FILMING A MAKAH VILLAGE FOR
JIM JARMUSCH'S *DEAD MAN*

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis looks at ethnographic film using Jim Jarmusch’s 1996 Dead Man as a “site.” Dead Man’s penultimate scene portrays a Northwest Coast village using Makah actors and Makah-made set pieces. The production of this scene provides a setting where mainstream American culture, represented by a Hollywood film crew, comes into contact with Makah culture in a collaborative filmmaking effort, making Dead Man a site of cultural negotiation and mediation. By contextualizing Dead Man with earlier films from the Northwest Coast by Edward S. Curtis and Franz Boas, by examining the film’s production through the words of the participants, and by incorporating theoretical notions of contact zones, authenticity, and experience, the author gleans an understanding of the contemporary Makah experience of Dead Man.
# Table of Contents

- **Abstract** ii
- **Table of Contents** iii
- **List of Figures** iv
- **Acknowledgments** v
- **Introduction: Film and Memory** 1
- **Using Film for Salvage: Curtis and Boas** 5
- **The Story and the Cast: Curtis and Jarmusch** 13
- **Making a Makah Village for *Dead Man*** 21
- **Back in Neah Bay** 31
- **Discussion and Conclusions: Authenticity, Contact, and Experience** 35
- **Works Cited** 40
- **Filmography** 45
LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1 6

A reconstructed longhouse at the Makah Cultural and Research Center in Neah Bay, Washington. Photograph by Todd J. Tubutis.

FIGURE 2 6

The urethane foam pole used in Dead Man in temporary storage outside the Makah Cultural and Research Center in Neah Bay, Washington. Photograph by Todd J. Tubutis.

FIGURE 3 23

A film still of the Dead Man set showing the longhouse facades based on reconstructed longhouses in Neah Bay, Washington. Photograph by Christine Perry.
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INTRODUCTION: FILM AND MEMORY

Images take root in your mind, hot and bright, like an image on a photoplate. Once they etch themselves there, they can’t be obliterated, can’t be scratched out. They burn themselves in the mind. Because there’s no arguing with pictures. You simply accept or reject them. What’s up there on the screen moves too fast to permit analysis or argument. You can’t control the flow of images the way you can control a book—by rereading a chapter, rereading a paragraph, rereading a sentence. A book invites argument, invites reconsideration, invites thought. A moving picture is beyond thought. Like feeling, it simply is. The principle of a book is persuasion; the principle of a movie is revelation.

Guy Vanderhaeghe
The Englishman’s Boy

Photographs haunt our memories. While not every photograph taken will resonate with time, a well-made, well-composed photograph has the ability to linger in both the public and private consciousness for years, if not centuries. The reasons for this are multiple: the subject matter of the photograph, its artistry, the unspoken context of the image, the uncanny timing of the photographer being in the right place at the right time, the emotion which the image evokes, the quintessential-ness of what it portrays. Such photographs are the subject of special issues of magazines, coffee-table volumes, and large scale museum exhibitions. The photograph, having recently celebrated its sesquicentennial, has been thoroughly analyzed, critiqued, and hallowed by journalists, artists, writers, and academics in many fora, not the least being Susan Sontag’s eloquent and oft-quoted On Photography. For the anthropologist, perhaps the most useful of Sontag’s lines are:

In teaching us a new visual code, photographs alter and enlarge our notions of what is worth looking at and what we have a right to observe. They are a grammar and, even more importantly, an ethics of seeing. Finally, the most grandiose result of the photographic enterprise is to give us the sense that we can hold the whole world in our heads—as an anthology of images. (1977: 3)

What Sontag is discussing is the implicit power of photography: shaping the way we view the
world and also giving us a mechanism for expressing ourselves visually. In addition to improving access to people and places, photographs also impact the way we experience not only distant locales, but our own lives.

While photographs may haunt our memories, perhaps causing us to remember an event only as it was photographed, films take hold in a different way. David MacDougall suggests: “Films have a disconcerting resemblance to memory. ... Sometimes film seems even more astonishing than memory, an intimation of memory perfected” (1994: 260). As films have been categorized into distinct genres, it is ethnographic film which has become the most recognizable of the visual efforts of anthropologists. While Barbash and Taylor (1997: 4) have stated that there is no clear difference between films labeled “documentary” and those labeled “ethnographic,” simply put, ethnographic film is the use of film (and video) to conduct ethnography. Yet Karl Heider (1976) suggests that many types of films have elements of ethnography and argues for a system of determining the “ethnographicness” of any given motion picture. Sol Worth asserts that all films are ethnographic, regardless of their origin, as “records of culture—as objects and events which can be studied in the context of culture within which they were used” (1980: 17). Rosalind C. Morris, in her examination of films about Northwest Coast cultures, argues that an anthropology concerned with visual representations “must be concerned with films in their dual aspect: as symbolic statements about foreign cultures, but also as embodiments of our own culture’s system of representation” (1994: 19). Morris’s is a look at both “films in anthropology and an anthropology of films” (ibid.). Faye Ginsburg takes Morris’s notion a step further and calls for an anthropology which both recognizes “the complex ways people are engaged in processes of making and interpreting media works in relation to their cultural, social, and historical circumstances,” and
investigates “the ways that mass media—and especially television—are contributing to the mediation and construction of cultural difference within and across societies” (1994:13).

It is with Ginsburg’s ideas in mind that I bring an anthropological approach to one film in particular, Jim Jarmusch’s *Dead Man* (1996). A neo-traditional western set in the second half of the nineteenth century, *Dead Man* portrays the story of a man traveling west from Cleveland to the frontier who, through compounding circumstances, becomes an outlaw and finds himself in the care of an outcast Native American. Filmed in black and white, *Dead Man* ends in a Northwest Coast village visually reminiscent of film and photography from the period, and one where contemporary Makah perform Native roles. Jarmusch’s film provides a setting where mainstream American culture, represented by a Hollywood film set, comes into contact with Makah culture in a collaborative filmmaking effort, making *Dead Man* a site of cultural negotiation and mediation. By using ethnography to explore *Dead Man* as a site, by examining the film’s production through the words of the participants, and by incorporating theoretical notions of contact zones, authenticity, and experience, I hope to glean an understanding of the collective Makah experience in *Dead Man*.

Anthropologists rely heavily on the memories of the people with whom they work and treat recalled memories as expressions of a lived experience. There are also performances, objects, and other cultural phenomenon that express experience, but it is the spoken word that serves the core of ethnography. As *Dead Man* is a performance, a fictional historical recreation, my primary concern is with the filmmaking experience itself: what is the contemporary Makah experience of participating in *Dead Man*? A different concern might be with the “text” of the performance: what the film’s narrative is expressing about the frontier, about violence in America, about travel and
transition; but I leave that discussion to others. My purpose is to understand the social life of *Dead Man* for the Makah community which it involved. For this, I am relying on the memories of those Makah who took part in the film as actors and artists.

Over 200 hundred films were made on the Northwest Coast before the 1940s (Morris 1994: 13), one of the earliest being Edward S. Curtis's *In the Land of the Head-Hunters* (1914). By paying homage to Curtis with the stylized look of *Dead Man*, Jarmusch also reflects on the social mores of the time and taps into the salvage paradigm which attracted Curtis and others. This includes the germinal work of anthropologist Franz Boas, who experimented with motion picture research in his own studies. It is useful to begin by detailing Curtis's work in film and photography, and that of his anthropological foil Boas, to situate *Dead Man* in the continuum of film and photography of Northwest Coast groups; Jarmusch draws directly on the visual legacy of Curtis' film and also reflects the salvage paradigm prevalent in the work of both Boas and Curtis. Applying Mary Louise Pratt's concept of contact zone—"the space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations" (1992: 6)—to the Makah village set of *Dead Man*, I will formulate a picture of the Makah experience in the film based on the words of those with whom I conversed.

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1 For my purposes here, I cannot adequately acknowledge other photographers from the Northwest Coast, Native or otherwise, or those who have critically examined their work. See, for example, Ira Jacknis (1992) on George Hunt's work with Boas, Margaret Blackman (1981) and Carolyn J. Marr (1990) for examinations of the relationship between coastal photographers and subjects, Kendall, Mathé, and Miller (1997) on the photographs generated by the Jesup North Pacific Expedition from 1897 to 1902, as well as David Neel (1992) for a discussion of his own photographic work. For provocative approaches to photographers not situated on the Northwest Coast, see James C. Faris (1996), who looks extensively at Navajo and photography, and Peggy Albright (1997), who contextualizes the work of Crow photographer Richard Throssel with the words of living Crow elders.
USING FILM FOR SALVAGE: CURTIS AND BOAS

The town of Neah Bay is located at the entrance to the Makah reservation on Cape Flattery on the Olympic Peninsula in Washington State—geographically, the most northwestern point in the continental United States. The Makah Cultural and Research Center (MCRC) is the first Makah establishment to greet visitors as they enter the reservation. Commonly referred to as the Makah Museum, the MCRC opened in 1979 to house and display artifacts uncovered at the Ozette site, about 22 kilometers south of Neah Bay on the Pacific coast where approximately 550 years ago, a Makah village at Ozette was buried in a mudslide. What archaeologists at the site have since uncovered is a well-preserved slice of Makah material culture as it was that fateful day. Today, the MCRC serves the community not only as a repository for the significant Ozette collection, but also as a center for cultural activities in the Makah Nation and as a resource for community research.

In front of the museum, along the road into town, stands a large reconstructed longhouse based on dimensions of longhouses unearthed at Ozette (FIGURE 1). Behind the longhouse outside the MCRC storage building (where the majority of the Ozette collection is housed), a long carved pole rests horizontally on a series of crates under an eave of the museum roof. It is painted white, orange, and black, and it becomes apparent upon closer inspection that the pole is carved out of urethane foam, not of wood as one might expect. This is the very pole which served as the focal point for the recreated Makah village in Dead Man (FIGURE 2). Designed and carved by Makah artists on the set of Dead Man in Grants Pass, Oregon, the pole came to the MCRC after filming had finished as an artifact of the production. With the pole came a series of costumes worn by Makah actors in the film and a few other set pieces, such as a bench and a carved club. Yet none
FIGURE 1

A reconstructed longhouse at the Makah Cultural and Research Center in Neah Bay, Washington. Photograph by Todd J. Tubutis.

FIGURE 2

The urethane foam pole used in Dead Man in temporary storage outside the Makah Cultural and Research Center in Neah Bay, Washington. Photograph by Todd J. Tubutis.
of these pieces is officially “on display” as part of the MCRC collections; the pole may be visible, but it is clearly there in temporary storage. While the making of Dead Man may have been a small moment in the lives of those Makah involved, the film’s legacy lingers at the MCRC in the material objects left behind. The administration of the MCRC may—at this point—have no concrete plans for the pieces, but they remain there as reminders of the community’s participation in the film.

Similarly, in the Great Hall of the University of British Columbia’s Museum of Anthropology (MOA) in Vancouver, stands a totem pole used on the set of Edward S. Curtis’s In the Land of the Head-Hunters carved by George Hunt.2 Surrounded by other Kwakwaka’wakw, Nisga’a, Gitksan, Tsimshian, and Haida poles, it is identified on a large label as being a part of Head-Hunters, complete with a small illustration from the film that highlights the placement of the pole on the set. The Hunt pole stood at the front of a longhouse facade on the beach of Deer Island near Fort Rupert, British Columbia, where most of the filming for Head-Hunters was completed. While the film lives on in its restored and reedited incarnation—In the Land of the

2 It is certain that this pole (MOA catalogue #A50041) was carved by George Hunt, yet museum records present some confusion as to when the pole was actually produced. While one set of information indicates that the piece was carved in 1914 for Curtis’s film, other documents mention that the pole was carved for Charles Knowles and erected in Fort Rupert for his marriage circa 1895, only later brought to the Head-Hunters set on Deer Island for the filming. This latter comes from notes made by Marius Barbeau (who served as a liaison in the purchase of the pole) and the pole receives a mention in volume one of Barbeau’s Totem Poles (1950: 155). Nonetheless, after it was acquired by the University of British Columbia, it was repaired and repainted by Kwakwaka’wakw carvers Ellen Neel in 1949 and Mungo Martin in 1950-51 and then placed outside with other poles in an area called Totem Park. When the present MOA building was completed in 1976, the pole was moved to its current place in the Great Hall. The pole can also be seen in Curtis’s book of the same title as his film (1915) on page 67.

3 Today, Kwakwaka’wakw is the term preferred by those of northern Vancouver Island and the nearby mainland who speak kwakwala, who were historically and popularly called Kwakiutl. Boas, Curtis, and Jarmusch all use Kwakiutl to refer to the same people, and I hope that my use of Kwakwaka’wakw does not cause confusion.
War Canoes (1973)—the Hunt pole is probably one of the few surviving material remnants from Curtis’s original set.

Edward Curtis conceived of Head-Hunters—with an all Kwakwaka’wakw cast—as part of a grand plan to use photography to document the quickly disappearing Indian cultures of North America. The primary vehicle of this plan was a mammoth 20-volume publication, The North American Indian (1907-30), which took Curtis over thirty years to complete. Sold on a subscription basis, each volume contained both photographic and written material documenting a tribe or series of tribes from a specific geographical region. While he had the monetary support of financier J. Pierpont Morgan and various subscribers to help complete the project, it was not enough to cover the great expense of his efforts and Curtis often considered other potential income-generating activities. The film Head-Hunters was thus conceived as a way to visually document Kwakwaka’wakw culture, to entertain the public, and to generate revenue for continued work on The North American Indian.

Curtis was an extremely talented photographer, both in technique and composition. His sepia-tone photogravures captured the romantic image of the “Vanishing Race” of native North Americans like no other. Curtis’s work today fills the pages of calendars, gift books, and encyclopedias illustrating the what he believed to be the pre-contact ways of life of native North Americans. It can also be found in many museums as visual context for objects on display. His style is immediately recognizable: formal portraits of blanketed Navajo girls, horseback warriors

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4 Two examples in British Columbia: enormous copies of Curtis’s images serve as backdrops for the Royal British Columbia Museum’s First Peoples exhibit in Victoria. Also, In the Land of the War Canoes is the only visual component in the recent exhibit “Down From the Shimmering Sky: Masks of the Northwest Coast” at the Vancouver Art Gallery, June 4 to October 12, 1998.
positioned against large prairie skies, masked dancers emerging from the woods in a moment of liminality. Each volume of *The North American Indian* contains extensive ethnographic information Curtis collected illustrated by photographs of dancers, gatherers, baskets, tipis, warriors, totem poles, landscapes, etc. The size and scope of his project demonstrate the salvage paradigm in which he was working; it was Curtis’s intent to fully document—both visually and textually—Native life as it was. Curtis’s work has been thoroughly assessed for its methodology and content (Lyman 1982), and it is well-known that he often staged his subjects to appear more “Indian” or less “civilized.” And his scientific credibility was challenged by anthropologist Franz Boas (Boesen and Graybill 1977).

Boas was working with the Kwakwaka’wakw on Vancouver Island at the same time Curtis was working with different coastal nations in British Columbia. Boas, like Curtis, was worried about the fast disappearance of Native cultures and focused his scientific project on the collection of material, textual, and visual objects, the results of which can be seen in the collections of museums throughout North America and beyond. Yet Boas’s personal efforts in film and photography do not bear the same impact as his written work, compared to Curtis whose visual images have endured longer than his ethnographic writing. While this may reflect different audiences (and also different ends—Boas’s film work is almost unknown), it is quite ironic to see publications where a Curtis image is used to illustrate ethnographic work accomplished by Boas (for example, Suttles 1990: 385).

5 More recently, Kwakwaka’wakw photographer David Neel (1992) has also critiqued Curtis in an essay contextualizing his own work with that of his predecessors.

6 Ira Jacknis (1996) looks at Boas’s ethnographic “tool box” to examine the ephemeral and material types of objects Boas sought and the anthropological use to which these objects were put.
Boas himself was not the principal photographer in his fieldwork; this duty was often left to his field collaborators, such as George Hunt. However, in 1930, at the age of 70, Boas filmed a series of Kwakwaka'wakw activities in Fort Rupert. Never fusing the segments into a polished “film,” Boas ultimately lost track of the footage and even considered it stolen at one point. In 1973, art historian Bill Holm edited the segments with the help of Kwakwaka’wakw assistants into a finished 2-reel film with titles introducing the various sequences and released the film as The Kwakiutl of British Columbia (Morris 1994: 56). In Holm’s edit, there is no narrative, only scenes of technological processes, of games with children and adults, of seventeen separate dances, of men demonstrating the use of a copper, of a shaman healing a patient. Catherine Russell (1996: 63) suggests that Boas may have been reluctant to impose an outside narrative on his filmic ethnographic “objects,” a contradiction which would have been incongruous with his efforts to describe Kwakwaka’wakw culture in its own terms. These filmic objects, Rosalind Morris has argued, are visual echoes of Boas’s writing.

For much of Boas’ written ethnography reads like the footage for the Kwakiutl: numerous sequences of detailed images strung together one after the other with only minimal overt theorization. Moreover, while he occasionally discusses anthropological uses for the footage, these did not include the production of an edited “film.” (1994:43)

These sequences, then, equate to the numerous other ethnographic “objects” collected by Boas throughout his career.

Boas did, however, find some value in films made for general audiences, such as Head-Hunters. This came to light in a series of letters between Boas and Will Hays, President of the Motion Picture Distributors and Producers of America, wherein Boas advocates the use of film in ethnographic work and discusses the particular value of films like Robert Flaherty’s Nanook of the North (1922) and Moana (1926), and Cooper and Schoedsack’s Grass (1925) for portraying...
cultural behaviors.

Excellent material is contained in these pictures; nevertheless they might have been made ever so much more interesting if a person had been consulted who knows the social life of the people intimately. ...I am convinced that the motion picture industry could do itself a great service and at the same time a great service to science if expeditions to exotic people were organized in such a way that somebody who has studied and knows the people exhibited, should be on the spot in order to indicate what essential points should be covered, which might be combined with a connected story and would be of educational and scientific value, and more attractive to the public than what is now generally presented. (Boas in Jacknis 1987: 61)

Ira Jacknis, through uncovering this correspondence, suggests that *Head-Hunters* was one such film in which Boas found valuable “scientific” fragments despite its contrived fictional narrative.

Boas’s thoughts on the use of film in anthropology reflect his larger agenda of gathering as much data as possible from cultures on the verge of disappearing. They also mirror his belief in the role of museum exhibits in educating the general public. In a letter to Morris Jesup in 1905 (printed in Stocking 1982), then President of the American Museum of Natural History, Boas outlines his opinions on museum exhibits “with perfect frankness.” He states that in the case of a large museum, general-themed exhibits with only a few objects should be installed to “teach” the public the various aims of anthropology. More complex exhibits should be created for those people interested in more complex questions: high-school students, teachers, artists, missionaries, etc. “Just as our school system requires, besides primary and grammar schools, high schools and universities, so a large museum should fulfill the function of a primary objective school for the general public, as well as serve those who strive for higher education and help to train the teacher” (Boas in Stocking 1982:299). Just as one collection of ethnological objects, such as that of the Kwakwaka'wakw, can serve to educate at many levels by being exhibited in different contexts, so too can feature films educate both the general public and the serious scholar by using the same documentary footage.
I believe that an undertaking of the kind I suggest might be exploited to a very great extent in high schools, college, and universities,—wherever geography, sociology, and anthropology are taught. Presumably special parts of films could be combined and utilized for this purpose both to the advantage of education and the film industry. (Boas in Jacknis 1987:61)

A feature film, when produced by an anthropologist in tandem with a filmmaker, would be able to instruct the public through a few filmic ethnographic "objects" strung together by a narrative—the same "objects" which a scholar would use to study questions of performance, tool use, subsistence strategies, or other similar ethnographic questions.

Beginning his career early in the "museum age," Boas relied on museums for financial support and as a means to return to the field—the same museums which were repositories for his collected ethnographic "objects" (Jacknis 1996:194). By contrast, Curtis relied on American financiers and the backing of prominent politicians to subsidize his career as photographer and filmmaker. As an academic, Boas concerned himself with salvaging the true "ethnological character" of the Kwakwaka'wakw by collecting material culture, texts, recordings, and visual images—all ethnographic "objects"—to recreate a holistic picture of the Kwakwaka'wakw pre-contact, usually to the exclusion of any non-Native influence of the image. Curtis, to the contrary, had Kwakwaka'wakw performers recreate a past that many had never known to fabricate an image of themselves as "Indian." In looking at the two on a temporal cultural (not evolutionary) continuum, Boas tended to exclude the present in his ethnography whereas Curtis reconstructed the present to represent a fictional past. Both men illustrate two distinct methods of salvage ethnography.

George Stocking, in recounting the Boasian influence on anthropological theory, concisely summarizes the foundations of salvage ethnography:

...the special character of "salvage ethnography" was largely a product of a generalized tradition
of ethnographic assumption, the limitations of funding, the object-orientation of museums, the
document-orientation of humanistic disciplines and the hard-“fact” elementalist empiricism of
much contemporary science—as well as the condition of the American Indians, who after three
centuries of ethnocidal conflict had been reduced to a marginal reservation existence, their
traditional cultures surviving more vividly in memory than in the drab reality of daily life.
(1992:119)

Edward Curtis’s images are those of the “memory” to which Stocking refers and have endured
republication in more numerous forms than any photograph depicting “the drab reality of daily
life” from the period. Because Franz Boas had no intention of documenting early-twentieth
century Kwakwaka’wakw life, his footage from Fort Rupert shows a conscious effort to salvage
traditional pre-contact culture in a systematic object-oriented method. This methodology
profoundly influenced the anthropological landscape of North American museums and universities,
yet Boas’s images never reached public consciousness in the way Curtis marketed his efforts.
Curtis, on the other hand, played to the tastes of the public in sacrificing the scientific nature of In
the Land of the Head-Hunters: “The picture is a compromise between what I would like to make,
if I was in the position to say—‘the public be damned’—and what I think the public will support”
(Curtis in Gidley 1982:74).

THE STORY AND THE CAST: CURTIS AND JARMUSCH

Curtis also said of the film’s Hollywood-style narrative: “My film is a love story” (Curtis
in McLuhan 1974). Head-Hunters’ often confusing plot revolves around a young woman, Naida,
and two men pursuing her love, Motana and the Sorcerer. In the film, Motana marries Naida, but
the Sorcerer attacks Motana’s village during the night, wounding Motana and capturing Naida for
himself. Once healed, Motana steals Naida away and leads the Sorcerer in a canoe chase that ends
in the Sorcerer’s death. By way of this plot, Curtis was able to portray traditional
Kwakwaka'wakw songs and dances of the Winter Ceremonial, a contest of drinking candlefish oil, a scene of slahal (a gambling game played in teams), and numerous shots of canoes, longhouses, regalia, and other Kwakwaka'wakw material culture. For the purpose of a “love story,” many of these scenes do little to advance the plot, yet Curtis included such footage to present “authentic” Kwakwaka'wakw life; *Head-Hunters* was debuted in Seattle as “Every Participant an Indian and Every Incident True to Native Life” (Holm and Quimby 1980: 15). While many of the dances and activities in *Head-Hunters* were familiar to Curtis’s all-Native cast, certain elements of turn-of-the-century Kwakwaka'wakw life were consciously eliminated in an effort to look more “primitive.” For instance, Hudson’s Bay Blankets, which would have been traded at a ceremony in 1914, were replaced with raffia blankets. Also, the actors donned long unruly wigs and cedar bark costumes quite different from their everyday clothing. At one extreme, Curtis even included a whale hunt as Motana’s test of manhood, whereas the Kwakwaka’wakw had never been a whaling nation.

Curtis never realized the financial success he had invested in *Head-Hunters*. The film played only two venues—New York and Seattle—before disappearing into obscurity. Uncovered in the 1940s, it was recognized by anthropologist George Irving Quimby as the work of Edward Curtis, but it was not until the late 1960s that he collaborated with Bill Holm to restore the film using archival photographs and Curtis’s written accounts of the filming. Many Kwakwaka’wakw were consulted during the restoration project, including surviving actors. With their consultation and participation, a Kwakwala soundtrack was recorded and added to the final edit of the new production: *In the Land of the War Canoes*. Regrettably, much of Curtis’s original footage was lost due to the fragile condition of the sensitive, highly flammable film stock used. As a result, Curtis’s already convoluted narrative is carried in the new film mainly by Holm and Quimby’s
written intertitles which convey the plot and substitute lost footage. The anthropologists' restorative efforts have helped secure an honored place for Head-Hunters (as War Canoes) among the earliest ethnographic films (Heider 1976, Rohner 1976).

Jim Jarmusch’s Dead Man follows an equally fictitious storyline. In Dead Man, the main character, Bill Blake (Johnny Depp), is mortally wounded within the first half-hour of the film as a result of an awkward bedroom shootout. Blake is subsequently found by Nobody (Gary Farmer), a Native American outcast who believes that this Blake is the famous poet, William Blake, and must help him return to where he dwells in death. Nobody is a peculiar character; as a child, he was taken to England as a caged curiosity where he learned to mimic European behavior and also discovered the revelatory poetry of William Blake. His dialogue sounds like a cross between a Romantic scholar and a victim who hates “stupid fucking white men.” For the remainder of the film, Blake follows the affable Nobody, simultaneously fighting Nobody’s belief that he is Blake the poet and becoming the outlaw Nobody prophesies. Blake’s demise comes in the final scene of the film: Nobody casts the wounded Blake away from shore in a dugout canoe just as a bounty hunter arrives on the scene. Nobody and the hunter simultaneously shoot and kill each other as Blake watches from the canoe, moments before his own death.

Members of the Makah community in Neah Bay, Washington, participated in the

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7 It is perhaps with over eighty years of anthropological and filmic retrospection that Head-Hunters can be classified an “ethnographic” film; would Curtis have used the term himself, calling ethnographic film a distinct genre?

8 As Jarmusch’s narrative tells of a man from the eastern U.S. who ultimately finds himself on the Northwest Coast, there is an interesting resemblance to the life of James G. Swan, amateur ethnographer, schoolteacher, diarist, who left Boston in 1850 for the Pacific coast of America and spent some years in and around Neah Bay. Apart from Swan’s own published (1857, 1870) and unpublished writings, writer Ivan Doig recounts both Swan’s and his own wanderings on the coast a century later in Winter Brothers (1980).
penultimate scene of *Dead Man*, where Nobody brings the dying Blake into a Northwest Coast village to negotiate for a sea canoe. Watching the scene, there is no clear indication that the village is supposed to be a Makah village; some of the actors speak Makah language, but it is neither subtitled nor identified in the dialogue as Makah. The audience is left only to understand—by visual clues—that the location is somewhere on the Northwest Coast and to hazard a guess as to the ethnicity of the villagers. Perhaps it is not crucial to Jarmusch’s plot that we, the audience, know the place to be Makah, but only that we see it as coastal, as a recognizable icon of the Northwest. This is most noticeable in Jonathan Rosenbaum’s review of *Dead Man* (1996a) where he calls the village “a Kwakiutl settlement.” Yet Rosenbaum also interviewed Jarmusch for another publication where the filmmaker describes “Kwakiutl” art and culture as a model for the Makah village in *Dead Man*.

I don’t really know of any fiction film where you see a Pacific Northwest culture. I know there’s the film *The Land of the War Canoes* made by Edward Curtis, the early twentieth-century photographer—he shot some Kwakiutl people, but it’s a sort of *Nanook of the North* deal where he used them pretty much as actors. But their culture was so rich because where they lived provided them with salmon, and they could smoke that and exist all winter long without having to hunt very much. Therefore they spent a lot of time developing their architecture, their carving, their mythology, and their incredible elaborate ceremonies with these gigantic figures that would transform from one thing into another, with all kinds of optical illusions and tricks. That’s why the longhouse opens that way in *Dead Man*, when Nobody goes inside to talk to the elders of the tribe and eventually gets a sea canoe from them. It seems to open magically, but it’s based on a real system of pulleys that the tribes used. (Jarmusch to Rosenbaum 1996b: 23)

It is no wonder Rosenbaum misidentified the village, but then Jarmusch does not ever directly call the village “a Makah village” during the interview. For Jarmusch, the writer and director of the film, it is a generic, pan-Northwest Coast village.

While *Dead Man* is a visually stunning film, one with a textured critique of a violent America and a nuanced paean to the writings of William Blake, it begs comparison to its
predecessor, *In the Land of the Head-Hunters*, not only for its surface similarities, but also for the complexities of cultural representation that arise in such films (Tubutis 1998). Catherine Russell (1996: 70) suggests that contemporary Kwakwaka'wakw audiences read *Head-Hunters* "indexically rather than symbolically," that "the film constitutes a living memory of both the traditional practices and the colonial containment activated by the rigorous framing and 'photoplay' conventions." The film serves a very different purpose for those Kwakwaka'wakw who view it today than for those who were members of Curtis’s intended audience: non-Native North Americans. And through the commentary of present-day Kwakwaka’wakw, a better understanding can be gained of what original cast members may have thought about being in *Head-Hunters* (Holm and Quimby 1980).

What, then, is the contemporary Makah experience of participating in *Dead Man*? Beyond the surface of the film, beyond the physical remnants of the film set, what makes it—for those Makah who participated in the filming—a particularly "Makah" village? To the film critic or the literary theorist, these questions may seem irrelevant. In light of the uses to which Curtis’s work has been put and the ethnographic value that both he and his admirers have attributed to his images, it is important to examine Jarmusch’s Makah village in anticipation of its becoming an ethnographic representation of Makah life over a century ago. With *Dead Man*, Jarmusch did not intend to make an ethnographic film, but ethnography *can* assist in illuminating how the Makah scene came to be made.

The making of a feature film involves a complex network of writers, directors, artists, technicians, actors, and a host of administrators, consultants, and other support staff. This network, a creative corps employed to produce a film on a regulated schedule and budget, operates
with particular guidelines understood by the participants; each stage of film production requires the careful coordination of every individual. Yet films such as *Dead Man* create an additional dimension for this social network. By hiring members of a community with little or no filmmaking experience—people who are bringing their cultural knowledge to the film—a dynamic of cultural negotiation is established between those on the “inside” of movie-making and those on the “outside”: the emic film crew and the etic character actor. And with *Dead Man*, it requires the patience and willingness of the filmmakers to understand what it is exactly that the Makah actors are bringing to the set: the emic Makah village and the etic observer with camera\(^9\).

Again, the parallel with *Head-Hunters* helps us to understand this particular dynamic; James Clifford, drawing on Mary Louise Pratt’s notion of contact zones, illustrates it as such: “The staging of cultural spectacles can thus be a complex process with different scripts negotiated by impresarios, intermediaries, and actors” (1997: 199). Where Pratt describes contact zones as “usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict” (1992: 6), Clifford extends this to suggest that there are mutual exploitations happening between the groups in contact. These zones are “places of hybrid possibility and political negotiation, sites of exclusion and struggle” (1997: 212). As Clifford is exploring contact zones in relation to museums\(^10\), it is helpful to look at two distinctions within the concept. First, there is the physical space, or geographical location, of contact (for Pratt, the colonial mission or maybe the fort; for

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\(^9\) Here I use the standard anthropological terms for those with the perspective of an insider (emic) and those who perceive experience as an outsider (etic).

\(^10\) Marjorie M. Halpin considered this notion twenty years ago when reviewing the First Peoples exhibit at the Royal British Columbia Museum in Victoria; “It both is and is about the contact of white and native cultures” (1978: 41, original emphasis).
Clifford, the museum). Secondly, there is the perceived social space of contact, where Pratt’s coercion and conflict is situated and where Clifford finds tension and negotiation. In this way, a contact zone is at once both physical and ephemeral, extensive over time and space.

Why the distinctions? In looking at the making of the Makah village in Dead Man as a contact zone, it is crucial to look at two different aspects of the film: the site of its production and the experience of its production. Members of the Makah community came together with the non-Makah production team at a specific geographical location near Grants Pass, Oregon, to make part of a feature film. Simultaneously, at this physical convergence, the Makah actors and artists were engaged with Jarmusch and his assistants in sensitive negotiations around issues of cultural representation, in subtle mediation over how the Makah village would come to be for the film. One could argue that any finished film presents a myriad of contact zones—that between the filmmaker and those filmed, between audience and filmmaker, between generations, between nations, etc.—but I am choosing to concentrate on the particulars of the contact zone where a group of Makah from Neah Bay came to assist Jim Jarmusch in the making of a period western set at the end of the last century.

In February 1998, roughly three years after Dead Man was filmed, I interviewed eight Makah individuals who participated in the production. Six acted in the film, two worked as artists on the set, one served as a canoe skipper and double for Cayuga actor Gary Farmer, one helped Farmer with his dialogue in Makah, and one wove a cedar bark mat for the film but did not actually take part on the film set. One woman (who was pregnant at the time) brought two of her children who also appear in the film. None of those I interviewed had a speaking role in the film. The interviews were semi-structured in nature; I wanted individuals to explain to me, in their words,
what their role was in the making of *Dead Man*, what they felt of their experience, and what they thought of the finished film. My questions varied in content and order. Those with whom I talked seemed eager to recount their experiences in *Dead Man* for me; I encountered little reluctance to discuss the film or what occurred on set. In fact, I was somewhat surprised at the readiness of individuals to speak to me about *Dead Man*. I think this happened partly because it had been a number of years since the filming took place and people were ready to reminisce about their experiences, and partly because the film, not the actors, essentially became the subject of the interview. As the Colliers wrote about using photographs in ethnographic interviews: "Photographs allow [the interviewees] to tell their own story spontaneously. This usually elicits a flow of information about personalities, places, processes, and artifacts.... Photographic interviewing offers a detachment that allows the maximum free association possible within structured interviewing." (1986: 106-7). I did not have the film with me during the interviews, but I did bring one still image\(^\text{11}\) that I showed during each conversation. While I was not attempting to glean ethnography from the literal images of *Dead Man*, I feel that the situation was comparable to that the Colliers described. Having the film to discuss, as a discrete object, the onus of each interview subtly shifted away from the participant toward the related experience. This is not to say that I did not hear very personal responses to my questions, but it was much easier for people to express themselves after being able to delineate, in their words, what exactly happened on the set. All but

\(^{11}\) In the United States, *Dead Man* is distributed by Miramax. I obtained a still image from the Miramax website which I was able to show during the interviews. It was probably of greatest help to me to identify some of those I spoke to as they appeared in costume.
two interviews were taped and transcribed verbatim\textsuperscript{12}, and excerpts from them appear below.

\textbf{MAKING A MAKAH VILLAGE FOR \textit{DEAD MAN}}

In looking at the Makah experience in \textit{Dead Man}, I would like to turn first to the production of the film, to the actual set where Makah participants gathered for the filming. Jarmusch’s production team solicited participation through the Makah tribal offices, as recalled by one actor: “And [an employee of the Makah Tribal Council] took a Polaroid picture of me in my office, and then that was the last I heard of her until several months later when I got a phone call from her stating that they would like me to participate in the \textit{Dead Man} movie as an extra.” Once everyone was chosen, a bus was hired to bring the cast from Neah Bay to Grants Pass, Oregon, near where the scene of the Makah village was shot. The Makah cast stayed together at a motel in Grants Pass and drove to the actual location of the set each day, about 15 miles outside of town. This was not the first film to be made in the area; apparently, the feature film \textit{The River Wild} (1994, starring Meryl Streep and Kevin Bacon) had just finished filming before Jarmusch and crew arrived, and a John Wayne western had been made there many years before. Not everyone from Neah Bay traveled there together. The two Makah artists arrived on set a month before the cast in order to create the artwork for the mock village (they lived in a trailer at the site) and one actor with whom I spoke arrived in Grants Pass with the canoes brought down from Neah Bay on the top of a horse trailer. Those who acted in the film stayed in Oregon just over a week before returning to Neah Bay.

\textsuperscript{12} One interview was conducted at the admissions desk of the MCRC and the other in a cramped sandwich shop. I taped neither of these conversations because the aural conditions would not have produced good recordings.
In *Dead Man*’s penultimate scene, Nobody is paddling a canoe with the wounded Blake cradled in the bow when they come upon a Makah village alongside the river. Nobody beaches the canoe and announces Blake to the Makah chiefs and others gathered on shore. Blake can barely stand; he is helped along by Nobody who follows the chiefs into the main entrance to the village. As they walk through the village, they pass people engaged in various activities: rocking a cradle, carrying objects, wrapping a body, cooking. The camera switches back and forth from Blake’s perspective as he passes the villagers to close-ups of Nobody dragging the dying Blake. One actor recalled that when Blake passes him, he was instructed “to give him a glance or a look of astonishment because that’s the first white man we’ve ever seen;” another said “we were just told to turn and look at him and not say anything.” Once the two make it the length of the village, Nobody rests Blake against a large whalebone and tells him that he is going to talk to one of the men who makes sea canoes. After a brief exchange, a great wolf’s head opens to allow Nobody and his escorts to enter the main longhouse. The head closes, and the villagers gather around to inspect Blake, who is fading in and out of consciousness. The scene lasts approximately seven minutes.

The *Dead Man* village set in Oregon consisted of a T-shaped village facade with an entrance alongside a river bank at one end and a huge false longhouse front at the other. Because the audience never sees the inside of any of the longhouses, a complete structure was never needed on the set. The facades look identical to the two reconstructed longhouses at the MCRC in Neah Bay (FIGURE 3), as well as images of Makah longhouses from Curtis’s *The North American Indian* (volume 11). Of the actors who talked to me, Cynthia Powers13, mentioned how much the village

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13 The names of all Makah participants in *Dead Man* with whom I spoke are pseudonyms.
set reminded her of historical photographs she had seen of Neah Bay, and Sam Price actually described Jarmusch’s efforts as replicating the look of Edward Curtis’s work. Howard Miller told me that they based the village design on the longhouses at Ozette (which were the models for the MCRC replicas as well) and that the set looked fairly accurate: “as far as throwing a village together in a set-up like that, it was pretty accurate.” Sam echoed Howard’s thoughts: “I think it’s as close a facsimile as you could come across, you know, given the amount of time,...the location and all that.”

FIGURE 3

A film still of the Dead Man set showing the longhouse facades based on reconstructed longhouses in Neah Bay, Washington. Photograph by Christine Perry.

To accentuate the Makah village, Jarmusch approached two artists in Neah Bay who had done some previous set-design and construction for a children’s theatre production in Seattle: Eric Charles and George Carter. This particular play required a turn-of-the century carving representative of the Puget Sound area. Since the cost would have been prohibitive to create a set-piece out of cedar, the artists chose to carve the piece out of an eight foot high block of urethane foam. Based on their previous experience with set-design and construction, Eric and George were then
approached by Jarmusch’s artistic team with a proposal for the Makah village in *Dead Man*. They were sent a package consisting of photographs of older coastal villages from Washington, British Columbia, and Alaska with accompanying notes from Jarmusch and the artistic director for the film, Robert Ziembicki. From this, the artists designed various carvings and paintings for the scene to accentuate the false longhouse-fronts made by the production team, including a massive pole with the large wolf’s head that opens to serve as the entrance to the main longhouse (the very one which now lies under the eave of the MCRC roof, *Figure 2*).

The images Jarmusch and Ziembicki presented to the two artists were not solely of Makah origin. Among the photographs were Kwakwaka’wakw masks, Tsimshian and Haida totem poles, Tlingit houses, etc. Eric told me that “when they contacted us they said that they wanted [the village] to be representative of anywhere on the coast. Not necessarily Makah, just a coastal village somewhere. So that people would know that they’re in the Northwest, not necessarily at any particular tribe.” From this, it is evident that Jarmusch did not expect the village, in its final incarnation on film, to be understood specifically as a Makah village, that it merely be recognizable as coastal. George echoed Eric’s thoughts: “It wasn’t a Makah village, that’s for sure.” It is obvious that Jarmusch’s artistic team carried out a significant amount of research in designing the *Dead Man* Makah village. No doubt they encountered Curtis’s ubiquitous images of the coast, including his photographs made on Vancouver Island and in Neah Bay. Whether or not Jarmusch or his assistants had seen photographs of Makah life taken by the lesser-known, more ethnographic Samuel G. Morse, who had lived in Neah Bay between 1896 and 1903, is speculative.\(^{14}\)

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\(^{14}\) See the MCRC’s *Portrait in Time: Photographs of the Makah by Samuel G. Morse, 1896-1903* (1987) for a history of Morse’s life and a selection of his photographic work.
The pieces Eric and George made were not the only ones present on the set. Apparently, some objects were manufactured in Arizona ("looks like a Jurassic Park pterodactyl") and other pieces were made by non-Natives in the area: "They just said, 'hey, I have this piece.' I don’t know if you can see any of it in any of the pictures, but there are some things that were done by local people. I don’t know if they were rented or borrowed." George recounted how one of the chiefs at the beginning of the scene is wearing an eagle mask which a non-Native person had made. People on the set were treating it as if it were a remarkable mask; George felt otherwise: "It was just a piece of junk.” He also thought that it was an inappropriate use of the mask for no chief would ever wear it when first greeting a stranger, and he would not be wearing it in an everyday situation such as depicted in the scene. Yet Jarmusch did borrow other materials from Neah Bay for the scene, such as the whalebone that Blake rests against (from the MCRC’s collections) and some of the canoes (from the Makah Nation Canoe Club). The finished set is a pastiche of contemporary Makah art and material culture, Makah museum pieces, non-Native art, and Hollywood set fabrication.

Makah actors were given preassigned roles for the scene. "I remember one of the girls that was with us was a ‘woman warrior.’ ...They had us all labeled out before we even got there. ...They knew who we were going to be, but we didn’t know what we were going into.” Each one was given a prefabricated costume to wear in the scene, which one actor felt looked “traditional” while others thought did not resemble Makah clothing at all: “gunny sacks for the shirts and pants.” One woman felt that the costumes should have had a bit more cedar bark to look more Makah. Some of the costumes, along with a club that Eric made for the set, a bench, and the foam pole, were brought back to Neah Bay to the MCRC. It is interesting to note that the costumes at the MCRC
have since been used in another theatrical production, a musical drama titled *The Tale of Otokichi* performed at the Meydenbauer Center in Bellevue, Washington, on October 1, 1997. *Otokichi’s* plot revolves around an historical incident where some Japanese traders were taken captive by the Makah some centuries ago. This production involved a Japanese cast from Mihama, Japan, and seven Makah actors from Neah Bay—who wore the *Dead Man* costumes for the play. All of the lines spoken by the Makah cast were in Makah language\textsuperscript{15}. In two different dramatic productions, the one set of generic costumes made by Hollywood craftspeople has served two casts of contemporary Makah actors to represent Makah culture of over a century ago.

None of the Makah dialogue in *Dead Man* is subtitled. Jarmusch, in the interview with Jonathan Rosenbaum, commented on the reason why he did not subtitle any Native dialogue in the film.

\begin{quote}
No, I didn’t want it subtitled. I wanted it to be a little gift for those people who understand the language. ...Makah was incredibly difficult; Gary [Farmer] had to learn it phonetically and read it off big cards. Even the Makah people had trouble, because it’s a really complicated language. (Jarmusch to Rosenbaum 1996b: 21)
\end{quote}

Efforts like these have awarded Jarmusch praise from critics as to his “carefully researched, multifaceted approach to various Native American cultures...” (ibid., 20). Kevin Costner’s *Dances with Wolves* (1990), by comparison, was also lauded for its sensitive attention to the Lakota dialogue spoken in the film (Morris 1994: 172), having each line translated for the audience in easy-to-read subtitles. Jarmusch has taken this a step further and restricted language comprehension to those speak and understand it. This additionally serves Jarmusch’s narrative by further distancing William Blake from those he meets; at the same time, it helps the audience come

\begin{flushright}
\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{15} The Makah language is called q"i?q"i-diččaq. I refer to it as “Makah” or “Makah language” because none of the people with whom I talked called it q"i?q"i-diččaq in conversation.
\end{flushright}
to understand what Blake feels by not knowing the words that are spoken around him.

Gary Farmer learned his Makah dialogue phonetically. Maggie Miller, who was originally supposed to appear only in a small portion of the scene, assisted Farmer with his Makah dialogue. Apparently, Farmer received an audio recording of what he was supposed to say, made by staff of the MCRC, only days before the scene was shot, which he felt was not enough time to learn the lines properly. She recalled:

…it was very difficult because he didn’t get the tape until a couple days before I got there. And being that the language is so difficult he was quite upset. We had to stop the set for, like, 25 minutes or half an hour. …Yeah, then we went from the scene up to his trailer because he wanted to work on it a little bit more before they shot it again. …It sounded kind of like [Makah] but it was so complicated for him that…basically, he said because he didn’t have enough time that we would just go ahead and let him say it the way he could, but to make sure the chiefs said the language in the way it should be said because we are Makahs. So that was our agreement when we were in the trailer because he was quite upset.

After she helped him with the dialogue, Farmer asked that Maggie be present throughout the entire scene, both on the beach and when they walk through the village. Maggie also told me of an incident involving Makah language on the set.

…I was helping them work with the language and then one of the guys that said (they were in a film before) that he could speak Makah, but the Makah that we needed on the paper that was there, he couldn’t speak. And I mentioned it to my brother, and he went to the producers and said “He doesn’t speak Makah.” So that was one of the things that we had to deal with within ourselves because he didn’t…he couldn’t say them right, which was different. And he was getting paid a lot more than I was. …[My brother] went to the producer and they come down and said “let’s get somebody else in there” and he changed everything just like that. They gave him a part and he got paid the same because they didn’t want to make him feel bad.

While it was appropriate for Gary Farmer (being non-Makah) to learn to speak Makah for his part, it was inappropriate for a Makah actor who could not speak Makah to learn his lines phonetically; he had to be replaced by another Makah actor who could speak the language. This judgement was made by the Makah participants, not Jarmusch or his crew. Gary Farmer’s insistence on speaking Makah properly demonstrates a shared expectation among Makah and non-Makah Natives that
there is an mutually understood “correct” way to speak Makah, something that Jarmusch and his crew did not perceive. Also, this reveals another nuance of the Dead Man contact zone: that between the Native participants of the film.

Maggie is not the only person to have mentioned speaking Makah in Dead Man. When I talked with Cynthia Powers about her participation as one of the actors in the village who did not have a speaking role, I asked her if it was good experience for people from Neah Bay. She responded: “Yeah, it was, really. I wish I spoke Makah. I’d be proud to speak and do a part in that.” Then, later in the interview, she added: “I never was raised in Neah Bay, so I didn’t get the chance to speak the language. But that’s no excuse. I should learn anyway, no matter how old I am.” She continued by telling me how her daughter brings home Makah words from school. The Makah Language Program, started by the MCRC in 1978, has been the largest educational undertaking of the MCRC and has had significant effects in Neah Bay.

In order to preserve and restore qʷiʔi·diččaq, the Makah Language Program works with Elders who speak Makah as their first language. We record oral histories, conduct linguistic research, prepare entries for the qʷiʔi·diččaq-English dictionary and develop curricular materials for use in the public school on the reservation, and in Makah Cultural and Research Center exhibits and projects. (Makah Tribal Council 1979: 1)

Such is the concern with Makah language in Neah Bay that two surveys conducted by the MCRC in 1980 and 1985 asserted that the number of school children who speak and understand some Makah was on the rise, and that Makah language classes increased English proficiency among students (Renker and Arnold 1988: 305-6). Cynthia made a connection between speaking Makah on film and being Makah in Neah Bay. Had she been raised in Neah Bay and learned Makah, as now encouraged and fostered by the MCRC, she would have been able to portray the linguistic aspect of Makah life for Dead Man—an aspect she views with pride.
Kathy Whitman, who is Sioux, was hired as Cultural Advisor for *Dead Man*. Jarmusch commented on one element of her role in the crew:

Our cultural advisor, [K]athy, is a member of the Native American Church and even uses peyote ceremonially. We used to go up on these hillsides sometimes early in the morning before shooting, usually with just the Native people in the cast and crew, and pray and smoke. She’d put tobacco in a ceremonial pipe and pass it around, and you’d wash yourself with the smoke. She prays to each direction, to the sky, to the earth, to the plants and all the animals and animal spirits. (Jarmusch to Rosenbaum 1996b: 22)

Apart from this, it is unclear what other duties Whitman had as Cultural Advisor, for when she reached the Grants Pass set, she let the Makah participants advise themselves. As Eric told me:

*Eric:* She came down to where we were working and she said, “well, you guys look like you know what you’re doing, and I don’t have any idea, so I’m not going to say anything.”

*Todd:* Oh, really?

*Eric:* Yeah.

*Todd:* So she let you do it?

*Eric:* Well, it wasn’t a matter of letting us do it... [laughter]

So while the Makah cast was hired to fill specific pre-assigned roles as needed in the film, there were moments when Makah participants felt it necessary to correct cultural inaccuracies where the Cultural Advisor, being non-Makah, was apparently reluctant to intervene. Once again, Kathy’s reticence in advising on the Makah village set illustrates how the Native participants of the film were acutely aware of the complexities of cultural representation where Jarmusch and crew were less attuned to the politics of the situation. Having a Sioux woman advise all First Nations participants conveys the impression that Jarmusch had a conventionally generic idea of “Native.” It also characterizes the contact zone of *Dead Man* where Makah and non-Makah Natives negotiated cultural appropriateness on the set relatively unbeknownst to Jarmusch’s crew.

Without the need for an official Cultural Advisor, Makah actors took it upon themselves “to portray what we thought things were like...within the confines of what we had.” There was an effort among the Makah participants to make the scene as Makah as possible given the conditions.
This included correcting the crew on detailing of clothing and other activities. Eric recalled how the crew and Makah cast negotiated certain cultural details:

...they’d say “does this look all right?” We’d say “you need to do this,” then they’d make little changes. That went for some of the people that were in the movie too. Because some of the women...would show up with Plains-style braids and hair-wraps. We said, “no, that doesn’t go, they didn’t wear their hair like that,” so they made them undo it, and that kind of thing.

Later, when I asked him about the look of the costumes, he said: “Then again, some of the things that they did, we said, ‘we generally don’t do that.’ They said, ‘well, we’ve got to have a bit of Hollywood here.’” While Eric’s recollections intimate the ease with which Makah actors were able to express their concerns—and sometimes have things rectified—Howard Miller, who both acted in the film and served as a body-double for Gary Farmer, went to great length to describe for me how some Makah participants were offended by the filmmakers.

In Howard’s opinion, there was a lack of cultural understanding between the Makah cast and the film crew (illustrative of the contact zone between Makah and Hollywood culture). He felt that the crew may not have been aware of the Makah efforts to share what they felt should be done in the scene. He suggested that the situation would be comparable to his going abroad, to Italy for instance, to make a film about that place, and how he would not understand or be aware of certain cultural specificities there because he would be a foreigner. But Howard thinks people might not have been offended if someone had explained how a movie is made and also if the film crew had taken the time to understand the Makah cast’s concerns. George Carter, while on the set, helped Howard understand it better: “He helped me understand that it’s a business for the media; it’s a business for the movie. They’re not here to find out, you know, your world and what revolves around your way of life.... It’s a scene, and it’s part of a movie....” Howard’s is a comparison of two cultures: Hollywood and Makah. “It’s their way of business, their life, and it’s our way of life
and our culture.” Essentially, Howard is describing the contact zone of the film set. He even describes the implicit tension of the situation: “When it’s your first contact with them, and it’s their first contact with you, so, you know, feelings get hurt, and it’s not understood.” Maggie even mentioned how the Makah cast was not able to differentiate the members of the film crew: “there were so many film workers that were there, kind of in the way, in the sense that they all looked the same to us.”

There was a sense of Makah propriety on the set, similar to what Catherine Russell (1996) suggests happened on the set of Head-Hunters. Howard told me of other non-Makah actors, including some of Asian descent, who were part of the cast, and Maggie mentioned it twice in our conversation. At one point she said, “there were other Indians there that were with us that weren’t Makah, and we didn’t know what to think of that.” Then, just before we parted, she told me that everyone “should have been all Makahs” in the last scene. I take this to mean that, for her, the fictional village was indeed a Makah village (something Whitman and Farmer recognized), and that to be such, all of the actors had to be Makah. When filming for the scene was complete, the Makah cast “had singing and dancing, and they celebrated themselves, the people that went down there. ... They even had a dinner at the end of the movie, and everybody got up and sang their table songs in celebration.” The Makah participants incorporated traditional Makah songs into the extracurricular activities around the filming and provided a particularly Makah manner of ending their work on the set.

**BACK IN NEAH BAY**

In many ways, the Makah participants have brought the experience of Dead Man back to
Neah Bay. This was most evident by the photographs of the set people had on display. At her desk at work, Cynthia kept photographs she made while in Grants Pass. She was particularly proud of one picture she took of Johnny Depp in costume holding one of her young cousins that made it to the front page of a local newspaper. Eric showed me a 3-ring binder full of memorabilia, including newspaper clippings and other photographs. He also had a framed autographed picture of Johnny Depp on the wall of his living room, hung among numerous family photographs. Others also offered to show me either photographs or other materials from the film, such as cast lists and filming schedules. When people presented their photographs to me and when I showed the one picture I brought along to the interviews, they immediately identified themselves and other family members in the shot, just as Kwakwaka’wakw actors did for Holm and Quimby (1980: 59). Eric had a sister and a brother (with a speaking role) in the film, and five of the Miller family were involved in some way.

It appears that the film also generated a lot of discussion back in Neah Bay. Maggie said that people asked those returning from Grants Pass for autographs: “just joking around because we’re movie stars.” Sam recalled that many people talked about it when they first got back to Neah Bay, and then again when the film was officially released in cinemas. Interestingly, only three of the eight people with whom I spoke had seen the entire film, and they had seen it on video—not in a theatre. In the interview with Jonathan Rosenbaum, Jim Jarmusch finished by stating, “I’m going to take the film eventually to the Makah reservation to show them” (Rosenbaum 1996b: 23). At the time of my visit to Neah Bay, he had not yet returned to screen Dead Man to the Makah community. But George Carter, when I asked about this, said “someday it will happen.” He intimated things in Hollywood get hectic, and there are no hard feelings in the community about
it. Personally, George does not want to see the film; he would rather remember it as it happened.

Howard Miller related the plot of the film to me, despite not having seen the film.

The movie started out when [Gary Farmer] was little boy and some people came from England or somewhere and captured him and put him in a cage and brought him back to England. He grew up...with Johnny Depp, the other actor [who] was a little boy when the movie started out. When they grew up to be adults, Johnny Depp left England and came back to the United States in the mid-1800s. ...Gary Farmer learned English from Johnny Depp. When he grew up and got away and came back to the U.S., his home, and found his friend and he was shot in the scene. And he dragged his friend all the way across from the east coast to the west coast, in Neah Bay, to have a formal Indian burial—send him off in a canoe.

While this is not exactly what happens in Jarmusch’s version, it is similar, and it demonstrates how the Makah village in the film was necessary for Nobody and Blake’s story to end as Howard remembers it as a participant.

Howard was the most verbose in describing the larger role of Dead Man for the Makah community. He began our conversation by explaining how the film required canoes, and he immediately switched to telling me how he skippered a large canoe that went up to Bella Bella, British Columbia, to take part in the Qatuwas festival celebrating the resurgence of coastal canoe culture. Qatuwas was conceived as a challenge to each of the coastal First Nations of the Northwest Coast and the Pacific Rim to build and paddle a traditional canoe to Bella Bella in July 1993. Frank Brown, executive director of the festival, wrote that the event “served as an important rite of passage for individual and tribal participants alike and reaffirmed our vitality as maritime indigenous nations. ...Qatuwas was an important moment of truth and a powerful expression of community and cultural identity for all who participated.”\footnote{Kwakwaka’wakw artist David Neel documented the event with photographs (1995) and Barb Cranmer, a Namgis filmmaker, wrote,}
produced, and directed *Qatuwas: People Gathering Together* (1996). Brown said of her film:

The *Qatuwas* documentary acts as a modern historian, which is being told through the eyes and hearts of the people whose history is being recorded. Native people were once considered the vanishing race. This documentary shows the resurgence of North West Coast Native canoe culture as a living symbol of our struggle against programmes of enforced assimilation and as testimony to the power of our cultural and traditional values.

For Howard Miller, participating in *Qatuwas* as a Makah canoe skipper was an important cultural event, and one which he relates directly to his experience in *Dead Man*; before even mentioning his role in Jarmusch’s film, he described for me the experience of paddling 30 miles a day to Bella Bella from Neah Bay. In this way, he also demonstrates how *Dead Man* is just one more event in a life of events.

Once he finished telling me about his work on the film, I asked Howard if people were proud to be in *Dead Man*. He responded: “Oh, they were. They were very proud.” He also sees the MCRC and the Ozette dig as a source of pride in the Makah community because “that’s the way our people are is to share in our culture, to be proud of it.” The Ozette site originally encouraged the Makah government to build an appropriate interpretive and storage facility for the artifacts: the MCRC (Renker and Arnold 1988). Soon after its inception, the MCRC’s mission grew to include not only protection of and research on Ozette materials, but also to foster Makah linguistic and cultural studies and education, and to promote economic development for the Makah people (for the full mission statement, see Makah Tribal Council 1979: 17). Having the MCRC as the most public display of Makah culture in Neah Bay, and even having the dig as the subject of a special *National Geographic* issue on native North American life in 1491 (Pascua 1991), makes Ozette a significant locus of Makah pride. As Howard told me, the Ozette dig “made everybody proud. Twice as proud...” as they were before the dig was discovered. Just as the
MCRC represents Makah culture—the Makah home—so does Dead Man: “we were being seen in the movie around the world. Wherever that movie was at, it was part of our home.” He even said that some documentary filmmakers who had been to Neah Bay recognized his brother in Dead Man when they had seen it in Germany. “It’s pretty neat because it goes all over the world. It’s really neat.”

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS: AUTHENTICITY, CONTACT, AND EXPERIENCE

I’ve never quite appreciated photographs and have rarely taken them, even of my children. I’ve felt that the life we live and the stories we hear and tell are the real and imaginative substance called memory.

Suzanne Benally
“Women Who Walk Across Time”

While I asked Makah participants if they felt certain aspects of the Dead Man set to be typically Makah, I purposely avoided the word “authentic” and they did too. While it may not have been mentioned, authenticity certainly was present as a subtext throughout our conversations. Edward M. Bruner (1994), in discussing historical sites, delineated four meanings of “authentic”: verisimilitude, genuineness, originality, and authority. In creating the Makah village, Jarmusch operated with all four definitions in mind. First, he wanted the village to resemble an actual Northwest Coast village and he succeeded. Not only did Makah participants feel the village looked accurate, a friend remarked to me after seeing the film, “How did Jarmusch get permission to film in the longhouse like that?” Second, he modeled the set on Ozette longhouses and old photographs so the set would appear genuine. Third, Jarmusch brought actual museum artifacts to decorate the set, hired Makah artists to construct artwork in situ, and asked for accurate Makah dialogue from
the MCRC, establishing a veneer of originality for the set. Fourth, he hired a First Nations Cultural Advisor to effectively “certify” the set as appropriately “Native:” following cultural protocol equates to being authentic. Film critics and reviewers also serve to validate Jarmusch’s efforts by praising his sensitive approach to Native American culture. Again, parallels can be drawn with Curtis’s direction of *Head-Hunters*.

It is clear that Jarmusch wanted a generic Northwest Coast village to serve his narrative, and he invited the participation of the Makah community to insure its authenticity. Makah participants, however, came to the *Dead Man* set with their own notions of “authenticity.” Within what was asked of them as actors, they strove to behave and look as they believed Makah villagers of the period should, and the non-Makah Native participants respected and honored these efforts. Perhaps the two artists were the most aware of all the Makah participants that Jarmusch was attempting to replicate a generic Northwest Coast village. George Carter told me that the set is “100% make believe, the whole thing—except my work.” Even though it may not look like traditional artwork, simply being made by artists who are Makah makes the replicated village Makah. Sam Price said, “It was a chance to show Makah artwork...by Makah artists.” And off the set, the film continues to live as a Makah experience in Neah Bay, both in the memories of the participants and in the material remnants from the filming. “Does *Dead Man* portray an authentic Makah village?” is the wrong question. The question that better illuminates the Makah experience in the film is “how was the village in *Dead Man* made to be a Makah village?”

Based on what Makah participants said about being in *Dead Man*, it is clear that the Makah village set in Grants Pass was indeed a contact zone. While Pratt’s definition stresses “copresence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices” between groups in contact, it assumes
“radically asymmetrical relations of power” (1992: 6). For the Dead Man set, the coming together of Makah and non-Makah, of First Nation and Second Nation groups, in the mid 1990s does reflect the legacy of colonial coercion and power imbalances long since established. While we cannot posit that we have surpassed colonialism, it is safe to say that the set of Dead Man does not bear the same widespread destructive, dehumanizing, and disempowering impact of colonial efforts represented by the former Hudson’s Bay Company forts and other similar sites. Pratt refers to a contact zone of the size depicted in Dead Man’s narrative; Dead Man’s Makah village set, however, represents a contact zone of the scope Clifford addresses.

The Makah village in Dead Man, as exemplified by Makah who went there, was a site where Jim Jarmusch needed actors to fill specific roles and artists to complete certain jobs. Simply put, it was a power relationship of employer and employee. In this way, Makah participants were expected to do their jobs as defined by Jarmusch’s narrative and as supervised by his production crew. Yet Jarmusch’s call for Makah participation in making a Northwest Coast village was essentially a request for Makah consultation, whether Jarmusch knew it or not. Responding to the given situation, Makah participants in the film brought forth cultural knowledge in their work on the set. Makah artists were given liberties within a set of Northwest Coast “guidelines” to create appropriate art for the set, some Makah actors took it upon themselves to insure those given lines in Makah were able to speak it properly, and other Makah participants corrected Makah-specific details on costumes and hairstyles, at times taking some offense by cultural anachronisms and inaccuracies happening on the set. While these efforts are demonstrative of Pratt’s copresence

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I side with Nicholas Thomas on this point: “I have rejected the idea that we can complacently situate ourselves in a postcolonial epoch” (1994: 195).
and interaction, it better illustrates what Clifford calls a place of “hybrid possibility and political negotiation.”

Anthony P. Cohen writes “people become aware of their culture when they stand at its boundaries. Such boundaries are not ‘natural’ phenomena: they are relational, they may be contrived and their very existence is called into being partly for the purpose for which one group distinguishes itself from another” (1982: 3). He continues: “The sense of belonging, of what it means to belong, is constantly evoked by whatever means come to hand: the use of language, the shared knowledge of genealogy or ecology, joking, the solidarity of sect, the aesthetics of subsistence skills” (ibid., 4). It is helpful to think of Cohen’s boundaries as those of the contact zone of the Makah village set. They are artificial phenomena, constitutive only of the relationship between the Hollywood and Makah cultures that existed on set. They are contrived in that the relationship lasted for only a short while during the production of a film. And the relationship between the Makah participants and Jarmusch’s crew was one of cultural demarcation and identification. Those with whom I spoke demonstrated this to me by discussing the importance of Makah dialogue, by identifying family members in the film, and by showing solidarity in gathering to correct cultural inaccuracies and creating closure for the experience by singing Makah songs at the end of the filming.

As I delineated earlier, it is important to distinguish the physical and ephemeral elements of contact zones. What I just discussed above relates to the physical site of the Dead Man set, and it also applies to the experience of Dead Man in Neah Bay after the film was made. Bruner contends: “A ritual must be enacted, a myth recited, a narrative told, a novel read, a drama performed, for these enactments, recitals, tellings, readings, and performances are what make the
text transformative and enable us to *reexperience* our culture’s heritage” (1986: 7, my italics). In this way, *Dead Man* is reexperienced by those Makah involved (and enlivened for those Makah who did not take part), by joking about being movie stars, by showing photographs of the event to others, and by talking about the film as a source of pride for Makah people. While it may be impossible to reenact *Dead Man* the film, *Dead Man* the experience is continually reenacted in some manner in the Makah community, in retellings of the film experience (both its narrative and its set, to me and to others), in other performances (*The Tale of Otokichi*), and in additional showings of the film.

Catherine Russell points to the usefulness of *Head-Hunters* for contemporary Kwakwa’ka’wakw audiences (and similarly *Nanook of the North* for Inuit viewers): “In the attempts of native communities to maintain cultural identity through traditional languages and activities, the films offer a previous generation’s attempt to do exactly the same thing” (1996: 71-2). Makah participants in *Dead Man* acted as they would in Neah Bay, speaking Makah as they are taught by elders and making innovative art in the traditions they know from parents and grandparents. For the non-Makah audiences of *Dead Man*, it is difficult to isolate what exactly Makah participants brought to the film. But those participants are keenly aware of how the movie represents their efforts to make the penultimate scene a particularly Makah village. Future Makah audiences will be able to view *Dead Man* much as contemporary Kwakwa’ka’wakw audiences watch *Head-Hunters*, looking for family, watching how the actors portrayed daily life, and admiring the work of artists on the set. Plus they will have the film as it is recalled by the participants who will continually relive their *Dead Man* experiences in Neah Bay.

39
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