on a number of items for their engagement potlatch, from dance screens to disposable water bottles. The design’s meaning did not change depending on the object it was on, even if some of these objects were meant to be kept and cared for, and others were meant to be used and later discarded. Each object’s value may have been different, but this did not affect the value of the crest itself.
Serialization did nothing to make the latter less symbolically, spiritually, and emotionally important to them. A similar argument can be made about the reproduction of Debra and Robyn Sparrow’s weaving *Ten* by the blanket company Kanata. Debra Sparrow explained to me that, even though the blankets may be less valuable than the weaving itself, “Every blanket has a label on it, and it tells the story of the original blanket that is hanging at the Museum of Anthropology, made by Robyn and I to honour our mother, and then in turn to honour all mothers.” Of course this kind of label might not be able to communicate everything there is to say about the design.

Like museum labels, product tags are often minimalist in the information they include, not because their writers have nothing else to include, but because their readers are expected not to have the necessary interest or prior knowledge to justify including anything more. In relation to the field of contemporary art, Stallabrass describes how “[h]ighly trained museum professionals, who have spent years arduously acquiring specialist art-world discourse, are enjoined to lose it when communicating with the public. Displays in public spaces must be understood by the uninformed”.\textsuperscript{110} Tags on artware, much like museum or gallery labels, can be poor reflections of what could be said about a particular design, regardless of whether it is painted onto a ceremonial curtain or reproduced onto a scarf. It is not necessarily that reproductions have less associated meaning than the original design, just that consumers are being given a tag-sized version of this meaning. Jean and John Comaroff write that processes of cultural commodification often require riding “a delicate balance between exoticism and banalization – an equation that often requires “natives” to perform themselves as such a way as to make their indigeneity legible to the consumer of otherness”;\textsuperscript{111} in the case of artware, tags are often used as props in the performance of such legibility, hence some simplifications and omissions. However, these have little to do with whether or not the design itself is important and valuable or not. The value of an artwork cannot be gleaned from the quantity of information provided on the label that describes it – in fact, in certain institutions, the size of labels can be inversely proportional to a works’ price tag.\textsuperscript{112} There is no reason to evaluate a Northwest Coast design solely based on the text that accompanies it.

In many cases, artists use designs they had initially created as a painting or for silkscreen prints, for example, and there is no reason to believe their depth of significance would diminish

\textsuperscript{110} Stallabrass, *Art Incorporated*, 118.

\textsuperscript{111} Comaroff and Comaroff, *Ethnicity, Inc.*, 142.

once reproduced on wares. Still, the ‘stories’ some producers and distributors tell consumers rarely reflect this significance in any depth. This superficiality has been explained to me not as a reflection of these producers and distributors lack of knowledge, but rather as a result of their conviction that most consumers, while interested in the ‘stories’ behind this or that design or piece, are either not interested in or incapable of understanding the oral histories these are excerpted from. At the same time, the fact that consumers want to know what something “symbolizes” and “always ask for the stories behind the object,” as one retail store manager put it, helps reinforce the assumption that consumers’ interest in Northwest Coast art is primarily interpretational and representational, rather than formal or affective.113

Whether such an approach on the part of consumers is the result of the ways in which Aboriginal art has been marketed by its producers and distributors or the other way around is beyond the scope of my research.114 However, the kinds of simplifications that result from the idea that ‘symbols’ and ‘stories’ will usually suffice to satiate consumers’ interest in interpretation and representation can cause the frustration of artists who feel this leaves their work always too superficially understood by its buyers. At the same time, the idea that, by and large, consumers are and do not mind staying relatively ignorant about Northwest Coast art provides another reason for being guarded about what is shared with them. Concerns about the negative consequences of sharing too much knowledge stems from both the apprehension that it would be overlooked and misunderstood by some, and appropriated and misused by others. This is illustrated in the conflicted feelings of this artist, who would likes to make his own artware line but is unsure about what information he would offer his customers:

> When you do it yourself, you are able to have a more clear interpretation of how you see it, or how you feel it should be used, where it should be used, as opposed to “Oh, this is the Whale, and it means ‘tadadadada’…” and “Oh, this is the Thunderbird, and its symbolizes ‘tadadadada’…” You know, it’s really quite hokey. But the sad part is, the Canadian public in general, ... they just don’t understand the art. ... It gets really challenging and tough because on the one hand, I want to educate the people and the public, so that they know. And then on the other hand, what information to give out and

113 I have recently heard complaints from visitors to two different Northwest Coast art exhibitions that they were not being provided with “the stories” represented in the art, with the implied critique that this was disrespectful of the true value of the works presented and a barrier to their appreciation, showing that those who take an interpretational and representational stance towards Northwest Coast art clearly do not reserve it specifically to artware.

use to educate them? Other companies [might] go “oh, look at that design, I’m going to use that on here!” and “I think it means this,” and then they alter it a little bit…

This artist’s reluctance to share information with consumers stems primarily from two things: the feeling that it may be a waste of time to share information with people who are not ready or willing to take this information seriously enough to really learn from it, and the apprehension that designs and their accompanying information might be inappropriately used or modified by others. This tension between what to share and not to share has been described by anthropologist Charlotte Townsend-Gault as a form of what Annette Weiner calls ‘keeping-while-giving’,\textsuperscript{115} when certain things are given so that others can be kept as “declarations of the inalienable”.\textsuperscript{116} On the one hand, some producers and distributors may not be able to share much more than that the thunderbird is sometimes used to symbolize “courage” (either because they do not know anything more, or because it is knowledge that is not theirs to share). On the other hand, producers and distributors may know that a particular figure is associated with complex oral histories, but choose only to share with consumers that it is associated with “courage”, providing consumers with what they think will be enough to meet their expectation that Northwest Coast art is exclusively made of symbols.

6.2.4 Colours, animals, and “shopability”

What producers believe consumers are able to understand and appreciate about Northwest Coast art is not the only thing that that influences artware design: it is also how distributors perceive these consumers to engage with products in retail spaces. In retail distribution, efforts are made to ‘merchandise’ products in such a way as to create interest on the part of the customer. Retail managers explained to me that merchandising can take many forms and requires consideration for various elements (from selection and pricing to display techniques and packaging...). With respect to Native Northwest Coast artware, one of the most common types of merchandising I have encountered is the association of different items according to a design theme and/or colour scheme. The draw of merchandising is premised on the idea that displaying an item as part of an assortment will make it catch customers’ attention more than if it is presented in rows of identical objects. For this reason, retailers are fond of products that can be

\textsuperscript{115} Weiner, \textit{Inalienable Possessions}.

\textsuperscript{116} Townsend-Gault, “Circulating Aboriginality,” 197.
easily integrated into arrangements that “go together” based on colours and animals. This is one of the reasons some companies like to create entire “programs” of several different products decorated with the same design that can be merchandised together and even purchased as a set. One retail manager explained to me the relationship between such programs and the concept of ‘shopability’:

When we do our buying, we try to merchandise it by program...: mug, shot glass, oven mitt, tea towel – a little package like that. And if there’s a First Nations grouping available, then we definitely will look for it so that we can merchandise it all together. The same thing with clothing, we look for a little package: so a tee shirt that goes with a full zipper or a cap, etc. Something so that is almost like a little family of items that looks good. ... We try to make it look shopable, so it is always great if a company offers you an actual program that will be like a salmon program, or a hummingbird program... But if they don’t, maybe one company has three of those items and then another company has three of them. Then, we will put all the salmon items from all the vendors that we have together, or maybe we’ll just put the red and black raven with the red and black salmon.

Ensuring ‘shopability’ thus also means that producers are not encouraged to create stand-alone products or products that stand out in the overall trends of the time. Thus, if producers are experimenting with colours outside of those associated with ‘classic’ Northwest Coast art, the fact that they know that retailers practice merchandising encourages them to pay attention to fashion trends. For instance, a product that is lime green or cherry blossom pink, if difficult to place in an assortment of other Northwest Coast art-themed items, might still suit the merchandising efforts of a store that carries the latest trends in yoga wear, for example. Making a display ‘shopable’ means, among other things, sparing consumers the effort to have to think about whether something goes with something else by creating a display showing that it does. Although this service of making shopping less “work” is provided to all consumers, this treatment is particularly adapted to those who are shopping as part of an experience of leisure, such as the “tourists” retail managers believe should be targeting with Northwest Coast artware.

The logic of merchandising not only encourages companies to use designs that are recognizable (frog designs that are easily identifiable as such make it easier to put the frogs together), but also gives them reason to select designs that are easily reproduced on a variety of shapes, and in a variety of mediums and sizes. Using one design that can ‘fit’ onto a mug, a t-shirt, and a blanket, is much less expensive than having to customize it so that each item is adorned with a design that ‘fits’ it. The issue then becomes finding designs that can endure change of scale, surface, and medium without suffering too much alteration or loss of detail. In
that sense, the specific technology of reproduction that will be used and the material on which the reproduction is being done does matter: for example, lines that are embroidered onto fleece tend to disappear into the fabric when they are too thin. Also, a design initially created in two dimensions can be modified by the very act of printing it on a curved or textured surface – all things that both artists and producers worry about. Even when the use of a design on a particular product has been approved by the artist, it may not be technically possible to do so without changing the design. Such changes sometimes flirt with the limits of what producers are allowed to do or feel comfortable doing with the designs that were provided to them.

For instance, one retail manager involved in product development stated that she tries not to force an image onto shapes that distort it. For instance, in order to reproduce a particular circular design in a size large enough not to make its many details disappear, it would look oval rather than round once applied around a mug. In contrast, she showed me how another simpler and more rectangular design could be used on just about any kind of product without changing it. Because of her concern for maintaining the integrity of the artwork she uses, her preference goes to the latter kind of designs. She calls them highly ‘flexible’ because they can be applied on the highest number of products without being visibly distorted. In this context, a good design by other standards (e.g. detailing, originality of space use, etc) might not be considered appropriate for the purpose of merchandising. As previously mentioned, this helps explain why artists are sometimes asked to create designs that are as easy to ‘drop’ on merchandise as are logos. However, this approach arguably does not make use of Northwest Coast artists’ ability to create specifically in relationship to the space that is given to them. In the words of Jim Hart: “We can adapt our style to any shape. It’s easy. Any shape.” This adaptation of designs to the surface and shape of the objects being adorned was theorized by anthropologist Franz Boas in his 1927 *Primitive Art* and revisited close to forty years later in Bill Holm’s 1965 *Northwest Coast Indian Art*.

Boas specifically dedicated his fourth chapter to what he had identified as the principal characteristics of Northwest Coast art. In his view, the essential characteristics of the masculine symbolic forms “are an almost absolute disregard of the principles of perspective, emphasis of significant symbols and an arrangement dictated by the form of the decorative field”.\(^{117}\) Boas explained that “the Native artist is almost always restrained by the shape of the objects to which

the decoration is applied”.118 In effect, “Far-reaching distortions result from the adjustment of the animal body to the decorative field”.119 In the formal treatment of the decorative field, he identified a tendency “to cover the entire surface with design elements,” vacant spaces being filled with a certain number of recurring curved patterns such as “eye designs,” “narrow crescents,” “double curves,” “wing designs,” which he thought did not bear particular symbolic meaning but rather serve ornamental purposes.120 Bill Holm later drew on Boas’s work to say that Northwest Coast art is essentially an “applied and decorative” art.121 In Holm’s view, “the purely decorative motive applies to a large segment of Indian art of the Northwest Coast, in spite of its underlying function of crest display”.122

Boas remarked that the symbolism of Northwest Coast art is not easy to interpret, stating that this “uncertainty of interpretation becomes greater the more fragmentary the figure”.123 In his view, this meant that the designs often left “ample room for the fancy of the interpreter”.124 Boas went on to explain that, although artists were “allowed wide latitude in the selection of the form of the animal,” the symbols required to identify the animal needed to be recognizable for the designs to retain their representational function as crest figures125 Holm also conceded that “the display characteristic” of Northwest Coast art has tended to “conventionalize” its symbolism in relation to some realistic elements.126 However, he also felt that, in cases where the art was meant to be essentially decorative, these conventions went much farther in the direction of a system of geometrical forms than a concern for recognizable representation would allow.127

It was one producer explaining to me that there is something about Northwest Coast art that makes it inherently easier to use for merchandising programs than Native art from other regions

118 Ibid.
119 Ibid., 221.
120 Ibid., 251–254.
122 Ibid., 20. Such analyses were not developed with the Coast Salish in mind, as the latter’s art neither follows the stylistic conventions described above, nor correspond to a system of crest display. As explained by anthropologist Aldona Jonaitis, their leaders “did not indulge in the kind of aggressive clan promotion that inspired lavish displays of crest art” (Aldona Jonaitis, *Art Of The Northwest Coast* (Douglas & Mcintyre, 2006), 88.) This, along with Coast Salish art’s more general lack of public recognition, helps explain why the Southern style is less abundantly represented in the artware industry than are Central and Northern styles. Indeed, the aesthetic that has been privileged within the industry is one that relies heavily on the formal principles of crest display.
123 Boas, *Primitive Art*, 212.
124 Ibid., 216.
125 Ibid., 217.
126 Holm, *Northwest Coast Indian Art: an Analysis of Form*, 20.
127 Ibid.
that prompted me to ask artists if and why they thought this was the case. What could make a
gallery owner say that Northwest Coast art “go[es] onto a mug pretty easy”? Most artists
answered my question by pointing to the age-old practice among Pacific Northwest peoples of
artistically adorning any and all objects. One artist referred to the fact that historically in his
community spoons were often elaborately carved. When it comes to adapting a design to a
particular shape, he commented, “What’s the difference between a spoon and a mug?” But his
and other artists’ answers emphasized the adaptation of a design to a specific object and surface,
echoing Hart’s comment, as well as the analysis proposed by Boas and Holm. However, since
Northwest Coast art first came to be applied to objects like mugs and key chains, this potential
for spatial adaptation was only marginally exploited. Artware companies have indeed tended to
put the emphasis on the recognisability of crest figures, with important implications for the kinds
of designs they have been applying to objects of everyday life.

In contrast, when companies select or commission designs that are adapted for use on a
variety of objects, the artware industry seems to take inspiration from its own ‘logo’
merchandising tradition, as well as from the ‘cultures of display’ of the Northwest Coast and
the central placement of particular crests on ceremonial dress such as button blankets to visibly
signal clan affiliation and status. In addition to obvious questions of cost (e.g. printers usually
charge more for non-standard design placements when they require additional computer
programming and set-up adjustments), this encounter between Northwest Coast design culture
and branding culture helps explain why the industry has had a distinct penchant for the
reproduction of crest-like Northwest Coast designs rather than commissioning designs adapted to
each particular product. However, it is important to point out that such an approach is not dictated
by serialization itself. As I will show in the following section, there are examples of artware
items that exhibit different approaches to Northwest Coast designs than those I have just
described. Most were developed with other consumers than ‘tourists’ in mind; some were
designed in consultation with members of a particular group of consumers; and a few reached
consumers for whom they were not initially intended. All of the above helps demonstrate that
oversimplifying the relationship between social location and consumption, such as when artware
is believed to be a strictly “touristy” affair, can lead to needlessly simplifying the use and the
placement of Northwest Coast designs.

6.3 Artware Beyond “Tourists” and Standardization

As I have explained, some see artware as working in favour of the democratization of Northwest Coast art by rendering it accessible to all. Artists in particular tend to present their involvement in the artware industry as a way to enable anyone to purchase examples of their work. However, the focus on breaking down barriers of access to Northwest Coast art in both a top-down direction (e.g. ‘art collector’ to ‘tourist’) and a more lateral fashion (e.g. artist to friends and family) has meant that serialization has not always been used to reach other potential consumers. As I will show, the notion that Northwest Coast art could also be spread through more rhizomatic routes across a variety of social groups has only been explored more recently by artware producers. That said, there are a number of counter-examples to the trends I have described in the previous section with respect to both imagining ‘tourists’ as the primary audience of artware and to the kinds of standardization to which this assumption can lead. Whether these differences are subtle or more pronounced, I argue that they are significant in that they show that the artware industry is slowly shifting away from simply multiplying production numbers to multiplying product development approaches. This is in turn leading not only to increasing access but also to increasing choices – a shift that mirrors the changes that have occurred in the contemporary ideology of consumerism more generally.

As a reminder of the difference between consumerism as the ability to consume (‘equal access’) and the ability to express individuality through consumption (‘freedom of choice’), I will here contrast two recent car television commercials: the “Key to Your Happiness” commercial for the Tata Nano and the “To Each Their Own” commercial for the 2012 edition of the Honda Civic.

The Tata Nano was developed in India by Tata Motors, and at around US$2000 it was the world’s least expensive car when it came out in 2008. Its first television commercial features a young Indian girl, impatient to see the new Tata Nano arrive at her rural home. When it finally does, she jumps joyfully, and runs down the stairs to give the little yellow car a hug. She looks around at the many neighbours who have come to celebrate, displaying a facial expression showing that she feels that something is missing. She then uses her eye makeup to decorate the
hood with a bindi. Rejoicing once again, the girl jumps in the air to catch the keys of the new car as the voice-over proclaims “Tata Nano: Key to your happiness.”

Honda’s 2012 Civic commercial features five characters: a male zombie salesman, a female ninja, a woodsman, a female monster, and a male luchador (or free wrestler). Each character is shown getting ready at their homes on what appears to be a regular work day morning: the luchador eats a bowl of cereal, the monster puts on contact lenses on her unusually big eyes, the zombie puts on a tie (and loses a putrefied finger in the process), the woodsman picks up a tin lunch box while saying goodbye to his pet fox, and the ninja acrobatically tumbles across her living-room to pick up her cell phone. Each character is then shown driving a different model of the 2012 Civic, clearly enjoying the experience. All five cars end up on the same street, as the words “To Each Their Own” appear in bold red letters on the screen and the voice-over informs us that “We are all different. That is why there are five new Civics.”

The underlying narratives of the two commercials are different in that the first one emphasizes ‘equal access’ (the car can be purchased by more people than any other car before) and the second one ‘freedom of choice’ (under the same name, several cars cater to the most diverse set of drivers ever portrayed on television). And yet, both products are in effect presented as ‘fit’ for ‘everyone,’ though at different levels: the Tata Nano advertisement emphasizes that the product is for ‘the people’ (in reality, mostly the middle-class) while the Honda Civic is made for ‘you’ (as original and different as you may be). In addition, both narratives operate under the understanding that even when partaking in mass-consumption, consumers want the product to feel like their own – hence the symbolic bindi customization of the Tata Nano, and the five different versions of the Civic. In other words, both commercials attempt to address the ‘masses’ and the ‘individual’ at once, but weigh their relative importance differently. Where access to a four-wheeled vehicle is still relatively rare, the object of consumption needs to be accessible to all, but also adoptable by the individual consumer. Where this access is taken for granted and thus cannot in and of itself be considered an act of differentiation, it becomes even more crucial for the object of consumption to be adapted to various kinds of consumer.129

In many ways, Northwest Coast artware’s ubiquity in Vancouver and British Columbia more generally suggests that the industry has achieved its goals of harnessing serialization to

129 It is interesting to note that the Civic was initially named after Honda’s wish to create “a car for all people, a car for the world.” (http://world.honda.com/CIVIC/history/ accessed May 23, 2011 at 3:36 pm). It will be interesting to see if Nano follows a similar trajectory, from being adopted by ‘all people’ to being adapted to ‘all individuals’.
democratize Northwest Coast art by increasing its accessibility. Therefore, ‘access’ in and of itself has become taken for granted, and the industry has begun exploring ways to continue growing the ranks of artware consumers, maintaining and fostering interest for Northwest Coast art by offering more ‘choice.’ With artware consumers no longer imagined to be solely ‘tourists’ (those unfamiliar with Northwest Coast art and needing to find its designs easy to recognize and interpret), some artware companies have begun to recognize that the industry’s “machine” cannot continue to “rotate on the same spot”, to refer back to Adorno and Horkheimer.

During my fieldwork, I indeed witnessed frustration against artware companies that, in the words of a particular fashion designer, “keep putting the art on everything just because it fits.” I imagine that artware producers and distributors have themselves heard similar comments over the years, as such a critique has been in circulation for some time now. In this respect, Haisla artist Lyle Wilson’s design work for the UBC Museum of Anthropology merchandise in the 1980s was already a response to this critique.

Each image was actually meant to be on a particular space on a particular product and nobody had ever done that. … The intent was just to take that market and show that all these images can rest comfortably on each item, whether it be a t-shirt, an oven mitt or what, they could actually be transferred onto that space without losing any of the integrity. … I have an interest for working with certain spaces that are odd, spaces that you wouldn’t traditionally consider artistic spaces. When you look at the history of art, everything has been put into some odd spaces once in a while, so I just think of this as an extension. A lot of artists would not touch a gift shop pin, whereas I look at it as a challenge getting a Northwest Coast image to look nice and beautiful in that space.

What Wilson describes is a design approach that draws on Northwest Coast art’s adaptability to the space provided much more than the less creatively involved (and less costly process) of ‘slapping a design onto an object,’ as the standard product development process has been described to me.

As I have already touched upon in section 6.2.3, the frustration some artists feel towards the market in general also stems from the approach of Northwest Coast art from an interpretive, symbolic, stance. This is heightened by the fact that even though Northwest Coast art tends to be abstractionist rather than realist,130 it is generally expected to be used in a figurative,

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This is the case even for the work of artists who do not participate in the artware industry. In other words, even when viewers do not see a figure come through in the design, the tendency is to look harder instead of considering that the piece may be non-representational. For instance, even though artist Sonny Assu insists on interpreting the ‘formline’ vocabulary in his own style and in a conceptual but non-narrative manner, he still gets asked what “animals” are represented in his work.

Some artists working in the artware industry play along, purposefully creating around the constraint that consumers should be able to ‘see’ the animal in their designs. But even so, they are not necessarily fully convinced that such designs are the only thing that these consumers could enjoy about Northwest Coast art. Some artists have in fact started offering companies some of their more complex or abstract designs, challenging companies’ concern that consumers would be puzzled or uninterested if they were unable to identify or understand them. For example, Haida artist Corey Bulpitt explained to me how he adapts his style to make his figures easy to decipher, but has also tried to make room for other kinds of designs:

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131 The now famous story of how one of Robert Davidson’s prints became much easier to sell once he changed its title from ‘Abstract’ to ‘Killer Whale Fin’ is often told to illustrate this point. Another interesting example showing the penchant of the market for representational work is the choice to make into silkscreen prints the most representational paintings among Doug Cranmer’s 1970s ‘Abstract series’ Kramer, “Kesu”, 90.

132 His iPotlatch, iHamatsa, and iDrums series include representations of iPods, but his Disconnected and Longhouse series are conceptual more than they are representational.
Corey Bulpitt: A lot of it I make it friendlier looking for kids or something, so you know, it’s not completely traditional in style, I kind of make my own little style for [artware] almost. Some of the stuff is more traditional or whatever, like I give him box designs that are more traditional. For the most part, I’ll do it kid-friendly, or even just…

Solen Roth: Urban-friendly?

CB: Urban-friendly, yeah, where somebody who is not familiar with Northwest Coast to be able to see that it’s a frog or that it’s whatever it is.

SR: Do you think that it’s something that this market requires, that given who is buying [these products] some designs wouldn’t quite work because people want to see [what they represent]…

CB: That kind of was [the company owner’s] idea, I almost in a way talked him into using traditional-style designs that are not as recognizable. Then he got into a phase where he really liked that kind of stuff. Because at first, he was worried about if [consumers] couldn’t understand it.

The various examples that follow illustrate how certain producers have been starting to make more inventive uses of designs, and being less intent on providing consumers with ready-to-consume interpretations of these designs. In some cases this has resulted in marketing Northwest Coast art by moving past Easy Button ‘Northwest Coast art’. Interestingly, the artware products that most challenge this standard approach to design and meaning attribution come from producers, including artists, who target a demographic close to their own and do not dwell on the possible gap in knowledge between Northwest Coast art connoisseurs such as themselves, and their targeted consumers. Drawing primarily from the field of Native Northwest Coast ready-to-wear fashion, the remainder of this chapter’s third and final part discusses examples of such products, describing what kind of consumer their producers have in mind, and how they are taken into consideration (directly and indirectly) in the product development process. These examples will also show that the relationship between identity, social location, and consumption can be less straightforward than it appears.

6.3.1 Aboriginal consumers: designing for the quintessential non-tourists

As already discussed, contrary to what is often assumed, artware consumption is far from being a solely non-Aboriginal affair. Some companies have caught on to this and have started

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133 My question shows that I too occasionally ‘play along’ with classic representations of artware consumers.
designing specifically with Aboriginal consumers in mind, while others only discovered the popularity of their products among them after the fact. For instance, Larry Garfinkel, owner of Native Northwest, discussed with me the development of a line of reusable shopping bags. He explained to me that there was a debate within the company about their saleability, given that similar bags sans Northwest Coast are available at London Drugs, Safeway and other stores for under $1.50. There was some concern among his employees that people wouldn’t be willing to spend $4 on the Northwest Coast art emblazoned bags, but Garfinkel was convinced of their success. He believed that Aboriginal women in particular would appreciate them as a practical item with which they could in their everyday life express their identity, their belonging to a community, and the values they uphold with respect to cultural and ecological sustainability. The goal was thus not *per se* to compete with the bags sold in ‘big box’ stores, but to make the most of an already established niche market to ensure the viability of the product.

Garfinkel explained to me that this reflects a recently developed marketing strategy at his company. For example, he told me that one of the questions he asks himself when developing a new line is “What would a First Nation woman want to wear and walk around with?” This is not only a rhetorical question, as he occasionally consults with Aboriginal women who come to the office on other business. Garfinkel feels that this consultative process helps make his products distinct from things created with “tourists” as their target audience, which he often finds to be “tacky.” In addition, Garfinkel feels that “culturally connected” products – those developed for Aboriginal consumers – are a way for his company to honour the support of his work by Aboriginal individuals and communities. Thinking about an Aboriginal audience first would be a way of expressing cultural sensitivity and making concrete efforts towards earning their respect, he explained. For instance, at the time of my conversation with him, the company was commissioning an artist for a feather design to be used on a series of products. Although feathers are sometimes considered stereotypical when used to symbolize Aboriginal identity for outsiders, by working with an Aboriginal artist to create a design with an Aboriginal audience in mind, Garfinkel hoped to make a more respectful use of them. This strategy did not preclude the line from being appealing to consumers who are not of Aboriginal ancestry, but “tourists” would only represent a secondary “bonus” market compared to Aboriginal consumers. Interestingly, products designed specifically for Aboriginal consumers are not the only ones to be successful among them. As illustrated in the two examples I describe below, artware producers sometimes discover
more fortuitously that their products have an Aboriginal audience, highlighting the fluid rather than deterministic nature of consumption’s relationship to identity.

Vancouver designer Chloe Angus wanted to develop a line catering to non-Aboriginal consumers who like the aesthetics of Northwest Coast art but would feel they would ‘cross a line’ by wearing clothes or accessories that bear too much resemblance with ceremonial regalia. This audience informed her initial concept for her and Haida artist Clarence Mills’ ‘Spirit Wraps,’ which seeks to “subtly highlight ancient Haida art techniques in a very contemporary and fashionable way”:

I started thinking about doing this contemporary line that would be, like I said, not too bold for the average white lady to wear. ... Some of the clothing that is being made with Native designs, not a lot of ladies can pull it off. It’s often quite traditional, in heavier wool... and the images on them are very bold. And I can’t wear something like that, even though I have a huge appreciation for this. ... [I was] trying to find how we can make it in softer, lighter-weight cashmere, some easier-weight knit, and how we can sublimate [the design], like we’ve done on the wraps. We do more like tone-on-tone colours too, instead of the really bold, the traditional black and red.\(^{134}\)

In general, Angus’s customer base is primarily made up of women in their mid-40s to mid-50s.\(^{135}\) She created her Spirit Wrap line with non-Aboriginal women in mind, and more specifically those who already own Northwest Coast gold and silver jewellery, as she knows many Vancouver women do. In other words, she was hoping to target the already existing niche of Northwest Coast art appreciators and expand the art from their jewellery to their wardrobe. However, after she launched the Spirit Wraps, Angus was surprised and flattered to see that they have had “an overwhelming response by First Nations women themselves,” in particular those in their late 20s and early 30s. “I was pleasantly surprised to realize the amount of First Nations women that are really happy to come up to me and say ‘Hey, this is cool! It’s me, but it’s modern’” Angus reported in our interview. Demonstrating that she now takes the Aboriginal market seriously, she has since decided to enhance the Spirit Wrap collection with different crests by Clarence Mills in order to accommodate the desires of some Aboriginal clients to use the wraps to signal their clan affiliation. She has also proceeded to blow up and crop designs in order

\(^{134}\) For a full description and images, visit http://www.chloeangus.com/#/spirit-wraps/4520849860, accessed May 18, 2011 at 5:13 pm.

\(^{135}\) Angus purposefully targeted this market because her approach (using expensive fabrics, incorporating art, keeping production local, for instance) makes it so that, as she put it: “a 20 year old can’t support my vision for business. But a 55 year old can.”
to make them appear abstract and thus potentially suitable for those whose particular crests are not available yet.

Similarly to Angus, Carla D’Angelo, developer of the line of AYA sunglasses with Komoyue/Tlingit artist Corrine Hunt, was surprised with the enthusiastic reception of her glasses by Aboriginal consumers. Like Angus, D’Angelo felt that the popularity of Northwest Coast jewellery suggested that there was a market for other ‘light’ fashion items. Although Aboriginal women figure prominently among those who own and wear this jewellery, she did not anticipate such a success of her glasses among Aboriginal consumers in general: “That has been a really, really, great surprise. ... I guess I thought the market would be local people, tourists, that is who I thought the market would be, and it’s turning out that it’s hugely First Nations people.”

Both Angus and D’Angelo thought of themselves as crafting a new space for Aboriginal art in non-Aboriginal closets, but the aesthetics of their products ended up whence it originated: on Aboriginal bodies. This does not signal that their products did not succeed in reaching those who know Northwest Coast art, on the contrary: it signals that the products were particularly successful in reaching its front line supporters. As quintessential non-tourists, Aboriginal consumers are sometimes not expected to be particularly interested in being consumers of their own culture through the purchase of artware. The two above examples show that artware can reach audiences such as Aboriginal consumers that its producers had, if not discounted, at least not counted on.

6.3.2 Sports equipment and wear: grounding passion in place

Some producers have aimed to broaden the audience of Northwest Coast art by associating it with particular sports and the regions where they are practiced. For instance, Ivan Thomas’s line of t-shirts was developed with vibrant colors typical of surf wear, inspired by the West Coast of Vancouver Island, where his Nuu-chah-nulth heritage encounters the surfing culture of Tofino. Similarly, Prior Snowboards, based in the ski resort town of Whistler, produces snowboards with designs by Coast Salish artist Dylan Thomas, as well as designs by Haida artist Clarence Mills. The company presents these Northwest Coast designs among a variety of other kinds of designs more typical of the snowboarding aesthetic, but that the company believes all reflect its regional ties, as made evident in their statement:

With Prior's roots firmly planted in the Pacific Northwest, it's natural that our graphics are consistently influenced by the local surroundings and people who live here. Canadian
themes, native art, natural Whistler landmarks, and contributions from local artists continue to be the inspiration behind the Prior graphics line-up.\textsuperscript{136}

Both snowboarding and surfing are not outdoor activities that are specific to British Columbia, far from it. However, Northwest Coast designs are here being used to ground sport products geographically and in turn help brand these sports as ‘local’ – from more specific places such as the West Coast of Vancouver Island, to broader regions such as the Pacific Northwest, but also Canada as a whole. In this respect, perhaps the most striking example of a product that associated Coast Salish art to sport and national iconography is the National Team of Canada 2010 Olympic Hockey Jersey. The design of the jersey included a maple leaf designed in Coast Salish style by Musqueam artist Debra Sparrow (including weaving patterns that are seldom reproduced on artware, as discussed in Chapter 5). Hockey enthusiasts, and supporters of Canada’s national team in particular, are an example of consumers that both fit and do not fit with social representations of ‘tourists’ – not usually visitors to Canada, there is also no \textit{a priori} reason to believe they would be particularly interested in Aboriginal art. Stuart Iwasaki, the Nike designer with whom Sparrow worked, Iwasaki explained to me that Nike’s goal was to “maximizing country identity” by using “symbols or icons of Canada”. He had initially imagined Sparrow would provide the kind of “Haida-like art” that he and many consumers might be most familiar with and expect – a very different aesthetic from the Coast Salish art Sparrow does create. Upon learning about the differences between the two from Sparrow, Iwasaki was easy to convince that this was a golden opportunity to raise awareness of the Musqueam people’s continued presence on their territory and instil appreciation of Coast Salish art in those who may not even have previously known of its existence. By combining what Nike had identified as symbols of Canada with examples of Musqueam designs, Iwasaki and Sparrow used the passion for hockey as leverage to this end, with assistance from the impressive network of retail stores in which the jersey was sold across Canada: SportChek, SportMart, Hockey Experts, Sports Expert, Athlete's World, The Bay, Zellers, Pro Hockey Life, Game On Sports, not to mention the official online Olympic store. Via these outlets, and powered by the association to a popular sport and national pride, Musqueam designs were made to circulate across rural, urban, and suburban Canada in a way that few products designed for ‘tourists’ could have. Whether or not the jersey

ultimately enhanced its various wearers’ knowledge of Musqueam art, culture, and history, one thing is clear: consumers apparently did not feel this knowledge was a pre-requisite to their enthusiastic purchase of the jersey.

6.3.3 Creating patterns, evading readability

During the 2010 Olympic Games, one of the most popular items among the myriads that were developed by the licensees of the Vancouver 2010 official merchandise was a hoodie made by the Canadian sportswear company Sunice. The hoodie featured a tone-on-tone pattern that repeated a thunderbird design, one of the two artworks that had been commissioned by VANOC from Squamish artist Xwalacktun. By creating a pattern (rather than stamping the hoodie in a few distinct places as is usually done), the designer of this hoodie made this Aboriginal artwork blend into a youth sportswear aesthetic to the point of making it almost indistinguishable from it. Although when given the opportunity to examine the hoodie, Xwalacktun’s original design remains easily recognizable as a thunderbird, the pattern created with it made its representational aspect secondary to the overall aesthetics of the garment. It is not thunderbirds or any of the other figures included within the body of the design (sun, canoe, salmon) that jump out at the viewer first, but rather the complex visual effect created by the design’s repetition. Xwalacktun’s design was indeed used by the Sunice designer in a way that created a clear aesthetic affiliation with the trend in youth sportswear of tone-on-tone patterns created from a design that often represents something but that is made to be secondary to the effect of its repetition. In almost every one of my encounters with the hoodie, I could not tell for sure that it was this particular one rather than just another surf/snowboarding brand hoodie, until I was able to see it up close. This is very different from my experience with Northwest Coast clothing designed according to the more standard approach of design branding, which I usually find easy to spot even from a distance. While I do not have access to sales figures attesting to this hoodie’s commercial success, my very frequent sightings of it in Vancouver before, during, and after the Games (more frequent than any other Aboriginal-themed Vancouver 2010 clothing product) give me reason to believe that it was a top seller among the Aboriginal Olympic merchandise. This suggests that a design approach that does not favour the immediate recognition of particular figures is not necessarily a barrier to

137 For numerous examples of such surf/snowboard hoodies, search Google images with the word ‘hoodie’ and any of the following brand names: Burton, Roxy, Quicksilver…
the consumption of Northwest Coast art, even by Olympic sport enthusiasts who may or may not be familiar with this art style.

6.3.4 Northwest Coast fashion by producers-as-consumers

To conclude my review of counter-examples of standardization in artware design, I have chosen two examples of Aboriginal fashion companies created by young artists: Eighth Generation by Louie Gong, and Native American Apparel by Alano Edzerza. These examples will help illustrate what products can look like when they are designed and marketed by artists who draw their consumers into their creative universe, rather than keep them at a distance.

Of Nooksack, Squamish, Chinese, French, and Scottish heritage, Louie Gong describes himself as an advocate for mixed-heritage people and families, in addition to being a college educator, which he calls his ‘day job’. Quoted in a 2008 msnbc.com article, Gong stated that “Mixed race isn’t post-race. It’s not less race. It’s more race”. This approach to identity may be one of the things that make him attentive to the possibility of designs also having more than one meaning. The following is an excerpt of the biography reproduced on his company’s ‘Eighth Generation’ website describing how he started to make his ‘Custom Coast Salish/Northwest Coast Shoes’:

In 2009 he found his groove as an artist when – on a whim – he took a sharpie to a pair of Vans. The resulting merger of Coast Salish art and a pop culture icon like Vans was the perfect statement to represent his complex cultural identity. When many other folks also recognized the message carried by the shoes, Louie realized he had stumbled upon a new way to spark dialogue about identity. While many are drawn to his shoes because they represent the confluence of multiple worlds, others simply appreciate Coast Salish art or the shoes’ freshness and originality. Either way, Louie feels honoured that people are finding value in something he loves to do.

His shoes are hand drawn directly onto the fabric of the shoes, adapted to each size and shape as well as the person receiving them. While many of his designs represent animals, Gong makes a clear effort to leave open the meaning of his work even when he provides details about his inspiration, which almost always relate back to his personal story and experience, as well as

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138 Alano Edzerza has also marketed some of his apparel under the labels “Edziza” and “Edzerza Sports”.

pop culture. For instance, he describes his *Grandma* silkscreen print (2010) as inspired by his childhood hero Bruce Lee, but also his grandmother:

This is an Asian dragon illustrated in Coast Salish-style formline. Growing up in the Martial Arts, I was constantly exposed to the dragon as a symbol of power and strength typically associated with masculine figures such as Bruce Lee. Lately, however, I’m more inclined to link the positive symbolism of the dragon to my Native Grandma, Renee Rosemund Gong (Miranda/Cheer), who exercised her power and strength to take care of me until she passed away in 1995.¹⁴⁰

Paradoxically, by being this specific instead of resorting to generalizations, Gong opens up the possibility to other interpretations of his work. For those who do not know Gong and his family, this print cannot be a reminder of his grandmother (whom they have not met) and so, *for them* it in a sense *has* to be tied to somebody or something else. Thus Gong does not feel the need to resort to a common denominator narrative to communicate meaning about his art to his supporters, and they in turn are freed from the imperative to cling to his interpretation as the only ‘true’ meaning behind the image. Instead, they are invited to imagine their own narrative to accompany it. This is made even clearer when Gong, a savvy social media user, posts images on his Facebook page and asks his followers to come up with tag lines for his work. For example, on April 18, 2011, he posted an orca image on a red background with the letters for ‘Insert Tag Line Here Contest’ dotted around its contours, giving the following instructions:

The image speaks for itself! Help me capture the spirit of Eighth Generation in 22- 26 characters. If I use your tagline or I am inspired by it, I will send you an Eighth Generation care package with a t-shirt, stickers and whatever else I have available. Btw- this design is for a t-shirt, and I’d like people of all backgrounds to find relevance in the art and tagline on this t-shirt.

With close to 150 different messages posted in response, the image may ‘speak for itself’ but clearly says many different things. Of course the objective of the contest being to choose one idea among all of those suggested, ultimately a specific meaning is still being fixed to the piece – in this case, the winning tagline: “We are all living legends”. However, the experiment in itself shows that Gong does not see his orca as having one *a priori* meaning to which only he as the artist and Coast Salish person holds the key.¹⁴¹ This is an alternative approach to the assignation

¹⁴¹ By referring to Louie Gong as ‘Coast Salish person’ in this particular instance, I do not intend to erase his other lines of ancestry, which would be antithetical to his experience as a person of mixed heritage. I use this expression in
of meaning to representational Northwest Coast designs so often encountered in the artware industry. Gong’s approach challenges the viewer to imagine more than one way to understand a design instead of clinging to an already existing tag-line. This point is reminiscent of Gong’s idea about mixed heritage that “If people can remember twenty different ways to order their coffee, then we can learn more than just a few different ways to talk about race and identity”. Similarly, surely consumers can learn more than just a few different ways to talk about orcas, ravens, and thunderbirds. With an audience of more than fifty-one thousand online followers (and growing), Gong has one of the most impressive fan bases in the field of Northwest Coast art, and one that reaches much farther than the Pacific Northwest. This example shows that placing some faith in consumers’ ability to understand that there might be more than one simple and straightforward interpretation to a design does not necessarily lead to their confusion. Thus, even in cases where it is not possible or not desirable to share interpretations and histories in all of their depth and complexity, there are alternative ways to engage artware consumers.

Alano Edzerza’s ‘Native American Apparel’ line displays a concern for designing a garment rather than simply branding a garment with a design. Several of his shirts are de-centered, using right- or left-justified designs. On others, the designs wrap around the body, adorn the back of a shoulder, or hug the side of the hip. While it might be objected that such design placements are common in so-called ‘mainstream’ fashion, as I have already pointed out, it was until recently quite uncommon in the use made by artware companies of Native Northwest Coast art. Edzerza’s inventive use of space was key in making his line stand out when it came out in the mid 2000s, at a time where most if not all of his competitors still placed designs roughly in the center of the shirt, almost as if by default. He describes his own use of space as “A little bit more cutting edge” – something that makes his shirts “funky” in comparison to others, including some of those he created with what he considers to be a more “conservative” approach to design.

In his more recent collections, Edzerza continues to play with offbeat design placements, as well as makes use of various framing devices. Like in many of his paintings and prints, his apparel designs appear to exceed the limits of the image presented to the viewer. While a t-shirt might offer the space to give more of the ‘full picture’ (by showing the tips of the wing in his

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this context because the orca I am discussing is executed in Coast Salish art style, and a common assumption on the Northwest Coast art market is that culturally specific heritage is what gives artists authority over the interpretation of their designs.
*Eagle Strike* design, for example), Edzerza still frames the image by editing out part of the image at right angles, giving the impression that the viewer has zoomed into it through a camera lens. The zoom effect is even more striking when the design is cropped in such a way that the design appears abstract. This is reflected in the fact that the t-shirts in which he uses this kind of cropping are titled *Formline*, as opposed to titles referencing specific animals. A recent addition to his line is a tunic dress in which the framing is done by the limits of the cloth itself. Another one is a wolf design t-shirt that is both right-justified and gradated laterally so that the design looks increasingly in focus as the eye moves towards the center of the shirt, as if it was viewed through a macro-lens and its limited depth of field.142

Instead of having to constantly negotiate the split between their own aspirations and those of their imagined consumers, both Gong and Edzerza have been able to more easily embrace the dual personality of the producer-as-consumer. Rather than worrying that consumers will be rebuffed by anything different than what they might expect from Native Northwest Coast art, these two artists seem to trust that what seduces and interests them about this art can have popular appeal. Although many of their consumers can be described as “fans” in the sense that they are followers on social media such as Twitter and Facebook (“re-tweeting”, “sharing,” “liking,” and “commenting” to express their support), these consumers are also being addressed directly with invitations to events, questions regarding their opinion about products, and opportunities to take part in contests. In other words, not only are the producers taking on the role of producers-as-consumers, they also take their consumers seriously in their role of consumers-as-producers. This illustrates well what anthropologists (and market analysts) have observed more generally in contemporary markets, which is that consumers are no longer regarded simply as the passive “endpoints” of a commodity-chain, but rather active participants in a commodity-scape.143

At the same time, these examples show that it is possible not to be concerned with catering to what ‘others’ (such as ‘tourists’) are imagined to need in order to be interested in Northwest Coast art, all-the-while keeping them at arms’ length. Instead, they show that it is possible for artware companies to garner support by drawing on what generates their own interest in

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142 Most of the garments I describe here were designed by Edzerza almost two years after our interview in which he stated that in the market he was targeting with his shirts, “you don’t need to have much”, showing that he has come to imagine a new kind of audience for his products, one that can handle more than a crest-like figure stamped in the center of a shirt, for instance.

143 Foster, “Tracking Globalization: Commodities and Value in Motion.”
Northwest Coast art, not afraid to reduce the distance between themselves and their works’ consumers.

Coda

Developed in an era when mass-consumption is alternatively heralded as promoting democracy and under fire for enabling the alienation of citizens, the Native Northwest Coast artware industry has a somewhat paradoxical relationship to serialization as a means to support Northwest Coast cultural production. As I have discussed, on the one hand, it is heralded as creating wider access to, and thus promoting, Northwest Coast art. On the other hand, it is criticized for trivializing and thus depreciating this art. While serialization can help flatten out certain inequalities, it is also used as the backdrop for hierarchies of value among both products (art and not-quite-art) and consumers (knowledgeable and not-so-knowledgeable). Indeed some producers and distributors of Native Northwest Coast artware have contributed to the re-assertion of these hierarchies by imagining their primary audience to be made up of consumers whose approach of Northwest Coast art would be very different from that of those who ‘know’ this art and thus are seen to be adequately equipped to understand it.

However, after several decades of having developed its niche market under this premise, leading to certain standardization in types of designs and their uses, some artware industry participants have been taking more varied approaches to match a more varied audience for their products, acknowledging that there is a wide range of knowledge of and familiarity with Northwest Coast art among current and potential artware consumers. Similar to the shift of the consumerist movement from ensuring equal access to promoting freedom of choice, producers and distributors of artware are starting to shift their attention from promoting access to Northwest Coast art to supplying a broader set of choices to a less homogenous audience than previously identified. With these efforts, the industry is slowly shifting away from the niche it had fashioned for itself, on behalf of the audience it had imagined for its products. Along with company owners who are themselves Northwest Coast artists, artware producers have been increasingly using artists as their ‘research arm’ to propose products that demonstrate that there is nothing inevitable about treating serialization as a vector of standardization.
Figure 12: Argillite and an imitation of argillite.
Piece of uncarved Haida Gwaii argillite (above); example of argillite-like black plastic totem pole with other plastic totem poles (below).
Photos by the author, November 11, 2009 and March 20 2008.
7 Materials of Value, Plastic Disruptions, and the Spectre of the Simulacrum

This chapter examines the mutual relationship between, on the one hand, the values placed on certain materials, and on the other hand, these materials’ uses in the field of Northwest Coast art and artware production. A combination of various values play into artists and artware producers’ decisions to use or not use certain materials: from the economic value yielded from ‘natural resource’ extraction and the symbolic value of ‘native fauna and flora’ as a marketable index of locality, to the social value of ‘sustainably harvested material’ and the cultural value that certain materials acquire through their use by Indigenous peoples, for instance. Some choices of materials reinforce and/or capitalize on already established values, others are made to transform the expectations that are placed on the materialities of Northwest Coast art. The preciousness of certain materials can prompt different attitudes depending on the producer: from the desire to employ them or the aspiration to reference them through imitation, to the decision to refrain from their use and the desire to place restrictions on their imitation. The various materialities of Northwest Coast artware that are the object of this chapter attest to these tensions.

In section 7.1, I discuss the various materialities of Northwest Coast art, and will contrast the kinds of values associated with materials that are considered local, Indigenous, and natural (e.g. cedar, argillite) and materials that are usually considered to be neither of these (e.g. plastic). It would be possible to frame this discussion by revisiting the question of what quite literally ‘makes’ traditional vs. contemporary and even authentic vs. inauthentic Northwest Coast art. But even as an exercise in the deconstruction of outmoded dichotomies, this kind of discussion is beside the main point of this chapter, which is to tackle another, not unrelated but different, problem: that of the relationship between imitation and simulation, or semblance and simulacrum – in other words, between a representation that affirms the value of the model and one that undermines it. More precisely, this chapter examines how the values associated with particular materials give thrust to the creation of imitations, including some that brush up against simulation. To further illustrate this, in section 7.2, I will discuss the example of hlgas7agaa and its imitations. This argillite stone is a carbonaceous shale that is relatively scarce, rather fragile, difficult to access, locally circumscribed, and culturally valued. It is a material that is found on Slatechuck Mountain, in the basin of TIlgaduu randlaay (Slatechuck Creek), on Graham Island,
One of argillite’s distinctive material characteristics is that, even when polished, its particular shade of dark grey continues to absorb much of the light around it. Although this visual effect is extremely difficult to reproduce using other materials than argillite itself, there have been many attempts to do so, both in the form of art and artware. With this in mind, I will discuss how the imitations of argillite in circulation in the artware industry are received differently depending on how convincingly they “pass” for argillite: when they are not convincing at all, they tend to be regarded either as amusing ersatzes or as trivial nuisances; when these imitations are much more convincing, they are regarded both as an impressive achievement and as a troubling and even treacherous feat. I argue that it is when imitations of argillite are believed to threaten the threshold between resemblance and simulacrum that they receive most attention – both awe and infuriation. Nonetheless, all imitations of argillite, including those that are nowhere near achieving simulation, draw their appeal from evoking a symbolically, socially, economically, and culturally valued material. As I will show, this can be seen to indebt all producers and distributors of argillite-like items to those who hold argillite as an ‘inalienable possession’, namely the Haida.

7.1 Pacific Northwest Natural Resources and Culturally Valued Materials

Museums around the world have collections of objects from the Northwest Coast that are made out of a specific range of materials, most notably wood (cedar, cherry, spruce), grass (cat-tail, swamp), metals (silver, gold, copper), fibre (wool, cotton), eagle feathers and down, abalone shell, and argillite stone. These objects, and in particular those collected in the late 19th century, have been serving as reference points in the study of Northwest Coast art. As anthropologist Aaron Glass remarks, these collections tend to be treated as “the benchmark for establishing and

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1 Although argillite exists in other part of the world, the specificity of Haida Gwaii argillite comes from the lack of quartz or feldspar, and a high carbon content that gives it its particular black colour. In this text, the word ‘argillite’ is used as a short-hand for the argillite found in Haida Gwaii.

2 In this respect, contrary to other Northwest Coast materials, argillite would not be one of the “shiny things” pursued by Raven. Also, given its relatively recent introduction into Haida cultural expression, it is not surprising that argillite does not appear nearly as much as other local materials in Haida mythology and oral history. Therefore, although argillite carvings can certainly be infused with meaning and symbolism by their makers, the material of argillite has not itself accrued Indigenous symbolism in the same measure as have materials like copper or cedar. However, as I will argue, this has not kept argillite from becoming a “quintessential substance” for the Haida (E. E Ferry, “Inalienable Commodities: The Production and Circulation of Silver and Patrimony in a Mexican Mining Cooperative,” Cultural Anthropology 17, no. 3 (2002): 331–358.)

3 Weiner, Inalienable Possessions.
describing ‘traditional’ or ‘classic’ periods in [Northwest Coast] material culture production”.

Their materiality has been used as an established model or standard of being “Northwest Coast art” for both so-called “traditional” and “contemporary” works and discourses about these works. It is in this sense that I refer to certain materials as “classic”, regardless of the time-period in which they were made. These materials correspond to expectations associated with the materiality of Northwest Coast material culture, expectations that other materials defy.

Many classic materials can be harvested locally, but some have been relatively recently added to the local repertoire through trade (e.g. silver, gold, cotton, certain kinds of wool). Also, access to some of the local materials is challenging, either because they are difficult to obtain (e.g. argillite) or because strict regulations determine where, how, and by whom they can be harvested (e.g. eagle feathers). In some cases, human-induced scarcity leads their harvest to be forbidden by law, such as in the case of northern abalone, which it has been illegal to harvest since 1990 and is protected in Canada through the Species at Risk Act. But even when materials are not protected by law, it can be challenging for artists to find what they need. For instance, while red cedar is classified as ‘Least Concern’ under the International Union for Conservation of Nature conservation status ranking, the monumental and old growth cedar that are required for large totem poles and longhouses are becoming far and few between, in great part due to industrial logging across the province in the past century and a half. The availability of such timber both for use by artists and as resources for First Nations has become a common concern in the region.

Some First Nations have taken initiatives to create regulations that better reflect these needs. The Haida Gwaii Forest Stewardship Plan (HGFSP) is an example of this. As artist Jim Hart explained it to me, “We [the Haida] are fighting for our trees, we have to think about our future generations here. We might go through quite a few red cedars on a project like the Haida House [at MOA], totem poles… You can do so many things, and that’s a lot of trees…” Among many other things, the April 14 2011 draft of the HGFSP regulates the harvesting of monumental trees, and includes provisions to prioritize access to them by the Haida Nation, including for cultural use. It also stipulates that logging companies have to report annually to the Council of the Haida Nation about their efforts to minimize the impact of their activities on “cultural heritage

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resource that are the focus of traditional use and continued importance”⁵ as defined by the Haida. In essence, the HGFSP outlines ways to manage the forest as a site of both economic and cultural resources. On the one hand, it recognizes the potential value of, but also places limits on, the economic resources that can be extracted from the forest. On the other hand, it puts emphasis on the value and enhances the potential of the forest as a storehouse of cultural resources, both to be used and to be perpetuated.

At the individual level, some artists think about the forest in similar terms, as in the example of an environmentally concerned artist I interviewed: on the one hand, he usually carves individual artworks out of cedar, some for ceremonial purposes, others to sell on the art market; on the other hand, for the artware company he intends to create, he plans to use other materials so as not to contribute to the depletion of the forest through logging, which he says is “taking away from [his] trees, our trees on the Northwest Coast.” Another strategy towards the effects of logging is illustrated by Spirit Works Ltd, an Aboriginal-owned and operated artware company based in North Vancouver. For Shain Jackson, the company owner, cedar has the great cultural value of having been used by his people for thousands of years. In a market with such a strong focus on representations of locality such as the artware industry, cedar also has the strong symbolic value of being a local material. These values, combined with Jackson’s concern about the negative effects of logging in the region, played into his decision to find sources for recycled and salvaged wood – wood that draws social value from its association with sustainability. As presented on the company’s website, their bentwood boxes are made “exclusively out of salvaged shorts which are the cut-off ends from cedar milling operations”.⁶ Furthermore, the company pays a premium for “getting the most out of [the] materials”.⁷ During one of my visits to the company, Jackson also showed me how he would like to use the scraps of wood leftover from his company’s operations to create patterns evoking cedar bark weaving to decorate the walls of the warehouse. The purpose of this was not only to beautify the warehouse, but also to leave as little unused wood as possible. Although the sale of left-over wood by milling companies and its subsequent parsimonious use by an artware company may not change the overall face of the

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⁷ Ibid.
logging industry, it is an example of efforts to draw on cedar for its combined social, symbolic, economic, and cultural values.

This illustrates how various values associated with particular materials create tensions with respect to how they are approached by art and artware producers. Some values pull towards a material’s extensive use, while others push towards only a sparse use of the same. As in the previous example, an artware company might be genuinely concerned about the effects of logging, but might purchase cedar leftover from the forest industry rather than use another kind of material entirely. There are several reasons why this makes sense, despite the apparent paradox. From the perspective of Aboriginal rights and title, it can be argued that the threat of resource depletion caused by its exploitation by non-Aboriginal parties should have little bearing on Aboriginal stakeholders’ decision to use this resource for purposes of economic development, including artware production. From a technical perspective, there are reasons why certain materials are favored: not just any wood can be steamed and folded into a bentwood box, for example. However, even if it were technically possible to substitute another kind of wood for cedar, it may feel as though the substitution were also a kind of subtraction from the values the product is meant to embody, a loss of Benjaminian ‘aura.’

Anthropologist Elizabeth Ferry describes how, in Mexico, the local Guanajuato population thinks of their mining resources as inalienable possessions, and consider its products, including silver, as things that can be sent into the world in the form of commodities but remain a “quintessential Guanajuatan substance”. Similarly, in the Pacific Northwest, Aboriginal individuals including politicians, activists, and lawyers make the case that trees, and cedar in particular, are considered an inalienable resource when they argue that they should not be exploited without consideration for unexhausted Aboriginal property and use rights. In this respect, anthropologist Marie Mauzé remarks that cedar forests are increasingly treated as

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9 In his famous essay, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” Benjamin argue that, while manual reproduction does not truly challenge the authority of the original, technical reproduction jeopardizes the power of the authenticity of the work of art, its derived value as historical testimony, and its authority – in one word, its ‘aura.’ In his view, the age of mechanical reproduction brings with it a decay of this ‘aura.’ This decay rests on “the desire of contemporary masses to bring things ‘closer’ spatially and humanly” and the growing urge “to get hold of an object at very close range by way of its likeness, its reproduction” Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” 223.
10 Ferry, “Inalienable Commodities,” 332.
“synecdoche or metonymy for the whole of Northwest Coast Indian culture”\(^\text{11}\) Bill Reid’s emphatic foreword to Hilary Stewart’s *Cedar*, in which he expresses the heartfelt hope that cedar “will always be with us”\(^\text{12}\) is one example of this kind of discourse, as is Stewart’s own contention that “So thoroughly did the cedar permeate the cultures of the Northwest Coast peoples that it is hard to envision their life without it”.\(^\text{13}\) A simple reversal of this proposition – “So thoroughly did Northwest Coast peoples permeate the nature of the cedar, that it is hard to envision its life without them” – provides the basis for considering cedar as a form of wealth that, wherever it goes once removed from the land to be sold or carved, becomes the alienable, circulating, embodiment of a patrimony considered inalienable.\(^\text{14}\) From this point of view, cedar can be considered a ‘quintessential Native Northwest Coast substance,’ to use Ferry’s expression. This status associates cedar with the cultural value of being ‘Indigenous’ and the symbolic value of being ‘local’; in turn, both can give cedar products an added economic value in the artware market. Indeed, from the pragmatic standpoint of marketing, the use of materials with a strong association to people and place can be crucial to the image of a company, in particular when the value of its products is measured against criteria like locality and cultural specificity, as tends to be the case for Indigenous art.\(^\text{15}\) Being able to say that products are ‘from here’ in a material, symbolic, and cultural sense helps brand them as different from goods that are seen as having an indistinct relationship to place and identity, which earns them the label of ‘global’ consumer products.\(^\text{16}\) It also associates their purchase to the movement of ‘ethical consumption’ in its articulation with the now taken for granted notion that purchasing locally-made products is a virtue.\(^\text{17}\) For all of these reasons and others, in the Northwest Coast art market (artware industry

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\(^{12}\) Bill Reid, “Foreword,” in *Cedar: Tree of Life to the Northwest Coast Indians*, by Hilary Stewart (Douglas & McIntyre, 1995), 9.

\(^{13}\) Hilary Stewart, *Cedar: Tree of Life to the Northwest Coast Indians* (Douglas & McIntyre, 1995), 13.

\(^{14}\) Ferry, “Inalienable Commodities.”


included), the use of materials considered to have local and cultural attributes continues to play an important role in the production of value, both figurative and monetary.

7.1.1 Visual and aural indexes of value

In order for particular materials to play their role in the generation of value, simply making use of these materials is not always enough: these materials must be perceived and promoted as what they are. In particular in the artware market where suspicions of illegitimacy and inauthenticity can run deep, even the ‘true nature’ of materials can be the object of doubt. I once overheard a retail shop employee remarking to one of her colleagues that some of the products sold in the store were made out of cedar but did not look like they were. She felt it was important that producers ensure the material was easily recognizable as cedar, otherwise it might be mistaken for another kind wood or, even worse, plywood.\(^\text{18}\) In the constant effort of producers and retailers to assert the value of what they make and sell, it is thus insufficient for a material to ‘be’ something, it also needs to ‘look like’ what it is, or rather, look like what it is expected to look like. For instance, a product that was advertised on an online store as ‘sustainable’ because it was made out of recycled glass failed to convince some consumers of its environmental merits because they thought it looked like plastic, not like glass. And indeed, the product was made out of a resin that incorporated crushed glass, but did not have the brittle and translucent qualities that are expected of glass. The fact that it was in effect both glass and plastic may not have been a problem for these consumers had it looked more like the former and less like the latter. Indeed, as Baudrillard remarks, both are man-made materials, but glass is experienced as more natural than plastic.\(^\text{19}\)

In general, products made out of recycled materials do not always look like that material – polar fleeces don’t look anything like the plastic water bottles they are made from. However, certain ideas, such as sustainability, are tied to a particular aesthetic that consumers do not typically associate with the likes of plywood and plastic. In contrast, certain materials like paper are experienced as “completely natural”,\(^\text{20}\) despite being a synthetic material, the production of which has adverse environmental effects. Put differently, in order to be recognized as embodying

\(^{18}\) Interestingly, the series of abstract paintings made by ‘Namgis artist Doug Cranmer in the 1970s, many of them painted on recycled mahogany plywood, are among his most critically acclaimed works.


\(^{20}\) Ibid.
certain values, materials need to do more than be attributed those values, they also need to materially incarnate the particular kind of aesthetic that is associated with them. This also applies to the idea of indigeneity. For instance, one company owner chose paper that felt ‘earthy’ rather than ‘slick’ so that it could be, in her words, “true to what it is”, i.e. (a representation of) Aboriginal culture. Former gallery owner Debra Hoggan also remembers how, during Expo ’86 in Vancouver, the first piece she sold was, to her surprise, a rustically carved box that was purchased by an Australian visitor who liked “that it was rough and it looked so ‘tribal.’” In such cases, the material translation of common, and in certain cases stereotypical, representations of indigeneity takes precedent over what else Aboriginal culture can be.

It is not only the visual properties of materials that are put forward as indexes of value. Even with my rather limited day-to-day exposure to this material, I understand what a powerful association the sensory experience of cedar can create. It has such a distinct and strong smell that I have come to associate it with my fieldwork, even despite the fact that I conducted most of my research in urban areas, and that many artware companies do not make extensive use of wood, let alone cedar. And yet, I once had the unsettling experience of walking across an industrial zone in South Vancouver and stopping in my tracks to tell the friend who was accompanying me that “it smells like my fieldwork.” As I stood there, unable to tell her what could possibly smell like the artware industry, I studied our surroundings to understand what I was experiencing. The site was analogous to that of the headquarters of one of the major companies I had visited, which made me think it was simply the similar industrial environment that created this sense of familiarity. But it was in fact the characteristic smell of cedar coming from a nearby lumber factory that made me feel like I was ‘in the field,’ demonstrating the strength of association between a particular material and the artists I had been encountering over several months of research. The fact that I study mugs and t-shirts did not erase from my sensory memory the experience of smelling cedar in their workshops.

With this sensory experience in mind, it comes as no surprise that an artware company that does make its products out of cedar would call attention to this fact, including by way of this material’s distinctive fragrance. For instance, the inside of Spirit Works’s bentwood boxes is left unfinished precisely because of the added value provided by this scent. For instance, I have several times seen Jackson invite customers to the sensory experience of smelling the unfinished cedar of one of his bentwood boxes. Some products are thus designed so that materials can better
perform what they are and what they represent. In some cases, the material performance of
cultural substance can trump other objectives. For instance, two artists – Nathan Wilson (Haisla)
and Louie Gong (Nooksack, Squamish, Chinese, French, Scottish) – both made skateboard decks
out of cedar, this despite the fact that this choice prevented the decks from being functional. As
Gong wrote on his Facebook page about his piece: “it’s not for riding, just for looking… and
smelling. It smells great.” The value of cedar, embodied in its look and in its scent, pushed to a
secondary plane the fact that it is not strong enough to be used for skateboarding. In this case, the
importance of communicating the association of skateboarding culture with these two artists’
respective cultural identities took precedent over a more practical choice of materials. In other
cases, this order of priority does not hold in the face of pragmatic considerations, such as tending
to the less figurative question of costs. For instance, fully aware of the values of cedar, including
economic, an artware producer lamented the fact that competition from a rival company had
rendered the use of cedar in their own products too expensive. The wood she chose as an
alternative could be purchased at lesser cost, but it also has less symbolic and cultural value, in
turn making the products more difficult to market to an audience expecting Northwest Coast art
to come in shades of cedar.

7.1.2 Disrupting expected materialities
As I have explained, expectations about what Northwest Coast art looks like (and smells like) can
be capitalized on by the artists and producers who use the materials that produce these qualities.
At the same time, these strong associations can also be felt to constitute symbolic and material
barriers to creativity. With their longstanding symbolic and spiritual values in the Pacific
Northwest, materials such as cedar,\(^{21}\) abalone,\(^{22}\) and copper\(^{23}\) remain emblematic of Northwest
Coast art and continue to be prized both by artists and those who appreciate and purchase their
art. However, over the years, Northwest Coast art has also undergone great material
diversification. Using new materials and using the same materials in new ways is by no means a

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\(^{21}\) See Stewart, *Cedar.*


\(^{23}\) Carol F. Jopling provides a thorough analysis of the status of copper on the Northwest Coast – as a material, an
embodiment of the supernatural, and a type of wealth. She argues that the various values associated with coppers
(economic, political, spiritual) are linked to the very materiality of copper, both “its distinctive metallic properties
and its seemingly fortuitous occurrence in nature” (Carol F. Jopling, “The Coppers of the Northwest Coast Indians:
new phenomenon in the field. Materials such as silver and wool fabric – respectively used to make jewellery and button blankets, for instance – were first obtained through trade with European explorers but are now part of the standard Northwest Coast artistic repertoire. More recently, the silkscreen printing ‘boom’ of the late 1970s and early 1980s has made paper a staple of Northwest Coast art making (see Chapter 6), when just a decade before, curator Audrey Hawthorn could only list three artists who had “turned to paper” – Charlie James, Mungo Martin, and Henry Speck. Even more recently, glass has become one of the more common ‘new’ media used by artists, whether it be sandblasted, stained, cast, or etched. There are virtually no limits to the kinds of materials currently being used by artists, to the excitement of some and the annoyance of others.

Even artists who like to work in ‘classic’ valued materials can tire of the expectations that come with their use. For instance, in his Celebrating Flight totem pole (commissioned by the YVR Art Foundation for the Link building of the Vancouver International Airport), Haida artist Don Yeomans simultaneously fulfilled and challenged what can be called the ‘cedar imperative’ of Northwest Coast carving. Echoing the words of other artists who want to show that this art “does not need to look a particular way,” Yeomans carved the two sides of his 40 foot pole from two large cedar logs, but then proceeded to cover their surface with beige, white, light blue, and light green paint, masking the wood entirely. In a film documenting the production of the commission (played on a screen at the foot of the pole), Yeomans stands in front of his fully carved and still bare totem pole, explaining that “probably to the chagrin of those who like totem poles,” the next step is to paint the entire pole, rendering absent the “precious wood grain” of cedar. He goes on to say that he has no personal preference between bare wood and painted wood: “Culture is about what you want it to be, if that’s your culture,” he concludes.

The quality of Yeomans’ design and carving notwithstanding, the pole stands in the airport Link building not unlike a blown up version of certain plastic totem poles sold in the gift shops I so often frequent as part of my fieldwork. Given Yeomans’ purposeful decision to create this pole both along and directly against the grain of the ‘cedar imperative’, the piece makes an important

25 Paradoxically, gaining this creative ‘freedom’ from specific materials is slowly leading to the reverse expectation that all Northwest Coast artists should be able and willing to work in a variety of media. As Coast Salish artist lessLIE pointed out to me, instead of building their reputation on a particular specialization of media and scale, the marketability of artists now increasingly depends on providing galleries with “work on paper, on drums, on paddles, in jewellery, in wood, glass” as well as securing large scale “corporate commissions.”
artistic statement: totem poles need not look like cedar, even when they are indeed made out of cedar. In the art world more generally, it is not uncommon for works that are made out of one material to look like they are made out of another. To give one example of works recently exhibited in Vancouver, in his sculptures, artist Matthew Monahan manages to give weightless foam the look of heavy marble. In addition, kitsch has made it into the repertoire of contemporary art such that artists who create this aesthetic are unlikely to be accused of having “bad taste” as opposed to be seen as making an artistic statement. However, in the field of Aboriginal art, the decision to produce the illusion of non-wood and the aesthetic effect that results from this illusion directly contravene expectations of what Northwest Coast artists produce. Because of this, by painting the entirety of the pole’s surface and running a line of neon green LED along its side, Yeoman exposed his work to the kinds of ‘anti-kitsch’ discourse I have many times heard levelled against artware (see Chapter 1). Indeed, if cedar is considered a valuable material, plastic (and by extension, what looks like plastic) is nowadays often regarded as the least ‘noble’ materials of all.

As historian Jeffrey L. Meikle has shown, although the invention of plastic was initially received as a “high-tech miracle,” it now tends to be associated with “cheap substitutes or imitations”. Promoters of plastic were constantly “caught between a sense of wonder at plastic’s utopian potential as a democratization agent, and a recurring suspicion that plastic exemplified the cheap, the shoddy, and the meretricious”. However, if as Meikle argues, plastic has been naturalized in our everyday lives, it has yet to be naturalized into the material repertoire of Northwest Coast cultural production. Contrary to Roland Barthes’ prediction that, in what advertisers of the late 1920s already called the ‘Plastic Age,’ “the hierarchy of substances is abolished: a single one replaces them all”, plastic has not managed to dethrone all other materials. “Plastic’s freedom to become anything” (due to its inherent formlessness before it is molded) is what makes plastic such a fascinating material. However, this plasticity is also what makes it be perceived as a suspicious material that needs to be detected and its imitative quality

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29 Barthes, “Plastic,” 111.

denounced. As early as the post-WW2 period, “plastic became an adjective meaning fake or insincere”, a connotation it continues to bear in a number of contexts.

During my fieldwork, the adjective “plastic-y” was constantly used as qualifier for what my interlocutors considered to be “junk,” and the expression “plastic totem poles” was relentlessly used as short-hand for everything that is evil and should be taken off the artware market. In this context, it is not necessarily easy to understand why an artist of Don Yeomans’ stature would spend endless hours carving a monumental pole out of cedar to finally dissociate his work from the valued material of which it is made, taking the deliberate risk of it being visually associated with a poorly regarded material instead. However, it is likely by virtue of rather than in spite of his stature in the Northwest Coast art world that he made this artistic decision. Indeed, Yeomans’ reputation in the Northwest Coast art market as one of the most highly respected artists of his time renders him largely immune to the false criticism that his pole is no different from that of a gift shop plastic totem pole. The Northwest Coast art world knows that the two are in fact quite different, if only because beige and neon green in one case reinforces expectations, and in the other unapologetically disrupts them. Further, for those who are not familiar enough with the art to know of its expected and unexpected materialities, the film that accompanies the pole is there to provide clarifications on the artist’s intentions.

Historian of technology Ezio Manzini argues that “every object made by man is the embodiment of what is at once thinkable and possible”. In other words, “the material culture that constitutes our everyday environment is a result of a compromise between ... technology in its most advanced state and the ‘ideas’ that are generally acceptable ...: i.e. culture”. In the field of Northwest Coast art, plastic is a material that is ‘possible’ but remains difficult to ‘think’. Because plastic quickly became the material par excellence of mass production and thus of ‘mass culture’, it has come to be a material of ‘non-art.’ As design historian Penny Sparke explains, only starting in the 1960s did the shift away from the culture of the Modern Movement and its dedication to the ‘truth’ of materials allow plastics “to become respected on their own terms – i.e.

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31 Ibid., 6.
as materials which could perform a number of different cultural roles simultaneously”.^{36} Pop and Post-modern artists embraced the aesthetic range offered by the flexibility of plastics, which had been largely overlooked as an art medium since the early 19th century.^{37} But shortly thereafter, critics of the 1970s turned their attention to another concern, that of plastics’ “ecological implications” and “the fundamental problem of their disposability”.^{38} Plastics are now completely ubiquitous in everyday life, showing that they are generally speaking in the realm of both the ‘possible’ and the ‘thinkable’. Nevertheless, to this day plastics continue to be indexes of falsehood and waste, often considered “in some way inferior to the ‘real thing’”.^{39} In part because the value of Aboriginal arts and cultures generally continue to be measured against simplified notions of authenticity, locality, and environmentalism, the field of Northwest Coast art has only recently yielded works in a plastic medium.

I suspect that plastic has been difficult to ‘think’ as a medium of Native Northwest Coast art because it is seen to lack particular cultural, symbolic, and social values: first, it is regarded as a superficial material on which cultural meanings slide, contrary to (super)natural materials in which such meanings are absorbed; second, because it is emblematic of global consumer goods, plastic is not typically thought to be a local material; third, as the archetype of man-made waste, plastic is seen to stand in contradiction with the ideals of sustainability, which are increasingly associated with Indigenous worldviews and practices. That is not to say that plastic has not been present in Northwest Coast art at all; it is indeed present, most notably on certain blankets in the form of shiny white plastic buttons that provided a practical alternative to pearl. However, especially for works created in ‘formline’ style, plastic has seldom been the material of choice of a Northwest Coast artist – not as a substitute for another material, but as a medium in its own right with its particular material properties and aesthetic qualities.^{40}

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^{36} Ibid., 11.
^{40} Vancouver-based artist of Dane-zaa and Swiss ancestry Brian Jungen offers a series of artworks made primarily out of plastic, or rather, out of found plastic objects: Mise En Scène (2000), Bushcapsule (2000), Shapeshifter (2000), Cetology (2002), Vienna (2003), Isolated Depictions of the Passage of Time (2001), Beer Cooler (2002), Crux (as seen from those who sleep on the surface of the earth under the night sky) (2008), Wasp (2008), Water Hemlock (2008) and Carapace (2009) (the first five are made out of pieces of plastic patio chairs, the others with such items as trays, coolers, luggage, gasoline jugs, and garbage bins). Neither of these pieces borrows from the formline style often associated with the idea of Northwest Coast art (contrary to Jungen’s Prototypes for a New Understanding
7.1.3 Making plastic “thinkable”

Although plastic is not currently a material commonly used in the field of Northwest Coast art, there are a few exceptions. One of them is Stephen Jackson’s 2005 *Nearing Completion*, an epoxy resin depiction of the “violent climax” of the Tlingit story of Kaats’ “when the bear children tear their father to pieces for having betrayed their mother”.41 The piece was commissioned by the Burke Museum to replace a pole it repatriated to the Tlingit. As anthropologists Aldona Jonaitis and Aaron Glass describe, the style of the piece “draws on the formline tradition but represents an innovative departure from convention”.42 Even though the work “quotes classical Northwest Coast native art” through its use of formline elements,43 Jackson himself says that it is “An abstraction made visceral” that challenges “the containment of the ovoid.” He also remarks that, although it was a ‘house post’ that was commissioned from him, the materiality of his piece makes it “too fragile to bear weight”.44 This contrasts with the previous example of cedar being chosen to make decorative skateboards. Where in one instance cedar was chosen for its symbolic and cultural value despite being too soft once carved into a skateboard, in this instance, it was the properties and aesthetics of plastic that were chosen as the medium for Jackson’s rendition of a Tlingit story, even if it meant the work could not function as a post. Jackson’s piece may not embody some of the values typically associated with cedar, but it is nonetheless loaded in cultural meaning: that of the story it represents, but also that of an artist giving the ‘cultural disruption’ back to the museum that created it in the first place through the misappropriation of the original and now repatriated house post.45

One recent piece by Clinton Work, *Clamming Bucket Circa 2011*, makes another foray into the use of plastic in Northwest Coast art. This piece, a five-gallon white plastic bucket of the kind commonly used for clamming that Work elaborately carved and decorated, is described on the Lattimer Gallery blog as follows:
When considering the media of fine art, a white plastic pail doesn't readily come to mind. But the working definition of what is considered fine art has become more broad with the expansion of emerging artists trying to break free of a constricting mold. The concept of elaborately decorated pieces used in everyday life such as bentwood boxes, button blankets and masks, has been tradition within Northwest Coast cultural production. So when Kwakwa’wakw artist Clinton Work decided to hand-carve a white plastic bucket, which is a utilitarian object, it made perfect sense.46

This description is an example of discourse illustrating plastic’s marginal utilization in Northwest Coast art. Further, it was not by coincidence that this piece was included in the 25th anniversary exhibit Silver of the Lattimer Gallery (June 9-30 2011). The latter was specifically intended to showcase works that artists had always wanted to do but had not yet created for fear that they would not be easy to sell. Work was among those who accepted the challenge. His piece inspired the title and is the main focus of an article published in the Vancouver Sun about the exhibit: “Lattimer Gallery: Northwest Coast Gets Contemporary”.47 Though I am not sure that the use of plastic is what makes this particular piece ‘contemporary’ – more than, say, the fact that it was made in 2011 – I would argue that this piece is an example of what artist Mike Dangeli (Nisga’a, Tlingit, Tsetsaut, and Tsimshian) calls “Making the Ordinary Extraordinary.” For his piece of the same name (2008), Dangeli painted a cardboard box the way he would a bentwood box, coating a material that is not particularly highly regarded with designs of cultural significance. For Clamming Bucket Circa 2011, it is by removing material from the bucket through the act of carving on and through its surface that Work operated a similar transformation of plastic into a ‘media of fine art,’ as the Lattimer Gallery blog post put it.

Interestingly, the top of the bucket is adorned with a ring of other, more expected, materials of Native Northwest Coast materiality: woven cedar bark, buttons, and red felt. The Vancouver Sun reporter interpreted this addition of material to the bucket as a “reference to its origin” – that of open-weave clamming baskets. I would argue that this ring, and the woven cedar in particular,

47 Kevin Griffin, “Lattimer Gallery: Northwest Coast Art Gets Contemporary” Vancouver Sun, Culture Seen, June 8, 2011, http://communities.canada.com/vancouversun/blogs/cultureseen/archive/2011/06/08/lattimer-gallery.aspx accessed June 28 2011, 11:48 pm. Another piece included in Silver was Steve Smith’s untitled painted Munny figurine (made by the toy company Kidrobot). The figurine itself is made out of vinyl, making it another example of the use of plastic by a Northwest Coast artist. My focus on Clinton Work’s Clamming Bucket Circa 2011 for this discussion about materials is predicated by my interest in the fact that Work carved his design into the bucket, making plastic the media rather than the supporting canvas for the piece. Both Smith and Work’s pieces were prominently featured in Griffin’s Vancouver Sun article, relegating the works of such prominent artists as Daphne Odjig, Bill Reid, and Norval Morrisseau to a secondary plane in the author’s discussion of his interest in the exhibition.
also ropes the supposedly ‘foreign’ materiality of plastic into what is today’s Northwest Coast material repertoire. The plastic buttons serve as reminders that this material has for a long time already been part of artists’ selection, even if it is not usually associated with the symbolic value of being ‘local’ or the cultural value of being ‘Indigenous.’ And yet, especially in the areas of northern British Columbia known for their impressive oil deposits, the oil-derived product that is plastic is effectively a local material, as illustrated in Brian Jungen’s work. The gasoline jugs of his Wasp (2008) and Water Hemlock (2008) are good examples of his use of plastic to comment on the oil industry’s activities in Dane-zaa territory.\(^{48}\) However, even for those convinced that plastics can be considered a local material, their status as an oil-derived product and a symbol of waste makes it difficult to reconcile them with the figure of the environmentally conscious Aboriginal artist. For instance, one gallery visitor voiced his regret that Work’s Clamming Bucket Circa 2011 was carved out of plastic, evoking the Great Pacific Garbage Patch to illustrate the environmental damage he associates with this material. It apparently did not matter to him that, by recycling plastic for artistic purposes and “making the ordinary extraordinary,” the artist actually destines this plastic object anywhere but a landfill or a garbage float.

As I will explain in more detail below, materials like cedar and plastic tend to be placed at opposite ends of the natural-artificial spectrum. Still, the concerns raised about the effects of resource extraction connect these differently valued materials: the risks environmentalists associate with over-exploitation and pollution concerns both forest and oil resources. With respect to art making, harvest for the purpose of basket-making hardly presents an environmental threat; similarly, the collection and subsequent transformation of five gallon buckets into clam digging equipment, as referenced in Work’s Clamming Bucket Circa 2011, is certainly not the main push for oil exploitation. Beyond art, there are many ways in which Aboriginal people are involved in forest and oil industries, including as the bearers of land, cash, labour force, and political leverage.\(^{49}\) But despite this, common notions of what constitutes ‘Indigenous’ practices set materials like wood and plastic apart. While making art from ‘natural resources’ such as cedar can be used to reinforce the representation of Aboriginal peoples as responsible stewards of these resources, the idea that these same peoples also make art from man-made materials such as plastic might trouble this image. Such representations render the argument that Aboriginal

\(^{48}\) Many thanks to Charlotte Townsend-Gault for pointedly suggesting this connection.

\(^{49}\) Helin, Dances with Dependency, 184–188.
peoples are stakeholders in the management of oil extraction seem more difficult to make than the argument that they are stakeholders in the logging of forests.

Through their respective conceptual and aesthetic registers, artworks like those of Jackson, Jungen, and Work communicate the fact that there are ways of using and thinking about oil-derived products such as plastic that are informed by Indigenous experiences. From this, it can be argued that there are also specifically Indigenous stakes in the oil industry – and not solely because Aboriginal individuals are often the front-line victims of pollution-induced health problems, but also because oil and oil-derived products are as much part of their contemporary lives as is cedar. To me, this suggests that a prolonged and creative use of plastic as a medium of Northwest Coast art, including in the form of artware produced by Aboriginal companies, could eventually provoke a radical re-thinking of what constitutes a ‘local’ and ‘Indigenous’ material, perhaps even helping to strengthen the position of Aboriginal people as stakeholders of the oil industry. However, this argument runs up against strongly established notions of what constitutes Indigenous substances, and according to this framework, oil is not currently one of them. Nonetheless, some substances have acquired this status over a relatively short span of time through their continued artistic use – argillite being a case in point.

7.2 Argillite and the Spectre of the Simulacrum

The inherited nobility of materials forms part of a cultural ideology which is analogous to that of the aristocratic myth in the human domain, and even this cultural prejudice evaporates through time.

- Jean Baudrillard  

There are historical, social, cultural, and economic reasons why certain materials are considered more valuable than others; as we have seen, this is reflected in the repertoire of materials used in the production of Northwest Coast art. Conceptually, it may be relatively easy to deconstruct such systems of value, as Baudrillard suggests. However, affectively speaking, they are much more difficult to unsettle. Baudrillard himself remarks that wood “is in such demand today because of its emotional associations: it takes its substance from the earth, it seems to live, to breathe, and ‘to work’... In short this material is a living being”.  

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51 Ibid., 112.
the first part of this chapter, such strong emotional associations with certain materials, both positive and negative, are also present in the Northwest Coast art market. For example, one artist explained to me that he “lives by” the idea that “everything consists of energy – except for plastic.” Indeed, although few so-called “raw materials” can be used prior to having endured some kind of transformation (wool is spun and dyed, metals are processed into alloys, etc), they are perceived to have initially sprung from “nature”. In contrast, even when the composition of a plastic includes organic and/or mineral matter, it tends to be perceived as so highly processed as to be “artificial”.

In this context, plastic imitations of hlgas7agaa or argillite are a fascinating example of a kind of plastic that acquires a veneer of nobility through its association with the much-valued stone it imitates. While a certain kind of ‘plastic totem pole’ is easier to write off because it is not seen to pose as anything different from what it is, one of the complaints I have heard against argillite-like materials is that they are sometimes too successful in their imitative endeavour. Indeed, while there are products that simply look and feel like black plastic, some companies have gone to great lengths to develop a much more convincing material, which I will call from this point on ‘faux-argillite.’

Although, as explained above, plastics later became the object of scepticism and disdain, they were developed in the nineteenth century as substitutes for precious materials that were in high demand but limited supply. For a time, plastic was a bourgeois material that was treated as “a raw material for artistry and ornament” and “a vehicle for spreading taste for luxury”. A faux-argillite is a contemporary example of this early use of plastics. Like the celluloid of the nineteenth century, faux-argillite is caught in the tension between the value it acquires through its ability to imitate a revered material and the value it loses from being perceived as a purely imitative material. Considered artificial ‘copies’ of a natural ‘original’, imitations of argillite are bound to be the object of some criticism since, as art historian Michael Camille has argued, “At least since Plato the theory and practice of the visual arts have been founded, almost exclusively, upon the relationship between the real and its copy”. What some find problematic with faux-argillite is analogous to the problem Barthes associates with plastic in general, contending that, in

53 Ibid., 29.
the Plastic Age, “the age-old function of nature is modified: it is no longer the Idea, the pure Substance to be regained or imitated: an artificial Matter, [plastic], more bountiful than all the natural deposits, is about to replace her”. In Barthes’ quasi-apocalyptic scenario, the proliferation of faux-argillite would eventually threaten the relevance of argillite as its model, insofar as it could cease to be a representation of argillite to become a medium in and of itself, independent from artistic developments in the use of argillite. At least for the time being, this scenario seems rather unlikely. Nonetheless, imitations of argillite do raise some concerns, not the least of which is the market being haunted by the spectre of the simulacrum: a representation that negates the relevance and primacy of the reality it represents.

As I will discuss in more detail in section 7.2.2, argillite is a material that has gained attention and value in the last two centuries from being carved by the Haida into objects sold primarily to non-Haida. Today, it derives much of its value from its synchondochic relation to Haida territory, art, and culture. From a Platonist perspective, the idea of argillite and the values encapsulated in the materiality of this stone can be held as “a model that exists so forcefully that in its presence the sham vanity of the false copy is immediately reduced to nonexistence. With the abrupt appearance of Ulysses, the eternal husband, the false suitors disappear”. In our example, imitations of argillite are the ‘false suitors’ courting Ulysses’ place in Penelope’s arms, with more or less success. The interest for objects made out of imitative materials can vanish rather quickly in those who, seduced by the idea of argillite, realize that even though these materials produce a similar visual effect, they do not embody the values that argillite has acquired beyond what it looks like. On the other hand, the interest generated by objects made out of what I call faux-argillite does not disappear quite so easily. As argued by Meikle, plastic “quickly recedes into relative invisibility as long as it does its job well”. In our example, the better a particular kind of plastic does its ‘job’ to imitate argillite, the more it recedes into the background, and the less the object of which it is made becomes invisible in the presence of argillite itself. Whether intended or not, when faux-argillite is mistaken for argillite, it can be said

56 In his Spectres of Marx (1993), Jacques Derrida uses the notion of ‘spectrality’ (a reference to Marx and Engel’s idea that Europe was haunted by the spectre of communism) to explain his idea that Marxism continues to have a role to play even after the twentieth century demise of communism in Europe. Here, I use the notion of ‘spectre’ in the more prosaic sense of an image of something unpleasant or dangerous that need not have existed in the past to be haunting.
58 Meikle, American Plastic, xiii.
to perform as a simulacrum that “calls into question the ability to distinguish between what is real and what is represented”. For the Penelopes of argillite, this poses a problem.

7.2.1 Marketing imitations

As with any market where certain products are identified as ‘originals’ and others as ‘copies,’ makers, sellers, and collectors of argillite carvings have vested interest in maintaining a clear distinction between these works and imitations of these works (both in the general sense of imitations of argillite carvings and in the more specific case of imitations of their individual artworks). Several of those I spoke to were particularly concerned with the extent to which casts of faux-argillite cut into the market of argillite carvings, in particular in cases of consumers confusing the two. For instance, one gallery manager described how an artware company making reproductions of argillite carvings had been blacklisted by several art galleries specifically when its reproductions of argillite carvings had become too convincing. In contrast, plastic that only shares with argillite a vague resemblance of colour elicits only as much concern as the threat of postcards being mistaken for oil paintings. Producers and distributors believe that products made out of black plastic to evoke argillite are purchased by consumers instead of other objects made out of man-made materials, but not instead of argillite carvings themselves. As one artist explained: “I don’t really have too many objections, even to stuff like that… I mean, it’s targeting a certain part of the market ..., they want a little three dimensional sculpture, and they can’t afford a real carving, so they buy this fake thing.”

However, this serene stance is made under the assumption that most consumers can distinguish ‘a real carving’ from a ‘fake thing.’ Although consumers are not always as ignorant as they are thought to be, I did observe a number of marketing strategies that play with the possibility that some consumers might be incapable of making such distinctions. This is evidenced by the fact that some producers and distributors subtly (and sometimes not so subtly) play with potentially deceptive wording and display techniques, all the while trying to steer clear from accusations of false advertisement. In those cases, it takes more than a quick look and a shrug for consumers who are seduced by the idea of argillite to dismiss faux-argillite as only a

59 Camille, “Simulacrum,” 35. It goes without saying that, strictly speaking, the composite material of faux-argillite is as ‘real’ a material as argillite – as argued by Baudrillard, “materials are what they are: there are no true or false ones” Baudrillard, “Natural Wood, Cultural Wood,” 112. However, used in the particular way that I have described, faux-argillite is also a representation of the real (i.e. argillite).
representation of the model they are actually after. Some labels and product arrangements seem to have been designed so that, on the off chance that one of these consumers has not seen argillite up close before, the opportunity to create a seemingly ‘honest misunderstanding’ is not missed. Although even faux-argillite would not be mistaken for argillite by someone who is familiar with this stone, it simulates its properties well enough that it may confound someone who is not, even without a misleading label to enhance the potential for confusion. For example, having just heard about my research interests, a friend showed me a black pepper grinder she assumed had been carved by an Aboriginal artist. According to the label that came with it, however, it was cast out of resin. Thus, its producers did not hide that it was plastic, and still my friend was under a different impression.

Thus, outright trickery need not be involved for some confusion to arise. However, in some cases ambiguity is nurtured much more purposefully. During one of my many visits to the strip of Gastown gift shops on Water street, I picked up a faux-argillite product and looked at it long enough to catch the attention of a store clerk. He approached me and said that these were “made in Canada, carved by First Nations.” I knew that at least the second part of his statement could not have been true, not even in the sense that the item could have been made using industrial means by a First Nations person: there does not currently exist an Aboriginal-owned company making faux-argillite products, and the non-Aboriginal companies that do make such products did not at the time employ Aboriginal individuals in their production activities. On this particular occasion I did not press the store clerk to give me further explanation; I could thus give him the benefit of the doubt and imagine that if I had he would have perhaps clarified his statement by saying the product was a reproduction of a First Nations-made item. Even then, he would have initially taken his chances with the ethically questionable practice of playing with the ambiguous spaces between strategic omissions, partial truths, and more direct lies. Many times, I have seen faux-argillite pieces presented without tags, letting aesthetics rather than words suggest to customers what materials in which they might be made. I have seen stores in which an explanatory note about the nature of argillite was placed close enough to faux-argillite products so that the association could be made, but just far enough that the store could claim that the association with anything else than the stone itself was not deliberate. In another instance, I found a piece of faux-argillite placed atop a certificate of authenticity meant to accompany the products
of an Aboriginal-owned and operated company that had nothing to do with the piece (and that does not produce faux-argillite of any kind).

On the internet, when objects can only be appraised via photographs and written descriptions, the exact nature of a material can be even more difficult to assess by potential consumers. For example, the online auction website of eBay, when prompted to search for the word ‘Haida,’ calls up a list of dozens of items that includes pieces made out of argillite and argillite-like materials. One of the latter kinds of pieces is described both as a ‘Copy 19th C. HAIDA INDIAN Argillite RAVEN TOTEM, Canada’ and as a “Handmade REPRODUCTION of Haida Indian Raven Totem originally carved in black argillite”. While the word ‘copy’ and the full capitalization of the word ‘reproduction’ emphasize that the piece is not an original, the structure of the phrase ‘Totem originally carved in black argillite’ opens up a space for ambiguity about the object’s materiality. Other elements in the description enhance the possibility of confusion, in particular due to the fact that some information refers to the original, some to the reproduction. The description seems to be designed to simultaneously provide and correct misleading information. It obfuscates what is being presented for sale precisely because its description is neither entirely truthful nor entirely deceitful. For instance, the advertisement includes information like “time: 19th century”, “location: Haida culture,” but also explains that the “original is in a museum,” and that this is a “highly accurate scaled recreation.” It is said to be ‘the result of painstaking detailed work” and that efforts were made to offer the “look and feel of ancient stone.” The post describes the material used to achieve this ‘look and feel’ as “cast stone” in one instance and as “simulated Argillite stone” in another. It lists the name of an artisan (“S. Stoneking”) but also explains how “Artists-archeologists in the United States” created a “master mold” from photographs and measurements of the totem pole. Despite the mention of this master mold, which was likely used for the purpose of mass-reproduction, the piece proposed for sale is boasted as a “Unique Work of Art Commissioned Exclusively by Echoes In Time”. Like many other marketing strategies of argillite-like products (and of many other products being currently sold on sites like eBay), this particular internet advertisement flirts with, but stays on the legal side of, false advertising – or the false representation of a representation.

As always, there are exceptions to this trend. One Vancouver retailer had taken it upon itself to make the distinction clear with a label placed next to its faux-argillite pieces that read:

What material is this? This Totem Pole/Sculpture is made out of a composite material of crushed Quartz and Resin. This combination symbolizes the look and feel of Argillite.
Argillite is only found on the Queen Charlotte Islands, Haida Gwaii, BC. Argillite is a much revered, and expensive to mine, stone.\textsuperscript{60}

This label is particularly interesting because, in its earnest attempt to warn consumers that these pieces are not made out of argillite, it also plays down their ‘plastic-ness.’ It does so through the use of two words: ‘composite material’ (which in the 1980s became the generic and less negatively perceived word for ‘plastic\textsuperscript{61}) and ‘symbolizes’ (which is a flattering euphemism for ‘imitates’ or ‘simulates’). In addition, the fact that it lists ‘crushed quartz’ as one of the material’s components is rather ironic considering the fact that the argillite specific to Haida Gwaii is a kind of slate that, contrary to other kinds, does not contain quartz.\textsuperscript{62} However, by lauding argillite as a rare, revered, and expensive stone, this label also gives faux-argillite a certain cachet that the imitation of a common, poorly regarded, and inexpensive stone would not have. This example provides a pointed introduction to the issue that I will explore in the following section: why do artware companies go to great lengths to achieve a simulation of argillite instead of either a) using argillite itself or b) leaving argillite alone altogether?

\subsection*{7.2.2 Barriers to the use of argillite in artware production}

The answer to the first question – why not use argillite itself rather than an imitation – is rather straightforward. As mentioned in the above-mentioned label, access to argillite is challenging from a pragmatic perspective, since it is primarily if not exclusively available from one site, Slatechuck Mountain near the village of Skidegate.\textsuperscript{63} As Leslie Drew and Douglas Wilson once commented, “The seeker of raw argillite must be patient, sturdy, and sure-footed as a mountain goat”.\textsuperscript{64} In addition to the physical challenge, access to argillite is also regulated by law – both Haida law, and Canadian law. As noted by anthropologist Peter Macnair, “The Haida have been using the Slatechuck quarry since at least the 1820s and, from their own legal view,

\textsuperscript{60} When I recently returned to this retail store, this label was no longer in use.
\textsuperscript{61} Meikle, \textit{American Plastic}, 7.
\textsuperscript{62} See Leslie Drew and Douglas Wilson, \textit{Argillite, Art of the Haida} (North Vancouver, B.C: Hancock House, 1980), 43.
\textsuperscript{63} Carol Sheenan contends that “it is an often-repeated fiction that argillite is only found in Haida Gwaii”, but it is unclear whether she is speaking only of argillite that is black or if her point also concerns argillite of other colours, such as green and red. From her perspective, the exclusiveness of argillite to Haida Gwaii is, in essence, a powerful marketing strategy: “Given their well-established cultural reputation for being astute entrepreneurs, it’s neither unkind nor unrealistic to suggest that Haida carvers have deliberately enhanced the value of their medium with such stories to attract collectors” Carol Sheehan, \textit{Breathing Stone: Contemporary Haida Argillite Sculpture} (Calgary, Alta: Frontenac House, 2008), 21.
\textsuperscript{64} Drew and Wilson, \textit{Argillite, Art of the Haida}, 47.
proprietary rights extend into the past far beyond that date. However, it was only in 1941 that the quarry site of approximately 18 hectares was designated as an Indian Reserve... thus assuring access exclusively to the Haida.\textsuperscript{65} Control is vested in the Skidegate [Hlragilda ‘Illnagaay] Band although they presently permit members of the Masset [Raci7waas] Band to gather the stone”.\textsuperscript{66} It is a commonly accepted understanding that “the argillite of Haida Gwaii is reserved for the sole use of Haida artists”,\textsuperscript{67} and it is said that “Queen Charlotte Islanders respect the Slatechuck as the private property of the Haida and do not visit it except by invitation”.\textsuperscript{68} Also, although Drew and Wilson say that geologists believe the deposit to be “inexhaustible,” they also note that “the Haida wonder whether the supply will diminish or whether the quality will be maintained”.\textsuperscript{69} Since geological formations produced over thousands of years are not technically renewable resources, where use by artists may not be considered a likely cause for depletion, exploitation at an industrial scale would no doubt enhance their concern.

The literature on argillite reports at least one commercial attempt to access argillite for other purposes than individual carving by Haida artists. Drew and Wilson write that

One [report], in 1909, stated that investigating prospectors believed the quarry had possibilities as a source of slate for mantels, and that attempts had been made to stake it. There is actually a 1906 report for the Geological Survey of Canada stating that a quarry had been opened by a Victoria company, and that the material was being shipped to Victoria ‘and there manufactured’.\textsuperscript{70}

The authors go on to state that “Any commercial use by whites could not have lasted long”.\textsuperscript{71} It is unclear what put a stop to this mantel company’s activities, but today it would seem impossible for such a large-scale initiative not to be met by Haida (and even public) outcry. This

\textsuperscript{65} This was apparently not widely known, as in 1945, Arthur E. Pickford of the Society for the Furtherance of B.C. Indian Arts and Crafts wrote Major D. McKay, Indian Commissioner of B.C to enquire about whether Indian Affairs had “taken any action to reserve to the Haida that supply of Black Slate from which material so many beautiful carvings have been made”. Arthur E. Pickford, “Letter to Major D. McKay, Indian Commissioner for B.C.,” March 21, 1945, MS 2720 [Microfilm A01661]: BCIAWS 1940-1954 (Correspondence), B.C. Archives.


\textsuperscript{67} Sheehan, \textit{Breathing Stone}, 20.

\textsuperscript{68} Drew and Wilson, \textit{Argillite, Art of the Haida}, 47.

\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., 45.

\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., 47.

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., 47.
seems all the more probable that the production of *faux*-argillite items is for many already an object of great concern.

All of these factors obstruct the use of argillite in artware production. However, even if a supply of argillite was made accessible to artware companies (which could perhaps happen in the case of a Haida-owned company) the material properties of the stone would make it rather difficult to use for industrial machine production. As described by Carol Sheenan, “Argillite can flake and break ... as the stone may be riddled with hidden fissures and tiny ribbons of other mineral deposits”.72 Art historian Carole Kaufmann also writes that argillite is “brittle and shattered easily, and thus, could not be used in any capacity which required strength and durability”.73 With a relatively scarce and difficult to access material, a high breakage rate during production would be rather costly. Even if new production technologies mitigated this problem, argillite is also protected by a general understanding among the participants in the Northwest Coast art market that it is not for non-Haida to use. Because of this, although some individuals might disagree with this exclusionary premise and carve it nonetheless, it is very rare to find argillite works created by non-Haida artists, at least on the Canadian market.74 Sheenan goes as far as to say that “It is a fascinating marketing coup that for nearly 200 years they have protected their exclusive proprietary interests in carving argillite to the extent that no other Northwest Coast artists carve or attempt to market any stone art. In the art world, the world ‘argillite’ is practically synonymous with Haida”.75 Drew and Wilson also marvel at the fact that the success of the market for argillite came despite the fact that there was “no high-powered advertising, no Madison Avenue marketing, no corporate controls”.76

Marketing “coup” or not, argillite is everywhere described as inextricably tied to the Haida. For instance, Drew and Wilson write that “From the beginning, whenever it may have been, the Haida and argillite have enjoyed a long and happy association. ... [T]he Haida have kept it to themselves, to express their own private sense of beauty”.77 In her foreword to the 2002 re-

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73 Kaufmann, *Changes in Haida Indian Argillite Carvings, 1820 to 1910*, 41.
74 Although there are surely more, I personally was able to find only two examples of argillite works by artist who do not present themselves as affiliate to the Haida: *Salish Comb*, by Musqueam artist Susan Point, which is a 14k gold comb inlaid with argillite, and *Telephone Box*, by Gitxsan Charles Ya’Ya Heit, which is a wood, brass, and argillite telephone casing. It should be noted that artists who are not referred to as “Haida artists” on the art market may have ancestral ties to the Haida but choose to be publicly affiliated primarily to another cultural group.
77 Ibid.
edition of *The Magic Leaves*, RBCM curator of ethnology Martha Black wrote that “The beautiful black slate of Haida Gwaii continues to be a vehicle for profound expressions of Haida history and artistic innovation.”

Sheenan also writes that “Argillite carving speaks eloquently, through many voices, to audiences worldwide, echoing songs from Haida Gwaii, songs of sea and sky, songs from the Land of the People.”

Interestingly, as strong as its association to Haida culture currently is, the importance of argillite has a strong relationship to outside demand and valuation. As discussed throughout the literature, the use of argillite was boosted through the high demand for carvings from visitors of all sorts. In these publications, the kinds of objects (scrimshaw, pipes, etc) and decorative subjects (floral patterns, representations of Europeans, etc.) found in argillite carvings are often put forward as a clear indication of their non-Haida audience. The popularity of argillite among those who are not ‘from here’ has somewhat paradoxically contributed to the association of argillite with a very specific place and the people whose place it is. Thus when an 19th century argillite mug makes it way to Scotland, it is imagined to have been made specifically to travel, but at the same time maintains a synecdochic relationship with the place argillite comes from and the people who carve it – Haida Gwaii, and the Haida people.

In other words, while *carved* argillite may have been initially made for outside consumption and as such is alienable, the fact that *raw* argillite is sheltered from outsider access

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81 Teri Robin Yoo suggests that, even early on, Haida and non-Haida shared their taste for argillite. She writes that “After the 1820s, argillite became the dominant medium associated with carvings because it appealed to the Euroamerican market as well as to the Haida.” Terri Robin Yoo, “History Reconfigured: Haida Argillite Carving,” in *Dimensions of Native America: The Contact Zone*, by Jehanne Teilhet-Fisk and Robin Franklin Nigh (Tallahassee, FL: Florida State University, Museum of Fine Arts, School of Visual Arts & Dance, 1998), 42.; Yoo also writes: “Capitalizing on its uniqueness the Haida began making functional and non-functional pipes for sale or trade among themselves, other tribes, and outsiders” Ibid., 44.; and “By manipulating this “tourist” venue, the Haida were able to produce a range of argillite sculptures that are sold to non-Indian and Indian communities – each perhaps buying for very different reasons” Ibid.

82 This is a reference to the argillite mug in the collections of the Royal Museum of Scotland (Object ID: A. 702. 9). This mug is part of the collection given by James Hector to the Royal Museum of Scotland in 1861. Alexander B.C. Dawkins, “Western Canada, Colonialism and Doctor Hector: An Investigation into the Royal Museum of Scotland’s Argillite Holdings” (M. Sc., University of Edinburgh, School of Arts, Culture and Environment, 2006).

83 This is the case even when the argillite obtained in Haida Gwaii is carved elsewhere, in the art market’s hub of Vancouver, for instance.
has helped maintain and reinforce its strong association – an exclusive one, even – with the Haida, who treat it like an inalienable possession. Although, at the scale of the globe, it is a very scarce resource, it is also too geographically circumscribed to have become the object of a competitive ‘rush’ of the kind that could have established it as a monetary standard (as with gold). In fact, currently, raw argillite circulates as a commodity quasi-exclusively among the Haida themselves (and even so, only to a limited extent); also, only once carved does argillite become acquirable by non-Haida. While it could be and indeed has been argued that the value of carved argillite was initially tied to an inter-culturally developed notion of Haida art, the exclusiveness of raw argillite access and use has worked towards establishing it as a ‘quintessential Haida substance,’ to again use Ferry’s expression. This helps answer the second part of my question, concerning why companies strive to convincingly simulate argillite rather than leave argillite be.

7.2.3 Imitations, copies, and licensed reproductions

As the activities of tourism ceased to be the privilege of the rich and the symbolic value and price of argillite carvings rose with its promotion on the art market as fine art, a niche for imitations of argillite opened up. By the 1960s, with more and more consumers coming through galleries and gift shops (with either less money than needed to acquire argillite carvings or with less interest than needed to spend enough money to acquire argillite rather than plastic), it was well worth it for artware companies to explore the development of imitative materials. Over the years, several companies did, including the British Columbia-based BOMA Mfg, Pearlite, AALCO, and Kootenay Collections Ltd (or KC Gifts).

Among the publications on the topic of argillite, a few mention these kinds of imitations, more or less disapprovingly depending on the author. For instance, art historian and argillite expert Robin K. Wright points to the proliferation of argillite imitations:

Model totem poles and chests carved in argillite have continued to be made throughout the twentieth century, becoming so typical of Haida tourist art and Northwest Coast Indian art in general that they have been reproduced by commercial companies in plastic, in wax as candles, and in chocolate as candy. Nearly every airport on the Northwest Coast has a gift shop with cast replicas of Haida argillite model poles.

84 See, for example Barbeau, *Haida Carvers in Argillite.*
85 Ferry, “Inalienable Commodities.”
86 Wright, “Hlgas7gaa: Haida Argillite,” 140.
Wright goes on to say that “While one might argue that these cast replicas mass-produced in factories are “mere tourist art”, the originals from which they derive represent a tradition that links directly to the great artists of the nineteenth century”. 87 This statement displaces the category of ‘tourist art’ away from argillite itself and onto imitations alone. Indeed, by pointing out that “The most successful Haida artists of today’s generation got their start at the knees of their fathers and grand-fathers carving model argillite poles for sale in the tourist markets of Victoria, Vancouver and Seattle”, 88 Wright instates argillite carving as a ‘real thing’ of art, and not just representations of large-scale totem poles. In this scheme, however, imitations of argillite do have the status of copies, representations of their argillite models. What is interesting is that not all argillite-like objects are made after an argillite model in existence; many of them are cast from models designed by non-Haida artists in a material other than argillite. Thus the market offers at least two kinds of ‘copies’: representations of existing works of argillite, as well as representations of the idea of argillite carvings.

In his foreword to the 1984 edition of The Magic Leaves, Roger Y. Edwards, then director of the British Columbia Provincial Museum (Victoria), had deplored the fact that “Hundreds of commercial simulations of argillite carvings now clutter tourist-oriented souvenir shops across Canada.” 89 Edwards also discussed the issue of ‘copies’, stating that “While pieces expertly cast can be difficult for the novice to identify as replicas, mass-produced pieces usually have poor quality and fool no one with any knowledge of the subject.” 90 Edwards’s critique therefore focused on the necessity of distinction, taking issue not so much with copies as such, but with copies that do not say their name. He wrote:

87 Ibid.
88 Ibid.
90 Ibid.
Values can certainly be found in copies of things as well as in originals. Each can give that first push toward more sophisticated understandings, deepening appreciations of traditions and of the things that traditions help people create. It is also clear, however, that copying must be controlled, and that copies must be clearly marked as copies in order to protect the integrity of the art and to ensure fair return to the artist.\(^{91}\)

Edwards also discussed how copies are sometimes made “under copyright arrangements” but are more often made “as approximations that are not true copies as defined by copyright protection, so may be copied quite legally”.\(^{92}\)

Although copyright arrangements incur more accountability, they can also come with more ambiguity. Paradoxically, since the issue identified by Edwards is not copying in and of itself but the potential confusion between what is a copy and what is not, then the faithfulness of what he calls ‘true copies’ that are “expertly cast” and thus potentially “difficult for the novice to identify as replicas” are as much at the heart of the problem than pieces that are only poor “approximations.” And indeed, several of the individuals I interviewed pointed specifically to the high quality of reproduction achieved by certain companies as being the main source of their concern. The annoyance that artists have to compete with ‘shoddy’ plastic totem poles is then doubled with the worry that they also have to compete with faux-argillite casts that “look pretty good” (to quote an artist) or are “fine reproductions” (to quote a company who sells these casts). One gallery owner refuses to carry faux-argillite products specifically because of the high quality of some reproductions:

The reproduction argillite poles, I would never carry. Argillite is something that is really... it’s something that is dear to me, I love the medium, I love the idea of what they are. They are basically the first form of tourist art. I mean they were not created for any other purpose, but there’s something about that black stone that moves me. And when I see reproductions of those, they are so good these days, a lot of people can’t even tell the difference. You go on eBay today, and you see (...) about ten people trying to sell a plastic totem pole as a real argillite totem pole. Because of that, I wouldn’t carry them.

Thus, on the one hand, the value of argillite can push a company to aim for as good a simulation as possible, while on the other hand, it can push a gallery to wish such high quality of reproduction were not possible; low quality products can be criticized for their disrespect of the value of argillite, and high quality products can be criticized for their potentially deceptive ‘homage’ to the stone. In this respect, in certain circles, the imitation of argillite is a lose-lose

\(^{91}\) Ibid.  
\(^{92}\) Ibid.
operation for the reputation of artware companies. That said, from another standpoint, achieving a convincing level of simulation can open the door to rewarding partnerships. For instance, one company produces faux-argillite of a colour, weight, and texture that makes one retailer say it gives “the impression... of authentic Haida argillite.” With this quality of product (which outdid that of a competitor), the company was able to secure a licensing agreement with a major Canadian museum. It now reproduces dozens of argillite pieces from the institution’s collections, some of them historical pieces with no identified artist, and others that are the work of living artists. As explained in their labels, these are “licensed reproductions” and royalties are paid to the museum, which then pays a portion of the proceeds to the “original artist or to the Haida community”. Although the company has other lines of argillite-like products, in the case of these museum reproductions, it was explained to me that they “put extra cost into [the production process] to make it more authentic.” In the case of reproductions made under copyright agreements, faithfulness to the original is indeed considered to be crucial (so much so that initially, the reproductions made from broken pieces were cast with visible breakage marks before it was decided that this made them too difficult to market).

The fact that the pieces reproduced are part of a museum collection adds a layer of complexity to the tension between replica-as-integrity and simulation-as-deceit. The museum (and likely the artists whose works were reproduced) wanted high quality product that they would be comfortable being associated with, and that is what this company delivered. Paradoxically, it is precisely this kind of quality of reproduction that makes some feel ill-at-ease with faux-argillite that can ‘pass’ as argillite, even when not falsely advertised as such.

7.2.4 The spectre of the simulacrum

In his essay “The Precession of Simulacra,” Baudrillard wrote that in contemporary times, “It is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real”.93 He distinguishes between pretending and simulating, arguing that the former does not challenge the existence of the reality to which it refers, whereas the latter blurs the distinction between what is real and what is imaginary.94 To illustrate this distinction, he contrasts a person who fakes an illness by staying in bed and a

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94 Ibid., 3.
person who simulates illness by actually producing its symptoms.\textsuperscript{95} In this view, a material capable of producing the ‘symptoms’ of the material it imitates – not just a vague resemblance, but indexes of the sensory experience of this material – can be seen as substituting the ‘signs’ of this material for this very material. Baudrillard predicted that images simulating the real would eventually mask the fact that the “profound reality” they supposedly reference would no longer exist.\textsuperscript{96} In his view, reproductions can indeed perform on four different levels: reflections of reality, perversions of reality, pretences of reality and, finally, simulacrum – when the reproduction bears no relation to any reality whatsoever. Some of the concerns raised in the artware market by faux-argillite products, may not amount to, but nonetheless point to the worry that the more argillite-like these products become, the greater the danger of a simulacrum rendering argillite itself irrelevant becomes.

Returning to the above example of museum reproductions, on the one hand, their labels make quite explicit that these are made out of a material that “simulates” argillite, not argillite itself, a choice of words that pre-empts allegations that the pieces are meant to perform as simulacra unbeknownst to the consumer. On the other hand, the labels also put emphasis on the fact that that these are licensed museum reproductions, which is a point of added legitimacy for these products. The labels do their job of marketing the pieces for what they are. However, artware companies rarely escape some form of criticism, and things like the “authenticating medallion” borne by each piece to attest that it is an authorized museum reproduction can easily be interpreted as an attempt to rope the language of authenticity into the realm of what remains, at least in a Platonist framework, a representation of the ‘real thing’ that is not the ‘real thing’ itself.

The fact that companies that produce replicas do not claim that they are made out of argillite does not necessarily shield them from the criticism that the more convincing and legitimate these products are made to be, the more they undermine both the figurative value and the market value of argillite carvings. This helps explain why some museums can be hesitant to lend their credibility to these products by forming partnerships with their producers. It also makes it unsurprising that, when they do form such partnerships, they would feel pressed to pay part of their proceeds to Haida stakeholders. At the same time, such reproduction have the advantage of

\textsuperscript{95} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{96} Ibid., 6.
giving an alternative to the kinds of ‘approximations’ decried by Edwards, which legally speaking do not bind their producers to any kind of relationship to a Haida artist or a larger group of Haida stakeholders. And yet, an ‘alternative’ is not a ‘replacement,’ and faux-argillite licensed reproductions are still largely outnumbered by other (usually less expensive) argillite-like pieces.

Therefore, faux-argillite can be celebrated by some as a step in the direction of more legitimate and controlled imitation, but be perceived by others as an even greater source of concern than other kinds of argillite-like objects. Not only do the latter worry about plastic cheapening argillite, they also worry about the nobility plastic acquires through its association with argillite. Thus they can ridicule failed attempts to make plastic resemble argillite, and at the same time decry the more successful of these attempts. I argue that this range of critical reactions to imitations of argillite, from condescension to indignation, can be explained by the fact that paralleling the difference between black plastic and faux-argillite is the difference between resemblance and simulacrum. Put in a Benjaminian framework, to draw on the auratic value of an original to promote reproductions is one thing, but to weaken the auratic value of this original is another.

In this respect, Baudrillard’s argument that pretending “leaves the principle of reality intact” whereas “simulation threatens the difference between the ‘true’ and the ‘false,’ the ‘real’ and the ‘imaginary’” 97 helps delineate the distinction between black plastic and faux-argillite. The difference between the two is similar to the distinction Baudrillard makes between the person who fakes an illness by staying in bed and the person who simulates illness by producing its symptoms. 98 Because faux-argillite produces the ‘symptoms’ of argillite – not just a vague resemblance of colour, but both its ‘feel’ and its ‘look’ – it can be seen as substituting the ‘signs’ of argillite for argillite – at least in certain contexts and for certain people. In settings where argillite carvings are sold and in the minds of those who know argillite, the ‘really real’ existence of argillite is not in question. But in situations where all that is offered as a referent for the idea of argillite is black plastic and faux-argillite – for instance, if someone goes from store to store down Water Street in Gastown and sees line-up after line-up of black carvings but fails to enter any of the galleries where actual argillite carvings are sold – the distance between pretending and simulating closes up. Indeed, in a world populated with black plastic and faux-argillite but not

97 Ibid., 3.
98 Ibid.
argillite itself, the domain of the ‘really real’ might fall onto faux-argillite (even more so when this faux-argillite comes with other legitimating assets such as being authorized reproductions). Even though the Northwest Coast art market is not divided into two parallel worlds, one of them entirely devoid of argillite, the other devoted to its promotion to the exclusion of its imitations, it is possible for certain individuals to follow a trajectory where the only symptoms of argillite they encounter are those of faux-argillite. In those cases, even when the original intention behind faux-argillite products was not an inherently deceptive one, what was initially designed to achieve a high level of resemblance comes closer to achieving simulacrum.

However, argillite does not provide an example of Baudrillard’s dramatic assertion that the image “masks the absence of a profound reality” and even further, “has no relation to any reality whatsoever”.\(^9\)\(^9\) Currently, the reality of argillite is not in question, and faux-argillite can hardly be said to be “its own pure simulacrum”.\(^10\)\(^0\) It does not accomplish a complete reversal of priority between the original and the copy, with argillite pieces being claimed as examples of faux-faux-argillite, labels in the likeness of “This material symbolizes the look and feel of faux-argillite” and consumers refraining from purchasing these pieces because they do not bear the ‘authenticating medallions’ that replicas do. However, there is indeed a concern that with every improvement in the ability of faux-argillite to imitate argillite, resemblance comes one step closer to performing as a simulacrum. In this context, it is interesting to examine examples that push things in the other direction. For instance, two prominent Haida artists have recently created artworks that play on argillite and the production of its ‘symptoms.’ As we will see in the following section, these works muddle the progression of faux-argillite towards the simulacrum by reaffirming argillite’s primacy over its representation, as well as its exclusiveness as a Haida substance.

7.2.5 Injecting the model into the representation

Creating a car or a piano to scale in argillite is no easy task. Two Vancouver-based Haida artists, Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas and Jay Simeon, have taken up these respective challenges. In addition to being extremely expensive, carving such large-scale pieces out of argillite would be, if not impossible, incredibly difficult due to the stone’s fragility as well as the quantity of

\(^{99}\) Ibid., 6.
\(^{100}\) Ibid.
stone that would need to be quarried and then carried back (on foot, no less). Creating a car or a piano that looks like it is made out of argillite may be easier, but also comes with its own sets of challenges. With or without intimate familiarity with the stone, simulating argillite is by no means easy to achieve. Its colour, its texture, and the particular way in which it absorbs and reflects light is difficult to achieve in other materials. Confronted with this task, both Yaghulanaas and Simeon chose to create artworks that are hybrids of argillite and the simulation of argillite.

In 2007, Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas was the artist-in-residence at the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia. The intervention in the museum space that resulted from his stay, Meddling in the Museum, consisted of three site-specific installations. One of them, titled Pedal to the Meddle, was located next to Reid’s Raven and the First Men in the Bill Reid Rotunda. The description provided by MOA curator Karen Duffek gives a general sense of the scene: “A gutted Pontiac Firefly, painted with a mixture of black autobody enamel and argillite dust, its mirrors reflective with copper leaf, appears to be careening out of the Rotunda, escaping the Museum with a 7.5-metre cedar canoe tied on its roof”.

The canoe is not just any canoe, but one created by Haida artists Bill Reid and Guujaaw, as well as Kwakwa’wakw artists Beau Dick and Simon Dick. As reported in a Galleries West profile, Yaghulanaas used the argillite dust collected over 30 years by his friend, the carver Ronnie Russ to produce three cans of dark paint. In a public talk at MOA on July 10th 2007, Yahgulanaas explained that his idea was to make the car look like it had been carved entirely out of argillite. He felt this could not be achieved with paint alone, and even with the use of argillite dust, several attempts had to be made before the artist considered the concoction imitated argillite well enough. Once painted and loaded with the canoe, the car could symbolize the Haida coming into the museum space to “steal the canoe back”.

In 2009, Jay Simeon was commissioned by Tom Lee Music to design a one-of-a-kind grand piano. The design of Kuniisii – Music and Mythology was painted onto a Steinway model D by Simeon, using ground argillite mixed with acrylic paint. When it was unveiled on July 23, 2009 at the Vancouver Convention Center, the piece was presented as the “world’s first Haida Art

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103 Yahgulanaas explained that the result was slightly shinier and slicker than he would have liked due to the technical constraint of using industrial paint that could be sprayed onto the car.
104 Yahgulanaas, quoted in Ramsey, “Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas,” 34.
Case piano” and the custom-made paint was highlighted as “one of the five things that made the project so special,” second only to the prestigious 9 ft piano itself.\textsuperscript{105} One of the speakers at the piano’s inauguration, Graham Blank (Tom Lee Music General Manager in Vancouver), did not miss this opportunity to point out that argillite is “a stone that is only found \cite{106} the Queen Charlotte Islands of B.C.”\textsuperscript{106} It was also announced that partial proceeds from the sale of \textit{Kuniisii} would be donated to the Lions Society of BC for children with disabilities (LSBC). Himself an argillite carver of repute, Simeon had asked one of his relatives to produce 10 to 15 pounds of argillite dust to be mixed in with the paint. Simeon developed this special paint with the engineers that also worked for the LSBC on the \textit{Eagles in the City} public art project. Like with Yaghulanaas, it took several tries before they obtained a satisfactory result. As Simeon commented, a light grain in the paint attested to the fact that the argillite had “resisted” through this process. Applied onto the matte ebony surface of the piano, the dark grey design looks carved into a lightly polished piece of argillite.

At a superficial level, both pieces look like objects carved out of argillite and as such have an imitative quality. But both pieces also do much more than imitate: first, they are indeed, if only partially, made out of argillite; second, they reaffirm the cultural value of argillite as a specifically Haida medium. The effectiveness of the latter is intimately tied to the former. Since only Haida individuals have access to argillite, only they can integrate argillite into their simulation of argillite.\textsuperscript{107} Also, as a material index of these two artists’ Haida identity, the argillite dust lends the pieces a cultural authority that is even harder to simulate than argillite itself. Ultimately, this makes the fact that the pieces are not made entirely out of argillite completely secondary to their value as examples of Haida cultural expression.

Through the use of argillite to simulate argillite, both pieces are a détournement of imitation, taking it down a path in which the distinction between the real and its semblance is blurred. Instead of threatening the value of argillite, these pieces reinforce it: they assert that a culturally legitimate imitation of argillite is one that is made with argillite. Both pieces show that it is not the process of imitation as such that implies that a piece is seceded from the values associated with the idea of argillite. In turn, they pose the question of the relationship between the

\textsuperscript{\textnormal{105}} Tom Lee Music Canada, \textit{Kuniisii - Music & Mythology Steinway Art Case Piano Ceremony - Vancouver Canada} You Tube, 2009, \url{http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k9DUHqL4s8s} accessed August 1, 2011, 11:00 am.

\textsuperscript{\textnormal{106}} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{\textnormal{107}} For instance, others are left to use such materials as quartz, which argillite from Haida Gwaii precisely does not contain (Drew and Wilson, \textit{Argillite, Art of the Haida}, 43.)
original and its copy not only in terms of argillite’s relationship to its imitations, but also in terms of argillite’s exclusive bind to the Haida. As artworks that both resemble argillite carvings and are injected with argillite itself, these pieces maintain the primacy of the real over its representation. As a Haida Art Case piano and a Haida vehicle of cultural re-appropriation, they reassert argillite as a Haida substance. By doing this, these works help make the case that those who produce imitations of argillite, no matter how bad or good a job they do to produce the symptoms of argillite, can be considered accountable to the Haida, in a both figurative and economic sense. It is an argument I have heard made on several occasions that argillite-like products draw a good part of their appeal from referencing argillite as a culturally distinct material, and that this in turn indebts their makers to, one way or the other, “give a cut to the Haida,” as one artist put it. However, even when artware items are not in any sense made by Haida individuals and are not made from an existing argillite model, the argument could theoretically still hold. Indeed, their value is closely related to that of argillite, which itself is intimately tied both to the guardedness of the Haida towards this stone as their inalienable possession, and their circulation of it in its only alienable form: art made for sale. Without this idea of argillite, argillite-like items would have nothing at all on the pariahs of artware that are plastic totem poles.

Attitudes towards the market of imitations of argillite are formulated at the junction between the ontological (e.g. “What is this?”), the praxeological (e.g. “How is it being presented?”), and the axiological (e.g. “What are its values?”). In other words, opinions about this market rarely focus on only one aspect, such as whether the items are authorized reproductions or not, who is involved in their production, how truthfully they are being marketed, what their level of quality is, or what kinds of prices they fetch. It is usually based on the answers to a combination of these questions that opinions about the ethics and legitimacy of imitations of argillite are formed. However, ultimately, the answer to the question “Who benefits from the existence of these items?” does greatly influence how severely those items are judged. This is consistent with the fact that, in the current capitalist context, questions of ethics tend to be managed both in terms of market shares and of profit (re)distribution. According to this logic,

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108 The example I described above of a museum paying the Haida royalties on the sale of reproductions of argillite objects reflects this premise.
business practices tend to be considered more ethical when they benefit the ‘right people’ – a category that will in many cases be hotly contested\textsuperscript{110} – than when they do not (see Chapters 5 and 8). The market of argillite and argillite-like items is no exception. Since argillite carvings have been commodities from the very start, the question posed is not whether the process of commodification is ethical or not, but whether the benefits of this commodification are distributed ethically.\textsuperscript{111}

Although it might be argued that saying the Haida are entitled to being remunerated by companies that reference argillite in their products is inconsistent with a capitalist logic, it is actually relatively easy to show that the inverse is true. A classical economic approach considers the value of a product to come from the relationship between supply and demand. Within this framework, it could be argued that those who control supply are in part responsible for creating value. Although there is, to say the least, no shortage of imitations of argillite, the supply of the argillite carvings they reference – the very carvings that make their plastic more valuable than other kinds of plastic – is in the hands of the Haida. Thus, the Haida play an important part in the creation of value, even with respect to the market of imitations. In addition, even considered through a more labour-centered approach to value production under capitalism, it can be argued that it is the labour of the Haida of transforming raw argillite into carvings over the last two centuries that has produced the value of this stone, a value that in turn makes the appeal of argillite-like products. For this reason, it can be argued that an equitable distribution of the profits generated by the sale of the latter products, even when their production does not directly involve Haida labour, would count Haida stakeholders among its beneficiaries. That said, there is currently no legal framework requiring compensation for this kind of value production (how does one go about patenting aura?). Nonetheless, even though it currently remains up to producers of argillite-like products to decide whether or not to include Haida stakeholders in their equation, this decision has implications for whether or not they will be perceived to recognize those whose material of cultural value made the business of argillite-like products possible.

\textsuperscript{110} Comaroff and Comaroff, \textit{Ethnicity, Inc.}, 60–85.
\textsuperscript{111} As I have discussed in Chapter 5, the morality of business transactions is not inherent, but is instead assessed relative to socially- and culturally- constituted points of reference.
Coda

Although, as a category, argillite carving can be said to have started its career as the “first form of tourist art” – in the literal sense that it was made for consumption by visitors of Haida territory – it is now the imitation of argillite carvings that tends to be labelled as such – in the more metaphorical sense that it targets those who are not aware of, are indifferent to, or cannot afford to sustain the distinction between the stone that comes from Haida territory and the composite materials that imitate it. Moreover, these individuals are not the primary audience of the artworks of Yaghulanaas and Simeon, showing that the symptoms of argillite – real, simulated, or both – no longer have one specific assigned audience. Philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault have both invited a reversal of the Platonist approach that would rid contemporary thought of the encumbering dichotomy that places the original and reality on one side, and the copy and false appearances on the other. According to Foucault, this reversal cannot be achieved by “reinstating the rights of appearances, ascribing to them a solidity and meaning” – “these timid creatures should not be encouraged to stand upright”.¹¹² In this sense, because Kuniisii and Pedal to the Meddle prop up a simulation of argillite by injecting it with both the materiality (dust) and the idea of argillite (tied to their Haida identity), these artworks do not fully reverse the Platonist premise of the dichotomy of truth and false appearances, but reaffirm the idea of argillite as a quintessential Haida substance, one that is only sent to travel around the world in the form of art. Thus, while on the one hand the exploration of a variety of materials drives much of contemporary Northwest Coast art production, on the other hand there is little interest in divorcing certain other materials (such as argillite, but also, as we have seen in section 7.1, cedar) from their strong association with circumscribed geographies and identities. Beyond the realm of art production, this is understandable in light of the political climate surrounding land ownership and resource extraction in British Columbia. Whether a material is sheltered from large scale quarrying like argillite or in the front lines of industrial exploitation like cedar, the stakes are high in the assertion of privileged associations between land, resources, cultural practices, and identities. In this context, a full reversal of the Platonist framework could be costly. Thus, authoritative reassertions of the value of particular materials will likely continue to be made by in the hopes of keeping spectres of simulacra at a safe distance from them.

Figure 13: Culturally Modified Tree.
A tree being culturally modified by bark stripping. Hand-width bark strips ensure that the tree will easily recover from this harvest. Photo by the author, August 22, 2007.
8 Sustainability, Reciprocity, and Culturally Modified Capitalism

For all their transformative power, as anthropologists have repeatedly insisted, [the] material and cultural forces [of capitalism] do not have simple, homogenizing effects. They are, in some measure, refracted, redeployed, domesticated, or resisted wherever they come to rest.

- Jean and John L. Comaroff ¹

The world-wide advance of capitalism has been seen as inevitably leading to the repression of practices inconsistent with its internal logic, and consequently to the destruction of pre-existing local economic systems, among other cultural specificities. As many before me have argued – and as the above quote by the Comaroffs illustrates – this view obscures the fact that capitalism rarely if ever manifests itself in the form of a ‘pure’ economic model.² It has also been demonstrated that capitalism is an economic model with which non-European peoples have been interacting with for several centuries now, contrary to the notion that they would only have encountered it with the most recent developments of globalization.³ Ethnographic work has helped demonstrate that underlying the fear of global cultural homogenization is largely unfounded due to the ability of peoples around the world to make their worldviews bear on the capitalist model.⁴ Given the resilience demonstrated by the Indigenous peoples of the Pacific Northwest in the face of disease, theft, and violence,⁵ it comes as no surprise that a market that is based on their cultural resources such as the Native Northwest Coast artware industry would be shaped by pressure from its Aboriginal stakeholders that this market not to align itself neatly with the idea of capitalism as a system that places individual wealth accumulation at the heart of economic activity.

¹ Millennial Capitalism and the Culture of Neoliberalism, 14.
³ Wolf, Europe and the People Without History.
⁵ Cole and Chaikin, An Iron Hand Upon the People; Mique’l Icesis Askren, From Negative to Positive B.A. Haldane, Nineteenth Century Tsimshian Photographer (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 2006); Ian Gill, All That We Say Is Ours: Guujaaw and the Reawakening of the Haida Nation (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2009); Arthur J. Ray, An Illustrated History of Canada’s Native People: I Have Lived Here Since the World Began, Rev. and expanded ed (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 2010).
As illustrated in Chapter 2, this industry has a history of being considered as bearing much potential for furthering economic development in Aboriginal communities. However, the industry is also a cause for concern among those who believe it is a field of business that thrives on taking risks with Aboriginal cultural resources, without guarantees of significant benefits for those whose resources are at stake. As a result of this tension, the practices and values that are currently being put forth to transform the Native Northwest Coast artware industry into a “new and improved” version of itself often reflect an adherence to both a capitalist framework and to local economic models. It is in this sense that I consider that this industry has been developing into a form of Culturally Modified Capitalism. I use this expression to describe a form of what Daniel Miller calls ‘organic capitalism’ in the sense that its norms and procedures have more to do with historical developments than the abstract model or ideal of capitalism as an economic system. It also bears similarities with what Slavoj Žižek alternatively calls “cultural capitalism” and “post-modern capitalism” – an economic system where the market provides not goods but ‘experiences,’ including that of thinking it is possible to alleviate the poverty of Others through individual consumerist acts. However, the expression Culturally Modified Capitalism is also meant to place emphasis on the fact that the norms and procedures of this market, including those relating to “compassionate consumption”, are being shaped specifically in relationship to the values and practices of reciprocity and sustainability put forward in Pacific Northwest societies.

I begin by examining the terms of reference that are central to the argument of this chapter, including how such concepts as Culturally Modified Capitalism, capitalism, sustainability, and reciprocity can be understood in relation to the Native Northwest Coast artware industry (section 8.1). I then discuss in more detail how the ideas of sustainability (section 8.2) and reciprocity (section 8.3) are being used to transform the Native Northwest Coast artware industry into an example of Culturally Modified Capitalism.

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6 Miller, Capitalism, 55.
7 Žižek, First as Tragedy, Then as Farce.
8 Lisa Ann Richey and Stefano Ponte, Brand Aid: Shopping Well to Save the World (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).
8.1 Context and Terms

8.1.1 Culturally Modified Capitalism

As noted in the introduction of this dissertation, my use of the expression *Culturally Modified Capitalism* is a reference to the designation of *Culturally Modified Tree* or CMT. This designation describes a tree altered by Indigenous uses of the forest, such as the harvesting of wood planks and bark. In British Columbia, CMTs are considered a form of heritage and are protected from logging by the *BC Heritage Conservation Act*. The designation conveys a sense that the cultural value of the tree exceeds its value as a natural resource. Ironically, the tree has become a CMT precisely because of its initial harvesting, and thus its consideration as a resource. However, there is a difference between a tree’s definitive logging on the one hand, and harvesting methods that purposely keep a tree alive, on the other. In a sense, the difference between what capitalism is often feared to do and the hopes some place in what I call *Culturally Modified Capitalism* is just that: the difference between a system in which the harvesting of resources leads to their depletion, and a system in which harvesting is conducted in such a way as to preserve the resource in question. However, the many challenges in the protection of heritage and resources do not end with such things as the designation of CMTs (the protection of one CMT does little for the preservation of the trees surrounding it, and the logging of the latter ultimately compromises the preservation of the spared CMT). Similarly, discussing the Native Northwest Coast artware market’s transformation into *Culturally Modified Capitalism* is not meant to suggest that it would be a system in which problems of resource exploitation and depletion become solved – far from that. The values and practices of sustainability and reciprocity currently being put forth in this market are as much the expression of an awareness of the persistence of these problems as an attempt at their resolution.

All forms of capitalism being cultural,\(^9\) the expression *Culturally Modified Capitalism* does not refer to the modification by ‘culture’ of a so-called ‘natural’ economic system or order.\(^10\) Instead, I use the expression to convey the ways in which particular values and practices inflect the bare bones (or should I say, the heartwood) of what is considered to constitute capitalism, this economic system with elusive and elastic contours.\(^11\) However, the phenomenon after which I

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\(^10\) For a discussion of this ideology, see Žižek, *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce*, 24–25.

\(^11\) Though my focus is on the Native Northwest Coast artware industry in Vancouver, similar processes can of course be observed in other regions of the world and is not limited to Indigenous or ‘non-Western’ modifications of
have coined the concept of *Culturally Modified Capitalism* is the efforts being expended to place sustainability and reciprocity as articulated in Pacific Northwest societies at the heart of the Native Northwest Coast artware industry.

The transfer of meaning from the idea of CMTs to that of *Culturally Modified Capitalism* is not one of exact parallelism, however. Perhaps the most evident correspondence would be that if the designation of Culturally Modified Tree is meant to protect trees, then *Culturally Modified Capitalism* would in effect designate a system that preserves capitalism. This is not entirely false, as we will see: for some, it is under the condition of certain modifications that the artware industry becomes a kind of capitalist enterprise that is deemed worth developing rather than curtailing. However, a slightly less direct comparison can also be made: the CMT designation seeks not only to preserve the tree as a tangible object, but also the intangible cultural heritage it embodies. In the case of the Native Northwest Coast artware market, the cultural modification of capitalism emerges from a desire to harness the tangible means of mass-production and mass-distribution the artware industry supposes for the purpose of preserving cultural resources. Paradoxically, these are the very heritage and resources that are often seen as being endangered by the processes of commodification that are felt to epitomize capitalism, that system in which virtually anything can have a price. Therein lie the tensions that run through the Native Northwest Coast artware industry: How can heritage be preserved and at the same time be used as a resource? How can *expending* heritage to produce tangible economic resources be a means not only to preserve it, but also to *expand* it as an intangible resource? As discussed in Chapter 2, these sorts of questions are not new, as they have informed the market’s development for over a century.

In the Native Northwest Coast artware industry as in many other fields, some believe that working within the capitalist model – in one of its succeeding iterations – has been unavoidable for some time now. Although some industry participants did express ambivalent feelings regarding their participation in capitalism, very few voiced outright rejection of this economic system. This includes a number of Aboriginal industry participants who emphasized the

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*capitalism. As stated in the 2001 handbook of *Culturally Modified Trees of British Columbia*, “There are no reasons why the term ‘CMT’ could not be applied to a tree altered by non-native people. However, the term is commonly used to refer to trees modified by native people in the course of traditional tree utilization, and is used as such in this Handbook” B.C. Ministry of Small Business, Tourism and Culture, *Culturally Modified Trees of British Columbia: Version 2.0*, 2001. Similarly, I suggest that it is possible to speak of *Culturally Modified Capitalism* in cases where non-Aboriginal values and practices inflect the economic model of capitalism.*
importance of business skills and entrepreneurship, clearly embracing many of the features and
d values of capitalism. I am therefore cautious not to misread the emphasis that these same
individuals also placed on the ideas of reciprocity and sustainability as an overt and direct form
of resistance to or push against capitalism.

Thus, to a large extent, when industry stakeholders insist on the importance of
redistribution practices, their focus is not on doing away with capitalism, but rather on finding
ways of “doing business” in the capitalist sense, while “doing business” as understood in the
Pacific Northwest Indigenous sense. As I will explain in more detail below, such redistribution is
related to a system involving generalized reciprocity and is now commonly compared to or
understood as a form of ‘sustainable resource management.’ Such concepts are not foreign to
capitalist systems; therefore, it is not that capitalism and Indigenous economies can be pitted
against one another as entirely distinct models, nor even that Culturally Modified Capitalism is
nothing more than a hybrid between the two.\footnote{With respect to developments in Aboriginal labour since settlement, John Sutton Lutz has argued that Aboriginal Peoples “built themselves a new, distinctive economy out of the available options, choosing independence over anyone of wage labour, state support, or “living off the land”.” Lutz, Makuk, 305. Rather than looking at this economy as located “between” the economic models of “tradition” or those of “modernity”, Lutz suggests to see it as a “moditional economy” that is “as flexible and responsive to change as… capitalism” Ibid. Even though the Native Northwest Coast artware market is not itself “moditional”, arguably the practice of such a flexible economy had set a precedent for the intertwinement of capitalist and Indigenous economic models as exemplified by the development of the artware market into a form of Culturally Modified Capitalism.} Rather, it is that some of the participants in the
Native Northwest Coast artware industry have come to expect from what they recognize to be a
capitalist market that it can be used to help sustain values and ways of life that would typically
not be considered characteristic of capitalist societies. In turn, they believe that deploying efforts
to sustain these values and ways of life has meaning and importance within and not necessarily
against a capitalist system.

For example, this was made obvious to me during a conversation with a particularly
sustainability- and reciprocity-minded Aboriginal artware company owner. He insisted on the
importance of reciprocity and ‘giving back’ and the crucial importance of contributing to the
cultural vitality of Aboriginal people. In the middle of his impassioned speech, he paused, looked
at me, and said: “Just to be clear: there is nothing wrong with an Aboriginal person making
money,” as if to dispel any ambiguity that may linger in my own and in mainstream views on the
question. This conversation was also one of many instances in which it was made clear to me that
the expectation of reciprocity should not be seen as negating the possibility of wealth
accumulation and personal success. Such a negation would in any case be antithetical to the accumulation required of chiefs prior to the mass give-aways conducted during potlatches and through which they assert their status.

Irrespective of cultural background, none of the dozens of individuals I spoke to during my research pretended that things like money and career advancement had nothing to do with why they participated in the artware industry. However, the notion that they should ‘give back’ was explained to me both as an Indigenous measure of success, and one of several mechanisms that could help protect Aboriginal cultural resources from the threat of an uncontrolled market, or rather from a market over which Aboriginal people do not have control. In sum, the redistribution practices that are put forward by industry stakeholders are conceptualized as a way to make the artware industry fulfill its promise to help sustain Aboriginal ways of life and cultural expressions, beyond what it can do to sustain the livelihood of individual industry participants.

In order to understand why the Native Northwest Coast artware industry can be considered a form of *Culturally Modified Capitalism*, it is necessary to take a few steps back and provide a point of reference for the kind of ‘capitalist model’ that is being modified. The following section addresses this question by discussing the practices and values that tend to be associated with the ‘capitalist model’ and differ from those that tend to be associated with the Pacific Northwest economic model.

### 8.1.2 Capitalism(s)

As noted in the Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology, “capitalism eludes its definitions”.\(^{13}\) It is difficult to say what exactly constitutes ‘pure capitalism’ and even more difficult to find a place where it is being carried out.\(^{14}\) Even in the most libertarian of nations, markets are affected by society and polity. And yet, as argued by George Dalton, the ideology of laissez-faire capitalism outlived the structural reforms that have rendered the idea that the market economy was uncontrolled altogether fictitious.\(^{15}\) As noted by Daniel Miller, “the ideals of a totally free market, of a pure optimizing rationality choosing freely between utilities, etc., would seem quite bizarre to lay individuals reflecting on their own society, but have been maintained in

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14 See Miller, *Capitalism*.
15 Dalton, “Primitive, Archaic, and Modern Economies: Karl Polanyi’s Contribution to Economic Anthropology and Comparative Economy.”
the esoteric textbooks of this increasingly influential discipline [of economics].” A century after Max Weber discussed the relationship between the Protestant ethic and the rise of capitalism, the ‘spirit of capitalism’ has found myriads of other “elective affinities” just as Weber himself had imagined it could. Even what has recently been described as the ‘new’ spirit of capitalism will likely become quickly outdated. Considering the variety of past and existing capitalsisms, the unqualified and singular word ‘capitalism’ may seem empty of meaning altogether. And yet, its prominent place in everyday vocabulary suggests that it does in fact carry meaning. However, perhaps this referent is not to the attributes of one specific economic system, but rather a set of values and practices believed to be found across various iterations of the capitalist system (including when it is in crisis as it has been since 2008).

What most definitions of capitalism have in common is, simply put, that it is an economic system in which the means of production are privately owned and are operated for profit. However, this minimal definition is not enough to clearly distinguish capitalism from Indigenous Pacific Northwest economies. For instance, anthropologists Charles Menzies and Caroline Butler have shown that Tsimshian society operates “within a noncapitalist economy”, and yet its social organization governs “ownership of, access to, and rights of use of resource-gathering locations,” and the circulation of these resources involves “trade for economic benefit”. What makes the Tsimshian system noncapitalist is neither the absence of privately owned means of production, nor the absence of activities geared towards economic benefit, but the fact that the wealth produced through such activities in excess of one’s needs (broadly defined) are not meant to be accumulated (‘stockpiled’) but should be redistributed. It is on this kind of difference that I center my argument when I say that the Pacific Northwest values and practices of reciprocity inflect the form taken by the capitalist model in the Native Northwest artware industry.

During my fieldwork, whereas the importance of ‘giving back’ was a recurrent and impassioned topic of conversation, ‘capitalism’ as such was only rarely brought up. In the few instances when it was explicitly discussed, it was not the object of a technical debate as to what

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16 Miller, Capitalism, 37.
18 The territories and contemporary villages of the Tsimshian people are spread along the northern coast of British Columbia and inland along the Skeena River. While one cannot generalize the specifics of Tsimshian social organization to all Aboriginal peoples of the Pacific Northwest, the argument made by Menzies and Butler about their economic system largely applies to the other groups of coastal British Columbia.
20 Ibid., 463 nn.31–32.
constitutes ‘capitalism’ and what does not. There were many more instances where capitalism was the more implicit backdrop of discussions about the industry and its effects on Aboriginal cultural resources. In these conversations, to be schematic, control and redistribution were put forward as necessary, while absence of regulation and greed were seen as threats embedded in the very existence of the market. In sum, though I encountered little forthright anti-capitalism sentiment, I did encounter much concern about the idea of a Native Northwest Coast artware industry functioning as a free market where wealth accumulation by certain individuals (non-Aboriginal company owners in particular, but not only) would be allowed to trump everything else.

In this respect, the role imparted and value afforded to individualistic pursuits by such foundational thinkers as Adam Smith and Karl Marx help set apart their ideal-typical understandings of capitalism. As is well-known, Smith believed that individuals pursuing their own interests would result in welfare at the scale of society, while Marx believed it would be collective, and indeed global, mobilization in the name of class interests that would lead to the well-being of individuals. With this in mind, it is interesting to contrast the classic Marxist idea of capitalism as the extraction of surplus value from workers by owners of the means of production with the contemporary neoliberal viewpoint of Matthew Bishop (US Business Editor and New York Bureau Chief of The Economist). According to Bishop, “Capitalism is a free-market system built on private ownership, in particular, the idea that owners of capital have property rights that entitle them to earn a profit as a reward for putting their capital at risk in some form of economic activity”. While these two descriptions of the structures of capitalism are broadly similar, the exploitation of man by man embedded in Marx’s definition stands in contrast with Bishop’s notion that profit is a ‘reward’ to which the owners of capital are entitled as the bearers of risk. Interestingly, with their focus on the dangers of exploitation, one might say that many of the critiques I heard voiced against the current configuration of the Native Northwest Coast artware industry have a Marxist bent; one might also interpret the suggestion that reciprocity might be a buffer against the industry’s potentially exploitative disposition as pushing back against the capitalist model. However, the kind of reciprocity put forward as a corrective to exploitation is not antithetical to the notion that risk-taking is what warrants

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21 Marx, Capital.
entitlement to profit: indeed, it is in part as bearers of risk that those whose culture is being commodified claim their fair share of returns.

Discussions about what companies make of their profits often quickly slipped into the value-laden question of what should be done with these profits. As I have explained in Chapter 5, points of view on this question varied greatly according to the resources from which these profits were seen to be primarily derived. For example, not everyone agreed on the relative level of returns warranted by the investment of economic capital by the company on the one hand, and the investment of cultural capital by the artists, on the other. Both investments are needed for artware to exist. However, some will point out that without the initial investment of the artware company, there would be no wares on which to reproduce the work of the artists, while others will assert that the artists’ work is in fact the foundational investment in that, without it, there would be no artware but only wares. In other words, at the scale of the industry as a whole, artware companies – those who own the means of production and have invested in the development of the industry – are not the only ones putting their resources at risk; the argument can be made that one of the major investments being made into the industry are the cultural resources of Aboriginal peoples. The value of these resources may be difficult to measure in monetary terms but would be difficult to deny if only on the account of the fact that the Native Northwest Coast artware industry would not exist without them. For this reason, the pressure put on companies to find ways to ‘give back’ can be seen as a way to instate Aboriginal peoples as collective investors and bearers of risks, entitling them to receive rewards from the Native Northwest Coast artware industry, beyond what specific individuals might receive in exchange for their artwork. In other words, even though redistribution as practiced in the Pacific Northwest is not in and of itself a feature of the capitalist model, it can be translated into capitalist terms. This relatively easy translation helps explain why a number of companies are, at least in theory, receptive to the injunction to “give back” and apparently do not see it as reflecting any kind of anti-capitalist sentiment.

8.1.3 Sustainability and reciprocity in the Pacific Northwest

Anthropologists are well positioned both to argue that the inflection of capitalism by local economic models occurs everywhere in the world, and to provide examples showing that such inflections via notions of sustainability and reciprocity are not confined to the Pacific Northwest.
For a start, as Marcel Mauss’s foundational *The Gift*\(^{23}\) and its many subsequent commentaries have shown,\(^{24}\) ‘reciprocity’ is by no means an attribute specific to Pacific Northwest Indigenous economy. Also, while the principles of ‘sustainability’ are often used to describe Indigenous models of resource management in the Pacific Northwest, they have also been championed globally as a means to better manage resources in the long term and the rhetoric of sustainable development has now become an integral part of mainstream discourse about social change. For instance, as pointed out by anthropologist Andrea Muehlebach, groups such as the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Peoples (WGIP) have been putting forward the idea that Indigenous people are environmental stewards concerned with the “rights of future generations” for decades before such concerns and the practices that address them became associated with the idea of ‘sustainable development’.\(^{25}\) In WGIP discourses, Indigenous peoples are presented as having in common a holistic worldview, whereby social, economic, ecological, and political injustice are seen as intrinsically connected.\(^{26}\) They are also portrayed as having a “relationship to the land that is inherently moral – that is, non-destructive”.\(^{27}\)

However, in this chapter I will not be unpacking the discourses of transnational Indigenous movements. Rather, I will be making connections between more culturally specific discourses about such things as sustainability and the kinds of practices of redistribution that are being promoted in the artware industry. I argue that beyond that which can be observed cross-culturally, the economy of Native Northwest Coast artware exhibits culturally specific modifications crystallized around the values of sustainability and reciprocity in their articulation with local Indigenous worldviews and practices, including those reflected in the potlatch economy.\(^ {28}\) Over a century and a half of anthropological research in the Pacific Northwest, a

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\(^{23}\) *The Gift; Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*[1924].


\(^{26}\) Ibid., 430–431.

\(^{27}\) Ibid., 426.

\(^{28}\) As John Sutton Lutz has explained, welfare payments are another example of an economic transaction that would typically be considered “non-Indigenous” but that Aboriginal people could nonetheless make sense of through Indigenous economic models: “In the coastal cultures, where wealth was unevenly distributed, the wealth were obliged to take care of the poor. To maintain one’s high status meant regularly delivering food and wealth to other
great number of different interpretations of the potlatch have been offered. Their comprehensive review could be the object of an entire dissertation. Here, I will limit myself to providing an overview of the ways in which these analyses frame mass give-aways in relation to the ideas of reciprocity and sustainability.

In general, ‘sustainability’ is not to be confused with practices that limit resource extraction to ‘subsistence’ needs to the exclusion of economic benefit through trade. In the Pacific Northwest, where practices of long distance trade largely predate the colonial encounter, what is commonly referred to as ‘sustainable resource management’ is practiced by efficiently extracting resources, including for economic benefit, combined with care for the conditions (ecological, social, and otherwise) required for the perpetuation of these resources. Similarly, ‘reciprocity’ does not always imply a system of exchange organized around maintaining a balance between what has been given and what has been received by each individual or group involved. In the Pacific Northwest, best known to anthropologists through the institution of the potlatch, disposal of wealth is seen to override accumulation, which is carried out for the purpose of redistribution. However, reciprocity is generally understood as the mass-redistribution of what has been amassed by an individual or family, not as a means of social equalization, but as a mechanism in support of social structures, including hierarchies.

Homer G. Barnett defined the potlatch as “a congregation of people, ceremoniously and often individually invited to witness a demonstration of family prerogative”. In his view, the goods distributed are not loans to the guests, but rather “payment[s] for services rendered” by the attendees as witnesses, or payments “in return for the… benefits of labor and ceremonial prerogative”. Potlatch goods are only secondarily, if at all, ‘capital’ or ‘prestige’ investments: they are primarily gifts or “a favor unconditionally bestowed”. The host calls witnesses to

people. … Relief was easily assimilated into the aboriginal version of a subsistence/prestige economy, in which those who had food, like the Indian Agent, were obliged to share it with those who did not” Lutz, Makuk, 287. Lutz even remarks that “when an Indian Agent distributed food as relief, this action was referred to by the Chinook jargon word ‘potlatch’” Ibid..


32 Ibid., 353.
recognize his status and reputation, and his expenditure should be in accordance with “the status he holds or presumes to acquire”.

According to Barnett, potlatch gifts are customary and culturally approved expressions of esteem for self and other, and as such, are “productive of good will.”

Thus “Potlatching to establish position and receiving according to status are complementary aspects of one fact”: giving a potlatch does not validate the status claims of the donor, as the latter must be validated by the other members of society; in turn, this validation “depends upon the good will which the claimant is able to establish among them.” In other words, the validating of status requires the distribution of potlatch gifts by the host to witnesses. Echoing Barnett, Marjorie Halpin also emphasized the importance of witnesses in the potlatches of the Haida “and other Northwest Coast peoples”. She stated that in a potlatch “the crucial distinction is the giving of wealth by the hosts to the guests in payment for the latter’s witnessing the transfer of honorific names and crests from one generation to the next”.

However, other scholars explained wealth distribution from a different angle, including that of ecological and subsistence management.

For instance, according to Wayne Suttles, the function of the Coast Salish potlatch derives from the combination of the individual drive for high status through the manipulation of wealth and the social need for solidarity with respect to the satisfaction of alimentary needs. He argues that in the Coast Salish socio-economic system, the ‘prestige economy’ and the ‘subsistence economy’ form a “single integrated system”.

In other words, the distribution of food, wealth, and high status are interdependent. Coast Salish subsistence relied on an environment characterized by local variation in the occurrence of foods, seasonal variation, and unpredictable fluctuation from year to year. Suttles sees in this variability a motivation for intercommunity cooperation. With temporary unforeseen shortages and surpluses, the exchange between affines by which food could be ‘converted’ into wealth provided a mechanism “by which members of one community could ‘bank’ a temporary surplus of some particular item of diet with members of

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33 Ibid., 354.
34 Ibid., 355.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid.
another community”. According to Suttles, as part of this ‘total socio-economic system,’ the most important function of the potlatch was the redistribution of wealth, which enabled inter-group cooperation to continue as it cyclically restored the ‘purchasing power’ of its partnering communities. Stuart Piddocke later extended Suttles’ hypothesis to the “Southern Kwakiutl”, and Andrew P. Vayda to the Northwest Coast as a whole.

However, Philip Drucker and Robert F. Heizer refuted Suttles’ idea that potlatching is a “food-for-wealth” exchange system put in place to accommodate local economies to fluctuation in natural resources. Against the cultural ecology model, they argued that the potlatch had developed gradually as a mechanism to reinforce certain elements of social organization such as marriage, relationships between affinal kin, inheritance of rights and mortuary rites in honour of deceased chiefs. Also against what others had asserted, Drucker and Heizer further argued that the Kwakiutl [Kwakwaka’wakw] potlatch did not give or create social status. In their view, the potlatch is “a formal procedure for social integration” made to “identify publicly the membership of the group and to define the social status of this membership”. Finally, they also refuted the idea that gift-giving always created a “double-return obligation” that “continued indefinitely, resulting in an endless... geometric progression of the obligations”. The concept of twofold return existed, they explained, but potlatch gifts were not what created such obligations since a chief’s “previous gift was recognized relatively if not in absolute amount”. Thus potlatch gifts could create chains of reciprocal transactions, but not in the form of infinitely growing exchanges of wealth, however. In this respect, Drucker and Heizer’s analysis resonate with Eric Wolf’s discussion of the Kwakiutl [Kwakwaka’wakw] potlatch in the fourth chapter of his book Envisioning Power. Placing emphasis on the context of destabilizing demographics and capitalist pressures, Wolf examined noticeable increases in the quantities of goods distributed through potlatching between the mid-19th century to the early 20th century. However, he

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39 Ibid., 302.
42 Philip Drucker, To Make My Name Good; a Reexamination of the Southern Kwakiutl Potlatch (Berkeley: University of California P, 1967), 8.
43 Ibid., 53.
44 Ibid., 56.
attributed this increase to the effects of colonisation and capitalism on the local socio-economic system, rather than identifying it as a feature of potlatching itself (such as a supposed obligation of double-return).

Wolf describes how, in the late 19th century, the competition over rights and privileges intensified, resulting in an increase in the quantities of goods distributed during potlatches.46 Until the 1830s, despite the growing influence of the capitalist market on the material goods redistributed, the chiefs maintained control over the ritually sanctioned feast foods, retaining the power and influence associated with them.47 According to Wolf, with the increasing flow of money and multiplication of commodities came claims to social mobility by wealthy non-nobles, and a devaluation of the cosmological roots of the Kwakwaka’wakw’s hierarchical social structure. Also, throughout the second part of the 19th century, individualized power coalitions increasingly replaced tribal sub-units (numayms) and tribal affiliations. Wolf believes this put a premium on acquisition of capitalistic wealth, and lessened the chiefs’ control over marriages of women and their numayms’ labour force.48 Though they did not originate in a capitalist system, the giveaways also did not operate entirely outside the market economy, argues Wolf, as the quantity of goods exchanged and loans with interests increased exponentially as a result of capitalist influences, creating inflation in the potlatch system. For Wolf, in an increasingly secularized evaluation of wealth, the introduction of European-made commodities contributed to the development of uniform quantitative standards, almost currency-like.49 Thus, in the encounter of potlatching with capitalism, the gifts that Drucker and Heinzer thought were previously “recognized relatively if not in absolute amount”50 would have come to be valued (and returned) in more absolute terms.

This analysis resonates with Christopher Roth’s analysis of contemporary Tsimshian potlatches.51 Revisiting Mauss’s notion that gift economies bind communities in networks of debt, Roth argues that Tsimshian social reproduction is located not in social mechanisms such as reciprocity, but in a symbolic order maintained by the paying of witnesses on the one hand, and the retention of inalienable wealth, on the other. According to Roth, goods offered to feast guests

46 Ibid., 80.
47 Ibid., 91.
48 Ibid., 93–95.
49 Ibid., 114–118.
50 Drucker, To Make My Name Good; a Reexamination of the Southern Kwakiutl Potlatch, 56.
51 Roth, “Goods, Names, and Selves.”
are not gifts but “payments for witnessing and validating the ceremonial renewal of the potlatch 
hosts’ status, wealth, and legitimacy”.  
A single feast is a closed-system economy of exchange, rather than “one turn in a chain of prestations”.  
Echoing Wolf, Roth explains that goods are transformed in the feast hall into a currency expressing social relations “by coming into a relationship of equivalence with the priceless and inalienable treasures of the hosts”.  
Two kinds of wealth circulate at feasts: 1) tributes flowing upward to the host or host group, and 2) payment for services flowing out of the house as payment to witnessing members of other houses. The sum total of these two flows of wealth is considered “indexical of the host house’s rank and its theoretically inalienable wealth”.  
This wealth distributed stands for the wealth that does not move, “by creating a ritual equation in value between the total alienable wealth and the total inalienable wealth”, creating “a correspondence between the value of the goods amassed and the value of the political support and social validation the hosts garner from their guests”.  
The feast hall thus suspends the commodity potential of the goods and transforms them into gifts, and currency also takes on a ritual quality of inconvertibility: “The entire feast assumes but also establishes a correspondence between the wealth and prestige of the house as a set of ranked names; the money, wealth, and services mobilized; and the prestige attributed to the house by paid, ranked, name-holding witnesses”.  
Thus, for Roth, in Tsimshian potlatches the location of the impulse to reciprocity is not in the gift itself, as argued by Mauss. Rather, it would be the responsibility imposed by the gift to testify that a name is legitimate and has been feasted properly for which reciprocal exchanges would be paying.

With respect to reciprocity, Roth argues that the Tsimshian display “an ethos of generalized (as opposed to balanced) reciprocity”.  
The obligation of reciprocity is predicated on guests performing as witnesses for their hosts and on their need to have the latter be witnesses at their future potlatches. However, Roth argues that this reciprocity is generalized rather than balanced

52 Ibid., 126.
53 Ibid., 129.
54 Ibid., 130.
55 Ibid., 137.
56 Ibid.
57 Ibid.
58 Ibid., 142.
59 Ibid., 125. According to Marshall Sahlins, there are three basic forms of reciprocity: a) generalized, when the transactions are “putatively altruistic, on the line of assistance given, and if possible and necessary, assistance returned”; b) balanced, “the simultaneous exchange of the same types of goods to the same amounts”; c) negative: “the attempt to get something for nothing with impunity” and “transactions opened and conducted toward net utilitarian advantage” Marshall Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics* (Chicago: Aldine-Atherton, 1972), 193–194.
because the composition of the attendance varies from one potlatch to the next, as does the value of what is exchanged. Although the presence of specific individuals is expected, the overall responsibility to attend and witness is borne collectively by the attendance. Instead of simultaneous and equivalent returns, what is expected is that the obligation of redistribution will be carried out over time and across the various groups participating in the potlatch economy.

In the following two sections, I will illustrate how potlatch-informed ideas of sustainability and reciprocity are currently being put forward in the artware industry. I will also discuss how the use of these two ideas to encourage the social transformation of this market reflects some of its stakeholders’ desires to create a form of capitalism they can get behind instead of fight against. In this respect, sustainability and reciprocity are closely related ideas and are often promoted hand in hand by their proponents, in the artware industry and beyond. However, in the interest of clarity, I will tend them in separate sections, beginning with sustainability.

8.2 Sustainability

8.2.1 The many faces of “sustainability”

It is important to recognize that the singular umbrella term of ‘sustainability’ covers a particularly wide range of ideas and practices. Perusing the April 2011 issue of Anthropology News dedicated to sustainability demonstrates just that. One can find almost as many definitions of this term as there are articles published about it in that issue. While for some sustainability is characterized by attempts to “reconcile the historically conflicted development goals of political economies and planetary limitations”, some evoke the Brundtland Commission’s definition of “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. One article argues that sustainability requires placing “humans squarely within the ecosystem equation” to “sustain human communities (including their livelihoods, cultural identities and social networks)”, while also sustaining natural resources and their “conditions of existence”. Another article talks of sustainability as “an understanding of what it means to sustain one’s self, livelihood and very existence in a dynamic and contested environment.”

60 See Trosper, Resilience, Reciprocity and Ecological Economics, 55–65.
environment of risk” — in other words, it is a condition of survival. In yet another article, the concept of sustainability is applied to cultural practices that endure through time, while elsewhere it is presented as reflecting “a sense of civic duty and responsibility for one’s surrounding environment,” as illustrated by good recycling programs. Still in this Anthropology News issue, a broader definition is proposed in an interview with Charles Redman: “bringing together a variety of perspectives... in a way that will lead to a better, all around world”. Finally, in another article it is argued that the concept of sustainability can help students “understand the ways and the extent to which they are interconnected with other peoples and places across the globe, and how their worldviews, values, beliefs and behaviours influence and are influenced by these interconnections”.

Such wide-ranging conceptual approaches are not limited to anthropology publications, and can also be found in sustainability-promoting events. For instance, on April 1st and 2nd 2011, I attended the Global Indigenous Conference in Sty-Wet-Tan, the Great Hall of the UBC First Nations Longhouse. Over these two days, a series of panelists addressed a variety of topics including land and resource rights, Indigenous health, and self-determination, but also sustainability. Over the course of this event, the understandings of sustainability that were put forth ranged from a) an argument in favour of the right of Indigenous people to live and perpetuate their culture, b) environmentally-friendly waste management, and c) the promotion of pan-Indigenous notions of interconnectedness between humans and non-humans.

By noting this variety of perspectives and foci (eight approaches in one journal issue, three approaches in one event), I wish to point out that the many different practices that claim an affiliation to this idea do not all reflect the same understanding of the thinking and practices it entails. In many ways, the word “sustainability” could easily be described in similar terms as I have discussed ‘authenticity’ and ‘collaboration’ in Chapter 5: as an ‘aspirational brand’-turned-‘commodity brand’. From recycling to the development of complex resource management

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models, and from surviving in the face of risk to making the world a “better place” – all can be carried out in the name of “sustainability” and at the same time may not all emerge from the same understanding of this world, and of humankind’s place in it. As I will show in sections 8.2.2 through 8.2.4, the Native Northwest Coast artware industry provides examples of similarly diverse approaches to ‘sustainability’.

8.2.2 Environmental sustainability

I will not dwell on the many examples of Native Northwest Coast products that are labeled ‘sustainable’ because they are reusable, recyclable, or made from easily renewable, recycled, or ecologically harvested materials. These products are developed following the idea that tending to the landfill is a “sustainable” practice. However, given the ever-growing popularity of the term, there has been growing skepticism as to what these products really do for the environment. For instance, after having discussed with artist Jim Hart the efforts of the Haida to plan the management of their forests so that they can still provide resources for at least another five hundred years, he looked at me and asked with a smile: “How do you think trinkets fare into this great scheme of things?”

The companies developing these products are aware that the idea of sustainability is a trend. Genuine environmental concerns aside, these companies are also aware that ‘sustainability’ has become extremely marketable. In this respect, as noted by an artware company-owner, Vancouver has the advantage of counting many Aboriginal art supporters that are also nature and outdoor activity enthusiasts. As he explained, this kind of merchandise can more easily than others be placed in venues that do not specialize in Aboriginal art, but base their image on environmental sensibility. This was confirmed when I visited the Capilano River Hatchery and I noticed that the gift shop carried a number of products by a particular company, almost all of them chosen among its explicitly sustainability-oriented lines. Whether or not the activities of the hatchery would be considered sustainable by environmental experts, the product mix of its gift shop certainly suggested that it was, thereby illustrating the ability of these products to associate a particular image of sustainability with the institutions that sell them. By being both Aboriginal-themed and ‘green,’ such products are meant to communicate both environmental and cultural sustainability. For instance, the company Native Northwest – Art by Native Artists uses the tagline “Designed to Preserve” to cleverly play on a reference to both nature and culture as the
products’ objects of preservation: reusable products would not only help limit the growth of landfills, they would also promote the continued production of Native Northwest Coast art. While such things as reusable shopping bags and travel mugs are being promoted as making contributions to sustainable ideals in both environmental and cultural realms, other initiatives are more centered on sustainability in its social and economic dimensions and it is on these that I now focus my attention.

8.2.3 Socio-economic sustainability

At a basic but essential level, the agenda of sustainability finds expression via the injunction, most often expressed by the artware industry’s Aboriginal stakeholders but also on occasion by some of its non-Aboriginal stakeholders, that this market should provide very concrete means of survival and ultimately contribute to the long term economic development of Aboriginal communities. Far from novel, this idea was already being promoted by the early proponents of the development of the market a century ago, as discussed in Chapter 2. Artware companies that are either Aboriginal-owned or work with Aboriginal artists do indeed contribute to this goal, albeit at markedly varied levels depending on the company.

As discussed in Chapter 5, not all artists who approach artware companies do so from vulnerable positions, far from it. Yet many well-off artists also tie their decision to work in artware at least in part to tending to their basic needs. The idea of “needs” is of course relative: they may include paying a mortgage on an expensive house in the wealthy neighborhood of Kitsilano, and not simply paying a monthly phone bill, but nonetheless relate back to the general idea of using the artware industry to sustain oneself. Even in those cases, however, there remains a difference between, on the one hand, helping provide the conditions of immediate survival of individuals and, on the other hand, committing resources to the long-term economic development of communities. Such contributions can include training and employing Aboriginal individuals, feeding a significant portion of the returns they generate into projects of community development, providing leadership and entrepreneurial role models, and volunteering in Aboriginal organizations.

One striking example of individuals making a combination of such contributions is Pam Baker, of the Squamish Nation, owner of one of the few Aboriginal-owned artware companies of the region. In addition to high fashion pieces, the current focus of her company is to design and
distribute fashion accessories. After having worked as a drug and alcohol counselor, she started coordinating fashion shows to showcase up-and-coming designers from her community as a means to build self-esteem among youth (see Chapter 5). A trained fashion designer herself, she opened the Touch of Culture Fashion School, where she trained dozens of peers. She regularly makes donations to youth-related initiatives, and is the dedicated volunteer coach of Squamish basketball teams. As elected member of the Squamish Nation Band Council, she also spearheaded the creation of the Siyamin Artist Cooperative. As previously mentioned, the cooperative’s main goal is to “Foster the self reliance of the Squamish People by celebrating our Distinct Traditional Culture”. This non-exhaustive description of her activities shows how Pam Baker (and others like her) aim to contribute to the economic development and well-being of her community, beyond what can be achieved through paying market prices for designs.

In contrast, artists being paid what they deem to be satisfactory amounts may be key to the sustainability of art making for the purpose of individual livelihood, but such payments alone cannot address questions of economic development and well-being at the scale of a community or Nation (see Chapter 5). In fact, some relatively simple initiatives in the social arena can potentially do more at the collective level than can payments made to individual artists – though of course one does not exclude the other. For instance, the following exchange with Tsimishian artist Corey Moraes quickly moves from provocative humour to serious considerations about his art and its potential impact on Aboriginal youth and their sexual health:

SR: Are there certain kinds of products or things that you would just refuse to create, like if you were asked by a company…
CM: What, like condoms or something?
SR: I don’t know (laughter), I wasn’t thinking about that, but…
CM: Well… It would have to make sense. Why do they want my image on that product? What is the correlation between my imagery and that product or how they want to market it? I’m open to just about anything, really. Like for instance, if somebody came to me with an idea about condoms, if they, for instance, were interested in promoting safer sex between young Native people and they convinced me that my having my image on the packaging would encourage these people to use these things, then I would be all for it. But if they just want to do it because it’s a market and just think it would be cool to emblazon a condom with Native imagery, then no. Things have got to make sense.

Thus according to Moraes, emblazoning contraceptive products with his artwork “makes sense” only when this idea serves more than a motive of personal wealth accumulation, whether it be by the artist or by the company. In this example, sustainability as promoted through health
and education override considerations of sustenance, or “putting food on the table.” Of course, it could be argued that this position is at least partly predicated on this artist’s career being farther along than simply feeding his family. Less successful artists may not always be in a position to place social causes above their ‘bottom line.’ In other words, immediate sustenance and long-term sustainability can go hand in hand where finding ways to meet basic needs (which are in any case always relative to the context), rather than leading to an endless pursuit of wealth accumulation, is closely followed by finding ways to support the well-being of others.

Recent developments in a non-Aboriginal artware company provide another example of this social approach to sustainability. Following several decades of activity, Native Northwest has for some time been considered one of the leaders in the industry. Like many non-Aboriginal companies, it is criticized by those who see it as making profits ‘on the backs’ of Aboriginal culture. At the same time, the company is also praised for having raised the profile of Northwest Coast art and setting a precedent in the early days of this industry for exclusively working with Aboriginal artists rather than using copied or imitated designs by non-Aboriginal artists. The owner of the company, Larry Garfinkel, explained to me that since the creation of the company, many of the artists he had worked with over the years had had successful careers, Aboriginal art had become much more widely celebrated, and a number of companies had begun working with Aboriginal artists when previously they did not. Upon realizing the extent of the changes that had occurred in the industry since the early days of his business, he began to feel that it was time to take on new initiatives. The company’s campaign to promote education and literacy, particularly among Aboriginal children, grew out of this realization.

Even though Garfinkel had noticed the lack of Aboriginal-themed educational material and resources in the market, he told me that he had not expected the board books his company produced to generate as positive a response in the educational community as they did. Educators and teachers were apparently contacting Native Northwest about the books, saying they used them in their classes. It is in view of this enthusiasm that the company decided to create a more comprehensive program of educational products. For instance, the company began creating bookmarks and posters promoting literacy made specifically to be distributed for free. Also, it partnered with Headstart to give away five hundred board books as part of the “A book in every home” program aimed at children from economically challenged backgrounds. In addition to these initial donations, the company’s plan was to sell the products to gift stores as well as
through educational networks, all the while continuing to distribute them free of charge to particular organizations focusing on Aboriginal education, preferring to provide in-kind support rather than a percentage of sales that would be dependent on the market. The company did not expect products such as bookmarks and posters to be commercially viable and although, as the owner pointed out, it would have been very easy to print a barcode on the bottom of the bookmarks, they ultimately chose not to.

Intrigued by the description of these products as not particularly lucrative, I learned that the sale of the company’s other products helped support the production of the educational line of products, which at least initially cost the company more money than it generated. Discussing why he would take on such an endeavour, Garfinkel explained that while he still enjoys merchandising and doing product development, he felt it would not make sense to keep augmenting the collections indefinitely without it serving another purpose. This new goal, he explained, was to create “culturally connected” and “sustainable” learning resources.

These kinds of initiatives do not transform a company from for-profit into a not-for-profit organization. In fact, it could be argued that commercially successful companies can afford to have social agendas. As explained to me by Garfinkel himself, Native Northwest is currently in a privileged situation, having resources to put into projects that have a social purpose to fulfil what he considers to be a “social responsibility.” It has indeed become a common expectation that successful businesses find ways to fulfil their “corporate social responsibility” by redirecting profits elsewhere than simply dividing them among the owners, reinvesting them in the growth of the company, or paying them out to shareholders, etc.69 As a result, many companies do dedicate a portion of their capital to supporting various causes, some very “distant” from the company’s activities and some more “proximate”.70 The use by companies of such initiatives to positively brand themselves is increasingly becoming an expectation in the capitalist system.71 Certainly in the Native Northwest Coast artware industry, such initiatives are seen as the fulfilment of an obligation of reciprocity.

Returning to the example of Native Northwest’s Aboriginal-themed line of educational products, it would be possible to dismiss this shift in direction as a well-crafted marketing strategy. For instance, free posters and bookmarks can also be a suitable means of advertisement

69 Richey and Ponte, Brand Aid, 121–176.
70 Ibid.
71 Žižek, First as Tragedy, Then as Farce.
for products that are for sale. However, this does not mean that the development of these products is not also an attempt at fulfilling an extra-monetary mandate that can be understood, as it is by the company’s owner, as participating in a ‘sustainable’ socio-economic paradigm. In other words, such initiatives are not necessarily only one thing: they can simultaneously help fulfil an obligation, maintain a certain level of social relevance, counter the image of a solely profit-driven company to the detriment of Aboriginal stakeholders, but also generate profit in the long-term (if not initially). Furthermore, I argue that such initiatives are not solely rooted in personal awareness of an undesirable situation and the aspiration for social change – in this case, education as a strategy for increased sustainability. These initiatives are also encouraged by the increasingly strongly articulated social expectation that a company that derives its success from Aboriginal cultural heritage must in one way or the other contribute to socio-economic development in Aboriginal communities, in which literacy and early childhood development can certainly play a part (a point I develop in more detail in section 8.3 about reciprocity).

The fact that similar combinations of profit-driven and socially-driven enterprises can be observed world-wide, including among the multi-national corporations that are considered flagships of neoliberal capitalism (take Coca-Cola’s ‘Living Positively’ sustainability program, for instance), would suggest that such practices are not in any way culturally specific to the context of the Pacific Northwest. However, as the example of an initiative centered on cultural sustainability will show, there is indeed something context specific to the ways in which the agenda of sustainability is addressed in the Native Northwest Coast artware industry.

8.2.4 Cultural sustainability

Bonny Graham-Krulicki’s mother was among the many Aboriginal women who lost their status under marriage provisions of the Indian Act. With the passing of Bill C-31 in 1985, which allowed for the reinstatement of these women’s Registered Indian Status, Graham-Krulicki began a two decade-long journey to research her mother’s and her own ancestry to have their status recognized. Already a professional graphic artist, this experience inspired her to make art that promotes the learning and preservation of Halkomelem language, one of the languages of her ancestors. After several years of conducting research about the language and polishing the aesthetics of her products, she launched B.Wyse Productions in 2009. Graham-Krulicki’s work integrates Salish art style into the lettering of inspirational Halkomelem words (e.g. iwest (teach),
lá:lém (home), áylexw (live), q’a:l (believe)) which are reproduced on art cards, bookmarks, prints, and original canvas paintings. The idea behind this project is, as Graham-Krulicki puts it, to “preserve the language in an artistic way.” Although she is aware that until recently Halkomelem did not have a written form, she nonetheless believes that there is value in using artistic writing as a means to promote appreciation and learning of a language that has been considered under the serious threat of being lost. With whole generations of children sent to Residential Schools having grown into adulthood with little exposure to their Aboriginal language and having endured pressure and even violence not to speak it, many people refer to current teaching and learning efforts as ‘language revitalization’. With this history in mind as well as her personal experience of having grown up at a distance from her cultural heritage, Graham-Krulicki understands her art to partake in this effort. “You have to do something in desperate times. Well to me, these are desperate times. This is why I create this art.”

B.Wyse Productions’s language art calls attention to the value of Halkomelem by giving it a visible, aesthetically pleasing, and marketable materiality. Graham-Krulicki uses her artistic skills and marketing knowledge to literally and figuratively package the value of language preservation in a way that can appeal to potential language learners (such as Native youth who appreciate the tattoo-like aesthetics of her art), but also the wider public (who is drawn in through the current appeal of inspirational words such as ‘dreams,’ ‘believe’, ‘life’, etc). As per the company’s tag-line, these products effectively combine business with the ‘Art of Preservation’. The direct impact of these products on language learning is difficult to measure. However, Graham-Krulicki’s personal trajectory exemplifies how artware production can be associated with a practice of cultural “sustainability”, in the sense of initiatives focused on the long-term future of cultural heritage. Furthermore, it is in direct relation to the development of her business that Graham-Krulicki and her daughter decided to take Halkomelem language and Salish handicraft classes through programs offered by the Sto:lo Nation. Thus, a business idea made Graham-Krulicki connect with her ancestry in a way that she had not previously experienced, garnering support from Sto:lo for both her business and cultural venture, while doing her “little

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73 The company’s website, bwyse.ca, now not only sells products but also has a page dedicated to education that includes a video featuring Halkomelem speaker Elizabeth Phillips and teacher Eddie Gardner pronouncing the Halkomelem words that are featured on B.Wyse products.
piece,” as she puts it, for Halkomelem language preservation. Although she may have eventually found her way to a Halkomelem language class independently from the creation of an artware company, it is indeed a business idea that led her to learning Halkomelem, not the other way around. Artware is not always the derivative by-product of sustaining cultural heritage, it can be at its very root.

8.2.5 Holistic sustainability

While most of the examples previously described approach sustainability from a particular angle by tending either to the environment, livelihoods, or culture, some initiatives within the artware industry attempt to address all of these at once. An example of this more holistic approach is illustrated by the mandate of Spirit Works Ltd. It was a gift shop manager who first brought my attention to this company. She explained to me that to me that it was always a pleasure for her to discover a new Aboriginal owned and operated business, citing Spirit Works as an example. She went on to explain that the company makes “quality jewellery,” offers a “good price point,” and is a “sustainability-minded business.” Not long after this conversation, I browsed the company’s website and enquired about meeting with its owner, Shain Jackson.

Spirit Works Ltd’s approach is well illustrated through the following excerpt, selected from a letter written for the purpose of the company’s corporate gifting program:

**We need your support!!**  We are a local Aboriginal owned, operated and staffed company which does something very unique. We 100% design, produce, and distribute Authentic Aboriginal gifts here at home in Canada. These products consist of traditional bentwood boxes, traditional wooden jewelry inlaid with beautiful abalone shell, traditional ornamental paddles, and so on. With companies from abroad appropriating our culture and selling it for cheap, we have found it very challenging to maintain our core values of Community, Tradition, and Environment and yet still compete in the retail market. Our response to this is to try to connect with our customers directly in the hopes that you will not only buy something made 100% in Canada, but also buy Aboriginal products made by Aboriginal people, with the benefits going back to where they are needed most, our communities. ... We feel we can provide the perfect gifts for those interested in something beautiful and truly Canadian, but also for those who would take great pleasure in receiving something from an ethical source. Spirit Works is an ethical source. ...We go to great lengths to ensure our communities remain healthy by paying fair wages, providing employment and training to our youth, and donating space, tools, equipment and support to Aboriginal artists. We take our obligations to pass down knowledge very seriously, and follow up with action by conducting free workshops to provide youth with important cultural teachings. We protect our culture and traditions by consulting our elders and cultural keepers about every step of our operation to ensure we are being respectful and consistent with our values. Also we go to great lengths to ensure

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our environment is not harmed by using only recycled, salvaged, or otherwise sustainable materials in the creation of our products. Many have said that as a company we cannot survive in this economic climate, where globally it is a race to the bottom in regards to the values we hold dear. We are asking that you help us in our struggle to prove this is not the case. When you purchase a product from us, you support all of the above and so much more.

As attested by this statement, Jackson has placed all dimensions of sustainability – environmental, economic, social, cultural – at the heart of his business model. Growing up in British Columbia, he witnessed and experienced firsthand the consequences of the abject poverty and despair that existed at the time and continues to exist among his people. This experience and his desire to bring on social change has been central in Jackson’s approach to business. He explained that at a time when many others had “lost their way,” his grandmother was weaving baskets day after day, and with the income generated by the sale helped raise several generations of children. Jackson describes her as a “true matriarch” and says he has learned from her that when you are endowed with certain strengths, you have to do the best you can do for your community: “You have to do it.” According to Jackson, the business model of Spirit Works Ltd is a direct consequence of this form of responsibility.

The values around which the activities of the company are organized reflect an effort to approach the ideals of sustainability in a holistic way. The practices it encourages underline the interconnectedness of economic, environmental, social, and cultural stakes. As we have seen, the term ‘sustainability’ is currently being used to describe a number of different ideas and practices. It is much easier to implement only one such approach at a time than to put them into practice all at once. In this respect, Spirit Works’ sustainability is not only all-encompassing, it is very ambitious. While most companies that use the rhetoric of sustainability will emphasize cultural or social or environmental sustainability, Spirit Works’s goal is to tend to all of them. This approach entails costs – economic and non-economic – that can be difficult to bear for a small company still in the early years of its development. As Jackson recognizes himself, his holistic approach to sustainability is both the company’s strength – what he hopes will set it apart from the many other companies that exist – and one of its weaknesses – that which places limits on what his company can and cannot do in order to grow.

During an interview, another artist discussed with me his idea for a sustainable artware company. Even though at the time he was only in the early planning stages of this project, I was
struck by the fact that, similarly to Jackson, this artist wanted to build his business around a holistic understanding of sustainability. He talked about discounting prices for Aboriginal customers, using environmentally friendly materials, sharing cultural knowledge via his products, maintaining his own spirituality and health, all of this while making a living through his art. In other words, he hoped to be able to address the wealth inequalities that exist between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples, care for the local environment, educate others about his culture, and tend to his own needs – all of which resonate with the idea of “sustainability” in the various ways in which this buzz word is currently being used. Further, and perhaps more importantly, this artist clearly articulated the relationship between sustainability in the artware business and maintaining the local economic system of wealth redistribution that is epitomized by the potlatch. He explained that he would design his business to cater to the needs of potlatching. In addition to producing items suitable for potlatch redistribution, he would use revenue made from selling products to outsiders to fund his own potlatches. “In order to have a potlatch,” he explained “you have to have money: you have to pay your singers, you have to pay the artists who will do your masks, you have to pay the man who composes your songs”. Thus the artware industry not only produces potlatch gifts, it can also help fund potlatches themselves, and therefore contribute to the continuation of this important institution in the Pacific Northwest. This remark brings us to the third part of this chapter, in which I discuss how Pacific Northwest conceptions of reciprocity are leading the artware industry to become a form of Culturally Modified Capitalism.

8.3 Reciprocity

8.3.1 The costs of reciprocity

Holding a feast or a potlatch can be very expensive, easily adding up to tens of thousands of dollars. The items distributed to guests as payment for witnessing the passing on of names, songs, and title rights, for example, represent one of the costs falling on the shoulders of the hosts. Whereas previously much of the wealth distributed could be drawn directly from the territories to which the hosts have rights, access to these territories and their resources has in many cases become limited if not denied by private property and conservation laws. This is not to suggest that goods like eulachon grease, seaweed, salmon, or cedar-derived items are no longer distributed in potlatches – they most certainly are. In fact, hosts will go to great lengths to make this possible even if they live in urban centers, taking time off from work to travel to their home
territories. However, store bought goods are also popular potlatch gifts. It can take years for hosts to save up the money needed for these mass purchases, not to mention all of the other expenses and required payments. In addition to mobilizing volunteers to help with preparations, it is not uncommon for hosts to seek donations in kind, in particular from individuals who are within their lineage and thus have an obligation to contribute. As the artist cited at the end of the previous section stated, artware items can be among those contributions: “Say, my Great Uncle, a big chief, has a big potlatch, [I’d say] “Hey Uncle, take this X amount of items, you can give it away, use it, that’s my contribution to your feast.” At the same time, this artist recognized that he would have to be careful not to donate more than his own economic situation could bear, having to “look out” for his business and keep his head “above water.” Thus, what some might call “commercial success” can also work in favour of meeting obligations in the local economy of reciprocity, not necessarily against it.

8.3.2 Supporting reciprocity

Artware companies, especially non-Aboriginal ones, could consider the potlatch economy not to be of their concern: it is peripheral to their own growth, which is largely predicated on selling to non-Aboriginal consumers. And yet, in the case of artware companies presenting themselves as dedicated to supporting Aboriginal peoples and cultures, finding ways to support the potlatch economy could in fact be seen as an integral part of their mandate. It is in this spirit that some companies offer goods at discounted prices when they are purchased to be given away in feasts and potlatches. In addition to being a way to keep potlatching costs down, such contributions can also function as ‘product placements’ of sorts – a way to signal to Aboriginal consumers that such products exist and that they are made by companies that are at least to some extent aware of cultural protocols.

Giving discounts on items that are subsequently given away is a way to support the redistribution economy; at the same time, it does not usually take shares away from the retail market. Also, offering clearance prices at the end of the season to customers who buy in large quantities is a good inventory management strategy at the same time as it provides a good opportunity for Aboriginal customers to stock up on goods for the coming year, including potlatch gifts, at a lower cost. In some sense, this practice accommodates both artware companies

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and its Aboriginal customers, doing the business of artware while enabling doing the business of potlatches, and vice versa – precisely what *Culturally Modified Capitalism* is about.

There are also other ways in which potlatching and practices typically considered to pertain to capitalist markets cross-over. For instance, from time to time, companies can make custom products with designs created by an artist who is hosting a potlatch. The production of these custom potlatch gifts bares a lot of similarity with producing custom corporate products and “name dropping” (i.e. when the name of the company is added to an already existing product design). In this regard, companies that have corporate clients are able to transfer their knowledge of corporate gifting to potlatch gifting. When the company discounts these custom products, it is similar to cutting prices for regular customers to keep up good business relationships. In addition, however, providing lower prices on the specific basis that the products are being ordered for the purposes of redistribution points to the specifics of products meant to be given away: first, the customer will not derive a bigger profit from the operation because of the discount, but will merely save on expenses; second, giving such a discount can be a way for companies to show their understanding of the cultural importance of carrying out these redistributions, even when resources are scarce. This second aspect is apparently not equally understood across companies. As a Squamish/Kwakwa’wakw artist explained, a company can ‘know’ that its products are distributed in potlatches but not “necessarily realize what that means in a strong way.” And yet such an understanding can make a difference in an artist’s desire to work with a company or not, as exemplified by Tsimshian artist Corey Moraes’s statement that a commitment to providing potlatch goods at affordable prices is key in his decision to work with an artware company.

Several other artists mentioned having access to low-cost potlatch gifts customized with their artwork as one of their reason for working with artware companies, sometimes agreeing to be paid in kind rather than by a fee. For example, Debra Sparrow of the Musqueam Nation purchases blankets from the company that reproduces her weavings, Kanata Ltd, at a discount equivalent to the royalty payment she usually receives. While she does not describe herself as a ‘business’ per se, she finds value in being able to directly provide the Band Office and other customers with blankets to be gifted, rather than having to send them to purchase these gifts at a retail store or to the company itself. In turn, as one of Kanata’s owners explained to me, the company prefers to restrict its activities to wholesaling in the circuits with which it is familiar, and the latter apparently do not include the potlatch economy. In addition, when placing large
orders of goods to be later distributed on the occasion of the visit of esteemed guests, some First Nations Band Offices will privilege operations that are run by artists in their community over large artware companies. Purchasing gift products directly from a community member is in itself a form of redistribution that maintains the Nation’s money “within the community,” not only helping individual artists and their family, but also nurturing the sense of responsibility of these artists towards their Nation.

8.3.3 The responsibility of reciprocity

Looking beyond how the artware market relates to the potlatch as a redistributive institution, expectations of generalized reciprocity also apply more generally to the economic activities and the circulation of wealth as they relate to the Native Northwest Coast artware industry. At first glance, this market is primarily defined by balanced reciprocity (when a company pays an artist for designs to the satisfaction of both parties, for example) and negative reciprocity (when one party profits at the expense of the other, for example). However, a closer look at how the industry operates shows that generalized reciprocity is also beginning to play an important role in the way it operates, as injunctions to “give back” have become increasingly common and increasingly acknowledged. As in the potlatch, the purpose of generalized reciprocity as it plays out in the artware industry is not egalitarian, and helps reinforce social hierarchies. The responsibility of those who can afford to redistribute wealth does not negate personal success – in fact, fulfilling this responsibility can serve to confirm it. In addition, not fulfilling this responsibility is to take the risk of being seen as successful on the back of Aboriginal cultural resources, instead of being celebrated as an agent of their promotion and perpetuation.

In order to understand the difference between the principles of generalized reciprocity in the Pacific Northwest and philanthropy, emphasis must be placed on the key word “back” in the injunction to “give back.” The responsibility borne by participants in the artware industry is not one of assistance to an ‘other’ who is at arm’s length; it is rather to feed wealth back into what is conceptualized as its original source, whether this source is described in general terms such as Aboriginal ‘peoples,’ ‘cultures,’ or ‘communities,’ or discussed in reference to a specific Nation, village, or network. Indeed, in Pacific Northwest societies, even individual economic activities are understood to draw to some extent on collectively owned resources. In a sense, for Aboriginal
artists and businesses not to fulfill the responsibility of reciprocity would be like challenging this worldview, and thus to put in question their cultural belonging. In this regard, it is perhaps easy to understand that engaging in reciprocity is seen as a responsibility for the Aboriginal participants in the industry. However, its non-Aboriginal participants are also pressured to ‘give back’, not just their Aboriginal counterparts – this, I argue, is one of the signs that the capitalist model is being modified by another cultural model of the economy, that of the potlatch.

It could indeed be argued that Aboriginal businesses tend to adhere to the notion of reciprocity because, in the Pacific Northwest, it is a responsibility that comes with being part of an Aboriginal community. The other side of this argument might be that business people who are not Aboriginal, and thus have no claims to this form of cultural belonging, would not be concerned by such obligations as they are not tied into this system of responsibility. For this reason, practices of redistribution by these non-Aboriginal companies could be read as a sign of good-will and benevolence on their part. However, this would be to overlook the fact that such practices are considered “normal”: even if quantitatively they are on the exceptional side, qualitatively they correspond to an expectation. It was many times made clear to me that all artware companies, regardless of the ancestry of their owners, are expected to ‘give back’. In fact, I was constantly told by Aboriginal individuals that non-Aboriginal companies were obligated to engage in practices of reciprocity, even when they do not know, care, or act like they are. Much of the animosity I encountered in the field against non-Aboriginal artware companies was levied against them not because of their chosen field of activity per se, but because they were seen to have accumulated a deficit in “giving back.” “They pay artists for their work, that’s a start. But what do they give back to the community?” I was constantly asked. Further, some would prefer there be nothing to “give back” because nothing would have been “taken” in the first place. For instance, after I described contributions made by non-Aboriginal companies as “some kind of back-and-forth, some give and take,” one artist replied with wry humour that “It would be better if it was just all “give.””

On some level, the responsibility of non-Aboriginal companies not to “take” at all or at least to “give back” when they do might be seen as associated with another responsibility – that attributed to settler society for many of the ills suffered by Aboriginal peoples. However, there is more than ‘white guilt’ to the social responsibility non-Aboriginal artware companies are said to
have towards the Aboriginal stakeholders of the artware industry. No matter the economic, social, cultural or political intentions behind the decision to create a business around the reproduction of Native Northwest Coast art, such a choice effectively pulls these businesses into the Pacific Northwest system of reciprocity. As we have seen in Chapter 5, what might normally constitute “fair business” is not considered a form of “giving back”: paying market price for a design is to play by the rules of balanced reciprocity but does not demonstrate a clear understanding of the ties to a system of generalized reciprocity that are created by such transactions, beyond their interpersonal dimension. The logics of this system of reciprocity is what creates the expectation that companies will engage in practices of redistribution, even though such redistribution practices are not as common as such an expectation might suggest.

This was made clear to me on a number of occasions, including during a conversation I had with Shain Jackson. When I mentioned a few non-Aboriginal companies that contribute funds to Aboriginal youth organizations, he flatly replied: “That’s the way it should be.” In another conversation, we discussed his disappointment with the lack of support certain retail stores showed towards his company, again pointing to certain expected behaviors on the part of those who draw on Aboriginal resources to run their business. Jackson explained that when he asked a store manager why she would not carry his products, she put it bluntly: why would she want to put his products in their store if they would take up shelf room and create four times less return for the shop than other items such as things made in China? While he said he appreciated this person’s honesty from a business standpoint, he could not agree with the worldview this thinking reflected. He was in fact quite shocked by this attitude, especially because the store she runs is attached to a public institution that not only attracts tourists with Aboriginal art, but also sits on unceded Coast Salish territory. From his standpoint, such stores should think it natural to “give back”, remarking that in his experience some institutions do acknowledge their responsibility and take it seriously, some do not as much, and too many others do not at all.

Essentially, this perspective is consistent with the view that there is nothing redemptive about contributing back to Aboriginal individuals, businesses, and communities. Instead of originating from a place of compassion or guilt, they are to be seen as a compliance with the social responsibilities that come with engaging in the local Aboriginal economy. From this point of view, a non-Aboriginal company contributing to an Aboriginal youth fund does not constitute an apology for focusing its business on Aboriginal art; rather, it would be an acknowledgement
and demonstration of respect towards the source from which it derives its success and with which it has carved its niche market. As such, it would be an obligatory and thus expected fulfillment of a responsibility; for this reason, those on the receiving end of such redistribution practices would have nothing to be thankful for, just something to be satisfied with.

Also, several individuals explained to me that they were wary of small or punctual “donations,” and felt the injunction of reciprocity called for long-term, substantial contributions – one might say “sustainable” forms of redistribution. For instance, Pam Baker, herself highly committed to practices of redistribution, has high expectations of non-Aboriginal companies.

My sister and I have done Millionaire Mind training… The way we’ve been trained is that you give 10% back of your yearly wages or yearly income. So what I’m thinking is that these companies could put aside 10% of that money and select somewhere where they donate it. Whether it’s to Emily Carr Art school where they encourage First Nations to go to school there, and enjoy the arts, whether it’s sports, whether it’s entrepreneurial training… Then I’d be pretty damn happy.

As evident in this example, not only are companies enjoined to find ways to redistribute wealth, such redistributions are expected to be specifically directed to Aboriginal stakeholders, further underlining the significance of the “back” in “giving back”. The fact that there are particular expectations as to how the wealth generated by this industry should be redistributed shows that it is not conceptualized as classic philanthropy. In this sense, it is not an example of “Brand Aid” – the combination of “aid to brands” and “brands that provide aid” since it is not “aid” that is being provided, but rather something that is owed in a system of generalized reciprocity. Still, in this industry like in any other, companies that dedicate a part of their profits to something else than their own growth could be seen as performing a kind of “cause marketing” – when companies associate their products with a “good cause” and market them in such a way as to suggest that purchasing them translates into a direct support of this cause. As we will see in the next section, in the Native Northwest Coast artware industry, the practice of cause marketing is modified in its articulation with the system Pacific Northwest reciprocity.

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75 T. Harv Eker, founder of the company Peak Potential Training that conducts Millionaire Mind seminars, writes “The mark of true wealth is determined by how much one can give away” T. Harv Eker, Secrets of the millionaire mind: mastering the inner game of wealth (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2005), 197.

76 Richey and Ponte, Brand Aid, 10.
8.3.4 Reciprocity and cause marketing

As Slavoj Žižek notes, the integration of charitable deeds in economic activity is no longer an idiosyncrasy but has become “the basic constituent of our economy”. With what Žižek calls the ‘post-modern’ spirit of capitalism, corporations have become increasingly good at selling, along with their products, ‘a good night’s sleep’ by embedding in the very consumerist act one’s redemption from being consumerist. In this sense, ‘post-modern capitalism’ sells the idea that private property can be used to alleviate what he calls “the horrible evils” resulting “from the institution of private property”. In the corporate world, this phenomenon has also given rise to the idea of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), which speaks “the argot of altruism” all the while being “portrayed to shareholders as sound fiduciary practice: a credit to company reputation” that ultimately also “feeds the bottom line”. In other words, practices such as cause marketing and CSR are ways in which businesses associate selling their goods with “doing good”.

Although I have not heard the specific idea of CSR discussed in the context of the Native Northwest Coast artware industry, I did find examples of business practices reminiscent of cause marketing that were presented to me as helping mitigate the endangerment of Aboriginal cultural resources that were being commodified. In this sense, these practices were a form of what Lisa Ann Richey and Stefano Ponte call “engaged” and “proximate” CSR. These kinds of redistribution are indeed designed to impact the people and the environment directly concerned by a company’s activities, all the while encouraging the consumption of this company’s products and improving its reputation. Much like other forms of “ethical business” (cause marketing and CSR, but also Fair Trade, etc), practices of redistribution in the Native Northwest Coast artware industry carry with them the hope that it is possible to counter one of the perils of “Ethnicity Inc.”, namely the sharpening of “the line of division between enrichment and exclusion”.

78 Žižek, First as Tragedy, Then as Farce, 51–65. Žižek also uses the expression ‘cultural capitalism.’ I do not use this expression here so as not to create confusion with the concept of Culturally Modified Capitalism, which meshes well with but cannot be reduced to ‘cultural capitalism’ as described by Žižek.
79 Žižek, “First as Tragedy, Then as Farce: The Economic Crisis and the End of Global Capitalism.”
80 Comaroff and Comaroff, Ethnicity, Inc., 129.
81 In contrast, “disengaged” and “distant” CSR practices usually associate goods with a “cause” disconnected from the activities of the company that produces them and the place where they are produced. RED products promoted by Bono and other celebrities are a good example of this kind of CSR, or what Richey and Ponte call “Brand Aid” (Richey and Ponte, Brand Aid, 129.)
82 Comaroff and Comaroff, Ethnicity, Inc., 143.
However, in the artware world as in the potlatch, in addition to helping sell goods and “doing good”, publicly performed practices of reciprocity are a way for those doing the redistribution “to make their name good”.83 However, I argue that in the case of the redistributions practices I have outlined above, the basic model of cause marketing as described by Richey and Ponte, analyzed by Žižek, and practiced by many businesses around the world is in fact also modified by its association with the principles of Pacific Northwest reciprocity. Shedding light on the role played by consumers in this particular form of reciprocity, or rather, the limited role they play in it, will help shed light on how this is so.

Thus far, I have focused on producers’ practices and values, only mentioning in passing that these shape the image they project to those who purchase their products. And yet, cause marketing is largely predicated on the idea that profits can be generated by tapping into what Catherine S. Dolan calls “the new morality of consumption”, 84 which draws consumers to goods they believe are associated with ‘good causes’ and enjoins them to stay away from those they see as symptomatic of the ills of the contemporary world.85 At first glance, cause marketing brings consumers into the fold of the Native Northwest Coast artware industry’s Culturally Modified Capitalism and the emphasis that it increasingly places on the ideas of sustainability and reciprocity. However, I argue that, in this particular case, the primary audience of cause marketing is not consumers, but the Aboriginal stakeholders of the artware industry.

With companies’ need to first accumulate wealth in order to be in a position to redistribute their profits, convincing consumers of the value of their products might be expected to figure prominently among the reasons why some Native Northwest Coast artware companies engage in various forms of cause marketing. From this, it might also be assumed that making consumers aware of what they are ‘buying into’ matters as much as what they are buying (as implied in the Starbucks tagline, “It’s not just what you’re buying. It’s what you’re buying into”86). In cause marketing, this awareness is indeed considered key to influencing consumers to choose one product over another similar product. The Pink Ribbon campaign is one example of cause

83 This is a paraphrase of the title of Philip Drucker’s 1967 analysis of the potlatch, Drucker, To Make My Name Good; a Reexamination of the Southern Kwakiutl Potlatch.
85 For a more detailed and comprehensive discussion of morality and economics, from fair trade to corporate social responsibility, see the edited volume Economics and Morality. Anthropological Approaches (Browne and Milgram 2009).
86 Cited in Žižek, First as Tragedy, Then as Farce, 53.
marketing that makes particularly visible the association of a product with a cause, in this case that of breast cancer research. Via the campaign’s now highly recognizable and conspicuous shade of pink, companies signal to consumers that their products are associated with the Pink Ribbon campaign, thereby differentiating them from other, otherwise identical, products.\(^87\) Fair Trade labels and other certification programs play a similar role in signalling to consumers that particular goods are “better” than others, or to make consumers themselves feel “better” than their neighbour.\(^88\)

There currently is not one particular, publicly recognized, code (a colour, a label, etc) that makes it possible to visibly associate Native Northwest Coast artware items to an overarching “cause” such as the redistribution of wealth to Aboriginal communities. And yet, these artware products are visually differentiable from other artware products: they derive their visual specificity from the Aboriginal iconography that adorns them. Native Northwest Coast artware is a genre of product that has visual recognizability built into its very concept, across all of the various companies that are involved in this industry. The art that is reproduced on these mugs, t-shirts, tea towels, and blankets are what constitute their particular consumer appeal. When consumers choose a product with a Northwest Coast design over the same product without it, they are ‘buying into’ the art in addition to simply ‘buying’ household and fashion goods. In this sense, when the decision is made to buy a Northwest Coast mug over a blank one, the art is in effect already what is being supported through their consumerist acts.

It is true that, as the ideas of sustainability and “giving back” are gaining momentum in consumerist culture in general and in the artware industry in particular, more and more tags and packaging signal the association of products with a “good cause”. However, It is important to note that, in all of the examples of which I am aware, the “beneficiaries” of this product-cause association are always Aboriginal stakeholders, whether it be specific organizations (e.g. the Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Center) or specific demographics (e.g. Aboriginal youth). In this respect, it is not only Native Northwest Coast art that is presented as a “cause” worthy of support; the well-being of Aboriginal peoples and cultures is also being cast as worthy of “compassionate consumption”.\(^89\) Such associations are indeed an illustration of companies playing into what Lisa Ann Richey and Stefano Ponte describe as “causumer culture,” promoting

\(^{88}\) De Neve et al., *Hidden Hands in the Market*.
\(^{89}\) Richey and Ponte, *Brand Aid*. 
the idea that it is possible as an individual consumer to be “shopping for a better world, effecting change through the marketplace”.

However, in a conversation with a gift shop manager in which we discussed consumer preferences, I became aware of a certain level of skepticism among distributors and producers with respect to consumer attitudes towards cause marketing. Discussing the example of a company that upholds various social commitments, this retailer told me – to my surprise at the time – that she believed that what made this company’s products so successful in her store was not really those commitments, but the fact that the products were good quality, attractive, and “priced right.” Several of the other producers with whom I spoke and who engage in this kind of cause marketing expressed a similar sentiment about their own practices. They explained to me that they thought their commitment to reciprocity is actually quite peripheral to customers’ decisions to purchase their products. First, they were not particularly confident that consumers read labels carefully enough to be aware of their company’s commitments. Second, they believed that if consumers do somehow become aware that they ‘give back,’ they would contend this represents more of an added interest for these customers, but not the biggest determinant in what they choose to purchase. Thus, consumers tend to be imagined by these producers as drawn to their products by the visual vocabulary of ovoids and u-forms or trigons and crescents, and only secondarily, if at all, by explanatory tags or tag-lines. Whether or not this is the case, this belief informs artware companies’ decisions regarding their practices of redistribution and these practices’ primary audience. I now turn to two specific examples that will illustrate this.

1) Carla D’Angelo is the founder and owner of Claudia Alan Inc., an eyewear company whose founding principle is to create “beautiful accessories that make a difference.” Although D’Angelo had not initially developed her Aboriginal art-adorned eyewear collection (AYA) with Aboriginal customers in mind, her products have turned out to be a huge hit among them. Not long after the launch of the line, I was among a crowd of supporters who greeted a group of canoes of the 2009 Tribal Journeys to the shores of West Vancouver, near Ambleside, in Squamish territory. In this crowd, the AYA sunglasses were impossible to miss. So many of the attendees were wearing them that I decided to ask someone about them and their producer. The woman I spoke to gave me the name of the artist who created the designs, Kwakwaka’wakw/Tlingit artist Corrine Hunt. She and Carla D’Angelo are indeed the co-

90 Ibid., 152.
designers of the frames, Hunt providing the Aboriginal iconography, D’Angelo providing the style of the frames. Interviewing these two women helped me understand their relationship and the rationale behind associating the products with a charity. For instance, D’Angelo explained:

I wanted to design beautiful product that gives back, and have fun in the creative process and bring unique beautiful things to the market. I had two ideas, integrating First Nations art and also a Pink Ribbon reading glass, because of the demographic of people who need reading glasses, and with breast cancer. I thought that would be a good one to get my company infrastructure going.

As Hunt explains it herself, her decision to work with D’Angelo was not fortuitous.

When we first met, I was just recovering from breast cancer… and she had created Pink Ribbon glasses. ... I knew then that she was really interested in doing something around [First Nations]. … I’m really drawn to people who see a big picture in how things are in the world and how we affect each other, and what consumerism is, and I felt like her motivation was a good one. Sound.

Given Claudia Alan Inc.’s mission statement to develop “beautiful accessories that make a difference”, directing a portion of the proceeds to a charity was part of the plan from the start. As soon as D’Angelo decided to create a line adorned with Aboriginal imagery, she felt she should adapt her business model, which already included the idea of cause marketing, to the Aboriginal “style of doing business,” as she put it. The specifics of the brand’s association with a charity were worked out in relation to her concern for demonstrating respect.

I was very concerned about how I would be received… I’ve never worked with First Nations individuals before, and I wasn’t sure about the style of doing business and I didn’t want to be seen as taking advantage of the culture. So that’s where I started looking at integrating a charity that would give back to the First Nation culture, and Corrine really liked that too.

While Hunt and D’Angelo hesitated between various organizations, they agreed to associate the eyewear with a charitable organization, One X One, which funds a program of nutritious breakfasts for Aboriginal children. Although this may appear to be a classic case of cause marketing, a more precise look at this particular business model and its ramifications will show that it is also a way for the company to acknowledge its entwinement with the system of reciprocity and its responsibility to redistribute wealth towards Aboriginal peoples. Even though one could see contributing funds to a nutrition program for First Nations children as a way to “buy” redemption (the owner was concerned she might be seen as ‘taking advantage of the culture’), it is also an example of buying into reciprocity. As pointed out before, her products’
association to a charity is framed as ‘giving back’ and not simply ‘giving’. Indeed, when I asked D’Angelo if she thought the association of her AYA eyewear line with One X One motivated consumers to purchase her glasses, she replied:

I think it’s a small part of it, a very small part of it. But you know, it has allowed us certainly to catch the Assembly of First Nations’ attention, and credibility, so there is definitely benefit to it, but I don’t think buyers take it because of that, no, and I don’t think consumers buy anything because of that.

A particular conversation confirmed that this analysis is not far from the mark. I was at an Aboriginal art event when I encountered a woman who was wearing a pair of AYA sunglasses in her hair. We were having a short discussion about the artware industry, and she was clearly surprised to hear from me that part of the proceeds of the sale of this eyewear line went to One X One. Coming from anyone else, this surprise may not have been particularly unexpected. However, this woman was herself very outspoken about the responsibility of artware companies to give back to Aboriginal communities. I argue that, if this person did not purchase the glasses because of its association to One X One, it is likely that few people do.

If it is true that consumers are not to particularly inspired to select Native Northwest Coast artware products on the basis of the fact that their purchases are presented as benefiting Aboriginal stakeholders, it may be difficult to understand why companies would dedicate any portion of their profit margin to these organizations and programs. However, what D’Angelo also mentioned was that the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) specifically invited her to present and sell her products at their Christmas party. There are myriads of Aboriginal-themed products on the market, and good business relationships between Hunt and D’Aneglo would likely not have been sufficient to set this particular brand apart. Furthermore, although D’Angelo explained that she does not see her company’s association with a charity as key to individual customers’ decision to purchase her eyewear, she also said that she believed that it was what garnered the support of an Aboriginal audience, including that of the national representative organization of First Nations of Canada that is the AFN.

With this in mind, although this example bears many of the features of cause marketing, I argue that it cannot be simply reduced to it. The commercial success of the brand among consumers seems to be as much predicated on the product itself, its low price point, and fashionable style, than on the donations it generates. At the same time, its acceptance and support in Aboriginal circles can be seen as coming not only from being the product of a non-Aboriginal
eyewear designer working with an Aboriginal artist, but also from the perception that the company tended to its responsibility towards Aboriginal stakeholders, this as soon as the decision to use Aboriginal imagery was made.

I now turn to one ultimate example that will help demonstrate that, in the Native Northwest Coast giftware industry, the use of cause marketing hinges less upon consumer sensitivity to “good causes”, and more on catching the attention of an audience able to witness these practices of redistribution as participation in a Pacific Northwest system of generalized reciprocity.

2) As I have argued earlier in this chapter and in Chapter 5, business arrangements that artists and artware companies both consider “fair” are examples of balanced reciprocity, but do not in and of themselves constitute an engagement in practices of generalized reciprocity. However, I also argue that artists who have positive relationships with the companies that reproduce their work and feel these companies treat them fairly can be ideally positioned to promote these companies and, if needed, encourage them to step up to the plate of their responsibilities of wealth redistribution. For instance, clothing designer Chloe Angus, creator of the Spirit Wraps with Haida artist Clarence Mills, explained to me that she makes sure that when she speaks to artists they know that the company takes “five dollars or so from each wrap that immediately goes into our donation back to the Aboriginal Friendship Society.” While this system was set up of her own initiative, she did so thinking that it would likely matter to her present and future Aboriginal business partners. It is for example important to note that Angus did not place the emphasis on making sure the message gets out to potential customers; instead, she pointed to her desire to foster positive relationships with the Aboriginal artists she might work with directly. This is another example showing that while many Native Northwest Coast artware products are packaged with what looks like cause marketing, this attractive wrapping is primarily there for the appreciation of partners rather than individual consumers.

Therefore, those in the Native Northwest Coast artware industry that do acknowledge their responsibility to engage in practice of redistribution to conform to the obligations of generalized reciprocity are thus primarily concerned with how their activities will be received by Aboriginal stakeholders and by Aboriginal industry participants, and only secondarily with perception from the consumers’ point of view. Although the association of their products with Aboriginal organizations and programs are a form of cause marketing, the reasons for which they carry out such practices are also consistent with the Pacific Northwest way of doing business. In particular,
they mesh well with the practice of calling upon specific witnesses to validate the acts of redistribution that validate status in the potlatch economy.

As explained above, in the Pacific Northwest, when property (names, stories, dances, land) is being transferred, a ceremony is held and its guests receive payment in exchange for “witnessing and validating the ceremonial renewal of the potlatch hosts’ status, wealth, and legitimacy.” Potlatch gifts signal the responsibility of the guests to testify forever after that the “feast was done properly”, and thus that the property transfer is legitimate. I argue that when an artware company decides to create product lines based on Aboriginal artwork, no matter how this artwork was acquired, this decision generates the need to make the use (if not the full proprietary transfer) of these cultural resources legitimate in the eyes of the Aboriginal property regime. Thus companies are expected, in particular by the industry’s Aboriginal stakeholders, to engage in practices of redistribution similar to those conducted during Indigenous feasts, thereby acknowledging that their economic activities have pulled them into the local system of generalized reciprocity. In addition, it is important that companies fulfill this responsibility publicly so that the exchange can be witnessed, not so much by curious ‘stand-buyers,’ but rather by those whose property is at stake through these exchanges. In sum, it not only makes sense for these companies to “give back” to Aboriginal communities rather than just “give” to a cause of their choice; it also makes sense for this redistribution to occur in such a way as to be addressed first to an Aboriginal audience, and only secondarily if at all to a non-Aboriginal consuming public. As in potlatches, although all present are witnesses, the presence of particular witnesses is more important than others. In this respect, those companies that redistribute wealth but whose reciprocity was not appropriately witnessed will continue to be the object of much frustration and aversion. They indeed continue to be seen as thinking of themselves as beyond the reach or above the local protocols that would dictate that they abide not only by the laws of balanced reciprocity with individual artists, but also those of generalized reciprocity with Aboriginal stakeholders at large. Somewhat ironically, this fact also gives companies a license to more fully deploy the strategies of cause marketing as a means to catch the attention of enough Aboriginal witnesses, perhaps also garnering attention from other consumers by the same token.

92 Ibid., 143.
Coda

The commodification of Aboriginal art is simultaneously seen as representing the manifestation if not the direct cause of the endangerment of Aboriginal cultural heritage, and as bearing potential for the latter’s perpetuation. In the Native Northwest Coast artware industry, the ideas of sustainability and reciprocity are being harnessed to make the systems of production, distribution, and consumption of capitalism work in favour of the promotion of the resources it puts at risk. If cause marketing is indeed a trend in this industry, it is not primarily used to provide “a good night’s sleep” to consumers. Instead, it is a means for producers and distributors to fulfil their responsibility in the local economic system they entered by capitalizing on Aboriginal resources.

During my fieldwork, there was little discussion of radically challenging capitalism as the economic system in which the Native Northwest Coast artware market functions. However, I did come across various initiatives that were geared towards modifying the capitalist model so that the profits generated by the industry can be more substantially and systematically redirected to sustain Aboriginal communities in their social, economic, and cultural dimensions. It is in this sense that the Native Northwest Coast industry is becoming more than ‘just business’ for the purpose of wealth accumulation. The belief that it should be a combination of profit-making with a participation in ‘business’ as understood in the local Indigenous economic model of generalized reciprocity is steadily growing and increasingly being heard.

As I have shown, the notions of sustainability and reciprocity that inform this standpoint are similar to those found in consumer culture of ‘green’ and other cause marketing, but are also shaped by their articulation with a cultural distinct system of redistribution. Practices reflecting the Pacific Northwest model of redistribution are being put forwards as a possible mechanism through which the benefits generated by the industry can be in part redirected from the owners of the means of production to the other bearers of risks that are Aboriginal peoples as the investors of their cultural resources. When witnessed by an Aboriginal audience, these acts of redistribution also help companies gain legitimacy and status within the industry.

It is in this sense that this market is becoming a form of Culturally Modified Capitalism: not an alternative to capitalism per se, but a variety of capitalism that is modified by a local model of resource management and its accompanying protocols. Much like trees are protected when considered to have been ‘culturally modified’, it is under the condition of certain
modifications that the status of the artware industry is shifting from a market that many Aboriginal stakeholders would like to see disappear to a market they see reason to maintain.
Conclusion

I aim to tell stories – lots of small stories that may produce a scaffolding but that will not necessarily add up to a master narrative. ... I’ve tried to use [the essay form] to negotiate the line between precision and breadth, without falling fully into either one or the other. This book, then, plans to suggest histories broad enough to strike familiar chords (if not necessarily perfect harmonies) with a number of Native community and individual experiences. At the same time, I hope to offer enough specific experience to ground my gestures toward broad framings of the intricacies of cultural interaction. I am aiming for the evocative rather than for the final word. On each of these topics, there is much, much more to be said.

- Philip J. Deloria

Much of what Philip J. Deloria has to say about the nature of his book *Indians in Unexpected Places* resonates with what I have to offer through this dissertation about the Native Northwest Coast artware industry. Deloria has written a collection of essays, and I, a collection of chapters. Together, they form a whole, but not because they impeccably and impermeably cover a specific area identified as a ‘gap’ in human knowledge. What Deloria calls a ‘scaffolding’ in the case of his book, I would call a horizontal ‘trellis’ in the case of my dissertation. Its chapters offer the reader an open weave across which to travel and catch a closer view of an under-examined area of study. The mesh is uneven at times, leaving variously-sized spaces for future studies to fill. Still, the latticework is sturdy, making it possible to take assured steps towards these spaces. On each issue I have discussed, there would be much more to say, likely even rectifications to make. Nonetheless, I hope that what I have written will strike familiar chords with the participants of the Native Northwest Coast artware industry. From the time I began to write, I knew that one of the challenges I was going to face was to produce an analysis that does justice to the knowledge, experience, and opinions of all the individuals I was able to speak to, all the while trying to avoid the pitfalls of both relativism and objectivism. Ultimately, I neither claim that I have produced an account that will perfectly match each of my interlocutors’ points of view, nor pretend that my work represents the only possible overarching view of this market. Instead, my goal has been to get a more precise and deeper sense of the complex tensions that run through the Native Northwest Coast artware industry.

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From the various reactions my research has provoked, both among industry participants and among scholars, I have learned that strong opinions about the artware market, its ethics, its politics, and its economics, come easily – especially critical ones. From the various phases of my doctoral research, I have learned that producing an overarching understanding of this industry, including through an examination of these criticisms, comes much less easily. May those who identify flaws in my analysis understand that I do not in any way wish to have the final word – this dissertation and the arguments it contains are not an attempt to close the book on issues that are hotly debated both in the market and in academia. On the contrary, I see this work as my contribution to these debates, an analysis offered for critical engagement.

Although I believe the value of research lies to a significant extent in its ability to be used to practical ends, I have never had the ambition to ‘solve’ the problems that have been discussed with me. First of all, as illustrated in Chapter 2, my work is preceded by decades of efforts to transform this industry such that it would present fewer risks and yield greater benefits for its Aboriginal stakeholders. In this respect, there is little reason to believe that my work would be any more effective in addressing the barriers that have been hindering the advent of such changes than any of the previous efforts to do so. Second, as a non-Aboriginal researcher, I dare not position myself as an individual instigator of changes that would affect Aboriginal peoples’ lives incomparably more than it would my own.

At the same time, I do see it as my responsibility to ensure that my work will represent a contribution other than purely intellectual. As a PhD student, I have had the privilege to dedicate several years to the study of the question of my choice. I took this opportunity to do what participants in the artware industry do not necessarily have the time and leisure to do: spend time where they spend time (warehouses, studios, retail stores, trade shows, etc) and talk to those they talk to (artists, company owners, sales representatives, etc) but without the pressure of running a business or making a living from these activities. I did this with an altogether different goal – that of better understanding the culture of this market in relationship to the resources it draws upon, promotes, but also puts at risk. What distinguishes my point of view from those of participants in the industry is not so much the imagined objectivity of the outsider-researcher, but the luxury afforded by graduate school to acquire and produce knowledge about an industry of which I am not a direct stakeholder, but which raises important issues that I, as a member of Canadian society and a student of Northwest Coast art, have a stake in understanding and addressing. As I
explained each time I discussed with my interlocutors why I chose to do this research, my aim has been to acquire the ability to lay out the current configuration of the industry in such a way that they, as its participants and stakeholders, can use this understanding to address the concerns this market continues to raise. Thus, to conclude this dissertation, I will briefly reiterate what I have learned about the Native Northwest Coast artware industry and identify the issues that, on the one hand, make this market so politically and morally charged, and on the other hand, feed the hopes of many of its participants and stakeholders that it can be transformed.

The adornment of objects of everyday life, as well as the production and distribution of objects in large series, are neither foreign nor new to the Aboriginal peoples of the Pacific Northwest. On the contrary, these are age-old practices that can be directly related to the region’s potlatch economy. In other words, if the current configuration of the Native Northwest Coast artware industry reflects a capitalist organization of the economy, this market also had Indigenous precedents.

The industrialization of Native Northwest Coast art was promoted over the course of a century as potentially beneficial both to the Canadian economy and to the well-being of Aboriginal peoples, and has grown amidst concerns that it would benefit more the former than it would the latter. In this respect, the idea that the industry can benefit its Aboriginal stakeholders more than it does has shaped and continues to significantly shape the discourses and practices of its participants and stakeholders.

Contrasting with hopes for such improvements, there are also concerns that, with globalization, local stakeholders are increasingly at risk of losing their grip on the ways in which the industry is run. In this context, it is significant that the Native Northwest Coast art and artware market is an example of a commoditiescape entwined in global connections but that nonetheless continues to be tightly bound to the local hub from which it initially derived its specificity. Despite various deterritorialization processes, the industry has indeed managed to maintain the Pacific Northwest as the territory from which local industry participants attempt to exert control over certain aspects of the market. This includes placing limits on the unauthorized reproduction and circulation of Northwest Coast designs, which has long been a problem in this market.
One manifestation of these efforts is that, even though most Greater Vancouver Area Native Northwest Coast artware companies are non-Aboriginal-owned and operated, it is increasingly becoming a “moral imperative” for them to work directly with Aboriginal artists. In this context, the vocabulary of “collaboration” has become a particularly common way to frame the arrangements of artists with artware companies, mirroring similar developments in the rhetoric used to describe relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples more generally. In both cases, it has become increasingly difficult to differentiate discourses about interactions that challenge colonial power dynamics through more equal and equitable partnerships, as early proponents of the collaborative model had hoped, from discourses about other forms of interactions. Similarly, the way in which the evocative yet elusive language of “authenticity” has been deployed in this market has meant that it is currently not reserved to specific kinds of practices or products, prompting efforts from particular Aboriginal stakeholders to assert greater control over its meaning and use.

Furthermore, in the Native Northwest Coast artware industry, economics and ethics are inextricably intertwined, making economic transactions between individuals often also be associated with more collective ethical stakes. As a result, the “fairness” of arrangements between artists and artware companies tends to be evaluated not only in terms of what is being exchanged between them from a technical-legal standpoint – whether it be art, labour, or services, for example – but also in relation to the kinds of relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples these kinds of exchanges represent. In general, debates about the morality of the artware industry’s current configuration tend to reach beyond whether or not its participants abide by the law and reflect market-defined prices. In this respect, there are parallels between negotiations as they occur in the artware industry and as they unfold as part of treaty processes. Ultimately, lengthy and thorny negotiations are not usually about whether or not the proposed political, legal, and economic frameworks are being respected; rather they often have to do with how these frameworks would need to be modified in order for them to better reflect the worldviews and interests of the Aboriginal parties involved.

In this respect, because of its use of means of mass-production and mass-distribution, the development of the Native Northwest Coast artware industry is more often associated with the rise of consumerism than with a strengthening of Aboriginal worldviews. Initially a social movement designed to protect consumer interests by promoting equal access to goods and
services, consumerism is now usually understood as the illusory and superficial pursuit of individual freedom despite the uniformity and conformity being proposed to consumers. In the artware industry, serialization has been used as a means to increase access to Northwest Coast art by making an ever-growing number of designs and products available in seemingly limitless quantities and at low prices, mirroring consumerism’s early democratic ideals. However, the pursuit of mass-consumption has also been accompanied by a certain number of standardizations in design choices and placements, leading to critiques of the industry as making Northwest Coast art conform to consumerism’s demands. I have argued that standardization is in fact not due to the process of serialization in and of itself, but rather to producers and distributors imagining artware consumers as having relatively homogenous expectations as to what this art “looks like” and “means”. The fact that this is not the only possible approach is illustrated by the efforts of some artware producers to address more varied audiences by exploring design approaches both to art and its application to wares that challenge these expectations and make more thorough use of Northwest Coast design’s adaptability and amenability to change. Thus, if serialization can be accompanied by standardization, it can also accompany more fine-grained singularization of taste, identity, and place – including Aboriginal tastes, identities, and places.

Also in relation to the importance of the singularity of place in Northwest Coast art and artware production, some materials are considered valuable by virtue of being “Indigenous”, “local”, and/or “sustainable” – in other words, because they are not only historically associated with Northwest Coast art in particular, but also because they mesh well with commonly-held ideas about Aboriginal art in general. In addition, I have shown how particular materials have become so inextricably tied to a specific region that they tend to be considered “quintessential substances” of this region’s Aboriginal inhabitants. In the Pacific Northwest, cedar is one such substance. In contrast, other materials tend to be completely disassociated from Aboriginal ways of life. Plastic is one of them, making the expression “plastic totem poles” shorthand for all that “real” Northwest Coast art is not. Interestingly, however, in the field of Northwest Coast art and artware the often denigrated material of plastic has gained value in its association with one particularly culturally valued material, namely argillite. Impossible to mass-produce using industrial means of extraction and manufacture, carvings made out of this black slate (found exclusively on Haida Gwaii) face competition from objects made from various imitative materials. While black plastic is usually criticized as a crude attempt at achieving resemblance,
more convincing faux-argillite draws criticism for being too sophisticated an effort to pass for argillite. Compared to other kinds of plastic, the appeal of these imitative materials in the artware market is directly derived from the value that raw argillite has accrued from its exclusive access and use by the Haida. Thus, it is not surprising that these imitations elicit not only concerns that they cut into Haida artists’ market, but also requests that some of the returns they generate be re-directed by artware companies to Haida stakeholders.

The idea that the industrialization of Aboriginal “arts and crafts” can be an opportunity for the “economic development” of Aboriginal communities has been more recently recast as that artware companies should adopt “sustainable” practices, not only with respect to the economic viability of their business and environmental protection but also, and perhaps more importantly, with respect to supporting the continued practice of Aboriginal arts, cultures, and ways of life in the Pacific Northwest. It may appear paradoxical that such a responsibility be placed on an essentially capitalist market since it was in the name of this very economic model – among other justifications – that the practice of potlatching was banned by law for sixty-seven years, severely impacting Northwest Coast political, social, and cultural life. However, as the example of the artware industry shows, the relationship between capitalism and potlatching is more complex than that of the destruction of the latter by the former. Far from only catering to the tourist market, the artware industry also produces potlatch goods, and a number of artists fund their contributions to potlatches through the sale of their work to galleries and artware companies. Also, the artware industry has been increasingly shaped by the expectation that its participants, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal alike, have to find ways to “give back” to the industry’s (other) Aboriginal stakeholders. Indeed, in the Pacific Northwest exchanges of property have to be publicly validated via practices of redistribution that are part of a system of generalized reciprocity. By the very fact that the industry derives its specificity from its use of Native Northwest Coast art to singularize otherwise ubiquitous wares, its participants are indeed pulled into this system of generalized reciprocity. Thus, beyond finding agreeable arrangements with their direct business partners, artware companies are expected to make reciprocity part of their overall business model. In turn, the fulfillment of this expectation is a way for companies to improve their reputation in the market. Indeed, it allows them to publicize their commitment to supporting Pacific Northwest peoples in their willingness to derive economic and other forms of capital from “cultural resources” such as art, insofar as they are able to manage the risks that
inevitably come with cultural commodification. It is in this sense that I speak of *Culturally Modified Capitalism*: a market in which capitalism’s main features remain but are modified via the norms of a local economic system.

It is also in this sense that I follow Jean and John Comaroff when they say that “Against the telos of both classical and critical theory, the rise of ethno-commerce in the age of mass-consumerism is having counterintuitive effects on human subjects, cultural objects, and the connection between them.”² In particular, “while the commodification of identity is frequently taken as prima facie evidence of the cheapening of substance, the matter has never been quite so straightforward.”³ In the Native Northwest Coast artware industry, the relationship between commodification and the “cheapening of substance” is indeed anything but straightforward, as I have endeavoured to show throughout this dissertation. Each argument suggesting otherwise invites a counter-argument. The idea that Northwest Coast art has been devalued by undergoing serialization can be counterbalanced by the observations that serialization has always been and continues to be an important mode of artistic exploration for Northwest Coast artists. To the suggestion that the distribution of mass-produced goods points to a decline in the importance of Pacific Northwest Coast potlatching, it can be objected that the availability of such goods has actually facilitated the holding of these expensive but crucially important events in the face of extreme economic hardship in many Aboriginal communities. The argument that Aboriginal identities are lessened by the use of industrial materials and technologies also fails to take into consideration the fact that artware items, which are produced with these materials and technologies, play an important role not only in everyday expressions of cultural identity but also in the payment of witnesses to the transfer of names, titles, songs, and other forms of intangible property.

Still, it cannot be ignored that the commodification of things “cultural” often involves both quantification, standardization, and destruction on the one hand, and qualification, singularization, and preservation on the other. In this respect, the artware industry treats Native Northwest Coast art as a “resource” that can be drawn upon and expanded, as well as promoted and protected, similarly to the other resources upon which it draws, such as labour, capital, and raw materials. At the same time, Northwest Coast art is not quite just another resource among

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³ Ibid.
others, this for several reasons. First, although Aboriginal designs alone do not make the Native Northwest Coast artware industry, they do occupy a central place in this market: they are indeed what distinguishes the industry and its products from others. Second, many of those I spoke to consider that the value of these designs cannot be quantified, despite the fact that commodification processes mean that they are attributed a price. In other words, although Northwest Coast art is treated as a resource in that it is drawn upon to create wealth, its intrinsic value is also regarded as exceeding this particular kind of utility. Therefore, there is a palpable tension between the designs’ economic value and its other values – social, political, spiritual, and cultural.

I argue that it is this very tension that is at the heart of the debates about how Aboriginal designs should and should not be treated, significantly shaping the Native Northwest Coast artware industry. Because of the various values attributed to Aboriginal designs beyond the economic, both the art and the artware market raise concerns about how far their commodification can be extended before these other values are adversely affected. Therefore, although some would like this market to be developed to its fullest potential, others would rather place limits on this development as a safeguard against the real and perceived dangers of hyper-commodification. On the one hand, powerful ideas like ‘visibility,’ ‘prosperity,’ and ‘democracy’ provide justification for taking the risks associated with developing the industry, pushing further the commodification of Northwest Coast art; on the other hand, ideas that also have some weight, such as ‘authenticity,’ ‘sustainability,’ and ‘reciprocity,’ are used as a basis to respond to the risks presented by this growth and hyper-commodification. Thus, one of the concerns this industry continues to raise, including among its participants, is finding ways to ensure that monetary value does not overpower the other spiritual, social, cultural, and political values in the name of which Native Northwest Coast art has been and continues to be produced. I argue that much of what makes the specificity of the Native Northwest Coast artware industry’s current configuration stems precisely from this concern, carried over decades now, not only by the industry’s opponents but also by some of its proponents. In many ways, what I have described as a yearning for a “new and improved” industry that benefits Aboriginal stakeholders more than it currently does is also an expression of the desire that Northwest Coast art be used as a resource only to the extent that the economic wealth it yields be fed into, rather than take away from, the ways of life of the Aboriginal peoples who developed this resource in the first place.
The politically and morally charged debates that animate the Native Northwest Coast artware industry, and to which this dissertation speaks, can surely be attributed to the undeniable complexity of this task and to the importance of the stakes to which it is associated.
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Appendices
Appendix A: Consulted Archival Fonds

The University of British Columbia Rare Collections and Archives
Alice Ravenhill papers

The University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology Library and Archives
Audrey Hawthorn fonds

The British Columbia Archives
F/1/R19 Alice Ravenhill fonds
GR-0111 BC Provincial Museum correspondence inward 1897 - 1970
GR-1661 Records of the Deputy Provincial Secretary 1954-1983
GR-1731 Lieutenant Governor files 1958 - 1978
H/D/R13 George Henry Raley fonds
MS-0964 Llewellyn Bullock-Webster fonds
MS-1077 Newcombe family fonds
MS-1116 Society for the Furtherance of British Columbia Indian Arts and Crafts fonds
MS-2629; MS-2799 Anthony Walsh fonds
MS 2720 British Columbia Indian Arts and Welfare Society fonds: 1940-1954
MS 2760 G Macrina Parker collection
MS 2837 Dr. A.N. Beattie papers: 1945-1973

The National Library and Archives of Canada
R9331-0-X-E (MG30-D387) Modest Cmoc fonds
RG10-B-3-e-xiv Economic development - Project assignment - Canadian Indian Marketing Services - Headquarters.
Appendix B: Museum of Anthropology Shop Customer Survey Questionnaire
Museum of Anthropology Shop
Customer Survey
Solen Roth, 2010

This first set of questions is to help us know a little bit more about you.

1.a
□ Male  □ Female  ………

1.b In what age group are you?
□ Under 19 (cannot participate)
□ 19-30
□ 31-40
□ 41-50
□ 51-60
□ 61-70
□ 70+

1.c Are you affiliated to UBC?
□ No [go to 1.d]  □ Yes  □ Student
□ Staff
□ Faculty
□ Alumni
□ Campus resident
□ Endowment Lands resident
□ Other (please specify)______________________

1.d What is your city and country of residence?
City:  ……………………………
Country:  ……………………………

1.e Not counting your visit to the Museum Shop, have you visited or are you going to visit the Museum of Anthropology today?
☐ No [Please skip to question 2.a]
☐ Yes

1.f Is this your first visit at the Museum of Anthropology?
☐ Yes [Please skip to question 2.a]
No  ➔ Overall, how many times have you ever visited the Museum of Anthropology?
☐ 3 times or less
☐ between 4 and 10 times
☐ More than 10 times

In this second section, the questions are about your experience at the Museum Shop.

2.a Was this your first time at the Museum Shop?

☐ Yes [Please skip to question 2.b]
☐ No  ➔ How many times per year do you come to the Museum Shop:
☐ once per year or less
☐ between 2 and 5 times per year
☐ between 5 and 10 times per year
☐ more than 10 times per year

2.b Approximately how much time did you spend in the Museum Shop today?
☐ Less than 5 minutes
☐ Between 5 and 15 minutes
☐ Between 15 and 30 minutes
☐ Between 30 minutes and 1 hour
☐ Over 1 hour

2.c For whom were you shopping at the Museum Shop today?
(Note: If you were shopping for more than 3 items, please pick any 3 from those items)
Item 1  Item 2  Item 3

No one in particular  □  □  □

Yourself  □  □  □

Friend  □  □  □

Partner  □  □  □

Family Member  □  □  □

Colleague  □  □  □

Other (please specify):  □  □  □

………………

2.d Please describe in a few words what you were looking for at the Museum Shop today.
Item 1

Item 2

Item 3

2.e For each of the items you were looking for at the Museum Shop today, up to what price were you willing to pay?
Item 1: ………..
Item 2: …………..
Item 3: ………….

2.f Were you able to find what you were looking for at the Museum Shop today?
□ Yes  [Please skip to question 2.g]
□ No  ⇒ Please explain which item(s) you didn’t find and why:
Item 1  Item 2  Item 3

Not available in the store  □  □  □

Selection available too expensive  □  □  □

Quality not satisfactory  □  □  □

Other (please specify): □  □  □

………………

2.g Concerning products you would prefer being able to purchase at the Museum Shop, rate the importance of each of the following items, using a scale from “1=Not important at all” to “10=Very Important”. If you wish, you can comment on the item and your rating.

i. Affordable

1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10  

Comments:

ii. Handmade

1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10  

Comments:

iii. Designed locally

(e.g. designed in Canada in the case of an item associated with Canadian culture)

1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10  

Comments:
iv. **Produced locally**  
(e.g. produced in Canada in the case of an item associated with Canadian culture)  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10  
Comments:

v. **Designed by a person of the culture represented**  
(e.g. created by a First Nations person in the case of an item with a First Nation theme)  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10  
Comments:

vi. **Produced by a business owned by individuals of the culture represented**  
(e.g. a First Nation-owned business in the case of an item with a First Nation theme)  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10  
Comments:

vii. **Fairly Traded**  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10  
Comments:

viii. **Environmentally Friendly**  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10  
Comments:

2.h When referring to First Nations objects, in what cases would you expect the word “authentic” to be used?
2.i After today’s visit, which three words or expressions would you use to describe the Museum Shop?
1. ........................................
2. ........................................
3. ........................................

2.j Have you been to other gift shops, galleries, kiosks or other stores that sell First Nations art in the last year?
☐ No  [go to question 3.a]
☐ Yes → In a few words, please explain from your point of view the similarities and/or differences between the Museum Shop and this (these) other store(s)?

This last section is designed to ask you about your level of satisfaction with your visit at the Museum Shop today.

3.a Please indicate which of these customer services you received during your visit at the Museum Shop today, and please rate each kind of service you DID receive from “1 = Not helpful” to “5 = Very Helpful”
☐ None [Please skip to question 3.b]
☐ Help finding products in the store 1 2 3 4 5
☐ Information about products 1 2 3 4 5
☐ Information about cultures 1 2 3 4 5
☐ Information about the maker/artist/artisan 1 2 3 4 5
☐ Other Service (please specify): 1 2 3 4 5

3.b What, if anything, do you think could be done to improve your overall experience at the Museum Shop?

3.c Do you have any other comments about the Museum Shop?

THANK YOU!