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Abstract

This dissertation examines the irony of Canada's discourse on "Indian affairs" by reinterpreting the postal literature generated around the banning of the potlatch in British Columbia from 1868 to 1936. To explain the logic behind the antipotlatch law, the first section, "Folding," examines a set of texts which draw an absolute limit between Europe and the coastal First Nations. The gift is the privileged sign of this limit: it divides the societies which potlatch from a Euro-Canadian society which claims to be a system of exchange. Ironically, the moment such a limit is put into writing, it folds together everything it sets apart.

The second section, "Giving," situates the antipotlatch literature within the context of this ironic fold. By banning the potlatch, Canada aimed to Europeanize the coastal First Nations: to collapse them into the white collectivity even though that collectivity defined itself by excluding them from its borders. To kill the potlatch was to erase the gift, the mark distinguishing Canada from the cultures it wished to absorb. Yet the potlatch which Canada banned did not correspond with the potlatches which the First Nations performed. The legal text gave its own potlatch to the world. The dissertation is, above all, an attempt to explain the mechanics of this textual gift.

The antipotlatch law also banned something it called the "Tamanawas" dance, which was alleged to be a form of ritual cannibalism. Section three, "Eating," argues that the effort to kill the potlatch was an act of cannibalistic white nationalism. The two authors of the only serious attempt to enforce the law--William Halliday and Duncan Campbell Scott--interpreted Canada's relation to the First Nations as a relation of incorporation. Their texts think whiteness as an act of mourning, where to be white is to
belong to a nation that recalls itself to itself by interiorizing the memory of an aboriginal other who has died. Yet the other refuses to die. The thought of whiteness finds itself tied to, and opposed by, the memory of a death which is projected onto the horizon of an endlessly deferred future.
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You there, what do you say about what you are,

while you are saying what I am?

Robin Blaser (citing Michel de Certeau),

_The Holy Forest._
Send-Off
If it began anywhere, it began in the mail. In 1884 the Parliament of Canada passed a law banning the performance of potlatches and tamanawas dances among the First Nations of British Columbia. When Parliament delivered it to history, the new statute took its place within a growing series of letters, reports, memoranda and petitions which had circulated between Ottawa and British Columbia, and between Ottawa and itself, since at least 1872. As it shuttled from post to post, this correspondence had knitted traders, missionaries, settlers, government officials and aboriginal people into an immense web of communication. After the statute came into force on 1 January 1885, writing gathered around it with increasing intensity. Most of the correspondence aimed to define, to regulate and ultimately to destroy the social systems of the British Columbia First Nations. But many texts were delivered in their defense, usually in self-defense. Over the years these potlatch papers gathered to form an archive of postal literature—from the first missives of the 1870s to the last reports of the 1930s, when the mail finally stopped coming.

What was sent in the potlatch papers? It would be correct to note that they transmit the arguments and counterarguments, recommendations and complaints, the errors, prejudices and hatreds of a whole canon of minor authors, most of them white. But something else was sent, something that left its mark in every dispatch yet resided nowhere. For the correspondence gives us access to the postal principle which, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, sent Canada out to its western limit, delivering it to the very edge of itself on the coast of British Columbia, where it immediately overlapped itself and returned to sender.

And behind Canada came Europe, travelling to its westernmost boundary via the
same system of posts. In the Pacific northwest, Europe was to discover not only its geographical border, but its conceptual limit, the line where Western-European metaphysics confronted the beyond of its own restricted enclosure. But Europe had also preceded Canada to the northwest coast. It was already there when Canada arrived, already there where Canada would come to be—as if Europe were Canada’s past sent to meet it from the future. However when I say that Europe arrived on the coast before Canada, I do not simply mean that European explorers had scouted the Pacific northwest in the 1770s, almost a century before the Dominion of Canada came into being and only a few years after Britain had seized control of New France. Nor do I point to the fur trade that had brought British, Russian, Spanish and Euro-American traders to coastal waters from the late 1770s through to the 1850s. Nor do I merely acknowledge that Vancouver Island had become a British colony in 1849. Or that Britain’s Colonial Office had entrusted the administration of the colony to the Hudson’s Bay Company until 1858—the year the mainland colony of British Columbia was established—and had overseen the union of the two colonies in 1866. Nor, finally, do I allude to the missionaries from Europe and elsewhere who had begun circulating through the northwest in the 1840s. In putting Canada behind Europe, I do not just confirm that Europe’s representatives had arrived on the coast long before 1871, when British Columbia passed out of Britain’s supervision and became the sixth province in the Canadian confederation.

Though these events all have a place in the historical record, they do not belong to the "already-thereness" that I wish to evoke here. What I want to underline instead is that when Canada finally delivered itself to its western border, it found Europe already embodied in a group of cultures that white Canadians wished to define themselves
against. Europe was already there among the very First Nations which European
Canada, Europe-in-Canada, considered absolutely different from itself. Since Canada
failed to distinguish itself conclusively from the people it encountered at its limit, an
uncertainty about whiteness has not ceased to haunt the settler society which grew up in
British Columbia. It was as if from the moment that society found itself reflected back to
itself by the local First Nations, it could no longer lay claim to its own identity—as if
white settlers arrived in British Columbia only to discover they were somehow unequal to
themselves.
Folding

If there were no fold, or if the fold had a limit somewhere--a limit other than itself as a mark, margin, or march (threshold, limit, or border)--there would be no text. But if the text does not, to the letter, exist, then there is [il y a, es gibt] perhaps a text. A text one must make tracks with.

Derrida, "The Double Session," Dissemination 270.
1. Three Zones

In what follows, I want to locate the law against the potlatch and tamanawas within three intertwining zones of textual contradiction. I have already identified two of them. First, there is the limit. In the colonial text, the limit marks the line, or set of lines, where Europe attempts to trace a clean boundary between itself and its exterior. Yet the limit inevitably fails to establish itself because it is crossed by the very movement that draws it. The limit occupies a textual zone where the marking of limits is impossible.

The fold is the second zone of contradiction. It draws together everything which the limit sets apart. The fold is a bend in the colonial text where Europe brings itself back into an intimate encounter with everything that it situates outside its outermost rim. Along the fold, Europe overlaps itself with what it defines as its own beyond. Considered as a rhetorical structure, the fold is a mode of irony; it makes contradictory terms interact.

Then there is the gift, though it cannot be thought without the limit and the fold. In the colonial text, the gift locates itself on both sides of Europe’s self-imposed limit. It occupies the zone where what Europe identifies as its beyond bends back over its interior. In the vicinity of the gift, Europe returns to itself even as it tries to stay at an absolute distance from itself.

I call the limit, the fold, and the gift intertwining "zones" to distinguish them from concepts. They are not ideas that inhere in a human subject, nor do they represent objects that exist in the world outside the mind. They are instead the evanescent and
violent effects of writing. They set themselves to work within that postal literature which delivered Europe-in-Canada to British Columbia in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Together they comprise a region in the postal-colonial text where an author’s discourse consistently fails to do what it says it is doing. To map the three zones is to show how a given text diverges from itself.

2. Limit

In an 1889 report to the Geographical Society of Berlin, Franz Boas interprets the northwest coast of British Columbia as Europe’s outer edge, the westernmost border of the West. It traces the conceptual and geographic limit of European civilization. Yet the traveller who arrives there hoping to study the region’s aboriginal, non-European cultures quickly finds that Europe’s "influence" (Einfluss) has infiltrated almost every corner of the province. In British Columbia, Europe defines its limits only to find that it has already exceeded them.

Published under the title "Herr Dr. F. Boas: Über seine Reisen in Britisch Columbien," the report resembles a postcard sent home by an observant tourist-ethnographer. Boas describes the sights he saw and the people he met during his first two research expeditions to British Columbia: the privately funded voyage of 1886 and the 1888 voyage which began his work for the Committee of the British Association for the Advancement of Science (B.A.A.S.) for Investigating and Publishing Reports on the
Physical Characters, Languages, and Industrial and Social Condition of the North-Western Tribes of the Dominion of Canada. Curiously, Boas prefaces his geographic and ethnographic remarks by hinting that it would be just as easy for his readers to go and look for themselves. British Columbia is a place where everything remains to be seen. Now that the Canadian Pacific Railroad is complete, says Boas, "every year the beauty of the country attracts a stream of tourists (Vergnügungsreisenden) who visit the accessible parts of the Rocky Mountains, the Selkirks, or the picturesque coast," and since neither the topography, nor the geology, nor the plants and animals, nor the original inhabitants of the territory "are sufficiently known" to Europe, the province "remains wide open" to the gaze of the tourist-explorer (Forscher) (Rohner 3). To the Boas of mid-1889, British Columbia lies at the outer boundary of European knowledge.

If the province as a whole is situated on the rim of Western thinking, then the mountainous coast forms the rim of this rim, its "outermost line" (der äußerste Rand). Boas reports that "there are only four routes" which pass through the Coast Mountains to connect the "long drawn-out coast with the interior." In the south the Fraser River serves as "an old traffic artery," while a difficult and dangerous trail winds through "the dark gorge of the Bute Inlet;" further north the Bella Coola river joins the upper Fraser Valley to the coast, and the Skeena and Stikine rivers trace a final pass through the mountains. Bound tightly within its borders, "the coast forms, geographically and economically, a closed-off piece of territory (ein in sich geschlossenes Gebiet) which has little in common with the interior of the country" (4).

What distinguishes coast from interior, for Boas, is not only a geography, but a whole economy of closure. On this "closed-off" strip of land Europe ceases to have an
exchange with itself. Not only does Western knowledge have no currency here, but Europe, conceived as a distinct body of territory, comes to its end. The West posts itself as far as this coastal boundary and does not circulate beyond it.

According to Boas, the western limit takes the form of a quadrangle anchored at four terminal points. Just as four overland routes tie the coast to the interior, so four cities mark out the liminal zone where British Columbia gives way to the Pacific Ocean. On the Fraser River Delta, New Westminster is home to agriculture and salmon fisheries. Victoria, the provincial capital and seat of trade, lies at the south end of Vancouver Island, with the coal-mining town of Nanaimo to the north. The city of Vancouver, "built after the Pacific Railroad was finished," sits on the mainland, at the mouth of the Fraser. Boas observes that "Steamboat lines to Asia originate there and the planned cable to Australia will start from there" (5).

Newly tacked to the edge of the edge of North America, the port of Vancouver marks the point where Europe comes to its end and gives way to something called "Asia." But just when it has arrived at its limit and begins to rub against the borders of the East, the West folds back to find that even at its end, it is still contiguous with itself. The British Columbia coast is soon to be tied to Australia, a once non-European space which, like Canada, has been forced into the orbit of the Western world. Thus, at the terminus of the new railway, Vancouver binds together a set of contradictory movements. The city points away from Europe by pointing directly back to it. At Vancouver, the West brings itself to a close only on the condition that it simultaneously begins again.

It is at this paradoxical limit-without-limit, where West and East join only to part again, that Boas situates the objects that he wants most to study. After describing the
landscape of British Columbia, he devotes the rest of his postcard-report to a discussion of the aboriginal people who live on the coast: the people he calls "Indians" (die Indianer). His remarks suggest that despite the efforts of settlers to make the province into a prosthesis of Europe, the whiteness of this "outermost line" remains precarious. "The total number of Indians in British Columbia is estimated at 38,000," he says, "the majority of whom live on the coast; there they outnumber the white inhabitants."

Boas assures his fellow geographers that "The stranger coming for the first time to Victoria is startled by the great number of Indians living in this town." Tourists and explorers "meet them everywhere," though he notes that "They dress mostly in European fashion (meist nach europäischer Sitte gekleidet)" (5). No matter where the European ethnographer looks, he confronts his own doubles. Totally other and yet the same, the Native people of Victoria reflect the observer’s Europeanness back to him while changing it utterly.¹ They adopt a code of dress that signifies their proximity to Western civilization, yet by repeating that code, they render it different from itself and distance it irretrievably from all things Western.

Yet Boas hints that Victoria’s aboriginal citizens are bound to Europe only in so far as they pass beyond it and attach themselves instead to Asia and to Japan. After he describes their clothes and their faces—"their skin is very light; they have prominent cheekbones, straight, short-cut hair, and dark eyes"—he notes that "They remind us so strongly of the east Asiatic peoples (ostasiatischer Völker) that throughout British Columbia there is the indisputable opinion that they are descendants of Japanese sailors (japanischer Schiffer)" (6).²

In the end Boas avoids discussing the complex identity of these figures who, in
their singular being, simultaneously tie and untie West and East. He simply asserts that they are not sufficiently authentic to be appropriate objects for serious ethnographic inquiry. "Victoria," he confides, "is not the place to learn much about the Indian." To his gaze, the Native people of Victoria have deprived themselves of their Native identity by imitating Europe and reflecting its own image back to itself. But why does their adoption of European dress not deprive Boas of his own identity? If the Native people of Victoria render their aboriginality less aboriginal by acting more European, surely their mimicry also makes Europe less European, and more aboriginal, than it was before encountering them. For Boas, however, the Europeanness of these non-Europeans is just an obstacle to research and does not give pause for reflection.

Boas advises his audience that to understand the people of the northwest coast, it is necessary to move beyond Europe’s edge and shift closer to Asia. "We have to seek [the Indian] out in his own country," he declares, "where he lives according to his old customs, not influenced by European civilization (europäischer Zivilisation)." The best way to get beyond Europe’s grip is to seek out "the northern parts of the coast," where the economy of closure restricts the traffic of European "influence" (6).

Still, as Boas admits, even the northern section of the coast cannot rigorously be said to lie beyond the bounds of Western civilization. "Trading posts" and "missions" have not failed to establish themselves there, and the region is strewn with "salmon fisheries" and "canning plants" which are "all situated in the larger Indian villages because the Indians do the fishing" (6). Boas argues that the impact of these European outposts upon the most remote First Nations is both pervasive and negligible. Though at one point he says the fisheries "exercise a much greater influence on the Indians than the
missionaries do," in the next sentence he affirms that the opposite is true: "A number of tribes, however, have even escaped this influence, as for example, the Kwakiutl of northern Vancouver Island" (6).

To find a culture uncontaminated by European influence—because situated outside Europe's outermost limit—Boas directs his audience ever northwards to the region where the tip of Vancouver Island angles towards Japan. He names the people who live here the "Kwakiutl," though Europeans have also called them Quackewlth, Quackuli, Quackerewhs, Kwakiool, Kwawkewlth. In Boas's lexicon, the name "Kwakiutl" refers not only to the so-called Southern Kwakiutl, but also to the Heiltsuk and the Haisla. The Southern Kwakiutl now tend to call themselves Kwagiulth in communities lying to the south of their territory and, in the north, Kwakwaka'wakw, which means speakers of the kwakwala language. For Boas, the Kwakwaka'wakw are not "totally different yet the same" with regard to European civilization. They are instead absolutely other. But other to whom?

3. Fold

When positioning the Kwakwaka’wakw, Boas presupposes that he already understands who they are, even though that is what he has travelled to the coast to find out. According to a precomprehension which he knows without knowing it, the Kwakwaka’wakw are a people and a culture who live just beyond the westernmost limit
of the West. Yet this definition presupposes another presupposition, assumes another
assumption. To make the Kwakwaka’wakw into the absolute other of Europe suggests
that Boas also precomprehends what Europe is. It assumes that he could, if called upon
to do so, define the West that he defines the Kwakwaka’wakw against, as if somewhere
in his store of knowledge, he knew the very essence of the West, Westness itself.

But what about Europe and the Westness of the West? What is this entity that
places every "non-Western" and "non-European" culture at a clear distance from itself by
pushing them, if necessary, over towards Japan? One might say that Europe is a
geopolitical body, a particular volume of territory. But it is a body that cannot be clearly
delimited because it constantly adds members to itself, strapping on prostheses like
British Columbia, Canada and Australia. Besides, the Europe sketched by Boas is not a
volume so much as a force, an "influence," which is rapidly and violently imprinting
itself onto every region of northwestern North America. This force arrives in excess,
moreover, for it is constantly overflowing itself. Forever edging closer to Japan while
turning away from it, Europe puts limits on itself only to discover that it has already
slipped past them.

Still, the Europe I am discussing is really not a thing at all, but rather a fold in
certain texts that locate the limit of the West in British Columbia. The signifier
"European" marks the place where the structure of these texts subverts, in advance, their
own efforts to determine what Europe-in-British-Columbia is. For Europe is not.
Rather, Europe folds. It binds together themes which desire to remain at an uncrossable
distance from each other and inexorably situates Europe where, by its own calculations, it
cannot and must not be, placing it amid everything it holds to be most unEuropean.
As it turns back upon itself, Europe doubles itself. It lays itself alongside itself and renders itself different from itself. The irreducible spacing that divides Europe within itself clears the way for an uncertainty over the Euro-Canadian identity. As soon as Europe holds itself apart from itself and finds its own reflection in the most unEuropean regions of Canada, there intervenes the possibility not simply that Europe-in-Canada has ceased to be itself, but that it has never been itself. The Euro-Canadian identity can form itself only on the condition that it remain unequal to itself. It produces itself by destroying itself, and the play of production-destruction is generated within the folds of the postal-colonial text.

The fold and the uncertainty it creates implicate not only Europe and Europe-in-Canada, but all the substitutes which tend to stand in for them in the literature under consideration here. The series of Europe’s substitutes includes civilization, the West, Christianity, improvement, progress, elevation, the settler, the colonist and, inevitably, "the white man." In texts dealing with a former British colony like British Columbia, though, a sustained synecdoche tends to substitute England for the whole of Europe and its "influence."

Gilbert Malcolm Sproat’s *Scenes and Studies of Savage Life*, published in 1868, exemplifies these rhetorical turns: both the synecdoche that takes England for all of European civilization and the fold that destroys Europe-in-Canada by making it overlap what it defines as absolutely different from itself. Perhaps because *Scenes* interlaces autobiography with ethnography, it is a text which has as much to say about itself as about the culture it claims to describe. The text is an autobiography of itself because it constantly draws its reader’s attention to the foldings that govern its structure—as if the
narrative were more concerned with its own life than with the life of its author. As an ethnography, *Scenes* records not the customs of other cultures, but the ways in which the author’s discourse escapes his control and becomes other to itself. For as we shall see, the reasoning which Sproat delivered to the shores of Vancouver Island did not fail to fold back on itself when it encountered the people who live to the south and west of the Kwakwaka’wakw.

**Distance and Return.** Sproat arrived on the Island more than fifteen years before Boas. And if Boas was a student come to study the region’s aboriginal cultures—a task which drove him to seek an authentic region of "old customs" somewhere beyond Europe’s limits--then Sproat was a colonial post-officer sent to deliver the West to its westernmost edge. It was his task to disseminate the civilising influence that Boas tried to circumvent.

When Sproat sailed into Barkley Sound in 1860, his mission was not simply to oversee the operation of a sawmill and the construction of a company town in "the district now called Alberni" (*The Nootka* 3). He says that as he passed through the Sound and continued up Alberni Inlet, heading far into the southern portion of the Island, he planned to set up Europe: to Europeanize not only a landscape, but its inhabitants as well. Alberni was not to be just another colonial outpost; it was to become a part of England, an appendage sewn to the Empire’s flank.

For Sproat, Vancouver Island, British Columbia and Canada itself were not English colonies. They were England’s equivalents. Thirteen years after his arrival at Alberni, in his speech *Canada and the Empire*, he would propose Canada as a substitute
for England. By 1873 Sproat was the Agent-General for British Columbia in London, at the seat of English government, though he insists that he shares the aspirations of the "younger political men of Canada" (*Canada* 7). In his speech he advocates that Great Britain adopt the Canadian political system (2, 13) so that Canada, England, Scotland and Ireland would become "provinces" joined under one Imperial Parliament—"a change that would make Vancouver Island essentially an outlying English county" (7). Sproat reassures his audience that "The Canadian political system is the natural development of the English; it would not, therefore, be a foreign, or incongruous excresence" (7). Canada is not a parasite upon the body of the Empire, but rather lies at its heart, like a legitimate child who expects to inherit everything that belongs to its parent. If for Sproat the English are "a dominant race" (8) among dominant races, the most European of European nations, then Canada is even more English than England itself. As the Native people of Victoria offer a double of Europe to Boas's gaze, so Canada offers itself as England's double and sends back to the English an improved image of themselves. But this is 1873.

In 1860 Canada was still forming itself as a nation, and Sproat situated himself in the vanguard of the colonization of the northwest coast. He recalls in the Preface to *Scenes* that (unlike Boas) he did not arrive on Vancouver Island to collect ethnographic data. His book was an accident, a by-product of the five years he spent as "a colonial magistrate, and also a proprietor of the settlement at the head of Alberni Inlet." "I did not intend, originally, to publish these observations," he says, "and have made no attempt, now, at literary ornament in producing them" (*The Nootka* xxiii). He did, however, append epigraphs by various English poets to each of his book's twenty-eight
chapters; and three short poems of his own "ornament" the original 1868 edition. What is more, the problem of literary style poses itself in every sentence of his narrative.

In the first scene of *Scenes*, Sproat makes himself a character in his own narrative, affirming that "In August 1860, I entered Barkley Sound, on the outside, or western, coast of Vancouver Island, with two armed vessels, *Woodpecker* and *Meg Merrilies*, manned by about fifty men, who accompanied me for the purpose of taking possession of the district now called Alberni" (3). But according to Charles Lillard, who edited the 1987 Sono Nis edition of *Scenes*, Sproat was not there to supervise the act of seizure. A work party had already landed in June 1860, more than two months before Sproat arrived to take up his post as overseer of the new settlement (xvii-xviii).

While the opening sentence hints at the role storytelling plays in Sproat's ethnography, Lillard insists that "This statement is Sproat's only excursion from fact to fiction in the pages that follow" (xvii). It is as if Lillard, like Sproat himself, wants to defend the text against a reading which examines how the author's discourse fails to offer a true account of its world. But there are many more occasions when Sproat's constative assertions turn against themselves: occasions when the demands of literary ornamentation render an accurate statement of fact impossible.

Sproat recounts his approach to the interior of the island with an image of rape. His arrival is an unwanted entry performed by force: what Boas calls "the penetration by the Europeans [das Andringen der Europäer]" into the still unknown region that is British Columbia (Rohner 13). The land is to be seized, moreover, in the name of European whiteness. After Sproat lands at Alberni, he informs the people who already live there that he and his companions have "bought all the surrounding land from the Queen of
England, and [wish] to occupy the site of the village for a particular purpose" (*The Nootka* 4). Later, he will name these people the Aht, though today they are widely known in the surrounding world as the Nootka, and though they call themselves Nuu’chah’nulth. Before naming them, however, he uses the threat of violence—"being provided, fortunately, in both vessels with cannon" (4)—to drive them from their ancestral village.4

I will continue to call these figures the "Aht" to emphasize the possibility that Sproat’s descriptions of them have more to do with "literary ornament" and the textual fold than with everyday life in a nineteenth-century Nuu’chah’nulth community. Since Sproat’s Aht are less a literary representation than a literary gift, one must take care not to assume that the two names—"Aht" and "Nuu’chah’nulth"—are equivalent terms that attempt to point to a single referent.

Like Boas after him, Sproat identifies the fringe of British Columbia as the western limit of Western knowledge. "These were the first savages I had ever seen," he confides, "and they were probably at that time less known than any aboriginal people under British dominion" (5). A double synecdoche establishes itself here: Sproat is the agent who stands in for the whole of "British dominion," while Britain’s boundaries in turn substitute themselves for the borders of Western science. At this limit Britain and the West mark themselves off from the community of so-called "savages" who embody everything that the European intruders insist that they themselves are not. But the moment that Sproat distances Europe from its beyond, the distinction between them begins to collapse, and all the text’s thematic strands which signify "civilization" become intertwined with the many strands signifying "savagery." It is no coincidence that, from
the outset, the Westerners and the "Aht" find themselves mixed together, entangled: "A
civilized settlement was now formed almost immediately in their midst," says Sproat,
"and the natives stared at the buildings, wharves, steam engines, ploughs, oxen, horses,
sheep, and pigs, which they had never seen before" (5).

A few days after his arrival, Sproat talks with the "Chiefs" of the "Sheshaht," the
people he has driven from their homes. An old man tells him, "We do not wish to sell
our land nor our water; let your friends stay in their own country." Sproat replies by
assuring him that he and his people will soon become white just like the European
intruders: "the white men will come," says Sproat, "All your people know they are your
superiors; they make the things which you value. You cannot make muskets, blankets
[sic!], or bread. The white men will teach you to read printing, and to be like
themselves" (4-5; emphasis added). The man responds that the Aht have no desire to be
eaten by Europe: "We do not want the white man. He steals what we have. We wish to
live as we are" (5).

What Sproat shows, however, is that even before the moment of contact the Aht
already resembled the Europeans, were already "like" them. The similarity which is to
spring up between the two cultures in the future is already coming towards them out of
the past. For Sproat's discourse consistently fails to put a racially "pure" Europe into
writing. Just when the Aht are said to be most different from the Europeans, the text
folds back on itself and brings the two groups into an intimate proximity. I limit myself
to two examples.

In Chapter Four Sproat describes the "physical appearance" of the "Aht." He
argues in the fourth paragraph that the "Haida and other natives to the north are fairer in
complexion than the Aht"--so fair, in fact, that "Their young women's skins are as clear and white as those of Englishwomen." Yet if for Sproat the Haida sometimes resemble Englishwomen, the appearance of the Aht sets them at an unbridgeable distance from all northern Europeans. "Cook and Meares probably mentioned exceptional cases," he assures us, "in stating that the natives of Nootka had the fair complexions of the north of Europe," and he insists that "The prevailing colour of the people in Vancouver is unmistakably, as here described, a sort of dull brown" (21).

But Sproat's discourse has already overlapped itself, in advance of itself, with an equal and opposite counter-assertion. The same "dull brown" complexion which divides the Aht from Northern Europeans in paragraph four draws them close to the English in paragraph three. Before setting the Aht at a distance, Sproat brings them near with this sentence: "Their complexion is a dull brown, just about, perhaps, what the English complexion would be if the people were in a savage instead of a civilized condition--the difference being explained by the habits of life of the Aht, by their frequent exposure, and by the effect of their food of blubber, oil, and fish" (21).

Though at one instant Sproat is careful to separate the two cultures, at another he says that the difference between the Aht and the English is a difference neither between two stages of human evolution nor between two races, but between two diets and two "habits of life." What he suggests, just before he affirms the opposite, is that the Aht are well-tanned English people who spend much of their time outdoors and eat a lot of fish, while the English are pale-skinned Aht who tend to stay indoors and, perhaps, eat too much bread. In his discourse the Aht are no longer simply brown and the English, and indeed all "northern Europeans," are no longer simply white. The two groups were
"like" each other before they ever met. However the colonizing gaze finds the mingling of races unbearable.

In his dialogue with the old chief of the "Sheshaht," Sproat states that the white skin of the European settlers marks them as racially superior to the Aht, but his commentary on racial difference shows that whiteness cannot be put into discourse without immediately becoming tangled up in its opposite--and ceasing to be white. Although the task which the text assigns to the words "white" and "brown" is to hold the "civilized condition" apart from the "savage," these words serve only to draw "civilization" and "savagery" together again. In Sproat's discourse, skin colour--which here serves as the privileged signifier of racial and cultural difference--fails to mean what it says it means because it occupies a zone of the text where two opposing themes overlap and cancel each other out. The mark of Europe's superiority crumbles before it can even take shape.

The textual fold recurs in the second last chapter of Scenes, where Sproat shows that civilization is closest to itself precisely when it approaches what it considers most debased and most uncivilized. In the Preface Sproat offers the last two chapters as a substitute for the rest of the book, as if the entire length of the narrative had been folded up and lodged at the end. "I have," he says, "stated in the two concluding chapters the opinions which I have formed from my observation and experience of these savages," and he proposes that "Some, perhaps, will read these chapters, who have not time to read the whole book" (xxiii).

In the next-to-last chapter, Sproat offers "some remarks...on the subject of intercourse between civilized and uncivilized races" (183), and he says he is convinced
that the European settlement in Alberni Inlet has brought on the death of the Aht. When he first arrived, he recalls, he did not see a change in his neighbours—but only because he had failed to observe "the gradual process" of their decline. Then suddenly he read the first signs of doom: "I seemed all at once to perceive that a few sharp-witted young natives had become what I can only call offensively European, and that the mass of the Indians no longer visited the settlement in their former free independent way, but lived listlessly in the villages, brooding seemingly over heavy thoughts" (186; emphasis added). Why should the narrator be offended to find Native people reflecting an image of Europe back to him as they edge towards extinction? The offense lies in the fact that their imitations destroy Europeanness by rendering it different from itself. For no matter what is happening to the Aht, it seems that Europe was already dead.

Though the act of mimicry presents European civilization with its own likeness, the production of that likeness is possible only if Europe was, from the start, never itself. Europeanness can be repeated by the Aht only because it was already a repetition. It is divided from itself when it is imitated, but if Europeanness did not already, and by definition, stand apart from itself, within itself, then it could not be taken away from Sproat and sent back to him by the "sharp-witted young natives" of Alberni. A Europe that maintained a unified and unruptured self-sameness could not be separated from itself and confronted with its own image. Europe is already dead because it is haunted by its own ghost, which doubles it in effigy. Europeanness exists only on the condition that it has, in advance, failed to exist.

Though it is Europe that confronts its own death here, Sproat insists nevertheless that the reason the Aht have become too European is that they, and not Europe, are
passing into oblivion. He attributes the "decay" of their culture neither to the disease nor the alcohol nor the social upheaval which European settlement has brought upon them largely against their will. The disaster is instead the result of a change in the light. "The steady brightness of civilised life seemed," he says, "to dim and extinguish the flickering light of savageism, as the rays of the sun put out a common fire" (187). The binary opposition that places the brightness of civilization over against the "dull" flicker of barbarism can only mean the death of barbarity. Unless it means that Sproat’s text cannot keep the two apart.

Sproat argues that the Aht responded to the construction of the settlement at Alberni by stepping off the path of human progress and regressing towards sheer bestiality. "The effect is this," he says:

the Indian loses the motives for exertion that he had, and gets no new ones in their place. The harpoon, bow, canoe chisel, and whatever other simple instruments he may possess, are laid aside, and he no longer seeks praise among his own people for their skilful use. Without inclination or inducement to work, or to seek personal distinction--having given up, and being now averse to his old life--bewildered and dulled by the new life around him for which he is unfitted--the unfortunate savage becomes more than ever a creature of instinct, and approaches the condition of an animal (190, emphasis added).

But just when the Aht have stripped themselves of whatever marks of civilization they once possessed and have reached the absolute limit separating humans from animals--at the point where to descend further would entail becoming more savage than the most savage--at this same point they find European civilization rising from the depths to join them. While they wilt under the glare of Europe’s white light, Europe itself turns in its upward path of social evolution, folds back, and begins to sink.

Sproat’s rhetoric places Europe simultaneously at the height of human attainment
and below the line dividing humanity from bestiality. Here is the next sentence:

He frequently lays aside his blanket and wears coat and trousers, acquires perhaps a word or two of English, assumes a quickness of speech and gesture which, in him, is unbecoming, and imitates generally the habits and acts of the colonists. The attempt to improve the Indian is most beset with difficulty at this stage of his change from barbarism; for it is a change not to civilization, but to that abased civilization which is, in reality, worse than barbarism itself. (190-1; emphasis added)

The most bestial, most barbaric thing a Native person can do is to imitate the white colonist. Every code which signifies Europeanness, including the codes of dress and of speech, of gesture and of habit—every symbolic act said to denote the racial superiority of settler society is transformed into its opposite the moment it is repeated by a Native mimic. But why? Sproat insists that these codes harbour no barbarism within themselves. Their debasement inheres only "in him": in the aboriginal figure who takes them up and doubles them. But why? What he finds most abhorrent in the Native mimic is nothing less than civilization itself. Civilization, "abased" within its own enclosure, is "worse than barbarism itself," and improvement itself blocks every "attempt to improve the Indian."

Like Boas after him, Sproat states that when faced with a specular image that brings otherness to bear on Europe’s dream of its unruptured sameness to itself, he prefers absolute difference. To become a European, then, it is not enough to imitate European codes. Sproat reserves his approval for the Native figure who has made a total "change" to "civilization" and become flawlessly white. The mimic who overlaps the civilized with the uncivilized, sameness with difference, is intolerable. "He is a vain, idle, offensive creature," says Sproat, "from whom one turns away with a preference for the thorough savage in his isolated condition" (Scenes 191). He desires either a native
who is exactly equal to himself or one who can be held at an absolute—"thorough"—distance from himself.\(^5\)

Sproat argues that his identity as a European, and particularly as a British European, justifies his occupation of the territory of the Aht and the slow extermination of their culture. "My own notion," he declares in Chapter Two, "is that the particular circumstances which make the deliberate intrusion of a superior people into another country lawful or expedient are connected to some extent with the use which the dispossessed or conquered people have made of the soil, and with their general behaviour as a nation" (8, emphasis added). Yet the episode where the Aht redouble civilization and render it offensive to itself destroys Europeanness along with its assurance of its own superiority, and transforms Europe into a place where nobody can ever be at home again. The mimics of Alberni simultaneously have the European identity and lack it, and they tell the white man who looks upon them that he has lost it forever because he never had it to begin with.

Though the colonist rejects the fold that catches up his writing in its movement—stating that he cannot bear to see an image of European Canada that is not equal to itself, a Europe-in-Canada that does not reflect itself back to itself point for point—nevertheless it is his own discourse that divides Europeanness within itself. The distance between civilization and savagery collapses along a fold-line that binds opposing themes together. Since a European Canada distinct from barbarism cannot be put into writing, Sproat's discourse establishes sameness at the very place where it situates difference. When it arrives at its western limit, Europe-in-Canada can only articulate itself within this zone of contradiction, and it inevitably bends back to find it is unequal to itself. The scene of
mimicry underscores the impossibility of tracing an unbreachable limit between Europeanness and its beyond.

4. Gift

Sproat begins his literary ethnography by stating that the Aht lie beyond the range of Western-European knowledge. Yet he claims to know them nonetheless. Scenes is based on the assumption that Western-European knowledge can cross beyond the limits it sets for itself without undermining the certainty of its findings. Yet Sproat’s discourse also shows how difficult it is for Europe to set its own limits in the first place. Although Europe defines itself in opposition to cultures which it considers wholly other to itself, Sproat’s text suggests it is impossible to maintain a stable distinction between what is the West and what is not.

Perhaps an uncertainty necessarily afflicts any text which assumes itself to be Western but leaves Westness unthought. The undecidability of the nature of the West imposes a responsibility upon the Western observer of the non-Western world: one cannot discuss aboriginal cultures without simultaneously asking what Europe’s limits are, and whether it ends where it says it does. For the inquiry into Westness itself, and into the Westness of the northwest coast, reveals that Europe neither discovers nor investigates the cultures which it endeavours to know. Rather, in its will to ethnographic understanding, Europe gives non-European cultures to itself. As it adds others to itself,
moreover, Europe extends its limits even as it tries to see past them. Understanding how such gifts and additions are possible requires a detour through the work of Martin Heidegger.

*Closure at the Origin.* In his late essays Heidegger situates the gift at the outer limit of Western-European philosophy. The gift marks philosophy’s origin as well as its end. Since Boas locates Europe’s limit somewhere between Germany and Japan in his 1889 report, perhaps it is more than a coincidence that Heidegger stages his "Dialogue on Language," published in the early 1950s, as a conversation between a German Inquirer and a Japanese Scholar. Although the "Dialogue" does not deal directly with the gift, it nevertheless makes a place for the gift on the border between Europe and Asia—as if some necessity were driving European discourse to set Europe’s outermost boundary in the vicinity of the Pacific northwest.

Both of the voices that speak the "Dialogue" stand in for Heidegger himself: the Inquirer (*der Fragenden*) claims authorship of all of Heidegger’s previous work, while the Japanese Scholar (*der Japaner*) is a mirror who reflects the Inquirer’s ideas back to him. Their discussion begins under the shadow of death. The Scholar reports that his teacher, Count Shuzo Kuki, who himself once studied under the Inquirer, has died "too early" (in *On the Way to Language* 1). Before he died, the Count wrote a book that applies European aesthetics to the study of Japanese art.

When he hears this news, the Inquirer does not pause to mourn the death of his student but points instead to the danger (*die Gefahr*) that attends every meeting of European and Asian systems of thought. He argues that the European philosophy of art,
and indeed the whole of "European thinking" (europäischen Denken)—which Heidegger elsewhere calls "philosophy," "Western metaphysics" and "ontotheology"—"must ultimately remain alien to Eastasian thinking (ostasiatischen Denken)" (2). Since Europe and Asia are said to be absolutely other to each other, the two speakers have to ask if a dialogue of West with East is even possible. As they talk, they question whether there can be any talking between them.

The Inquirer insists that the mutual otherness of West and East raises "a controversial question," namely, whether it is "necessary and rightful" for Asian thinkers to borrow from "European conceptual systems." He says that the language of Western philosophy tends to dominate whatever it attempts to know: when it sets out to understand things, philosophy threatens to reconfigure them, making them strange even to themselves. The Scholar responds that the "modern technicalization and industrialization of every continent" makes it impossible for thinkers in Asia and beyond to avoid engaging Western concepts. Though there lurks a danger that such concepts might lead Asian thinkers "astray" (3) in their research, one cannot wish away what the Inquirer calls the "complete Europeanization" (15) of the earth and its inhabitants (die Europäisierung des Menschen und der Erde). Since the whole world is becoming Europe’s intellectual colony, Asian intellectuals have to decide for themselves how best to deal with the fact of European domination.

Yet the Inquirer notes that "the danger" threatens not only Asian thinkers who borrow from European philosophy, but European thinkers conducting research on Asian cultures. Because the danger inheres within the fabric of language, the translation of nonEuropean matters into European terms threatens to make it impossible for European
thinkers to speak about Asia. If language is the house of Being, then Europe and Asia occupy "entirely different" houses, and communication between them tends to dissolve into sheer noise (4-5). However "the danger" also threatens to make Europe incapable of entering into a dialogue with itself. The speakers agree that Europe has always overlooked what is nearest to it. It has forgotten its own essence, forgotten what it is. As it extends its domination over non-European lands and peoples, Europe remains a stranger to Europe.

As the Scholar points out, the Europeanization of the world is normally thought of as the triumphal march of a European reason which asserts its dominance through its technological achievements (13-14). According to the Inquirer, though, the essence of Europe is not to be found in its technology and its industries; indeed its essence has yet to be thought. Although the influence of the Western "technical world" spans the globe, "a true encounter with European existence" has failed to occur "in spite of all assimilations and intermixtures" (3). Since the Europeanization of the world "attacks at the source everything that is of an essential nature," Europe's essence may well be that it cannot know its essence (16).

Ironically, if Europe finds itself nowhere, it still knows where it is not. It insists that it is not in Japan (and that it ends just short of the "Kwakiutl"). The European's Europe consistently fails to blend with any of the cultures which it has tried to swallow. Hence in the "Dialogue" one speaks of the Europeanization of Asia, rather than the Asianification of Europe. Europe is always assumed to dominate its others, yet it is anxious to remain pure of them.

The speakers say that Europe cannot enter into dialogue with non-European
cultures until it begins talking to itself. But before it can become its own interlocutor, Europe has to become other to itself. How is its self-alienation to be negotiated? The Inquirer argues that the only way Europe can cease to be other to itself and to its others, the only way it can cease to be both its own other and the other of its others, is to become even more other to itself. Only by distancing itself ever further from itself can Europe come back to itself and learn that it never parted from itself. The process that renders Europe different from itself, and prepares it for a dialogue with others, begins with an effort to initiate the closure of Western philosophy.

The speakers conceive of Europe not so much as a homogeneous territory nor as a source of political, industrial and technological dominance, but rather as a logic—a mode of reasoning, a metaphysics—which enacts strategies of intellectual domination. How is this "metaphysics" to be defined? When the late Count Kuki described the experience of Japanese art, he spoke of a "sensuous radiance" which gives its viewers access to "the radiance of something supersensuous" (14). The Inquirer argues that Kuki’s work transformed Japanese art into something European by situating it within "the difference between a sensuous and a suprasensuous world" (14). For the Inquirer, the distinction between the sensuous and the suprasensuous forms the basis of "what has long been called Western metaphysics" (14). Metaphysics encompasses any Western-European conceptual system that opposes the earthly to the transcendent, the real to the ideal, the world to a text, the referent to its sign, an original to its representation, a content to its form. In keeping with a postal logic, metaphysics sends the sensuous term of each of these binary pairs to stand in for and "represent" the suprasensuous term. The suprasensuous requires a sensuous substitute because it cannot make itself present as an
object of perception.

To initiate the closure of metaphysics means recalling the limits of its postal logic. What is at stake in the "Dialogue" is a vast "transformation of thinking" in the West (42): a transformation conceived of as a "passage" between two sites. The place to be abandoned is metaphysics, while the goal to be reached is an unnamed yet uncannily familiar area beyond the boundaries of Western philosophy. The goal is "familiar" because a truly anti-metaphysical thinking escapes metaphysics only to arrive back inside it; philosophy reaches its end by folding back on itself and encountering what it has left unthought throughout its history. Since the "unthought" has made Western thinking possible since its inception, the closure of metaphysics—a closure conceived as thinking the unthought—means taking a step back to the origin of metaphysics. Metaphysics becomes other to itself in order to discover how it has always been identical to itself. The transformation of metaphysics makes everything different by leaving everything where it was.

The Scholar affirms that any philosophy of art which presumes to pass out of metaphysics "also leaves behind the aesthetics that is grounded in metaphysics" (42). An aesthetics beyond aesthetics promises students an entirely new encounter with art, but only by returning to what the old aesthetics forgot. As the Inquirer notes, the end of philosophy surpasses aesthetics "in such a way that we can only now give thought to the nature of aesthetics, and direct it back within its boundaries" (42). The task of the thinker who leaves the enclosure of Western metaphysics is to place limits on metaphysical concepts to keep them from intruding where they do not belong and where, by their intrusion, they destroy the possibility of understanding the matter under
The work of transforming metaphysics, of rendering it strange yet strangely familiar to itself, begins by inquiring into the nature of language. The Inquirer says that although this question has barely been posed by Western thinkers, it promises to bring Europe back to itself by tearing it away from itself. Yet he introduces the problem of language with a note of caution. "The prospect of the thinking that labors to answer to the nature of language is," he warns, "still veiled, in all its vastness" (8). The opacity blocking the advent of a thinking beyond metaphysics makes it difficult to tell whether the Inquirer's understanding of "the nature of language is also adequate for the nature of the Eastasian language"(8). It is possible that "European-Western saying" and "Eastasian saying" might, once the transformation of metaphysics is underway, engage in a dialogue where Europe does not overpower Asia and where, instead, there is "something that wells up from a single source" (8). However it is too early to tell if West and East will overcome their otherness to each other and clear a path of mutual understanding outside of Western-European domination.

But Europe has to learn to speak to itself before it can speak to Asia. And if it is to begin a dialogue with itself, Europe must first step beyond the bounds of the metaphysical understanding of language. The conversation between Europe and Europe cannot deploy words as sensuous signs representing suprasensuous ideas. The dialogue has to occur, rather, in the mode of "saying" (die Sage). Saying is not a form of representation but rather a way of "letting appear" or even "letting shine" (47). It is "the beginning of that path which takes us back out of merely metaphysical representations" (48) and returns Europe to an encounter with what is essential to itself. But what does it
mean to say that saying lets appear or lets shine?

Heidegger’s interlocutors stage their inquiry into the "saying" of language to explain how things arrive before thought. They cannot assume that things are objects existing in the world and that thoughts represent those objects in the minds of human subjects, for this argument draws on the metaphysical distinction between sensuous facts and suprasensuous ideas. Instead they have to redefine the way the beings that are present in the world come into the presence of thinking. They concern themselves with "saying" because it allows them to explain how language gathers things and thinkers together without maintaining—metaphysically—that words represent thoughts and thoughts represent things.

The Inquirer approaches the problem of the becoming-present of present things by distinguishing between the entities that appear in the world and the appearing that enables them to become present: between the appearance that appears and the appearing that allows an appearance to appear. "If to be present itself is thought of as appearance" (39), he says, then the appearing of this appearance also needs to be explained. The problem, then, is to account for the presence which holds what is present before thought. For the Inquirer argues that "there prevails in being present" an "emergence into openness," which he calls "unconcealedness" (39). What is present arrives into the presence of thought in an event of unconcealment, yet what metaphysics fails to think is precisely this open region where what is present becomes unconcealed.

Heidegger says elsewhere that "what is present," the "present being," can simply be called a thing. A thing is anything that in any way is. Yet when one says that "a thing is," the "is" which allows it to be in the world goes unthought. To say a thing is
present or absent, that it is or is not, takes the "is" for granted. Thus to inquire into the presence of what is present, or the Being of beings, means asking about the "is" which is presupposed in any discussion of what exists. In "The Nature of Language" Heidegger poses the problem as follows: "the thing "is." Yet, what about this "is"? The thing is. The "is" itself--is it also a thing, a step above the other, set on top of it like a cap? The "is" cannot be found anywhere as a thing attached to a thing" (in On the Way 87). The "is" is a nonthing that permits things to be: Being holds beings without being anything itself.9

Heidegger identifies the "is"--Being itself--as the unthought which makes metaphysics possible. But he notes in his "Letter on Humanism" that metaphysics has forgotten to think the difference between the beings that are and the Being that allows beings to be. One brings about the closure of metaphysics by recalling this difference to thought. The end of metaphysics leads back to its origins, however, because to pose the question of Being is to ask how it has been possible throughout the history of Western-European philosophy to say that "there are" beings, entities--indeed anything at all.

But what gives Being? What sends this mail which carries not things, but the "is-ness" of things? What postal principle can account for such a delivery? Answering these questions leads into the vicinity of the gift since for Heidegger the thought of Being is tied to a thought of giving. In the "Letter" he notes that one cannot say that "Being is": such a phrase treats Being as a being and fails to approach the "is" which is itself under investigation. For Being is not a being that is. Being is not because, in the "Letter" at least, it is what gives the "is;" it is logically prior to the "is" and cannot be understood in terms of it. Heidegger uses the idiomatic German phrase "es gibt"--which in English
simultaneously means "there is" and "it gives"--to bring Being into language. He recalls that he once "purposely and cautiously" wrote "il y a l'Etre: "there is/it gives" ("es gibt") Being," but he notes that "Il y a translates "it gives" [es gibt] imprecisely. For the "it" [es] that here "gives" [gibt] is Being itself. The "gives" names the essence of Being that is giving, granting its truth. The self-giving into the open, along with the open region itself, is Being itself" (in Basic Writings 214). Here Being is the open region where, according to the Inquirer, beings come into their unconcealment.

In the "Letter" Heidegger calls Being's self-giving activity the "destiny" of Being (das Geschick des Seins): "Being comes to destiny in that It, Being, gives itself" (215). Yet Being "refuses" itself while giving itself: it goes unthought even as it allows beings themselves to be thought. The history of metaphysics is the history of this self-giving, self-withholding of Being in all its epochs: "The happening of history occurs essentially as the destiny of the truth of Being and from it" (215).

Throughout the history of the West, then, Being has ceaselessly put itself in the mail but has never arrived. What sort of postal system delivers the self-withholding gift of Being? In the "Letter" Being delivers itself to the world through the "saying" of language: "Being comes, lighting itself, to language. It is perpetually underway to language" (239, my italics). Being gathers thinkers and things into the "open region" of discourse. Only this "open region," this space of language, permits beings to reveal themselves to thought.

In "Time and Being" Heidegger modifies his account of the gift by insisting that although Being is sent to the world, it does not send itself. For the later Heidegger, Being arrives without putting itself in the mail. Being is delivered in an event of giving,
but the gift-event is itself prior to Being and indeed is what makes Being possible ("Time and Being" 8-9). This event cannot be thought in terms of Being because it stands outside of Being and its determinations (20-21). But if Being does not give itself, then how is it given? What is the gift-event which Being cannot give to itself?

In "The Nature of Language" Heidegger states that "the word gives Being" (88) (gibt das Wort: das Sein). The gift of the word gives presence to the beings that are present before thought. The word makes a present of presence. "Only where the word for the thing has been found," says Heidegger, "is the thing a thing. Only thus is it. Accordingly, we must stress as follows: no thing is where the word, that is, the name is lacking. The word alone gives being to the thing" (62). A word is a mode of "saying" which holds things and thinkers together in Being. For Heidegger, "there are" things to be thought only in so far as "there is" discourse in which to utter them.

The word gives access to the unthought which sets Western-European metaphysics going but exceeds its limits. As a mode of Being, a way of giving the "is" to the thing, the word necessarily belongs to the history of metaphysics, but since the inquiry into the relation between the word and "saying" clears a path to what metaphysics has forgotten--namely Being--the word also plays a role in the transformation that draws metaphysics towards its closure, which is also its origin.

But what if the word were "potlatch"? Since it is the word that gives being to the thing, cannot the word also give being to a whole culture and all the things that are said to pertain to it? If for Heidegger what remains unthought in metaphysics is the way the word--and the name in particular--makes a present of the thing, then it follows that words also give us the things of Western-European ethnography. The unthought in Western
thinking is not only the gift of Being, but the gift of the other. The closure of
metaphysics requires that thought direct itself not only to the delivery of Being in
general, but to the precise mechanics which enable words to send Europe the worlds
which it tries, always without success, to situate somewhere beyond itself. Especially if
the word is "potlatch."
The name seems produced, one time only, by an act without a past. There is no purer present, no generosity more inaugural. But a gift of nothing, of no thing, such a gift appropriates itself violently, harpoons, "arraigns," [arraisonner] what it seems to engender, penetrates and paralyses with one stroke [coup] the recipient thus consecrated. Magnified, the recipient becomes somewhat the thing of the one who names or surnames him, above all if this is done with the name of a thing.

...To give a name is always, like any birth (certificate), to sublimate a singularity and to inform against it, to hand it over to the police.

1. Nameless Distribution

Sproat suggests that the Aht have a privileged relation to the gift in Chapter Fourteen of *Scenes*. "The principal use made by the Aht of an accumulation of personal chattels," he says, "is to distribute them periodically among invited guests" (79). The act of distribution keeps the Aht at a marked distance from settler society, because those who give away their "chattels" continue to clothe themselves in blankets and do not offend the European observer by imitating his dress:

The collection of property for the purpose of distribution is the constant aim of many of the natives who, to the common observer, seems [sic] listless and idle. The Indian who stands by your side in a tattered blanket, may have twenty new blankets and yards of calico in his box at home. Whatever he acquires beyond immediate necessaries goes to increase this stock, until his high day comes in the winter season, when he spreads his feast and distributes gifts among the guests, according to their rank. (80)

But if the Aht accumulate property only to give it away, they give all knowing that every expenditure will eventually be repaid: "The giver does not now consider that he has parted with his property," says Sproat, "he regards it as well invested, for the present recipients of his largess will strive to return to him at their own feasts more than he has bestowed" (80). But how can a gift be called a gift if it eventually has to be given back in excess? This question will haunt Europe's discourse on the gift for years to come.

Although Sproat offers a standard outsider's description of what will come to be known as the potlatch, he fails to name it. In the Sono Nis edition of *Scenes*, the omission of the name is striking enough to merit a footnote from Lillard: "Here the author is describing the potlatch," the editor explains, "the ceremonial distribution of property that established the giver's political or social status." One of the "features of
Sproat’s description" that is "worth noting," Lillard notes, is that "he never uses the term "potlatch""(79).

There is irony in the fact that Sproat withholds the gift of the name from his text. After all, the factor of Alberni is describing a ceremony where gifts are given in the name of the name. When the Aht distribute property, they receive both a social rank and the title that goes with it:

The person who gives away the most property receives the greatest praise, and in time acquires, almost as a matter of course, but by voice of the tribe, the highest rank obtainable by such means. This rank is not of the highest class. It is only for life, and is different from the ancient hereditary tribal rank. With each step in rank there is usually a change of name. Thus, bearing different names, the industrious or acquisitive native may rise from one honour to another, till finally he reaches a high position. (80)

Sproat compares distribution of property to an election to political office. It gives some individuals a way to improve their rank in the social hierarchy, though for others rank is "ancient" and "hereditary," and therefore not "obtainable by such means."

Sproat does not attack the gift-giving ceremony in this 1868 text, yet a mere five years later Euro-Canadians will find gift-giving so intolerable they will take steps to abolish it forever. How is it that the gift (if it is a gift) was a matter of indifference in the 1860s yet became the target of a moral crusade by the 1870s? To answer this question, it is necessary to investigate the arrival of the name in the dialogue which the Canadian government held with itself on the subject of "Indian affairs" in nineteenth-century British Columbia. For the shift in the status of the gift is inextricably bound up with the delivery of the gift of the name.
2. The Mark of Expenditure

When British Columbia joined the Canadian confederation in 1871, the Terms of Union transferred control over Indian affairs from the province to the federal government. In 1872 the Indian Branch of the Department of the Secretary of State appointed Doctor Israel Wood Powell as the first Indian superintendent in Victoria. Though he was hired to manage relations between Canada and the British Columbia First Nations, Powell continued to practice medicine after taking charge of the superintendency (Fisher 180). In An Iron Hand Upon the People Douglas Cole and Ira Chaikin say that Powell brought the "baneful aspects of the potlatch" to the attention of the Indian Branch as early as January 1873. According to them, his first annual report to Ottawa noted "that potlatches, "quite common" on the coast, retarded civilizing influences and encouraged idleness among the less worthy Indians" (Iron 14). Yet this version of Powell’s "comments" omits one minor detail: in 1873 Powell did not yet mention the word "potlatch"--not quite.

Powell’s observations are paraphrased by William Spragge, the deputy-superintendent of the Indian Branch, in the "Annual Report on Indian Affairs for the Year ending June 30 1872." Under the heading "The Interior and Coast Indians Compared," Spragge writes: "Superintendent Powell informs us that the interior Indians are far superior in character and general condition to the Indians of the coast." What mark distinguishes the two groups from each other? "Those of the coast retain many of their barbarous customs, among them the great medicine feasts," while in contrast the people of the interior display "a decided capacity for trade, and possess commendable business
It is already, in the first months of British Columbia's union with Canada, a question of drawing limits. The "medicine feasts" trace a double border. They not only distinguish the First Nations of the interior from those of the coast, but also draw an absolute boundary between barbarism and civilization. Although Powell does not describe the feasts, he affirms that they are a sure sign of moral degradation. They inscribe the coastal First Nations with the mark of savagery. Since it is said that the First Nations of the interior do not hold such feasts, Powell locates them over towards the pole of civilization. The line dividing coast from interior is not so much a fact of geography as the product of a regulatory gaze that delivers an order of rank to the Pacific northwest. So far it is the "feast," and not the gift, that marks this division. But the gift has its own role to play in Powell's attempt to situate the aboriginal people of British Columbia on the scale of social evolution.

Elsewhere in his report, Powell claims (via Spragge, using him as a postal relay) that tyranny is the preferred system of government among the province's First Nations. Each group is, he says, ruled by hereditary "chiefs" who exercise a "despotic power" over their people. Moreover they shore up their authority by circulating what seem to be gifts: "The chiefs still...imply practices peculiar to themselves, in order to maintain as large a share of influence as possible with their people. Some of them donate, under the name of "Patlatches," to their people, blankets, food, firearms, &c., &c." As in Scenes gift-giving is here construed as a means of shoring up one's rank within a social hierarchy. But by a "strange" paradox, "Patlatches" prove not to be donations at all. "The gifts are dealt out with profusion," writes Powell (via Spragge), "but it is attended
with a strange feature; for *an equivalent in return* at a future gathering is expected to be presented" (*Sessional Papers* for 1873, No. 23: 10; emphasis added).

From the moment Canada's administrative apparatus arrives on the northwest coast, an undecidability haunts the official inquiry into the truth about "Patlatches." Are they acts of gift-giving where no present is ever returned? Or are they acts of exchange where everything given away is invariably given back, if not immediately then "at a future gathering"? In the discourse on "Indian Affairs," the difficulty of deciding whether these practices involve gift-giving or exchange is supplemented by the difficulty of naming them. Although Powell calls them "Patlatches" in 1872, an undecidability never ceases to haunt this word as it circulates through government dispatches. Indeed, other versions of both the word and the thing it names were in the mail by 1874.

In May 1874 Powell instructed George Blenkinsop, a former Hudson's Bay Company trader who had found work with the Indian Branch, to visit the Nuu'chah'nulth of Barkley Sound on the west coast of Vancouver Island "for the purpose of acquiring an intimate knowledge of their wishes in regard to lands to be hereafter reserved for them" (*Fisher* 50; *Sessional Papers* for 1876, No. 9: 51). According to Cole and Chaikin, Blenkinsop reported "that, until the local Indians were cured of their propensity for potlatching, "there can be little hope of elevating them from their present state of degradation" (*Iron* 15). It is true that Blenkinsop sent back word of gift-giving, yet the record shows he was not the one who put the word "potlatching" into circulation within the government's correspondence.

In a report to Powell dated 23 September 1874, Blenkinsop frames his observations within a set of oppositions between high and low, elevation and degradation,
civilization and barbarism. What marks the limit between these contradictory terms is
not the "feast," but the notion of expenditure. Blenkinsop writes that the people of
Barkley Sound "are a race of people easily controlled" and suggests that "it requires but
firm and judicious management to bring them under the sway of civilization as far as is
practicable with any of their race" (Canada, Public Archives, Record Group 10, volume
3614, file 4105). They are already close to the West and could easily be raised up and
swallowed by it. Yet at the same time "two serious obstacles" block their "elevation" out
of their allegedly sunken condition and place them at an absolute remove from Western
civilization. Blenkinsop declares that "until they are cured of their propensity for
gambling and accumulating property, solely for the purpose of giving away to other
Indians, there can be but little hope of elevating them from their present state of
degradation and bettering the condition and appearance of their wives and families."
While Sproat argues that the people of the west coast of Vancouver Island distribute
property only on the condition that it be returned later, Blenkinsop informs Powell that
on the same coast and among the same people, every distribution takes the form of a
spending without return. The gift that demands to be given back has given way to the
gift that stays with its recipient.

In Blenkinsop’s text, this pure expenditure inscribes the people of Barkley Sound
with the sign of barbarism and keeps them low in relation to settler society. But what
allows expenditure to be endowed with the value and authority of a limit? The
assumption that gambling and giving away weigh down the upward pull of civilization
finds justification in what Georges Bataille calls "the principle of classical utility." In
"The Notion of Expenditure" Bataille argues that "any general judgement of social
activity implies the principle that all individual effort, in order to be valid, must be reducible to the fundamental necessities of production and conservation." What this principle entails is that "humanity [Bataille posits a universal humanity] recognizes the right to acquire, to conserve, and to consume rationally, but it excludes in principle nonproductive expenditure" (117). Bataille reserves the term "expenditure" for modes of consumption which contribute nothing to the conservation of life or to the continuation of productive activity within a social formation. Acts of pure expenditure require a loss which "must be as great as possible in order for that activity to take on its true meaning" (118). Examples of such a loss include games (like gambling), pleasure, poetry--and the "potlatch" (118, 121 and 122-3). But it is 1874, and that name has yet to arrive in the post.

"Potlatch" does not appear in the Indian Branch correspondence until 1875, when Powell sends Ottawa an account of his own recent voyage to the west coast of Vancouver Island. Whether by chance or by design, Powell's 1875 text is remarkably similar in its logic and its phrasing to Blenkinsop's 1874 report. Like Blenkinsop, Powell calls attention to the "paradoxical" fact that "the natives inhabiting the West Coast of Vancouver Island" are "poor" even though they are "the richest of any Indians [he has] met in the Province." Like Blenkinsop, Powell explains this contradiction by noting that the Nuu'chah'nulth spend all their earnings on gambling and giving away property. "They are inveterate gamblers," he says, and they convene "frequent assemblages of the different tribes for the purpose of holding donation feasts ("potlatches") [where] a large amount of property is given away or destroyed" (Sessional Papers for 1876, No. 9: 44-5).
When it arrives in Powell’s report, the plural of the word "potlatch" is set off from its context by two kinds of marks. First, it is enclosed between parentheses, as if it has no legitimate place within Powell’s discourse and can appear there only if it brackets itself off from its surroundings. The word is doubly enclosed, however, since it is also encased in quotation marks—as was "Patlatches," or rather ""Patlatches"," in his 1873 report. To explain why Powell says (within parentheses) "potlatches" instead of potlatches, one might recall John Searle’s argument that quotation marks are conventionally deployed in written discourse "to mark the fact that the word is not being used normally but is being [mentioned] as a topic of discussion" (Speech Acts 75). Powell’s quotation marks suggest, if only inadvertently, that here "potlatches" does not refer to an event, but is itself a problem in need of a solution. Though it is inserted into his report, the word properly belongs to another context where it would itself be the topic of a debate.

What both Powell and Blenkinsop find on the west coast of Vancouver Island, however, is not a word that asks to be discussed, but a practice that Western civilization wants above all to exclude from itself: the practice of nonproductive expenditure as it manifests itself in gambling and giving away. The gambler spends property in a way that invites a return but cannot guarantee it, while the person who gives property away without hope of getting it back incurs a pure loss which brings no apparent material benefit. In his 1874 report Blenkinsop asserts that the Dominion government has the right to control the lives of any people that gives all. The principle of classical utility empowers the representatives of European civilization to lay down a regulatory grid to restrict every nonproductive expenditure, no matter where it occurs.
In the postal literature circulated by the Indian Branch in the early 1870s, the northwest coast sits at a distinct limit: it lies at the very end of the Western-European economy. The gift is the sign of this outer boundary. A pure loss without return, the gift marks the zone where civilization ends and barbarism begins. Or so it seems. For it is possible that the gift is not a gift at all, but rather an exchange which obliges the recipient to make a reciprocal counter-gift. Nevertheless, after 1875, Canada’s uncertain discourse on the gift continues to focus on the question of pure expenditure, and this question continues to be posed amid the efforts of the British Columbia First Nations to protect their lands from the encroachment of white settlers. For Blenkinsop was not the last reserve agent to pontificate about the evils of giving all.

3. Patlach

The Royal Proclamation of 1763 states that the aboriginal people of what is now Canada retain title to lands which they have not surrendered by treaty to the agents of the Crown. For "it is just and reasonable, and essential to our Interest, and the Security of our Colonies," proclaims George the Third, "that the several Nations or Tribes of Indians with whom We are connected, and who live under our protection, should not be molested or disturbed in the Possession of such Parts of Our Dominions and Territories as, not having been ceded to or purchased by Us, are reserved to them, or any of them, as their Hunting Grounds" (4-5). The Proclamation does not address itself to the First Nations of
Eastern North America alone. It also says that unless the First Nations of what is now Western Canada cede or sell their territory directly to the Crown, they retain title to their share of "the Lands and Territories lying to the Westward of the Sources of the Rivers which fall into the Sea from the West and North West" (4; Tennant, *Aboriginal* 10-11).

The chief factor of the Hudson Bay Company post at Fort Victoria was appointed second governor of the colony of Vancouver Island in 1851. During the early years of his administration, James Douglas upheld the principle of aboriginal title (Tennant, 17-20). He signed fourteen treaties in the early 1850s, purchasing land from Native communities near Fort Victoria, Nanaimo and Fort Rupert and setting aside reserves for their exclusive use (Tennant 18-20). By the late 1850s, however, Douglas had ceased his policy of extinguishing aboriginal title through land purchase, though his administration continued to map out reserves on the Island. The colonial House of Assembly set aside funds for land purchases in 1862, but the money was never spent (22). The new policy of allocating reserves without extinguishing title was extended to the mainland after the colony of British Columbia was formed in the wake of the 1857 gold rush (Tennant 26-38). Since the middle of the nineteenth century, then, settler society has enclosed the First Nations of British Columbia on reserves, although most communities never formally surrendered their title to their ancestral lands. Only the communities that signed the Douglas treaties and those communities living to the West of the Rocky Mountains which were included in Treaty Number Eight can be said to have formally ceded the territory which the Royal Proclamation guarantees them.

After Douglas retired in 1864, the principle of aboriginal title continued to be abused as the colonial government, under the impetus of land and works commissioner
Joseph Trutch, began appropriating reserve lands for the use of white settlers (Tennant 39-43). The First Nations objected to the infringement upon their land, and when British Columbia joined the Canadian confederation in 1871, their protests received some support as the Dominion government began a long effort to coax the province into increasing the size of reserves (Tennant 46; Duff, *History* 67). By 1875 Powell had stopped visiting Native communities because he said that "when a question of such vital import to a large proportion of [aboriginal people], as that concerning the quantity of land to be reserved for their benefit and support remains in doubt, an official visit is much more detrimental than useful in...promoting confidence and amicable relations between them and the Whites" (*Sessional Papers* for 1876, No. 9: 44). Provincial officials refused to compromise, although the Dominion government stopped well short of asking British Columbia to recognize the principle of aboriginal title (Tennant 43-52). In a belated effort to address the land question, the two governments agreed in 1876 to appoint a reserve commission composed of Alexander Anderson, representing Canada, and Archibald McKinlay, representing British Columbia. The joint commissioner, appointed after a delay, was Gilbert Malcolm Sproat.

The commission was dissolved in 1878 because provincial officials claimed it cost too much, but Sproat worked on alone until the hostility of the white community forced him to resign in 1880 (Fisher 189-99; Canada, *Sessional Papers* for 1879, No. 7: 15). Though some of the the First Nations convinced Sproat to increase the size of their reserves, these gains were clawed back after Trutch’s brother-in-law, Peter O’Reilly, took over as reserve commissioner (Tennant 50-1).
At the Limit the Gift. On 6 November 1878 Sproat briefly set aside his work for the Reserve Commission and wrote the Indian Branch for permission to convene a meeting with "the Nekla-kap-amuk" "people" or "nation" at Lytton. He explained that the Nlaka'pamux wanted to negotiate with federal officials to gain "a clear understanding with the Government as to all matters" (RG 10, v. 3669, f. 10691). The meeting was held in the summer of 1879, and Sproat reported that the Nlaka'pamux had agreed to adopt a political system consisting of a Chief and thirteen councillors and had outlined a set of community ordinances. He advised the Dominion to encourage this move towards a municipal form of self-government, noting that "the Government might save money and largely foster self-reliance among the Nekla-kap-amuk Indians...by encouraging the organisation of these people which they themselves have commenced" (26 July 1879). However Paul Tennant argues that Sproat tried to impose the municipal system upon the Nlaka'pamux because he opposed their traditional mode of self-government (Tennant 54-5).

In the 1860s Sproat had taken offense when the people he named the Aht refused to stay beyond the limits of the West and pulled close to their colonizers by imitating European codes of dress, gesture and speech, yet almost twenty years later he encourages the Nlaka'pamux to set up a local administration patterned after a Euro-Canadian model of government. There has been a shift in the pattern of substitutions which governs his discourse. In his 1873 speech Canada and the Empire he had proposed the Canadian confederation as a stand-in for the existing English parliamentary system, yet at the end of the 1870s he advocates an elected Nlaka'pamux council as a replacement for the government of Canada. The council is to substitute itself for the system of "Indian
superintendents" (like Powell) administered by the Indian Branch—a system which he calls "an expensive farce" (6 November 1878). But why are the Nlaka'pamux not "offensively European" to Sproat when they set about to imitate "the habits and acts of the colonists" by adopting a European form of government? The answer is that they have renounced the gift, and this act brings them over to the "civilised" side of the border separating civilization from barbarity.

By the fall of 1879 Sproat had brought his reserve commission to Vancouver Island, and on 27 October, during his stay in the Kwagiulth village of Fort Rupert, he put a name in the mail. In a letter to the superintendent general of Indian Affairs, Sproat recalls the meeting at Lytton and notes that "Among the rules and regulations framed by the Nekla-kap-a muk Council, now before you for consideration, there is one, namely rule 11, which states that the "Patlach" is to cease among the Nekla-kap-a-mus." He calls this resolution "The most hopeful Indian fact in the history of the Province."

In 1879 the word which is lacking in Scenes makes its appearance in Ottawa: "Patlach." It is another version of "potlatch"—the word which Cole and Chaikin add to Blenkinsop's report of 1874, though Blenkinsop himself did not then use it. And it is related both to the term "patlaches" which surfaces in Powell's 1873 report to Ottawa and to "("potlatches")," which has only a tenuous place in his report of 1875. Sproat has mailed a present to the discourse on "Indians" in Canada, enclosing his own version of the name as a sort of gift. But will it give the gift of the thing?

In his letter Sproat scolds the officials of the Indian Branch for failing to suppress the practice which he names "Patlach," because he argues that it "is the parent of numerous vices which eat out the heart of the people." "When I landed in 1860 on the
west coast of Vancouver Island," he says,

and soon became acquainted with the evils of the "Patlach," I would not have thought it probable that 19 years later, I should have to write of the "Patlach" as I should have written in 1860, and that not in out of the way places but within easy reach of Victoria, and after the management of Indian affairs had been for 8 years in the charge of the Government of Canada which spared no reasonable expenditure.

Yet the outrage he articulates in 1879 contradicts his earlier efforts at west coast ethnography.

For "nineteen years" earlier, in the 1860s, Sproat did not "write of the "Patlach"." He spoke instead of the distribution and destruction of property (The Nootka 79). Furthermore he did not condemn the practice either as a "parent of evil" or as an eater of hearts. Rather, he speculated that "the custom probably is secured by the gratification which the practice affords to two strong propensities in human nature--pride of rank and love of display" (79). In Scenes the distribution of property marks just one more place where Sproat's narrative folds over on itself. Distribution is the line where the Aht cease to be absolutely other to settler society and turn to join the Europeans in a "human nature" whose "propensities" are said to be common to people of all cultures.

Strictly speaking, in the letter of 1879 the "Patlach" continues to occupy this same fold in Sproat's discourse. "The habit of the "Patlach" is based," he says, "on the common human desire for distinction which appears to be as strong among uncivilised as among civilised people." The giving of gifts still marks the place where the "uncivilised" aboriginal population overlaps the "civilised" European colonists, and this fold effectively erases the limit that holds "civilization" apart from "barbarism." In 1879, as in 1860, all of humanity shares that "common human desire for distinction" which motivates social
life on the northwest coast of British Columbia.

Yet in 1879 the Patlach places Native people and Europeans at an unbridgeable distance from each other even as it gathers them into a universal humanity. Though at one instant he collapses the gap between civilization and its exterior, in the next sentence Sproat expels aboriginal cultures beyond the limit of settler society by stripping them of their arts and literature. "Men wish to be talked of among their own and among neighbouring tribes," he argues, "and having no literature, few arts, and no opportunity now of becoming known as tribal warriors, they try to make themselves known by more or less lavish distributions of property among their own, or among other people." It is worth noting that in *Scenes* the Aht are not lacking in literature. Indeed, the Sproat of the 1860s insists that "An account of the innumerable original traditions and legends current among the people...is sufficient for a large book" (*The Nootka* 120).

In the 1860s Sproat treated the practice of distributing property in communities on the west coast of Vancouver Island as just another ethnographic object to be recorded but not condemned. By the late 1870s, however, he has given it a name and singled it out as an activity to be regulated and dismantled. Why "nineteen years later" has the unimpassioned account of distribution offered in *Scenes* given way to a harsh polemic against the "Patlach"?

For the Sproat of 1879 the Patlach is an event of pure loss, and it violates the principle of classical utility which according to Bataille forms the basis of bourgeois reasoning. But how has the distribution of property come to be identified as an instance of loss? In *Scenes* Sproat makes it clear that among the Aht property is given away only on the condition that it is to be returned later (*The Nootka* 80). However, the nameless
distributions which are described as a means of investment in the 1860s are transformed, in the letter of 1879, into expenditures without return. Bataille argues that it is characteristic of bourgeois discourse to vilify every such absolute expense of property.

For Bataille, gift-giving does not mark a limit between civilisation and barbarity. Rather, it is the demise of the potlatch, the loss of the practice of loss, that signifies the transition from a society dominated by an aristocracy to an industrial society dominated by a bourgeoisie. Bataille defines the bourgeoisie as the class that gives nothing away: "It has distinguished itself from the aristocracy through the fact that it has consented only to spend for itself, and within itself—in other words, by hiding its expenditures as much as possible from the eyes of the other classes" ("Notion" 124). Because the bourgeoisie is governed by "a reasoning that balances accounts," it maintains a "sterility in regard to expenditure." It holds itself in an intimate proximity to itself by keeping its wealth close at hand.18 Governed by a hostility towards loss, "bourgeois society has only managed to develop a universal meanness." Says Bataille, "the bourgeois are incapable of concealing a sordid face, a face so rapacious and lacking in nobility, so frighteningly small, that all human life, upon seeing it, seems degraded" (125).

Sproat's letter against the Patlach—like the reports by Blenkinsop and Powell on the people of Barkley Sound—suggests that a "meanness" with regard to expenditure rules the life of the professional middle class in late-nineteenth century Canada. After all, Sproat makes a point of complaining that the Patlach imposes a loss on the Dominion government by adding to the cost of Europeanizing the British Columbia First Nations. Canada has, he notes, "spared no reasonable expenditure" in its campaign to make them European but has received no return on "8 years" of investment. Sproat advocates
restricting the expenditures of the coastal First Nations to decrease the government's own expenses. The government ought to keep its gifts to itself so that it might, in Bataille's words, "only spend for itself." 19

But the gift and the people who give it exceed the principle of classical utility altogether. The discourse which I am following situates gift-giving beyond the borders of European territory—and beyond the bounds of European reasoning. When Sproat writes to complain about a practice of distribution which he had not criticized in Scenes, he is staying at Fort Rupert, at the north end of Vancouver Island. It is this region of the Island that Franz Boas will situate beyond Europe's influence, and beyond the territorial limits of Europe itself, when he submits his postcard-report to the Geographical Society of Berlin almost ten years after Sproat's letter. Sproat sends the gift of the name to Ottawa from an area which the colonial gaze repeatedly defines as Europe's exterior.

Yet his attack on the Patlach coincides not just with his arrival at Europe's geographic limit, but with his experience of the people who live there: the people Boas will define as absolutely other to Europe. By 1879 it was customary for white officials to define the Kwakwaka'wakw as a group incapable of integrating themselves into Euro-Canadian culture. For example, after superintendent Powell visited the "Nimpkish" community of Alert Bay in the spring of 1879, he reported that "like all the Quah-kewlths," the residents of this village "have a decided dislike for anything approaching reform." When he arrived at Fort Rupert (only a few weeks ahead of Sproat), he was informed by the Anglican missionary Alfred Hall that "the Indians were a most difficult lot to civilize" (Sessional Papers for 1880, No. 4: 112). If colonial administrators conceive of progress towards civilization as a process of lifting up, then the
Kwakwaka’wakw sink like a stone. Thus Sproat composed his Patlach letter at an acknowledged site of resistance to colonization. The Patlach is the very embodiment of this resistance.

Like Blenkinsop and Powell, the Sproat of the late 1870s construes the distinction between civilization and barbarism as an opposition between low and high, heavy and light. To him, the British Columbia First Nations are poor in culture and can overcome their poverty only by rising to the level which the English have already reached. The Patlach has to be outlawed because it blocks this upward movement; it is a "great obstacle" holding the First Nations down. Sproat warns that "no material nor social progress among the Indians is possible while the "Patlach" exists," and he advises the government to instruct its agents to suppress the practice. "Warning and rebuke from an officer having the great authority of the Government and acting judiciously but decisively," he argues, "would have a remarkable effect in discouraging" the Patlach. The effect of such measures will probably not be "remarkable" enough, however, so Sproat says the government must be prepared to use coercion to put the Patlach to death. "[W]hen the proper time came," he writes, "it might be necessary in some cases to lay an iron hand upon the shoulders of the people in some parts of the country--particularly on the coast."

In his letter Sproat complains that the Patlach is a form of aboriginal self-government which stands in the way of the Canadian government and its civilising mission. As in Scenes he suggests that the Patlach is similar, but not too similar, to an election by ballot: the person who gives away the most property is the person most likely to be appointed "Chief." "Though no direct election as chief follows a [continuously?]
large distribution," he claims, "the distributor puffs himself up on the strength of it, and has at least the support of numerous friends and the credit readily given to the one who exceeds in what many, if not all, are striving for."

Since there is no room on the coast for two political systems, the aboriginal mode of government must give way to a European one. In keeping with the reversal which has inverted the structure of his discourse, the Sproat who formerly took offense at Native people when they mimicked Europeans now villifies Native communities which refuse to imitate the Euro-Canadian model of municipal government. He no longer criticizes Native people for being too European and attacks them instead for not being European enough. He says that not all aboriginal communities are "fit at present for organization for municipal purposes under the Indian Act," but he insists those who reject the European system by continuing to Patlach "should be rebuked, warned and instructed, and gradually trained for responsible management of their own little affairs."

Though the fold in Sproat's discourse has shifted since he first landed on Vancouver Island, he continues to justify his arguments by deploying the metaphor of white light. At present the municipal system and the Patlach are in direct competition, but Sproat is confident that "The one will quietly and naturally kill off the other as the rays of the sun kill a small coal fire," for "Compared with the "Queen's chiefs," the Patlach chief, (under a system condemned moreover by the Queen's officer) would soon be nowhere." In a contest between white sun and dark coal, darkness is fated to die. Settler society gives itself the right to force its civilization upon the aboriginal civilizations of the coast because in the eyes of the colonist whiteness is a stronger shade of colour. No other justification is necessary for the suppression of the Patlach than this
appeal to the sun: whiteness is here an absolute good, and deeds done in the name of a quality of light are above reproach.

Sproat also criticizes the Patlach because he claims it "produces indigence, thriftlessness, and a habit of roaming about which prevents home associations and is inconsistent with all progress." In particular, he alleges that giving away property encourages the practice of borrowing at interest. "If an Indian impelled by rivalry with another, decides on holding a Patlach," says Sproat, "he often has to borrow blankets [which here serve as currency, not clothing] from richer men and they charge him two blankets for one, thus fostering grinding usury." Yet "indigence" and the "thriftlessness" that breeds "grinding usury" endlessly transform themselves into their opposites, because the Patlach is an expenditure which requires its practitioners to accumulate wealth. "The poor as well as the rich follow the practice," he notes, "and spend their time and their earnings in accumulating and then in distributing." Governed by a folding he cannot control, Sproat's discourse tangles itself into a web of paradoxes: "It is not possible," he continues, "that Indians can acquire property, or become industrious with any good result, while under the influence of this mania." The accumulation of property prevents the accumulation of property; the industry which supports accumulation blocks the path to industriousness.

But for Sproat the "worst" effect of the Patlach, and the most urgent reason for laying down an iron hand, is prostitution:

Worst of all, a man will say to his wife, nay to his maiden daughter, that before the spring or other appointed time he must have so many dollars for his proposed "Patlach"; and they are in this way and more I believe in this way than from licentious desire are forced into the prostitution which it has become almost a conventional thing for Indian agents to mention and
deplore without seeking to strike down the hideous system which mainly produces it.

In the banning of the Patlach, as in the prohibition of sāti in nineteenth century India, white men will justify colonial legislation by—to borrow a sardonic phrase from Gayatri Spivak—"seeking to save brown women from brown men" ("Subaltern" 297 and 305). The government administrator’s determination to protect Native women from "the hideous system" of prostitution does not arise out of concern for the women themselves, for as Sproat hints, whites assume that Native women are by nature prone to "licentious desire" anyway. The allegation that the Patlach fuels the sex trade is instead a compelling excuse for officials to crush a system of government that competes with their own administration.

By raising the question of prostitution, Sproat inscribes his opposition to gift-giving over a grid of sexual difference. He implies that in prostitution a woman sells herself to any taker when what she ought to do is give herself freely in marriage to the man of her choice. Women are gifts, he argues, but the Patlach transforms them into commodities exchanged for profit. The best reason for banning the Patlach, therefore, is that its gifts discourage women from making gifts of themselves. To become gifts, aboriginal women have to be saved from the gift-giving practiced by the men they live with.

Deploying a crude logic of penetration, Sproat identifies aboriginal women as the preferred point of entry through which Europe’s "civilizing" influence can infiltrate the First Nations and threaten them with the danger of Europeanization. However the notion that Europe can best attack a non-Western culture through the figure of the woman is not
unique to the postal literature generated by Canada's Indian Branch.

In Heidegger's "Dialogue on Language," the Inquirer recalls that when he used to discuss aesthetics with the late Count Kuki, the Count "occasionally brought his wife along who then wore festive Japanese garments." He says her clothes "made the Eastasian world more luminously present, and the dangers of [their] dialogues became more clearly visible" when she was there (4). For the Inquirer, Asianness is most fully itself, and yet most exposed to the European danger, when embodied in a coded female form. Metaphysics is most likely to rob Asia of itself when confronted with a woman in whom Asianness most "luminously" shows itself as itself, who wraps herself in what, to the Inquirer, seem to be her culture's most authentic, and most female, signs of itself. Yet if the Inquirer dreams of rescuing Asian women from Europe's danger, in contrast Sproat wants to save aboriginal women from their own culture by imposing his version of European civilization upon them. He will certainly not be the last Canadian government agent to urge the Indian affairs bureaucracy to help aboriginal women by destroying their people's traditions (see Cole and Chaikin 75-83).

4. Encountering Language

In "The Nature of Language" Heidegger argues that in everyday utterances, language itself remains unthought, just as in our everyday interactions with beings, we neglect Being itself even though it is what allows beings to be. Whenever we speak or
write, language simultaneously gives and withholds itself. It gives itself by allowing us to discuss the matters that concern us. "Any number of things are given voice in speaking," says Heidegger, "above all what we are speaking about: a set of facts, an occurrence, a question, a matter of concern." But language brings things to our attention only by drawing attention away from itself: "at whatever time and in whatever way we speak a language, language itself never has the floor" (59). The act of speaking in language is to be rigourously distinguished from the act of speaking about language. Yet the fact that language withholds itself from attention while giving voice to the matter at hand is the condition of possibility of all speaking—and of all writing. "Only because in everyday speaking language does not bring itself to language but holds back," Heidegger argues, "are we able simply to go ahead and speak a language, and so to deal with something and negotiate something by speaking" (59).

For Heidegger, language is a "prior grant" (im voraus den Zuspruch) given to us in advance of every act of speech and writing (71). We could not pose a single question to the world unless language had already promised itself to us. Its promise is what makes every inquiry possible. To put questions to language therefore presupposes that there are languages in which such questions can be formulated. "If we are to think through the nature of language," says Heidegger, "language must first promise itself to us, or must already have done so" (76). Since the inquiry into the nature of language is constrained to follow in the path of language, that inquiry necessarily travels in a circle.

When it gives itself, however, language arrives from the future and not from the past. Though it is a promise already given, language is an event which is always about to happen. It is the element we have always lived in, yet it waits for us in every phrase
that remains to be uttered. To inquire into language is to follow behind an inheritance whose arrival is forever anticipated though it has already arrived. "We speak and speak about language," says Heidegger, but "What we speak of, language, is always ahead of us." Hence "Our speaking merely follows language constantly" (75). Whatever language gives, then, it gives in time.

In everyday utterances we use language like a tool, an instrument. Although as we speak and write, we follow in the path of language, we seldom have what Heidegger calls "an experience with language" (mit der Sprache eine Erfahrung machen), for we rely on language to give voice to our concerns but do not concern ourselves with language itself. We take it for granted without asking how it has granted itself to us. On those rare occasions when language does reveal itself as language--when it momentarily ceases to allow us "to deal with something and negotiate something by speaking" and instead makes "speaking" itself a "something" which demands to be "dealt with" and "negotiated"--on such occasions the problem of language is "usually" discussed in relation to the body of the speaker and is thereby situated within "the metaphysically conceived confines of the sensuous" (98). The "usual notions of language," says Heidegger, derive from a preoccupation with speech and phonetics. "If we take language directly in the sense of something that is present," he notes, "we encounter it as the act of speaking, the activation of the organs of speech, mouth, lips, tongue" (96).

John Searle's theory of speech acts stands as an unavoidable example of the way metaphysical reasoning identifies language as a function of the human body. For Searle ties language firmly to the "mouth, lips, [and] tongue" of the person who speaks. To make an utterance is, for him, to perform a physical act, though the speaking body never
acts alone. He argues that "talking is performing acts according to rules," or to put it more broadly, "speaking a language is...a rule-governed form of behaviour" (*Speech Acts* 22). Speech acts are events in which the law-giving body of language takes hold of the body that talks. Though it is individual speakers, not language, who give voice to thoughts, it is language, not speakers, which determines what form thoughts take when they are uttered. Searle makes room for writing in his theory of "talking," but he explains the use of ordinary language in terms of a body whose utterances obey the strict code of a law.

Heidegger says that one of his goals in "The Nature of Language" is to break with the metaphysical tradition that understands language primarily in terms of the bodies which utter it. His task (and mine) is to pass beyond the reasoning that distinguishes the nonsensuous, intellectual content of an utterance from its sensuous, bodily form. But since the step out of metaphysics is necessarily a step back towards all that has been left behind, Heidegger argues that to circumvent the "usual notions of language" is to return to what was already there: language itself. While it is true that language withdraws itself from scrutiny when it is used, Heidegger maintains that it is nevertheless possible to isolate certain instances when language manages to "speak itself as language" (59). In such moments language makes an issue of itself instead of simply giving voice to issues that concern its speakers. Heidegger warns that "to undergo an experience with language, is something else again than to gather information about language" (58). While the linguistic research performed by linguists, philologists, psychologists and analytic philosophers (this last group includes ordinary language philosophers like Searle) has its own justification and logic, it fails to make language speak itself as language (58-9).
To encounter language, one must look not to the conclusions of researchers but to those familiar, everyday situations where one finds oneself at a loss for words. "But when does language speak itself as language?" asks Heidegger, "Curiously enough, when we cannot find the right word for something that concerns us, carries us away, oppresses or encourages us" (59). Language presents itself to scrutiny in a moment of absence, when the word is missing. It withholds itself from our attention only so long as it serves our desire to give voice to our concerns, providing us with a reliable instrument of expression. But when words fail to arrive, the limits of language announce themselves and trouble our thoughts. "Then we leave unspoken what we have in mind," says Heidegger, "and, without rightly giving it thought, undergo moments in which language itself has distantly and fleetingly touched [streifen] us with its essential being [Wesen]" (59). Though he says he wants to direct the inquiry into language away from the speaking body, and especially the speaking mouth, Heidegger construes the essence of language as a physical density which, in its absence, stands so close to its speakers that it rubs up against them yet stands so far from them that it touches them only "distantly." Language grazes us precisely when we cannot grasp it.

If the essence of language presents itself when words are absent, what happens when we want to articulate something that we have never encountered before? Heidegger says that "when the issue is to put into language something that has never yet been spoken, then everything depends on whether language gives or withholds the appropriate word." "Such," he notes, "is the case of the poet" (59). To write poetry is to encounter the twofold play of a language that simultaneously gives and withholds itself. Yet the difficulty of arriving at "the appropriate word" for something previously unknown is a
problem which also confronted the traveller, the ethnographer and the Indian Affairs administrator in nineteenth century British Columbia. If, as Heidegger maintains, finding new words for new things is a poet's job, then Sproat, Powell and even Boas are, in their own way, poets. They all write about a margin of coast where, according to Boas, everything remains to be seen by the gaze of Western science and where the European explorer is offered endless possibilities for research. When they write about the activities of the coastal First Nations, these postal-colonialists report on events and practices which, according to Sproat, lie beyond the established limits of their civilization: practices which have "never yet been spoken" in the vast array of statements uttered, up until the late nineteenth century, by the disembodied voice of Western-European science.

5. Referring Expressions

The white officials who undertook to regulate the Patlach in British Columbia inherited the task of finding the appropriate word for a practice formerly unknown to the West, to Europe, and especially to Europe-in-Western-Canada. Their search brought them into an encounter with language itself, drawing attention to the verbal matter in which every utterance is formed. It is hardly surprising, then, that their discourse is obsessed with the orthography and the meaning of "Patlach" and its many surrogates. As they sought a standard spelling and a true sense for this word, they also ran up against problems of reference: problems having to do with the relation between a thing and the
word that names it. What their discourse gives us to think, in the end, is that the word
makes a gift of the thing it names.

In 1874 Lawrence Vankoughnet replaced William Spragge as deputy-
superintendent general of Indian affairs in Ottawa. For the next twenty years
Vankoughnet personally supervised every aspect of Canada’s Indian administration, first
in the Indian Branch and later in the Department of Indian Affairs. One of his apparent
aims as chief administrator was to keep his department’s expenses at a minimum, though
the discontent which this policy aroused on the prairies probably helped spark the
Northwest Rebellion (some would say Resistance) of 1885 (Titley 14). The Conservative
government rewarded him for his frugality by forcing him to resign in 1893 (Leighton
105-8, 114-17).

In December 1879 Vankoughnet responded to Sproat’s Patlach letter by
distributing a memorandum to Sproat, Powell and James Lenihan, who had been Indian
superintendent at New Westminster since 1874. The memo notes that the Dominion
government is troubled by "the custom existing among certain tribes and bands of Indians
in British Columbia of giving "Patlachs"." "I am directed," Vankoughnet writes, "by the
Right Honourable the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs [who at the time was the
prime minister, and Vankoughnet’s mentor, John A. Macdonald] to instruct you upon
every favourable occasion that presents itself to discountenance the prevalence of this
custom and to enjoin the Indians to discountenance the same" (RG 10, v. 3669, f. 10
691; 2 December 1879). Sproat’s letter has brought the Patlach under the regulatory
scrutiny of the Indian affairs bureaucracy. Henceforth the practice will be actively
administered--"discountenanced" at first but afterwards outlawed--and not just criticized
in letters and reports from British Columbia.

But what are Patlachs? Although federal officials are about to launch an inquiry into the truth of "this custom," they will not ask the people who potlatch to explain their own traditions. The inquiry will instead fold itself up between the two limits which Sproat has already mapped out for it. The word "Patlach" will be made to refer, at once, to the giving of gifts and to the reciprocal exchange of property.

In his memo Vankoughnet takes up Sproat's version of the word, but is not sure what it means. The thing it names is utterly unknown to him. Yet drawing on what Sproat has told him, Vankoughnet states ""Patlachs"...seem to comprise the parting with...personal property without any benefit being derived therefrom excepting the questionable one of obtaining a name for liberality" (emphasis added). The "Patlach" "seems" to signify a pure expenditure without return, "without any benefit," but this appearance is not certain. The fact remains that one gives without return to receive, in return, the counter-gift of a name that identifies one as a giver, as one who gives with "liberality." How can the "Patlach" be construed as an absolute loss if it earns a nominal profit for the Patlacher? For Vankoughnet this benefit, this counter-gift of a name, is so "questionable" that it is not a return at all. "Patlachs," then, are occasions for circulating pure gifts which earn nothing, although a mark of prestige always comes back to the one who gives.

When superintendent Powell wrote Ottawa in reply to this memo, he opened a debate about the meaning of Patlaching, yet it is a debate which deals not so much with the thing known as the Patlach as with the word "Patlach" itself. Powell places "Patlach" between quotation marks whenever he uses it. Or is he mentioning it rather than using...
it? He begins by acknowledging that he has received Vankoughnet's dispatch "respecting
the evil of the "Patlach" or donation feasts, customary among the uncivilized Indians of
this Province" (19 December 1879). To cite the name correctly, one ought to write
""Patlach"" instead of "Patlach." Indeed, I have misled my readers by suggesting that
Sproat and Vankoughnet discussed the Patlach in their letters of 1879, for the fact is that
they wrote not of the Patlach but of the "Patlach" which, again, ought to have been
quoted as ""Patlach"".21

Although he takes up Sproat's version of the word in reply to Vankoughnet, we
know that Powell had already offered several versions of his own in previous reports to
Ottawa. Each time he writes the word down, he inscribes it with certain marks--such as
capital letters, quotes, italics and parentheses--that distinguish it from the words around
it. Hence one finds ""Patlatches"" in 1872, "("potlatches")" in 1875, "potlaches" in
1876, and "(potlaches)" in 1878 (Sessional Papers for 1873, No. 23: 10; for 1876, No.
9: 45; for 1877, No. 11: 36; for 1879, No. 7: 71).

I have noted that, according to Searle, to put a word in quotation marks can mean
that it is being mentioned as a problem in itself and is not just being used as a sign of
something else. The various marks which haunt ""Patlach"" and its surrogates--
"potlaches," "(potlaches)"--in Powell's correspondence during the 1870s hint that this
word, in all its forms, is plagued with difficulties that remain unsolved. The constant
variations in its spelling confirm that it is a node of uncertainty. It is as if this word
marks a point in the canon of Western-European knowledge where the will to
understanding is bound to fail.

The word's reference--its relation to the thing it names--is especially uncertain. In
his reply to Vankoughnet, Powell acknowledges this difficulty when he tries to solidify the link tying "'Patlach'" to the practices of the coastal First Nations. Powell bluntly tells Vankoughnet that his memo has attached the word to the wrong thing. "I must state for your information," states Powell,

that the "Patlach" does not altogether show the great liberality of the donor, as I infer from the tenor of your letter, for the Indian never gives or "patlaches" except with the knowledge that he will receive his gifts with interest at a future feast. On the part of shrewd Indians it is really "casting their bread upon the waters" in order that it may be returned to them "fourfold" and, in many cases, without doubt it is.

Powell's letter is another instance where, as Searle puts it, "The word itself [here the noun "'Patlach'"] is presented and then talked about, and that it is to be taken as presented and talked about rather than used conventionally to refer is indicated by the quotes" (Speech Acts 75-6). But in this case the distinction between use and mention is not absolute. Powell does use "'Patlach'" conventionally to refer to certain practices, but also mentions it in order to "talk about" the difficulty of determining exactly what practices it refers to. But what exactly does the act of "referring" entail? What is the nature of the relation binding a word to the thing it names?

As Heidegger notes, it is customary to think of words as supplements, or prostheses, which come to fasten (umgreifen) themselves onto objects, actions, events and processes that already exist somewhere outside language ("Nature" 68). For example, when Sproat describes how the Aht invent names for things in Scenes, he argues that first things arrive in the world without names and afterwards people encounter them and decide to find words for them. Although he affirms that language itself was sent to earth from God, Sproat claims that nouns are products fashioned by individuals skilled in their
manufacture. He is struck by

the readiness with which the natives invent names for any new objects. A compound word is suggested by some individual in the tribe who is considered skilful in forming appropriate names, and who, for the sake of sound [like Searle, Sproat understands language in terms of speech and the voice], subjects the roots [the basic morphemes which, he says, are "expressive of natural sounds and generic ideas"] to great change and, often, abbreviation in the process of compounding. Yet all who hear the new word at once recognize its meaning, and it is added to their vocabulary. It is surprising to find how quickly any such new names become universal (*The Nootka* 87-8).

For Sproat, naming is a collective speech act in which the speakers of a language agree to fasten particular words to particular objects. Naming makes reference possible by attaching a sign to something that already exists in a nameless state.

Searle argues that speakers bind words to things through the act of pointing. Words themselves do not point, however. Rather, people use them to point. Though names are tied to things in speech acts, "speech acts are performed by speakers in uttering words, not by words" alone (*Speech Acts* 28). Words that have been firmly bound to things are called "referring expressions." Searle says a referring expression is any expression "which serves to identify any thing, process, event, action." "Referring expressions point to particular [and individual] things," and as he points out, "they answer the questions "Who?" "What?" "Which?"" (26-7, emphasis added). There are between three and four classes of referring expressions in English, including the class of proper names (28 and 81).

The question which Powell raises in his 1879 reply to Vankoughnet is whether the word ""Patlach"" is qualified to serve as a referring expression at all. For Powell, ""Patlach"" is a mark that should be used to point to the act of exchange and not to gift-
giving. When Vankoughnet points it towards the gift, he sends the sign in the wrong
direction. If a speaker is supposed to answer such questions as "What?" and "Which?"
by directing a referring expression at a particular entity—as if to say "That one there"--
then "'Patlach'" is an unreliable pointer because it refuses to let itself be used to point in
a single direction. Government officials who deploy "'Patlach'" can never be sure that it
is pointing the right way, towards the right "thing, process, event, action," for it tends to
point away from the thing it is said to refer to. Though Powell uses it to point to
exchange rather than the gift, "'Patlach'" serves just as well, in the dispatches of Sproat
and Vankoughnet, to point to the gift instead of exchange. "'Patlach'" is a referring
expression which fails to point anywhere because it points in two opposite directions at
once. It has one referent too many and thus has no referent at all.

But it is not unusual for a single word to refer to several things. As Searle notes,
"the same word is sometimes used as a name for more than one object." For instance,
he cites "the fact that both riversides and financial houses are called "banks"." He
considers it "too obvious to need stating" that "one does not prove a word meaningless by
pointing out that it has several meanings" (Speech Acts 170). Is it not wrong, then, to
suggest that "'Patlach'" loses it ability to refer when it points towards two things at
once? The answer depends on the "at once"--the question of simultaneity. For a word
can indeed drain itself of reference if it is said to refer to one thing only but is used to
refer to two different things at the same time. The word "bank" would be rendered
nonsensical if we were to agree that it points to a single object and that this object is,
simultaneously, both a riverside and a transnational institution which deals in financial
services. Yet this is precisely how Sproat, Vankoughnet and Powell deploy "'Patlach'".
In their texts it gestures towards one thing alone, yet this thing is at the same time an act of giving and an exchange of payments: it is at once itself and the direct opposite of itself. Is it not as absurd to say that a gift is an exchange as it is to say that a riverside is a financial institution? ""Patlach"" spends all its referential power when it refers to one thing as if it were two things at once.

*The Circle and the Limit.* The inquiry into the truth of the ""Patlach"" follows a circular path precisely because it fails to point this word in a straight line towards a single referent. In 1868 Sproat says that the distributions performed by the "Aht" belong to a general system of exchange where every expense is ultimately repayed. In October 1879, however, he turns round and declares that the property circulated in these same distributions never comes back home to the giver. The effort to define the practice comes full circle when Vankoughnet repeats Sproat's second argument, which ties the ""Patlach"" to the pure gift, only to have Powell insist that ""Patlachs"" are reciprocal exchanges and not acts of gift-giving at all.

Since the Euro-Canadian understanding of the ""Patlach"" revolves from exchange to the gift and then back to exchange again, it is to be expected that the reasons for condemning the ""Patlach"" also go round in circles. In his 1879 letter, Sproat alleges that the ""Patlach"" is a limit blocking the movement from barbarity to civilisation. But the ""Patlach"" has the authority to trace such a limit only when defined as a mode of gift-giving.

In his reply to Vankoughnet, however, Powell redefines ""Patlaching"" as a system of investment which bears no relation to the gift. By changing the meaning of the
word, he strips "Patlach" of its power to divide civilization from its beyond. The word occupies a zone of his text where the two sides of a limit fold together and overlap each other: "Were the system not so general," he writes, "I do not know that it is different from that prevalent among more civilized beings—nine out of ten of whom expect a commensurate return for a gift. But the Indians who make a practise of it will deprive their families and even themselves of necessaries in order to obtain "patlach" capital" (emphasis added). When Powell makes the gift vanish, declaring that he does not know that "Patlach" distributions are "different" from exchanges, he erases the mark distinguishing uncivilized peoples, who spend without return, from "civilized beings" who (on average: nine times out of ten) "expect a commensurate return for a gift"—and prefer a return "with interest."

In the absence of this mark, it is impossible to "know" with certainty whether the now giftless "Patlach" is an obstacle to the assimilation of the First Nations into settler society, or whether it is a sign that they were civilized before the European gaze arrived to vilify them. If Powell defines civilization as that which gives no gifts and seeks instead to earn a profit from every present, then all giftless cultures must be equally civilized. And if, for Powell, gift-giving is the privileged sign of "barbarity," then the lack of the gift among the British Columbia First Nations collapses the distance between the "barbaric" circulation of aboriginal "capital" and the "civilized" exchanges of the Euro-Canadian economy. There is no longer any reason to condemn the "Patlach" because it has been transformed into a mark of civilization, a pointer which points directly away from the act of pure expenditure which Europe-in-Canada so abhors.

Powell refuses to admit that his own logic leads to this conclusion. He inserts a
"But" into his reply to relieve aboriginal people of any qualities that might render them equal, in his gaze, to European-Canadian colonists. Aboriginal people may well give and take like "civilized" beings, "But," he says, they are at bottom uncivilized because they are so driven to accumulate "capital" for investment they deprive themselves and their families of the very "necessaries" of life. It is as if each aboriginal family and indeed each individual psyche ("...the Indians who make a practise of it will deprive their families and even themselves...") were composed of a capital-holding class which jealously guards its accumulations and a working class which is too poor to meet its most basic needs. But Powell's analysis of the struggle between accumulation and necessity, surplus and lack, applies as much to his own society as to aboriginal societies, and cannot trace a limit dividing Europe-in-Canada from everything it tries to set outside itself.

Powell nevertheless insists that this will to accumulate at any cost sets aboriginal people at a firm remove from white Canadians. The effort "to obtain "'patlach" capital" is, he says, "directly opposed to the inculcation of industrious or moral habits." Is it necessary to recall that these observations contradict the arguments advanced by Sproat in 1879? His "'Patlach'" letter states, albeit in a self-contradictory way, that the "'Patlach'" ought to be suppressed because it prevents aboriginal people from accumulating property. Banning the "'Patlach'" would, Sproat argues, allow Canada to decrease the funds it spends providing "'Patlachers'" with "necessaries" that they refuse to keep for themselves.

For Sproat, it is the failure to store up wealth which situates aboriginal people outside the bounds of Europe-in-Canada. This same failure justifies Canada's attempt to take over the administration of their lives. But the failure which traces a limit between
civilization and barbarity in Sproat’s text fails to occur in Powell’s letter of December 1879. Powell’s logic reverses each of the terms deployed by Sproat to set Canada apart from the First Nations. For Powell, the failure of the failure to accumulate marks a limit which was formerly marked by the failure to accumulate.

This folding occurs whenever a postal-colonial author draws a limit between Europe-in-Canada and everything that it situates outside itself. The overlapping of the civilized with the uncivilized governs every facet of Canada’s discourse on the "Patlach," undermining every attempt to justify putting the practice to death. However the impossibility of vindicating the administration of Indian affairs is no reason not to proceed with it. For Canadian administrators do not hesitate to act upon their conclusions even when the reasoning that supports them proves to be nothing but a tissue of contradictions.23

6. Double Inscription

The Bureaucratic Fetish. In 1880 the Dominion government closed the Indian Branch and replaced it with the Department of Indian Affairs. Although renamed and reorganized, the Indian bureaucracy remained attached to the Department of the Interior, which was charged with overseeing the colonization of western Canada, and the minister of the Interior continued to serve as superintendent general of Indian Affairs. In 1881 the Indian administration in British Columbia underwent a parallel restructuring. James
Lenihan was relieved of his duties, and Powell was appointed the sole Indian superintendent for the province. Also, six Indian agencies were established: the Cowichan, West Coast and Kwaw-kewlth agencies on Vancouver Island, and the Fraser River, Kamloops and O'Kanagan agencies on the mainland. Each of these administrative districts was placed under the supervision of an Indian agent. By 1882 two more agencies were planned: one in Williams Lake region and the other high on the north coast of the mainland (Sessional Papers for 1882, No. 6: xii; for 1883, No. 5: xxi; Statutes of Canada, 1880, Ch. 28, sections 2 to 8; Tobias 45-6).

Since prime minister Macdonald continued to oversee the Department of the Interior, the new Department of Indian Affairs came under his supervision, and in his annual report on Indian affairs for 1882, he does not fail to discuss what he names the "Potlache." While I call the report "his," however, it is not certain that Macdonald was the author. Though his signature is attached to the report, it is equally possible that it was written by Vankoughnet on Macdonald's behalf. One has only to leaf through the government's correspondence to learn that Vankoughnet often wrote letters and reports that were to be understood as issuing from the desk of the superintendent general. But it does not matter who the author was; it is enough to underline the possibility that one of two administrators could have penned this report. My reasons for stressing this seemingly trivial detail will soon become clear.

When Macdonald (or is it?) discusses the "Potlache" in 1882, he breaks with the circular logic that governed the correspondence of Sproat, Vankoughnet and Powell in the 1860s and 1870s, and deploys a rhetoric that allows two contradictory themes to be true at the same time. While reviewing Indian affairs in British Columbia, Macdonald writes
that "It is satisfactory to be able to report that the old heathen feast known as the
"Potlache" is gradually being abandoned on the east coast [of Vancouver Island]
((Sessional Papers for 1883, No. 5: xxiii). This statement is hardly remarkable in itself,
since it merely echoes the 1882 report of W. H. Lomas, the agent in charge of the
Cowichan agency. Like Macdonald, Lomas insists that "The "Potlaches," once so
common [among the Coast Salish people in the agency], are...gradually dying out" (55).
But when Macdonald defines this "dying" practice, his rhetoric sets out an irreducible
contradiction.

What is "known" as the ""Potlache"", what the name refers to in Macdonald’s (or
Vankoughnet’s) report, is a distribution of goods which invokes a counter-distribution.
"At these celebrations," Macdonald continues, "a large quantity of personal property is
wont to be squandered in largesses from one tribe to another, the lucky (?) [sic]
recipients being expected to return subsequently as much as if not more than they
receive" (xxiii). The prime minister’s report points ""Potlache"" where Powell told
Vankoughnet to point it in 1879: it gestures towards a cycle of reciprocal exchanges
which generate profits in the form of interest.

But Macdonald (or not) points ""Potlache"" in another, second direction. For the
very words which describe the practice as an exchange of goods simultaneously identify it
as a form of gift-giving. The items distributed in a ""Potlatche"" cannot be gifts because
they have to be returned, and thus paid for, "subsequently," yet these same items of
exchange are nevertheless "largesses" that are "squandered" the moment they leave the
hands of the giver. In a ""Potlache"" as Macdonald construes it, whatever is given away
is eventually given back--and yet it never arrives back home. Everything is returned yet
nothing is repaid. Though nothing is lost, "a large quantity of personal property" is wasted. When Macdonald writes "Potlache," the word points to two different practices at once. What makes this double and contradictory reference possible? His text enacts a logic which Freud has named fetishism. As I turn to Freud to explain this notion, my goal is to give a name to the structure of Macdonald’s (or Vankoughnet’s) text, not to analyse the workings of his psyche. Fetishism here names a way of organizing concepts into discourse.

In "Fetishism" (Fetischismus), Freud discusses the case of "a young man [who] had exalted a certain sort of 'shine on the nose' into a fetishistic precondition" for erotic enjoyment (152). Freud’s essay traces the process by which the young man made the nose into a fetish. It seems that as a boy he had firmly believed that his mother had a penis. When he discovered that she did not, says Freud, this knowledge meant "his own possession of a penis was in danger" (153) and made him fear the possibility of being castrated. The child theorist dealt with his fear by adopting a peculiar mode of reasoning. In his thoughts he set up a substitute, a fetish--in this case the nose--in place of the absent penis, so that he could continue to believe it was there although he knew it was not. "He has retained that belief," notes Freud, "but he has also given it up" (154). Fetishism is thus a mode of doubling. The fetishist’s logic holds that two contradictory propositions can both be true at once. It is this idea of a simultaneous balancing of opposites that I want to bring to bear on Canada’s discourse on the "potlache."

Macdonald’s report draws our attention back to the "at once": that textual structure which allows a word to refer to a single thing as if it were two opposite things at the same time. Derrida notes that in the logic of fetishism the "at-once, the in-the-
same-stroke...of the two contraries, of the two opposite operations, prohibits cutting through to a decision" (Glas 210). The weighing of two contraries "at once" makes it impossible to decide exactly which practice--gift-giving or exchange--the word "Potlache" refers to. When Macdonald (or is it Vankoughnet? and is it merely a coincidence that in this instance there could be two authors?) maintains that the "Potlache" entails both profit and loss, he overlaps two opposing referents, folding them one over the other, instead of "cutting through to a decision" about the precise relation between the word and the thing it names. The reference of "potlache" will remain undecidable so long as it is frozen between two these contradictory possibilities.

It is no coincidence, though, that Macdonald's (?) report keeps both possibilities in view "at-once." When he states that the "potlache" includes both gifts and exchanges, he is obeying a logical necessity. What his report attempts is to set Europe-in-Canada at a clear remove from the coastal First Nations of British Columbia, yet it is impossible to trace a limit between Europe and its beyond without deploying the structure of the "at-once" within his discourse.

Powell's 1879 reply to Vankoughnet has shown that to identify the "Potlache" as a form of exchange is to cease to "know that it is different" from the exchanges practiced by European-Canadians. Yet the erasure of difference prevents Europe-in-Canada from setting itself apart from the First Nations. If the limit is to be drawn, the "Potlache" has to continue to be identified as a giving of gifts after it has been declared an exchange, because in the logic of the discourse on Indian affairs it is the gift that distinguishes the First Nations from a settler society which interprets civilization as an attribute belonging only to itself. Canada wants to distance itself from the people it calls
uncivilized, just as Freud’s fetishist wants his body to remain different from his mother’s. And just as the fetishist works, at all costs, to fend off the realization that he might someday lose his most prized possession, his penis, so Canada wants to protect itself from admitting that it too could lose its most cherished attribute: its whiteness. It is whiteness, after all, that permits Euro-Canadians to consider themselves superior to the original inhabitants of their new nation. If they were to lose their precious colour, they would have no mark to reassure them of the justness of their mission to put aboriginal cultures to death.

As we have learned to expect, the people white administrators situate farthest from Europe—the true others of Western civilization—are the Kwakwaka’wakw. "The Kwawkewlth Agency comprehends 25 bands and 2,264 Indians, who are the most depraved and uncivilized in the province," Macdonald writes, noting that "The ruinous Potlache feast is constantly held by them" (xxiii). The most uncivilized people on the coast are those who hold themselves close to the gift by maintaining the "Potlache"—even though the "Potlache," it is said, gives no gifts. It is true that the Nuu’chah’nulth, who are called the "Aht" here, also continue the practice of "potlaching." Yet Macdonald places them a little farther from the gift and a little closer to Europe and its ways than the Kwakwaka’wakw. Though he admits the "Aht" are still "much addicted to "potlaching" feasts, and gambling," which is what Blenkinsop had already said in 1874 and 1875, he insists "they are much more industrious and amenable to law than their neighbours the Kwakhewlths" (xxiii).²⁵ It seems the great crime of the Kwakwaka’wakw is their refusal to endorse white standards of labour and legality: a refusal to become white.
Fighting with Property. In the summer of 1885 George Dawson’s work for the Geological Survey of Canada brought him to "the northern part of Vancouver Island and its vicinity." A self-styled ethnographer, Dawson found time amid his other duties to write his "Notes and Observations on the Kwakool People...," which was presented to the Royal Society of Canada in May 1887. Dawson’s paper repeats the simultaneous balancing of contrary assertions which organizes Macdonald’s (or Vankoughnet’s) 1882 account of the "Potlache." In "Notes" the potlatch is once again—and at once—an act of gift-giving and a circular economy of expenditure and return.

Like Macdonald (or Vankoughnet), Dawson locates those he calls the "Kwakool" beyond the outermost limit of Europe and its civilizing influence. "The difficulties attendant on any effort toward the improvement of the condition and mode of life of the coast tribes of British Columbia, are very grave," he writes, emphasizing that "the actual results of missionary labours, such as those carried on by Mr. Hall among the Kwakool, and other self-sacrificing persons elsewhere, are in most cases, to all appearance, small" (87). Dawson claims there are two reasons why the "Kwakool" have not raised themselves up into the hierarchy of European-Canadian civilization. The first—which echoes Blenkinsop’s 1874 report from Barkley Sound—is that their traditions are stones causing them to sink back or "relapse" towards a state of near-bestiality. "It is difficult to induce individuals to abandon their old customs and bad habits," he argues, "and nearly impossible to prevent them from relapsing from time to time, owing to the fact that they still live promiscuously among and herd together with the mass of the tribe" (87, emphasis added). According to Dawson, the Kwakool are virtually animals, and it is difficult to cut individuals out from the "herd" and teach them to resemble the white
colonists.

But the main reason why the Kwakiool have so far failed to become white—and for Dawson this is the second obstacle to their progress—is whiteness itself. Like the Sproat of the 1860s, Dawson maintains that in recent years "the Kwakiool, equally with other tribes, have became [sic] in a word "demoralised"." He says they have given up their traditions and have lost their "spirit and self-respect...replacing it by nothing" (87). Though they sometimes find work on farms at harvest time, they do little more than eat for the rest of the year. What has brought on this crisis? Dawson states that the process of "demoralisation" has been underway only "Since the arrival of the whites" (87). The "Kwakiool" were not uncivilized until the lack of civilization arrived on their shores from Europe, and the greatest obstacle to their upward movement into civilization is nothing less than civilization itself. In "Notes" Europe-in-Canada is at once a force that draws people to the height of human achievement and a weight pulling them down to the level of animals who can barely feed themselves--although eating is almost all they do.

One of the "old customs and bad habits" that weighs heaviest upon the progress of the Kwakiool, though it is not so heavy a restraint as progress itself, is the "pernicious effect of the extension and frequent recurrence of the potlatch" which, in a further proliferation of names, is also known "as pus-a and ya-hooit, these terms probably denoting special forms of the ceremony appropriate to certain occasions" (79). Dawson warns his audience that this custom is spreading, not dying out. "Mr. George Blenkinsop" and "The Rev. A. J. Hall" have observed its growth firsthand. As they approach absolute "demoralisation," the Kwakiool are at once abandonning their traditions and pursuing them with increased intensity. It is as if their long descent into
death has served to enrich their cultural life.

The potlatch, as Dawson describes it, is "a struggle for social preeminence" which takes the form of a ceremonial distribution of blankets (80). It is a gift-giving competition, and whoever wins gains prestige within a social hierarchy. The greatest "preeminence" goes to the person who can accumulate and then give away the most blankets. To lose the contest, Dawson says, is to be humiliated before one's peers: "should the aspirant [to a position of eminence] be beaten, [he or she] would feel mortified and ashamed." Driven to prevail at any cost, "wives even rob their husbands to assist a brother, or some other relative in amassing blankets" and competing for social status (79-80). Dawson articulates a theme which will become typical, indeed stereotypical, in the ethnography of the Kwakwaka'wakw: the potlatch is a war fought with property.

But the distribution of blankets is more than a hostile act of expenditure. In keeping with the double logic of fetishism, Dawson argues that the potlatch is at once a loss and an accumulation. Though it includes moments when gifts are given, every gift ultimately finds its place within a general system of investment. Anyone planning to distribute blankets begins by lending them out to people from other villages, "giving large numbers to those who are well off, and particularly to such as are known to have the intention of giving a potlatch in return" (80). "This loan is reckoned a debt of honour," says Dawson, "to be paid with interest at the proper time." One lends blankets to receive, in return, a payment of interest that doubles the amount loaned. However the interest paid sometimes takes the form of a gift from the debtor to the creditor. "It is usual to return two blankets for every one borrowed," declares Dawson, but he notes that
"Indians with liberal ideas may return even more" (80; emphasis added). The debtor has the option of giving back, and also giving away, a supplement of interest in excess of the amount owing.

The potlatch is not held until this long cycle of exchanges designed to earn a profit has run its course. Then people from different communities gather in the lender's village. "At length," Dawson writes, "all is ready, and with the accompaniment of much bombastic speech-making and excitement [as well as "feasting" and "ceremony"], the mass of blankets is distributed in exact proportion to the social position of those taking part—or, what is the same thing, in proportion to their individual contributions" (80, emphasis added).

Dawson offers his readers two possible scenarios. Either the value of the gifts one gives in the bid to improve one's prestige has to match the social position of each recipient, or--"what is the same thing" but also a thing different enough to be worth noting separately--the value of the gifts must be "in proportion" to the interest one has received from one's debtors. If the second hypothesis is correct--a second hypothesis which is "the same" as the first and is thus the only hypothesis--then potlatch gifts are a repayment of interest earned from loans. For the potlatcher returns even those extra payments of interest, those supplemental gifts, paid by debtors with "liberal ideas." In the end one earns nothing from potlatching because the profit made while preparing the potlatch has to be repaid during the final distribution of blankets.

But the Dawson potlatch is not just a repayment of the interest accrued on loans. It is, in fact, a return of interest--with interest. To give a Dawson potlatch, one begins by lending out blankets. Later one receives, in return, both the blankets that were loaned
and a supplement of interest. To end the cycle, the potlatcher gives back the interest to those who paid it, and also gives them the blankets which they had previously had to borrow. The Dawson potlatch is therefore all gift and no profit, though everything is arranged in a manner which suggests that every gift received is a profit earned. While in 1882 Macdonald's diction of gift-giving described the "Potlache" as an instance of exchange, in 1885 Dawson's diction of exchange describes the potlatch as an act of gift-giving. In both texts, however, the practice of the "Potlache"/"potlatch" balances these two contrary operations simultaneously.

Dawson notes that the competition for prestige among the "Kwakiool" sometimes leads to the outright destruction of goods that might otherwise have been given away.

"Should an Indian wish to humiliate another for any reason," he writes, "he may destroy a great number of blankets or much other valued property" (80). If the adversary fails to destroy an equal amount "or if possible a greater amount of property," then "he lies under the reproach of having been worsted by his foe" (80). The destruction of property—often a destruction "with interest"—is an absolute gift, an expenditure that cannot be returned because what was spent no longer exists, except in the memory of two "foes."

7. Doctoring

Dawson says that the only way to make the "Kwakiool" communities give up the potlatch and accede to whiteness is "to establish industries among them" (88). Before
they can develop into "very valuable members of the community of the west," he argues, they have to be trained to work like Western-Europeans (88). The notion that "industry" is a force capable of lifting barbarity into civilization also governs Macdonald's report for 1882, where he notes that the "industrious" nature of the "Aht" brings them nearer to whiteness than the "Depraved and uncivilized" "Kwawkewlths." Superintendent Powell was also known to laud the civilizing power of industrial education in his correspondence. But he advocates a more violent means of putting the "Potlache" to death in his annual report for 1882.27

While describing his tour of the Kwawkewlth Agency in June 1882, Powell argues that because the Kwakwaka'wakw have refused to embark on the path to whiteness, the government will have to force them into the ranks of European-Canadian civilization. "I was glad to be able to visit the Kwahkewlths in a ship of war," he says, "not from a probability of actual rebellion on the part of these otherwise wild and reckless people, but because a proper show of authority is still necessary when endeavouring to break up any of their old and demoralising customs to which they seem devotedly attached" (Sessional Papers for 1883, No. 5: 162). It is no longer enough to discountenance the "old customs." They are to become the target of a whole apparatus of coercion.

To support his call for "a proper show of authority," Powell cites the experience of Alfred Hall, who retreated to Alert Bay in 1880 after spending two years trying, and failing, to Europeanize the "incorrigible" residents of Fort Rupert.28 "Mr. Hall is labouring in a field," writes Powell,

where he meets the daily discouragements incident to the reforming of people who are opposed to his work.... He informed me, that the chief obstructions to his efforts were the liquor traffic, the potlaches and
barbarous medicine feasts, which he thought should be prevented by law, now that an Agent, who might enforce such an enactment, was stationed there (162).

By citing Hall, indeed using him as a postal relay, Powell advances the idea of banning the practices that "obstruct" the civilizing influence of missionaries and government administrators. He remarks elsewhere that if a law were passed, the Dominion would have to build a jail and hire constables to make arrests (RG 10, v. 3628, f. 6244-1, 22 November 1882).

Note that the statute foreseen by Powell (via Hall) would forbid not just "potlaching" and the sale of liquor to aboriginal people, but a whole class of events known as "barbarous medicine feasts." Though it remains undefined here, the "feast" has surfaced as a new object to be scrutinized and regulated by federal officials. Powell says it is a mark of barbarity. Like the potlach, the "feast" traces a fragile limit between those who practice it and those who declare themselves the (Indian) agents of civilization.

The 1882 report of the agent for the new Kwaw-Kewlth Agency—Powell’s old colleague George Blenkinsop—shows the Indian affairs administration had already taken measures to suppress the practice of "feasting" in British Columbia. In his text Blenkinsop claims that the people recently placed under his paternal supervision "are so wedded to their old customs, and even filth, that they have to be driven to make the least effort to rise above their present degraded level" (Sessional Papers for 1883, No. 5: 65). Here, as in 1874, Blenkinsop sketches the relation between Europe and its beyond as a hierarchical opposition between high and low, raising and sinking, elevation and degradation. But while in 1874 he wrote that gambling and giving away kept the "Aht" from lifting themselves into the ranks of Western civilization, in 1882 he affirms that the
Kwakwa'wakw are weighed down by "potlaching" and an activity named the "Tamanowes."

"The question of "potlaching" has engaged my most serious attention," he writes, adding that

A general tone of despondency prevails among the elders of the different tribes on account of their being obliged to give up this old custom.

I have pointed out to them over and over again, the evils attending it, which the younger members do not fail to recognize, and even appreciate its intended abolishment.

They have had due warning, and those who choose to risk or lend their property to uphold such a pernicious system will experience a difficulty in recovering it (66; emphasis added).

The new agent rehearses a theme which is to become a standard part of the discourse against "potlaching" for years to come: young people support, and even "appreciate," the abolition of this practice, while their elders refuse to give it up. Yet no doubt it is the children of these same young people who will be jailed for "potlaching" fifty years later.

Although the word "Potlaching" appears in quotation marks here, as if it were destined always to be a node of uncertainty in the utterances that condemn it, Blenkinsop has no trouble identifying its proper referent. "Potlaching" is--at once--a circulation of gifts and a "system" of loans, and like all forms of investment, it involves an element of "risk." Indeed in 1882 the risks are greater than ever before. If in the potlatch as Dawson explains it, one distributes property knowing that it will soon be returned, then the arrival of an Indian agent determined to put an end to the custom means that in future creditors may be prevented from collecting what is theirs--a situation which would leave many people in a state of financial crisis.
Blenkinsop ends by reporting that "The "Tamanowes" was attempted to be carried out last winter in this camp, but the steps taken to prevent it caused the disgusting part of the performance to be abandoned, under threat of prosecution for assault" (66). Like "potlatching," the word ""Tamanowes"" surrounds itself in quotation marks here. It is as though by insistently demanding that quotes be placed around the names for these two practices, language itself were covertly calling attention to the difficulty of deciding what they are. For not even an experienced observer like Blenkinsop can explain what thing, what practice, ""Tamanowes"" refers to. He simply declares "I have reason to hope it has seen its last days" (66). The "it" withdraws itself from view, and the reader is left asking what it is that he finds so "disgusting" in this "performance." If ""Potlache"" is a sign that points nowhere because it gestures towards two mutually exclusive things at once, then for Blenkinsop ""Tamanowes"" points nowhere because it has nothing to point to.

In a familiar pattern, the indecision clouding the relation between this word and its referent is matched by the undecidibility of its spelling. When Macdonald mentions the suppression of the practice at Fort Rupert in the 1882 annual report, he substitutes ""Tamawawas"" for Blenkinsop's ""Tamanowes."" "The medicine dance, "Tamawawas," was celebrated in the camp last winter at Fort Rupert," writes Macdonald (or Vankoughnet), "but threats to prosecute for assault had the desired effect of preventing the disgusting portion of the performance" (Sessional Papers for 1883, No. 5: xxiv). It seems that "medicine dance" and ""Tamawawas"" are equivalent terms--but terms for what? The only certainty is that there is something about this object which the colonial gaze refuses to see.
Dr. Powell states in his 1882 report that the standard means of curing illness in aboriginal communities is the "Gamanawas," but he explains that the cure itself functions as a disease. "The usual amount of sickness always exists in Indian camps," says Powell, "and on account of the absence of professional assistance much suffering is often experienced. To this want may be attributed, in a great measure, the continuance of the "Gamanawas," or Indian doctoring, and its attendant evils among semi-civilized tribes" (Sessional Papers for 1883, No. 5: 166). Where there is "potlatching" there is sickness, and where there is sickness, there is the "evil" "Gamanawas." The two practices support each other like two sides of an arch.

Although Powell calls the "Gamanawas" a form of "doctoring" in this report, he had already defined it elsewhere as an act of cannibalism. In February 1881 the bishop of Victoria had sent the superintendent general of Indian affairs a petition asking for the suppression of the "Tamanawas dances" in the Cowichan Agency. The petition was written by Catholic missionaries, but it articulates the interests of local Salish people who had adopted European ways. It describes the "Tamanawas" as a rite of initiation into a secret society. Everyone who participates in this rite is prevented from acceding to industriousness and, in particular, to whiteness:

We see with...every winter, (the season that the [initiations] take place), young men who had settled themselves upon their land, worked it industriously and built themselves a little house, after the white fashion, a step towards civilization of which a white man can scarcely appreciate the importance--drawn into the society, sometimes by actual violence, and falling back into all their former Indian habits. Henceforth, they quit their land to live in the villages and spend the greatest part of the summer in roving about in their canoes, and the winter in the degrading practise of the Tamanawas dances. There is not a part of our reservation [where] one cannot behold one of the houses alluded to, deserted and falling into ruins (RG 10, v. 3737, f. 27590; 2 February 1881).
According to this "we," "Tamanwas dances" are directly opposed to "the white fashion" of being. For to be white is to reside in one place and practice agriculture; it does not include "roving about" and neglecting one's property.

In response, Vankoughnet asked Powell to determine what steps might be taken to curb "the influences & practice of said society" (30 March 1881). The Indian superintendent was again called upon to play the role of ethnographer. His report states "that "Tamanawas" or Medicine Work is a prominent and chief feature of savage life in every part of the world and it is somewhat singular that so much similarity in the practice or mode of carrying it out exists among the heathen tribes whose habits are quite dissimilar in other respects" (25 April 1881). Like the gift, ""Tamanawas"" obstructs the passage from savagery to whiteness. It must be overcome, says Powell, "before any progress can be made in inducing Indians to entertain the enlightening influences of christianity and civilisation" (emphasis added). However, while "Formerly the custom was followed by every tribe on the coast," missionaries have already suppressed it in many communities.

Powell describes ""Tamanawas"" as a sort of grisly meal: "the ceremony used to begin in October lasting until March, and consisted of orgies of the most disgusting character, namely biting the arms of spectators, eating or rather tearing to pieces dogs and human bodies (exhumed for the purpose), and occasionally, killing slaves with this object in view." Ironically Powell interprets this practice of eating human and animal flesh, of assimilating others into oneself, as an obstacle to the assimilation of Native people into the white body of European Canada.

Like "Potlach," the fourfold ""Tamanowes"" -- ""Tamawas"" -- ""Gamanawas"" --
"Tamanawas" points towards two opposite practices simultaneously. It is a mode of healing bodies that are sick, and it is the act of devouring the bodies of animals and people. Unlike the word "bank," though, "tamanawas" does not refer to different things in different contexts. Rather, it claims that one thing is two things at once—as if a being could at the same time be absolutely equal and absolutely other to itself.

8. Truth as Pointing.

By the middle of the 1880s the search for appropriate words for two practices hitherto unknown to Western knowledge had brought Canada's discourse on Indian affairs into an encounter with language itself. Government administrators had initiated a debate about "potlatch" and "tamanawas" but had failed to decide exactly what these words mean, what knowledges they convey. What is more, the difficulty of finding their correct meanings was bound up with the problem of determining what things, what actual practices, the two words name. Even the spelling of "potlatch" and "tamanawas" proved undecidable. But what is meant by "meaning"? And what does "reference" refer to? Before proceeding further in this interpretation of a postal literature, it is necessary to ask what is a name, a word, a sign—and how does it function?

While Searle defines words like "bank"—not to mention "potlatch" and "tamanawas"—as "referring expressions" which people use, in speech acts, "to point to particular things," Heidegger argues that any account of language which reduces
signification to the act of pointing belongs to a Western-European metaphysics that has reached its limit and has begun overturning itself from within its own borders.

Heidegger maintains that when language is taken to be a system of vocal sounds articulated in the mouths of speaking subjects, it is assumed that: "[written] letters are signs of sounds, the sounds are signs of mental experiences, and these are signs of things." In metaphysics, the sign is "something that signifies and to some extent shows something else" ("Nature" 97). It is a pointer linking the nonsensuous contents of a mind to the sensuous realm of things that exist in the world.

In an essay that situates itself in the wake of "Heidegger's uncircumventable meditation" on the difference between Being and beings, Derrida says that in metaphysics the sign is "usually" thought to be a substitute, a proxy, which replaces a thing when that thing itself cannot make itself present--""thing" here standing equally for meaning and referent." When a sign stand in for things, it replaces either a sense that remains unuttered or a person, object, action or event that is absent when the sign is deployed. "The sign represents the present in its absence," says Derrida. "When we cannot grasp or show the thing [whether it is a meaning or a referent], state the present, the being-present, when the present cannot be presented, we signify, we go through the detour of the sign" ("Différance," in Margins 9, also 22). If the sign is a pointer, then it gestures only towards what is lacking. It points to things by pointing out that they are not there, presenting itself as the absence of what it signifies.

The "classical" definition of the sign as a substitute for what is missing becomes the definition of the proper name in Searle's theory of speech acts. One reason "why we have the institution of proper names," says Searle, "is that we need a convenient device
expression only if a hearer understands exactly what entity that expression is intended to point out. The hearer alone decides whether an act of reference has succeeded or not.

There are two ways, though, of measuring the success of referential speech acts. Searle distinguishes "fully consummated" acts of reference, which identify an object for the hearer without ambiguity or doubt, from "successful" acts of reference, which refer in a vague way but fail to identify an object unambiguously for the hearer, creating uncertainty about what is being discussed (82). Two necessary conditions need to be satisfied for a speaker to perform a "fully consummated" reference. First, there must exist only one object to which the referring expression points (82). Hence the referent itself, and not just the expression which refers to it, must be singular and definite. Secondly, the referring utterance must give the hearer the means to identify the single, definite object which the speaker is discussing. To identify means "that there should no longer be any doubt or ambiguity [for the hearer] about what exactly is being talked about" (85). The fully consummated reference points not to the object itself, but to that trace of difference which sets the object referred to apart from all the other objects in the world. To refer in the "fully consummated" way, a phrase such as "the potlatch" must distinguish a single potlatch from all the other potlatches practiced along the northwest coast. It will be seen, however, that "the potlatch" is a general term that does not function smoothly in acts of singular, definite reference, though many postal-colonial texts use it to refer to a single, definite event.

To distinguish one object from every other, the speaker must either demonstrate it or describe it. To demonstrate an object means to show it directly to someone--as if to say "This one right here." A demonstration succeeds only when the object itself is
for making identifying reference to commonly referred to objects when the objects are not always themselves present" (Speech Acts 74-5). The name’s task is to point accurately and on demand to an object which may well be absent when a speech act is made. Names allow speakers to "talk" in words about things which are not themselves words (75).

As noted earlier, for Searle uttering a proper name is one of three ways of performing an act of reference. Naming is thus a particular instance of a general process. Does it follow that every act of reference is a way of using a sign, or set of signs, to compensate for a lack? If so, then what are the exact mechanics which enable a referring expression to present the thing it names without making the thing itself present?

Searle limits his consideration of acts of reference to cases of "singular definite reference." An act of reference is singular and definite when it answers the questions "Who or what in particular" rather than "Who or what in general" (85-6). The "most obvious cases" of singular definite reference are proper names such as "John Searle." Noun phrases are another case, though not every noun phrase can be said to refer. If confronted with a sentence like "my brother left me in the lurch," for example, Searle would exclude the word "lurch" from his admittedly "incomplete theory of reference" because "lurch" does not "serve to pick out or identify some object or entity" that exists in the world of perception (72-3). Words like "lurch" cannot be used to point to anything concrete. Searle’s metaphysics of reference deals exclusively with those referring expressions--whether they are names, noun phrases or pronouns--which point to individual people, objects, events or activities that can be presented by going through the detour of the sign. A speaker is said to have uttered a singular, definite referring
present, and there is no need to provide a substitute. In contrast, describing an object involves telling someone something about it which identifies it without ambiguity or doubt. A description continues to function when the object itself is absent.

It seems that for Searle any act of reference which is not an utter failure is also an act of description. That part of a referring expression which describes its referent is called its meaning, while the referent itself is the object described. Yet sense and reference are in practice inseparable. A referring expression cannot refer unless it gives the hearer some information about the object it refers to. Such information allows the hearer to identify the difference that marks the object in question, and this trace of difference in turn permits the hearer to "pick out" from the vast universe of possible referents the single definite referent which the speaker is discussing. A referring expression refers with accuracy only if it tells the hearer certain distinctive facts about an object (92).

What class of singular, definite referring expressions do "potlatch" and "tamanawas" belong to? Are they proper names? Probably not, since Searle includes only the names of people and places—for example "Socrates," "Russia" and "Everest"—in this group. It is more likely that "potlatch" and "tamanawas" belong to the class of "noun phrases" which, in their simplest form, are composed of concrete nouns and their articles, as in "the bank." As we have seen, this class excludes abstract, non-referential noun phrases like "the lurch."

Since for Searle acts of reference are also acts of meaning, every noun phrase is a double pointer. It points both to an object and to what is known about the object, allowing its hearers to identify a sensuous thing (a referent) by offering them a
nonsensuous idea of that thing (a meaning). When Searle says that "objects cannot be named independently of facts," moreover, he makes the speech act of reference depend on already established relationships between objects and knowledges (93). His theory of reference is grounded in a theory of truth. It is sometimes said that this theory of truth is as old as Western-European philosophy itself.

Immanuel Kant notes in his *Critique of Pure Reason* that the "logicians" of metaphysics have long defined truth as "the agreement of knowledge with its object" (97). Truth binds ideas to things in a relation of adequation. An idea is true when it is determined to be equal to the thing it describes. Yet the relation that links them together is forged by the words which circulate between a nonsensuous knowledge and a sensuous object and point out the agreement between them. The role of the word is built into the truth-relation because knowledge and object need a go-between to bring them into communication by mediating the gap that separates them.

In the metaphysical definition of truth, knowledge and its object correspond, as if by mail. The subject who knows addresses a word to the object known, just as Powell mails his yearly reports to Ottawa, confident they will arrive where he sent them. As it travels the path from knowledge to object and back again, the word functions as a sort of dispatch, a missive or perhaps a postcard. If truth is to remain true, however, the mail must not go astray. Truth is true only when knowledge is delivered to its proper object via the proper word, yet it is always possible that knowledge will address itself to the wrong destination and, in going astray, establish a relation of falsehood between an object and itself—just as a letter sometimes gets lost in the post and ends up at the wrong place.

"If truth consists in the agreement of knowledge with its object," says Kant, "that object
must thereby be distinguished from other objects; for knowledge is false, if it does not agree with the object to which it is related, even though it contains something which may be valid of other objects" (97). Knowledge is false when it arrives, via the word, at the wrong destination. Only the word that arrives safely at the correct address is qualified to serve as a postal relay bringing knowledge into correspondence with the thing known.

Searle’s "incomplete" theory of reference is predicated on a theory that understands truth as a form of correspondence. For him, reference and truth both fail unless they direct themselves toward a single definite object, their true object, to the exclusion of all others. Moreover, reference and truth alike are in constant danger of going astray. It is always possible for them to single out an inappropriate object from the crowd without knowing they are pointing in the wrong direction, and it is always possible for them to address themselves to objects that simply do not exist.

These chances for error are always ready to block the paths that truth travels as it circulates from post to post. We are about to witness them undermine the very foundations of Canada’s discourse on the "potlatch" and "tamanawas."


When it was finally enacted, the statute banning the ""Potlach"" and ""Tamanawas"" prohibited two words rather than two practices. Within the frame of the legal text ""Potlach"" and ""Tamanawas"" were referring expressions which failed to
address themselves to two referents, two objects, in the world. The problem was that they had no meaning, or perhaps too many contradictory meanings, and referring expressions which mean nothing, which give no facts about their objects, point to nothing at all. Hence "Potlach" and "Tamanawas" designated hollow knowledges: they were signs sent astray, postings without destination. Perhaps they were not signs at all. Perhaps they were, at best, mere half-signs: signifiers without signifieds, verbal traces without any sense to give them weight and bind them to things. What remains certain, though, is that the law against these half-words was effectively quashed the first time it was enforced. Its failure marked the breakdown of an entire apparatus of truth conceived as an act of pointing.

By 1882 the Department of Indian Affairs had received several dispatches from white officials recommending that the potlatch and tamanawas be suppressed. Vankoughnet had officially "discountenanced" distributions of property and Powell had urged that they be banned altogether. Blenkinsop had interrupted the winter dances at Fort Rupert in 1882. Then in the first months of 1883, the department received a "Petition of the [Coast Tsimshian and Nisga'a] Chiefs at Port Simpson, Kincolith, Greenville and other places [on the north coast], praying that the system of Potlatching as practised by many Indian Tribes on the Coast of British Columbia may be put down" (RG 10, v. 3628, f. 6244-1, 13 April 188[3]). The text of the petition is missing from the public archives, though Cole and Chaikin surmise that it was "Transparently inspired and written by Methodists Thomas Crosby [a missionary at Port Simpson] and A. E. Green [a missionary working on the Nass River], perhaps with the collaboration of Anglican Thomas Dunn at Kincolith" (Iron 16; 186, note 6).
It is tempting to dismiss the petition as a forgery composed by a group of white authors who acted without consulting the aboriginal community they claimed to represent. According to this interpretation, the petition would have put the arguments of settler society into the mouths of the First Nations, inviting readers to hear in its pages the prayers of a people longing to be freed from their own culture and to accede to the ranks of European civilization. Yet the petition can also be interpreted as the work of a Native community that had deliberately chosen to deal with the violence inflicted on it by the arrival of Europe-in-Canada on its shores. John Borrows argues that "Native society has long been written about from a western perspective in the areas of religious life, social customs, economic practices, historical genesis, political routines, and legal customs." Adds Borrows, "These accounts of Native society have often portrayed us in a way that does not capture the active and transformative role we played in reacting to settler institutions" (Borrows 6). What he gives us to think is that the petition of 1883 was an effort by aboriginal people to modify white institutions to suit their own interests, rather than a heavy-handed attempt by white missionaries to erase aboriginal cultures from the map of a young nation.

Vankoughnet sent the petition to Powell in April 1883, asking him to discuss the text with land and works commissioner Trutch and to submit a report of their deliberations. Powell replied on 19 May 1883. With Trutch’s endorsement, he suggests that "every practicable means should be adopted by the Government to put a stop to the custom," noting that it is "often associated with gambling, medicine dances (Tamanaw[as]) and similar Indian vices." He says the civilizing efforts of missionaries and Indian agents are the best means of suppressing "vice" on the north coast. But
Powell insists a law is also necessary—even though there is "no crime in the Potlach"—because he says Native people have such respect for "the Queen's law" that if a statute were enacted, they would soon give up their "reprehensible customs." For Powell, no single measure can kill the potlatch. To make sure it dies, he urges the department to replace traditional aboriginal governments with "Indian Municipal Councils" empowered to pass by-laws—an idea he rejected when it was advanced in Sproat’s "Potlach" letter.

In June Vankoughnet sent Powell’s report to prime minister Macdonald and recommended that the government pass an Order in Council "disapproving" of the potlatch and tamanawas. Vankoughnet says the Order "would in his opinion probably have the effect of greatly reducing the number" of distributions and dances, yet he advances the idea as a provisional measure which is likely to be replaced later by legislation banning "such ceremonies" outright (11 June 1883). Eight days later Vankoughnet addressed a memorandum to the Privy Council, requesting that "strenuous measures...be adopted to put a stop to the heathenish custom in vogue among the Indians of B.C. known as the "Potlach"—a custom which, he says, is "worse than useless" (19 June 1883). To support the request, Vankoughnet quotes long passages from Sproat’s "Potlach" letter and from Powell’s recent report. Vankoughnet also notes that the department plans to ask for legislation against the "Potlach" in the next session of Parliament (Iron 16-17).

The Privy Council’s reply, dated 7 July 1883, touches on all the difficulties of interpretation that have plagued the discourse against the "Potlach" up till now. The problem is not that Cabinet resists Vankoughnet’s proposal. It dispatches the Order in Council without delay. What stands out is a clerical error made as the government’s
actions were being recorded for posterity. For the report of the Privy Council approves
the suppression not of the ""Potlach""--but of the ""Potlack""." To be precise, it advises
that a letter be sent to the lieutenant-governor of British Columbia, asking him to "use his
best efforts for the the suppression of the "Potlack" and to circulate the Governor-
General's Proclamation discountenancing this "heathenish custom" (7 July 1883).

Whoever transcribed this cabinet decision added a tail to the word for the thing to
be prohibited. By substituting k for h, strapping a tiny prosthesis onto its midsection, the
anonymous copyist transforms the word into a warning that what it refers to is lacking.
Though no doubt the mistake was made by chance, it obeys a necessary law. The
addition of a supplementary mark to ""Potlach"" tells the truth about its status as a
referring expression: "Potlach" points, in the end, to a "Potlack." It does not gesture
towards an object nor to what is known about that object. Or rather it refers to the
absence of its referent, and its meaning is that it has no meaning. The word points, in
truth, to the truth about truth: it points to the truth that truth itself is not to be found in
the act of pointing.

When Powell learned the Order in Council was in place, he responded that the
"Queen's objection" was unlikely to have any influence on the ""Potlach"" and renewed
his call for legislation (15 August 1883). Early in the new year, however, Cornelius
Bryant--a Methodist missionary working in the Nanaimo Salish community--urged the
department to use persuasion rather than coercion to stop a practice which, he agrees,
"seems to be on the increase among the Indians of this Coast" (30 January 1884).
Though Bryant admits that steps must be taken to suppress the potlatch, he says it would
be better to reward people for renouncing it than to punish them for keeping it alive. He
does not oppose the passing of a law, but he believes it is unlikely to achieve its goal.

It is worth noting that Bryant’s definition of the potlatch turns away from the concept of exchange and circles back towards the notion of expenditure and the gift. He claims that "giving away" reduces the people to "beggary," that travelling to potlatches exposes them to misery, and that potlatches themselves are moments of "debauchery" and "intoxication" which lead to the use of "knives" and "fire-arms." But above all he notes that the "reckless and spendthrift customs which are maintained at these potlatches" bring "impoverishment" to children and the old, and squander wealth that he would rather see spent on houses, roads, fences and the cemetery. He also hints that the potlatch is an obstacle to missionary work because "The church and the school" cannot flourish where "the "potlatching" holds sway."

Just days after Bryant warned that the potlatch could not be legislated away, the Roman Catholic missionary at Cowichan wrote Indian agent William Lomas to demand a ban on the "heathenish practices of "Potlatching" and dancing" (2 February 1884). "I respectfully request you Sir in the name of the civilized Indians," writes Father Donckele, "to beg the Indian Department to have a law to stop the disastrous practice of "Potlatching" and especially dancing as it is carried on by the Indians of Vancouver Island." Donckele says the question of ""Potlatching"" and "dancing" has divided the community where he lives and works, because people who support the traditional way of life have come into conflict with those who prefer to adopt the ways of settler society. He urges the government to protect the people who have embarked on the upward climb into European civilization—which is also a climb into whiteness—from those who remain loyal to their own aboriginal civilization. Although improvement was supposed to have
happened "as soon as the young people adopted the habits of the whites," he says it is impossible for the young to rise into whiteness when they continue to have access to non-white "habits." The battle over "'Potlatching'" continues to be construed as a conflict between two colours--between two qualities of light--and whiteness considers itself threatened wherever another shade is allowed to persist.

Lomas addressed his own recommendations to Powell three days later. "I have come to the conclusion," Lomas writes, "that before the Indians of this coast can be permanently benefited a law must be passed for the prevention of the foolish, wasteful, and demoralising custom of "potlatching" and for the punishment of any Indian allowing a Tom-an-ōēs dance to be held in any house of which he is owner or part owner" (5 February 1884). He argues that "'potlatching'" not only weighs down the ascent of "Indians" into whiteness, but causes population decline, the destitution and misery of the old, the sickness and death of children, a general indifference to education, and the neglect of farms and livestock in winter. Paradoxically, although it said to lie at the very root of social decay in Coast Salish villages, the potlatch must end only on the condition that it immediately begin again. Its death must overlap its birth:

But in the event of any law being passed it would be advisable to allow a fixed time for its coming into force, as potlatches are in reality a lending of a certain amount of property which has to be returned at an uncertain date with interest, or rather with an additional amount, which at some future date has also to be returned either by the recipient or if he lie dead by some of his sons.

It seems that the discourse against the potlatch will never cease folding together two contradictory themes. While Bryant states on January 30th that the Coast Salish potlatch is an "improvident" act of gift-giving, Lomas maintains less than a week later that it is a
system of loans that have to be repaid at enormous rates of interest. Just as in the
potlatch, as Lomas understands it, one gives in order to add to one's wealth, so in the
Euro-Canadian definition of the potlatch there is always a surplus, "an additional
amount," of meaning and reference. The potlatch is never just an exchange for profit,
and it is never just an expenditure without return, gift without counter-gift. It always
includes a certain "amount" of both—at once.

Lomas maintains that when a father dies before paying what he owes, a law
dictates that his debts are to be assumed by the son. But the potlatch is itself both a
father and a son, and although the white nation-state will soon condemn the father to die,
the son is bound to assume his obligations. The moment the law kills the potlatch-father,
the son will take his place and an "additional amount" of potlatch will survive its own
death. The potlatch has to replace itself with itself so that property owing from previous
potlatches can be returned.

The superintendent general of Indian affairs brought legislation before the House
of Commons on 12 February 1884. According to Cole and Chaikin, "Macdonald
introduced debate in committee by noting that the government had received strong
representations from both agents and missionaries"--including Bryant, Donckele and
Lomas. The Minister of Justice quoted from their letters when he delivered the bill to
the Senate, where it passed "without a role call or recorded vote" (Iron 17-18). The new
statute came into effect on 1 January 1885 and in 1886 took up its place as section 114 in
Chapter 43 of the Revised Statutes of Canada. Ironically, the full title of Chapter 43 is
"An Act respecting Indians;" its short title, of course, is "The Indian Act" (emphasis
added).
Section 114 promises harsh penalties to anyone who holds a potlatch or a dance and to anyone who collaborates in potlatching or dancing. And it rigorously distinguishes between "Indians" and "persons." I quote it in full:

114. Every Indian or person who engages in or assists in celebrating the Indian festival known as the "Potlach" or the Indian dance known as the "Tamanawas," is guilty of a misdemeanor, and liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months and not less than two months:

2. Every Indian or person who encourages, either directly or indirectly, an Indian to get up such a festival or dance, or to celebrate the same, or who assists in the celebration of the same, is guilty of a like offence, and shall be liable to the same punishment.

By enclosing ""Potlach"" and ""Tamanawas"" in quotation marks, the very orthography of the law calls attention to all the problems that gathered around these words as they circulated through the government's mail over the years. In keeping with the established pattern, the legal text mentions the words as nodes of uncertainty and does not just use them to refer to things known to exist in the world.

In British Columbia the majority of aboriginal people responded to the new law by defying it (Iron 25). Just days before it came into effect, William Lomas wrote Powell that the people of the Cowichan agency were "dis-concerted" to learn the government had taken steps against the "Potlach," and "they are strongly supported by Indians from the West Coast and New Westminster Agencies" (27 December 1884). Lomas repeats that people owed debts from previous "Potlaches" are concerned the law will prevent them from recovering their investments. It is therefore urgent that the Cowichan people be allowed a supplement of potlatch. "I cannot help thinking," he writes, "that the enforcement of the new Act had better be delayed for a while, or, that each Band be allowed by special license to hold one returning "Potlach" with the distinct understanding
that no additional property shall be lent." The banning of the "Potlach" leads only to another "Potlach."

When he forwarded Lomas's proposal to Ottawa on 7 January 1885, Powell confided that "the holding of one or two "Potlaches" in [Lomas's] district might pass without notice on the understanding that they would be the last." To mask the fact the law has failed only a week after coming into force, Powell endorses a scheme put forward by Lomas: the government could sponsor an "Industrial Exhibition" as a forum for repaying debts. The "Potlach" would be allowed to continue provided that it proceeds under a different name.

By the spring of 1885 the question of the supplemental "Potlach" came to a crisis around the case of Lohah, an elder in the Cowichan village of Comeaken. On 8 April Lohah and his supporters wrote the department for permission to hold a final distribution of property. Promising to lend no more, Lohah states that he is responsible for repaying his own debts and those of his son, who has recently died. Indeed it was the death of his son that prevented him from making a return before the law came down. "It cannot be wrong to pay what we owe," Lohah insists, "& this is the only way to do it--we are not yet like white people--and it is one of our laws that these payments shall be done in public."

Lohah's petition is the product of a conflict between two legal systems. The laws of his society leave him no choice but to break the law passed by the legislature in Ottawa. His obedience to his own traditions also marks his difference from white people and keeps him from becoming too much "like" them. The battle over the potlatch continues to be interpreted--by whites and Native people alike--both as a clash of cultures
and as a clash of colours.

However it would be wrong to assume that all the Cowichan people supported the potlatch. The aboriginal community had its own internal divisions and was not everywhere equal to itself. In Lohah's own petition, Antoine Seseawon declares himself in favour of putting the "Potlach" to rest. Seseawon explains his opposition by rehearsing the argument that potlatching demands absolute expenditures—a giving of all—which leave the donor and the donor's family destitute. "I am always against the Potlach," he says, "I have no interest in Lohah's, I know if I join the Potlach party, I shall be poor, my children will be poor and suffer." But while he opposes the "Potlach" in general, Seseawon affirms his sympathy and his support for Lohah: "but I feel for Lohah, he has always tried to help white men and now the law is against him, and all the old Indians are sneering at him, it will kill him and I would like to see him raised up for he is a good man."

Though Seseawon disapproves of the "Potlach," unlike its white critics he does not interpret it as a stone weighing down Lohah's progress into a higher Western-European civilization. He suggests the opposite is true. The "Potlach" is not a descent into barbarity but rather a "raising up" that preserves Lohah's dignity in the eyes of his peers by allowing him to fulfill the obligations which knit him into the social order. To the observer who stands within the potlaching culture, the Potlach has no authority to mark a limit between civilization and its beyond.

We know from Blenkinsop's 1882 report that it was not uncommon for white administrators to argue that the distribution of property was practiced exclusively by men—especially "old men" who did not have the support of the young. However in Lohah's
petition Cehawitawet of Comeaken notes that women have their own "Potlach" debts to pay. She herself owes, along with her husband, a total of 350 blankets and, she insists, "we must pay it in public."

Cehawitawet’s remarks also identify the flaw which undermines the authority of the law forbidding her to pay her debts, though this flaw will not surface until the legal machine breaks down four years later. She says simply, "the white Chief does not understand our ways." What Cehawitawet knows and the white administrators refuse to admit is that the two words cited in the statute do not correspond to the practices they ban.30

On 20 April 1885 superintendent Powell reported that he had visited Comeaken at Lomas’s request and struck an agreement to ease the people’s hostility towards the new statute. "I explained that a Potlach meant the donation of property in order to get back the original and interest," Powell reports, "and that an assemblage such as they now desired did not constitute a Potlach as referred to in the Act" (emphasis added). Powell’s pragmatic interpretation identifies the Potlach which Lohah wants to hold not as an expenditure that invokes a return, but rather as an absolute and final gift which leaves no debt outstanding. Powell had given in to the demands of Lohah and his supporters. Cole and Chaikin explain that he had no way of enforcing a law which the Cowichan people intended to defy—despite the "good grace" of their protest. "Against a background of Metis, Cree and Assiniboine discontent on the prairies and the armed conflict of the Northwest Rebellion in late March and early April, Powell quickly realized that enforcement would be both unwise and futile." Hence he "capitulated" (Iron 31). The people had won the right to that "additional amount" of "Potlach."
Powell’s solution to the standoff at Comeaken once again raises the question of reference. If a Potlach continues to be called a Potlach even when it does not "constitute a Potlach as referred to in the Act," what exactly does the word "Potlach" refer to? How can two contrary practices--lending and "donation," profit and loss--be named "Potlach" at the same time? "Potlach" always means more than it wants it to mean, refers in a single instant to more objects than it wants to refer to. But there is never enough "Potlach" because there is something lacking in it. The name means nothing by meaning too much, refers to nothing at all by pointing in two contrary directions at once. The same can be said of "tamanawas."

We can only imagine how the people of Comeaken reacted to the sight of a white doctor from Victoria standing up and defining them to themselves, telling them what is and what is not a Potlach. Powell reports that his words "gave great satisfaction and delight." Then, as if to excuse himself for failing to enforce a statute barely three months old but already dead, he affirms that "at the same time my visit has pretty well stamped out the continuance of the Potlach system in the district visited, as I explained to them that any goods lent (ie. potlached) hereafter, would not be likely to be returned, as the law prohibited it." Powell will contradict this assertion a month later when he advises the superintendent general that "Indians should not be prevented from assembling to return property that they owe for some time to come" (22 May 1885).

There will always be a little more Potlach. In fact Powell had already distributed a circular which, in a circular fashion, cited the law banning the Potlach yet permitted Potlaches to continue for the repayment of debts. His circular also attempts to clarify a further problem of reference. Since the law forbids the "Tamanawas" without defining it,
Powell notes that "The term "Tamanawas" refers to the Medicine Dance, customary among many of the coast tribes" (21 April 1885). His clarification leaves the question of reference unresolved, though, because the phrase "Medicine Dance" itself goes undefined.

In April 1886 A. E. Green complained in a letter to Ottawa that the potlatch would have "died out" if Powell’s circular had not allowed "potlatching for the return of presents received." Powell had already defended his policy in the letter dated 20 April 1885, where he explains that the law must be managed with "great care" not only because "a large majority of Indians are opposed" to it (in a province where whites were still a minority), but because the provincial government refused to enforce it for fear of losing the votes of white traders who sell many of the goods distributed in potlatches.

Throughout the 1870s and early 1880s, British Columbia assumed no responsibility for upholding the Indian Act, and the lack of cooperation between the provincial and federal governments allowed the anti-potlatch and dance law to go unenforced for more than four years. As Cole and Chaikin point out, "The provincial government, while accepting its responsibility to enforce federal criminal law, maintained that the Indian Act was solely a federal responsibility. Victoria went so far as to refuse Indian agents the use of its jails or its police to render them any assistance." Without a law-enforcement apparatus, the Dominion government was powerless to put Section 114 into effect (Iron 34; R. H. Pidcock to Powell, 19 March 1888; Powell to the Provincial Secretary, 23 March 1888).

The impasse persisted until the fall of 1888 when Thomas White, who had replaced Macdonald as superintendent general of Indian affairs, made a deal with John Robson, the provincial secretary of British Columbia. The province agreed to enforce
"Criminal laws among the Indians of B.C….on the condition that the moieties of the fines imposed upon parties in B.C. for violations of the liquor clauses of the Indian Act should be paid over to the Provincial Government" (Vankoughnet to Powell, 3 October 1888). The terms of the bargain were simple: Ottawa bought British Columbia’s cooperation.

10. White Purveyors

Poor health forced Powell to retire in 1889, but the debate over section 114 did not pause to mark his departure. In January Charles Todd, acting agent for the North West Coast Agency, advised the acting Indian superintendent in Victoria that the department should either have the statute repealed "or else make its enforcement dependent on the pleasure of a majority of the Indians of any Indian settlement" (Todd to H. Moffat, 22 January 1889). His request was ignored, and eight months later the statute was tested in court.

An arrest was made on 1 August 1889 in Fort Rupert, among the people Europe-in-Canada had consistently located at an absolute distance from itself, the Kwakwaka’wakw. Ha-mer-cee-luc of Mamalilikula was taken into custody by Indian agent Reginald H. Pidcock, with the help of two Native constables. Ironically, the arrest was made without any help from provincial officials (Cole and Chaikin 35).

The people of Mamalilikula petitioned lieutenant governor Nelson of British
Columbia, arguing that the arresting officers had seized Ha-mer-ceed-luc in the middle of the night. For them, the arrest was an act of violence, and as proof they note that Pidcock and his men broke down the door of the house where Ha-mer-ceed-luc was sleeping when they abducted him (19 August 1889). However Pidcock later denied using force to make the arrest, and his report received Vankoughnet’s approval (Pidcock to superintendent general of Indian affairs, 2 October 1889). In their petition Ha-mer-ceed-luc’s supporters tell the lieutenant-governor they do not want to lose the potlatch because they have already lost so much—including rivers, trees, land, and fish—to white settlers. They also point out that they do not know exactly what the law has forbidden: "why should we be threatened all the time," they ask, "when we don’t know what is required of us[?]." There appears to be some obstacle preventing the Kwakwaka'wakw and white Canadians from understanding each other.

Ha-mer-ceed-luc was tried almost as soon as he was arrested, with Pidcock presiding as justice of the peace. After pleading guilty to two counts of potlatching, he was given the maximum sentence of six months in prison. But the trial took a bizarre turn. While Ha-mer-ceed-luc was being convicted and sentenced, he was simultaneously committed for trial in Victoria, where he was to be arraigned for the same offence.

On 17 August Ha-mer-ceed-luc’s supporters applied to the Supreme Court of British Columbia for habeas corpus. That is, they asked the Court to decide whether or not it was lawful to detain him for a second trial after he had already pleaded guilty as charged. On 21 August Chief Justice Sir Matthew Begbie released the defendant, who is now called He-ma-sak, on the grounds that "he was not...held on a proper warrant of Committal" (R. v. He-ma-sak, in Moffat to Vankoughnet, 30 August 1889). Yet
Begbie’s ruling gave the case a second unexpected turn. The judge did not just determine that He-ma-sak had been illegally detained; he also made a scathing evaluation of the anti-potlatch statute.

Begbie’s judgement confirms that the meaning and the reference of "Potlach" and "Tamanwas" are undecidable. As he points out, when He-ma-sak pleaded guilty to "the offence of celebrating the Indian festival known as a Potlach," "It is not alleged that the nature of the charge was explained to [him]." The charge could not have been explained, moreover, because nobody seems to have understood what the "Potlach" is. Says Begbie, "from all I know of the gathering, I think it would be very hard to explain" because "Different people appear to have very different notions as to what the word means." It is difficult to identify this particular kind of "gathering" because the meaning of the word "Potlach" does not give its hearer sufficient information to distinguish the "Potlach" from the other kinds of gatherings that occur on the northwest coast. In Searle’s terms, "Potlatch" fails to refer because it does not satisfy the second condition for a fully consummated act of singular, definite reference: it does not give a hearer or reader facts that would make it possible to pick out a single, definite object unambiguously from the world of possible objects. The failure to refer derives from a failure to mean. Without a clearly defined sense, "Potlach" cannot help a hearer or reader identify the difference that distinguishes its referent from all other referents.

The ruling also confirms that "potlatch" is a referring expression that refers to nothing in particular because it points to a single thing as if it were several things simultaneously. It is an example of pure ambiguity. "Under the name of a "potlatch"," Begbie writes, "very different practices & objects may be intended." Since the word has
many referents at once, it is impossible for anyone--including a judge or a jury--to decide what specific acts make up the crime of "potlaching." The set of the word's possible yet "very different" referents is finite, however, because they play themselves out between two strict limits: exchange and the gift. Although "Mr. Mills seem [sic] to think it [the "Potlach"] is a formal and periodical repayment of obligations," a circular economy of goods and services, Begbie himself maintains that it is a pure expenditure without return: "To me it has always appeared to be a meeting announced at very uncertain intervals, at which a chief or several chiefs to show his magnanimity either gives away or destroys all his accumulated wealth."

If, as Searle claims, the meaning of a word encodes what is known about the referent of that word, then the meaning of ""potlach"" is undecidable precisely because the "potlach" itself remains an unknown quantity. As Cehawitawet hinted in 1885, white observers have a poor understanding of the truth of this "gathering" because it is still, for them, a new and unfamiliar object of knowledge. Begbie himself notes that ""potlach"" points to a thing which has only recently come to the attention of Western-European science and Euro-Canadian law, and he argues that "if it be desired to create an offence previously unknow[n] to the law there ought to be some definition of it in the Statute" (emphasis added). It "seems an abuse of the forms of justice," he adds, to have a defendant plea guilty to an offence "the facts constituting which we should ourselves be unable to set forth." "Potlach" does not point to a truth--as truth is traditionally understood in Western-European metaphysics--because it does not denote a nonsensuous knowledge which can be put into correspondence with a sensuous object.

"Tamanawas" is another referring expression that fails to refer. The problem
here, though, is that the word does not fulfill the first condition for a fully consummated act of reference. The thing known as the "tamanawas" simply does not exist. Says Begbie: "The dance "Ta-má-ná-wás" for instance referred to in the same Section is utterly unknown here, and it may well be that an Indian who had taken part in some quite innocent performance of dancing which the Legislature never intended to ban, might plead guilty to a charge of having danced." Since its referent cannot be found, since the thing it signifies "is utterly unknown," ""Tamanawas"" is a pointer that points to nothing in the world. "Until a defendant knows what those forbidden Acts are," asks Begbie, "how can he say whether he has committed them or not?"

As he affirms that the law does not know what it bans, Begbie muses on the origins of the "potlatch." He speculates that it "is not an old Indian custom," for "If we may judge by the name," he writes, "the practice is of very modern origin" (emphasis added). "The name," he explains, "is Chinook jargon which as the language of trade and diplomacy has not been in use more than 50 years." For Begbie, the "potlatch" could not be any older than the word that names it. "I have heard the origin attributed," he continues, "very often less than half in jest and more than half in earnest to the white purveyors of blankets and clothes."

What Begbie gives us to think is that the word ""potlatch"" has been delivered to popular usage by a group of "white purveyors." Yet white purveyors are not just traders who sell manufactured goods to the First Nations. They are inventors who give names to things. The class of purveyors includes anyone who coins words and puts them into general circulation—for example Indian agents, administrators, ethnographers, and even judges.
But what if the relation between words and things were reversed? What if the words for things were no longer signs that come to be fastened to objects and events lying somewhere outside of language but were instead the purveyors of the things they name? It would then be words that bring things into existence. Things would not be until they had been named. The words European-Canadians give to entities situated outside the established archive of Western knowledge would themselves be white *purveyors*, and their task would be to draw ethnographic artifacts within range of a Western gaze trained to study and regulate them. But how would the words I name white purveyors distinguish themselves from all the other words which lend themselves to the discourses of ethnography and administration? White purveyors name without referring, because they give things and do not point them out. They include, for example, "Potlach" and '"Tamanawas'."

White purveyors do not deploy themselves within the realm of truth, as truth is understood by metaphysics. They are not postal relays which serve to communicate a knowledge that attempts to correspond with its object. They do not participate in the agreement between thoughts and things. Rather, they give things to thought and allow them to be put into writing. It is the mechanics of the white purveyor that enabled the Euro-Canadian bureaucracy and Western-European science to give aboriginal cultures to themselves at the end of the nineteenth century. The white purveyor creates a set of doubles, a set of ghosts which haunt the cultures that were already there when the Europeans arrived on the northwest coast: ghosts sent to hound those cultures into their graves.
11. Gift of the Text

**Word and Event.** In "The Nature of Language" Heidegger investigates the problem of finding a name for something "previously unknown" by interpreting Stefan George’s poem "The Word" *(Das Wort).* The poem is a monologue in which an unnamed speaker recalls how he once tried to carry a "Wonder or dream" from a "distant land" back to his "country’s strand" (60). It is tempting to compare the speaker to the European traveller-ethnographer, such as Boas, who has gone abroad to study the local cultures of, say, Asia or the Americas and returns home burdened with research data to be prepared for publication and ethnographic treasures to be deposited in the national museum.

But George’s speaker is an unlucky traveller, or perhaps a failed ethnographer, because he loses the thing he has found before he can deliver it safely to its new home. He reports that during the return journey, "I could grasp it close and strong," but when he learned from a "twilit norn" that there was no name for this unknown thing, then, he says, "straight it vanished from my hand." And so "The treasure never graced my land." The poem ends with this maxim: "So I renounced and sadly see: Where word breaks off no thing may be" (60).

In Heidegger’s interpretation, the poem’s final verse, *Kein ding sei wo das wort gebracht,* records the poet’s experience with language, an experience where language fails to voice human concerns and by its failure makes itself into a matter of concern. "For this line," Heidegger says, "makes the word of language, makes language itself bring
itself to language" (60). "The Word" is written in language about language. In particular, the poem "says something about the relation between word and thing" (60). It turns out that their relation is not one of correspondence. The word does not point to a knowledge which, in turn, directs readers and hearers towards the thing which the word refers to. The word does not mediate between things and the facts about things: it is not a postal relay which puts the poet's nonsensuous thoughts into communication with sensuous objects. Then what is a word?

I have said that for Heidegger the word is what gives the gift of Being to the thing. It makes a present of the "is." "Only where the word for the thing has been found is the thing a thing" (62), repeats Heidegger, "something is only where the appropriate and therefore competent word names a thing as being, and so establishes the given being as a being" (63). Yet the question remains: "how can a mere word accomplish this--to bring a thing into being?" (62)

Heidegger proposes that the word and the thing it names arrive together. The relation between them is an event of simultaneous delivery--the arrival of two at once. While Heidegger describes this event as a gift, his description is itself a gift of language, for it derives from that idiomatic German phrase "es gibt" which in English means simultaneously "there is" and "it gives." "If our thinking does justice to the matter," argues Heidegger (and we are very much concerned here with the doing and undoing of justice), "then we may never say of the word that it is, but rather that it gives [Vom wort dürften wir, sachgerecht denkend, dann nie sagen: Es ist, sondern: Es gibt]--not in the sense that words are given by an "it," but that the word itself gives" (88). The path of our inquiry into the mechanics of the legal text has now come full circle, returning us to
the "es gibt" and everything it puts into circulation.

"We are familiar with the expression "there is, there are" [wir kennen die Wendung »Es gibt«]," continues Heidegger, "in many usages such as "There are strawberries on the sunny slope," il y a, es gibt, there are strawberries [il y a, es hat dort Erdbeeren]." These usages assume that things like strawberries exist independently of the word which names them. It is customary to suppose that if you came across such things "there on the slope" for the first time, and had no word for them in your language, you could supply this lack by inventing a name for them and binding it to them in a speech act of reference. What Heidegger suggests, however, is that you can only happen upon things such as these strawberries on the hill because language has already given them to be encountered—both strawberries and hill. "In our present reflection, the expression "Es gibt" is used differently; not: There is the word, rather: It, the word, gives" [In unserer Besinnung ist das »Es gibt« anders gebraucht; nicht: Es gibt das Wort, sondern: Es, das Wort, gibt] (88; translation modified). For Heidegger, although "The word itself is the giver" that gives Being to things, the word is not anything that is. It is neither the subject of a giving nor an object that is given. "Neither the "is" nor the word attain to thinghood, to Being," says Heidegger, "nor does the relation between "is" and the word" (87). The word is rather an activity, a process; it is giving itself. Its "task" is "to give an "is" in each given instance" (87).

But not just any word gives the gift of Being to beings. It is, above all, the name that gives. Heidegger's account of the relation between word and Being privileges the "power" of nouns and plays down the work which the other parts of speech--such as prepositions, articles, pronouns--perform in acts of utterance. Words that are not nouns
seem not to be "words," as Heidegger understands them, at all.

Heidegger acknowledges that "current notions" about language tend to contradict the suggestion that words are not things. Common sense insists that words are, that they "can be like things, palpable to the senses." One has only to "open a dictionary" to prove that words exist just like other beings. Yet the dictionary is filled with "terms," not words. It can "neither grasp nor keep the word by which the terms become words and speak as words" (87). But what does it mean to say that terms "become words" only when spoken as words. Words are terms that have been enacted in utterances. Words are not things that can be separated from each other and defined in isolation, because they are instead events which take place in acts of discourse. They do not exist, yet they do occur. They are not, yet they set themselves into play.

The distinction between word and term recalls an argument put forward by J. L. Austin. In his 1940 essay "The Meaning of a Word," Austin insists that words do not have meaning in themselves. They participate in the production of meaning when we put them to work in sentences. For Austin, "what alone has meaning is a sentence." "All the dictionary can do when we ‘look up the meaning of a word’," he says, "is to suggest aids to the understanding of sentences in which it occurs" (in Philosophical Papers 56). For Austin, a word is defined not by the facts it points out, but by its ability to contribute to the performance of speech acts.31

Since "it gives" what it names instead of describing an already established fact or thing, the word as Heidegger thinks it serves not as a mode of cognition, but as a mode of action. The "it" of the "it gives" delivers the thing--for example the potlatch or the tamanawas--in an irruptive event of presencing. Such an "event" can no longer be called
by that name, however, because the gift-event cancels the very concept of "event." The
gift of the "it gives" is an act that destroys itself even as it brings itself to completion.

In "Time and Being" Heidegger gives the name *Ereignis* to "It" that "gives" in the
phrase "it gives/es gibt." Though the dictionary tells us that *Ereignis* means "event,"
Heidegger maintains that this term is to be glossed instead "as Appropriation or event of
Appropriation" (19). His paraphrase acknowledges that the event of appropriation fuses
the notion of event with the notion of the proper, the "own": embedded within *Ereignis* is
"*eigen,*" an adjective meaning "own," as in the phrase "your own words." The event of
appropriation delivers something over into its own, allowing it to be what it most
properly is. As Derrida puts it, *Ereignis* realizes "the desire to accede to the proper"
(*Given Time* 21). The task of the "It" that "gives" Being, then, is to allow Being to
assume its proper nature as Being so that it can own its ownmost essence. The "It"
brings Being to hide and reveal itself as presence although, *properly* speaking, Being is
nothing that is.

Like language, the event of appropriation gives only by withholding itself. The
event that gives access to the proper has no proper essence of its own. It has no own of
its own. The giver of the gift of "ownness" owns nothing of itself. For the event of
appropriation is an event of owning which disowns its essence as event.

Heidegger warns that "One should bear in mind...that "event" [*Ereignis*] is not
simply an occurrence, but that which makes any occurrence possible" ("Time and Being"
19). Since the event of appropriation is the necessary condition for every event, but is
not an event itself, it cannot be understood in terms of what it makes possible. "What
the name "event of appropriation" names," says Heidegger, "can no longer be
represented by means of the current meaning of the word": its meaning defines only those events which have already been given and fails to grasp the event of appropriation that gives releases and preserves them in their own essence (20). The "current" notion of event presupposes the event of appropriation and cannot be used to explain it. Hence an irreducible difference divides the event of appropriation from all the everyday events which "it gives." Heidegger rigourously distinguishes between the Ereignis which brings wordly events into their own and those events which are brought into their own through Ereignis.

Although Ereignis gives, it is not therefore an origin. It engages but does not belong to the sequence of events where causes and their effects are said to occur. What the gift gives to be thought is a beginning which escapes the notion of the inaugural event altogether. Derrida:

Before, if one could count here with time, before everything, before every determinable being {étant}, there is, there was, there will have been the irruptive event of the gift {don}. An event that no more has any relation with what is currently designated under this word. Thus giving can no longer be thought starting from Being {être}, but "the contrary" it could be said, if this logical inversion here were pertinent when the question is not yet logic but the origin of logic. In Zeit und Sein, the gift of the es gibt gives itself to be thought before the Sein in the es gibt Sein and displaces all that is determined under the name Ereignis, a word often translated by event" (Glas 242, left column).

The event of appropriation--the "It" which "gives" Being (Sein), and time (Zeit) in "Time and Being"--occurs as an irruption that fractures a continuum.

The event of appropriation is a paradoxical gift-event because it stands outside eventhood and thus outside its own essence. What is more, although it arrives to cut across a cycle of events that were already going on without it, the gift-event is also,
though this is impossible, what set the cycle going in the first place. The gift is the
origin of a series, but it is an origin which comes to meet that series, and to intersect it,
from the future—as if the inaugural event, which can no longer be properly called
inaugural, were consigned to arrive after everything it has put into play.

To read Heidegger is to encounter this impossible thought of the gift: the gift is an
originary event which irrupts within the smooth curve of a circle, but a circle is a figure
that has neither origin nor end.

The Gift and the Circle. In Given Time Derrida affirms that the motif of the
circle has come to represent the structure of Western-European metaphysics itself (7-8).
The circle is, for example, the privileged metaphysical figure for economy. "What is
economy?" he asks. Transgressing Austin’s law about the meanings of words, Derrida
answers his own question by looking to the dictionary and uncovering the layers of sense
that have gathered around "economy" since the Greeks gave it to history.

He notes that economy marks the "partition" which, working like a hinge, joins
the law of the public sphere to the private confines of the home. "Among its irreducible
predicates or semantic values," says Derrida, "economy no doubt includes the values of
law (nomos) and of home (oikos, home, property, family, the hearth, the fire indoors).
Nomos does not only signify the law in general, but also the law of distribution (nemein),
the law of sharing or partition [partage], the law as partition (moira), the given or
assigned part, participation" (Given Time 6). The meaning of the word "economy" points
both to distribution in general and, in particular, to the circular exchange of goods and
services which ties the home to the laws of the marketplace:
Besides the values of law and home, of distribution and partition, economy implies the idea of exchange, of circulation, of return. The figure of the circle is obviously at the center, if that can be said of a circle. It stands at the center of any problematic of oikonomía, as it does of any economic field: circular exchange, circulation of goods, products, monetary signs or merchandise, amortization of expenditures, revenues, substitution of use values and exchange values. This motif of circulation can lead one to think that the law of economy is the—circular—return to the point of departure, to the origin, also to the home (6-7).

The law of economy is the law of the return home. It dictates that whatever is spent has to circle back to its place of origin. Everything paid out must be paid back. Economy is best represented by the figure of the circle because economics requires that every exchange end where it began.

The gift, however, is precisely that which does not return to sender. It is related to the circle of economy but works to interrupt it. The gift does not, indeed cannot, come back home, for it ceases to be a gift the moment it invokes a re-payment, a debt or a counter-gift. "It must not circulate," Derrida maintains, "it must not be exchanged, it must not in any case be exhausted, as a gift, by the process of exchange, by the movement of circulation of the circle in the form of return to the point of departure."

For "If the figure of the circle is essential to economics," then "the gift must remain aneconomic" (7). The gift does not belong to any system where expenses circle home as profits: it is an event that ruptures the curve of circulation, distribution, reciprocity and exchange.

When a giver and recipient participate in an act of giving, they enter into an unsigned agreement—a contract—which dictates what a gift is and how it is to be distributed. Derrida reduces the law of the gift to a brief axiom: "In order for there to be gift, gift event, some "one" has to give some "thing" to someone other" (11). This
law generates a paradox, though, because as Derrida notes, "These conditions of possibility of the gift (that some "one" gives some "thing" to some "one other") designate simultaneously the conditions of the impossibility of the gift" (12). How is this impossibility possible?

If I wish to give a gift, then I must insist that nothing circle home to me as the profit of my giving. A gift, by definition, does not invoke a counter-gift: "there must be no reciprocity, return, exchange, countergift, or debt" (12). Yet it is not enough that I receive nothing back. In order to give, I must not even know that I have given. What is more, the recipient of my gift must not know that she or he has received it. As Derrida notes, "The simple identification of the gift seems to destroy it" (14). For if I know that I have given, then, at the very least, I receive, in return, the knowledge of my own generosity and I can congratulate myself for my deed. As soon as I take satisfaction from my gift, however, I have begun to pay myself back and my gift returns to me. Similarly, if the recipient of my gift perceives it as a gift, then, at the very least, that person owes me a debt of gratitude. But as soon as the recipient is obliged to pay something in return—even if that "payment" only means acknowledging that I have given—my gift runs "the risk of its being anulled in thanks...of its becoming a benefit" to the person who gives it (Mémoires 149).

Since every gift is destroyed the moment it is recognized, a gift remains a gift only if it occurs within an instant of absolute forgetting. "For there to be gift, it is necessary that the gift not even appear, that it not be perceived or received as gift" (Given Time 16). It must neither be taken into consciousness nor retained in memory. However the forgetting of the gift is not a repression in the psychoanalytic sense of that
term, since whatever is repressed from consciousness is, by definition, merely displaced and immediately returns to consciousness in another form. The unconscious invariably gives back whatever is given to repression (16). To be what it is, the gift has to destroy itself utterly the moment it is given, leaving no trace of itself within consciousness or within the unconscious. Otherwise it is annulled. The gift can be only on the condition that it has no being—that it is not.

For Derrida, as for Heidegger, the gift is the impossible itself. A gift-event can happen only on the condition that it never happen because every gift ceases to be a gift not only when it is returned, but when it is given. Since the gift-event cannot occur and remain a gift, it is not an event at all.

*Time and the Gift.* But the gift-event does not sacrifice itself so completely that it is never given. Though a gift leaves nothing behind itself, something of it nevertheless remains. "For there to be gift event," says Derrida,

(we say event and not act), something must come about or happen, in an instant, in an instant that no doubt does not belong to the economy of time, in a time without time, in such a way that the forgetting forgets, that it forgets itself, but also in such a way that this forgetting, without being something present, presentable, determinable, sensible or meaningful, is not nothing (17).

The gift happens without happening, in an instant that is not an instant in time. It is neither "present" nor "presentable" because it does not deliver itself during a present moment, a now.

If the self-incinerating gift exceeds every present, that is because it interrupts the metaphysical representation of time. "One of the most powerful and ineluctable
representations, at least in the history of metaphysics," says Derrida, "is the
representation of time as a [process or movement which takes the form of a] circle" (8). He recalls that Heidegger had already launched a critique of "this privilege of circular movement in the representation of time" in his first publication, Being and Time (Given Time 8).

In the final chapter of Book Two, for example, Heidegger remarks that metaphysics thinks time as a series of present moments: "It is held that time presents itself proximally as an uninterrupted sequence of nows" (Being and Time 476 [H424]). Temporality "ensnares itself in the Present, which, in making present, says pre-eminently, ‘Now! Now!’" (459 [H407]). Metaphysical time consists of the now of the present present, the no-longer-now of the past present and the not-yet-now of the future present. These three modes of the present—the past now, the present now and the future now—ceaselessly circle into each other. The present forever advances into the future: "Every last "now," as "now," is always already a "forthwith"" (476). Yet the future occurs as a mode of the past: every "forthwith" to come is already "a "forthwith" that is no longer [ein Sofort-nicht-mehr]; thus it is time in the sense of the "no-longer-now"—in the sense of the past." But the past itself occurs as a mode of the future: "Every first "now" is a "just-now" [a past] that is not yet [a past that has yet to happen]...thus it is time in the sense of the "not-yet-now"—in the sense of the future." The present is the ever-recurring instant in which the future revolves into the past and past revolves into future. In the sequence of nows, time is an infinite series that ceaselessly ends where it begins—only to begin again. "If in characterizing time we stick primarily and exclusively to such a sequence," declares Heidegger, "then in principle neither beginning nor end can
be found in it" (476). It is customary to represent infinity as a circle. Hegel, for example, insists on the circularity of an infinite return home: "Infinity has rightly been represented by the image of the circle," he says, "because a straight line runs on indefinitely and denotes that merely negative and false infinity which, unlike true infinity, does not return into itself" (Philosophy of Right 54; emphasis added).

Derrida argues that the metaphysical representation of time necessarily excludes the gift: "wherever time as circle (a "vulgar" concept, Heidegger would therefore say) is predominant, the gift is impossible" (Given Time 9). Just as it breaks with the circle of economy, the gift relates itself to time's circle by breaking it up. Thus a gift is, by definition, a moment of rupture: "A gift could be possible, there could be a gift only at the instant an effraction of the circle will have taken place, at the instant all circulation will have been interrupted and on the condition of this instant" (9). Curiously, the moment when the gift cuts through time is not a moment in time. The event of the gift escapes not only eventhood, but temporality: "this instant of effraction (of the temporal circle) must no longer be part of time." The gift is an instant that is not an instant: it is an instantless instant that marks the limit between metaphysical time and its exterior. The gift-event arrives in time from beyond time's circle--in an instant which severs the metaphysical sequence of nows. Hence "There would be a gift only at the instant when the paradoxical instant...tears time apart" (9). To think this impossible time of the gift, this instantless instant, it is necessary to entertain the possibility, the impossible possibility, that time itself is the gift of nothing temporal.

In Given Time Derrida points towards the thought of a time beyond time when he says that "the structure of this impossible gift is also that of Being...and of time" (27).
There remains a correspondence between the gift, Being and time: a disjunctive correspondence set into play by the "there is--es gibt" of the event of appropriation. Time, Being and the gift are related in that they "own" themselves in the same fashion. What is the nature of their mutual "ownness"?

For the Heidegger of "Time and Being," Being is given to thought only when placed in a relation to time. Being, after all, is the presence that allows present beings to be present in the world. It gives the "is" to anything that in any way is. But the presence which Being bestows on every present being is also a dimension of time. Presence persists in presence only within the present moment—the now. Heidegger therefore concludes that "Being as presencing remains determined as presence by time" ("Time and Being" 3). Being conceived as presencing would be unthinkable if time did not offer the present to thought. To think Being, it is also necessary to think time.

However time is itself determined by Being. Though every now constantly passes, it also stays constant. The present is held in presence even as it recedes into the past. Right now it is the present, and as this present now passes, another now takes its place. But the present itself remains the same during the transition between these two different present moments, these two nows. Heidegger says that "To remain means: not to disappear, thus, to presence" (3). To think time, therefore, it is also necessary to think Being as the presencing of what is present.

Still, "not every presencing is necessarily the present" (13). Heidegger maintains that absence too is a way of giving presence to something. For example the present moment is present only on the condition that earlier and later moments are absent from it. The present is defined not by what it is, but by what it is not. It presents itself insofar as
it is neither the past nor the future. True time, Heidegger concludes, is not circular but four dimensional. It comprises not just the past, present and future, but also the negativity, the play of difference, that holds these three in a relation to each other. For Heidegger, "the unity of time's three dimensions consists in the interplay of each towards each." Their negative interplay is time's "fourth dimension," but this negative temporality is also time's first dimension because it allows past, present and future to extend themselves towards each other without merging into a single, undifferentiated "now" (15). The unity of time is a "nearness" which holds past, present and future together by holding them apart. While metaphysics defines past, present and future as three versions of the same thing--as three modes of the now--Heidegger defines them in terms of the differences that set them apart from one another.

Although Being (conceived as presencing) and time (conceived as a negative interplay of differences) determine one another, they do not thereby give each other. Being is not a mode of time, nor is time a mode of Being. Being and time are gathered into relation in an event of appropriation that is also an event of giving. Says Heidegger, "What determines both, time and Being, in their own, in their belonging together, we shall call: Ereignis" (19). Since it gives time and Being, the event of appropriation stands outside the world of things that belong in time and in Being. By allowing time to persist in Being, and Being to remain present in time, the event of appropriation makes it possible for there to be a world where things and events are given to experience. For Heidegger, whatever is in the world is in time, but whatever is is possible only because, as Derrida puts it, "before everything, before every determinable being, there is, there was, there will have been the irruptive event of the gift"--the gift of Being and of time.
Paradoxically, in "Time and Being," the gift of time arrives from beyond time. The "it" that "gives" in the idiomatic phrase *es gibt Zeit* occurs in an instant which is not a moment in time because it is the moment when time is given. The *es gibt* "is" the instantless instant itself. Derrida:

In *Zeit und Sein* (1952), Heidegger’s attention bears down on the giving (*Geben*) or the gift (*Gabe*) implicated in the *es gibt*. From the beginning of the meditation, Heidegger recalls, if one can put it this way, that in itself time is nothing temporal, since it is nothing, since it is not a thing (*kein Ding*). The temporality of time is not temporal, no more than proximity is proximate or treeness is woody. He also recalls that Being is not being (being-present/present-being), since it is not something (*kein Ding*), and that therefore one cannot say either "time is" or "Being is," but "*es gibt Sein*" and "*es gibt Zeit*" (*Given Time* 20).

Time is not, just as Being is not. "There is/it gives" time (*es gibt Zeit*). There is something which is time, but time itself is not a thing in time. What is more, the gift of time breaks time apart. For Heidegger this rupture, if it can be called a rupture, is not an act of violence. The giving of time marks the movement in which time accedes to what is most properly its own. In *Ereignis* time lays claim to itself, owns its onmost essence as the negative interplay of past, present and future.

For Derrida, though, the gift necessarily occurs as a rending because it tears the fabric that receives it. The gift of the name is especially violent, for it arrives as an instantless instant of irruption which can have devastating consequences for anyone it touches. "The name seems produced," he says in *Glas*, "one time only, by an act without a past." It does not attach itself to what already exists, but comes instead to give existence to a thing. But not every gift is necessarily good. When what is given is a name, "such a gift appropriates itself violently [in an event of appropriation which is no longer an event], harpoons, arraigns [arraisionne] what it seems to engender, penetrates
and paralyses with one stroke [coup] the recipient thus consecrated." The gift of the name owns itself within a system of power relations: a system that aims to control the actions of the person or thing that is named. "To give a name is always," says Derrida, "to sublimate a singularity and to inform against it, to hand it over to the police" (Glas 6-7). It is hardly surprising, then, that the law which gave the names "potlatch" and "tamanawas" to certain "previously unknown" practices of the British Columbia First Nations served to "arraign" them, to accuse them, to find fault with them and to bring them to trial.

And "here one need hardly mention the fact that in certain languages, for example in French, one may say as readily "to give a gift" as "to give a blow" [donner un coup], "to give life" [donner la vie] as "to give death" [donner la mort]" (Given Time 12). One might also recall that "Gift," in German, means "poison."

_The Continuum of Discourse_. Heidegger and Derrida have placed us in their debt by giving us this schema: a gift is an event which intervenes in an ongoing series and ruptures its continuity; it is an origin that arrives only after everything it inaugurates is already in play; and it delivers itself in an instant which is not an instant in time. But does their schema help us to understand how words give the things they name? If it is true that "potlatch" and "tamanawas," for example, make presents of what they are said to represent, then the mechanics of the textual gift demand to be explained.

By giving what they named, "potlatch and "tamanawas" ruptured the continuity of an already established series of utterances and events. Yet the Government of Canada did not invent these words when it handed them over to the police. They were recorded
in dictionaries long before they were cited in the Indian Act. Begbie’s judgement shows that by the 1880s it was understood that they came from Chinook, a trading jargon which had circulated along the northwest coast for perhaps hundreds of years and continued to have a role in the region’s economy until the early twentieth century. Although "potlatch" and "tamanawas" cut across a continuum by delivering things "previously unknown" to the world, the two words belonged to the very continuum which they fractured.

Before it was replaced by English, Chinook was spoken on the coast from the Columbia River to the Alaska panhandle. It allowed people from different cultures to conduct trade without having to learn one another’s languages. It was therefore an invented and fragmentary language which occupied the spaces between a number of natural languages.

In his memoirs, Harry Assu of the Lekwiltok Kwagiulth recalls that "Everybody spoke this trade language when [he] was young." He also notes that the First Nations have their own names for the potlatch, though different cultures do not necessarily potlatch in the same way. "We call these big potlashes pesa in our language," Assu says. However in Tsimshian, for instance, the potlatch is properly called the yaokw. While the word "potlatch" was once as foreign to potlatching cultures as it was to Canadian law, today it circulates freely across cultural boundaries: "now it’s called potlatch by Indians and everybody else all up and down the coast," says Assu, adding that, "One of my father’s names was pesala, meaning Potlatcher" (Assu 10; Seguin, "Lest" 110; Interpretive 58-61).

In Scenes Sproat insists that Chinook is all that remains of the original language of
the Pacific Northwest. "The truth is," he says, "that the Chinook jargon is simply a
deprivation of the Chinook language--an old language, which probably is the mother of
all dialects spoken on the coast between the Columbia River and the north of Vancouver
Island" (The Nootka 97). But Edward Harper Thomas says the Chinook jargon is not to
be confused with the Chinook language. He argues that the jargon was in use before the
first Europeans arrived on the coast but did not become known to them until the early
nineteenth century (Thomas viii). In his account, the Chinook jargon was a mixture of
aboriginal languages, which absorbed European words after the fur-trade began. In
contrast, J. V. Powell maintains that Chinook did not develop until after the Europeans
had arrived on the coast. According to him, it was a pragmatic mingling of English,
French and a number of aboriginal northwest coast languages, and it sprang into being to
facilitate the circulation of goods and services among a diverse group of people speaking
a variety of languages. "It is estimated," says Powell, "that more than 100 000 people
could use Chinook Jargon in 1900, and it was employed widely in court testimony,
newspaper advertising, missionary activity among Indians, and everyday conversation
from central BC to northern California" (Powell 417).

To look up the meaning of the word "potlatch," one can turn to any number of
dictionaries that translate Chinook into English, and English into Chinook. In Long’s
Dictionary of the Chinook Language, the word denotes both the act of giving and the
thing that is given: "Pot’-latch, n., v. To give; a gift" (28). Thomas adds that the
potlatch is a struggle for prestige:

POT’-LATCH (N): A gift and to give. (When it denotes giving, it is a
verb and when it is used for the gift itself or for the celebration, it is a
noun.) The potlatch was a native festival common to all the tribes of the
Northwest. Its feature was the distribution of gifts. The most noted chief was he who held the largest potlatch and gave away the most valuable and largest number of presents (92-3).

For Thomas, a gift remains a gift only if it later returns to the giver. A "bad gift" is one that never comes home: ""Cultus potlatch"--a gift without prospect of recompense--a "bad gift" in an Indian’s view" (93). Good gifts find a place for themselves on the circle of economic exchange. However Charles Montgomery Tate defines "cultus potlatch" simply as "gift"--as if to argue that a gift remains a gift only when nothing returns to the giver (Tate 32). In the dictionaries, as in everyday usage, the meaning of "potlatch" oscillates endlessly between two poles: the pole of the commodity that revolves in the circle of economy and the pole of the pure expenditure which breaks with all circulation.

George Shaw’s *The Chinook Jargon and How to Use It* sets "potlatch" into oscillation by insisting that it points both to the gift that never comes home and to the gift that obliges a return payment. Here "Pot’latch, or Pahtlatsh, n., v." means at once "to give; allot; cede"--that is, to give without return--and to "expend; pay; impart; restore"--that is, to give in order to get something back (20). Shaw traces a distinct limit between the "Cultus potlatch,--a present or free gift; expecting no return; a donation"--and the potlatch proper, where every gift invokes a counter-gift (20), but the moment that limit is drawn, it folds together everything it has just set apart. Though in the potlatch every expenditure is supposed to come home to the giver, Shaw quotes an informant who describes potlatching as a sheer dissipation of wealth:

"The potlatch was the greatest institution of the Indian, and is to this day [note the disjunction between the two verb tenses, "was" and "is"--throughout the White discourse on "the Indian," the First Nations always seem to be both dead and alive, as if they belonged to an absolute past which somehow survives into the present]. From far and near assembled
the invited guests and tribes and with feasting, singing, chanting and dancing, the bounteous collection was distributed: a chief was made penniless. [T]he wealth of a lifetime was dissipated in an hour, but his head ever after was crowned with the glory of a satisfied ambition: he had won the honor and reverence of his people. It was a beautiful custom; beautiful in the eyes of the natives of high or low degree, confined to no particular tribe, but to be met with everywhere along the coast" (20-1).

The potlatch is a "beautiful" act of loss where, in an hour, one gives away the earnings of a lifetime, knowing that everything is gone forever, but at the same time it is a source of profit, a further accumulation of wealth, because by giving all one receives, in return, "glory," "honour" and "reverence."

In Shaw's dictionary, "Potlatch (noun)" means "That which is given, bestowed, bequeathed, given, etc.,--i. e. a gift," but it is "Always given with the expectation, greater or lesser, of a return" (21). What circulates in a potlatch, then, is not necessarily a gift. The only pure form of expenditure is the cultus potlatch, which Shaw defines--a second time--as "a purposeless gift, that is, outright with no expectation of return" (21).

If the "potlatch" is at once a gift and not a gift, what do the dictionaries say about the "tamanawas"? Long defines it as the name for destiny: "Ta-mah-no-mas,n. Magic; luck; good fortune" (29). But Thomas insists it is a living being which accompanies a person through life: "TAH-MAH'-NA-WIS (C): A guardian or familiar spirit in its personal application. Every Indian had [note, again, the past tense, signifying death] his tahmahnavis." For Thomas, Long's definition is not incorrect, but merely secondary, derivative: "Tahmahnavis also means magic, ghost, spirit, or anything supernatural," Thomas writes, "and is used as the equivalent of luck, fortune and kindred words. It was applied to anything the Indians could not readily understand" (97-8).

Although section 114 says that the "tamanawas" is an "Indian dance," neither
Long nor Thomas associates dancing with the thing they call the "tamahnomas/tahmahnawis." What about Shaw? He identifies the "Ta-mah-no-us, n." as "A sort of guardian or familiar spirit; magic; luck; fortune; anything supernatural; the spirits; a ghost; goblin; idol; witch" (24). Though "Tahmahnous" does not point directly to a dance, it does designate the practices of the "Tah-mah-na-wis man"--"a doctor, priest, conjurer, and fortune teller, a dealer in magic and a maker and destroyer of charms for good and evil, all in the same personage" (24-5). The Tah-mah-na-wis man is an organizer of dances. For example, Shaw mentions "The red, or pill ta-mahn-a-wis, [which] was an assembling together, an invocation, in short, of the spirits for a good season the following summer. It lasted three or four days and consisted of singing, dancing, the beating of tom-toms, drums and the decoration of the face and limbs and body invariably with streaks and spots of red paint" (25).

Although "Potlatch" and "tamanawas" belong to a jargon belonging to no-one in particular, the dictionaries define them as practices common to all of the coastal First Nations. When the law borrows these Chinook terms to name acts which have different names and take different forms in different communities, it reduces the diversity of the coastal First Nations to an unbroken sameness. It is as if, to the Euro-Canadian gaze, aboriginal societies were all, in the last analysis, the same--despite the differences that not only separate them from each other, but divide them within themselves.

The overlapping of difference with sameness recurs in Boas's canonical ethnography "The Social Organization and the Secret Societies of the Kwakiutl Indians" (1897). In the opening pages Boas affirms that "The Pacific Coast of America between Juan de Fuca Strait and Yakutat Bay is inhabited by a great many Indian tribes distinct in
physical characteristics and distinct in languages, but one in culture" (emphasis added).

Ironically, as soon as he has said these societies are "distinct" yet "one," he affirms that their homogeneity is an illusion generated by careless research: "While a hasty glance at these people and a comparison with other tribes emphasizes the uniformity of their culture, a closer investigation reveals many peculiarities of individual tribes which prove that their culture has developed slowly and from a number of distinct centers, each people adding something to the culture which we observe at the present day" (317). The tendency to reduce the "distinct" to the "one" is a standard feature of the rhetoric which describes "The Indian Tribes of the North Pacific Coast" in the the ethnography of the late nineteenth century and beyond.

Heidegger performs an analogous reduction of diversity to sameness in his inquiry into the nature of language. When he argues that the word gives the thing it names, for example, he is dealing with language and naming as such. What he says on a general scale is supposed to apply to each language and its stock of words. Since "potlatch" and "tamanawas" belong not to a full-fledged language, but to a trade jargon, an economic code developed in-between languages, are they to be understood as words in the sense which Heidegger gives to the word "word"? Recall that, for Heidegger, the word is an event of giving, not a thing that can be stored away in dictionaries. Yet "potlatch" and "tamanawas" are defined, just as if they were things, in a whole array of Chinook dictionaries. Perhaps they are mere "terms," not words. Perhaps, but Heidegger says that words reveal themselves as words only when they participate in saying. Saying, moreover, is that event of "letting appear" in which beings come into Being through language while language withholds itself from the open. It is in the event of saying that
language gives the "is" to the thing that is ("The Nature" 93-4); in saying, it is revealed that the nature of the word "conceals within itself that which gives being" to every given thing (88, also 90). But if the nature of the word is to give being to the thing, the event of the gift occurs only as an instantless instant within a discourse that was already underway. The word does not initiate this discourse, but rather irrupts within it. The gift-event delivers itself to the world as an effraction within the infinite circulation of speech and writing.

Before "potlatch" and "tamanawas" began to "speak as words" in Heidegger's sense (87), they had circulated throughout the northwest coast and had become the topic of a sustained debate in Canada's correspondence on Indian affairs. There is no doubt that they were inscribed in a continuum of discourse when, sometime after 1895, they assumed their role as white purveyors.

Return of the Dead. Two months after Begbie put section 114 of the Indian Act to death, Lawrence Vankoughnet wrote the deputy minister of Justice to ask whether there were grounds for an appeal. According to Vankoughnet, "The release of the Indian [He-ma-sak] under this ruling of Judge Begbie has caused much dissatisfaction among the respectable white people resident in the locality of Alert Bay, Fort Rupert and such places" (RG 10, v. 3628, f. 6244-1; 2 November 1889). There has been an outbreak of white anxiety in those places where Europe-in-Canada rubs up against its outermost limit. Despite their English names, the "localities" named by Vankoughnet have for centuries been the traditional village sites of the Kwakwaka'wakw. But the deputy minister of Justice has no comfort to offer the "dissatisfied" settlers living there.
On 13 December Robert Sedgewick informed Vankoughnet that "[T]he law makes no provision for an appeal" because "if the statements of the Chief Justice with respect to the [lack?] of certainty as to the meaning of the word "potlach" or "potlatch" are well founded, the Minister of Justice agrees with the view to which the judgement gives expression, that it would be difficult, and probably impossible, to sustain a conviction under the provision of the statute at all." In Sedgewick's letter the difficulty of determining what the word means continues to be marked by the difficulty of deciding how it is spelled: whether "'potlach" or "potlatch"." For Sedgewick the meaning of "tamanawas" is equally uncertain, and he advises that if the department wishes to secure convictions under section 114, it ought to table an amendment "clearly defining what is meant by the prohibition" (13 December 1889).

Sedgewick's interpretation of the statute seems to confirm Searle's metaphysics of reference. For Searle, a speaker performs a fully consummated speech act of reference by identifying an object unambiguously for a hearer. But a referring expression can be used to point to a thing only if that expression has a clearly defined meaning. Its meaning describes what is known about the thing referred to, and this knowledge, in turn, allows the hearer to distinguish the referent from every other thing that could possibly be pointed out. According to Sedgewick, the reason "potla(t)ch" and "tamanawas" fail to refer is that they have no meaning. Without sense there is no reference, and without reference, the legal system breaks down. A law which does not define what it bans makes it impossible for police and judges to identify the practices that are forbidden. It fails to mark out the difference between crime and lawful activity. Moreover, so long as "potla(t)ch" and "tamanawas" fail to correspond to activities known
to exist somewhere in the world, Native people cannot know what not to do in order to avoid being arrested.

In 1893 R. H. Pidcock informed Arthur Vowell—who had replaced I. W. Powell as Indian superintendent for British Columbia (a difference of a single consonant)—that the death of section 114 made it impossible to control the potlatch in the "Kwawkewlth" agency. Pidcock reports that he could only stand by and watch as one thousand people gathered for a potlatch at Cape Mudge in January 1893, for "The law in regard to the potlatch is practically a dead letter, as Chief Justice Begbie gave it as his opinion that he could not convict under the present law, as it did not define what a potlatch was" (16 March 1893). However the "dead letter" is about to be given a second life. For if it neither refers nor means, if it points neither to actual practices nor to knowledge about actual practices, then its reference and its meaning will have to be purveyed. Whatever remains poorly understood in the first statute will be reinvented according to the government's specifications in a revised statute.

Although five years elapsed before the law hauled itself from the grave and lurched back into life, it was not repealed. It rested quietly in the statute books in a state of living death. Meanwhile, supporters and opponents of the potlatch continued to debate it, and their arguments continued to focus on the word itself. Between 1890 and 1893, "potlatch" took on a set of contradictory significations, pointing towards vastly different practices at once—as if it had come to be defined by the ease with which it could be honed to suit every context. It served as an empty sign to be filled with any number of meanings for any number of purposes. How else can we account for the fact that "potlatch" defined itself, over a span of three years, both as a benefit society which takes
care of the weak and as a "curse" that degrades Canadian society?

In the winter of 1890, Captain Napoleon Fitzstubbs, the stipendiary magistrate at Hazelton, and C. W. D. Clifford, a Hudson’s Bay Company manager on the Upper Skeena, joined in questioning the reasoning behind the suppression of the potlatch. In a letter to the Attorney General of British Columbia, Fitzstubbs weighs the arguments of white settlers against those advanced by the First Nations of the north coast. His comments summarize the leading themes of the discourse for and against potlatching:

it is I believe said that to get the people as far as may be, out of the tribal state, is the first step towards reformation and advancement, and that the Potlach system being imbedded, in that tribal condition, is a great obstacle to this hoped for progress. It is further said that various evils attend the celebration of the Potlach.

The Indians on the other hand appear invariably to regard the institution of the ‘Potlach’ [in single quotes here] with affection, as they charish [sic] it as a social, and from their point of view beneficent institution which has grown up amongst them during perhaps centuries past, and has been shaped naturally by circumstances in conformity with their social needs and ideas. They ask invariably what do the whitemen propose to substitute for this ancient and popular institution?

According to Fitzstubbs, aboriginal people insist the "Potlach" is a public "fair" where goods are exchanged, marriages arranged, and questions of rank decided. It is also a "benefit society" that takes care of the old. The hostility that appears to be aroused when potlatchers compete for social prestige is just a "harmless" artifice. Whatever is given, moreover, is always given back to the giver a year later, for potlatch gifts belong to the circle of exchange and are not really gifts at all (13 March 1890).

In a memorandum written to support Fitzstubbs’ letter, Clifford argues that the government has failed to answer a fundamental question: "What is ‘Potlatching’?" And he asks: "Please define it. What overt act is contrary to the law against it?" It is as if
there were a law requiring the law to alert its interpreters to the difficulty of defining what words mean and what acts they refer to. Clifford himself defines the potlatch, as it is practiced "in the [northern] Interior" of British Columbia, as "a primitive system of banking" where everything that is lent out ultimately returns home to the creditor—with interest. It also "feeds" the aged and infirm. Clifford says the project to forbid the potlatch serves only to consolidate the power of "Methodist missionaries" determined to set themselves up as the sole lawgivers on the Skeena. "The contention of the Methodist Missionaries that it is necessary first to put down potlatching in order to civilise the Indians is false," he writes, "and it is an attempt on their part to make the Indians believe, that they are the law and that the law which the Indians now respect is with these missionaries and is backing them up in all their monstrous claims and assertions" ([13 March 1890]). For Clifford, the methodists incite contempt for authority by teaching that the law of the Bible takes precedence over the laws of the state.  

The government of British Columbia forwarded these texts by Fitzstubbs and Clifford to the Secretary of State in Ottawa. The province was preparing to withdraw from its agreement to help federal officials enforce the Indian Act (Report of the Executive Council, 15 April 1890; Lieutenant Governor Nelson to Secretary of State for Canada, 19 April 1890; Cole and Chaikin 36-7). Although Vankoughnet held provincial authorities responsible for enforcing all criminal law, in the spring of 1889 he asked Sedgewick to clarify whether the Act was a provincial or a federal jurisdiction. As Vankoughnet notes, "the opinion has been expressed that as the Federal govt passed the law...this Dept shd prosecute any parties who violate same & that the Provincial govt shd not be called upon to do so" (7 June 1890). Sedgewick answered that under the British
North America Act, criminal law is a provincial responsibility and the expense of enforcing it ought to be borne by the province, not the Dominion, but he adds that if the government of British Columbia refuses to support the ban against the potlatch, it is up to the Department of Indian Affairs to decide whether it "should incur any expenses in the matter or should allow the law to become a dead letter" (9 July 1890). Vankoughnet suggested that in future Indian agents and local authorities should consult with each other before "interfering" with the potlatch. However the "local authorities" had resolved to heed Fitzstubbs's warning that "where the Indians are numerous, and where they [sic] are few white residents the attempt to enforce the law against the "Potlach" [now in full quotes, gathering marks as the text unfolds] in too summary fashion might not produce the effect desired, but rather, might defer the good results hoped for, by causing disquiet, and a disinclination to obey the law, on other points" (13 March 1890).

The story of "The Evil Potlatch," published in the Toronto Empire on 4 February 1893, offers a less cautious opinion about how the potlatch ought to be dealt with. The story reports that a "party of missionaries" visited the Lekwiltok reserve at Cape Mudge early in 1893, "where they found the red man engaged in a great "potlatch""--the same potlatch which had led Pidcock to call the law a "dead letter." The news report leaves no doubt as to the meaning of ""potlatch"": "The word means "to give"," and the thing it refers to is described as a celebration of "filth," "fire water" and sexual "corruption."

To evoke the reader's disgust, and pleasure, the story recalls that the visiting missionaries saw "Men [many of them white] and women in their drunkenness actually tearing the clothes off each other, and wallowing about in reaking filth--the picture is more like hell upon earth than anything ever heard of." It affirms that potlatchers neglect their children
and the elderly to give away blankets earned not by "industry" but by "prostitution." In the final paragraph, the story ceases slandering the Lekwiltok and pressures the federal government into enforcing the antipotlatch statute. It reports that "A few years ago a law was passed prohibiting the potlatch," but notes that "This was as good as winked at by some of the officials"--an allusion to the department's failure to prevent Lohah's potlatch in 1885. To conclude, the story states that "The law remains on the Dominion statutes, but is practically a dead letter [popular usage repeatedly affirms that the law is a letter (that is, an article of correspondence, something sent in the mail, a postal effect) and that it is dead]; and the Indians, instead of being an upright and industrious people, are a filthy, indolent, degraded set, a disgrace and a curse to our country" (RG 10, 3628, 6244-1, 4 February 1893).

What is to be drawn from these readings? "Potlatch" signifies "to give" and "to loan," but that is not all because there is always a little more of it. To potlatch is also to sink, to stay low in relation to Euro-Canadian civilization. It is a failure to improve oneself, to advance out of barbarity. To potlatch is to decide on one colour rather than another: it is to refuse to raise oneself into whiteness and to insist, as the Empire puts it, on remaining "red." To potlatch is to forgo assimilation into settler society. It signifies an unwillingness to be eaten by Europe-in-Canada, though that is not how the government of Canada will define it.

A revised version of section 114 was grafted to the Indian Act on 22 July 1895. Although it tries to stabilize the meaning of "potlatch" and "tamanawas," the new statute is not an exercise in truth. It does not bring knowledge into agreement with an object. It does not identify the nature of two practices that were already in being, independent of
the names tacked on to them. Instead, the statute gives being to the things it names, adding another potlatch and another tamanawas to those already put into circulation by
Canada’s Indian affairs correspondence. The gifts of the legal text irrupt within a circle of events and utterances—a circle which already includes the words "potlatch" and "tamanawas"—forcing it to leave its accustomed path and rotate around a different axis.

The revised statute conforms to Searle’s rules for performing complete acts of reference. Searle argues that to achieve a fully consummated act of reference, a speaker cannot just use a referring expression to point to a thing, but must be prepared, on demand, to replace that referring expression with a phrase describing what is being referred to; if the hearer is presented with the referring expression but cannot tell exactly what it is supposed to point out, then the speaker must set out a group of facts which allow the hearer to identify it—or present the hearer with the referent itself. Otherwise the act of reference goes awry.

The revised section 114 does not even contain the words "potlatch" and "tamanawas," though, as Heidegger might say, they are present by their very absence. They have been replaced by brief descriptions identifying the acts henceforth forbidden. The substitution of a description for a word satisfies what Searle calls the "axiom of identification": "If a speaker refers to an object then he [sic] identifies, or is able on demand to identify, that object apart from all others for the hearer"—whether by demonstration, description, or both at once (Speech Acts 91; emphasis added). Begbie and Sedgewick had "demanded" that the Department of Indian Affairs describe the practices which "potlatch" and "tamanawas" refer to. The new statute attempts to meet this requirement.
The text begins by stating the facts about the set of acts which, in the previous statute, was named the "Potlach":

Every Indian or other person [note that the law continues to distinguish between "Indians" and "persons"] who engages in, or assists in celebrating or encourages either directly or indirectly another to celebrate, any Indian festival, dance or other ceremony of which the giving away or paying or giving back of money, goods or articles of any sort forms a part, or is a feature, whether such gift of money, goods or articles takes place before, at, or after the celebration of the same...

Next, the acts which were formerly gathered under the name "tamanawas" are called into the open and described:

and every Indian or other person who engages or assists in any celebration or dance of which the wounding or mutilation of the dead or living body of any human being or animal forms a part or is a feature, is guilty of an indictable offense and is liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months and not less than two months... (Statutes of Canada, 1895, Chapter 35, "An Act further to amend the Indian Act," Section 6).

The second part of the statute bans cannibalism and animal sacrifice. This law that aims to put the First Nations of British Columbia to death by helping white Canadian society swallow them alive is, in effect, a law against eating others. To facilitate its project of racial assimilation, the Dominion government has had to outlaw the act of assimilation itself. I will analyse the irony of the ban on the "tamanawas" later, in "Eating."

Though the second section forbids a small number of acts, the first reaches into every aspect of life in aboriginal communities. For it bans all economy. The statute is a letter sent not just to rupture the economic circle at a few selected points, but to smash it altogether. Every conceivable exchange, every possible circulation of "money, goods or articles," is forbidden here. Henceforth there can be no forum, no market, whether public or private, no "Indian festival, dance or ceremony," where something would be
allowed to pass from someone to someone other. "Giving away" is prohibited. So too is "giving back." "Payment" is also banned. It has become impossible for an "Indian" either to buy or to sell property, to borrow or lend capital, give or receive presents without risking imprisonment. Taken literally, the law states that as of 22 July 1895 there can be no trade between aboriginal people anywhere in Canada.

To get at the potlatch, Parliament has had to ban all forms of distribution. It had no choice. Suppressing the potlatch means suppressing everything that has ever gathered itself under that name, even if that includes the whole circle of economy. Since white administrators have long defined potlatching as at once an act of gift-giving and a moment in the reciprocal exchange of property, both the gift and the counter-gift must be outlawed. If the definition of what is prohibited is not broad enough, then some portion of the potlatch might be allowed to go free, because there always seems to be more.

There is one exception, however. Though it forbids anything that could possibly qualify as an instance of "giving away," the law does not address itself to the "civilized" pursuit of agriculture. The legal text therefore closes with a "but" that introduces a qualifying clause: "but nothing in this section shall be construed to prevent the holding of any agricultural show or exhibition or the giving of prizes for exhibits thereat."

The revised statute does not just define the word "potlatch." It grants the world an object to be observed, regulated, handed over to the police--and arraigned. From now on the potlatch will be whatever the law says it is although, according to the letter of the law, the potlatch could be any form of trade. Since it was an object of administrative attention long before the law delivered it to history, the potlatch existed before it originated. It is necessary to remember, however, that the practice which the law gave to
the world was not the same as the practices which the First Nations performed. The potlatch named in the Indian Act is not, for example, the practice called pesa in the Kwakwala language, nor is it the practice called yoakw in Tsimshian—even though "potlatch" is used today to refer both to the Kwakwala pesa and to the Tsimshian yoakw. Furthermore, while the outlawed potlatch is a gift of the legal text, it is not a fiction. It is a real object that took up its place in the order of Western-European knowledge, and it gave federal administrators a reason to send people to jail. The gift of the legal text was therefore a transfer-point in a system of power relations. To think such a gift is to acknowledge that texts inflict violence on people—that words wound.

The "Brief on the Bill further to Amend the Indian Act 1896," confirms that the revised statute was meant to replace the words "Potlach" and "Tamanawas" with descriptions of the things they named. According to the "Brief," "It has been held that the mere designation of the festival or dance such as Tamanawas or Potlach is not sufficient for conviction...but that what is done thereat which constitutes the offence must likewise be described" (RG 10, 3628, 6244-1; undated). The "Brief" also shows that the government planned to use the new statute to attack the dances of the First Nations of the Prairies. It states that

As there is a similar dance to the Potlach celebrated by the Indian bands in the North West Territories known as Omas-ko-sim-moo-wok or "grass dance," commonly known as "Giving away dance" and there are, no doubt, Indian celebrations of the same character elsewhere, all of which consist of the giving away, parting with, or exchange of large quantities of personal effects sometimes all that the participants own it is considered better to prohibit all giving away festivals as they are conducive of extravagance and cause much loss of time and the assemblage of large numbers of Indians, with all the usual attendant evils (see also Titley 166).

A single law, built up around two descriptive phrases, was to suppress a number of very
different practices in a number of regions and among a number of cultures. It mattered little whether the acts which the law described existed or not, for if they were nowhere to be found, it would give itself something to ban.

Text Machine. But how is it possible for a legal text to give what it names? "How can a mere word accomplish this, to bring a thing into being?" Paul de Man sketches the mechanics of the textual gift in "Promises," his essay on Rousseau's The Social Contract. He argues that Rousseau's text is a meditation "on the authority of legal language" in particular, but as the essays unfolds, de Man circles "closer and closer to the "definition" of text" in general (in Allegories 246 and 268). He argues that any text, whether it is a statute or a book of political philosophy, consists of the interplay of two functions of language: grammar and "referential meaning." Though there is an exchange between them, the two functions are ultimately incompatible and tend to work at cross purposes (269).

Grammar is the set of rules which determine how the words of a given language are to be combined into technically correct utterances. "The system of relationships that generates the text...is its grammar," says de Man (268), but grammar functions only in "the suspension of its referential meaning" (268-9). When a text is "generated," it does not know what it is saying, because grammar strings words together to form utterances while ignoring what those words mean. Grammar therefore operates in a purely mechanical way. "To the extent that a text is grammatical," says de Man, "it is a logical code or a machine" (268). The fact that grammar functions independently of meaning explains how the government of Canada was able to enact a law against the "potlatch"
and "tamanawas" in 1885 without knowing what these terms meant and, more importantly, without knowing precisely what practices were being forbidden.

Yet if grammar brings on the suspension of "referential meaning," reference and meaning resist the machinations of grammar by giving sense to the rule-bound utterances of the text. Although de Man maintains that "the logic of grammar generates texts only in the absence of referential meaning," he acknowledges that "every text generates a referent that subverts the grammatical principle to which it owed its constitution" (269). Grammar produces the text by stringing its words together, but once it is produced, the text disconnects the machine which set it in play and lends itself to reading. Hence the text acquires its "referent" only after it has been constituted.

What de Man suggests, then, is that a fundamental disjunction structures every text, and this disjunction can only be thought in relation to time. The text never arrives at once, in a single instant. Rather, it delivers itself to the world at least twice: once in the moment when it is constituted and its "referential meaning" is suspended, and again in the moment when it is interpreted and "referential meaning" establishes itself. However Heidegger and Derrida have taught us to expect that the instant when the text is generated, when it irrupts into being, is not an instant in time. The text owns itself, becoming what it most properly is, in a moment that does not belong to the sequence of moments in which it will be read and discussed. The moment of the text's arrival cuts across the circle of its interpretation.

It might be objected that De Man undermines the claims advanced in "Promises" by failing to distinguish meaning from reference. He deploys these terms as if they were interchangeable: at one moment affirming that grammar works by suspending the
referential meaning of the text, while at another instant insisting that the text overthrows the suspension of referential meaning by generating its own referent (269). Are "referential meaning" and "referent" equivalent terms that can be substituted one for another without posing any difficulties? Searle does not think so. He holds the two apart by maintaining that meaning is what is known about an object, while the referent is the object itself. If for de Man "reference" is another term for "referential meaning," then what he is saying is that first a text establishes itself according to grammatical rules and afterwards gives itself a sense to convey to its reader. But if he is using "referential meaning" as the equivalent of "reference," then what he is saying is that first the machine of grammar builds a text and afterwards the text gives itself something to refer to. But it would be wrong to draw too rigourous a distinction between reference and meaning. After all, Searle maintains that meaning plays a central role in the work of referring. The task of meaning is to point towards a thing. It does not close in upon itself and cut itself off from acts of reference.

Begbie’s ruling offers a telling example of the exchange between sense and reference. Although his judgement states that the first version of the law is defective because it does not define its terms, this lack of sense is a problem only because it makes it impossible for the court to decide what Parliament intended to ban. What matters in this instance is not just that the law fails to mean, but that its failure to mean brings on a loss of reference. As de Man might say, the statute of 1885 was, like every text, generated in the suspension of meaning. Yet the law failed because it did not overturn the suspension of meaning in which it was written. No definition came to attach itself to "potlach" and "tamanawas" after they were cited in section 114, and without meaning,
they were powerless to point to the practices that were to be suppressed.

Unlike the 1885 statute, the revised statute of 1895 defines "potlatch" and "tamanawas" without mentioning them. In the second text, meaning immediately overturns its suspension and fills in the lack of sense left over after the machine of grammar generated the text. Yet the revised statute supplies itself not only with meaning, but with reference as well, giving itself things to condemn.

The moment the law defines the potlatch, it is inevitable that missionaries and Indian agents will seek it out and put it on trial. If they cannot find a potlatch that conforms to their knowledge, they will warp what they find until it bends to fit their understanding of what the law prohibits. The revised statute functions as a mechanical apparatus geared to the production of potlatches, and it manufactures them in order to inflict its violence on those people who are said to participate in them. Hence the legal text gives a gift that is both violent and repeatable: it presents its world with a potlatch which can be produced and reproduced many times over. What allows the law to give its gift, though, is the temporal gap dividing the instant when the law is stated from the instant when it acts.

Towards the end of "Promises," De Man introduces a second set of terms to supplement the notions of grammar, referential meaning and reference. This substitution of one group of terms for another allows him to arrive at his general "definition of text." "A text is defined," he says, "by the necessity of considering a statement, at the same time, as performative and constative" (270). Moreover, it is the disjunction between these "two linguistic functions"--the performative and the constative--that makes it possible for the legal text to give what it prohibits.
It is customary to identify J. L. Austin as the author of the terms "performative" and "constative." After all, Austin begins his theory of speech acts by distinguishing between constative utterances, which function as a mode of cognition, and performative utterances, which serve as a mode of action. In philosophy, constatives are called statements; they give voice to knowledge and have "the property of being true or false" ("Performativa-Constativa" 22). In contrast, performative utterances are ones "in which to say something is to do something": in performatives, language itself acts upon the world (How to Do Things 12). The class of performatives includes such sentences as "I name this ship the Queen Elizabeth" or "I find the accused guilty." Performatives are conventional acts because they are governed by rules. Not just anyone can christen a ship or deliver a verdict before a court. The person who makes such utterances must first be granted the authority to do so, and has to make them in an appropriate context by following accepted procedures. When a performative utterance manages to do what it says it is doing, it is said to be "happy" or "successful" or "felicitous." If it fails, or if the person who utters it does not adhere to the required conventions, then it is "unhappy" or "unsuccessful" or "infelicitous." Unlike constatives, performatives are never true or false.

Yet Austin collapses the distinction between performatives and constatives almost as soon as he sets it up. In Lecture Five of How to Do Things with Words, he warns that "in some ways there is a danger of our initial and tentative distinction between constative and performative breaking down"--even though he had only begun to draw that distinction in the first four lectures (54). And it does break down. In Lecture Eleven, Austin declares that constatives and performatives are both ways of doing things with words.
(133), and he situates the "doctrine of the performative/constative" within a general theory of speech acts (147). Every genuine speech act, Austin insists, is at once a locutionary act, the performance of an act of saying something, and an illocutionary act, the performance of an act in saying something (98-9). Though it is true that each statement is a constative utterance, to say "I state" is nevertheless to perform the act of stating--just as to say "I promise" is to state that one is promising. Every constative contains an element of performativity, and every performative includes an element of constatation.\(^{35}\)

While De Man acknowledges it is impossible to separate the performative and constative functions of language, he observes that the two "are not necessarily compatible" (270). Their mutual incompatibility takes the form of a disjunction in time. In law, for example, there is a lapse between the constative moment, when the legal text states what it prohibits, and its performative moment, when it acts on its knowledge and brings its prohibition down upon the heads of the accused. De Man argues that when a law is understood as a speech act, its structure proves similar to that of the promise. "All laws are future-oriented and prospective," he says, "their illocutionary mode is that of the promise" (273). Like the promise, the legal text is divided in two. It announces its ban in the present--"every promise assumes a date at which the promise is made and without which it would have no validity"--but it pledges to enact that ban sometime in the future--"laws are promissory notes in which the present of the promise is always a past with regard to its realization" (273). Thus while the revised antipotlatch law came into effect on 22 July 1895, pledging to fulfill its prohibition sometime in the future, the law was not enforced, and its promise was not realized, until February 1896 and after.
It seems that since a law cannot be enforced until after it has been written, its performative function lags behind its cognitive function: first the law states what it bans, but only later does it ban what it states. However the moments of cognition and action cannot be so neatly separated, because the law does not know what it bans until the moment its ban is enforced. No-one can be convicted for potlatching until a potlatch is known to have occurred, but a potlatch cannot be known to have occurred until someone is convicted of potlatching. The conviction occurs at the same time that the facts are established and the evidence verified. By a strange paradox, the law states what it knows before it is enacted but cannot know what it states until it is enacted. As de Man notes, "if a text does not act, it cannot state what it knows," yet "as soon as a text knows what it states, it can only act deceptively, like the thieving lawmaker in the Social Contract" (270). The law against the potlatch learns what the potlatch is by sending potlatchers to jail, but it can only send them to jail by lying about what the potlatch is. The law "acts deceptively" by setting up its own version of the potlatch, because potlatchers are sentenced not for taking part in the practice which they call the potlatch (or pesa or yoakw, and so forth), but for participating in the practice named potlatch by police officers and Indian agents.

Just as grammar is a machine, so the law is a machine, and it produces what it forbids. It does not just enact a ban. It bans what it enacts. Between the moment it is formulated and the moment it is applied, the legal machine gives itself something to refer to. While the constative utterance states something ("A law is a promise") and the performative does something ("I promise a law"), the gift-giving utterance does what it states, setting up its constatations as a real object in the world. To think the mechanics
of the textual gift-event is to dissolve the limit dividing texts from their world and to acknowledge that the two terms fold together to interact and do not remain in separate spheres. It is to acknowledge that texts have the capacity to strike out at the world with all the force of a clenched fist. The gift-bearing text does not represent the practices of non-Western, non-European cultures, but rather gives other cultures to itself. When deployed on Europe’s westermost limit such a text empowers the postal-colonial nation to appropriate itself violently, owning its own essence by attempting to rob the First Nations of theirs.36

12. Destroying Property

When it is revised, section 114 forbids every conceivable circulation of goods and services, but when it is enforced, it works to prevent acts of pure expenditure. Though as a constative utterance it states that it is a ban on exchange, as a performative utterance it comes into effect as a ban on waste. What the statute forbids, in the end, is the impossible itself. The distribution of property is a crime when what is given away does not invoke a return, but according to Derrida, it is impossible to give a gift that brings nothing home to the giver. Such a gift cannot be given and remain a gift. For the moment the giver or the recipient recognizes that a gift has passed between them, that gift enters the circle of exchange. The giver receives—as a counter-gift—the knowledge of having given, of having acted with generosity, while the recipient owes the giver a debt
of gratitude in return for what was gained. A pure gift has to take place in an instant of absolute forgetting, an instant when the thing given conceals its status as a gift. Otherwise the act of giving earns a profit for the giver--and ceases to give anything at all.

Section 114 says it prevents aboriginal people from participating in the circle of economy, but acts to prohibit a gift-event that breaks with every economic circle. The law bans economy only to preserve it, forbids circulation to protect its unbroken curve from a crisis which would rupture it. Perhaps Parliament outlawed the event of the gift not to "lift" the First Nations into the ranks of Euro-Canadian civilization, but to protect Europe-in-Canada from itself. For the law marks a refusal to tolerate the thought of a distribution that renounces every profit. It takes aim at practices which point beyond the circle of economic reasoning. It is an attack against exteriority itself. The law works to suppress the possibility that there is an event of appropriation, an es gibt, which gives economy to itself but remains outside every economic circle. By banning the potlatch, Europe-in-Canada forbids itself to question its own limits.

The Crime of Waste. Only a few weeks elapsed before the revised statute was put into force. The anglican missionary at the Nisga’a village of Aiyansh, James B. McCullagh, had tried to prosecute "some Tamanawas dancers" in 1893, well before Parliament moved to define the crime they were accused of. Though at that time the Nisga’a had chased away the justice of the peace who had been sent to summons the accused to trial, McCullagh remained determined to bring the potlatch to an end (Cole and Chaikin 46).

In August 1895 eight Nisga’a elders came down from the Nass River to Victoria,
where they petitioned Vowell to "prevent clergymen and missionaries" from "interfering with" the "Potlach" in their communities. Their petition singles out McCullagh as the main source of complaint: "the Rev. J. A. McCullagh of Naas River has, we believe unduly interfered with Us in our holding or giving potlaches." To defend the "potlach," they underline that it is not a divisive war fought with property, but a way of strengthening the social bonds that link their people together: "the holding of potlaches has been a custom prevalent among our people for many generations," they write, "and a method that we have of showing our good will toward one another, and we believe it is our right just as much as it is the right of our white brothern to make presents to each other" (RG 10, v. 3628, f. 6244-1; stamped 30 August 1895). The petitioners also note that "it is the opinion of many intelligent and good white men that the clergymens meddling in our affairs is very often uncalled for." But another group of white men sitting in the federal legislature had already relieved the Nisga’a of their legal "right to make presents."

Vowell referred the Nisga’a petition to Hayter Reed, who had replaced Vankoughnet as the deputy-superintendent general of Indian affairs in 1893. Reed told Vowell to remind missionaries working on the Nass "that the ability to retain the law must depend on the exercise of discretion with regard to its enforcement." The idea of "discretion" was to guide the department’s management of the antipotlatch law for the next two decades. Reed thought it would be unwise to ban potlatching all at once, and he advised Indian agents not to interfere in potlatches held for the repayment of debts. Vowell insisted there was no need to put the potlatch to death because it was already dying of natural causes. From 1895 until he resigned in 1910, his policy was that
prosecuting potlatchers would arouse the hostility of the First Nations while doing nothing to change their ways. The potlatch would succumb to the influence of European-Canadian civilization, he argued, but it would succumb gradually and of its own accord. On those rare occasions when agents tried to enforce the law, Vowell did little to support their efforts. It could be argued that he took steps to ensure their initiatives failed (RG 10, v. 3628, f. 6244-1, Vowell to deputy-superintendent general of Indian Affairs, 6 September 1895; Reed to Vowell, 18 September and 8 November 1895; Vowell’s circular, 16 January 1896.)

McCullagh pursued a more aggressive policy. Since he was both a missionary and justice of the peace, he had three potlatchers arraigned before him at the Aiyansh Municipal Council in October 1895. But he did not send them to jail. He sentenced them to be confined to the village for two months and made their attendance at school compulsory. Early in 1896 he arrested four more people who were released after posting one hundred dollar bonds and promising "to keep the peace for two years" (RG 10, v. 3631. f. 6244-G and v. 3628, f. 6244-1, McCullagh to Vowell, 1 February 1896; McCullagh’s report, 1 February 1896; Cole and Chaikin 45-7).

In the Cowichan Agency, William Lomas responded to the passing of the revised section 114 just as he had responded to the enactment of the 1885 statute. He let the people of his agency perform a supplement of potlatch. While the "last gathering" of 1885 was given by Lohah, the last potlatch of 1895 was held by "Chief Jim Sil-kah-met" of Nanaimo. In a letter to Vowell, Lomas reports that "the Nanaimo Indians assured [him] that this was the last gathering of the kind they wished to hold, [and] that the old man "Jim" had been accumulating blankets for years, which according to custom of the
native have to be returned in public" (RG 10, V. 3631, f. 6244-G, 21 October 1895).
Lomas notes elsewhere that most of the white people living in the Cowichan agency are
not opposed to the potlatch: "I can only say that the popular feeling in this part of the
Province is that we have no moral right to interfere with these harmless Indian customs"
(RG 10, v. 2628, f. 6244-1, 18 March 1896). Though Jim Sil-kah-met's potlatch was the
"last" of its "kind," it was followed by a second "last gathering" on Kuper Island in the
spring of 1896. Lomas later informed Vowell that this second last potlatch lasted ten
days and attracted fifteen hundred participants as well as a crowd of white spectators (30
April 1896).

Lomas's practice of allowing a supplement of potlatch to survive its own death
had already attracted the criticism of C. M. Tate, a methodist missionary labouring on
southeastern Vancouver Island. On 17 October 1895, Tate had written Vowell that there
was no justification for allowing a final potlatch for the repayment of debts, and he laid
"a formal charge" against Lomas for refusing to enforce section 114. "The greatest
kindness that can be shown to the Indians," says Tate, "is to "Firmly & kindly" put the
law into effect and say to them:--if you owe any debts, go and pay them as white men
do." For Tate, the potlatch is a system of loans repaid at interest, but it is inferior to the
"white men's" system of credit because potlatching leads to quarelling, drunkenness,
neglect of the old and the infirm, and to "immorality of the worst kind"--in a word, sex.
It is also a waste. Tate says the potlatch incites Native people to destroy their own
property. More importantly, it depletes the resources of everyone who seeks to "elevate"
them. "It is an injustice to the Govt. and to the Missionary societies who are spending
their money to make a better people of the Indians," he writes, "to have these
demoralizing practices propagated, and that in the face of a law, which if enforced would speedily terminate all such proceedings." The potlatch earns a profit for people who have property owing to them, but it imposes a loss on everyone else—especially white missionaries and taxpayers. The potlatch, then, is a minor accumulation and an absolute expenditure, but it is above all a waste of white funds.38

When called on to defend himself, Lomas argued that his actions conformed to Vowell's recommendation "that great care should be taken in enforcing the [antipotlatch] provisions of the [Indian] act." Also, Lomas notes that chief constable Stewart of the provincial police "says it would be unwise to strictly enforce the law preventing these gatherings until something has been devised to take their place, as action of this kind must result in bringing about a bad feeling against the authorities, particularly as the potlatch is dying out, and there are only one or two to take place and the custom will be over [emphasis added]" (Lomas to Vowell, 21 October 1895). In November Reed praised Lomas and Vowell for pursuing a policy of "a gradual and discreet enforcement of the law for the suppression of the Potlach" (RG 10, v. 3631, f. 6244-G, Reed to Vowell, 8 November 1895). Meanwhile, the opponents of the potlatch continued to urge that there would always be "one or two" more if the law went unenforced. They wanted the potlatch abolished because to them it was a practice of excess—an activity that ceaselessly added itself to itself.

McCullagh joined Tate in condemning the potlatch as a celebration of loss. In February 1896 he wrote Vowell to complain "very much" about "the seeming laissez faire policy of the Department." McCullagh's letter calls for the active suppression of the potlatch on the grounds that potlatching is a useless expenditure of property and of
time: "The potlatch takes up, that is wastes, nearly five months every year," he says (emphasis added). For McCullagh, the circle of time is also a circle of economy where every instant is calculated either as a profit or as a loss. Measured against this circle, the potlatch proves to be a pure gift of time. "For the old time Indians it might be harmless enough," he admits, "but for the young men and women of the present generation it is the shortest and easiest way of going to the bad imaginable" (1 February 1896; emphasis added). Time is a commodity which should never be wasted, though it does not matter if the elders lose time because, for McCullagh, the "old time" which they inhabit has no value. It is necessary to protect "the present generation" from loss of time, however, because "the young men and women" belong to a temporal circle where "the present" ceaselessly resolves itself into debits and credits. For the generation of the present, the present is a currency which can earn them "the good" and keep them from "the bad." If they spend the time of present profitably, their reward will be their escape from the unprofitable "old time." But that is not all that stands to be won or lost.

For Alfred Hall, the potlatch is a waste not just of property and time, but of women. In a letter to the Victoria Daily Colonist, Hall "desires" "to place before [the newspaper’s] readers a few facts with regard to the potlach [with one "t"]," and, he continues, "I emphasize the word facts and wish it to be understood that I am only referring to what I have observed on the north end of [Vancouver] Island, where I have lived seventeen years" (11 March 1896). There is no reason to assume, though, that Hall’s "facts" correspond to the events they claim to describe.

Hall reports that young women from the Nimpkish village of Alert Bay have made a regular practice of travelling to Victoria to buy blankets for distribution in potlatches.
"I once counted thirty-two women in one month who embarked on steamers to bring back the coveted blankets," he says. What he suggests, without stating it openly, is that these women are making their purchases with money earned by prostitution. But if Native women are selling themselves, it is Native men who are spending the profits. Hall calls attention to the "fact" that many women have "sacrificed" themselves so that men can maintain their social prestige by acquiring and distributing property. "In my time about fifty women under 25 years of age have died," he alleges, "all of whom have been sacrificed to maintain the potlatch [now with two "t"s]. Girls that I have taught in school have returned only to be nursed and die." For Hall the only way to stop the sacrifice of women is to make a sacrifice of the potlatch itself. "Whenever a tribe ceased to potlatch," he argues, "the life of shame, which some of these women lead, practically cease [sic]." However it was white Canada's determination to prevent the waste of property, not its concern to save time or to protect women, that led to the first prosecution under the antipotlatch law.

On the day after Christmas 1895, W. H. Barraclough, a methodist missionary stationned at Sardis in the Fraser River Valley, wrote Vowell about a Sto:lo man from the Tzeachten reserve who had just performed a scandalous act of giving away. "Another of our Indians," says Barraclough, using the genitive to denote possession, "by the name of Bill Uslick, only a week or so ago Potlatched nearly everything he had away and to my knowledge he has a number of White Creditors who can now whistle for their money" (RG 10, v. 3631, f. 6244-G, 26 December 1895; Cole and Chaikin 44). Uslick's crime consisted of giving gifts at Christmas time. Yet in describing the incident, Barraclough construes the potlatch as an absolute waste which leaves nothing but poverty
in its wake. "As long as the department permit[s] the Potlatch to continue," he warns, "we will always have indigent Indians." Ironically, Barraclough ends his letter by reporting that white profiteers are charging the Sto:lo people inflated prices for drugs and medical care. "Many Indians who might not be classed as indigent," he notes, "are nevertheless unable to pay the high rates asked for medical attendance and the exorbitant charges of the drug stores" in the area around Chilliwack. Some stores are charging up to twenty-four dollars for a "liniment" that costs less than three dollars wholesale. Yet it is a Sto:lo man, not profiteering merchants, who will be sent to jail for creating poverty.

The Indian agent for the Fraser Agency shared Barraclough's understanding of the potlatch. In his report to Vowell, Frank Devlin agrees that "The Indian mentioned by Mr. Barraclough, Bill Uslick is one of those Indians that is very hard to manage" because "He still wishes to keep up the old habits and customs, and would like to be a leader among the Indians." For Devlin, the defining feature of Uslick's potlatch was the "waste" of capital. "I am not aware that any human, or animal bodies, were mutilated or anything of that kind occured," he says, but "There certainly was a great waste" because Uslick "practically left himself destitute; having given everything away that he had in the world." Devlin advises the department that putting Uslick in jail for "a couple of months" would have "a good effect" because it "would deter others from following his example" (RG 10, v. 3628, f. 6244-1; 18 January 1896).

Vowell instructed Devlin to proceed with the prosecution, noting that "the wanton destruction of property...must be stopped in the interest of the Indians and of the Department which is labouring for their advancement" (22 January 1896). On 31 January Reed wrote from Ottawa that if "Mr. Devlin is tolerably certain of securing a conviction
it would I think be well to take proceedings against Uslick." But he qualifies his
instructions by adding, with his usual concern for "discretion," that Uslick need not be
prosecuted if "he promises to obey the law in the future" (RG 10, v. 3631, f. 6244-G;
Reed to Vowell, 31 January 1896). One day later Devlin arrested Uslick and arraigned
him before a justice of the peace named Mellard. He was sentenced to two months in the
provincial jail. Afterwards Devlin noted that the Sto:lo were unimpressed by this attempt
to make an example of Bill Uslick. "All the Indians in the District were at the Court,"
he writes, "and with a very few exceptions feel that Uslick should not be interfered with
for giving a Potlatch" (RG 10, v. 3628, f. 6244-1; Devlin to Vowell, 3 February 1896).

The prosecution of Bill Uslick did not signal a shift in the department’s policy of
discreet enforcement of section 114. His conviction was an an exception, not the rule.
But it was not the only exception. After Alfred Hall’s letter appeared in the Victoria
Daily Colonist, Vowell wrote the agent in charge of the Kwawkelth Agency, R. H.
Pidcock, and suggested it was time to enforce the law. The Kwakwaka’wakw must learn,
Vowell says, that "the law is not a mere shadow used to frighten them," though he
repeats that "the very greatest discretion must be used to avoid raising a spirit of
antagonism" among them (16 March 1896).

Sometime in January 1897 R. J. Walker, the methodist Missionary at Cape
Mudge, arrived at school to find the Lekwiltok had taken their children to a potlatch at a
village "fifty miles" away, and he asked Pidcock to arrest the "Chief" who had given the
invitation. Since Vowell had instructed him to enforce the law, Pidcock issued a warrant
for the arrest of Johnny Moon and "the Indian named Harry." A justice of the peace and
two constables went to Salmon River to arrest the accused and to summons two witnesses
to testify against them. The officers seized Johnny Moon and took him to Comox, but when they tried to arrest "Chief Harry," they were confronted by a group of angry villagers who refused to let him go.

Vowell informed Reed that the incident had almost led to "serious trouble." It had also angered the provincial government. When Johnny Moon was brought to trial, the attorney general of British Columbia intervened to issue a stay of proceedings, hinting that the accused had been unlawfully detained. It seems that Johnny Moon had been arrested for assisting in a potlatch before the potlatch had occurred. Vowell later reprimanded Pidcock for failing to go to Salmon River to supervise the arrests (RG 10, v. 3628, f. 6244-1; Vowell to Reed 12 and 16 January 1897; Vowell to Pidcock 15 January 1897).

On 16 January Vowell distributed a circular to all the Indian agents in British Columbia, reminding them that "it is the desire of the Department in regard to the putting in force of Sec. 114 of the 'Indian Act'...that the greatest discretion be observed by the Indian Agents so that all possibilities of creating serious disturbance between the officers putting the law in force and the natives may be guarded against as far as can be reasonably avoided." While the circular does instruct Agents to be careful when making arrests, it encourages them to "avoid" enforcing the law altogether: "when the Indians only meet together for a friendly and harmless interchange of kindly and social relations," says Vowell, "they should not be unduly interfered with." The sorts of "kindly and social relations" that are to be permitted include the distribution of blankets ("clothing") and the giving of feasts ("food"). Only absolute expenditures are to be prevented: "when on these occasions food and clothing is distributed amongst the aged and destitute of the
people assembled, no property being destroyed or otherwise wasted, such proceedings on the part of the Indians should not be considered as coming within the purview of the Amendment to the Indian Act now under consideration." Reed approved these guidelines on 29 January 1897.

Though the revised section 114 describes the potlatch as a crime of economy, Vowell's circular declares that the statute prohibits crimes of waste—especially destruction. The ban on the circulation of property has become a ban on gifts that never return to sender. But Vowell had decided it would be better to persuade the First Nations to give up the potlatch than to enforce the law against it. There would not be another potlatch trial until 1914.

**Banking.** The delivery of Vowell's circular does not mean the interpretation of the potlatch has ceased to overlap the idea of the gift with that of exchange. Just when the Indian affairs administration has finally stated that potlatching is a form of waste, not trade, Franz Boas announces his opposition to section 114 by arguing the potlatch is a form of trade rather than waste. While Canadian law sends the potlatch over towards the pole of the pure gift, the discipline of ethnography defends it by edging it over towards the pole of investment.

On 6 March 1897 the Victoria *Province* published an anonymous letter from an "enthusiastic natural scientist," Dr. Charles F. Newcombe (Rohner 201). Enclosed was a letter from Boas, dated 11 February 1897. Newcombe introduces Boas's text by emphasizing that Boas "is a recognised authority on the Indians of our coast and has for some years been employed by the "British Association for the Advancement of Science"
to study Indian traditions and customs." Boas is thus an expert on "Indians," and his text is based on the fieldwork he conducted in British Columbia between 1888 and 1895—sponsored in part by the B.A.A.S. committee for the study of the First Nations of northwestern Canada (The Province, 6 March 1897 xi-xii; copied in RG 10, v. 3628, f. 6244-1; Vowell to McLean, 22 May 1897).

Boas's letter within a letter begins by alluding to the recent events at Salmon River. "With much regret," he writes, "I have seen in recent newspapers that the enforcement of the provincial law forbidding potlatches has led to serious disturbances among certain Indian tribes." He insists that the tension between the Kwakwaka'wakw and settler society has resulted from a white misunderstanding although, ironically, Boas himself mistakes section 114 of the Indian Act—a product of the federal Parliament—for a "provincial law." "It might have been expected," he continues, "that the attempt to enforce such a law among tribes who still adhere to the old custom would lead to disaffection and discontent." He adds that whites would not have aroused the First Nations' hostility if they had interpreted the "potlach" correctly before moving to ban it: "Unfortunately the meaning of the potlach has been much misunderstood by the whites; else, I believe, the attempt would not have been made to abolish it by law without making provision for the gradual transition of the old system to a new one." If Canadian officials would only bring their knowledge of the potlatch into correspondence with the potlatch itself—if they would only arrive at the truth about the potlatch—they would see that their policy is flawed, and they would repeal the law.

For Boas section 114 points to a failure of reading. It is the sign of a white society's inability to comprehend the "meaning" of a social practice which, he says, is
common to the First Nations of the Pacific northwest. What he fails to understand, though, is that the antipotlatch law does not aim to reveal the facts about potlatches. It gives itself practices to correspond with and does not bring its knowledge into agreement with the acts the First Nations perform. For the law is a machine which manufactures lies. As de Man says, "the incompatibility between the elaboration of the law"--the constative instant when it states what it knows--"and its application (or justice)"--the performative instant when it acts on its knowledge--"can only be bridged by an act of deceit" (Allegories 269). Acting deceptively, the antipotlatch law does not represent the truth but rather steals it away from its owners. "Justice is unjust," writes de Man, "no wonder that the language of justice is also the language of guilt" (269, see also 287).

When Boas lends his signature to the discourse opposed to the law, he tries to change government policy by denouncing the untruths that have been told about the potlatch and replacing them with the latest research, as if misunderstanding is obliged to melt away the moment it is brought into the burning light of the truth. As if it is enough to "explain briefly what the potlach is" to have the law purged from the legal archive. But the law did not collapse when confronted with the facts, because the gift-giving utterances of the legal text escape the grasp of a metaphysics that understands truth as a correspondence between knowledge and its object.

Boas was not alone in thinking that Indian administrators would repeal the law once they arrived at a correct understanding of the thing which "potlatch" refers to. On 14 April 1897 the British Columbia Legislative Assembly passed a resolution asking the Dominion government to hold "an enquiry into the origin, nature, and meaning" of the potlatch "with a view, should it be ascertained that the grievance complained of [by "the
Indians" is well founded, to the immediate repeal of that part of the statute which "prohibits the said custom and will allow the Indians to enjoy such custom unmolested." The resolution requested federal officials to take another look at the thing that has been banned, in the hope that they would find, as Boas predicted, that their first interpretation of the potlatch had been wrong.

By 1897, the new minister of the Interior, Clifford Sifton, had removed Hayter Reed from the position of deputy-superintendent general of Indian Affairs and replaced him with James A Smart, a "political ally." In his day Reed had dealt with the everyday details of departmental business, but "under Smart, almost all letters went out over the signature of the departmental secretary," John. D. McLean (Hall 122). Given responsibility for the antipotlatch law, McLean tacitly endorsed the existing policy of placing discretion before enforcement.

When the resolution of the provincial legislature was forwarded to Ottawa, McLean asked Vowell to begin an inquiry. Vowell responded by confessing that he had never been a willing supporter of the law. "I have always been of the opinion," he writes, "that the Indians as regards their social and friendly intercourse with each other should not be interfered with" (Vowell to McLean, 22 May 1897). In defense of this "opinion," he cites Boas’s argument that the law is grounded in a misunderstanding. "In the minds of many people," says Vowell, "the term "Potlach" conveys an idea of some vicious ceremony or performance whereas it is quite the contrary in many respects." "As evidence of this contention," he continues, "I inclose herewith a copy of a letter written by Dr. Boaz [sic], who for years has made it his business to learn as much as possible of the lives, habits and customs, etc. of the British Columbia Indians amongst whom he has
travelled and lived for lengthened periods at different times." By having his letter published in *The Province*, Boas had come as close as he ever would to winning a repeal of the law.

Boas returned to the coast in June 1897 to begin the first of two field trips he conducted for the Jesup North Pacific Expedition, which was sponsored by Morris K. Jesup, president of the board of trustees of the American Museum of Natural History. On 3 June he noted in a letter to his wife that he had had dinner with Charles Newcombe "and a lawyer named Martin" (presumably Joseph Martin, then the attorney-general of British Columbia) the previous night. Superintendent Vowell was there too. "It was a very nice evening," Boas recalls, "Just imagine, the letter I wrote to Dr. Newcombe about the potlatches led to a bill [in fact a request] to cancel the law. I only hope that it will pass" (Rohner 201 and 200). Vowell appears to have shared that hope.

In his letter to McLean, Vowell suggests that Parliament delete the first clause of the statute--the one banning the giving away, paying and giving back of property--yet retain the clause banning dances involving the mutilation and wounding of people and animals. "As the law now stands," he writes,

great hardship and injustice may be inflicted upon the Indians by a too strict enforcement of its provisions; and although owing to instructions guarding against such a contingency having been clearly given to the Indian Agents the latter are not likely to act so unadvisedly, yet [what follows is an allusion to the events at Salmon River] there are unfortunately Justices of the Peace over whom the Department has no control scattered throughout the Province who are at any time either from ignorance, prejudice, or pressure brought to bear upon them by interested parties, capable by injudicious proceedings of creating serious trouble through which will spring up a feeling of antagonism in the breasts of the natives against the Indian Department and the Government.

In reply, McLean asked Vowell to explain why he thought it "unnecessary to make any
provisions against the giving away of articles at such festivals" when "missionaries and others" had identified the distribution of property as one of their "chief causes of complaint." Instead of defending his proposal, Vowell withdrew it, suggesting that it might be best to "pause" before repealing the law—provided that it continued to go unenforced. In January 1898, after receiving reports on the "origin, meaning and nature" of the potlatch from Indian agents in British Columbia, the department advised the Privy Council to reject British Columbia's request for an amendment to the Indian Act. The antipotlatch law remained in place, though the department promised to exercise "great care" and "discretion" in all its handling of the potlatch (McLean to Vowell, 31 May 1897; Vowell to Deputy-Superintendent General 1 June 1897; Clifford Sifton to Governor-General, 18 January 1898; Extract of a Report of the Committee of the Privy Council, 22 February 1898).

Boas's letter gave both the provincial government and the local Indian superintendent a chance to excuse themselves from their responsibility to enforce the law. Exactly what did he say to defend the potlatch? His text affirms that the true interpretation of potlatching identifies it not as an instance of waste, but as a system of credit. "In all his undertakings the Indian relies on the help of his friends," Boas writes.

He promises to pay them for this help at a later date. If the help furnished consisted in valuables—which are measured by the Indians by blankets as we measure them by money—he promises to repay the amount so loaned with interest. The Indian has no system of writing, and, therefore, in order to give security to the transaction, it is performed publicly. The contracting of debts, on the one hand, and the paying of debts, on the other, is the potlach" (emphasis added).

The "potlach" is a substitute for writing. But as Heidegger notes, Western-European metaphysics has always held that writing is itself a substitute for speech, while speech is
a substitute for thoughts, and thoughts are substitutes for things ("Nature" 97). If writing is the act of replacing one system of signs with another, is not the substitute for writing itself a form of writing? A writing that is unique to cultures which have "no system of writing"?

In *Given Time* Derrida provides his own commentary on this paragraph by Boas. The commentary unfolds while Derrida is discussing Marcel Mauss's *Essai sur le don*, for as it turns out, Mauss cites the whole of Boas’s paragraph, as well as the one that follows it, in the one hundred and thirty-first footnote to Chapter Two of the *Essai*. One might ask how Boas’s letter to a weekly newspaper in Victoria transmitted itself from there to Mauss and from Mauss to Derrida. The answer is that Boas’s letter had more than one destination from the start. Boas not only sent it to Newcombe for publication in *The Province*, but also grafted it to the end of his "Summary of the Work of the Committee in British Columbia," published in the 1898 Annual Report of the B.A.A.S. The "Summary" brought Boas’s work for the Association to an end. When Derrida quotes from this text, he is citing the citation of a citation: quoting Mauss quoting Boas quoting himself. Derrida’s commentary marks the only occasion when his meditation on the gift entangles itself directly in the correspondence generated by the law against the potlatch.

What Derrida underlines in Mauss’s citation of Boas is Boas’s claim that the potlatch is a form of public record-keeping which serves as a substitute for writing. For Derrida, the passage from Boas’s letter, which is also a passage from Boas to Mauss and back, reveals "a certain relation shaping up between writing or its substitute (but what is a substitute for writing if not a writing?) and the process of the gift" (*Given Time* 43).
Boas draws a link between the act of writing and the "process"--the event--of giving. To be precise, he suggests that it is the text in particular which gives the gift. But what sort of gift? Says Derrida, "The latter is perhaps not determined only as the content or the theme of a piece of writing--accounting, archive, memoirs, narrative, or poem [or law]--but already, in itself, as the marking of a trace" (43). The gift is not to be found in the content which a text communicates. To think the gift is to ask what makes the process of inscribing written traces possible at all: a process which, as de Man insists, is purely mechanical and occurs in the suspension of meaning and reference. "The gift would always be the gift of a writing," Derrida continues, "a memory, a poem, or a narrative, in any case, the legacy of a text" (43-4). The gift is "always" a textual gift. Hence "writing would not be the formal auxiliary, the external archive of the gift, as Boas suggests here, but "something" that is tied to the very act of the gift, act in the sense both of the archive and the performative operation" (44).

The gift is an event that occurs in writing, and it contains two moments that cannot be separated one from another. First, there is the constative moment when the text records what it knows and files its knowledge away in an "archive." "The Indian Act," for example, is both a constative statement and an archival record stored among the Revised Statutes of Canada. Secondly, there is the "performative operation" in which the text gives itself meanings to convey and objects to refer to. For instance, the Indian Act "operates" in its performative mode when it reaches into people's lives and cultures to change them, becoming an Act of violence. In sum, the constative function of language generates the legal text and donates it to the archive, while the performative sets the law into play, allowing it to bring down its iron hand, clenched into a fist.
If, as Boas maintains, the potlatch is a means of inscribing events in the public memory, it is a mode of inscription patterned on the rhetorical model of the promise. Ironically, it shares this structure with the law that bans it. According to Boas, the potlatch is divided into two moments: the date of its enunciation and the "later date" of its fulfillment. One borrows blankets in the present and pledges to return them with interest sometime in the future. The distribution of property cannot be contained within a framework where time is calculated exclusively in terms of the present moment. The potlatch preserves itself only if the majority of payments remain deferred. Since the value of the debts owing far surpasses the value of the currency available to repay them, the system would collapse if all debts were to be repaid in an instant. Hence there must always be a supplement of potlatch to come. Boas:

This economic system has developed to such an extent that the capital possessed by all the individuals of the tribe combined exceeds many times the actual amount of cash that exists. That is to say the conditions are quite analogous to those prevailing in our own community: If we want to call in all our outstanding debts, it is found that there is not, by any means, money enough in existence to pay them, and the result of an attempt of all the creditors to call in their loans results in a disastrous panic from which it takes the community a long time to recover.

To defend the act of giving away, Boas folds the economy of the coastal First Nations into the vicinity of the "quite analogous" economy of "our community"--the white community--overlapping Europe-in-Canada with the very cultures it works to keep apart from itself.

Boas holds the First Nations so close to Euro-Canada that they become a mirror where "we"--the European observer--find ourselves reflected back to ourselves. As "we" gaze upon "our" image, moreover, "we" find that the potlatch serves two purposes
"which we cannot but acknowledge as wise and worthy of praise" (682). It allows people to pay their debts honestly, and it gives parents a means of guaranteeing the prosperity of their children. Since what is loaned has to be repaid to the lender or to the lender’s family "after the lapse of several years," "the potlatch comes to be considered by the Indians as a means of insuring the well-being of their children if they should be left orphans while still young."

In his 1897 letter, and in the almost identical conclusion to the 1898 "Summary," Boas justifies potlatching by conflating it with the economic practices of what he calls "civilised communities." It was not the first time he had tried to whitewash the potlatch in order to save it. In his "Second General Report on the Indians of British Columbia," published in the 1890 Annual Report of the B.A.A.S., Boas had already interpreted the potlatch as a system of loans where people distribute presents that have to be returned with interest. "The principle underlying the potlatch," he writes, "is that each man who has received a present becomes, to double the amount he received, the debtor of the giver" (588). Boas insists that the system is "common" to all the First Nations of the northwest coast. He erases the differences between the various forms of potlatch by all too easily substituting a part for the whole, as if to describe one potlatch is somehow to describe them all.

In the 1890 "Report," "Potlatches are celebrated at all important events," including marriages, funerals, and the taking of a name or dance. They occur at the end of a long series of preparations. "When a chief has to give a great potlatch to a neighbouring tribe," says Boas, "he announces his intention, and the tribe resolve in council when the festival is to be given." A messenger is sent to tell the guests that a
gathering is planned, and when all is ready, another messenger invites them to come. They arrive "dress[ed] up at their nicest," and their canoes "proceed to the [host’s] village in grand procession" (588). "The chief’s son or daughter...attired in the dress and mask of the crest animal of the sept" meets the guests on the beach and performs a dance in their honour. Then they come ashore, making sure that the highest in rank are the first to disembark. The guests receive a few blankets as they land, and finally, "after a number of feasts have been given, the chief prepares for the potlatch, and under great ceremonies and dances [and songs], the blankets are distributed among the guests, each receiving according to his rank" (588). Boas argues that those who give away property in potlatches gain influence within their community and rest secure in the knowledge that what they have given will return to them when they are in need.

In the introduction to Boas’s "Second General Report," Horatio Hale points out that Boas’s research offers a compelling argument for repealing the antipotlatch law.°° "We now perceive," writes Hale, why the well-meaned act of the local [sic] legislature, abolishing the custom of potlatch, aroused such strenuous opposition among the tribes in which this custom specially prevailed [Hale is alluding here to the first version of the law, quashed in 1889]. We may imagine the consternation which would be caused in England if the decree of a superior power should declare that all benefit societies and loan companies should be suppressed, and that all deposits should remain the property of those who held them in trust. (557)

Like Boas, Hale entangles the ethnography of the potlatch—"a custom which has been greatly misunderstood by strangers" (557)—in the battle against the law, ensuring that the discourse of northwest coast ethnography takes a polemical turn.

The folding together of the First Nations’ economies with the economic
"conditions...prevailing in our community" recurs when Boas sets down his canonical (though not necessarily "correct") account of the potlatch in "The Social Organization and Secret Societies of the Kwakiutl Indians." Though it was published in 1897, Boas says his ethnography is based largely on material collected at Fort Rupert by himself and by his informant and coauthor George Hunt. Their research focuses on the social practices of the Kwagiulth of Fort Rupert, but they also discuss certain practices of the Kwakwala-speaking communities at Quatsino and Seymour Inlet. Like other European observers Boas uses the name of the Fort Rupert people—the Kwagiulth or, as he puts it, the "Kwakiutl"—to refer to all Kwakwala-speaking people (Assu 16).

In the "Social Organization," as in the 1897 letter and 1898 "Summary," Boas (or should I say "Boas-Hunt" to acknowledge that the text has a corporate author?) prefaces the discussion of the potlatch by charging that whites have so far failed to interpret it. "This custom has been described often," he admits, "but it has been thoroughly misunderstood by most observers." While he reaffirms that its "underlying principle is that of the interest-bearing investment of property," he insists that potlatch investments are not made for the sake of earning interest (341). Rather, the distribution of property is "the method of acquiring rank" not only among the Kwakwaka'wakw, but throughout the aboriginal communities of the northwest coast. Yet he affirms at the same time that rank cannot be acquired because it is inherited.

According to Boas (or Boas-Hunt), the people he calls "Kwakiutl" speak three different "subdialects" of a single language and are divided into a number of distinct "tribes" (329-32). Every tribe is comprised of a number of "clans" (Harry Assu says the Kwakwala term for clan is ŋamina) (Assu 57) and the members of every clan claim to
have descended from a common ancestor, "who built his house at a certain place and whose descendants [still live] at that place" (333). "[E]ach clan claims a certain rank and certain privileges which are based upon the descent and adventures of its ancestor" (334).

But the clan is not the only unit of "Kwakiutl" society to claim inherited ranks and privileges. Every clan is divided into a "limited number" of families, and the ancestors of these families have passed down names and other legacies to their descendants. "The ancestor of each of these families has a tradition of his own aside from the general clan tradition," says Boas, "and, owing to the possession of tradition...he has certain crests and privileges of his own" (338).

A complex system of inheritance determines how a family's inherited crests and privileges, and the names that go with them, are handed down from generation to generation. Boas says that when a man's daughter is married, he gives his inherited privileges to his son-in-law. The son-in-law does not receive them for himself, but holds them in trust for his own children, who are their rightful owners. Boas adds that "Names and all the privileges connected with them may be obtained, also, by killing the owner of the name, either in war or by murder" (335). No matter how these legacies are transmitted, though, "there is only one man at a time who personates the ancestor and who, consequently, has his rank and privileges [and names]" (338). Anyone who acquires a rank through the permitted channels holds exclusive rights to it and can neither gain nor lose it by distributing property in potlatches. "The individuals personating the ancestors form the nobility of the tribe," says Boas, noting that "The number of noblemen is therefore fixed" (338-9).

Boas simultaneously identifies the potlatch as a "method of acquiring rank" and
affirms that rank cannot be acquired through the potlatch. Though he seems to contradict himself, it is clear enough that in his interpretation the potlatch is a method not of acquiring rank, but of claiming it. For it is during the potlatch that people assume the names and privileges which they have inherited (341-2).

In Boas’s account, the cycle of assuming names and privileges begins at birth and culminates just before puberty. "The child when born is given the name of the place where it is born," he says. Once that child is "about a year old," "his father, mother, or some other relative gives a paddle or a mat to each member of the clan and the child receives his second name" (341). As "the boy" approaches the appropriate age for assuming his third name--about ten or twelve--"he is liberally assisted by his elders, particularly by the nobility of the tribe." They lend him blankets, and he promises to give them back a year or so later at one hundred percent interest. He makes the return payment the following June, "giving [blankets] proportionately to every member of the tribe, but a few more to the chief" (341). Before a month has passed, the recipients return the blankets with interest, so that he "receives treble the amount he has given" (341).42

The youth is obliged to settle this debt in June of the next year. "Up to this time he is not allowed to take part in feasts," says Boas, but after he repays his creditors, "he may distribute property in order to obtain a potlatch name" (342). In future potlatches he will sit in the seat formerly held by his father:

After the boy has paid his debts, the chief calls all the older members of the tribe to a council, in which it is resolved that the boy is to receive his father’s seat. The chief sends his speaker to call the boy, and his clan go out in company with the speaker. The young man--for henceforth he will be counted among the men--dresses with a black headband and paints long
vertical stripes, one on each side of his face, running down from the outer corners of the eyes. The stripes represent tears. He gives a number of blankets to his friends, who carry them into the house where the council is being held. The speaker enters first and announces the arrival. The young man follows, and after him enter his friends, carrying blankets. He remains standing in front of the fire, and the chief announces to him that he is to take his father's seat. Then the boy distributes his blankets among the other clans and sells some for food, with which a feast is prepared. His father gives up his seat and takes his place among the old men (342).

After the "young man" assumes the inherited privilege of giving away property, his next task is to make his name heavy. Says Boas, "the man's name acquires weight within the councils of the tribe and greater renown among the whole people, as he is able to distribute more and more property at each subsequent festival" (343). It is especially important, Boas argues, for the "young man" to demonstrate his greatness by distributing more property than his peers. "Boys of different clans are pitted against each other by their elders.... And as the boys strive against each other, so do the chiefs and the whole clans, and the one object of the Indian is to outdo his rival. Formerly feats of bravery counted as well as distributions of property, but nowadays, as the Indians say, "rivals fight with property only"" (343).

It would be easy to conclude from the "Social Organization" that the privilege of inheriting names belongs exclusively to boys and men, for Boas tends to obscure the roles which girls and women play in the potlatch. However George Hunt insists, in his bilingual text Contributions to the Ethnology of the Kwakiutl, that women too hold potlatch names and exercise the privileges which go with them, including the office of giving away property (65-7). For example, Hunt notes that his own daughter-in-law assumed eight man's names in addition to her woman's name. It is questionable, though, whether a name can continue to be called a "man's name" when it belongs to a woman
According to the "Social Organization," there are a number of ways of waging war with property. The goal of every battle, however, is to break up the circle of economy. Potlatch rivals strive to give each other a pure gift which will interrupt the continuum where every present eventually returns to sender in the form of a counter-present. The gift of rivalry is never supposed to return home. To start a battle, one rival gives the other a gift so massive that it is unlikely to be repaid with the required interest. Since the failure to repay a gift with interest strips weight from one's name, the rival enlists the help of his or her kin to return as much as, and preferably more than, what was given. But when one rival succeeds in shaming another by giving a gift that cannot be returned, the victor nevertheless receives a counter-gift of prestige, a supplement of "weight" added to his or her name, in compensation for what was spent. The war of property simultaneously breaks the circle of exchange and preserves it, because even a gift of rivalry is annulled the moment it sends something home to the giver. In Boas's account potlatch rivals give by giving nothing at all, and everyone seeks to buy prestige at someone else's expense.

Boas says that one "method of rising in the social scale...by showing oneself superior to one's rival" is to give the rival a large number of blankets at a potlatch. A strict law dictates that the rival cannot refuse this gift and obliges him or her to return it later at one hundred percent interest. One can also invite the rival and "his [or her] clan or tribe" to a festival called dāpEntg·ala. Here one gives the rival a pile of blankets, and the rival not only has to place "an equal number of blankets on top of the pile," but is required to return "the whole pile" later at one hundred percent interest. If the rival
fails to repay this amount, the challenger's name grows heavy (343).

Sometimes the challenger gives the rival a canoe, which the rival then fills with blankets amounting to half its value. The challenger keeps these blankets, and at a later date the rival has to give another canoe in return, "together with an adequate number of blankets, as an "anchor line" for the canoe." Here too the rival who fails to preserve the circle of gift and counter-gift suffers a loss of prestige (344).

"Still more complicated," says Boas, "is the purchase or the gift, however one chooses to term it[!], of a "copper" (344). As its name suggests, the "copper" is a flat copper plate built around a T-shaped frame. Since coppers represent a large investment of blankets, Boas compares them to paper money, but unlike, say, a one-hundred dollar bill, a copper gains value every time it changes hands:

coppers have the same function which bank notes of high denomination have with us. The actual value of the piece of copper is small, but it is made to represent a large number of blankets and can always be sold for blankets. The value is not arbitrarily set, but depends upon the amount of property given away in the festival at which the copper is sold. On the whole, the oftener a copper is sold the higher its value, as every new buyer tries to invest more blankets in it. Therefore the purchase of a copper also brings distinction, because it proves that the buyer is able to bring together a vast amount of property. (344)

Boas says coppers are always sold to rivals, often to a rival tribe, and the purchaser is under pressure to pay whatever price is asked for it. "If it is not accepted," adds Boas, "it is an acknowledgement that nobody in the tribe has money enough to buy it, and the name of the tribe or clan would consequently lose in weight. Therefore, if a man is willing to accept the offer, all the members of the tribe must assist him in this undertaking with loans of blankets" (345). The sale is arranged long before the copper changes hands. Then at the appointed time the buyer gives the owner blankets
worth about one-sixth of the copper’s value. After the owner has loaned these blankets out and earned interest on them, he or she gives them back to the buyer along with an interest payment calculated at a rate of one hundred percent. The copper is sold the next day. When the people have assembled, the buyer begins by offering "the lowest prices at which the copper was [previously] sold" (345). The owner’s supporters demand higher prices until the buyer’s bid matches the current price of the copper. The owner accepts this price but asks for boxes to put the blankets in. After these are provided, more blankets are demanded as a "belt" "to adorn the owner of the copper" (345). The next day, all the blankets which the owner has received for the copper are distributed "among his [or her] own tribe" (345).

Boas argues that although the purchase of a copper is an important way of gaining prestige, "The rivalry between chiefs and clans finds its strongest expression in the destruction of property" (353). He claims that sometimes a "chief" burns blankets, canoes and fish oil in public gatherings to show the people that his or her mind is "stronger" and power "greater" than that of a rival. "If the [rival] is not able to destroy an equal amount of property without much delay," says Boas, "his name is "broken"." The "vanquished" rival loses influence in the community, "while the name of the other chief gains correspondingly in renown" (354). The destruction of property breaks the rival’s name by breaking the economic circle where every present returns to the giver. To burn property, one gives a gift that never comes home: a gift of smoke. The act of incineration can only be "equalled"--if it is equalled at all--by a counter-incineration.

But the most effective way to break a rival’s name is to break a copper. Boas:

Still more feared is the breaking of a valuable copper. A chief may break
his copper and give the broken parts to his rival. If the latter wants to keep his prestige, he must break a copper of equal or higher value, and then return both his own broken copper and the fragments which he has received to his rival. The latter may then pay for the copper which he has thus received (354).

To repay the gift of a broken copper by breaking a copper of one's own is to remain inside the circle of exchange, of gift and counter-gift, destruction and counter-destruction. Hence for Boas the most honorable way to receive a broken copper is to destroy everything and give nothing back to the rival: "The chief to whom the fragments are given may, however, also break his copper and throw both into the sea. The Indians consider that by this act the attacked rival has shown himself superior to his aggressor, because the latter may have expected to receive the broken copper of his rival in return so that an actual loss would have been prevented" (354). Indeed, broken coppers actually increase in value when they are riveted together and put back into circulation (354).

If there is irony at work in "The Potlatch" chapter of the "Social Organization," the contradiction lies in the fact that Boas begins by insisting the "underlying principle" of the potlatch is the "interest-bearing investment of property," but ends by suggesting the potlatch "finds its strongest expression" in the outright destruction of wealth. His text draws the idea of the potlatch apart from the idea of waste only to fold them together again. The potlatch is at once a system of banking and a mode of absolute expenditure. It allows the Kwakwaka'wakw to accumulate capital yet forces them to spend all they have.

In Potlatch: conquête et invention, Isabelle Schulte-Tenckhoff argues that Boas’s interpretation of the potlatch is not just a scientific project to understand a set of diverse and complex cultural practices, but also a highly political attempt to defend the British
Columbia First Nations from the civilizing mission of the Christian churches and the white Canadian state (120-6, especially 120-1). She says that Boas describes the potlatch as a system of interest-bearing investments to counter the missionaries and administrators who condemned it as a great waste. But anthropology has forgotten the historical context which produced Boas's account of the potlatch. Though he deployed his arguments in a local colonial conflict, his arguments have the status of primary data in the archive of Western-European anthropology (123-4). According to Schulte-Tenckhoff, Boas’s potlatch is a rhetorical invention—an invention designed to persuade Canada to lift its ban on the waste of property--which in some quarters has been elevated to the status of positive truth. But Boas’s defense of the potlatch did not succeed in freeing it from the spectre of waste, for in trying to wrench the two apart, he succeeded only in tying them all the more tightly together.

13. Sacrifice

I have done nothing so far but go round in circles. The theory of the textual gift, which I have elaborated to explain the machinations of the antipotlatch law, is itself a residue of the debate that grew up around the potlatch in late nineteenth century Canada. To articulate a theory of a gift-event that breaks with every metaphysical circle--including the circles of time and of economy--is to take up a place within that circle of interpretation which has not ceased trying to decide whether the potlatch is a system of
Mauss introduces his *Essai*—named *The Gift* in English translation—as an inquiry into the "organization of contractual law" and the "system of total economic services" of "primitive" and "archaic" societies. For Mauss, the term "primitive society" denotes a non-Western, non-industrialized social formation—the type of society Western-European ethnography takes as the object of its fieldwork. The term "archaic society" refers to Western-European culture in any of its pre-modern forms—for example ancient Rome. As for the "system of total economic services" (*le système des prestations économiques*), it includes every conceivable type of transaction, exchange and contract that passes between people living together in a given society. The system of total services is what Mauss calls a "total social fact" because it draws on the whole of a society and its institutions, such as the family, government, religion, law, morality, aesthetics and economics (*The Gift* 3 and 78).

Mauss argues that in "primitive" and "archaic" societies people have "almost always" performed the exchange of economic services by giving each other gifts (3). The exchange of gifts occurs between collectivities--such as "clans, tribes and families" (5)--not between individuals. The types of "economic services" that circulate in gift-giving societies include not only wealth and property, but also "acts of politeness: banquets, rituals, military services, women, children, dances, festivals, and fairs" (5). All gifts are obligatory, but are given as if they were voluntary. For Mauss, the distribution of presents in so-called "primitive" societies proves that no social order is
"devoid of economic markets." The study of the gift reveals how markets functioned before the development of modern forms of law, contract, sale and, especially, money (4-5). Mauss argues that the morality and organization of these gift-driven markets still survive in "our own societies...hidden below the surface," where they constitute "one of the human foundations on which our societies are built" (4).

Since the study of any "total social fact" confronts the researcher with many "very complex themes" and a "multiplicity of social 'things' that are in a state of flux," Mauss proposes to consider "only one" problem raised by the inquiry into systems of total economic services. "What rule of legality and self-interest," he asks, "in societies of a backward or archaic type, compels the gift that has been received to be obligatorily reciprocated? What power resides in the object given that causes its recipient to pay it back?" (3). Mauss emphasizes that it is the gift itself that obliges the recipient to send something home to the giver.

For Mauss, the potlatch of the British Columbia First Nations displays the system of total services in its purest form yet also passes beyond it (5-6 and 46). Though the potlatch is a means of exchanging gifts (35), it prefigures the modern European system of individual contracts and circulation of money. Like Boas, and in part because of him, Mauss describes the potlatch as a system of "total services of an agonistic type" (7). "[W]hat is noteworthy" about the "tribes" of the Pacific northwest, he says, is that their economies are based on "the principle of rivalry and hostility" (6). In the Essai the potlatch continues to be construed as a war fought with property, resulting in acts of great waste, though Mauss extends the meaning of "potlatch" to include exchanges practiced in many different parts of the world, particularly in Melanesia and Papua.
While discussing the coastal First Nations, Mauss argues that the potlatch, like every "total social fact," encompasses juridical, religious, economic, familial and aesthetic elements (38). Moreover, the things distributed in the potlatch possess an inner force which imposes "three obligations"—to give, to receive and to reciprocate—on every participant (43). For Mauss, the exchange of gifts dissolves the boundary between people and things (44-6). Everyone in the potlatching society is obliged to give to others, yet every given thing has a soul that mingles with the soul of the giver (20). To accept a gift is to accept part of the giver's spiritual essence (12), and the soul of the thing urges its recipient to give something in return for it. Thus "by giving one is giving oneself, and if one gives oneself, it is because one 'owes' oneself—one's person and one's goods—to others" (46).

Mauss affirms that the system of obligatory gift-exchange among non-Western peoples points to the existence of an "eternal morality" which Western-Europeans societies have largely forgotten. For they have made people into "economic animal[s]" who value things only insofar as they serve their own individual self-interest. In their obsession with themselves, Western-Europeans neglect the interest of society as a whole, a "total fact." Mauss insists that the economic rationality based on the "calculation of individual needs" has to be balanced by public expenditures that benefit the whole social order because the "brutish pursuit of individual ends is harmful to the ends and the peace of all" (77). If in those societies Mauss deems "ancient" and "primitive," the exchange of gifts puts an end to war, isolation and social stagnation by bringing different groups into alliances and allowing them to trade with each other (82), so in modern Western-European societies, the renewal of gift-giving and the acknowledgement of the mutual
obligations that tie different sectors of society together can produce social harmony through a return to group morality (66-71). The wealthy have an obligation to guarantee the "financial security" of the working classes whose labours produce value and profits, but the workers have to reciprocate by agreeing to work for their living instead of relying on the upper classes to support them (68-9).

I have made this detour through the *Essai* only to circle back to Derrida, who offers this comment on Mauss's "moral conclusions": "Mauss's discourse is oriented by an ethics and a politics that tend to valorize the generosity of the giving-being. They oppose a liberal socialism to the inhuman coldness of economism, of those two economisms that would be capitalist merchantilism and Marxist communism" (*Given Time* 44). However Derrida takes Mauss to task not for his middle-of-the-road liberal socialism, but for his apparent failure to ask if it is even possible to speak of an exchange of gifts. When "Mauss is describing the potlatch," says Derrida, "He speaks of it blithely as "gifts exchanged". But he never asks the question as to whether gifts can remain gifts once they are exchanged" (37). We know that for Derrida the gift enacts the impossible itself: it is not a gift unless it is given to someone by someone else, but it cannot remain a gift if the two parties perceive that something has passed between them. The thought of the gift requires that it move from giver to recipient in an instant--which is not an instant in time--of absolute forgetting when the phenomenon of giving burns up its participation in perception and memory. Derrida maintains that "Mauss does not worry enough about this incompatibility between gift and exchange or about the fact that an exchanged gift is only a tit for tat, that is, an annulment of the gift" (37).

What Derrida forgets, though, is that for Mauss the distinction between a gift,
conceived as an event that brings nothing back to the giver, and an exchange, understood as a reciprocal circulation of goods and services between two or more parties, is a "fairly recent" development peculiar to Western-European societies. In Chapter Three of the *Essai* Mauss says that "our civilizations, ever since the Semitic, Greek, and Roman civilizations, draw a strong distinction between obligations and services that are not given free, on the one hand, and gifts, on the other" (*The Gift* 47). The "strong distinction" between gift and exchange—a distinction which structures the whole of Canada's discourse against the potlatch—is an accident of Western-European history, not a universal logical necessity. And as if to contradict Derrida's criticism of him in advance, Mauss does not fail to pose a number of questions that deal directly with the problem of whether, as Derrida put it, "gifts can remain gifts once they are exchanged." "Yet are not such distinctions [such as that between gift and exchange] fairly recent in the legal systems of our great civilizations? Have these not gone through a previous phase in which they did not display such a cold, calculating mentality? Have they not in fact practised these customs of the gift that is exchanged, in which persons and things merge?" (47-8)

Derrida argues that it is precisely this merging of "persons and things," a merging which endows the thing given with a portion of the giver's soul, that allows Mauss "to pass unnoticed over that contradiction between gift and exchange [de ne pas sentir entre le don et l'échange cette contradiction] on which I have insisted so much" (39).

However Mauss makes it clear from the outset that his aim is to learn why, in certain pre-modern and non-western societies, total services are exchanged not as gifts, but as if they were gifts. Besides, for Mauss the mingling of persons and things belongs to a historical epoch that predates the strict and strictly Western-European distinction between
gift and exchange. What concerns him above all is that Western-European societies have lost their former moral insight that the thing given possesses a force obliging its recipient to give something back to the giver after a lapse of time.

It is not necessary to linger on the disagreement between Mauss and Derrida. What matters is not whether Derrida’s reading of Mauss is true or not, but what their debate gives us to think. As Derrida notes, Mauss’s claim that the gift is a mingling of persons and things leads him to posit the concept of the "term," a concept intimately bound up with the concept of the gift. By binding the gift to the term, moreover, Mauss suggests that the gift cannot be thought outside of time and narrative, for what the term "term" denotes is precisely a delay in time, which is also a delay in writing (Given Time 39). To explain how Mauss uses the term "term," Derrida cites this passage from the Essai:

in every possible form of society it is in the nature of the gift to impose an obligatory time limit. By their very definition, a meal shared in common, a distribution of kava, or a talisman that one takes away, cannot be reciprocated immediately. Time is needed in order to perform any counter-service. The notion of a time limit is thus logically involved when there is question of returning visits, contracting marriages and alliances, establishing peace, attending games or regulated combats, celebrating alternative festivals, rendering ritual services of honour, or ‘displaying reciprocal respect’ (The Gift 35-6; Derrida’s citation is longer and interspersed with his comments, Given Time 38-9. The two translations are not the same).

In the Essai the term, the difference in time which distinguishes the moment the gift is given from the deferred moment of its return, belongs to the very structure of the thing given. "Here is, it seems," says Derrida, "the most interesting idea, the great guiding thread of the Gift: For those who participate in the experience of gift and countergift, the requirement of restitution "at term," at the delayed "due date," the requirement of the
circulatory differance is inscribed in the thing itself that is given or exchanged" (Given Time 40). Every gift is necessarily divided within itself. For it bears within itself the trace of a future, of a time for giving back, which is entirely other to the time for giving away. It is the delay between these two times that makes it possible to give credit: to loan out property which is to be returned at a future date.

Since the thing given is an archive marked by two incompatible temporalities, it shares the principle of its structure with the legal text. As de Man suggests, a law is a text that always arrives at least twice: once in the moment it is formulated and later in the moment it acts. In between these moments, it gives itself something to act against. The gift given by the law therefore inhabits the term, the delay between two disjunctive instants, and since this textual gift occurs between two instants without belonging to either of them, it arrives in an instant that is not an instant in time.

Derrida argues that the term, the deferral that divides two instants but is not itself an instant in time, is what makes narrative possible. Narration occurs as a process of delay which holds together the past, present and future of a story only by keeping them apart. The term permits narrative to put space between its temporal elements without overcoming their disjunction. According to Derrida, "The thing as given thing, the given of the gift arrives, if it arrives, only in narrative" (41). Since the gift-event happens in between two narrated instants, what every textual gift "demands" if it is to "give" a "thing" to the world is that it be able to "take its time," that it be able, in other words, to occupy the delay, the term between the past, present and future of a narration--of an act of writing that does not happen all at once. "The gift gives, demands, and takes time," says Derrida, "The thing gives, demands, or takes time. That is one of the reasons this
thing of the gift will be linked to the--internal--necessity--of a certain narrative [récit] or of a certain poetics of narrative" (41).

But when the gift arrives, it drains away the meaning of the narrative that delivers it into being. For in the moment a text is generated, it is stripped of "referential meaning." It gives itself to the world by suspending its ability to point either to an object or to what is known about an object. Reference and meaning move quickly to overturn their own suspension, however, by giving themselves objects and knowledges to refer to.

Derrida traces a relation between the gift and the incineration of "referential meaning" when he argues that Mauss's effort to articulate a theory of the gift makes his theoretical narrative "go a little mad" at times (46). Here madness is described as a loss of sense. "The madness that insinuates itself even into Mauss's text," says Derrida, "is a certain excess of the gift": a mad excess that overflows and overwhelms both the word "gift" and the gift-idea which that word tries to communicate. "It goes so far perhaps as to burn up the very meaning of the gift; at the very least it threatens the presumed semantic unity that authorizes one to continue speaking of gift" (45). To write of the gift--a gift which always arrives, if it arrives, as the gift of a writing--is to reproduce that rupture in meaning which governs the generation of every text. It is as if one can only write about an event that suspends the meaning of the text in a text whose meaning is itself suspended.

What I want to underline, though, is that in Derrida's commentary on Mauss, the madness which gnaws at the word "gift" can only be thought with reference to the potlatch and, in particular, to the potlatch understood as a destruction of property. Derrida says that Mauss's "language goes mad at the point where, in the potlatch, the
process of the gift gets carried away with itself [s'empore lui-même] and where, as Mauss comes to say, "it is not even a question of giving and returning, but of destroying, so as not to want even to appear to desire repayment"

(46). According to Derrida, while Mauss is usually careful to call a gift a gift (though he in fact speaks of exchanges that mimic gifts), there is a passage in the Essai, what Derrida calls the "passage of madness," where Mauss begins to mix up the concept of the gift with the concept of sheer waste, pure expenditure—in short, the destruction of property. Says Derrida, "Whereas, in the preceding paragraphs, he has shown himself to be so scrupulous, so demanding with regard to the name gift and the necessity of calling a gift a gift [a necessity Mauss denies ten pages later], Mauss will begin to proliferate signs—to give signs, as one says—of a lexical uncertainty, as if his language were about to go a little mad one page after it had insisted so strenuously on keeping the meaning of gift for the gift" (45-6). In the passage of madness, "The trembling of this [lexical] uncertainty affects the word "gift" but also the word "exchange" with which Mauss regularly associates it" (46).

There is an unfortunate tendency, among Western-European observers, to interpret the potlatch as an instance of madness. In 1934 Ruth Benedict argued that the "object of all Kwakiutl enterprise was to show oneself superior to one's rivals," and she concluded that the collective will to "self-glorification" drove the Kwakwaka'wakw to make a virtue of megalomaniac paranoia (Patterns of Culture 190-1). For the missionaries and bureaucrats of colonial Canada, the word "potlatch" was the name for a waste that surpassed the limits of reason itself. For Mauss, the struggle for prestige leads to acts of "mad extravagance" which contrast sharply with the "cold, calculating mentality" of
modern Western-European Societies. And for Derrida, the gift that is destroyed in the mad act of giving is a figure for a non-return that afflicts language in general. I cite Derrida citing Mauss’s long "passage of madness." The interpolations are Derrida’s:

No less important in these transactions of the Indians is the role played by honor. Nowhere is the individual prestige of a chief and that of his clan so closely linked to what is spent and to the meticulous repayment with interest of gifts that have been accepted, so as to transform those who have obligated you into the obligated ones. Consumption and destruction are here really without limits. In certain kinds of potlatch, one must expend all that one has, keeping nothing back. It is a competition to see who is the richest and also the most madly extravagant [le plus follement dépensier; emphasis added]. Everything is based upon the principles of antagonism and of rivalry. The political status of individuals in the brotherhoods and clans, and ranks of all kinds are gained in a "war of property," just as they are in real war, or through chance, inheritance, alliance, and marriage. Yet everything is conceived of as if it were a "struggle for wealth." Marriages for one’s children and places in the brotherhoods are only won during the potlatch exchanged and returned. They are lost at the potlatch as they are lost in war, by gambling or in running and wrestling. In a certain number of cases, it is not even a question of giving and returning, but of destroying, so as not to want even to appear to desire repayment [emphasis added]. Whole boxes of olachen (candle-fish) oil or whale oil are burnt, as are houses and thousands of blankets. The most valuable copper objects are broken and thrown into the water, in order to crush and to "flatten" one’s rival. In this way one not only promotes oneself, but also one’s family, up the social scale. It is therefore a system of law and economics in which considerable wealth is constantly being expended and transferred. One may, if one so desires, call these transfers by the name of exchange or even trade and sale; but [emphasis added] such trade is noble, replete with etiquette and generosity. At least, when it is carried on in another spirit, with a view to immediate gain, it is the object of very marked scorn. (Derrida, Given Time 46-7; Mauss, The Gift 37)

It seems the more Western-European observers describe the potlatch, the more extravagant their narratives become. While in the "Social Organization" Boas reports that names and privileges are acquired either by inheritance or by killing their owner, and are simply given "weight" through potlatching, Mauss assures his readers that political
status and "ranks of all kinds" are "won" or "lost" in potlatches which take the form of outright battles and where masses of property go up in smoke.

Derrida’s commentary suggests that what burns itself up in Mauss’s narrative about the burning of property is not just the word "gift" but "everything that claims to know what gift and non-gift mean to say [veulent dire]." A "lexical madness" is at work, which "manages to eat away at language itself" (47). "There is always a moment," says Derrida, "when this madness begins to burn up the word or the meaning "gift" itself and to disseminate without return its ashes as well as its terms or germs" (47). In the "passage of madness," the "word or meaning "gift"" incinerates itself because it draws too close to its opposites. But its opposites begin to burn at the same time. Mauss’s text destroys the concept "gift" as well as its contraries--"return," "exchange," "trade" and "sale"--by making them say the same thing as "destruction" and, in particular, "destruction without return."

Derrida has already said that the madness which annuls the meaning of "gift" here is itself "a certain excess of the gift." It is therefore the gift that gives the gift of madness. What is more, this gift, which for Derrida is always a gift of a narrative text, irrupts within a discourse that is already underway, and reorganizes the relationship between that discourse and the things it describes. In giving a gift the text destroys its own meaning, just as the coastal First Nations are said to destroy their own property, without hope of receiving any wealth in "return." But just as--according to northwest coast ethnography--the destruction of property sends back a counter-gift of prestige to the person whose property is consumed, so the text that incinerates its own meaning works to give itself a countergift of meaning, and even of reference, to replace what was lost in
Derrida’s reading of Mauss folds the thought of the gift—"always" a gift of writing—into the vicinity of the potlatch understood as a sacrifice of wealth. But were they ever far apart? In "From Restricted to General Economy...," an essay on Bataille, Derrida gives a name to the event where a text incinerates its own meaning. That name is "potlatch." Here, as in Given Time, words raze themselves of sense when they participate in a discourse that indulges in excess, one that gives too much and without limit: "the destruction of discourse is not simply an erasing neutralization," says Derrida, "It multiplies words, precipitates them one against the other, engulfs them too." Yet the event of textual "sacrifice" does not "multiply" words that have no meaning to begin with, or that have been stripped of their established meanings: what is at stake is "Not a reserve or a withdrawal, not the infinite murmur of a blank speech erasing the traces of classical discourse." Rather, the textual sacrifice makes words mean nothing by making them mean too much: it is "a kind of potlatch of signs that burns, consumes, and wastes words in a gay affirmation of death: a sacrifice and a challenge" (Writing 274, emphasis added).

14. Fire at the Limit

I have argued that the gift makes a crease in the postal-colonial text, and this crease in turn marks a limit where Europe folds back over all that it repeatedly tries to
locate at an absolute distance from itself. For Derrida, the gift itself traces both a limit and a fold. For it sets Europe apart from its exterior while at the same time drawing them into an intimate proximity.

There is a passage in *Glas*--a text which declares that "what affords reading affords reading by citations" (168)--where the thought of the gift overlaps the two incommensurable sides of an absolute border: a limit that lies at the outermost edge of Europe itself, on the edge of European history. In this passage, Derrida construes the gift as a burnt offering, a "holocaust," that makes the history of Being possible without belonging to it. This gift of the possibility of European history stands on the threshold of Europe: is neither inside it nor outside it, but both at once. Says Derrida, "the process of the gift (before exchange), the process that is not a process but a holocaust, a holocaust of the holocaust, engages the history of Being but does not belong to it" (*Glas* 242).

How can the self-immolating gift touch on the history of Being without touching it? To answer that question it is necessary to recall that for Heidegger (a certain Heidegger) the history of Europe happens as the recollection of the destining of Being. We know that in the "Letter on Humanism" he defines destining as an act of giving. Destining is a gift that Being gives to itself, of itself. Any thinking that inquires into Being is necessarily historical (or "historial" [geschichtlich]), says Heidegger, because "The happening of history occurs essentially as the destiny of the truth of Being and from it. Being comes to destiny in that It, Being, gives itself" ("Letter" 215). The "historial" destining of Being determines the way beings give themselves to thought and experience in each epoch of Western-European history ("Letter" 214). The historicity of Being
names the very possibility of history, understood as the history of humanity's past experience. But Being gives being to historical events only by directing thought away from itself. That is why the gift of Being generates the history of beings without participating in it: Being makes a gift of history but does not "belong" to any given historical epoch.

Since Being is a postal principle that delivers beings to their history, but is not a being itself—since it is not even though it sends the "is" to whatever is—Being at once gives itself and burns itself up. It gives history but never arrives there itself. According to Derrida, "The gift is not; the holocaust is not; if at least there is some such" (Glas 242). Because it "engages" the circle of European history without belonging to it, the event which gives Being occurs along Europe's outermost limit. The gift of Being gives onto a region—which is not a region of Being—which makes European history possible but is itself neither European nor historical. This gift lies simultaneously inside and outside of Europe's history, on its absolute edge.

The moment such a limit offers itself to thought, however, it folds together everything which it holds apart, drawing Europe over against the beyond of its own history: "But as soon as it [the gift] burns (the blaze is not a being)," says Derrida, "it must, burning itself, burn its action [opération] of burning and begin to be. This reflection (in both senses of the word) of the holocaust engages history, the dialectic of sense, ontology, the speculative [Derrida is discussing Hegel]" (242). Though the gift which delivers things into Being is not, though it gives presence to present things only insofar as it burns up its own participation in history, nevertheless the "mad energy of a gift" leaves something of itself behind after sacrificing itself (243). Otherwise there
would be no gift. For a gift that gives nothing is no gift at all. And the residue of the gift must be even if the gift itself is not. However, since the gift by definition leaves a legacy of itself in being, it finds a place for itself within the history which it sets going but is supposed to escape. The gift-event at once brings Europe into contact with the beyond of its history—a site which is exterior to the destining of Being but which makes that destining possible—and allows the history of Being to overlap its beyond by granting it a legacy that remains with it, but is not. There is (es gibt) a constraint that folds European history onto its ahistorical beyond: "what this constriction provokes is perforce a counter-gift, an exchange, in the space of debt" (243).

The gift of Being is a pure gift, a gift without return, in that it gives Europe its history without giving anything that would demand a counter-gift. But it is an exchange, a circulation of gift and countergift, in that it leaves a residue of itself behind in the history it gives to Europe, and a gift which leaves something of itself with its recipient—bestowing a legacy that creates a debt and obliges a countergift—annuls its status as gift and makes a place for itself on the circle of exchange. The gift of Being obliges a return as soon as Europe succeeds in interiorizing it, keeping close to this gift-event that, by definition, is supposed to remain heterogeneous to the history it makes possible. Indeed, the gift ceases to occupy the beyond of Europe the moment it becomes the negative of Europe, becoming what Europe is not, its opposite, its outside. For Europe has no trouble absorbing its contraries and holding them within itself, sublating them. If the gift is to remain wholly other to Europe, it must refuse to leave behind something of itself for Europe to swallow.

For Derrida, Being brings beings into their own but burns itself up, giving the gift
of ownness to things while setting fire to its own presence, a presence that would, if it
did not burn away, be proper to Being itself. But the gift of Being inevitably burns up
the burning that incinerates its participation in Being. And in burning this burning it
begins to be. The gift is therefore both a destruction of the proper and a destruction of
the destruction of the proper. It is a destruction of property. It is what both Mauss and
Derrida call a "potlatch."

Heidegger says that the inquiry into the truth of Being brings Western-European
metaphysics to an end by returning it to what it has forgotten since its beginning: the
thought of Being. What Derrida suggests in Glas, though, is that to return to the thought
of Being, a Being that makes a gift both of itself and of history, is to begin thinking the
potlatch. Metaphysics reaches its outermost limit, finding its beginning in its end, on the
northwest coast of North America. When it can go no further west without giving way to
the East, the West finds its truth reflected back to itself from a site which is said to be
neither Western nor Eastern. On this its westernmost rim, the West rediscovers the true
meaning of its Being. The truth is that Being, which cannot be thought apart from the
gift, is a fiery potlatch. The British Columbia First Nations have been made to serve the
ends of the West: they have given it its own paradoxical truth.
Then the wolves offered him the water of life and the death bringer. He thought: "That is what I came for." WiLaqā'latit knew his thoughts and gave them to him. Then he ordered the wolves to devour Ya’xstaL. At once they tore him to pieces and devoured him. They vomited the flesh, and when WiLaqā’latit sprinkled it with the water of life, Ya’xstaL arose hale and well. He had become exceedingly strong.

(In Boas, "Social Organization," 570-1)
1. Giving Eating

_Tamanalatch_. As a constative utterance, section 114 prohibited "any Indian festival, dance or other ceremony of which the giving away or paying or giving back of money, goods or articles of any sort forms a part, or is a feature," while as a performative, it came into force as a ban on waste: waste of property, of time and of women. But the statute also banned "any celebration or dance of which the wounding or mutilation of the dead or living body of any human being or animal forms a part or is a feature." In 1885 the Indian Act had given the name ""Tamanawas"" to this second "celebration or dance," without defining it. If the "potlatch" proved to be a crime of pure loss, what sort of thing did ""Tamanawas"" name? I. W. Powell had described it as an orgy of cannibalism in 1881. By the first decade of the twentieth century, however, white administrators began affirming that the "Tamanawas" was itself a kind of potlatch.

At the end of January 1904 secretary McLean informed Arthur Vowell that the department was planning to amend the Indian Act to "further" curtail "the practice of dancing among Indians in Manitoba and the North West Territories." He wanted to know whether or not "similar action" was needed in British Columbia. Since 1897 Indian agents and the North-West Mounted Police had used section 114 to discourage the First Nations of the prairies from performing "sun" and "thirst" dances (Titley 165-7). McLean instructed Vowell to determine how the legislation had contributed to the "suppression of dancing" in British Columbia and asked Indian agents to submit reports on the subject (RG 10, v. 3629, f. 6244-2; 27 January 1904). Most agents--including those from the Williams Lake, Kootenay, Cowichan, Kamloops-Okanagan, North West
Coast and Babine Agencies—answered that dancing was not a problem in their jurisdictions. Only three had anything to contribute to the department’s inquiry.

R. C. McDonald had just taken charge of the Fraser Agency, and his report was based not on his own observations, but on the testimony of missionaries. He advised the department to find a new, less "simple" word for tamanawas dances, for "although these gatherings now go by the simple name of dances, they are nevertheless similar in many respects to what was formerly called potlatches" (McDonald to Vowell, 12 February and 21 March 1904).

A. W. Neill of the West Coast Agency also stressed the difficulty of attaching names to ethnographic objects. His report warns that "the word "potlach" must be interpreted with caution," because its field of reference stretches "from what a white man might call an invitation to dinner up to a frenzied carouse leaving the hosts absolutely penniless" (Neill to Vowell, 12 February 1904). According to Neill, "Potlach" points not just to feasts and "absolute" expenditures, but to the tamanawas dance as well. "The subject [of "Indian dancing"] can not be adequately discussed," he writes, "without considering also the question of "potlaches" with which it is almost inseparably connected." "Section 114 constitutes two offenses, the potlach--and the tamanawas dance"--which are in fact two parts of a larger whole. Neill adds that on the west coast of Vancouver Island it is incorrect to call a tamanawas a "tamanawas" since the Nuu'chah'nuulth have their own name for their winter dance: "what passes here as [the] equivalent [of the tamanawas], is called--the Clokwana or wolf dance." The "wolf dance" always includes a potlatch, he says, but not every potlatch is accompanied by a "wolf dance." Although he claims the dance-potlatch used to have "objectionable
features"--children were kidnapped, people gnawed on disembowelled dogs, men were hung up by their skin--he insists it has been "innocent" of them since the arrival of settler society. For Neill, the only remaining problem is that of waste--specifically the waste of time--and he advises the department to keep the antidance statute on the books because "its moral influence is considerable." Ironically, he recommends that it should not be enforced.

George Ward DeBeck had taken over the Kwawkelwth Agency in 1902. He does not even mention the "tamanawas" in his report, but notes instead that in Kwakwala the correct name for the outlawed dance is "Ha-mat-sa." The "only objectionable dance practised by these Indians, that I know of," he writes, "is what is known as the Ha-mat-sa or Cedar Bark dance," and "this dance, like all the others practiced by them, is not a ceremony of itself, but belongs to and is a part of the potlatch" (19 February 1904). For DeBeck, the relation of potlatch to Ha-mat-sa is like that of center to margin: "the potlatch being the center or body, and the dances, feasts, etc, are what one might call the trimmings." It "is impossible to separate one from the other." Among the Kwakwaka'akw, the practices banned in section 114 are two moments of a single process: the tamanawas is the Ha-mat-sa, and the Ha-mat-sa is the potlatch. Or rather, the Ha-mat-sa is a prosthesis strapped to the "body" of the potlatch--just as, in these agents' reports, words are prostheses repeatedly tied and retied to things in the search for a name that fits.

DeBeck had been preparing to suppress the potlatch, with all its trimmings, since the summer of 1903, when he consulted a Vancouver lawyer about "the exact legal procedure" for enforcing section 114 (DeBeck to William MacLaughlin, and
MacLaughlin to McLean, 20 and 21 July and 5 August 1903). On 24 December the Victoria Daily Times published an article about a "Ha-Matsa Dance" underway on the Koskimo Reservation. Though the article passed itself off as "news," it was a summary of ethnographic data drawn from Boas's "Social Organization"—particularly from Chapter Ten, which describes the initiation of a Koskimo "Ha-Matsa" in the winter of 1895. The article calls the "Ha-Matsa" dance "a cannibalistic rite" and claims the "Ha-Matsa" bites members of the audience, tearing "mouthfuls of flesh" from their arms. Four days after it was published, Vowell called DeBeck's attention to the story, telling him that "Should it be the case that the Indian medicine man actually bit the arms, etc., of other Indians and that he also indulged in cannabalistic performances...the ringleaders should be punished" (28 December 1903). Paradoxically, though he had ordered Debeck to enforce the law, before long Vowell began to discourage him from doing what he was told. Over the next two years, whenever DeBeck took measures to suppress the potlatch, Vowell accused him of incompetence and complained to Ottawa about his lack of discretion. Vowell undermined DeBeck's antipotlatch campaign just as he had undermined Pidcock's antipotlatch effort in the late 1890s—an effort which Vowell had also set in motion (Vowell to DeBeck 8 January, to deputy-superintendent Frank Pedley, 30 January, and to McLean, 19 March, 5 April and 30 May 1904).

DeBeck's only concerted attack on the potlatch came in April 1904 when with the help of a police officer and a special constable, he intervened in a gathering at Fort Rupert. Instead of making arrests under section 114 of the Indian Act, he fined five people under section 22, which restricted the movement of aboriginal people between reserves. Since he had not used the antipotlatch statute against them, the potlatchers
concluded that they had beaten the law. When DeBeck tried to break up large potlatches again in the fall of 1904 and in the summer of 1905, he received little support either from the department or from the provincial government. He resigned in April 1906. That July Parliament passed a consolidated Indian Act and section 114 was relocated to section 149 (DeBeck to Vowell, 17 April 1904, and Extract from DeBeck’s Report for April 1904; Cole and Chaikin 71).

After 1906 the discourse against the potlatch focussed with renewed intensity on the social practices of the Kwakwaka’wakw: the people Boas had identified in the 1880s as the absolute others of Europe. What is more, Boas’s "Social Organization" had somehow entangled itself in the public debate over the Ha-Matsa-potlatch, making a chance irruption within an ongoing discourse. Since a newspaper’s unacknowledged citation of this text had set off another clumsy attempt to enforce the law against giving and dancing, one might ask how the Ha-Matsa is given to be thought in the "Social Organization". It is here, above all, that Boas deploys the full weight of his reputation as "a recognized authority" on northwest coast anthropology to affirm that hamatsa dancers indulge in acts of ritual cannibalism. Yet, ironically, his text withdraws this affirmation in the very act of giving it.

Secret Societies. In the "Social Organization" Boas states that the hâmats’a dance, as practiced by the Kwaguilth of Fort Rupert, cannot be understood without reference to their system of marriage. "Marriage among the Kwakiutl must be considered a purchase," he writes, "which is conducted on the same principles as the purchase of a copper"(358)—an interpretation which Indian affairs officials will soon come to share.
Boas suggests that the Kwagiulth woman is a commodity because her family sells her in marriage to the man of their choice. However the purchase money which the groom pays to his wife’s family buys him not only a bride, "but also the right of membership in her clan for the future children of the couple" (358). Since clan privileges pass from their owner, through his or her son-in-law, to the son-in-law’s children (359), marriage is a means of reproducing the Kwagiulth social organization.

When a marriage is arranged, the woman’s family agrees to return the purchase money to their son-in-law, with interest, at a future date. "The wife is given to him as a first installment of the return payment," says Boas. "The crest of the clan, its privileges, and a considerable amount of other property besides, are given later on, when the couple have children, and the rate of interest is the higher the greater the number of children." After the woman’s family has repaid her "purchase money," she is free to leave her husband. She is also free to stay (359). What Boas fails to consider, though, is that since the man pays for his partner on the condition that he is to be paid back later with interest, it could be said that the woman’s family buys her a husband instead of selling him a wife.

During the return of the purchase money, the father-in-law gives the son-in-law not just clan privileges, but the right to belong to certain "secret societies" which are watched over by "guardian spirits" endowed with "supernatural powers," though the son-in-law acquires this right not for himself but for his children (393). Boas asserts that "the acquisition of a guardian spirit" is an "idea" which has "attained its strongest development in America" (393). "Every young man endeavours to find a protector of this kind," he says, and "to gain their help, the youth must prepare himself by fasting and
washing, because only the pure find favour with them, while they kill the impure" (393).

For Boas, the First Nations of the northwest coast are unique in North America in that their young people inherit a "protector" and do not find one (393).

Every clan possesses stories which recall how its ancestor first encountered a guardian spirit. In these stories the spirit gives the ancestor not only a special power, such as a magic harpoon for hunting sea-otter, but also "a dance, a song, and cries which are peculiar to the spirit" (396). The stories are not fictions divorced from reality because the spirit guardian remains "in constant contact" with the ancestor’s living descendants. To dance is to relive an ancestor’s encounter with this spirit. Says Boas,

In these dances he personates the spirit. He wears his mask and his ornaments. Thus the dance must be considered a dramatic performance of the myth relating to the acquisition of the spirit, and shows to the people that the performer by his visit to the spirit has obtained his powers and desires. When nowadays a spirit appears to a young Indian, he gives him the same dance, and the youth also returns from the initiation filled with the powers and the desires of the spirit (396).

The spirit also gives the novice a name. According to Boas, "each name of the nobility has a separate tradition of the acquisition of supernatural powers" (418).

Boas warns that although to acquire a guardian spirit is to inherit an ancestor’s name, that name is to be used "only during the time when the spirits dwell among the Indians—that is, in winter," when "all the summer names are dropped, and the members of the nobility [what might be termed the name-bearing class] take their winter names" (418). The transition from "summer" to "winter" names transforms the whole social organization: "Instead of being grouped in clans," says Boas, "the Indians are now grouped according to the spirits which have initiated them" (418). "The period when the clan system is in force is called bā´xus," he adds, "which term also designates those who
have not been initiated by any spirit, and might be translated "profane." The winter period "is called ts’è’ts’aëqa, the secrets," though there are other words for it (418). Each winter name has a fixed place within a secret society, and each society is made up of "a limited number of names" (418).

Boas argues that the Kwagiulth have two groups of secret societies: the seals, or mē’émqoat, and the quē’qutsa. The seal societies consist of winter name-holders who are "possessed" by guardian spirits, while the quē´qutsa "embrace those individuals who, for the time being, are not possessed by the spirits," often because they have transferred their seal names to younger relatives (420). The seals are divided into two groups: the la´xsâ and the wī´xsâ. The la´xsâ are the highest in rank and have been initiated by the guardian spirit "BaxbakuālanuXsī´waē": they have "gone through [his] house" and "learned all his secrets." In contrast the wī´xsâ have "leaned against [the] walls" of his house but have not gone through it (420). Although here Boas says "every young man" seeks a guardian spirit, he notes elsewhere that at least two la´xsâ societies—the Ha´mshamtEs and the K·i´nqalaLala--are made up almost exclusively of women (see 463 and 438).

The hā´mats’a are the highest ranking la´xsâ at Fort Rupert. They are initiated by BaxbakuālanuXsī´waē, and during their initiation, they are "possessed of the violent desire of eating men" (437). Their desire mirrors his desire, moreover, for BaxbakuālanuXsī´waē is "a cannibal living on the mountains who is always in pursuit of man" (394). He has several helpers. They include "his servant (or wife)" Q’ō´minōqas, "who procures food for him"; his "female slave" K·i´nqalaLala, who catches people and gathers corpses for him; his slave Qoā´xqoāxuālanuXsīwaē, a raven who eats the eyes of
his victims; the hō'Xkōk-, a "fabulous bird...which lives on the brains of men" (394); and the cannibal grizzly bear Nā'nēs BaxbakuālanuXsiˈwaē, "who delights in killing people with his strong paws" (395).

Boas calls the rite of initiation into a "secret society" the "winter ceremonial." Its goal is "to bring back the youth who is supposed to stay with the supernatural being who is the protector of his society, and then, when he has returned in a state of ecstasy, to exorcise the spirit which possesses him and to restore him from his holy madness" (431). The ceremonial "generally" coincides with the refund of the marriage-purchase money (500), for it is here that the father-in-law gives his seat in one of the secret societies to one of his son-in-law's children (501). To become eligible for a name in the hāˈmats'a society, the child must first pass through each of the lower societies. Then the youth's father invites three leading elders to his house and announces that he wants to make his child a hāˈmats'a. The elders determine whether or not the father can afford the ceremony, which is "exceedingly expensive" (501). If he passes this test, he calls "all the chiefs of the tribe" to a meeting to be held in four days. Here the three elders tell the "young chiefs" about the planned initiation, and the father of the novice informs his father-in-law that "he desires to have the blankets which he paid for his wife returned, and that he wants to have the box containing his father-in-law's dance" (501). The box contains dance regalia, such as whistles and ornaments of red cedar bark (518). Four days later the three elders call the people together and ask them to prepare for the intitiation. Four days later still the novice vanishes and is heard in the woods crying
"hāp, hāp, hāp"—"eating, eating, eating"—the sound of the cannibal spirit (503), which means BaxbakuālanuXsi´waē has taken the youth to his house for initiation into the cannibal ceremonies. In four days the people will stop using their summer names and prepare to bring the novice home (503).

[15 November 1886] Today I found something worthwhile: a very old, well-preserved skull. I discovered it in the mound I spoke of yesterday. I hope to find more tomorrow.

When the four days have passed, the father of the novice distributes red cedar bark ornaments among the people and gives a number of feasts (504-18). Meanwhile the father-in-law calls in his debts and amasses his property, "principally food, blankets, boxes, dishes, spoons, kettles, bracelets, coppers, and box lids" (518). Then he repays the purchase money to his son-in-law. After receiving his father-in-law's winter dance and name, the son-in-law announces that he will bring his son back from the woods in four days (519-20). As the return of the novice unfolds, he will give away everything he has just received from his father-in-law.

Boas says that the return and taming of the novice takes four days. First the people bring the novice home from the woods by performing a carefully selected sequence of dances and songs. Then the novice is "tamed" by women who dance for her or him and by singers who perform songs composed for the occasion (431 and 520-1). The ceremony ends with the "purification" of the new hā´mats’a (431).

Why make this second detour through the "Social Organization"? It leads us back to the question of cannibalism, which has haunted this essay from the outset, and draws attention once more to the mechanics of the textual gift. It also makes it possible to ask who, in the context of Canadian postal-colonialism, are the true cannibals—the Kwagiulth
or their colonizers?

To grapple with these problems, it is necessary to examine how Boas's account of the cannibal dance changes each time it is repeated. The differences between certain recurring moments in the text need to be underlined because, as Derrida advises us to expect, the textual gift arrives in between the instants of a given narrative. In Chapter Eight, for example, the novice who is "possessed" by the cannibal spirit is said to have a violent craving for human flesh. After returning to the dancing house, she or he "bites pieces of flesh out of the arms and chests of the people" (438). "In olden times," adds Boas, "when the hā´mats´a was in a state of ecstasy, slaves were killed for him, whom he devoured" (439). One informant confides that "it is exceedingly hard to eat fresh human flesh, much more so than to eat dried corpses" (440). After the initiation, new hā´mats´as observe a number of rituals to cleanse their bodies, which have allegedly tasted human flesh, and they give blankets to anyone they have bitten or whose slaves they have killed (443).

At these instants, which occur in a cluster, Boas's narrative clearly states that the hā´mats´a is an authentic cannibal. Yet the text withdraws that thesis a few paragraphs later. "Nowadays," writes Boas further down, "when the ceremonies have lost much of their former cruelty, they do not actually bite the piece of flesh out of the arm, but merely pull the skin up with their teeth, sucking hard so as to remove as much blood as possible, and then with a small sharp knife cut off secretly a piece of skin" which is returned to its owner afterwards (440-1, emphasis added). But what if both the former
It is most unpleasant work to steal bones from a grave, but what is the use, someone has to do it.

Boas's text has given to the archive of Western-European ethnography?

When Boas describes other dances, he emphasizes that every apparent act of violence is a carefully staged piece of theatre. For instance, there is a certain t'ō´X'uít dancer, "almost always" a woman, who openly "invite[s] the people to kill" her as she dances (487 and 489). An attendant "will appear to drive a wedge through her head from one temple to the other," but as the use of the phrase "will appear" suggests, this murder is pure artifice. "The wedge is first shown to the people and then secretly exchanged for another one, which consists of two parts attached to a wooden band that is slipped over her head and covered with hair" (489, emphasis added). A good deal of fake gore accompanies the feigned murder:

"bladders containing blood, which are attached to the band, are burst, and the blood is seen to flow down her face." The blood "is seen" to be blood from the onlooker’s point of view, but for the dancer, it is a stage prop. Curiously, even as the text calls attention to the illusions woven by the t'ō´X'uít dancer, it resists admitting that she is capable of artifice. At one point, the text simultaneously affirms that she "bites her cheeks" to produce blood, and that she releases artificial blood without biting herself at all: "She also bites her cheeks or bursts a small bag containing blood
which she holds in her mouth, so that it flows out of her mouth" (489, emphasis added). Her blood is said to be real even as it is shown to be staged.

Why is it that when the hā´mats’a dancers bite someone, the blood they draw is declared to be real rather than artificial? If the text can admit, albeit not without contradiction, that the t’ō´X’ūıt is highly trained in theatrical techniques, why does it deny the same possibility to the hā´mats’a? The answer is that the "Social Organization" is governed by a pattern of give and take. Like a cannibal, the text posits a thesis only to swallow it again. It simultaneously places facts before the reader and withdraws them from view, folding the ideas "hāmats’a" and "cannibal" together in the act of drawing them apart.

As soon as Boas has affirmed that "nowadays" the hā´mats’as of Fort Rupert no longer practice real acts of cruelty, his discourse turns and states the opposite, declaring that cannibalism continues to play a role in every initiation. "When a new hā´mats’a, after being initiated, returns from the woods," he writes, "he will sometimes carry a corpse, which is eaten after his dance.... The hā´mats’a must use for this ceremony the corpse of one of his deceased relatives" (441). But the hā´mats’a never eats alone. His K·i´nqalaLala comes out of the woods with him. She too is a relative, and because her task is to procure food for the hā´mats’a, she carries the corpse that is to be devoured (441-2).

After saying that the novice returns with a corpse, Boas describes the two dances which the same novice performs in the dancing house. "The first dance represents him [1 Decemer 1894] Today is packing day.... George and I went out to get some skulls. An Indian came our way, however, so we could not do much. I tried again in the afternoon, but this time a Hamatsa came and I had to give up.
as looking for human flesh to eat" (443, emphasis added). Here the hâ´mats’a acts as if he were a cannibal, but not as a cannibal. Says Boas, "his head is lifted up, as though he was looking for a body that was being held high up in front of him" by the corpse-bearing K·i´nqalaLala (443, emphasis added). There is no body, however, because the hands of the K·i´nqalaLala—who "dances backward in front of him"—are empty. "She stands erect and holds her hands and forearms extended forward as though she was carrying a body for the hâ´mats’a to eat" (444, emphasis added).

The give and take of Boas’s text works by first hiding a set of textual markers and then revealing them. These markers include words and phrases like "as though," "is seen," "secretly exchanged" and "represents." When revealed, they alert the reader that the hâ´mats’a’s cannibalism is a sophisticated dramatization of an inherited story. When they are withdrawn, the hâ´mats’a’s cannibalism is given to the reader as an actual practice: "is seen" gives way to "is." The moment the markers return, however, the reality of cannibalism is withdrawn again, and the cannibal dance resumes its status as artifice.47

The link tying the hâ´mats’a to cannibalism is a gift of Boas’s text, and that gift is delivered in the interval dividing the instant when the marks of artifice are revealed from the instant they are hidden. Suspended between the moments of an ethnographic narrative, the gift arrives in an instant that is not an instant in time. The interplay of hiding and revealing erases the limit between artifice and reality altogether, and enables the text to offer the hâ´mats’a’s feigned cannibalism to the world as an actual practice.

By the time Boas’s account was cited in the Victoria Daily News, it had become "real"--
so real that it impelled Arthur Vowell to consider enforcing a statute which he usually ignored.

2. Remembering Death

Meanwhile the potlatch correspondence was settling into its own pattern of give and take, for it began to be traversed by two opposing forces. First there was a drive towards death. It compelled administrators to repeat over and over that the potlatch was nearing extinction. But there was also a drive towards life, because even as they were consigning the potlatch to its grave, the same administrators were compelled to admit that it had been resurrected—or that it had never died in the first place.

_The Dying Potlatch._ In March 1898 a Vancouver lawyer named R. W. Harris sent the superintendent general of Indian Affairs a set of identically worded petitions signed by the people of several Nisga’a, Tsimshian and Haisla villages on the north coast.

The petitioners declared that their "emancipation" from ignorance, superstition, and barbarism is impeded, and opposed by the custom of _giving away, and destroying property,_—a custom generally called "potlatch," together with its preliminary, and supplementary rites and ceremonies at which the _bodies of human beings and dogs are frequently bitten and mutilated,_ such rites and ceremonies, though variously designated within the tribes, being commonly known to outsiders as "tamanawas."

Secretary J. D. McLean replied that the department’s policy was to let these "festivals"
wane of their own accord (RG 10, v. 3628, f. 6244-1; McLean to Vowell, 15 March 1898; Harris to Minister of the Interior, [9] March 1898; McLean to Harris, 15 March 1898).

About a year later three Nisga’a elders hand-delivered a petition against the potlatch to British Columbia attorney general Joseph Martin. "We did not know that there could be a dead law on the Law Book," they write, "But the Potlatch law seems to be dead" (Martin to Sifton, 29 April 1899). Superintendent Vowell answered that it was "The custom" that was "dying out gradually"—not the law. In September he received another Nisga’a petition thanking him for ignoring the potlatch’s opponents (RG 10, v. 3629, f. 6244-2; Vowell to McLean, 25 May 1899; Petition, 13 September 1899).

Vowell repeated his prophecy of death in 1904 when McLean asked him to gauge the impact of antidance legislation in British Columbia. Although Vowell described the winter dances as a waste of time and a cause of poor health, he insisted the old ways were steadily dying out and did not need a law to kill them. He noted later that the practice of dancing had "entirely died out" in many parts of the province (Vowell to McLean, 9 February and 22 October 1904). When John Ford of Broughton Island wrote his member of parliament in 1906 to complain about potlatching in communities where "Until recently cannibalism was held sacred," the deputy superintendent general of Indian affairs, Frank Pedley, responded that "the Department for long past has been following a well defined policy which beginning with the suppression of the more objectionable features aims at the eventual extinction of these dances and festivals" (Ford to William Sloan, 8 June 1906; Pedley to Sloan, 21 June 1906).

Not every official thought the potlatch ought to be allowed to die in peace. In
1904 George DeBeck predicted that it would kill its supporters unless it were killed first. "I am determined if possible to break up this pernicious practise indulged in by these Indians," he writes, "as it is fast decimating their numbers and will in a short time exterminate the whole lot of them" (DeBeck to Vowell, 1 April 1904). For DeBeck, the potlatch was not just an avenue for the spread of contagious and deadly diseases. Rather, it was death itself.

*The Reviving Potlatch.* Ironically, while white officials were assuring themselves that it was almost dead, Bill Uslick—so far the only man to be jailed for giving all—asked the department for permission to hold another potlatch (RG 10, v. 3629, f. 6244-2; Jukes to Vowell, 13 November 1902). The vanishing tradition had refused to die on schedule. But some officials were unwilling to admit their predictions had been wrong: they suggested that the potlatch had indeed passed away but then returned from the dead. In May 1912 missionary A. E. Green, now employed as an Indian school inspector, reported that "The Indians are becoming demoralized by the *revival* of the old "Potlatch" in British Columbia (10 May 1912, emphasis added). A year later he warned that "it is spreading" (14 May 1913). In winter 1914 T. Ferrier, the national superintendent of Methodist schools and hospitals, advised the department that "Something should be done...in the stamping out the *revival* of the old heathen feast of the Pot Latch" (26 January 1914, emphasis added). But there was no reason to conclude that the reviving potlatch had ever died. What about dancing?

When Green passed through the West Coast Agency early in 1909, he had observed that "The Indians in the village [of Clayoquot] resurrected the "Wolf" dance
this winter and carried it to extremes" (2 March 1909, emphasis added). Indian Agent A. W. Neill replied sardonically that "The wolf dance could not be spoken of as having been revived as it never died" (14 April 1909). Nor was it to die in the immediate future. Years later, in 1920, constables from the provincial police and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (R.C.M.P.) laid informations against forty-three people for attending a winter dance and potlatch at Clayoquot at Christmas time. The accused were fined for giving presents although, as they later argued, they "were doing no more than is customary with the white people" at that time of year (RG 10, v. 3630, f. 6244-4, Pt. 1; Keatta and Atlea to DIA, 12 January 1921; R.C.M.P. report, 7 January 1921).

In 1920 the department also received a second-hand report from a missionary complaining about the "revival" of the potlatch in Gitksan communities on the upper Skeena. He described its rebirth as a fall from whiteness. "At first it began in a small way by having small feasts of the dead and conducted in a half Christian manner," he writes, but "Year after year the evil increased until today they potlatch as if they were heathen" (in Shearer to Scott, 9 November 1920). Although R. E. Loring was preparing to retire from the Babine agency, he posted notices warning that the R.C.M.P. was ready to enforce the law (Loring to McLean, 22 December 1920). Ironically, more than twenty years earlier he had argued that it would be better to repeal the statute than to enforce it because he claimed winter dances had already died and the potlatch was about to follow them (RG 10, v. 3629, f. 6244-2; 15 July 1897).

Impossible Mourning. Why, in their correspondence with themselves, did settlers, missionaries and government administrators pronounce the potlatch dead even as they
acknowledged it was still alive? One could argue that bureaucrats predicted its death so they could avoid enforcing the law against it. Their talk was an excuse for their inaction. One could also argue that missionaries were quick to declare the potlatch dead because by dying it would show that their work had not been wasted. As J. W. Grant notes, they found it especially difficult to disseminate Christianity among the British Columbia First Nations (*Moon* 136). But there is another reason why the potlatch correspondence folds together a drive to forecast death with a drive to affirm life. According to this other reason, these two discursive tendencies belong to a system of thought which once allowed European-Canada to conceive of itself as a homogeneously white society.

In this system, whiteness gives itself to be thought in the disjunction that separates two forms of recollection. It is a gift that negotiates the gap between an interiorizing memory, which permits the white body politic to dream of absorbing aboriginal cultures into itself, and a thinking memory, which situates white Canada in relation to a set of aboriginal cultures which it cannot swallow, interiorize, cannibalize. According to Derrida, the mutual incompatibility between these two forms of recollection manifests itself in the work of mourning.

And what is mourning? Freud says that "the work which mourning performs" consists of the slow and painful loosening of the "attachments" which tie us to a loved one who has died ("Mourning and Melancholia" 244). Since we do not give up such attachments easily, mourning allows us to prolong them. By taking the departed other inside ourselves, we win time to undo each of the "memories and expectations" which bind us to an other who is no longer present (245).

In *Mémoires*, a text that mourns the death of Paul de Man, Derrida acknowledges
that "since Freud" the work of mourning has been described as "a movement in which an interiorizing idealization takes in itself or upon itself the body and voice of the other, the other's visage and person, ideally and quasi-ideally devouring them" (34). An interiorizing idealization is an act of virtual cannibalism. It requires the memory of the bereaved subject to preserve the dead by swallowing them.

Derrida contrasts interiorizing memory with a memory that is oriented towards the approach, rather than the departure, of the other. This other memory is not distinct from interiorizing memory, however, because it is what makes the act of interiorization possible. Derrida notes that in Freud's account "If death comes to the other, and comes to us through the other, then the [departed] friend no longer exists except in us, between us. In himself, by himself, of himself, he is no more, nothing more. He lives only in us" (28). When understood as an idealizing interiorization, mourning requires that the "self" provide an enclosure where the other's existence can be prolonged until mourning has done its work. But the self-identical and self-enclosed self that holds the interiorized other constitutes itself only by putting itself in relation to an other who is never interiorized. The condition for the possibility of mourning is therefore the condition for its impossibility. It is mourning which establishes the enclosure where the other is held in the work of mourning. Since mourning builds up the self where mourning unfolds (34), it has to occur in advance of itself if it is to happen at all. But that is impossible.

The only way mourning can precede itself is by grieving for an other who has yet to die. It has to begin "even before the death of the other actually happens" (28-9), because it is the anticipation of mourning that "constitutes in advance all "being-in-us," "in me," between us, or between ourselves" (28). The self sets up its self-enclosure in
relation to an undeparted other: an other who is mourned but who cannot be interiorized because she or he is not dead yet. "The possibility of death "happens"," says Derrida, before there is a "me," an "us" or a "between us" "and makes them possible" (33). By a paradoxical turn, the interiorizing memory that prolongs the life of the other remains open to its exterior, for it is built upon the memory of an other it can never reduce to itself. Derrida:

The "me" or the "us" of which we speak then arise and are delimited in the way that they are only through this experience of the other, and of the other as other who can die, leaving in me or in us this memory of the other. This terrible solitude which is mine or ours at the death of the other is what constitutes this relationship to self which we call "me," "us," "between us," "subjectivity," "intersubjectivity," "memory" (33).

Although the self sets up its enclosure around the thought of an other who can die—though "The "within me" and the "within us" acquire their sense and their bearing only by carrying within themselves the death and the memory of the other"--the memory of the other recalls a death which has yet to happen: a death that remains outstanding, like an unpaid debt (33).

Perhaps the word "experience" is not adequate to name the encounter with an "other as other who can die." Since it is the experience of an event which has not occurred, such an encounter does not offer itself to perception. It cannot be recorded within an interiorizing memory that swallows the traces of past events and stores them within its self-enclosure. Rather, the encounter with "the other as other who can die" is an experience that never arrives before a self. It is only insofar as it is on the way, as if it were forever in the mail, like the fulfillment of a promise. Since the "experience" of the other who can die occurs before the other dies, it is not an experience at all but rather
a thought of death: a thought which offers itself to a memory turned towards an endlessly deferred future, towards a time that exceeds the enclosure of the interiorizing self altogether (38). 49

3. White Cannibals

_Act of Assimilation._ The disjunction between a memory that aims to interiorize an other who has died, and a memory that thinks an other who is always about to die, underlies the history of Canada’s Indian policy. John L. Tobias argues that Canadian law has "always" tried to push the people it defines as "Indians" towards two contradictory goals at once, seeking both to protect and to assimilate them. In the middle of the eighteenth century, the British government’s policy was to help the First Nations defend themselves against the "European encroachment" on their lands and cultures (Tobias 40). By 1830, however, the British declared that it would be better to "civilize" aboriginal people and encouraged them to settle on reserves where they could be taught to farm and to live like Europeans but would generally be kept at a remove from European settlements (40-1). When the civilizing mission failed, the Province of Canada elected to absorb aboriginal people directly into the body of settler society and, with that end in view, granted them special legal status in the Gradual Civilization Act of 1857 (42). The Act distinguished "Indians," who were made disenfranchised wards of the state, from people (that is, white men), who had the rights of full citizens—including the right to vote
Yet the Act set the two groups apart only to fold them together again (Tobias 42). Canada sought to distance the First Nations from itself so that it would have time to instill them with European values and prepare them to live in Euro-Canadian communities. Once "civilized," they were to be given the franchise and all the other rights of white (male) citizens. By granting them special status, however, Canada ensured aboriginal people would never be assimilated into white society. For Tobias, this double bind is the "paradox that was to become and remain a characteristic of Canada’s Indian policy": "the legislation to remove all legal distinctions between Indians and Euro-Canadians actually established [those distinctions]" (42).

The self-contradictory policy of the colonial period survived intact after Confederation (43). The Indian Act of 1876, which set "the foundation for all [of] Canada’s future Indian legislation," included "all the protective features of the earlier legislation" and introduced new ones. By preserving the colonial policy of "protection," moreover, the Indian Act continued to check the absorption of the First Nations into settler society even though it was designed, and later amended, to encourage assimilation through enfranchisement (44-5). The same principles of protection, civilization and assimilation underlie the Indian Act of 1951.50

Since its inception, then, Canada’s Indian policy has folded itself up between two incommensurable poles. It has served the interests of a devouring national memory that seeks to absorb the aboriginal other, yet the moment when that other is to be devoured belongs to a future which will never arrive. Canada has aimed both to draw the First Nations into itself and to hold them beyond its outermost limit. They are to be eaten
immediately, but remain always-about-to-be-incorporated. Though the nation wants to put them in their coffins, it is determined to bury them alive. The law against the potlatch has to be understood within the larger framework of Canada's plan to make the First Nations white by taking them into itself (47-8).^5^

*Suspended Sentences.* For almost three decades federal administrators were content to vilify the potlatch while doing little to keep it from happening. The policy of non-enforcement did not end until the fall of 1913, when the Department of Indian Affairs began its only sustained attempt to put the potlatch to death. The new policy was to last for the next ten years.

The attack was led by William Halliday, who had taken charge of the Kwawkewlth agency in 1906. In *Prosecution or Persecution* Daisy Sewid-Smith calls Halliday a "fanatic" and holds him responsible for the damage done to her community by the antipotlatch crusade. "He and others like him," she says, "thought it would be easy to stamp out a culture that had been in existence since the great flood" (Sewid-Smith 1). But Halliday had not always been a foe of the potlatch. Not long after he took charge of the Kwawkewlth Agency, the Victoria *News Advertiser* published an inflammatory article about two potlatches held at Alert Bay, where he was stationed. Halliday responded by reminding superintendent Vowell that "the potlatch is a comparatively harmless institution." Its only faults, he says in his letter, are that it involves "a great waste of time" and it encourages "the sale of girls" among men. He even enclosed two photographs he had taken during the Alert Bay potlatches. The new agent appears to have been more interested in observing the potlatch than in preventing it (RG 10, v.
However Halliday was opposed to the marriage practices of the Kwakwa’wakw: practices inseparable from the potlatch. Months before the News-Advertiser printed its potlatch story, he had sent his own inflammatory report on "the sale of girls" to superintendent general of Indian affairs Frank Oliver. Halliday complains that men in Kwakwala-speaking communities sometimes buy and sell the same woman several times to earn money for potlatches. "It has always been the custom among these people," he alleges,

to marry their girls as soon as she [sic] has her first menstrual flow or rather I should say before she has her second flow. In none of these cases is the girl consulted but is simply sold to the highest bidder. She is not openly put up and sold by public auction as was done in slavery times, but private offers are made to the father or nearest male relative and he almost invariably accepts the highest offer (RG 10, v. 3629, f. 6244-3; 1 February 1907).

It is once again a case of a white man intent on saving brown women from brown men. Ironically, one of the premises of Halliday’s letter is that his own society stands as an example of the just treatment of women--an example which the Kwakwa’wakw ought to emulate.

Sewid-Smith emphasizes that although Halliday "made statements about our marriage custom that were pure "rubbish," [h]is remarks left such a guilty feeling among our old people, especially pertaining to the age they got married." It took her years, for example, to find out how old her grandmother was when she married (7). But while Halliday charged that her people made marriages for profit, he did not transform his attack on marriage into an attack on the potlatches where those profits were allegedly spent. Instead he advised the department to do more to educate the Kwakwa’wakw in
European ways, and suggested that the Indian Act be revised to impose the marital values of Euro-Canadian society upon all aboriginal people.

Halliday did not turn against the potlatch until the winter of 1913 when John Antle, an Anglican missionary in charge of the Columbia Coast Mission, made a complaint about the management of the Kwawkewlth agency. By this time Arthur Vowell was no longer in a position to deflect criticism of the department's potlatch policy. He had resigned in 1910, and the department had closed its British Columbia superintendency and divided the province into three regional inspectorates. William E. Ditchburn, a former printer, was appointed to the southern inspectorate, which included the Kwawkewlth Agency (Cole and Chaikin 90-1). After investigating Antle’s complaint, Ditchburn reported that although Halliday was "inclined to be too self-opinionated and always seem[ed] to rub people the wrong way," the agency’s main problem was the "deplorable custom" of the potlatch (RG 10, v. 3629, f. 6244-2; Ditchburn to McLean, 27 March 1913). A few months later Ditchburn observed that "the time is opportune" for the antipotlatch statute "to be put into force" (28 August 1913).

In November Halliday had John Bagwany and Ned Harris committed for trial in Vancouver for participating in some "small potlatches" at Alert Bay (Halliday to McLean, 8 November 1913). A jury found them guilty in May 1914, but the presiding judge gave them suspended sentences. In his report on the trial, Halliday recalls that the jury had some difficulty deciding whether or not the acts defined in the law corresponded with the acts which the accused had performed. While "the fact of the potlatching having taken place was proved satisfactorily," the jury was sure that this event was the type of "Indian festival, dance, or other ceremony" prohibited by section 149 of the Indian Act (Halliday
to McLean, 12 May 1914). Halliday remarks that "in summing up" the judge "read from the unabridged dictionary from the Law Library the meaning of the words festival and ceremony." "According to that dictionary," he adds, "a festival was a religious gathering and a ceremony was described as an affair that was conducted by fixed rules and regulations." But it proved impossible to match the potlatch to either of these words: "The jury disagreed as to the fact that a potlatch was either a festival or ceremony." As Searle would say, the statute did not refer in a fully consummated way because it did not give its readers enough information to select its intended referent out of the field of possible referents. When a second trial was held the next day, the jury concluded that the accused had taken part in a "dance"--which the law also banned. In the end, then, the potlatch given to the world by the legal text substituted itself for the potlatch which the accused had attended--and they were convicted.

Halliday's report shows the law once again wavering between its constative function, in which it states what it bans, and its performative function, in which it bans what it states. As a constative, the legal text has no referent to correspond with: in de Man's terms, its "referential meaning" is suspended. Since it is also a performative, however, it must act, and to act, it overcomes its failure to refer by giving itself something to point to. The arrival of the textual gift temporarily bridges the disjunction between the two incompatible moments of the legal text. Its constative function helps the jury establish that Harris and Bagwany participated in a potlatch-dance, and its performative function allows it to set into action as a ban on dancing.

Halliday had also laid potlatching charges against Cessaholis from Kingcome Inlet, but withdrew them after learning that the sentences of Harris and Bagwany had been
suspended. A year later he laid new charges against Cessaholis as well as Kiskwagila. Cessaholis pleaded guilty to giving a potlatch at Gwyasdums and received a suspended sentence, but when Kiskwagila went to trial, the jury saw no offence in what he had done and threw his case out of court. It was becoming clear that juries were unlikely to send people to jail for preserving a cultural practice which had many supporters among the province’s white population (RG 10, v. 3629, f. 6244-2; Halliday to McLean, 20 February 1915; v. 3629, f. 6244-3; Halliday to McLean, 9 February 1915, and Halliday’s Report for May 1915).

Recollections. Why did Halliday and his overseers lay siege to the potlatch when they knew the public did not consider it a crime? They were, above all, driven by the necessity to think their own whiteness. They were also driven to trace the borders of their new nation there where the First Nations had once been (and still are). By endlessly anticipating the death of the potlatch, they made it possible for Canada to remember itself by bearing within itself the trace of an aboriginal other who had died.

Halliday describes whiteness as a relation to the other in the first sentence of his memoirs, *Potlatch and Totem and the Recollections of an Indian Agent*. In order to "recollect" himself and his life, he draws a rigid and impermeable boundary between "whites" and "Indians." "In very many things," he begins, "the customs of the Indians on the Pacific Coast are directly opposite to those of whites" (3, emphasis added). For Halliday, the coastal First Nations are the absolute others, the "direct opposites," of Western-European civilization, and he locates them beyond its outermost limit.

It is the gift, moreover, which marks the difference between whiteness and
aboriginality. "The white man of the present age," he says, "considers too much the acquisition of property as being the essential sign of success," while in contrast, "The Indian in his native state [which, as the shift to the past tense implies, is assumed to have vanished] considered that the more he gave away, and impoverished himself, the better off he was" (3). We have seen this pattern before: to be "white" is to renounce the gift in favour of accumulation, and to be "Indian" is to embrace poverty by making total expenditures. Halliday cannot remember his life—can neither think himself nor consider what is most proper to him as a "white man"—without first calculating the distance that divides him from "the Indian."

Later, when he remembers his war on gift-giving, he recalls that for years the potlatch refused to die. Though "It was thought that education and missionary training amongst the Indians would so open their minds to the folly of the custom that the custom itself would die a natural death without any legal proceedings having to be taken to compel it to die," administrators eventually realized that, instead of dying, the potlatch was actually growing: "assuming greater and greater proportions" (188). By surviving its own death, the potlatch continued to mark the limit between whiteness and aboriginality. But the potlatch was not supposed to survive. It was supposed to be absorbed into the nation's memory and mourned. The antipotlatch statute was put into force to make this work of mourning possible. As "things gradually got worse and worse," remembers Halliday, the department had no choice but to "see that this custom was done away with entirely" (188). As the potlatch died, the border which it traced between whiteness and aboriginality was supposed to fade as well. For if it was gift-giving that divided "whites" from "Indians," then the death of the gift was supposed to integrate them both into a
larger totality, a single nation state.

To think himself as a white citizen of a homogeneously white country, Halliday has to perform two contradictory operations at once: he has to set his whiteness at an absolute distance from the aboriginal other, but he also has to take the other into himself so that he can "recollect" his whiteness to himself and to his reader. Thus while he begins his memoirs by setting the terms "white" and "Indian" apart, he ends by underlining the necessity of folding them together again. For Halliday, it is inevitable that whiteness will devour its aboriginal other at an unspecified future date. Indeed, his chapter on "Medical Progression" suggests that white Canada has been eating away at the First Nations for several decades. "The white man," he affirms, "is largely responsible for the near extermination of the Indian," for it was white society that introduced the North American First Nations to the disastrous influence of liquor and to diseases which overcame "their powers of resistance" (226). Yet they refused to die. Though "the Indian population was almost exterminated" in the nineteenth century, Halliday admits that it "has been gradually increasing for several years past" (226). He attributes their "better physical life" to a process which he calls "the infusion of white blood" (226). "A very large percentage of the Indians to-day are not of pure Indian blood," he confides,

but have a large admixture of white blood, and, as one can imagine, it is not the better class of white men who have thus degraded themselves by intermingling with the Indian women [1], so that the result morally is not so great as the result physically. However, it will hasten the time when the Indians as such will be no more, but will be absorbed into the white race, and will help to carry the burden that so far has been borne by the white man for his benefit (226-7).

Halliday's vision of racial assimilation, where whiteness inexorably swallows its aboriginal other, overlaps interiorizing memory with its own other--thinking memory.
Whiteness is here a life-force that takes aboriginal people into itself by attacking them from the inside, not from without. Like a disease, it infiltrates the aboriginal body and quietly masters its inner workings. Halliday predicts that when the process of incorporation-from-within is complete, there will be only one "race" left in Canada, the white race—a master race whose "blood," he says, is destined to overpower the "blood" of all its others. And it will do so for their own good, indeed for their own "physical betterment." Need I recall that *Potlatch and Totem* was published in 1935?

Yet Halliday's "recollection" of the moment when whiteness will have assumed its eugenic mastery over aboriginality—"the time when the Indians as such will be no more"—remains forever deferred. The absorption of one "race" by another is not an event that has passed, but one that has yet to happen. It anticipates the death of an other who can die, but is never dead yet. What is more, an other who is always-about-to-die cannot be absorbed into an interiorizing memory and mourned. An unassimilable other can only be thought by a memory that recollects the arrival of future events.

In his last pages Halliday construes assimilation as a promise which Canada has made to the First Nations. It is enshrined in the Indian Act, a legal text and archive:

> by the terms of Confederation, the Dominion Government took on themselves the oversight of the Indians with *a promise* that they should be treated fairly and squarely. *This promise* has been kept in all fidelity and honesty, and the day will come, and it is not far distant, when the Indians who are in the province of British Columbia will receive their enfranchisement; will cease to become minors in the eyes of the law, and will be honest, law abiding, respected citizens of Canada (239, emphasis added).

Canada has signed a contract with the First Nations. It has pledged to make them "honest," "law-abiding," "respected"—and white. However, according to Paul de Man,
when "the speech act of the contractual text" is "[c]onsidered performatively"--as an utterance that acts and not just as one that states--it "never refers to a situation that exists in the present, but signals toward a hypothetical future" (Allegories 273). The speech act of the promise is suspended between the past moment when it was uttered and the future moment when it is to be fulfilled. It is the memory of an event that never happens.

Throughout Halliday’s memoirs, whiteness gives itself to be thought in the disjunction between two incompatible forms of memory, which are in turn governed by two equally incompatible temporalities. Whiteness recalls itself to itself as a self-enclosed political body which has absorbed the aboriginal other after the tragic moment of the other’s death. But the other is not dead. Moreover a memory geared to eating the departed other is possible only because the moment of the other’s death never comes. Though the memory which gives the gift of whiteness aims to devour the past, it is built upon the memory of a meal that is always about to be served. Whiteness remembers itself by thinking a past which never comes to pass because it comes to itself from the future.

4. Poet of Memory

_Policy Memoir._ When Halliday came under pressure to kill the potlatch in 1913, the chief accountant of the Department of Indian Affairs scrawled a brief note to deputy superintendent general Frank Pedley. "It seems a great pity," he confided, "that we
cannot do something to break up this abominable and wasteful aboriginal custom" (RG 10, v. 3629, f. 6244-2; 14 April 1913). Pedley replied that Indian administrators in British Columbia "should be able to suggest means to deal with this state of affairs." But he would not be there to help them. By October Pedley had been forced to resign his post after he was caught speculating on the sale of First Nations lands, and the position of deputy superintendent-general went to the former chief accountant, Duncan Campbell Scott (Titley 22).

In December 1879, when Scott was seventeen, his father had secured him a clerical position in the department, and by the end of 1880s he had become the department’s bookkeeper and had published his first poems in Scribners magazine. By 1891 he was clerk in charge of the accountant’s branch, and he became chief clerk and accountant in July 1893, which meant he was responsible for restricting departmental expenditures. In 1893 he also published his first book, The Magic House and Other Poems. Though he remained chief accountant until 1913, he was appointed to the commission in charge of negotiating Treaty No. 9 in northern Ontario in 1905 and was made superintendent of education in 1909 (24).

Scott was not just a talented bureaucrat in a minor government department. By the end of the nineteenth century he had established himself as one of Canada’s leading literary intellectuals. He was admitted to the Royal Society of Canada in 1899 and served as its president in 1921-22. In 1922 he was the first person to be named honorary Doctor of Letters by the University of Toronto (28). He wrote poems, stories and essays, as well as a play and an unpublished novel. In 1892 and 1893 he contributed to "At the Mermaid Inn," a weekly column in the Toronto Globe. His poetry in particular
is obsessed with the themes of death, mourning and memory. It also concerns itself with light and the play of colour—especially at sunrise and sunset.

Scott served as deputy superintendent general of Indian affairs until he retired on 31 March 1932. In "The Administration of Indian Affairs in Canada," a paper he presented at a conference in China in 1931, he provides an overview of the policies he pursued during his time as Canada's leading Indian affairs administrator. "The Administration" records the memoirs of Scott the civil servant, if not of Scott the writer. Like Halliday's *Recollections*, Scott's policy memoir is governed by the disjunction between an interiorizing memory that seeks to absorb the other into itself, and a thinking memory which holds the other at an irreducible remove.

The disjunction between these two memories structures Scott's explanation of Canada's policy of setting aside reserve lands for the First Nations. The reserve system, he recalls, "is intended to ensure the continuation of the tribal life and that of the individual as an Indian" (26). It is supposed to help aboriginal people "protect" their distinct cultures and identities as Euro-Canadians invade their homelands. Yet it also has the opposite goal. It is intended "as well to render possible a continuous and consistent administrative policy directed towards civilization" (26). The reserve system is supposed to help Canada devour the First Nations while holding them at an absolute distance from itself.

Scott admits that Canada cannot swallow the First Nations by holding them apart from whiteness. Reserves contribute to the civilizing mission but also inhibit it. "In the older provinces," he says, "where Indians have mixed and intermarried with whites for more than two centuries, the efficiency of the reserve system tends to weaken" (26). "In
southern Ontario and Quebec," for example, "there are communities of Indians who for the most part show little trace of their ancestry, either in physiognomy, colour or habits of life" (26). Aboriginal people who, to Scott's gaze, bear no marks of race to distinguish them from the white population are ready to be absorbed into the body of Canada and should no longer live in segregation. "There is no apparent reason why these groups should not take their place in the community and assume the responsibility of citizenship" (26). For Scott, the right to vote is the privileged mark of whiteness. It is to be given only to those people who have renounced every trace of their aboriginality and given up the special legal status which is theirs under the Indian Act.

Scott's discourse unites the civilizing mission of the nineteenth century, a mission to Europeanize others through education and evangelism, with the eugenic project of the early twentieth century, a project that aimed to solve social problems by manipulating human biology. In his lexicon, assimilation means not just the absorption of one culture, one collective mode of being, by another, but rather the biological absorption of one "race," one "heredity," by another.53 However, for Scott, as for Halliday, the moment when white Canada will have swallowed its aboriginal other is deferred into a future that never arrives. "It is the opinion of the writer," he concludes, "that by policies and activities such as have been outlined, the Government will in time reach the end of its responsibility as the Indians progress into civilization and finally disappear as a separate and distinct people, not by race extinction [an option soon to be deployed in Europe] but by gradual assimilation with their fellow citizens" (27, emphasis added). Though Canada plans to eat its others, the nation's totem meal is scheduled for a time that lies beyond time, a deferred time that will not pass until time as it is currently understood has
"reached" its "end." The memory that seeks to devour and then to mourn a departed other is tied to, and opposed by, a future-oriented memory that thinks the other as absolutely other, irreducible to whiteness.

In Scott's discourse there is no white self, no white subject or subjectivity, before and outside the possibility of an impossible mourning that falls short of its aim to interiorize an aboriginal other. Although the thought of a homogeneously white Canadian society, a pure white "us," is grounded in the bereaved memory of an other whose death is always-about-to-have-happened, the other's death is nonetheless a possibility promised, in a past that is past, for a future which cannot come to pass or else the seamless white "us" which it institutes would be shattered. "Our" other must remain--and remain living outside us--so that their death can be promised and by that promise give "us" our being. The promise of the other's death happens before the instant of death itself to make the thought of whiteness possible. Taking nothing in return, the other sends "us" a gift of whiteness in death, a gift of white death. But "our" whiteness is impossible, for it requires "us" to eat what cannot be swallowed. Unable to absorb the other into itself, our "we" is irreconcilably divided from itself: as Derrida puts it, "we are never ourselves, and between us, identical to us, a "self" is never in itself or identical to itself" (Mémoires 28). "We" are never ourselves, because this "we" establishes itself in relation to an other whom it can never assimilate to itself.

A National Feeling. Perhaps the story of the antipotlatch law is the story of a nation trying to get a "feeling" for itself--a feeling that Scott calls "national consciousness"--by giving itself others to eat. Scott muses in "Poetry and Progress" that
the "feeling of nationality" is "a strong aid and incitement to a poet, no matter how much we may talk nowadays about the danger of national feeling" (Circle 129). But how does a poet, let alone a people, come into contact with a "national feeling" that is distinctively its own, proper to one nation only? In "The Tercentenary of Quebec," Scott says that to touch itself in the present, a nation has to devour its own past: "Our lives should be blown through and through by historical memories and national ideals, otherwise we live in a fen country without vistas, or in stifling air, like old people in a workhouse" (Circle 154). For Scott, a nation is "civilized" only insofar as it remembers itself, but its memories are of a past that "projects" itself into the future: "In a highly civilized state, accompanying the actions of each day and year, there is the shadowy, intangible, but ever-present drama of the past, existing not only in manners, forms, and precedent, but in definite characters that project their force into life, and feed the imagination with instances of resource and fortitude" (154, emphasis added). By "projecting" its past into the future, the nation recollects itself as the "country" it will have been, in the future perfect tense. It carries its dead within itself so that it can remember a national destiny that is still to come. "Especially for such a young people as ours," says Scott, writing as an English-Canadian about Quebec, "it is wise to perpetuate old deeds and to treasure what is, after all, our chief possession--the actions of those who were all unconsciously framing our destiny." The departed arrive from the future to give the nation to itself, for "A state might boast of impeccable laws and enjoy the smoothest, most improved methods in the art of living," says Scott, "but it would be a poor, dead thing without the memory of great men and great actions" (154). The nation would itself be dead if it did not preserve its dead within a bereaved, interiorizing memory. For the national self-
consciousness is fashioned in an act of mourning.

If a "young" nation is to "project" its past forward onto its destiny, it has to distinguish between the others it wants to store within its national memory and those it wants to exclude from itself. It must make a judgement about what to remember. According to Freud, the "function of judgement" makes "two sorts of decisions." It determines whether or not a thing has a particular attribute, and it decides whether or not the things represented in the mind have an existence "in reality" ("Negation" 236). Freud's two functions of judgement correspond to two of the functions of language outlined by Searle: meaning and reference. For Searle, the meaning of a referring expression defines the attributes of a thing, while the speech act of reference establishes whether or not that thing exists.

Freud argues that the two functions of judgement begin forming in the oral-cannibalistic phase of a child's development. When an attributive judgement is expressed "in the language of the oldest--the oral--instinctual impulses, the judgement is: 'I should like to eat this,' or 'I should like to spit it out'; and, put more generally, 'I should like to take this into myself and to keep that out.' That is to say: 'It shall be inside me' or 'it shall be outside me'" (237). Judgements of existence develop out of the child's efforts to rediscover what is judged to be good and to avoid what is known to be bad (237-8).

While for Freud "Judging is a continuation...of the original process by which the ego took things into itself or expelled them from itself, according to the pleasure principle" (239), for Scott the formation of a national consciousness is a process of incorporating the memories of those others who are judged to be good and rejecting the memories of others judged to be bad. In "The Tercentenary" he notes that the "young"
nation of Canada—"a young people such as ours"—has already absorbed a "rich" supply of the French others, good others, into the national memory: "Peculiarly rich is our heritage in the memories of the early navigators and explorers"—he cites Cartier, Champlain and Frontenac—"who groped their way among our coasts and founded our cities unerringly on the points of natural vantage" (Circle 154). In the poem "Indian Place Names," however, he suggests that Canada has at once eaten and expelled the First Nations. Though the white collectivity has absorbed them into itself, making them a part of itself, they remain exterior to it and haunt it from its periphery, like living "ghosts": "The race has waned and left but tales of ghosts,/That hover in the world like fading smoke/About the lodges: gone are the dusky folk/That once were cunning with the throng and snare." "But" as they disappeared from the land, "the dusky folk" bequeathed their "wild names" to the white child-nation: "But all the land is murmurous with the call/Of their wild names that haunt the lovely glens/Where water lonely falls, or where the street/Sounds all day with the tramp of myriad feet." Couched in iambic pentameter, "Toronto triumphs; Winnipeg flows free/...And Restigouche takes the whelmed sound of sea" (Poems 22).

Scott situates the "dusky" dead—dusky because related to the dusk, the waning of daylight—both inside and outside the borders of the white body politic. The "Indian" names of its cities are at once distinctively Canadian, fully assimilated into the national consciousness, and noticeably foreign, "wild," other.

By anticipating the death of the First Nations, Canada gains the power to name itself not only in aboriginal languages but also in English, the language of the colonizer. Let us recall Scott's "Lines in Memory of Edmund Morris," where the act of naming once again coincides with a thought of death. Towards the end of this long elegy, the
poet addresses an apostrophe to a departed friend whose life has been prolonged in a
bereaved interiorizing memory. Curiously, the apostrophe requires the departed other to
"Think" the death of yet another other:

Here, Morris, on the plains that we have loved,
Think of the death of Akoose, fleet of foot...
Akoose, in his old age, blind from the smoke
Of tepees and the sharp snow light...

Once when sharp autumn
Made membranes of thin ice upon the sloughs,
He caught a pony on a quick return
Of prowess and, all his instincts cleared and quickened,
He mounted, sensed the north and bore away...
And for these hours in all the varied pomp
Of pagan fancy and free dreams of foray
And crude adventure, he ranged on entranced,
Until the sun blazed level with the prairie,
Then paused, faltered and slid from off his pony.
In a little bluff of poplars, hid in the bracken,
He lay down... *(Poems 148-9).*

What the bereaved poet says to the departed, in memory of the departed, is that it is
impossible to name either the land or the citizens of the young country called Canada
without at the same time remembering the death of the aboriginal other. The bracken
hides Akoose within itself, preserving him after his death: "There Akoose lay, silent amid
the bracken, Gathered at last with the Algonquin Chieftains" (149). But it is the
recolletion of the other's death which allows "bracken" to be uttered here at all—whether
as a common noun or as a proper name—for the departed "Algonquin Chieftains" did not
graft this word to their resting place. The privilege of renaming the land of the colonized
belongs exclusively to the colonizer.
5. Summary Offences

It was only after D. C. Scott took charge of the Department of Indian Affairs in 1913 that William Halliday began his attack on the potlatch. The majority of potlatch prosecutions occurred between 1919 and 1922, in the middle of Scott's term as deputy superintendent. It was Scott, moreover, who made it easier for Indian agents to send potlatchers to jail.

Until 1918 potlatching was an indictable offence, which meant that anyone charged under the statute had the right to trial by jury. Moreover, the department allowed its agents to lay charges and conduct preliminary hearings in potlatch cases. In June 1913 Halliday advised J. D. McLean that potlatching ought to be made a summary offence, so that trials could be heard before a magistrate without a jury. After the Vancouver county court freed Cessaholis on a suspended sentence in 1915, Halliday renewed his call for changes to the statute (RG 10, v. 3629, f. 6244-2; Halliday to McLean, 20 February 1915). In 1918 Parliament amended section 149 to Scott's specifications, removing the word "indictable" and introducing the phrase "on summary conviction." The amendment took potlatch trials out of the courts and handed them over to justices of the peace, and under the Indian Act, Indian agents had possessed all the powers of justices of the peace since 1881. Scott's amendment gave them the power to act as prosecutor, judge and jury in potlatch trials (Statutes of Canada, 1918, chapter 26 (8-9 George V.), section 9; Titley 14; Cole and Chaikin 101-2).

On October 21 Scott sent a circular to the agents in British Columbia, instructing them that since the war in Europe had created an "urgent need for conservation" in
Canada, no "wasteful practice or mode of life can be countenanced" (RG 10, v. 3629, f. 6244-3). He reminds them that they are now permitted to make summary convictions for acts of "giving away" and advises them to use "these powers to the full in the matter of the potlatch." "One of the objectionable features of this ceremony," he adds, "is the congregating together of numbers of individuals and the wasteful distribution of food either as presents or in feasting." In Scott’s discourse, gifts are a form of waste, and waste has to be restricted, held in, contained—especially in time of war.

Ironically, the circular disobey the advice which the wood-spring gives the poet in one of Scott’s lyrics. In "The Wood-Spring to the Poet," the poet is told: "Give, Poet, give!/ Thus only shalt thou live./Give! for 'tis thy joyous doom/To charm, to comfort, to illumine" (Poems 127). The wood-spring instructs the poet, in particular, to give food to those who are in mourning--"Give manna for the mourner’s mouth/Sovereign as air"--and to give song to the living dead--"Give to dead souls that mock at life/Aweary of their cankered hearts/...Helve them a song of life" (129). There is a double standard at work here: giving is a virtue when done by white poets but a crime when done by the First Nations.

Halliday responded to the 1918 circular by noting that he had already warned the Kwakwaka’wakw "that the authorities could not look unmoved at them wasting their time and substance at potlatches during such times as these" (2 November 1918). In wartime there is no time for the waste of time, for every instant is a precious commodity and must be wisely spent. War obeys a temporality opposed to the temporality of pure expenditure and the instantless instant of the gift. But Halliday did not begin enforcing the law until after the war was over. In January 1919 he sentenced Likiosa, whose English name was
Johnny Seaweed (or Sewid), and Kwosteetsas, also known as Japanese Charlie, to two months in prison, after Likiosa married Kwosteetsas's sister, Kaakstatos, in the traditional manner: with a distribution of property (29 January 1919). The brothers-in-law were freed on bail after their lawyer, Frank Lyons, filed an appeal.

That March four more potlatchers—Harry Mountain, Isaac the son of Abraham, John McDougall and Chief August—were arraigned before justice of the peace Halliday. But they were not convicted. Instead they and seventy-three of their supporters signed an agreement to obey the law in future, and the crown withdrew its charges. Likiosa and Kwosteetsas were included in the agreement, and while the county court did not overturn their convictions, it ruled that they would not have to return to jail (RG 10, v. 3630, f. 6244-4, pt. 1; Halliday to McLean, 29 March 1919; Proceedings on Hearing of Appeal, 27 March 1919).

When Harry Mountain testified before the court, he insisted that the potlatch had nothing to do with wasting time. "I work all the time," said Mountain, "and only rest five months of the year" (22 May 1919, Ditchburn to Scott; Ditchburn's emphasis). W. E. Ditchburn later drew Scott's attention to this remark, noting that "The statement is somewhat contradictory, though very significant." Mountain suggests there is a time for work--a time that belongs to the circle of economy--and there is a time beyond economic time, a remainder of time which cannot be calculated in terms of profit and loss. The potlatch belongs to this "rest" of time beyond time: to the other time of the gift.54

In November 1919 the department gained an ally in its postwar battle against waste, when Parliament merged the Royal Northwest Mounted Police with the Dominion Police to form a national police force: the R.C.M.P. Its mandate was to enforce federal
law in the provinces, including the provisions of the Indian Act. By December two
R.C.M.P. officers had arrived in Alert Bay, the centre of the Indian affairs
administration in the Kwawkewlth agency. The potlatch was one of their first targets
(Cole and Chaikin 116).

In January 1920 sergeant Donald Angermann (Heidegger would no doubt consider
him well named) laid informations against nine potlatchers. Eight were charged and
pleaded guilty. Seven were sentenced to two months in jail, while one, an elderly man,
received a suspended sentence (Angermann to Halliday, 28 January 1921). They were
the first people to be jailed for potlatching since the conviction of Bill Uslick in 1897,
and Halliday interpreted their case as a sure sign the potlatch was about to die. "I think I
may safely say," he wrote to Scott, "that the recent convictions of eight Indians at Alert
Bay for potlatching has [sic] done a lot towards its extermination" (15 February 1920).
But it was too soon to mourn. In January 1921 Angermann charged Mrs. MacDougall
and an older man named Munday for participating in "what is commonly known as a
potlatch" (31 January 1921). Their crime consisted of arranging for Munday to marry
Mrs. MacDougall’s daughter Jennie, but their case was dismissed after witnesses refused
to testify against them. Two of those witnesses, Bob Harris and Amos Dawson, were
convicted of perjury in 1922 (Halliday to Secretary [McLean], 19 May 1922;
Angermann’s Crime Reports, 15 and 22 April, 22 and 27 May 1922).

The assault on the potlatch spread into the Cowichan agency in February 1921,
after three officers from the Nanaimo R.C.M.P. attended a gathering on the Hallalt
reserve. Sergeant N. D. McLaren laid charges against Edward Hulbertson, James
Gabriel, Jack Semo, Jimmy Albert and Modest Dick, who were convicted, given
suspended sentences and set free (McLaren, Crime Reports, 17 and 22 February 1921; Ditchburn to Scott, 24 March 1921). In March Angermann arrested Charles Nowell for celebrating his brother’s funeral at Alert Bay (his son had died a month earlier) (Crime Report, 26 March 1921). "I was sentenced for three months," Nowell recalls in his memoirs, "but after I had been there for six weeks Dr. Newcombe came to see me and got me a parole from the Governor of Victoria, and they let me out" (Smoke 224). Though his trial was intended to kill the potlatch, it served instead to bring it to life.

"From then on I have been giving potlatches," Nowell remembers,

> I have put my grandsons in their places ready when I die. My eldest grandson I put in my place as head chief, and the others in my other positions. I have told all the people about it, so that there will be no argument about it after I die. That's the way the Indians do before they die. Each of them has his own paraphernalia to use, so that they won't try to take away each other's. They have their own names (218).

In December 1921 Angermann laid informations against Johnny Scow, George Scow, Chief Dick, Lagius and Kasu for taking part in the sale of a copper (RG 10, v. 3631, f. 6244-5; Crime Report, 28 December 1921). After Halliday sentenced each of them to two months in jail, their lawyer--Edwin DeBeck, the son of former agent George DeBeck--lodged an appeal, but the British Columbia Supreme Court upheld the convictions. The five were sent to Oakalla prison on 22 January 1922 (RG 10, v. 3630, f. 6244-4, Pt. 2; Halliday to Secretary [McLean], 24 January 1922). Two days later Halliday informed McLean that the potlatch was on the verge of death. "The general consensus of opinion is that if the next case is successful," he writes, "the potlatch will be absolutely dead." In the same month Peter Wilson, Edward Saxsmith, John Morrison and Robert Wilson from the Gitksan community of Kispiox were charged with taking part
in a "giving away celebration." They were tried at Hazelton and given suspended sentences of six months each (Corporal Hall, Crime Reports, 6 and 8 January 1922).

By February 1922 white officials were preparing to deliver a death blow against the potlatch in the Kwawkelwth agency. Using evidence gathered by police informants, Angermann laid informations against thirty-four people who had attended the Cranmer potlatch on Village Island at Christmas. Emma Cranmer's family had returned the property that her husband Dan had given them at the time of her marriage. Then Dan Cranmer distributed the repayment, and a large amount of other property, to the assembled guests (Sewid-Smith 55-7; Cole and Chaikin 118-19). Thirty-two of the accused were brought before Halliday on 16 February. Fearing he would be accused of bias if he heard the case by himself, Halliday shared the bench with a second justice of the peace, A. M. Wastell (Halliday to Scott, 1 March 1922). When the trial resumed on 27 February, the lawyer for the defense offered to make a deal with the crown. If the accused would plead guilty and agree in writing to renounce the potlatch forever, the crown would give them suspended sentences and set them free. At Angermann's insistence, the agreement required the accused to surrender their masks, costumes, headdresses, coppers and all the other regalia used in their hereditary dances. The court gave them a month to sign. "I firmly believe," Halliday wrote Scott, "that the potlatch has been killed as they are all afraid to go on any further with it realizing that they are fighting a losing game" (1 March 1922). As always, Halliday was compelled to repeat the news of a death that never arrived.

By the end of March, most but not all of the people from three kwakwala-speaking communities—the Lekwiltok of Cape Mudge, the Mamililikula of Village Island
and the Nimpkish of Alert Bay—had agreed to surrender their possessions to stay out of jail. The Kwagiulth of Fort Rupert refused. To coerce more people into signing, Angermann laid further charges stemming from the Cranmer potlatch and from some smaller potlatches held on Harbledown Island in February 1922. On 10 April twenty-two people who had not signed were sentenced and taken to Oakalla. Halliday informed Scott that "the potlatch is killed" (Halliday to Scott, 10 April 1922; Angermann, Crime Reports, 19 April 1922; Cole and Chaikin 121-2). 35

Most of the confiscated articles were sent either to the Victoria Memorial Museum in Ottawa or to the Royal Ontario Museum—which requested "one or two large totem poles"--in Toronto (Currelly to Scott, 3 October 1922). They were not returned until 1979. In September 1922, Halliday sold a number of articles to George Heye, founder of the museum of the American Indian in New York (Halliday to Secretary [McLean], 6 September 1922). By the time McLean reprimanded him for making an unauthorized sale, the property had been moved to the United States. It has never returned. The Canadian government paid a total of 1,456 dollars for the goods it seized--including the coppers which, to their owners, represented vast accumulations of wealth (Sapir to Scott, 1 March 1923).

The potlatch had died. But it was alive again by 1923. On 31 March Halliday sentenced 10 people to jail for attending Quimolas's potlatch at Blunden Harbor. They appealed, and on 12 April the county court overturned their convictions on the grounds that Halliday had made errors in the warrants of committal. "The regrettable part of the whole thing," Halliday confided to McLean, "is that all the work that has been done with regard to the potlatch will be more or less nullified and will have to be done all over
again" (14 April 1923; Angermann, Crime Reports, 6 and 7 April 1923). The practice he had worked so hard to kill had returned from the grave, but the department refused to appeal (McLean to Halliday, 4 May 1923).

In March 1927, precisely five years after its death, Halliday informed McLean that the people of Kingcome Inlet had given "a real old time potlatch." Ten people were charged and pleaded guilty, but they talked their way out of going to jail: "they said that if they were given another opportunity it would be the last time they would ever break the law in this respect and they pledged themselves that not only would they give up potlatching but that no potlatching would be allowed on the Kingcome Inlet Reserves" (Halliday to McLean, 23 March 1927). Halliday gave them suspended sentences.

Perhaps the Kingcome people knew that what mattered to him was not that the potlatch be killed, but that its death be promised ("pledged") for a future that belonged to a rest of time beyond time--as if the unstated goal of the potlatch trials had not been to murder the potlatch, but to make it possible to say it was dead, over and over again.

Years later, in a letter to Scott dated 26 February 1931, Halliday resumed his discourse about a potlatch that is always-about-to-die. "You will remember," he begins, "that this Agency has been the cradle and nursing ground of that system known as the "Potlatch," for very many years, and although the prosecution which took place some time ago killed it for the time being, I am sorry to say that I have reason to believe that it has broken out again" (RG 10, v. 3631, f. 6244-5). Since the nineteenth century the potlatch had died only to be reborn in a postal literature that tirelessly folded and unfolded the themes of life and death. We know what drove Halliday to repeat the news of an instant that never arrived. His first three words sketch the familiar answer: "You
will remember...." His compulsion to repeat belongs to that thought of whiteness which
irrupts in the disjunction between a memory that aims to swallow the departed other and
a memory that thinks an other who is always about to die but never does. While
interiorizing memory seeks to preserve the present instant--"the time being"--within itself,
thinking memory ensures that the moment of death is projected onto the horizon of an
endlessly deferred future.

6. Exact Information

In June 1930 Halliday sent Scott a manuscript copy of *Potlatch and Totem* and
asked him to write a brief forward for the published version. Halliday notes that the
second section contains his recollections, while the first is, as he later confesses, a
fictional account of a "typical" potlatch which "never took place" (*Potlatch* 11): the
structure of his memoirs suggests that he cannot remember himself without referring to a
potlatch that is inching towards death. "The book has cost me a great deal of time," he
recalls, "and I m[ay] say, considerable expense in getting all the exact information, as I
have taken pains, particularly in the part relating to the Potlatch, to have every item of it
meticulously correct" (12 June 1930). Halliday has spent his time, for him a precious
currency, to gathering the "exact information" about a practice which he had long
identified as a waste of time. But narrative is impossible without delay, without that
instantless instant of deferral which holds each of its moments apart from every other.
The gift of the text irrupts in just such an instantless instant. And it was the arrival of a
textual gift which ensured that Halliday and his fellow administrators never sent
themselves a "meticulously correct" account of the potlatch.

By 1930 the British Columbia First Nations had spent years telling Canada that the
thing it had banned did not correspond to the gatherings held in their communities. After
the trial of Ned Harris and John Bagwany in 1914, Jim Quatel of Campbell River
informed the department that "the potlatch is bad to those who know nothing about it."
He put Halliday among the ranks of the ignorant: "Mr. Halliday is not Indian, he is
white-man and standing on the other"—indeed standing on others in order to kill their
traditions and swallow them into the white body politic. A month later Charlie Smith
affirmed that "That Indian Agent Halliday is only spoils everythings because he telling
you what is not correct" (RG 10, v. 3629, f. 6244-2; 14 May 1914, emphasis added, and
12 June 1914).

In 1897 Boas had argued that the potlatch served as a means of recordkeeping in
societies that had no system of writing. According to this argument, the potlatch was a
poor substitute for pen, paper and the graphic alphabet. But if the potlatch was an
inferior writing, surely it would have disappeared when the people of potlatching cultures
adopted the Western-European system of inscription. Surely, after years of contact with
Europeans and Euro-Canadians, when the First Nations needed to record their
transactions, they would have chosen the information technology of Western-European
"civilization" over the writing performed by the potlatch. But the potlatch did not die
when confronted with another technology. Instead, people like Jim Quatel deployed
writing in their defense of writing's substitute.
In September 1914 the Kwakwaka'wakw joined with a number of Salish-speaking communities to inform the white government that its hostility towards the potlatch was based on ignorance. "Indians don't understand white man's fashions," they wrote, "and white man don't understand our fashion, and they can't live as Indians does" (7 September 1914). On 28 January 1915 the Kwagiulth and the Nimpkish wrote H. S. Clements, a conservative member of Parliament, asking him to intercede with the department on their behalf. Clements, who admitted he "had considerable sympathy in some of their grievances," sent their letter on to Scott (RG 10, v. 3629, f. 6244-3; Clements to Scott, 3 February 1915). In reply, Scott wrote the Department of Mines and asked the anthropological division to prepare a report on the potlatch. Edward Sapir sent Scott a copy of Boas's 1898 "Summary" and advised him to read Boas's "Secret Societies" which, according to Sapir contained "[p]robably the best account yet published of the potlatch system of the Kwakiutl Indians" (11 February 1915). "It seems to me high time," Sapir added, "that white men realized that they are not doing the Indians much of a favour by converting them into inferior replicas of themselves." But that was already the goal of Scott's administration.

Sapir also mentioned that he was writing the leading scholars of northwest coast anthropology to ask "for their opinion on the potlatch." On 1 March he sent Scott letters from James Teit, Harlan Smith, Charles Newcombe, Charles Hill-Tout, John Swanton and Franz Boas. They all advised against enforcing the law. "Those who have caused all the trouble of thus persecuting these Indians," wrote Harlan Smith, "dragging them many miles before the courts and imprisoning them, so far as I have ever been able to find out, knew little or nothing about Indians." He doubted that "any one person
understands all about this institution" (16 February 1915).

Meanwhile the Kwagiulth sent a petition to J. D. McLean "to ask one or two Commissioners from Ottawa to come to this agency...and look into the potlatch themselves, so that we may explain to them what they call a potlatch" (2 March 1915). In 1919 Charles Nowell, Moses Alfred and William Roberts travelled to Ottawa to present their arguments directly to Scott. Cole and Chaikin say "The reception they received was as cool as the Rideau River in February" (111).

However Scott was eventually forced to listen to their appeals. When Harry Mountain, Isaac, John McDougall, Chief August and their seventy-three supporters signed the agreement to give up potlatching in March 1919, they reserved the right to petition the government to amend the law. The presiding judge, H. S. Cayley, later wrote minister of the interior Arthur Meighen and reminded him that the government had agreed to conduct an inquiry into the potlatch (RG 10, v. 3630, f. 6244-4, Pt. 1; 26 September 1919). When reminded of the agreement, Scott wrote his minister that "The facts are already available in this Department and in the anthropological division of the Geological Survey and lately a complete survey of all our papers on the subject was made by Mr. [Marius] Barbeau of that division." "As a matter of fact," he continues, "we probably know more about the aboriginal custom of the potlatch than do the Indians themselves" (12 January 1920). Though he claimed to know all, Scott agreed to ask the anthropological division to make a report and "to allow the Indians to make their representations to this Department in writing." He only kept the first part of his promise.

No matter what Scott argued, the Kwakwaka'wakw had never stopped insisting that, in fact, the government knew none of the "facts" about the potlatch. At the end of
1918 a group of men from seven communities had made the following plea: "We feel that the Government has not been fully and correctly informed about the potlatch and we would respectfully ask you to send a good straight man to come and see all the Indians so that you may know exactly what the potlatch is" (RG 10, v. 3629, f. 6244-3; 26 December 1918). A petition written at Alert Bay, dated 6 April 1920, stated: "we think that if you understood our customs from the beginning that you would amend the law to allow us to go on in our old way" (v. 3630, f. 6244-4, Pt. 1). The previous January Spruce Martin and Frank Walker had protested that "when the Government stops us from potlatching they are taking away from us one of our oldest and best customs" (14 January 1920). In March 1922 Chief Joseph of the Nuu’chah’nuulth community of Clayoquot declared that "we can’t possibly put away the ways of Indian dancing" (v. 3630, f. 6244-4, pt. 2; Joseph to Cooper, 13 March 1922).

In March 1921 Edwin DeBeck began a campaign to have the department release the promised report, but without success (DeBeck to Scott, 4 March, 18 May, 19 July 1921). Then, on 3 May 1922, while over twenty people were in jail for attending the Cranmer potlatch, Leon Ladner, the conservative member of Parliament for south Vancouver, inquired in the house of commons about the report that was to have been prepared by the anthropological division. In particular, he asked superintendent general of Indian affairs Charles Stewart whether or not the report was "favourable to the Potlatch Institution" (Canada, *Parliamentary Debates* for 1922 1377). On 11 May Ladner wrote Stewart urging him to amend the antipotlatch statute and to release the people who were in prison for the Cranmer potlatch. He reminded him that public opinion was opposed to the law. On 26 May he again asked Stewart for a copy of the
report which, as it turns out, had been ready for over a year. With pressure building, Scott prepared a memo for Stewart on 6 June, advising Stewart that "the report is neither favourable nor unfavourable" to the potlatch. "There would be no great objection to letting Mr. Ladner have a copy of this report," Scott wrote, "but I think it would be inadvisable" (6 June 1922).

Ladner rose in the house on 19 June and suggested to Stewart that the report was indeed "favourable to the lessening of these [antipotlatch] restrictions and giving back to the Indians some of their rights" (Debates 3191-2). Stewart answered that "If a report is in the department, it has not been brought to my attention." But he had known about it since at least 6 June. He promised to release the report if it was available. But it had been available since May 1921.

Since Scott said he was "absolutely and unalterably" opposed to amending the law, it is not hard to understand why he advised Stewart not to release the report. For it is unequivocally "favourable" to "the potlatch Institution." From the outset, the report proposes "to set forth reasons why the [KWAKI]UTL Indians should not be disturbed...in carrying out the principle of the Potlatch" (RG 10, v. 3631, f. 6244-X). It argues that the purpose of the law--to lift the Kwakwaka’kwakw into European civilization by stripping them of traditions which white observers, especially missionaries, considered barbaric--was wrong from the start: "The Kwakiutl Indian from the nature of his peculiar characteristics and mode of life can never be assimilated with the white race." Like Boas’s ethnography, the report interprets the Kwakwaka’wakw as the absolute others of European-Canada. They belong outside the westernmost limit of the West and cannot be cannibalized by a white society that aims to remember itself by eating others. Since "The
Indian will thrive only in an atmosphere and under condition[s] and customs handed down from one generation to another," the report advises the government to give in to the petitions of the First Nations and to repeal the ban on the potlatch "as soon as possible."56

If a crime was committed during the era of the potlatch trials, it was not the distribution of property on, say, Village Island. Rather, it was Scott's suppression of the report on the antipotlatch law. Since 1915 Scott had known that the leading researchers in his own culture were opposed to the law. By the first week of May 1921 he knew that the government's own research demanded a change in policy. According to the protocols of scholarship laid out by the institutions of his own nation, Scott was obliged to publish the findings of the acknowledged experts even if that meant having the law amended. That he refused to publish the latest data seems especially irresponsible if one recalls that throughout this episode Scott was serving as the president of the Royal Society of Canada.

He gave his presidential address, "Poetry and Progress," on 17 May 1922, while twenty-three people were serving time at Oakalla for potlatching. He begins by praising the "ideals of the Society." There is "something unique," he says, "in the constitution of a society that comprises Literature and Science, that makes room for the Mathematician and the Chemist, the Historian and the Biologist, the Poet and the Astronomer" (The Circle 123). This "unique" society also makes room for the anthropologist and for the publication and preservation of anthropological data. "It should be remarked," Scott remarks, "that one of the objects set forth by our charter was to assist in the collection of archives and to aid in the formation of a National Museum of Ethnology, Archaeology
and Natural History. Let us not weaken for a moment," he exhorts, "in the discharge of this obligation" (127). By suppressing the government's research, Scott broke his own self-imposed "obligation" to establish national "archives" where ethnographic research would be open to public scrutiny.

Perhaps his betrayal of his own principles is a consequence of his conviction that the poet's foremost ethical responsibility is to contribute to nation-building. In his address, Scott describes literature as the producer, rather than the product, of social and political relations. Although he says that "Literature in its purest form is vowed to the service of the imagination" and that "its ethical powers" are therefore "secondary" (125-6), he nevertheless affirms that since the task of poetry is to advance the cause of "human progress," poets are burdened with a heavy ethical "obligation." It is their duty to help raise people from barbarity and lead them towards nationhood, the ultimate achievement of human civilization. "The poet is the voice of the imagination," says Scott, and the "imagination has always been concerned with endeavours to harmonize life and to set up nobler conditions of living; to picture perfect social states and to commend them to the reason" (146). This is the reason why he suppressed the report. Scott's "perfect social state" has no place for non-European cultures. The poet's duty to contribute to the building of a homogeneously white European-Canadian society outweighed the anthropologist's argument that Canada must give up its project to absorb the First Nations into itself. Aboriginal cultures have a place in Scott's civilization only if they consent to die and leave their remains--such as confiscated potlatch regalia--in national museums to be remembered by future generations of white citizens.
End-Off

But let life go, naught can be altered after
The heart is vacant and all shed the tears;
Let it be told amid ironic laughter
"He had given all--through all the years."

D. C. Scott, "A Mood" (Poems 270)
1. The Image and The Gift

When Andrew Paull of the Allied Tribes of British Columbia demanded "a relaxation of the Potlatch law" in 1923, he suggested that the government’s knowledge did not correspond with its intended object. While he admitted that "Much has been said against the Potlatch," he noted that "what has been said in favor of the Potlatch has been done so by the people who are in a position to know" (RG 10, v. 3630, f. 6244-4, Pt. 2; Paull to Stewart, 30 August 1923). His argument assumes true knowledge is a correct representation, an authentic image, of a thing existing independently of the words that describe it. If administrators would "position" their utterances to bring what they said about the potlatch into agreement with potlatch itself, they would have to acknowledge that the law was an expression of ignorance, and they would repeal it.

No-one could have foreseen that the potlatch which the law had banned did not belong to a metaphysics which takes truth to be a correspondence between knowledge and its object. The legal text gave administrators a potlatch to regulate, and this thing, this ghost-potlatch, never tried to be a "meticulously correct" representation of the First Nations’ traditions. It was not an image of the potlatch, but a substitute for it. When Indian agents and police officers enforced the statute, they saw what it had given them to see, not the practices which aboriginal people were performing, and no amount of education could make them lift their prohibition. For if administrators did not know the potlatch, they did know what they called "the potlatch." Since it had arrived into being out of the gap separating two instants of the law--the past moment when it defined what it banned and the future moment when it banned what it had defined--the only way to revise
the government’s potlatch policy was to get rid of the legal text which had given the thing to the world. But the law did not drop from the statute books until Parliament passed a new (but not too new) Indian Act in 1951, after two years of hearings by a joint committee of the senate and house of commons.

There is no doubt that the law changed the way the First Nations pursued their traditions. Since the statute—which was relocated to section 140 of the Indian Act in 1927—banned "any Indian festival, dance, or other ceremony" involving the "giving away or paying or giving back" of property, in the early 1930s the Kwakwaka'wakw decided they could escape prosecution by letting six months elapse between dances and distributions of property (Ditchburn to Scott, 2 April 1931). As a result, in February 1931 Halliday made this complaint after a large number of sacks of flour were distributed on Village Island: "There is no difficulty whatever in getting proof that the flour was given, but the difficulty arises in making any connection between the giving away of the flour and any Indian festival, dance, or other ceremony, as prescribed in Section 140 of the Indian Act" (26 February 1931). But not every potlatch divided itself in two. Two months earlier Boas had written his sister from Fort Rupert, noting that "There were all sorts of feasts here during the past weeks, especially the wedding of a couple that had been living together for several years" (Rohner 294). The feasts included both dancing and the distribution of property. On Christmas Eve, Boas held a feast of his own: "The Indians used this opportunity to celebrate Christmas," he writes, "that is, they had entertainment in their old style" (298).

After the Cranmer potlatch in 1922, white officials lost their will to enforce the law. There were prosecutions in the north-east of the province, but no-one was sent to
jail. Silas Johnson of Kispiox received a lecture after holding a potlatch in 1927, and a potlatcher from the Nantley reserve was given a one year suspended sentence, which was illegal under section 140 (RG 10, v. 3631, f. 6244-5; T. E. E. Greenfield, Crime Report, 28 February 1927; K. H. Turnbull, Crime Report, 23 July 1927). In 1928 Chief Isadore and Thomas and Margaret Kettlo pleaded guilty to potlatching, but their convictions were overturned on appeal when it was found that, as in 1889, the crown was "unable to quote an authoritative definition of this word"—"Potlach" (A. H. Brien, Report, 26 June 1928). In January 1931 Moses Stevens received a one month suspended sentence for raising a totem pole (M. T. Berger, Crime Report, 9 February 1931).

After Halliday retired from the Kwawkewlth agency, his immediate successor, E. G. Newnham, tried to enforce the law but encountered resistance from the new pastor of the Anglican church at Alert Bay, C. K. K. Prosser (Cole and Chaikin 145-6). In a final ironic turn, the same Anglican missionaries who had previously demanded that the statute be enforced--such as John Antle and Bishop Schofield--now called for its repeal.57 When Murray Todd took over the Kwawkewlth agency in 1934, he suggested amending the Indian Act to make it illegal to attend potlatches and to own regalia associated with potlatching, such as masks and coppers. He also recommended that agents be empowered to seize the property distributed in potlatches (Cole and Chaikin 147-8). T. A. Crerar, the new superintendent general, brought the proposed amendment before Parliament in February 1936 but ran into opposition from a former Indian agent--the independent member for Comox-Alberni, A. W. Neill--along with J. S. Woodsworth and others (149-50). In 1904 Neill had advised that the antipotlatch statute be retained but not enforced. In 1936, at the urging of the First Nations which had written him in
protest, he helped to ensure that it became a "dead letter" once and for all.

2. A Final Fold

In "The Way to Language" Heidegger repeats that the "essential being" of language consists of "saying." To say is to show things, and showing makes it possible to signify them (in On the Way 123). For Heidegger, "in everything that gives itself to us in speaking, or waits for us unspoken, but also in the speaking that we do ourselves, there prevails Showing which causes to appear what is present, and to fade from appearance what is absent" (126). In showing, words give things to be thought and are not grafted to what already exists. Since showing delivers things into being, moreover, it belongs to that postal technology which Heidegger (who would insist it is nothing technological) calls owning, appropriation—Ereignis (127). It is appropriation—which is neither effect nor cause nor even an event—that allows "all beings to be present in their own, in what is most appropriate for them," and gives them to signification. Heidegger calls Ereignis "the plainest and most gentle of all laws" (128). But if it is a "law," owning is not a norm, an order or an ordinance—let alone a statute. It is a gift-event that occurs without occurring, beyond the metaphysical conception of being and of time, and it gathers things and people into their ownmost essence, "into the appropriateness of their nature and there holds them" (128-9).

It is clear by now that I do not endorse all that Heidegger proposes. The gift-
event which I have described here, using the antipotlatch law—a law against giving—as my privileged example, was neither plain nor gentle. It delivered itself violently to the world, arriving in the disjunction—not the gathering—of two incompatible yet mechanical functions of the legal text. When it arrived, it ruptured—and did not unite—an ongoing continuum of events, for the potlatch which Canada banned did not correspond with the potlatches which were already practiced on the northwest coast.

Heidegger might nevertheless agree that this textual gift had no author, was not the product of someone's intentions. It was an instrument which anyone could deploy in any number of racist undertakings. Instead of being a poor image of an original, the outlawed potlatch originated its own order of reality after the fact, and while its arrival in the world was aleatory, it made new oppressions possible. We have seen how it was used, and how it failed, to hasten the assimilation of the British Columbia First Nations into the Canadian body politic—part of a larger project to give Europe-in-Canada a feeling for its own whiteness and nationhood.

Assimilation had to fail, though, because it based itself on an irony which it could not overcome. Its aim was to fold together the two sides of the limit dividing Canada from the First Nations, gathering them into a larger national totality. In British Columbia the limit which whiteness traced between itself and its others took the form of the gift. If the fold was to be made, and assimilation to succeed, the distribution of property would have to be suppressed. But Europe-in-Canada had tried for years—in letters and in essays, in ethnography and in poetry—to set the First Nations at an irreducible distance from itself. In British Columbia, European observers placed the kwakwala-speaking people in particular, the same people who bore the brunt of the potlatch prosecutions, at
the furthest possible remove from Western-European culture. What made them absolutely other to the European gaze was their apparent proximity to the gift and their perceived willingness to spend all.

As Albert Memmi points out, the inscription of a limit dividing the colonizer from the colonized is one of the basic structures of colonial racism. Colonial logic works first to establish this limit as an "absolute fact," and once it is established, colonizers are free to exploit it for their own benefit (Memmi 71). In British Columbia the inscription of a border between Europe-in-Canada and the First Nations lent justification to the violence of European settlement, permitting it to be crudely interpreted as the victory of civilization over barbarity. Yet this mode of colonial racism has never ceased to be haunted by an internal contradiction. Although Canadian colonialism has justified itself by marking an absolute limit between settler society and its aboriginal others, Canadian whiteness has at the same time thought itself as a transgression of that limit. The white nation—or, to be precise, the nation that desires to be white--frames its sense of itself, its self-consciousness, by repeating over and over to itself that it is about to swallow and to mourn an aboriginal other who has died. When the instant of death arrives, and even though that instant is endlessly deferred, the nation will be able to give itself a distinctive white Canadian subjectivity. But thanks to the irony that grounds it, the nation cannot realize its aim of folding others into itself because the limit that holds it apart from them is also what gives it a feeling for itself, the consciousness of its own nationhood. And somewhere in that self-consciousness, which knows that it is fundamentally incompatible with itself, the nation acknowledges that its strategies of self-justification are inadequate to their task, and it silently confesses that its existence is also a crime.
NOTES

1. The phrase "totally other and yet the same" is drawn from Derrida's essay "The Double Session" (in Dissemination 241), but the play of the other in the same is also usefully revamped in several of Homi Bhabha's essays. For example in "Of Mimicry and Man": "colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same but not quite" (126); and in "Signs Taken for Wonders": "colonial specularity, doubly inscribed, does not produce a mirror where the self apprehends itself; it is always the split screen of the self and its doubling, the hybrid" (156).

2. William Halliday will insist on this resemblance in his memoirs:

   There are many people who believe that the coast Indians, from their racial characteristics, from their features, and from their physique, are descendants of some Asiatic race, most probably of the Japanese. It is seldom that one sees a coast Indian who is above medium height; his figure is stocky, his features are round, his nose has a tendency to be flat, and his cheek bones are high, all of which features are exactly similar to those of the Japanese.

   It is a well-authenticated fact that amongst the people of Mongolian blood there exists what is medically known as the 'Mongolian spot.' All children of that blood have at birth a bluish-black spot on the back, just above the natal cleft. The spot is not larger than a ten-cent piece, and is very pronounced at birth, but becomes more and more indistinct as the child grows, and finally at from the ages of ten to fifteen it disappears. From observations taken both at Bella Bella hospital and at the hospital at Alert Bay, the majority of the Indian children have the Mongolian spot at birth, and this fact confirms other data that the coast Indian is of Mongolian, and most probably of Japanese origin, in the far distant past, but it is so remote that there are few, if any, legends left concerning the migration (213-14).

The "mongolian spot" is the visible marker of racial difference, a sign "well known" to be inscribed on the body by nature itself, tracing a legible boundary between whiteness and the "mongolian" other. Because it is situated on the back of the body, the spot is visible only to the white staff of the white hospital. It is there to reassure them that their own whiteness is unblemished, unmarked by the trace of otherness. And yet, between the ages of "ten and fifteen," this reassuring marker slowly "disappears," for when the person who bears the mark grows old enough to interpret his or her own otherness, the mark of racial difference erases itself.

3. Harry Assu of Cape Mudge on Quadra Island: "Nowadays our people here use the term Kwagiulth for all the Kwakwala-speaking tribes to the north to Smith Inlet. Beyond there the Heiltsuk language begins. Almost all our southern tribes are represented by the Kwakiutl District Council. The name Kwagiulth (or Kwakiutl) has been spelled in all sorts of ways by missionaries, government agents, and anthropologists. It's the name of the tribe at Fort Rupert near Port Hardy on Vancouver Island, but we all use that name."
Assu notes, however, that "Each tribe of the Kwagiulth Nation has its own name." For example the community at Cape Mudge, in the Roman Alphabet, is the We-Wai-Kai band of the Lekwiltok tribe (16).

Joy Inglis adds the following comments in a footnote to this passage from Assu of Cape Mudge: "To get away from using the title of one band at Fort Rupert to stand for all bands of the Southern Kwagiulth, the word Kwakwaka‘wakw was proposed by the U‘Mista Cultural Society at Alert Bay. It is coming into increasing use by scholars and Native speakers to the north, but is not in use in the Lekwiltok area. It means 'speakers of the Kwakwala language'" (124).

4. Note that Sproat makes no mention of signing a treaty with the people of this community before expropriating their land. He ignores the principle of aboriginal land title, established Royal Proclamation of 1763. Ironically, it will later be his job to sort out the problems created by such acts of expropriation. See 58 and following.

5. In "Of Mimicry and Man," Bhabha suggests that the "post-Enlightenment English Colonialism" which brought its civilising mission to India in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was driven by a "desire" for what he calls "colonial mimicry." Bhabha finds an example of this desire in Charles Grant’s "dream" of reforming manners and morals in India through Christian education (127). Grant’s goal was twofold: to make the people of India more English by imposing mission schooling upon them, and at the same time to prevent them from becoming too English, lest they demand freedom from British rule. The term "colonial mimicry" points up the contradictions at work in the project to make the colonized subject similar but not too similar to the English colonizer. Bhabha elsewhere attaches the term "uncanny" to the colonial mimic who imports an element of difference--and unease--into the colonizing culture simply by repeating its codes ("Articulating" 215-16). To mimic something is to repeat it, to confront it with its own double and, according to Freud, the uncanny is a doubling which brings with it, as part of its structure, a sudden and unmistakable sense of anxiety.

6. This passage from "Letter on Humanism" helps to clarify Heidegger’s usual terminology: "The thinking that is to come is no longer philosophy, because it thinks more originally than metaphysics--a name identical to philosophy" (242). "Metaphysics" is the name for Western-European philosophy since Plato, while "thinking" is the name Heidegger reserves for what follows the end of philosophy.

7. "But what "is" above all is Being. Thinking accomplishes the relation of Being to the essence of man. It does not make or cause the relation. Thinking brings this relation to Being solely as something handed over to it from Being. Such offering consists in the fact that in thinking Being comes to language. Language is the house of Being. In its home man dwells. Those who think and those who create with words are the guardians of this home. Their guardianship accomplishes the manifestation of Being insofar as they bring the manifestation to language and maintain it in language through their speech" (Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism" in Basic Writings 193; emphasis added). For Heidegger, we live in a world of discourse: logos (202).
8. The appearance (Erscheinen) which Heidegger's Inquirer mentions here is to be distinguished from the appearance (Erscheinung) from which Heidegger distances his thinking in the second chapter of the Introduction to Being and Time. There Heidegger deploys the term "phenomenon" (Phänomen) to signify "that which shows itself in itself" (51). It is discourse (logos), moreover, which lets the thing be seen as it is in itself (55-6). The phenomenon is the thing itself, whereas an appearance is a sensuous substitute said to represent a thing which does not show itself and therefore remains suprasensuous-just as a symptom is said to point to a disease that hides itself within the body (52). In Being and Time, then, the concept of appearance belongs to metaphysics, with its distinction between sign and referent, while the term "phenomenon" is intended to exceed the language of metaphysics by collapsing the metaphysical opposition between the sensuous and suprasensuous, thing and representation. In the "Dialogue on Language," however, the term "appearance" has crept into the place formerly occupied by the term "phenomenon." Thus the "appearance" of the "Dialogue" is a substitute for the "phenomenon" of Being and Time. One might say that in the "Dialogue" the term "phenomenon" is represented by the term "appearance."

9. To say that "a thing is anything that in any way is (present)" presupposes not only the "is," but also the time in which the thing is. When asking what gives the "is," one must also ask what gives the present, the now, which allows things to be thought as beings present in the present. The inquiry into Being is also, and necessarily, an inquiry into time. Now time, according to Heidegger, is usually thought as a succession or stream of "nows"--including the now of the present, the now-no-longer of the past, and the now-not-yet of the future--but what gives the now remains unthought (Being and Time 472-80).

10. "Once," that is, in Being and Time, 255.

11. In the "Annual Report on Indian Affairs for the Year Ending June 30 1872," Secretary of State Joseph Howe outlines the reasons for creating the British Columbia Superintendency:

In dealing with the new provinces of British Columbia and Manitoba, and the wide territories of the North West, it has become already apparent that Indian affairs cannot be managed by the application of the old machinery which has been found to work so well in the Canadas. In these vast countries no very extensive or valuable Reserves have been set apart for the Indians, no large funds are invested, the missionary labor (though zealous and self-devoted men have from the earliest times penetrated into these regions) has been less in proportion to the mass of ignorance and pagan superstition to be encountered, and the distances from Ottawa are so formidable, that after a short experience of utter hopelessness of the task of carrying on Indian affairs by correspondence with this Department, I have felt it my duty to advise that Boards should be appointed, one at Victoria and another at Winnipeg, to whom should be largely entrusted the management of Indian affairs both in British Columbia and the North West" (Sessional Papers for 1873, No. 23: 2-3).
Yet a Superintendent, rather than a Board, was put in place in British Columbia. And the administration of "Indian affairs" continued to be carried on by "correspondence" despite the "utter hopelessness of the task"—giving rise to the postal literature which concerns me here.

12. To be precise, Powell was solely responsible for the administration of Indian affairs in the province when he was first appointed in 1872, but when a second Superintendent, James Lenihan, was appointed in New Westminster in 1874, Powell became responsible for managing Canada's relations with the coastal First Nations. The new Superintendent dealt with the First Nations of the interior. According to Robin Fisher, Powell was poorly qualified for his new job, and the appointment of the second Superintendent only added to the problem, for "Lenihan was, in the parlance of the day, going "'soft in the head''' (181). In 1879 the Dominion government wanted to establish a system of administration made up of one visiting Indian superintendent stationed in Victoria to oversee the activities of several "sub-agents" located on the Island and around the southern coast and interior of the province (Sessional Papers for 1881, No. 4: 15-16). By 1881 Powell was once again the only superintendent in the province.

13. I say "perhaps without knowing it" because the Douglas treaties were not directly modelled upon the Royal Proclamation. When he drew up his first treaty, Douglas had the chiefs [of "the Teechamitsa, a Songhees community occupying what is now Esquimalt"] indicate their approval at the foot of a blank sheet of paper; he then wrote to [Archibald] Barclay [the Hudson's Bay Company secretary] asking for a suitable text to place on the upper portion of the sheet. Barclay responded with a text virtually identical to that already used by the New Zealand Company in purchasing land from the Moari. Douglas himself then copied the text, with the necessary additions of names, dates, and amount of payment, onto the original sheet of paper. The same text was used for subsequent purchases from other Indian groups. Thus...it was New Zealand rather than Canada and the Royal Proclamation of 1763 that provided the immediate model for the Douglas transactions. (Tennant 18-19).


14. Wilson Duff says that in the 1870s the land question gave rise to a three-way conflict between Canada, British Columbia and the First Nations:

While the two governments argued, the Indians became more and more agitated. By 1877 the situation in the interior was so tense that an Indian war seemed imminent. In Ottawa the Minister of the Interior thought the situation serious enough to warn the Provincial authorities by telegram that his government would side with the Indians in any trouble: "Indian rights to soil in British Columbia have never been extinguished. Should any difficulty occur, steps will be taken to maintain the Indian claims to all the country where rights have not been extinguished by treaty. Don't desire to
raise the question at present but Local Government must instruct
Commissioners to make reserves so large as to completely satisfy Indians" (Duff, History 67).

It would be misleading, however, to portray the federal government as the champion of the First Nations in nineteenth-century British Columbia. When the conservative party returned to power in 1878, John A. MacDonald became superintendent general of Indian affairs, where he allowed provincial officials to protect white interests by decreasing the size of reserves (Tennant, Aboriginal 50-1).

15. Lawrence Vankoughnet, the deputy-superintendent general of Indian affairs, reports in 1878 that Sproat had gone so far as to fire his surveyor and to hire "a non-professional, and consequently a cheaper man"--which suggests that arriving at an accurate survey and allotment of land was less important than saving "about $6 per diem or $180 per month in the expenses of the commission" (Sessional Papers for 1879, No. 7: 16-17).

16. Settlers on Vancouver Island reacted to the meeting at Lytton with open hostility. A group of prominent whites—including William Duncan of Metlakatla and Alexander Anderson, who had recently served beside Sproat on the Reserve Commission—petitioned the premier of British Columbia, protesting that "to combine a number of half-civilised natives" would be "exceedingly dangerous to the peace of the province" (25 September 1879). They had reason to be afraid: the white society's encroachment upon aboriginal lands and its refusal to recognise aboriginal title had almost led to war in the interior in 1877. In a letter forwarding the petition to Ottawa, Superintendent Powell repeated that allowing the Nlaka'pamux to govern themselves might lead them into conflict with white settlers—and then he complained that Sproat had no business meddling in matters that properly belonged within the Superintendent's jurisdiction (29 September 1879; also Fisher 178-9).

17. "The [Indian] act [of 1868] allowed the department [of Indian Affairs] to impose a "chief and council" structure, which, in spite of its name, was copied from the typical Canadian mayor and council structure and was intended to induce bands to copy the municipal style of local government and to adopt the white view that local government should be subordinate to central authorities. Despite the implication of some local autonomy, the act gave sweeping powers of regulation over reserves and bands to the federal minister of Indian affairs and his officials" (Tennant 45).

18. An ironic reversal: to keep one's wealth to oneself is simultaneously to lose it, to make it worth shit: "Not to spend money, not to put it in the bank, not even to put it in circulation, to destroy it by dint of keeping it near oneself. It, money, is already the sublime being-close-by-itself of excrement. It is excrement that I can most easily keep. Absolute value, without value, the equivalent of all value" (Derrida, Glas 206).

And must one give everything away in order to keep it? "He knows that one only keeps what one loses. Self. One not only loses what one doesn't keep, one loses what one keeps. The other thing...is lost because you give it up. But the thing you keep is lost because you give up the other. And the crack between the two is nothing. The
crack is what one must occupy. The consistent miser analyzes the crack. And so he shuttles...between the two" (207, emphasis added).

19. One of the complaints Blenkinsop makes in his report of 1874 is that the people of Barkley Sound have asked the government for gifts even though, in his eyes, they give their own property away. Although they are "the richest in every respect" in the province, they fail to conform to the principle of utility, which states that every expense must serve the ends of producing and accumulating property. He claims that "were a proper disposal made of their immense gains they could furnish themselves with every comfort they could possibly wish for."

20. Powell comments on what he perceives to be the "laxity" of women’s morals when he sends Ottawa his report on the visits he made in the summer of 1879. His report, dated 26 August 1879, was written almost exactly two months before Sproat’s "Patlach" letter:

   The women have an exceedingly clear skin and pleasant contour, and were it not for the laxity of their morals, would, no doubt, be the conservators of a fine race.

   As it is, most of the young women spend the greater part of their time at Victoria and the Puget Sound ports, so that, in visiting any of their villages, they are rarely seen, and in some of the camps, very few, if any children.

   Indeed, the chief complaint made to me by some of the influential men of the tribe, was in regard to this matter, and expressing the hope, now that I could witness their condition, that some regulation would be enforced, compelling their women to return home, and preventing these destructive pilgrimages in future. (Sessional Papers for 1880, No. 4: 126)

21. In fact, I have so far misled the reader by suggesting that Sproat wrote about the Patlach when in fact he wrote, without exception, about the "Patlach."

22. Searle offers the sentence ""Socrates" has eight letters" as an example of a speech act in which a word is itself discussed rather than "used conventionally to refer" (73). ""Patlach"" has a somewhat different role in Powell’s letter, however, since it is mentioned as a topic for debate and at the same time used as a conventional, if unreliable, referring expression.

23. It is time to clarify my relation to Cole and Chaikin’s history of the law against the potlatch: An Iron Hand upon the People. The relation between my text and theirs is, in part, an anaclitic one: a relation of leaning. By weaving archival documents into a historical narrative, they have made my own textual analysis possible. But the relation of my text to theirs is also a corrective one. For, as de Man might say, the rhetorical mode of their work is that of the excuse. "Promise is proleptic," says de Man, "but excuse is belated and always occurs after the crime; since the crime is exposure, the excuse consists in recapitulating the exposure in the guise of concealment" ("Excuses," in Allegories 286). De Man notes there is a charge of pleasure to be won by re-exposing a
crime while pretending to cover it up. He also links the excuse to the crime of lying. How do Cole and Chaikin go about making their excuses? Let me cite one example. At the end of Chapter Two, they suggest that the antipotlatch law "was passed as reform legislation, intended to promote the health and the economic and social progress of British Columbia's Indians." "In many ways," they continue, its supporters represented all that was best and most noble in Euro-Canadian society. The law was in the tradition of imperial reform—of William Wilberforce and Exeter Hall, of the Aboriginal Protection Society, of the abolition of slavery and the slave trade, and the suppression of suttee in British India. That the proponents of the law prohibiting the potlatch and the tamananawas [sic] dance suffered from all the failings of this philanthropic and reform tradition should not blind their descendants to the fact that they also shared its virtues (24).

In short, Sproat, Powell, Blenkinsop, Vankoughnet and all their peers were heroes, indeed tragic heroes plagued by the same tragic flaw: they were all tied too closely to a certain "philanthropic and reform tradition." In short, they were too good for their own good. If you cannot see that, then you are "blind."

Cole and Chaikin's argument is sheer propaganda, and as such it comes a century too late. Moreover their portrait of the Noble Colonizer conforms to an old stereotype, one that is the object of an ironic commentary in Albert Memmi's The Colonizer and the Colonized. Says Memmi:

We sometimes enjoy picturing the colonizer as a tall man, bronzed by the sun, wearing Wellington boots, proudly leaning on a shovel—as he rivets his gaze far away on the horizon of his land. When not engaged in battles against nature, we think of him laboring selflessly for mankind, attending the sick, and spreading culture to the nonliterate. In other words, his pose is one of a noble adventurer, a righteous pioneer.

I don't know whether this portrait ever did correspond to reality [maybe it gave reality to itself?] or whether it was limited to the engraving on colonial bank notes [or to excuse-making passages from Canadian history books]. Today, the economic motives of colonial undertakings are revealed by every historian of colonialism [well, perhaps not every historian]. The cultural and moral mission of a colonizer, even in the beginning, is no longer tenable (3).

Memmi insists that one does not go to a colony to help the colonized. Rather, "You go to a colony because jobs are guaranteed [especially in the civil service, for example in the Department of Indian Affairs], wages high, careers more rapid and business more profitable" (4). One of the goals of Cole and Chaikin's book is to forestall such criticisms of Canada's noble colonizers—to defend their ghosts, in advance, from a critique that has become inevitable.

24. Douglas Leighton offers this account of the relationship between the administrator and the politician:

Because his family was long acquainted with John A. Macdonald and because of his own sense of personal gratitude, Lawrence Vanhoughnet made the prime minister his lifelong political hero. This became a
particularly important element in the administrative relationship of the two men after 1878 [the year Macdonald put the Pacific scandal behind him and was re-elected as prime minister of a Conservative government], when Macdonald was Vankoughnet’s minister. The civil servant was always careful to defer to the wishes of the politician. Macdonald found the arrangement convenient in another way. He was notorious for paying scant attention to the day-to-day operations of the government departments in his charge. In Vankoughnet, he knew he had a loyal and conscientious deputy who could manage the Indian Department with a minimum of supervision. Accordingly, Macdonald’s intervention was usually confined to problems with distinct political overtones” (105).

25. Macdonald’s (or is it Vankoughnet’s?) comparison of the "Aht" to the "Kwakhewlth" simply echoes this passage from Powell’s report for 1882: "The West Coast or Aht Indians, are not much behind the Kwakhewlths in their love of holding potlatching [without quotes this time] feasts, gambling, &c., &c. They are, however, much more industrious and amenable to recognized authority" (162).

26. Note that these other names are given no currency. For Dawson, as for all white observers, "potlatch" continues to be the standard term for the distribution of property.

27. Powell was an outspoken advocate of residential industrial schooling for Native children in British Columbia. He states his "opinion" clearly in his annual report for 1882:

The present system of assisting Mission day schools is the most economical, so far as mere outlay is concerned--in this light it may be the best, but it quite fails, in my opinion, to meet the requirements of the real object in view [Powell’s concern for restricting expenditures deserves to be analysed "in light" of Bataille’s commentary on the status of expenditure in bourgeois society].

A glance at the Reports furnished from time to time, of those that are not abandoned, prove, in my opinion, that, after all, the expenditure is large for the small amount of benefit conferred.

Indian school children are so irregular, that a large attendance is required to ensure a small average for the whole quarter, add to this, the opposing impressions and vicious allurements incident to the daily return of the child from school to uncivilized camp life, and the failure of the system to accomplish much in the way of education may be readily understood.

The only scheme for meeting the difficulty appears to me to be the establishment of two or three industrial boarding schools in the Province, where, separated from native customs and modes of living, children would have opportunities of putting in practice what they are taught in school (Sessional Papers for 1883, No. 5, 167).
28. In "A Priest Versus the Potlatch," Barry Gough argues that "Hall’s endeavours to convert the Fort Rupert Kwakiutl were virtually without reward, and this was owing principally to the strengths of Kwakiutl society, most particularly the power of chiefs and, integrally related to this, the pervasive influence of potlatching" (75). But this revelation had already been made in Powell’s report from 1882.

29. On the "The Traditional Conception of Truth" see also Heidegger, Being and Time, 257. Hegel describes the correspondence theory of truth as "the standard which consciousness itself sets up by which to measure what it knows. If we designate knowledge as the Notion, but the essence or the True as what exists, or the object, then the examination consists in seeing whether the Notion corresponds to the object" (Phenomenology 53). But what consciousness really examines while testing the agreement between notion and object, is itself: "For consciousness is, on the one hand, consciousness of the object, and on the other, consciousness of itself" (54).

30. Charles Nowell, who was perhaps fifteen or sixteen years old when the law came into effect, also recalls the ignorance of white officials determined to abolish something they could not understand:

   When one of the Indian agents first came to Alert Bay, he came to visit us at Fort Rupert, and he begin to talk to us about the potlatch and say he is going to stop it, for it is no good. I ask him how he knows. He says: "I know all about it. I know more than you do." I says: "You must be older than I am, because I have lived all my life amongst them, and I still don’t know everything about it." He says: "I’ve been told." And, when I ask him who tells him, it is always another white man (Smoke from their Fires 106).

   That Nowell does not claim to "know all" about the potlatch becomes especially significant when one recalls that, according to Drucker and Heizer, he is "the scholar, the philosopher" of kwawkwaka’wakw culture (see To Make my Name Good 7).

31. In Mémoires, Derrida too contrasts what Heidegger and Austin have to say about the "meaning of a word." Derrida’s account differs from mine, so let me quote him here, if only to acknowledge a debt:

   Neither Heidegger nor Austin believe that the meanings of words are found in dictionaries, not even in etymological dictionaries. But for apparently different, even opposed reasons. Heidegger thinks that it is necessary to think the meaning of words in order to be able to read and examine a dictionary. Austin says, in no uncertain terms, that words do not have a meaning, and that it is absurd to look in a dictionary for something like the given meaning of a word. Only sentences have a meaning, and the dictionary can only help by informing us about the sentences wherein conventions authorize the usage of these words (112).

32. In the "Letter on Humanism" Heidegger links the idea of "destiny" to the gift of the es gibt: "This "there is/it gives" rules as the destiny [das Geschick] of Being" (215). And further down: "The happening of history occurs essentially as the destiny of the truth
of Being and from it. Being comes to destiny in that It, Being, gives itself. But thought in terms of such destiny this says: it gives itself and refuses itself simultaneously" (215).

We have already seen that in "Time and Being" Being no longer "gives itself" but rather is given in an event of appropriation which brings Being and time into their mutual interrelatedness.

33. "Here, we assume, is the essential nature of language. "To say," related to the Old Norse "saga," means to show: to make appear, set free, that is, to offer and extend what we call World, lighting and concealing it. This lighting and hiding proffer of the world is the essential being of Saying" ("The Nature of Language" 93). Saying gives not only beings, but also their being-together: it gives world.

34. No doubt Clifford feared that the hostilities aroused by missionary work would harm relations between the First Nations and local settlers—and undermine the Hudson’s Bay Company’s ability to conduct its own, profitable business.

35. When Derrida discusses "the Austinian opposition between the performative and the constative," as for example in Mémoires (120-1), he seems to forget that Austin never ceased to undermine that opposition. It is difficult to restitute to Austin a distinction which he repeatedly disowns.

36. This theory of the textual gift, as a theory of sending, of putting Being and beings in the mail, owes an incalculable debt to Derrida’s fragmented commentary on Heidegger in "Envois" (in The Post Card 1-256, see especially 64-7). Here Derrida relocates Heidegger’s es gibt—which, in the "Letter on Humanism at least, names "the destiny or destining of Being (Das Schicken im Geschick des Seins)"--within a consideration of the "post," "the postal" and "the post card" (Derrida 65). What Derrida suggests, and what he says Heidegger would not entirely accept, is that postality does not belong only to one epoch, one technology, in the destining of Being. Postality is not a single, historically specific metaphor that attempts to substitute itself for the entire history of the destining of Being. Rather, it is destining’s most proper possibility. As soon as there is a sending, a send-off, says Derrida, "then the possibility of posts is always already there...As soon as there is, as soon as it gives (es gibt), it destines, it tends..." (64). Postality is not a figure of speech which could be used, in a reductionist fashion, to describe destining in a given discourse. Rather, it is the possibility of rhetoric, of figurality, in general; for to use figurative language is to send one term in place of another:

If...I think the postal and the post card on the basis of the destinal of Being, as I think the house (of Being) on the basis of Being, of language, and not the inverse, etc., then the post is no longer a simple metaphor, and is even, as the site of all transferences and correspondences, the "proper" possibility of every possible rhetoric. Would this satisfy Martin? Yes and no (65).

No, because Heidegger would likely regard the attempt to think postality on the basis of destining (the es gibt) as a return to metaphysics. The concept of postality implies a whole postal technology which, for Heidegger, belongs to the modern epoch of a metaphysics which fails to interrogate its non-metaphysical essence; moreover postality
determines the sending of Being as "position" (posture, thesis or theme), as the act of positing theses, and for Heidegger "position" belongs to metaphysics. Heidegger would therefore accuse Derrida "of constructing a metaphysics of the posts or of postality" (65).

For Derrida, however, the technology of the "posts" underlies the destining of Being and therefore has a place both inside and outside of the history of metaphysics (66). And since postality by definition includes the possibility that whatever is sent will not arrive at its proper destination, one can no longer speak of a single metaphysics, nor of a single sending of Being, but rather of multiple sendings that never end up in the same place. Since it is postal-destining that puts metaphysics in the mail, it is always possible, and indeed necessary, that metaphysics will get lost and never arrive at itself. Metaphysics, understood as the history of the epochs of the destining of Being, the history of the ways in which Being gives history to itself, cannot be reduced to a homogeneous totality because it is forever deferred, forever on the way, in the mail, forever rendering itself different from itself: "as soon as there is [es gibt]," says Derrida, "there is différence (and this does not await language, especially human language, and the language of Being, only the mark and the divisible trait), and there is postal maneuvering, relays, delay, anticipation, destination, telecommunicating network, the possibility, and therefore the fatal necessity of going astray, etc." (66).

37. Once an officer in the militia, Reed joined the Ministry of the Interior in 1881, and he served as an Indian agent and as assistant Indian commissioner for the Northwest territories before becoming the bureaucrat in charge of Indian Affairs. D. J. Hall offers a concise endnote on Reed: "Certainly Reed, and sometimes his predecessor as deputy, L. Vankoughnet, could be inflexible and unwilling to consider the Indian viewpoint. Reed, nevertheless, had had at least two years' experience as an Indian agent.... [Yet] He admitted in 1895 that he was "necessarily out of touch, to a great extent, with the Indians"" (Hall, "Clifford" 138-9).

38. On 29 February The Province had published an open letter from Tate to G. E. Courbould, a local member of Parliament. Its topic was the potlatch. It drew the following response from William Dwyer of Cowichan:

I have seen a few potlatches and I must say that I have come to the conclusion that the same number of white people could not live together for a week or two and settle up their affairs in a more peaceable and orderly manner than the Indians of this coast do. The potlatches of the present day seem to take more the part of a country fair. Friends and relatives living far apart meet together--debts are paid and presents made, besides which boats, canoes, cattle are bought and sold, and store debts of deceased relatives are often provided for.

Visitors constantly remark about the orderly manner in which these gatherings are conducted, but of course they are not like Mr. Tate behind the scenes and do not see the "barbarous practices, drunkenness and immorality" which he does.

In conclusion I would say that I believe the majority of the people of this province are opposed to any forcible interference with the harmless customs of the natives, knowing as all do that these customs are rapidly
39. Hall provides this note on McLean, which I duly note: "McLean, grandson of a liberal MP at the time of Alexander Mackenzie, one John Farris, had been appointed to the department in October 1876, rising to the position of first-class clerk by 1896." According to Hall, "Sifton had a high regard for his ability; but a perusal of McLean's correspondence suggested a man of short temper, concerned with picayune detail in day-to-day matters, and very impressed with his own importance. On more than one occasion he complained to the deputy that he was not being treated with due deference by other employees" ("Clifford Sifton..." 138, note 7).

40. Hale was editor of the Committee for the Study of the Northwestern Tribes of Canada, and he directed Boas's work for the B.A.A.S. Boas often felt that Hale's directives did more to disrupt his research than to help it. See Rohner 81-2.

41. From the middle of the 1880s until his death in 1933, George Hunt was Boas's leading Kwagiulth informant. According to one estimate, he collected about two-thirds of Boas's material on Kwakw'akw culture.

Drucker and Heizer note that Hunt was "adopted" rather than born into the social system of the Kwakwaka'wakw. According to them, he was "the son of the Scottish factor at the Hudson's Bay Company post at Fort Rupert and of a Tsimshian woman," but he grew up among the Kwakwaka'wakw and "came to hold a chief's name and status and carried all the associated duties of his formal position--functioning in the potlatch and dancing as a Hamatsa in the Shaman's Society [sic] performances--because he was adopted by the hereditary holder of those rights" (To Make my Name 25). Schulte-Tenckhoff says, in contrast, that Hunt was the son of a Scottish father and a Tlingit mother, and that he was considered a stranger at Fort Rupert (Potlatch 121). While anthropologists are compelled to note that Boas's coauthor was connected to whiteness, Charles Nowell recalls simply that his older brother became wealthy while cooking for Hunt's father, who paid him in blankets (Nowell 54-5).

Boas offers us some insight into his method of conducting field work when he recounts his first meeting with George Hunt in 1888. Here are some excerpts from the diary Boas kept during his first expedition for the BAAS. 12 June 1888:

It may well be that my anthropological [anthropometric] observations will turn out to be the most valuable results of my trip. I am very glad about this. I now have photographs of three men, two Haida and one from west Vancouver, the last a splendid fellow. I am having them all photographed nude to the waist.... Not being able to get hold of any Indians [to serve as informants] this afternoon, I cleaned the first skeleton [which he had stolen from a graveyard about a week earlier] and packed it up. They take up more room than I thought, and I shall have to acquire larger boxes. Besides having scientific value these skeletons are worth money.... I had asked my Haida to come this evening, but he was so drunk that I had to send him away. So I took a walk to Beacon Hill [for the time being Boas is conducting his field work in Victoria], from which one gets a beautiful view over San Juan de Fuca Strait. A Kwakiutl came this evening whom I
had wanted very much, and so I am "fixed" for tomorrow. (Rohner 90)
The man Boas "thought" he wanted so badly was George Hunt. 13 June 1888:
At least so I thought yesterday, but I have been very much disappointed. I
went first to the jail, but after waiting half an hour I learned that no new
Indians had been brought in. Then I went to my Tlingit lady and got along
well for three hours, but then she began to mutter. My Kwakiutl, George
Hunt, came at 1:45 to tell me that he had been called as an interpreter to a
court sitting but would come to me at 4:00 p.m. He is an interpreter. I
busied myself copying until four, but George Hunt did not appear. At
eight I finally set out to look for him and was able to find his home after a
long search, but he was not there. I must try to catch him tomorrow
morning. The only way I can get people is to drag them in by the hair.
(91)
In a letter to his wife, where he reports what he achieved between 15 November and 6
December 1894, Boas comments on his last trip for the BAAS. He is still making
anthropometric measurements. 17 November 1894:
The day before yesterday I started to measure; I got twenty-five adults
without any difficulty. I hope to get 100 altogether here, and for this I
need George Hunt. His help is of the greatest value. (178)
But Hunt’s great "value" does not prevent Boas from growing impatient with him. 22
November 1894:
This morning I obtained a few more items concerning last night and also
wrote down a few folktales. I wish I were away from here. George Hunt
is so hard to get along with. He acts exactly as he did in Chicago [he had
joined Boas there at the World Columbian Exposition in 1893]. He is too
lazy to think, and that makes it disagreeable for me. I cannot change this,
though, and have to make the best of it. He left at noon with some excuse
and returned only after several hours. He knows exactly how I depend on
him (183).

42. "And it is the baptising of the Indians; the giving away of blankets fastens a name on
a child" (Boas, Contributions 111).

43. "Finally, these total services and counter-services are committed to in a somewhat
voluntary form by presents and gifts, although in the final analysis they are strictly
compulsory, on pain of private or public warfare" (The Gift 5). Nothing in all this talk
of the gift ever strays very far from the potlatch of the Pacific northwest. Here are
Mauss’s next two sentences: "We propose to call all this the system of total services.
The purest type of such institutions seems to us to be characterized by the alliance of two
phratries in Pacific or North American tribes in general, where rituals, marriages,
inheritance of goods, legal ties and those of self-interest, the ranks of the military and
priests— in short everything, is complementary and presumes co-operation between the
two halves of the tribe." (5-6).
44. Why the word "holocaust" rather than "sacrifice" or "incineration"? Derrida explains that "The word holocaust that happens to translate Opfer is more appropriate to the text [Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit] than the word of Hegel himself. In this sacrifice, all (holos) is burned (caustos), and the fire can go out only stoked" (241).

"Holocaust" draws attention to one the ghosts that haunts my text, for the word also names the Extermination perpetrated in Europe in the 1940s. Since this name has arrived in my text, I can no longer ignore the fact that two of the writers who have laid the foundations for my argument, Heidegger and de Man, openly affiliated themselves with National Socialism in the 1930s and 1940s. How can a text which tries to disable a particular mode of Canadian racism ground itself in the works of thinkers touched by one of the most despicable racisms in human history? How can I condemn the authors for their life choices and still find value in their works? I do not think it is possible to criticize Western-European racisms from a region and a discourse situated outside of those racisms. I could try to place my research somewhere beyond such crimes, but that research itself suggests that I would succeed only in folding my text together with everything I want to exclude from it. Perhaps in a way my text is an endorsement of Walter Benjamin's declaration that "There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism" (256): a declaration which cannot be made without deploying two of the leading concepts of Canadian colonialism: "civilization" and "barbarism." Perhaps one has to occupy the continuum of history, with the wreckage of the past piling up at one's feet, in order to fracture it. Besides, to live in British Columbia is, already, to occupy stolen land and to participate in a crime.

45. In the fall of 1903 he complained that the property owned by the family of George Hunt, Boas's informant, had become the center of potlatch activity at Fort Rupert (DeBeck to Vowell, 30 October 1903).

46. DeBeck asked the department to send a detective to help him investigate the news report. Vowell dispatched Thomas Deasy, but by the time he arrived in Alert Bay, DeBeck had gone to the Koskimoo reserve without him. DeBeck discovered that "a hamatsa" had been initiated but was unable to learn the details of the ceremony (23 January 1904). Meanwhile, Deasy was making his own inquiry into the practice of potlatching in the vicinity of Alert Bay, and upon returning to Victoria he sent the Daily Times a long article describing a potlatch and "Cedar Bark Dance" held on Gilford Island. The article praises the Gilford Island people and contradicts the reports of whites who claim that the hamatsa dance involves acts of cannibalism. He suggests that the people be allowed to pursue their traditions in peace (Daily Times, 23 April 1904). An enraged DeBeck charged that Deasy was trying to incite public opinion against the suppression of the hamatsa-potlatch (see letters between DeBeck, Deasy and Vowell, 5, 10, 15, 17, 26 and 30 May 1904). But Deasy was not the only obstacle to DeBeck's antipotlatch campaign.

47. Perhaps this is the place to recall the iconoclastic arguments put forward by W. Arens in The-Man Eating Myth. Arens declares that there is simply no reliable evidence that any human culture has ever practiced either ritual or gustatory cannibalism. Yet every culture has been accused of it. Western-European societies characteristically
dismiss as ridiculous charges that they practice cannibalism, yet uncritically accept as true undocumented claims that non-Western, non-European peoples are cannibals. It invariably turns out that the cannibals in question ceased indulging in their grisly meals just before Western-European observers arrived on the scene: witness, for example, Boas’s opposition between "formerly" and "nowadays." For Arens what is most remarkable about the discourse on cannibalism is not just that there is no reliable evidence for it, but that Western-European anthropologists, who lay claim to scientific objectivity, are willing to accept that it exists without bothering to check their data. Note that Cole and Chaikin openly embrace the idea that the coastal First Nations practiced ritual cannibalism: perpetuating the myth of cannibalism allows the two historians to defend the framers of the law against the so-called "Tamanawas" from charges of racism (see Iron 23-4).

48. Martin was also provincial premier for three months in 1900.

49. Would Derrida "accept" this reading? Perhaps only "in part" (35).

50. The government’s own research points to the "obvious continuity" in Canada’s Indian policy from 1830 until the present. See Canada, Indian and Northern Affairs, *The Historical Development of the Indian Act* 191-3.

51. Section ninety-four of the Indian Act of 1876 denied the First Nations of British Columbia the "right" to enfranchisement because they were considered as yet unfit to be full citizens. They were protected from the legal mechanism of assimilation until 1892. *The Historical Development of the Indian Act*, 69 and 95-6.

52. Daniel Francis: "Canadians did not expect Indians to adapt to the modern world. Their only hope was to assimilate, to become White, to cease to be Indians. In this view, a modern Indian is a contradiction in terms: Whites could not imagine such a thing. Any Indian was by definition a traditional Indian, a relic of the past" (*The Imaginary Indian* 59).

53. It is well known that very few aboriginal people--only 102 between Confederation and 1918--gave up their special status and adopted the franchise. They knew the government was planning their demise. In 1920 Scott had the Indian Act amended to allow the government to enfranchise aboriginal people against their will. However the new section 107 collapsed with Arthur Meighen’s short-lived government (Meighen had been minister of the interior and superintendent-general of Indian affairs before becoming prime minister). It was replaced in 1922 with less coercive legislation providing for voluntary enfranchisement. Provisions for compulsory enfranchisement were once again added to the Act in 1933. See Titley 48-51, and Canada, *The Historical Development of the Indian Act* 124-5.

In 1920 when Scott proposed to "get rid of the Indian problem" by enfranchising aboriginal people without their consent, he openly confessed that the goal of the new policy was to enable the political body of Canada to eat its aboriginal others. "Our object," he affirmed, "is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has
not been absorbed into the body politic and there is no Indian Question, and no Indian Department..." (The Historical Titley 50). For Scott, Canada is a body, and the First Nations are its food. As long as they remain uneaten Canada remains weak and impoverished because it must spend its wealth to support them; by dying, however, they will feed and nourish the new nation, allowing it to grow strong.

For the history of eugenics in Canada see McLaren, Our own Master Race.

54. One might well compare Harry Mountain's phrase with the epigraph to Chapter One of Derrida's Given Time. There Derrida cites a letter from Madame de Maintenon, the morganatic wife of Louis XIV of France, to Madame Brinon. The citation reads as follows: "The King takes all my time; I give the rest to Saint-Cyr, to whom I would like to give all" (1). Saint-Cyr was not a lover, but rather "a charitable institution for the education of impoverished young ladies of good families" (4).

55. The best account of the events following from the Cranmer potlatch is Sewid-Smith, Prosecution or Persecution.

56. To be precise, the report calls for the repeal of the first subsection of section 149 of the Indian Act. A second subsection had been added to the statute in June 1914. This amendment forbid "Indians" in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia, or the territories to attend dances outside their own reserves and to appear "in aboriginal costume" at "any show, exhibition, performance, stampede or pageant." It also prohibits whites from encouraging such behaviour. It was intended to help suppress dancing throughout western Canada. See Statutes of Canada, chapter 35, (4-5 George V.), section 8. Subsection 2 was Scott's work (Titley 174-5).

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