

ABOUT HUMANITY, NOT ETHNICITY?  
TRANSCULTURALISM, MATERIALITY, AND THE POLITICS OF PERFORMING  
ABORIGINALITY ON THE NORTHWEST COAST

by

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B.A. (hons), The University of British Columbia, 2001

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

(Department of Anthropology and Sociology)

We accept this thesis as conforming

to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

August 2004

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Title of Thesis: About Humanity, Not Ethnicity?: Transculturalism, Materiality, and the Politics of Performing Aboriginality on the Northwest Coast

Degree: Master of Arts

Year: 2004

Department of Anthropology and Sociology

The University of British Columbia

Vancouver, BC Canada

## **Abstract**

In this multi-sited thesis based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted from 2002-2004, I examine how the transcultural production of Northwest Coast material culture subverts the hegemonic, discursive, and traditionalist constructions of 'Aboriginality' that have isolated Northwest Coast artists from the contemporary art world (Duffek 2004). This inquiry thus partakes in a very long dialogue in anthropology about how words and things differently convey cultural knowledge (see Cruikshank 1992). The thesis will consider contemporary material culture scholars' inquiries into how objects intermediate between people and culture (see Munn 1986), particularly in post-colonial situations (Thomas 1991; 1999). It will show, through two case studies on the Northwest Coast – Rebecca Belmore's solo 2002 exhibition at the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery at the University of British Columbia and Northwest Coast-style artists who practice in Seattle and Sequim WA – how objects can make people conscious of social and political affinities and make difference palpable in ways that exceed the limits of discursive representation. Drawing on my conversations with the artists, I extend Küchler's argument that the materiality of objects can act as a cognitive agent (Küchler 2001) to suggest that materiality might also be usefully re-conceptualized as a tool for social critique and political action.

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## Acknowledgments

As with all writing projects, this thesis is only one nodal point within a network of conversations, support, love and, of course, art. My greatest hope is that it contributes to generating the kinds of important and interesting debates and discussions that inspired it.

My greatest debt is to the artists I interviewed, Rebecca Belmore, Steven C. Brown, Robert Davidson, Dale Faulstich, Barry Herem, and Duane Pasco, who have been supportive of this research and engaged in open conversations about some very difficult issues. The Stonington Gallery in Seattle was helpful in providing me information and documentation on the Northwest Coast-style artists they carry, and in acting as a conduit between myself and some of the artists I approached.

Staff at the Burke Museum of Natural History in Seattle, Washington, the Museum of Anthropology in Vancouver, BC and the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery in Vancouver, BC gracefully accommodated my requests for images, collections information, and archival materials. At the University of Washington, Katie Bunn-Marcuse helped me understand how the Northwest Coast art scene works in Seattle, and also got me access to the Burke Museum's May 2004 auction for the Bill Holm Center for the Study of Northwest Coast Art.

On a fieldtrip in October 2002, Dr. Charlotte Townsend-Gault first showed me Lloyd Averill and Daphne Morris' *Northwest Coast Native and Native-Style Art* guidebook, which got me thinking seriously about Northwest Coast-style art production. She and my supervisor, Dr. Alexia Bloch, also suggested that I think comparatively about Belmore and the Northwest Coast-style artists and encouraged me to take up this challenging project. I thank them, and my third thesis committee member Dr. Jennifer Kramer, for their exemplary guidance, advice, and support through my research and writing. I am particularly indebted to their generous and critical readings of my work, always made with care and recognition of my academic strengths and personal circumstances.

Lastly, my friends in and out of the department provided all of the love, friendship, and good times to keep me going during the most difficult moments. Chris Harker, in particular, led me to think seriously about the politics of affective attachments to the world, and I thank him for showing me how to live critically and joyfully at the same time.

## Introduction

The long institutional neglect of urban and transcultural Northwest Coast and First Nations art within the post-1965 Northwest Coast art revival is symptomatic of what the late Northwest Coast anthropologist and curator Wilson Duff long ago critiqued as the development of a “mascot culture” (Duff cited in Jacknis 2002: 201). Referring to the civic and commercial co-option of Northwest Coast art and forms, Duff reveals an early concern with how Northwest Coast Native/non-Native subject positions, the former in a particularly aestheticized form, have become “normative [ideals] rather than descriptive features of experience” (Butler 1990: 16). Although Duff, a key agent in the Northwest Coast art revival, attributes this to the construction of Northwest Coast art as an emblem of regional identity (Jacknis: 201), I argue that the revival movement’s promotion of ‘well-made’ traditional Northwest Coast art played an equal role in producing the “matrix of coherent norms” through which the Native subject’s “coherent identity” was generated (Butler: 17). The criteria for recognizing good ‘traditional’ Northwest Coast art were clearly set out in Holm’s influential analysis of the Northern formline system (Holm 1965). Yet curiously, while the evaluative scheme that Holm’s analysis generated in such exhibitions as 1971’s *The Legacy* encourages the distinction between Native and non-Native subjectivities (see Macnair et al. 1984), Holm’s bestselling text and the countless ‘how-to’ guides that reproduce the formline system (see Clark and Gilbert 1993, [www.ravenpublishing.com](http://www.ravenpublishing.com), accessed June 6<sup>th</sup> 2004) subversively invite their readers to create works *in* Native genres.

In this multi-sited thesis based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted from 2002-2004, I am particularly interested in examining how the transcultural production of Northwest Coast material culture subverts the hegemonic, discursive, and traditionalist constructions of ‘Aboriginality’ that have isolated Northwest Coast artists from the contemporary art world (Duffek 2004: 12-15). This inquiry thus partakes in a very long dialogue in anthropology about how words and things differently convey cultural knowledge (see Cruikshank 1992). The thesis will consider contemporary material culture scholars’ inquiries into how objects intermediate between people and culture (see Munn 1986), particularly in post-colonial situations (Thomas 1991; 1999). It will show, through two case studies on the Northwest Coast, how objects can make people conscious of social and political affinities and make difference palpable in ways that exceed the limits of discursive representation.

The Northwest Coast-based artists whose work I examine in this thesis are all urban and transcultural, and engage with Aboriginality as something that is, in part, performative. In discussing their narratives and art work, I

hope to complicate what Ostrowitz (1999) and Crosby (1997) have identified as the commonly understood cohesiveness of firstly, Native Northwest Coast art with traditionalist aesthetics, and, secondly, First Nations politics with the 'Native spaces' of reserves, traditional territories and land use (Harris 2002). I must note, however, that I am critically assessing the artists' work and words from a distinctly ethnographic rather than a social art historical perspective. I seek to articulate how these artists are currently working with notions of transculturalism, materiality, and cultural difference to address race and Aboriginality in the production of indigenous art. Multi-sited research presents the challenge of illuminating the themes, issues and concerns that underpin the distinct sites while neither conflating nor reifying their differences. While I recognize that the contemporary art (historical) world employs particular criteria for evaluating and studying art, such as its originality and critical response to its artistic precedents – criteria which Duffek for one has shown to be problematic for examining tradition-based indigenous art (2004) – my primary frame of reference is the place Aboriginal art currently occupies in Northwest Coast public culture and the ongoing debates about who should be making what Native art, and for whom.

I begin this inquiry in the first chapter by probing how Rebecca Belmore, a Vancouver-based and internationally-renowned First Nations artist, showed naming to be a performative injunction in her 2002 solo exhibition at the University of British Columbia's Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery. Belmore came to prominence in the late 1980s and early 1990s as a politicized First Nations (Anishinabe) artist but strategically *unnamed* herself in this show that she insists is "about humanity, not ethnicity" (pers comm., October 5<sup>th</sup> 2002). In our conversation about the exhibit and her art practices, Belmore emphasized how she likes to use humble materials and simple gestures with which all viewers can identify, and which engage them in tactile and kinaesthetic ways. In this way, she builds on the work of feminist artists and art scholars such as Eva Hesse (Lippard 1976), Lucy Lippard (1990), Carol Mavor (1998), Griselda Pollock (1988), Kay Walkingstick, Faye Heavyshield and Jolene Rickard who, since the late 1960s, have explored the role of touch and materiality within the visual arts and have sought to re-value women's art, including textile and tourist art, and domestic work within contemporary Western and indigenous art worlds (see also Phillips 1999; Weiner 1977). Taken together with the palpable presence of Aboriginality throughout her show, Belmore's "humble materials" that deftly entangle her viewers enable us to understand social differences in softer and more politically effective ways than named locations permit.

My second chapter examines four influential Washington State-based Northwest Coast-style artists, Duane Pasco, Steven Brown, Dale Faulstich and Barry Herem, who similarly struggle with constructions of Aboriginality

and difference and the concomitant social restrictions placed on their desires to access Northern Northwest Coast Native cultures through art production. This chapter on Northwest Coast-style artists' deep engagement with Northwest Coast "formlines" (its formal design features) complicates the widespread understanding, engendered over a half-century of Native American political activism and also within the 'playing Indian' literature (Deloria 1997; Green 1988; Huhndorf 2001) that their kind of transcultural art production simply constitutes cultural appropriation. Drawing on Gell's theory of aesthetic captivation (1998), I argue that the agency of abstract design features, which takes particular kinaesthetic form in art-making, helps these producers and their First Nations and Native American collaborators to partially transcend ethnic differences. In this chapter, I examine how the artists mediate their captivation with Northwest Coast art and design, with their relationships in Native American communities. Their framework for understanding Northwest Coast-style art production as a universalistic venture and mode of inquiry was established by Reid and Holm at the onset of the Northwest Coast art 'Renaissance' (Holm 1965; Vancouver Art Gallery 1967; see Crosby 1994).

This is not to say that Northwest Coast-style artists eschew issues of Native meaning; however, they distinguish formline elements from their use in creating crest symbols and other culturally owned and protected designs and objects. Nevertheless, some are reticent to discuss the 'ethnic politics' that surround their work, which they view as associated with the highly contentious British Columbian political relations with First Nations, in particular the Treaty process, which have no parallel in Washington State<sup>1</sup>. Although Aboriginal rights were recognized and affirmed in the 1982 Constitution act (s. 35 [1]), and further upheld in subsequent Supreme Court of Canada decisions (*R. v. Sparrow* [1990], *R. v. Delgamuukw* [1997], *R. v. Marshall* [1999]), the dominant political parties in British Columbia (the BC Liberals and the Conservative Party of Canada) subscribe to a highly neo-liberal agenda that would make all citizens equal before the law and extinguish any group's special rights. Within this political climate that threatens the ongoing Treaty negotiation process, First Nations are continually engaged in legal and public claims and demands for cultural and political autonomy and the retention of their rights. To cite just one example, in August 2004, the Land, Freedom Decolonization Coalition in conjunction with NYM-Secwepemc Chapter (Native Youth Movement) and the Skwek'wekwelt Protection Center are organizing a large-scale protest of

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<sup>1</sup> Jolene Rickard observes that First Nations have far more presence on the Canadian political agenda than do Native Americans in the United States. Not only does 'race' in the United States typically connote African-American people (Kondo 1997), but the general public in the US is far less sympathetic to indigenous issues, which tend to emerge in the form of debates over casino operations. Jolene Rickard (2004) *Aesthetics and Sovereignty? Public*

Sun Peaks Ski Resort and Delta Hotel's development on "Secwepemc territories that have never been ceded or surrendered" ([apc.resist.ca/skwelkwekwelt](http://apc.resist.ca/skwelkwekwelt), accessed August 8<sup>th</sup> 2004).

If non-Native British Columbians are by and large wary of the Treaty negotiation process (Harris 2002: 320), they are more sympathetic to those Canadian discussions of indigenous cultural heritage and property rights that are concerned with kin-based ownership of indigenous cultural materials, including particular objects, crest symbols, songs, dances, and stories (Cruikshank 1998: 25-44)<sup>2</sup>. The notion that only Aboriginal people should produce Aboriginal art has deeply permeated Canadian political discourses on Northwest Coast art and cultural property, such that agents as diverse as commercial art galleries, their clientele, and British Columbia's Lieutenant Governor, the Honourable Iona Campagnolo, do not accept most Northwest Coast-style artists' work.<sup>3</sup> In contrast, the wide, though by no means full, approval of Pasco, Brown and Faulstich's practices by American Coast Salish, Nuu-Chah-Nulth and Tlingit communities provides for them the solid ground of legitimacy from which they can 'viably' produce their work (S Brown, pers. comm., April 15 2004<sup>4</sup>; see Appendix 1<sup>5</sup>). Herem, the most vocal advocate for the position that Northwest Coast-style art is open to all, is unapologetic about working with the abstract formline design he views as unattached to cultural property. I explore this theme in depth in chapter two.

Recent scholarship on performing Aboriginality has explained how different modes of 'playing Indian' throughout American history functioned as critical responses to modernity and American national identity formation. Scholars like Deloria, Huhndorf and Green concentrate their analyses of the performance of alterity on disguise and costume – with the decoration of one's body with Indian garb that can be easily discarded. The

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lecture delivered in the Department of Art History, Visual Art and Theory, University of British Columbia, January 14<sup>th</sup> 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Of course, these do not materially impact on the non-Native public.

<sup>3</sup> A representative from one Vancouver gallery explains that they only carry Northwest Coast-style art by Doug Zilkie on account of his long working association with Haida artist Bill Reid. He also notes that his clientele do not, on the whole, purchase non-Native work. In January 2004, when Campagnolo received a collection of Northwest Coast art from the Maltwood Gallery in Victoria for Government House, her official residence, she did not accept the works by Duane Pasco. Charlotte Townsend-Gault, personal communication, February 2004.

<sup>4</sup> All quotations from Steven Brown come from our conversation on April 15<sup>th</sup> 2004.

<sup>5</sup> Northwest Coast-style artist Dale Faulstich has carved for the Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe, in Sequim, WA for the last fifteen years. A commercial artist, Faulstich began practicing Northwest Coast-style art as a hobby about twenty years ago and, shortly thereafter, began producing work for the Tribe, one of his clients. He recalls: "I was designing things for them, doing signs for their commercial projects, carving doors for some of their buildings, and things like that. The tribal chairman and I got to be good friends and as his projects evolved, he would call me up first to, you know, do a design, carve doors. One thing leads to another and pretty soon, other stuff". Faulstich no longer operates his commercial art business as he is fully occupied with his work for the Tribe and his private commissions. The letter of endorsement in Appendix I is published on Faulstich's website. [www.olympen.com/hhtd](http://www.olympen.com/hhtd) (accessed June 9th

performances with which they are concerned – scouting and Camp Fire Girls, team mascots, Indian hobbyism and New Age Counterculture Indians – are complicit with the well-documented Euro-American desire to consume and control the (Native American) Other. Working with a more prismatic definition of performance that includes the performativity of speech (see Butler 1997) and the performances of gesture in the production of indigenous material cultures, I complicate this earlier work’s ontological purity with regard to its understandings of selfhood and difference.

Whereas these analyses utilized a discursive framework to uncover the historical and contemporary cultural salience of ‘playing Indian,’ this ethnographically grounded research unpacks how objects function as powerful agents in these transcultural engagements. In many ways, it follows the current path anthropologists of material culture have charted in analyzing objects’ cognitive capacities (Küchler 2001), networks of circulation (Myers 2002; Thomas 1991) and the somatic relationships people have with them (Miller 2001, Pinney 2001), and gives it a transcultural twist. The disciplinary segregation of text and object reaches back to 1905 when Boas, who was “convinced that it was impossible to represent culture adequately through such a restricted part of heritage as physical objects” (Cruikshank 1992: 5), resigned from the American Museum of Natural History. British anthropologists’ interest in material culture similarly waned in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century following the late 19<sup>th</sup> century Torres Straits Expedition. British functionalism’s focus on the interrelations of social institutions had little room for the objects, such as the heavily collected and documented string figures, that Haddon and Rivers understood as cognitive technologies (Küchler 2001: 60)<sup>6</sup>. Mauss’ influential argument that gift-giving elicits reciprocity because exchanged objects have symbolic and political power (1990[1925]) stressed objects’ efficacy within exchange relations but de-emphasized their materiality<sup>7</sup>. By the mid-to-late 20<sup>th</sup> century, the rise of the Saussurean linguistic model and its incorporation into Barthesian semiology, symbolic and interpretive anthropology more or less rendered objects the vehicles of discourse and thought (Küchler: 57).

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2004). Dale Faulstich, pers. comm., April 25<sup>th</sup> 2004. All quotations from Faulstich come from our conversation on April 14<sup>th</sup> 2004.

<sup>6</sup> During the 1920s, Soviet Constructivists were keenly interested in disrupting the “rupture between Things and people that characterized bourgeois society” through such techniques as “integrating ‘socialist objects’ within the world of consumable goods.” At the same time, the surrealist avant-garde were interested in collecting ‘cultural debris,’ including Northwest Coast art, to re-fashion their object world and challenge the distinction between subjects and objects. Boris Arvatov quoted in Bill Brown (2001) “Thing Theory” *Critical Inquiry* 28(1): 10; Christina Kiaer (2001) “The Russian Constructivist Flapper Dress” *Critical Inquiry* 28(1): 185-243.

<sup>7</sup> Annette Weiner shows that the key difference between Mauss and Malinowski’s understandings of the role of objects in reciprocal relationships is Mauss’ insistence that the objects have social efficacy as extensions of the

Concomitant with my argument that materiality provides a route to understanding transcultural performances of Aboriginality, a major theoretical concern this thesis addresses is the role of objects' agency in art production. Social anthropologist of art Alfred Gell (1998) and actor-network theorists Bruno Latour (2000) and Albena Yaneva (2003) have all made important interventions into our understanding of the efficacy of material objects to act on and with people. I seek to further our understanding of how objects work by exploring the ways in which material culture acts as a micropolitical agent (Connolly 1998: 137-161; Bennett 2001) – holding the capacity to generate real social and political change.

I collected my ethnographic data through e-mail dialogue and a lengthy (two-hour) semi-structured interview with each subject. Four interviews occurred in artists' homes/studios, one in the 7 Cedars Casino (Sequim WA) where the artist's work is prominently displayed, and one in a Vancouver Café. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and presented to the artists for review. I asked each artist a similar set of questions, which I adapted during our dialogue. Although I conducted extensive background research on each artist, I first asked each a series of questions about the history of their practice (in order to gauge their autobiographical narrative), the mediums they work in and prefer, their training, artistic or other inspirations, motivations, etc. These questions facilitated our more detailed and personal discussions on materiality, the politics of producing Northwest Coast, Aboriginal, or Northwest Coast-style art, the artists' involvement with Native communities and the different audiences for whom they produce. Interview data was analyzed by comparing answers to similar questions and cross-referencing and keyword-searching the transcripts for points of contact. I also conducted museum and archival research at the University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology and the Burke Museum of Natural History at the University of Washington to ascertain their Northwest Coast-style collections, and at the Belkin Art Gallery, where I collected and analyzed 83 visitor and 5 media responses to Rebecca Belmore's exhibition. I conducted site visits to Vancouver and Seattle galleries (Vancouver's Leona Lattimer, Douglas Reynolds and Spirit Wrestler Galleries, and Seattle's The Legacy; Stonington Gallery and Ancient Grounds) that carry Northwest Coast and/or Northwest Coast-style artists and attended the May 2004 Auction at the Bill Holm Center for the Study of Northwest Coast Art at the Burke Museum. I discussed with gallery staff the market demand (on either side of the border) for Northwest Coast-style art while the auction, attended by most major collectors and artists in Western Washington, starkly dramatized the social and economic capital associated with Bill Holm's legacy, Northwest Coast-style and

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givers. See Annette Weiner (1992) *Inalienable Possessions: The Paradox of Keeping-While-Giving* (Berkeley:

avowedly traditionalist Northwest Coast art in this region<sup>8</sup>.

This thesis aims to balance multi-sited ethnography with critical inquiry. Working across the border, I have had to negotiate the dominant Canadian assumption that Native-style art production is an almost inherently problematic enterprise with the widespread acceptance and promotion of Northwest Coast-style practice in the United States. I shy away from my colleagues' understanding of non-native Northwest Coast art production, wary that the uncritical application of literary concepts as 'desire,' 'fascination,' and 'othering' to the transcultural production of material culture only reproduces discourses of communities with clear conditions of belonging (Agamben 2000: 88)<sup>9</sup>.

If we are to seriously consider the efficacy of objects in processes of community and individual subject formation, then we also need to ask 'who is' Rebecca Belmore, Duane Pasco, or Steven Brown. Readers may wonder why I ask these questions, even if few who are acquainted with the politics of Northwest Coast art production would question their validity. I ask them because they point to the twinning of authorship and subjectivity with respect to who can 'legitimately' produce Aboriginal art. Further, if concerns about the authorship of Aboriginal art seek a stable Native subject, I hope that the question 'who is' helps unpack subject positions that, while salient in some communities, are nevertheless performative and profoundly unstable (Butler 1990).

Among the artists, however, my subjectivity as an academic is never in question. For some of the Northwest Coast-style artists, I carry the burden of anthropologists (those other Northwest Coast specialists) who only seek answers to *their* questions (D Pasco, pers comm.) and whose engagement with Native communities ends

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University of California Press), pp. 44-7.

<sup>8</sup> Northwest Coast-style production is an immense field, ranging from hobbyists who produce work for their own use and pleasure to artists like Pasco and Holm, who were widely influential in the post-1965 'renaissance' of Northwest Coast art. In this thesis, I have chosen to focus on carvers and sculptors based in Washington state due to their academic, curatorial and artistic influence on Northwest Coast art and scholarship. Furthermore, Pasco's, Brown's and Herem's public art is prominent in Seattle and throughout surrounding Puget Sound and hence contributes much to the public culture of indigeneity in that region. That my subjects for this chapter are all men reflects the predominance of men in Northwest Coast and Northwest Coast-style carving and sculpture. To be sure, there are many women Northwest Coast-style artists, including textile artists Cheryl Samuel and the late Katie Pasco, who have been influential in revivals of Northwest Coast weaving and textile arts. Their work warrants a fuller treatment than the parameters of this study permit. See Lloyd Averill and Daphne Morris (1995) *Northwest Coast Native and Native-style Art: A Guidebook for Western Washington* (Seattle: University of Washington Press), Cheryl Samuel (1987) *The Raven's Tail* (Vancouver: UBC Press), [www.ravenstail.com](http://www.ravenstail.com) (accessed August 20<sup>th</sup> 2004).

<sup>9</sup> These concepts, abound in post-colonial literary and cultural theory, primarily found their way into anthropology, museum studies, and indigenous art history through critical analyses of primitivism. See, for example, James Clifford (1988) *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature and Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), Sally Price (1989) *Primitive Art in Civilized Places* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), Marianna Torgovnick (1990) *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellectuals, Modern Lives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).

upon the completion of field research. Speaking occasionally with the artists in their studios, dispersed from Poulsbo, WA to Vancouver, BC, and visiting the galleries where they exhibit, I can make no claim to having close relations or intimate ties; I only enjoy our conversations and the artists' willingness to teach me to 'look at' Northwest Coast art and 'humble materials' and see them as they do. If my work does not impact on the artists' individual practices, I am nevertheless an interlocuter. I write with nervousness about interpellating race and aboriginality once more – as one of my Native-style subjects criticized outside commentators for so often doing – and congealing divisions that do not accurately reflect the kinds of belongings Rebecca Belmore and Northwest Coast-style artists claim.

**Chapter 1**  
**Humble Materials and Soft Difference**  
*Rebecca Belmore and the Politics of (not) Performing Aboriginality*

AC: It's interesting to me that your work *doesn't* specifically address First Nations all the time. I mean, it does and it doesn't. I guess that's one of the main themes of my research, is that, there are a lot of artists here, the 'traditional' artists, who are doing work that's really kind of transcultural? And it's really addressing broader politics but often it's put into First Nations art. In a little box.

Rebecca Belmore: Yeah. Well, if you go to the VAG, in the gift shop or any bookstore, I just had this conversation a half hour ago, someone said 'well all the First Nations stuff is segregated, whether it's contemporary or traditional.' Cards, T-shirts, whatever, tourism, etc. Of course that's the reason why, for consumer convenience. So I think, yes as someone who is First Nations and someone who's not from the West Coast, I as an individual, I as a person can deal with any issue that I wish. I can deal with the war, anything. We live in this country where we're supposed to, we're free. [Alice laughs]

(R Belmore, pers. comm., April 25, 2004<sup>10</sup>)

Even for an artist whose work is renowned for its almost minimalist formal elegance, it was a strikingly simple act: *Rebecca Belmore*. Belmore does not include "Anishinabe" or another word that would indicate her First Nations identity in the exhibition title or promotional materials for her 2002 solo exhibition at the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery in Vancouver, BC. Through this act of un-naming, Belmore un-tethers this work from ethnic ascriptions, which she and other contemporary First Nations artists, such as Gerald McMaster and Shelley Niro, have identified (with) and problematized since the 1980s (see McMaster and Martin eds, 1992; Nemiroff, Houle and Townsend-Gault eds, 1992). Not entirely free from these ascriptions – Belmore's reputation as a politicized contemporary First Nations artist nearly always precedes her and her work – the installations address and intensify issues around naming and un-naming Aboriginal people, and work to engender and represent other kinds of group affinities and memberships other than ethnicity.

Naming and un-naming are, of course, never absolute acts; selves and especially the names attached to them are "sticky" and highly inter-subjective as naming is co-constitutive (of the named and the unnamed) and socially situated in "time, space, society, and biography" (Bennett 2001: 164). Like labels, the genre Belmore uses to un-name herself, names "carry a number of nonreferential or pragmatic functions" (Strong 1997: 44). These "may be understood as the ways in which labels [or names] index aspects of the very communicative events in which they participate... because they include messages about museum audiences themselves – about audiences' relationships to both the objects on display and the institution displaying them – the indexical aspects of labels may become central to highly emotional controversies" (ibid). For the audience, the label, name, or title's referential and

pragmatic functions summon and reflect their prior knowledges and experiences which become confirmed or, in the case of Belmore's un-naming, made present in their absence. *Rebecca Belmore* is haunted by the specters of what cannot be, or simply is not, said. However, to borrow sociologist Kevin Hetherington's phrasing, Belmore's performance and installations mobilize the "social relations around what is [present]... as well as the presence of what is not" (Hetherington 2004: 159) to explore the porous boundaries of identity and difference.

This chapter is concerned with naming and un-naming, the (absent) presence of Aboriginality that *Rebecca Belmore* raises amidst the burden minority artists bear to perform identity and represent their communities. I will explore how Belmore addresses naming in her exhibition, bearing in mind her statement that the work is really "about humanity, not ethnicity" (R Belmore, pers. comm., October 5, 2002). Analyzing visitor comments on the exhibition, I will argue for an anthropology of art that is more closely engaged with the relation between materiality and subjectivity, and the possibilities of alternative communities that emerge in audience-art interactions. Put another way, I find analytical room for audience comments such as "it moves me" that, because they seem insubstantial, visitor studies has inadequately addressed. This is perhaps because their content is emotional – elusive and thus difficult to quantify and analyse. In addition, if visitor studies has primarily been applied scholarship – seeking to elicit data to be put to immediate use – I also suggest that it might be productively put into conversation with material culture studies and anthropologies of the senses, affect and emotion (see Basso and Feld 1996; Lutz 1988; Lutz and Abu-Lughod, eds 1990; Seremetakis 1996; Stoller 1997; Turner 1986).

*Rebecca Belmore's* inclusivity, through the use of "humble materials" and gestures, and gentle markers of difference enable her work to transcend (while acknowledging) difference and take part in micropolitical action<sup>11</sup>. In this way, Belmore's work cuts across the politics of difference that Northwest Coast museums promote. The prevailing understanding within museums, art galleries and criticism that cultural transactions are distinctly intercultural affairs developed in part out of theoretical work in American cultural studies in the mid-1980s to early 1990s that critiqued and undermined the discursive (including exhibitionary) 'othering' of non-white, male, middle-class subjects while insisting that all subjects have distinct situated knowledges (Haraway 1991, see Clifford and Marcus 1986, Karp and Lavine 1991, Pratt 1992). The movement in history and anthropology that began in the 1970s to examine and give full recognition to indigenous peoples' agency in colonial encounters (see Thomas 1991),

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<sup>10</sup> Unless stated otherwise, all quotations from Belmore come from our conversation on April 25, 2004.

<sup>11</sup> I will discuss micropolitics in greater detail further on in the chapter.

taken together with indigenous people's demands to curate exhibitions of their own communities and histories, has combined to further underscore the widespread understanding of museums as intercultural spaces.

Because museum exhibitions are taken to represent culture and the dominant academic and activist debates around museums have turned around the politics of representation, (Canadian) museums (in particular) have tended to privilege the power of discourse in their work at the expense of mobilizing other sensibilities. The placement of the large free standing text panels in the UBC Museum of Anthropology's contemporary Northwest Coast art gallery, *Gathering Strength* (2000, ongoing), illustrates the museum's desire to preserve its and its collaborators' discursive interpretative authority. Like scansion, the panels police viewers' physical proximity to the objects and, by extension, the possibilities for somatic knowledge production<sup>12</sup>. The resultant space between the people and the objects becomes a safe zone to be filled in by intervening text describing the work, its cultural and historical context, and its significance to the artist. The widespread use of Nuu-chah-Nulth text in the Royal British Columbia Museum's exhibition *Hupuukwanum Tupaat Out of the Mist: Treasures of the Nuu-Chah-Nulth Chiefs* (Black 2000) has a long precedent in contemporary Native American and First Nations art that incorporates and displays indigenous language as a means of showing and safeguarding cultural knowledge. In contrast, Seattle's Burke Museum of Natural History's 2002-2003 exhibition *Out of the Silence* had relatively minimal text that did not impede – and in its conspicuous placement on the exhibition's margins may have indeed facilitated – viewer's 'direct' engagement with the works<sup>13</sup>.

Museum objects like labels, particularly the text-heavy ones featured in many collaborative exhibits, ask visitors to consciously understand cultural difference and ascertain similarity. It follows that they risk reproducing popular notions of race, ethnicity and Aboriginality. Closely following Gell, K uchler contends that while art and material culture are often made the objects of discursive thought, few have considered how "thought [can be objectified and] conduct itself in art" (K uchler 2001: 60, 57; see Brown 2004, Gell 1998). K uchler argues that

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<sup>12</sup> *Gathering Strength* is comprised of 10 modules. Two to three modules are changed each year, hence 'ongoing.' *Gathering Strength's* modules have become increasingly textualized since the gallery opened in 2000. Visitors can, however, touch one work in the show: Eric Robertson's installation *Shaking the Crown's Bone*.

<sup>13</sup> *Out of the Silence: The Enduring Power of Totem Poles*, curated by Robyn K. Wright with the assistance of seven First Nations advisors from Coast Salish, Haida, Nuu-Chah-Nulth, Tlingit and Tsimshian communities, juxtaposed photographs of old Haida village sites shot by Adelaide de Menil (see de Menil and Reid 1972) with Northwest Coast cedar sculptures from the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Text panels within the exhibit document the 20<sup>th</sup> century decline and 'renaissance' of Northwest Coast cedar sculpture production. The exhibition also featured weekly carving demonstrations by local Northwest Coast artists. See [www.washington.edu/burkemuseum/OTS](http://www.washington.edu/burkemuseum/OTS) (accessed August 20th 2004).

objects can help us think by binding “affective and cognitive processes” (Küchler 2001: 59). One of the primary aims of this thesis is to further explore how they also act as micropolitical agents. Since museums, art galleries, and other exhibitionary locations displaying Aboriginal and First Nations art are indisputably political locations, sensuous (transcultural) encounters with material culture might be usefully re-conceptualized as tools for social critique and political action.

Rebecca Belmore’s performances and performative, participatory installations help to show us how objects kinaesthetically engage their viewers and harbour opportunities for them to engage in what Foucault termed ‘techniques of the self:’ “the means through which humans effect ‘a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conducts, and way of being’” ... “in the minutiae of subjective experience” (Foucault quoted in Bennett 2001: 145; Eagleton quoted in *ibid.*). Belmore is a Vancouver-based performance and installation artist who also works in photography and sculpture. After graduating in 1987 from the Ontario College of Art, she began performing at First Nations conferences and other grassroots organizations’ meetings, and exhibiting in small artist-run centres. She came to national prominence in the early 1990s with two installation/performance projects, *Mawu-che-hitoowin: A Gathering of People for any Purpose*, exhibited within the National Gallery exhibition *Land Spirit Power* (Nemiroff, Houle and Townsend-Gault, eds. 1992) and *Ayumee-aawach Oomama-Mowan: Speaking to Their Mother*, a giant megaphone Belmore built during her 1991 residence at the Banff Centre for the Arts and which she traveled across Canada in 1992. Belmore recalls that these works’ “conceptual base was about oral history, oral tradition, about speaking” – ongoing themes in her practice. She then elaborates:

Those were very specifically tied to the time that I was making them. Because I was interested in engaging community. First by taking the megaphone out to the community and then by, around the same time, making the other work (*Mawu-che-hitoowin: A Gathering of People for any Purpose*) to bring the community to the National Gallery. So these were very specific *strategies* that I was using to even understand for myself these kinds of relationships between the art world and my own broader community of First Nations people.

(R Belmore, pers. comm.)

The installation *Mawu-che-hitoowin: A Gathering of People for any Purpose*, a circle of chairs that viewers were welcome to sit on, each equipped with a headphone, created the conditions of possibility for an intimate dialogue between the visitors and the First Nations women whose recorded voices each occupied their own favourite chairs. *Ayumee-aawach Oomama-Mowan: Speaking to Their Mother* responded to the 1990 Oka crisis that elevated conflicts over First Nations’ land rights to the national and international stage. In this object-centred performance, Belmore invited community members to create intimate relations with the landscape by addressing it and “[having]

the land speak back” (R Belmore, pers. comm.). Belmore brought these two works up in our conversation to illustrate the importance she places on engaging community and localized politics in her work.

I’m always trying to understand where I locate myself in certain very specific sites or contexts or places. So I think that’s why again going back, I think as an artist I’m very conscious of place and time and I think that has a lot to do with also my practice and my history, the history of my practice as a performance artist. I like to make, I like to think of myself...as someone...who’s interested in making work that deals with the present. What drives my work is *now*. What’s going on now and where I’m at. Where I am physically located. So I can, as a performance artist address for example, because I was living here I had the opportunity, I could do the piece downtown, the *Vigil* piece, *the Named and the Unnamed*. So when I go to Regina, I can deal with that political situation... So, it’s present.

(R Belmore, pers. comm.)

Belmore has lived in Vancouver for only the last three years, and her affiliations with First Nations people are mainly with other contemporary artists. She explains that her “experience of Northwest Coast First Nations is limited. I have friends... But I don’t really have much of a relationship to the First Nations communities that are here, the reserves (pers. comm.)” Her un-naming reflects her reticence to work on in exclusively First Nations-specific projects, in light of her current social location in Vancouver, and also her desire to engage transcultural audiences.

It also stages a dimension of what performance theorist Della Pollock describes as metonymic writing (1998: 82-6). The presence of text (or a name) anticipates or gives the illusion of its referent’s bodily presence, but ultimately reveals its absence (see Handelman 1993). Un-naming dis-members the name from the body (see Kemp 1988). Pollock is primarily concerned with those words that are present, generally in textual form, and which “secure the absence of [the objects they represent] with [their] substitutional presence” (83). Metonymic writing, she continues, “underscores the difference between print-based phenomena and the corporeal, affective, processual temporalities in which they are operating, thus actually featuring what they aren’t” (85). She offers this mnemonic parable to stage the work that words – both her written and her fourth grade teacher Miss Carlson’s spoken ones – do to create absent presence:

She stood at the front of the room, before the gridlock of our fixed, evenly spaced desks, calling out each name backwards, as it was written on her roll sheet. “Smith, Joe!” she would call out; “Pollock, Della!” ... When the confirmation of presence was not quickly forthcoming, when “Smith, Joe” didn’t immediately answer, “Here!” we all turned away from Miss Carlson to *see* who *wasn’t there*....What had Miss Carlson, despite herself, authorized but this turning away? This giggling, momentary trespass of absence on school territory? Joe (or, for that matter, me, here) was more present in his absence, in being present in name only than he ever was on other days when, careful, polite, looking straight ahead, he guaranteed the connection between word and referent with his bodily presence, with the appropriation of his body to smug confirmation of print’s ability to name its object, “Here!”

(Pollock 1998: 85)

In the video installation *The Named and the Unnamed*, Belmore calls out the names of some of the 50 abducted women from Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, including many First Nations sex trade workers, whose disappearance went uninvestigated by Vancouver Police for several years<sup>14</sup>. The performance that *The Named and the Unnamed* documents, *Vigil*, was performed in June 2002 in the Downtown Eastside neighbourhood: the site of their livelihood and disappearance. At the beginning of the performance, Belmore cleans a ritual space and lights a votive candle for each missing woman. Their first names are marked on Belmore's arms: Ingrid, Elaine, Leigh. The women, some of whose remains and DNA have since been found on now-accused serial killer Robert Pickton's pig farm in Port Coquitlam, cannot call back. Belmore lays a rose for each woman, having called her name and drawn the rose's thorny stem through her teeth. Belmore then changes into a red dress which she nails and tears from a telephone post (figure 1.1). With the dress in pieces nailed to the post, Belmore changes back into her jeans and surveys the performance space, with the refrain from James Brown's "It's a Man's Man's Man's World" playing in the adjacent truck's radio. *The Named and the Unnamed* plays on a fifty minute loop, and the screen onto which it is projected is pierced by fifty lightbulbs. The performance is quiet except for the naming and the song, which fill the entire exhibition space.

In both *Speaking to their Mother* and *Vigil*, Belmore does not address her live audience, but the space or the landscape where her performance is located. This landscape includes "the missing." *Vigil*, she describes, is:

basically the cleaning, and then the memory, or like it's the absence of those people from that site. The missing, addressing the missing that were here. The megaphone is, you know, bringing people together to speak and then have the land speak back. With the echo. It's interesting because both works involve the whole idea of calling. Calling somebody. And in the megaphone you hear your own voice, whereas as the performer in the other piece, I call out the names and no one's answering.

(R Belmore pers. comm.)

Belmore's own un-naming within the context of the exhibition<sup>15</sup> separates her named Aboriginal identity from her body just as the women's names called in this public *Vigil* reinforce and re-member their presence in their community whilst their bodies are absent and, tragically, dismembered elsewhere. Although Belmore's performance is a "polemical commemoration" of the women's disappearance and the authorities' disinterest in their whereabouts, it nevertheless offers hope: her own un-naming or dis-memberment from the "box" of First Nations art, her presence in the Downtown Eastside calling the women's names, and her committing corporeal crimes on her own body "as if

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<sup>14</sup> The number of named missing women from the Downtown Eastside is now 65. The DNA from 3 unnamed women, in addition to 28 named women, was also found at accused-serial killer Robert Pickton's Port Coquitlam pig farm. Lori Culbert (2004) "Nine More Women Linked to Pickton Case, total 31." *Vancouver Sun* Jan 28, 2004.

in an act of atonement” (Townsend-Gault 2003: 18) enables her to articulate and work within other kinds of alliances than those tied to Aboriginal communities and politics. Belmore’s unnamings mark out the gallery and her performance space in the Downtown Eastside as “self consciously constructed [spaces] that cannot affirm the capacity to act on the basis of natural identification, but only on the basis of conscious coalition, of affinity, of political kinship” (Haraway 1991: 156). The suspension of Aboriginal identification latently recognizes the multiple communities in which she performs membership. It enables her to be simultaneously an Anishinabe person who is also always “a member of the world” (R Belmore, pers. comm.).

### **Humble Materials, Soft Difference**

Belmore’s performances and installations play with the dual materialities of bodies and objects; her emphasis on her materials’ qualities and presence render ambiguous the distinction between the two mediums. Installations such as *Blood on the Snow* (see figure 1.2) use “humble” materials, modes of production, and references that all observers can relate to (R Belmore, pers. comm.). A large quilt, simultaneously a blanketing of snow and a blanket, is designed to warm and soften the austere gallery space, even while the chair’s blood makes present the magnitude of the unspeakable tragedy that the blanket of snow conceals. At the same time, for one museum visitor, “a BFA student a UBC, originally from Pakistan” it evoked feelings of warmth and comfort. He/she “felt like lying down on the white quilted fabric,” while interpreting the blood as a sign of corporeal presence.

BFA student’s comments reflect how Belmore’s installations invoke simple everyday actions, like lying in bed/on snow, that enable her audience to “[see] themselves” through their kinaesthetic relation and response to the work (R Belmore, pers. comm.). I will argue in this section that her audience’s bodily response to her installations enable them to understand relations of difference by recognizing their similarity with her and each other. Instead of asserting difference, an alienating strategy, Belmore’s installations in *Rebecca Belmore* enact a form of what political theorists Jane Bennett and Michael Shapiro term “micropolitics” by dynamically engaging viewers’ sensibilities in the pursuit of making political statements (Bennett and Shapiro 2001: 5). By insisting on viewers’ bodily implication in their own spectatorship, Belmore’s works encourage their viewers to “deal... with their own bodies” and recognize their bodies’ attachments to the materials (R Belmore, pers. comm.).

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<sup>15</sup> Belmore’s naming and unnamings is always time and site-specific. She performed *Vigil* in June 2002 as part of

By micropolitical action, I refer to a mode of political action or thought that emerges out of affect or what political theorist William Connolly describes as “the organization of instinct” (1999: 147). It is deeply rooted in the experience of the body that enters into a relation with something material, including another body, which engenders a change in how the feeling individual thinks about the world. Theories of micropolitics turn on the assumption that people and the world they inhabit are co-constitutive and therefore continually in flux. Connolly succinctly articulates this in suggesting that “perhaps the current organization of your instincts in this [or any] domain is not the last word after all” (ibid.: 147). His focus on the mutability of human ‘instincts’ indicates that processes of becoming engage subjectivities beyond cognition – they touch and move between “registers of subjectivity” including “thought-imbued feelings [and] intensities below the reach of feeling,” including entrenched images and concepts (ibid.: 148). Feeling joy or suffering, as often mediated through images and objects as through language, slowly enables us to reconsider unspoken assumptions: “One part of your subjectivity now begins to work on other parts” (ibid.: 146). Our sensibility subtly alters, which modifies our thinking and allows us “to give more weight to minor feelings and arguments whose importance were heretofore minimized” (ibid.: 148)<sup>16</sup>.

Belmore’s haptic installations *Song* and *State of Grace* use participation and motion to confront viewers with their role as agents in the construction and consumption of Native art, disappearance and death. *Song* (figure 1.3) includes a floating eagle feather and opposite, a shelf holding a stack of cards, each reading “Soldiers/You Fled/Even the Eagle Dies” and each with a small stitching in red, white or blue thread. Each visitor was invited to take home one card (figure 1.4, see far left of figure 1.3)<sup>17</sup>: an act that re-distributes *Song* within the spaces of its collectors’ homes, recalls the production of Native women’s textile art as tourist art and souvenirs (see Phillips 1999), and also tempt viewers to create absence. While the cards with their tangled threads are inviting, their sculptural delicacy makes us ever aware that removing a card commits a kind of violence against *Song*’s supposed

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Talking Stick: Aboriginal Arts Festival organized by Full Circle: First Nations Performance.

<sup>16</sup> Connolly’s ‘instinct’ and his theorizing on the effects of the arts of the self on one’s political engagement are not dissimilar to what Turner conceptualized as the relation between affect and cognition. Turner began thinking about the relation between affect and cognition long after he famously theorized that between liminal and everyday places and times, and it is perhaps not surprising that he saw both relationships operating in parallel ways within the structure of normative social life. Whereas his analysis of liminality (1966) addresses how social relations within a collective transform or congeal, his work on affect and cognition tries to answer why individuals within a collective come to behave as they do. For Turner, affect underpins and informs an individual’s cognitive processes. Connolly differs from Turner in crediting individuals with far greater capacity to generate social action through relational and intersubjective experiences, and his work that teases out how the processes through which people consciously and unconsciously work on themselves enables us to consider political action, even in art, as something equally affective and emotive as conscious and discursive.

<sup>17</sup> The invitation was not part of the installation per se but was conveyed on the half-A4 maps to the exhibit.

integrity and presence<sup>18</sup>. In this way, *Rebecca Belmore* blurs the hard distinctions between viewer, participant, and objects that Western (Northwest Coast) ethnographic museums maintain in their naming and labeling practices.

No longer able to claim disembodied spectatorship, we look at the installations with consciousness of our bodies' implication in their production. Nowhere in the exhibition is this more apparent than in the photo-based installation *State of Grace* (figure 1.5), a sliced photograph of a sleeping (or dead) woman<sup>19</sup>. Owing to the air currents that flow through the gallery vents on the adjacent wall, the image/object undulates softly as visitors' bodies pass by. The use of photography in *State of Grace* also questions the detached ocularcentrism of 'reading' and 'understanding' two-dimensional art. The image presents a web of ontological ambiguities, in which two key questions are: is the woman sleeping or dead, and is she First Nations? *State of Grace* compels us to ask 'can we just let her rest?' and thus to confront the relevance of these questions, our motives for answering them, as well as the epistemological categories we bring to bear on them.

*State of Grace's* soft juxtaposition of liveness and motion with stillness resonates with Belmore's discomfort with documentation. In her performances and installations, Belmore works to engage visitors' and audiences' bodies, whether it is reckoning with her body in performance or reflecting on their own in the installations (pers. comm.). She is concerned that static and mechanical forms of documentation disengage people's bodies and sensibilities, not to mention their ability, highlighted in *State of Grace*, to literally change what they see<sup>20</sup>.

Belmore prefers not to document her performances, though she has never refused to allow anyone to document them. She explains that for her, "performance...is about the moment, and is about the experience of that time and that place" (R Belmore pers. comm.). In lieu of mechanical documentation, she prefers her work to live on in narrative, dependent on personal transmission of the information to a present audience:

I think there's a lot of power in the myth of what took place, the rumour....I could suggest that maybe the whole, the rumour, the gossip, the story of the performance told by others, could perhaps be stronger than the documentation. Because documentation of performance is in my opinion so weak. Visually, and it's not successful of capturing the essence of the work, which is the live factor.

(R Belmore pers. comm.)

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<sup>18</sup> In *Wana-na-wang-ong*, (1993, Contemporary Art Gallery) Belmore similarly invited visitors to consume part of the exhibition by inviting them to drink a cup of the cedar tea that was continually brewed as part of the installation.

<sup>19</sup> *State of Grace* was shot by Donna H. Hagerman. Florene Belmore, Rebecca Belmore's sister, is the model.

<sup>20</sup> Belmore has since printed the image from *State of Grace* onto pillowcases, the proceeds of which benefit Vancouver's Grunt gallery. These objects further blurry any boundary between 'art' and 'material culture.'

For Belmore, documentation, unless produced extremely well, eviscerates performance of much of its affectiveness, its corporeality, its liveness. Even a particularly “strong document” like Paul Wong’s video for *The Named and the Unnamed* isn’t exhibited alone<sup>21</sup>. She makes it as part of a sculptural installation by inserting lightbulbs into the screen onto which it’s projected (see figure 1.1). The physicality of the lights and their impacts on the space of the exhibition and of the viewers’ bodies draws them into the ‘original’ performance while the bulbs’ materiality and presence undercut the putative originality of the live performance that, for some performance theorists, documentation assures (Hobart 2001: 371-2; Auslander 1999; Phelan 1993). Referencing the candles lit during the performance for each of the missing women, the lights bridge the geographical and temporal gap between the installation and the performance. Through the reference - the metonymic artifacts - the performance of *Vigil* is somehow made much more present even while the sculptural quality of the installation reminds us that the performance has occurred elsewhere, and that we are experiencing it as something related but different.

## Textual Traces

In discussing with me the exhibition and her art practice, Belmore mentions only its universal, humble qualities to which all viewers can relate – not, for instance, the Sioux song printed on the *Song* cards that implicate their viewers, through touch and consumption, with the Aboriginal identity and culture to which they belong. She references *Blood on the Snow*’s quilt and its warmth and the nails in *Vigil/The Named and the Unnamed* (figure 1.1) that simultaneously reference building and crucifixion. When I asked what it was about the nails that she likes, Belmore replies:

I like the idea of building. I like the aggression, the exhaustion, the destruction, the puncturing. There’s all kinds of possibilities. The whole idea of the human being taking the nail. So it’s building as a human kind of, what’s the word that I meant? [laughs]

AC: something we do? There’s something very universal about building [yeah] something we all do. Common experience. It’s like what you were saying before about using humble materials

RB: It’s very simple. People can relate to it... I use candles, lightbulbs, very simple, water, very simple actions. It’s the way I like working.

AC: And repetitive actions as well

RB: Yes.

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<sup>21</sup> Paul Wong is a Vancouver-based video and performance artist. Belmore indicates that Wong’s background makes *The Named and the Unnamed* such a compelling document.

(R Belmore, pers. comm.)

Belmore invites her audience to first identify with the work – for instance with the softness of *Blood on the Snow*'s quilt and the warmth of the textile on the cool gallery floor - and then for us to experience together the blood that stains the top of the chair, the strained tearing of the red dress that she wears and nails to a telephone post. The audience is neither accused of nor made to face this violence; Belmore's relationship to her audience is grounded in community-building and shared experience. Instead, we – a 'we' which includes Belmore – witness the violence together. The shared experience of Belmore's performance "in the presence of the absent" (Belmore 2004: 1), and the performative production of works like *Blood on the Snow*, "give [names] to something" (R Belmore, pers. comm.) that had been silenced.

Visitors to *Rebecca Belmore* were invited to address the work in a comment book within the exhibition, which became a forum for discussion and debate and a place for audience members to communicate their affective responses to the show. While most do not explicitly cite Native-ness, they exhibit a (sincere) sentimentality that doggedly follows First Nations and Native American art and therefore work to situate Belmore within this box as she tries to move beyond it.

Considering the extent to which the local mass media's coverage of *Rebecca Belmore* stressed her Anishnabe heritage, it is surprising that only ten percent of the visitors' comments in the comments book (8, T = 81) make reference to Aboriginality. In this audience of primarily university-based visitors and many students, this suggests that the tropes the mass media draws on to frame Aboriginal art holds little sway over how people receive this 'un-named' work<sup>22</sup>. Of these eight commentators, four self-identify as First Nations, though do so while making reference to other identities: a two-spirit artist is urban-based; a Mohawk visitor's national identity would seem to be equal to "writer, teacher, traveler [and apparently secondary to] WOMAN"; a "First Nations man" is also a "future elementary school teacher here at UBC in my 4<sup>th</sup> year" ; a "First Nations artist" is intrigued by how Belmore and other First Nations artists incorporate and comment on "the world around them" in their work.

While these commentators all praised Belmore's work, other First Nations visitors were more ambivalent. Two First Nations colleagues, both students at UBC, wondered aloud why Belmore chose to disassociate herself from her Nation through un-naming. Did this signify a lack of pride in her First Nations identity? These colleagues were especially concerned that Belmore came to prominence in the late 1980s and early 1990s as a First Nations

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<sup>22</sup> Media reviews of the show were reprinted within the exhibition's information binder.

performance artist whose work was mobilized around pressing indigenous political issues. In 1988, for instance, Belmore performed *Artifact 671B* in protest of Shell Oil Company's sponsorship of Calgary Alberta's Glenbow Museum's exhibition for the 1988 Winter Olympics, *The Spirit Sings*. At the time, the Lubicon Cree from Northern Alberta had mobilized a large scale First Nations boycott of Shell Oil, who despite their support for an exhibition of Native American peoples, drilled for oil on the Lubicon's land without the band's permission. As *Artifact 671B*, Belmore exhibited herself for hours in the freezing cold outside Thunder Bay, Ontario, on the Olympic Torch's route to the Calgary Winter Olympics. My colleagues interrogated both the politics and ethics of Belmore's 'making her name' as a First Nations artist, only to disregard that important part of her (art) history once she attained considerable success and renown. In response, a non-First Nations colleague argued the case that she can achieve only limited success as a "First Nations" artist; to really succeed in the contemporary art world in which she circulates, she must stand alone of ethnic identity. Notably, my colleagues all interpreted her unname as a lasting gesture, and in so doing, asked Belmore to occupy an unambiguous location from which to comfortably engage with her work. I would argue Belmore's work to name and unname recognize herself and the missing women as multiple rather than single and coherent subjects. Absent and present, they simultaneously occupy a multiplicity of positions within different social relations and, as she so clearly shows in *Vigil/The Named and the Unnamed*, present and mnemonic landscapes.

A year and half after I witnessed these debates, Belmore related to me that she does not try to intervene in how her identity is interpellated by her observers. As with her preference for her performances to live on in rumour and narrative rather than documentation, she cedes to the uncontrollability of language to perform her and her identity.

I never know how to deal with [ethnicity] myself. I identify myself by who I am, my Nation... I do that, because it's true. It's how I identify myself in the world. But at the same time I am part of the world, I don't live on my trapland, without a radio. But I think that, the whole thing of putting First Nations in the box, the labels is something I've had to get over. How people frame, how people write about me. How they, understand me? The politics of the art world are so... crippling and, for me, I've had to come to terms with it and say, "I really don't [care]." How they talk about me, how they introduce me.

I just went to [a local public art gallery] and the woman, she introduced me and she said ' I looked up Anishinabe on the Internet' so she pulled some goofy crap off the internet and she introduced me as Anishinabe because she saw Anishinabe on my CV or somewhere. And so [she was] going to do this. And I said yeah, just do what you want. Now, I just let people do whatever they want, and it doesn't matter because I know where I'm coming from and I know what motivates me. I'm not interested in always correcting people or insist that they shouldn't put me here or shouldn't label me this way. I can't waste my time, I have too many other things to do. It's just so much, to take on everyone. So, you can't, now because of the internet people can pull up information, it's out of control, it's out of my control. So I've learned to not let it bother me.

(R Belmore, pers. comm.)

One particularly interesting exchange within the comment books indicates how viewers struggle to negotiate positionality and cultural specificity with essentialism. '23, Comp sci major from UBC, live in East Van' remarks: "It's interesting to feel the emotion you portray from the perspective of a native woman from east Vancouver" (Oct 25, 2002). His/her response that enacts one very situated perspective reaching out to what he wrote as another - 'a native woman, etc.' - drew criticism from two other UBC-student visitors that day, who took a stand against the essentialism and Othering they read in these words. Explicitly referencing this response, one of the visitors argues emphatically for the broad social relevance of Belmore's art. "The issues around missing women, poverty, prostitution, desperation, violence ...[do] not only pertain to being 'native and being from the downtown east side.'" His/her companion adds: "nor is it [*Rebecca Belmore*] only a woman's perspective on emotions" (Oct 25, 2002).

Reading the comment books, I witness not only these dialogues but also several commentators' performative words. Rather than document their reflections and thoughts on the work, the comments enact their writers' visceral responses to the exhibit:

My throat, my gut tight  
Holding your stunning images.  
You are power & beauty & grace.  
With respect,  
Shayna

Like Shayna and '23, Comp Sci Major,' these commentators and others reach out to address Belmore herself, continuing the dialogue that her works initiated. In fact thirty-five respondents, including Shayna, addressed Belmore directly using the second person, many (20) expressing gratitude for the exhibition; two of these visitors and seven others used the comment sheets to write to "Rebecca," while four left Belmore their email addresses and one named herself and the gallery that represents her.

That 42 visitors, or 52% of those who wrote comments, sought to address Belmore herself indicates how efficacious the art is in drawing alliances among the material and the artist, and the individuals in attendance. '50, Theatre artist and Ph.D. student' draws particular attention to how these affinities are located primarily in materials and in corporeal experience:

Thank you. These gifts from your hands and your spirit have touched my spirit and made my hands ready to hold.  
Kleco, kleco.  
P.S. I am moved most by the pieces that themselves are in motion. Spirit is breath in/through us.

Nov 28, 2002

Although not all enacted their responses on the page as did Shayna quoted above, many including '50, Theatre artist' expressed the emotional work the exhibit performed on them through describing it as moving (n = 13) and powerful (n = 14). The linkages between *Rebecca Belmore's* micropolitical work and the individual affinities between her, her work and her audience members become especially clear in 'Mother of a Murdered Daughter's' comment:

Powerful! Powerful! Powerful!  
Deeply moving

Material culture theorists have effectively argued on one hand that 'art' objects are social agents, and on the other, that they are such since they are extensions or objectifications of their makers' agency. It is pertinent to now ask how objects can act in a politically efficacious way. This requires further probing such questions as whether micropolitics is exclusively an attribute of live agents – and is agency something that can only be attributed to live things? Or can an object be micropolitical to the extent that it engenders a subject to think self-reflexively about his/her positionality, beliefs and assumptions?

It strikes me that Belmore's strategy of using and stressing humble materials to kinaesthetically engage her audience works to create affinities and alliances that cross class, race, gender, and aboriginality. Yet her reminders of indigenous cultural politics and the protected nature of Aboriginal knowledges, as in the *Song's* reproduction of the Sioux song, makes it apparent that she presses for a humanism punctured by cultural differences that have been sedimented by centuries of (ongoing) colonial discriminatory policies and dispossession and cannot be unnamed. In the next chapter, I will show how Northwest Coast-style artists and the First Nations and Native Americans with whom they work are similarly grappling with humanistic concerns and definitions of indigeneity and indigenous rights, particularly concerning the production of cultural forms. Their claims cut to the heart of current academic and activist debates about the fluidity and constitution of indigenous group membership. Do indigenous cultural politics, as Kuper charges, privilege "blood and soil" ideologies of descent and thereby make culture a euphemism for race (Kuper 2003)? Or do indigenous groups form through the historical sedimentation of colonialist policies, histories of dispossession and performative participation, including adoptive kinship (Kenrick and Lewis 2004). On the Northwest Coast, First Nations public identity is strongly defined by traditional art. Thus, in the next section, I explore how this view leaves room for transcultural, affective, and sensual acts such as Northwest Coast-style art production, particularly when the agents have played a large role in defining and promoting the art form.

## Chapter 2

### Northwest Coast Native-style Artists and the Enchantment of the Formline

I, myself, have derived a certain physical satisfaction from the muscle activity involved in producing the characteristic line movement of this art, and there can be little doubt that this was true also for the Indian artist. To say that there may be a kinesthetic relationship between this movement and dance movement is not to say that there is any visual or spatial similarity, although there may be, but to a lesser degree. Because of the purely sensory nature of the suggested relationship, it is difficult, if not impossible, for one who not personally participated in both activities to be aware of it.

(Holm 1965: 92-3)

So wrote Northwest Coast Native-style artist and scholar Bill Holm in the conclusion of his *Northwest Coast Indian Art: An Analysis of Form* (Holm 1965), imbuing his otherwise analytical detached prose with the sensuousness of producing Northwest Coast-style art. In this illustrated monograph on the formal aspects of “northern” Northwest Coast art and design.<sup>23</sup> Holm painstakingly details the formal relationships between the primary, secondary and tertiary formlines; design units including ovoids, U-forms, Split U-forms, S-forms, Split S-forms; colour use; characteristic design and design variations of eyes, cheeks, eyebrows, hands and feet<sup>24</sup>. He also discusses the relation between positive and negative spaces, which refers to the co-presence of ‘positive’ forms such as ovoids with the unmarked space within and around them. The interplay between positive and negative space and the transformation of ovoids into eyes, lungs, joints through its careful management lend Northwest Coast design its ambiguity, tension, and points of relief.

As it is ultimately the relation between positive and negative space that so captivates and enchants Northwest Coast-style artists, in this chapter, I seek to examine why Northwest Coast-style artists continually struggle with the politics of their transcultural art production. For example, former Seattle Art Museum curator and Native-style artist Steven C. Brown chose not to include Native-style production in *Native Visions*, an art historical retrospective exhibition of Northwest Coast art (Brown 1995). Bill Holm long ago ceased to publicly exhibit and sell his traditional work in Northwest Coast forms, circulating instead his ethnohistorically informed paintings of traditional Northwest Coast objects in use (see Brown and Averill 2000). Jay Haavik, a Seattle based Native-style

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<sup>23</sup> The idea of the ‘Northern’ style, popularized in *Northwest Coast Indian Art*, referred explicitly to Tlingit, Haida, Tsimshian and Heiltsuk two-dimensional design. Holm writes that “it appears to be impossible to differentiate with certainty, on the basis of style alone, two-dimensional design of these four northern tribes, since both decorative and representative tendencies occur in the work of all, and the conventions of the art are so strong throughout this area.” It has since been replaced by particular tribal style attributions. Bill Holm (1965) *Northwest Coast Indian Art: An Analysis of Form* (Seattle: University of Washington Press), pp. 20-1.

artist of Norwegian descent, creates hybrid works that combine Northwest Coast formline and Viking designs ([www.jayhaavik.com](http://www.jayhaavik.com), accessed August 3, 2004). Their traditional Northwest Coast-style art practices are positively received by local Native American artists and communities in Washington State and Alaska. However, most of them work in art forms that are indigenous to British Columbian First Nations, who consider their art to form a critical part of their cultural property, and who are not surprisingly far more critical of non-native Northwest Coast art practices.

Through an ethnographic analysis of how Northwest Coast-style artists view their art practice, I will explore how their work emerges from their *enchantment* (Gell 1992; Bennett 2001) with the formline system that ensnares them as viewers and thus entangles them within the design's network of social efficacy. The theme of positive and negative space, and its Western critical theoretical counterpart, "absent presence" (Hetherington 2004), will act as a counterpoint throughout this chapter to my discussion of how Northwest Coast-style artists locate viable places for their art practice, and will thus highlight the tensions and ambiguities in their inter-or-trans cultural performances. One key tension underpinning this chapter arises between the artists' overall commitments to working within and for Native communities and making ethnohistorically accurate work, and their received Western notions of what constitutes indigenous art. More specifically, the artists' narratives reveal how they bring to bear on their encounters with Northwest Coast art a Romantic interest with 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century Northern Northwest Coast materials and their relation to Native cultures coupled with a Western understanding of art as relatively autonomous from, if representative of, culture. The latter becomes particularly apparent when they question the relevance of examining race and ethnicity when discussing or engaging in Native art production. These two frames of romanticism and autonomy are hardly unique to these artists; both are formative and influential in the history of collecting and exhibiting Northwest Coast and Native American art. However, Northwest Coast-style artists are efficacious culture-makers in the Pacific Northwest. Not only do their public installations shape both the region's iconographic visual identity and how area residents and tourists think about and interact with Northwest Coast art, they actively teach and work within Native American communities. Although a full exploration extends beyond the scope of this study, it bears noting that Northwest Coast-style artists have greatly impacted upon local Northwest Coast artists' understandings of their indigenous art traditions.

When looking at and assessing Northwest Coast art, Native-style artists are particularly attuned to technical

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<sup>24</sup> To do so, Holm identified and coded the formal characteristics of 400 pieces of Northwest Coast art onto Keysort

virtuosity. Reflecting on the sudden increase of Northwest Coast artists in the 1970s, Pasco laments that “there’s nothing worse, than bad Northern formline design, there’s *nothing in the world worse*. That’s terrible” (Pasco, pers. comm., March 6 2004)<sup>25</sup>. This analysis follows Gell’s argument that art functions socially as its technical prowess psychologically captivates its audience by provoking them to imagine its origination (Gell 1998: 68). Technical skill, he maintains, “is intrinsic to the efficacy of works of art in their social context” (Gell 1992: 52). Because objects are distributed agents of their makers (Gell 1998), they “[create] asymmetries in the relations between people by placing them in an essentially asymmetrical relation to things” (ibid.: 52). Gell’s Maussian argument that a person’s relation to an object can fundamentally alter their social relations with its creator aspires to universal applicability (Gell 1998: 1). Yet it too innocently assumes a direct transfer of power from maker to object, which Marx, similarly interested in the powerful magic of objects, particularly commodities, long ago complicated in his critique that commodities as fetishes veil the social relations of their production. Art’s capacity to induce enchantment, captivation, and awe in its viewers – to make them wonder ‘how did this object come into being?’ – depends greatly on whether the viewers are themselves practitioners. Within the context of Northwest Coast-style art production, it also depends on the artists’ tendency to divorce their art production from their works’ circulation within the lucrative local art market.

In contrast to how Northwest Coast-style artists view their relation to design as intensely personal, Holm’s analysis focuses on information and is, for the most part, highly detached and object-ive (see Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998). Figuring Northwest Coast objects “as more or less inert ‘matter,’” it is also what Jane Bennett refers to as disenchanted (2001: 7): “construing the modern West as a radical break from other cultures; and [enacting] the modern self as predisposed toward rationalism” (ibid). The construction of material culture as disenchanted reveal anxieties about objects’ power and capacity to emotionally and affectively engage their viewers. The interplay of detached analysis with contrapuntal sensory engagement in exhibiting, studying, and discussing Native American arts is of course not new. At the 1893 World Columbian Exposition in Chicago, Washington Matthews, unable to fully articulate the intricacies and intimacies of making a Navajo drumstick, deferred to offering a demonstration in the “yucca-covered deserts of Arizona” (see Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 32-34). To develop mannequins for a Kwakwaka’wakw display at the same exposition, Franz Boas learned and performed Kwakwaka’wakw dances to correctly stage the models’ poses.

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cards, which he subsequently analysed. See *ibid.*, p. vii.

While the pulse of *Northwest Coast Indian Art* is the transcultural performance of aboriginal artforms, which it cannot quite document, a major source of controversy surrounding *Northwest Coast Indian Art* is that its analysis is disengaged from First Nations and Native American communities and makes no mention of the rich indigenous social and cultural lives of the art, its production, and use. Yet Holm was well aware of these issues. Starting in 1956, Bill and Marty Holm hosted Kwakwaka'wakw artist Mungo Martin and seven or eight members of his family, who performed 'play potlatches' at the Holm's Kwakwaka'wakw house on Lopez Island. The potlatches, which continued for 25 years and included up to fifty Kwakwaka'wakw participants, enabled community members to 'try out' ceremonial dances and practices that, according to Holm, "they didn't do at home a lot... Things that they hadn't done for a long time, they'd begin to do at Lopez" (Holm quoted in Jacknis 2002: 195). In 1959, Mungo Martin gave Bill and Marty Holm Kwakwaka'wakw names at a potlatch on Turnour Island, and from then on, Bill Holm actively participated in potlatching himself (Jacknis: 194).

Holm never took on the analysis of Northwest Coast objects' cultural significance and social positions within Northwest Coast communities as his intellectual project, leaving such matters to colleagues including Wilson Duff and Bill Reid (see Vancouver Art Gallery 1967). Instead, *Northwest Coast Indian Art* alternately focuses on analyzing "the art object 'in itself'" and reveals Holm's captivation with "its origination through the bodily activities of an artist" (Gell 1998: 72). It articulates an entirely different kind of subject-object relation between the non-representational (abstract) formlines and those who engage with them than those provided by ethnographic descriptions of the social roles of indigenous art in First Nations and Native American communities that turn on the art's representational life. One only has to pay closer attention to how subject-object relations are written within *Northwest Coast Indian Art* to see the life and drama that Holm sees within the formline – the primary elements of two-dimensional design.<sup>26</sup> For Holm, formline "curves are gentle and sweeping, breaking suddenly into sharper semiangular curves and, immediately upon completing the necessary direction change (usually around 90 degrees), straightening to a gentle curve again" (Holm 1965: 37). "The corners of ovoids" are interpreted as "points of tension" (38). Meanwhile, hatching affords "relief...from the constantly flowing, curvilinear, non-concentric aspect of the total design" (65).

These remarks and the passage from *Northwest Coast Indian Art* quoted at the beginning of this chapter

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<sup>25</sup> All quotations from Duane Pasco come from our conversation on March 6<sup>th</sup> 2004.

make palpable Holm's enchantment with the art. The passage in the conclusion particularly enacts his production as a "moment of pure presence" in which "thoughts are brought to rest, even as the senses continue to operate" (Bennett 2001: 7). Befitting a sublime encounter, the intensity Holm feels for the formline is unspeakable; experiencing it must come through a mimetic encounter. It is surely this love of producing Northwest Coast art and performing traditional dances, which in my reading is absently present throughout the text, that underpins Holm's analysis and the book's ongoing commercial success.<sup>27</sup>

Other Northwest Coast-style artists, like Duane Pasco, Steven Brown, Dale Faulstich, and Barry Herem, are as equally passionate about the formline and creating design, as about materializing design in three-dimensional form. Yet most express detachment from the objects that leave their possession and circulate socially once delivered to art galleries or clients who commissioned them, and detachment from the politics that invariably accompany any Native art production. Gell's analysis of art as an aesthetic trap provides a powerful tool for enabling us to better understand how Native-style artists are captivated by formline design, and to unpack the distinctions between representative and abstract arts. This will, I hope, enable us to better appreciate their locations within the swirling politics of appropriation and performing aboriginality that are predicated on the assumption that Northwest Coast art represents or enacts Northwest Coast First Nations national and family identities and cultures.

### **Ethnicity and the Politics of Transcultural Northwest Coast Art Production**

Bearing in mind that most Native-style artists cite 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century Northwest Coast art as their inspiration, it is important to open up critical questions about whether race or ethnicity were salient concepts at the time of the work's creation.<sup>28</sup> Are the ideas of ethnicity and identity with which 20<sup>th</sup> century Northwest Coast art is commonly identified fully applicable to this movement that takes as one of its guiding questions how pre-contact and early contact Northwest Coast people related to their natural world? Most Northwest Coast-style artists have reckoned with these questions. Their mediations of present-day understandings of ethnicity, their roles in circulating

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<sup>26</sup> This is not the case with Holm's discussion of colour use or representational forms such as cheek design and design variations, which document the organization of formal elements.

<sup>27</sup> *Northwest Coast Indian Art* is currently in its twentieth printing and remains one of the University of Washington Press' bestselling titles.

<sup>28</sup> The Northwest Coast-style artists I worked with are well aware of the collection history of the work that they can access in museums and in the historical record, and the concomitant understanding that Western ideas of race and ethnicity motivated the collection of these works. Nevertheless, they remain primarily interested in the works themselves.

Northwest Coast (Native-style) art in the art market and in Native communities and their captivation with essential forms are reflected in their practice and in those aspects of their practice that they are most passionate about and committed to: historical accuracy and contemporary cultural relevance.

Two foundational moments in the Northwest Coast art “renaissance” that Bill Holm was directly involved in were the publication of *Northwest Coast Indian Art*, discussed in my introduction, and the Vancouver Art Gallery’s 1967 exhibition *Arts of the Raven*, co-curated with Wilson Duff and Bill Reid. *Arts of the Raven*, mounted in celebration of Canada’s centennial, is widely acknowledged as the first major show to exhibit Northwest Coast art as “art, high art, not ethnology” (Shadbolt quoted in Vancouver Art Gallery 1967: 1).

Distinguishing *Arts of the Raven* from earlier exhibitions such as 1955’s *People of the Potlatch*, curated by Museum of Anthropology curator Audrey Hawthorn and mounted at the VAG (Hawthorn 1955), was the conspicuous lack of contextualizing information about the artists or the Northwest Coast cultures from which the art came; object labels only specified the type of object (eg. Chilkat blanket), the cultural group (eg. Tlingit), the material, size, and the lending institution or individuals. The assumption that Northwest Coast art stands alone as ‘art’ on its aesthetic merits was of course in keeping with the modernist assumption that undergirds *Arts of the Raven* – that ‘art’ is universal, self-contained and constitutively aesthetic. Shadbolt’s comments reflect how she and the institution saw this as a profoundly democratic shift. Not only was Northwest Coast art accepted without reservation as art, it was now untethered from culture and history. With the inclusion of Northwest Coast-style artists Bill Holm, Michael Johnson and Don Lelooska Smith in the last gallery, “The Art Today,” *Arts of the Raven* did more than make Northwest Coast art open for all to admire. It promoted Northwest Coast art as a style that all people can freely participate in producing.

This claim for the art form’s wide accessibility is given further weight and cultural legitimacy in Bill’s Reid catalogue text, “The Art – An Appreciation.” In his short essay, Reid draws on the familiar trope, that he also popularized elsewhere (Reid and de Menil 1972), that the exhibition’s 19<sup>th</sup> century objects are but “isolated remnants” of long past Northwest Coast cultures. Having claimed that the pieces were detached from cultural ownership, Reid then historically decontextualized them in making the modernist universalizing argument that they in fact affirmed “the exploring spirit of mankind, unquenched by the limitations of the physical world and the restrictions of their own society” (Reid in Vancouver Art Gallery 1967: 2). Despite the differences between mid-20<sup>th</sup> century British Columbian and 19<sup>th</sup> century First Nations societies, Reid argued that Northwest Coast art transcends

us/them dichotomies: “the art, because it embodied the deepest expression of this essential humanity, can be as meaningful and moving to us as it was to” its creators (ibid.: 1). He saw high drama within objects themselves (ibid.: 2), but included the maker within the interplay. In one of his most cited passages, Reid also explained that the objects as seen in the exhibition were not as their makers intended them to be seen. When made, they were “objects of bright pride, to be admired in the newness of their crisply carved lines, the powerful flow of sure elegant curves and recesses – yes, and in the brightness of fresh paint” (ibid.: 1). Taken together with his discussion of the humanity of Northwest Coast art, Reid’s text encourages the revitalization of the art form by any participants, but is also suggestive of how Northwest Coast art and design had already come to represent First Nations cultures and communities within Native/Non-Native social relations in an intercultural British Columbia.<sup>29</sup>

This is not to suggest that this view was promulgated through all locations in which the Northwest Coast art “renaissance” was carried out, because producing ‘high quality’ Northwest Coast art very quickly came to be seen by the Canadian government and by First Nations as a key route to both cultural revitalization and economic development. In 1969, two years after *Arts of the Raven*, the Kitanmax School of Indian Art and Design at ‘Ksan opened in Hazelton British Columbia, counting among its teachers noted Kwakwaka’wakw artist Doug Cranmer, Haida artist Robert Davidson, Tlingit artist Nathan Jackson and Native-style artist Duane Pasco (see ‘Ksan 1972). Pasco recalls that ‘Ksan, as the school is commonly known, was funded first by the Department of Agriculture and then by what was then Canada Manpower (now Human Resources Development Canada) as a program to help Gitksan people learn to make, produce, and sell their traditional art, and was governed by a board of directors that included Gitksan First Nations representatives and members of the local mainstream (White) community. Over the next few years, ‘Ksan’s constitution was expanded to include First Nations students from throughout the Tsimshian language area and then from throughout British Columbia (D Pasco, pers. comm.).

Pasco was hired by ‘Ksan, on Holm’s suggestion, to teach bent corner (bentwood) boxes. He cites his experience teaching at ‘Ksan as a watershed moment in his development as an artist working in the Northwest Coast style, and is quick to emphasize that at this time, he and his fellow teachers were still very much students of the art form and for him, of First Nations cultures. He describes teaching and working at ‘Ksan as a reciprocal experience; he not only shared and learned from his students but also members of the local community for whom he made masks

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<sup>29</sup> “Objects of Bright Pride” was also the name of a Northwest Coast art gallery in Juneau AK and New York NY owned by Roland Crawford, a Native-style artist. He has since opened a gallery/coffee bar in Seattle, “Ancient

and with whom he learned aspects of traditional Tsimshian culture and its role in the contemporary everyday life of Tsimshian people.

While *Arts of the Raven* simultaneously promoted an understanding of the art as isolated from its cultural context and the openness of the art form to all producers, not all Northwest Coast-style artists were willing to make discrete distinctions among art, culture, and contemporary indigenous communities. Duane Pasco, for one, asserts that his interest in the art has always been driven by his lifelong interest in Native American and First Nations cultures, engendered by living and working alongside Native peoples, first in Anchorage as a small child, later as a construction worker in the Pacific Northwest. In our conversation, the work Pasco got markedly excited about was his collaborative art-making and learning about art-making and cultures alongside artists, elders, students, and young people in Native American and First Nations communities.

Pasco's extensive pedagogical career and far-reaching influence in Canadian and American Northwest Coast art have made him a highly visible target for criticism from academics, the mainstream media, and First Nations. Throughout our conversation, Pasco described no less than three separate instances where his work came under fire: in the late 1960s at 'Ksan, when members of the Board of Directors did not want to sell his work in the 'Ksan shop; in the mid-1970s, a conflict with the late Nuu-Chah-Nulth Art Thompson the evening Pasco's solo exhibition opened at Seattle's The Legacy gallery who contested Pasco's right to produce traditional style art<sup>30</sup>; in the early to mid 1980s at The Legacy, which refused to carry Northwest Coast-style work after its owners were intimidated by young Native American activists.<sup>31</sup> Pasco's narratives describing these conflicts all turn around the idea that his White critics are uninvolved in and, therefore, ill-attuned to the everyday social relationships among Northwest Coast and Native-style artists, and the various communities within which they work. More pointedly, he argues that in many cases his non-native critics interpellate (or use the language of 'race' to create) race in Northwest Coast-style art production as a simple binary opposition when in fact it takes far more nuanced forms:

Usually when they bring out this, racial if you want to use that term for lack of a better term, issue, they like to ask, you know 'well how do you feel about this native/non-native issue' and I say there isn't any. There's never any *issue* until you guys write about it and make it an issue, you know.

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Grounds" that sells non-Western art. The 'Northwest Coast' section of roughly twenty-five carvings and twenty prints includes predominantly Northwest Coast-style work.

<sup>30</sup> Pasco recalls that Thompson visited him the next day, and the two quickly became close friends. By this time, Pasco had apprenticed and worked closely with Thompson's cousin Joe David. Barry Herem also recalls Pasco and Thompson's close association from the mid 1970s through the early 1980s.

<sup>31</sup> The Legacy has since changed ownership and once more sells work by Northwest Coast-style artists.

(D Pasco, pers comm.)

Pasco's long involvement with indigenous communities, through apprenticing and working alongside countless Northwest Coast artists (including Robert Davidson, Nathan Jackson and Joe David), teaching at 'Ksan, and working with the Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe to revitalize their ceremonial and artistic traditions buttresses his good reputation and privileged position in the Northwest Coast art world; even without Canadian galleries carrying his art, it is in high demand among US galleries and private collectors. Still, it is difficult to dissociate Pasco's or indeed any traditional Native-style artists' work from either the North American colonial and post-colonial histories of assimilationist policies, or the sudden market for well-made traditional art that arose in the 1960s through the efforts of interlocutors like Holm, Reid, and Shadbolt.

### **Putting Tradition to Work: Finding Viable Places to Produce Northwest Coast-Style Art**

Setting aside the very important question of who raises race or ethnicity as an issue and in what contexts, the politics of engaging in transcultural Northwest Coast style art production is a leitmotif for many Native-style artists in Washington State, even while the Northwest Coast-style movement enjoys approval from official state, county and municipal authorities, individual and corporate art patrons, commercial galleries, and many local tribal groups. A vast amount of public 'Northwest Coast' art throughout Western Washington is in fact produced by non-aboriginal artists. At the May 2004 fundraising auction for the new Bill Holm Center for the Study of Northwest Coast Art at the Burke Museum, Northwest Coast-style producers fetched prices equivalent to aboriginal artists<sup>32</sup>. Similarly, in the Legacy and Stonington Galleries, Seattle's main commercial Native art galleries, Northwest Coast-style art is placed alongside Northwest Coast work, the only apparent distinction being the absence of a tribal affiliation on the objects' labels. And Native American groups including the Puyallup Tribe, the Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe and the Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe have commissioned Northwest Coast-style artists to produce large scale public installations (see Averill and Morris 1995: 21-2; 106-8; 115). Despite the safe space for non-native production assured within Washington public culture and laid out in Holm's early work, the spectre of Native opposition looms over their work. Using the modernist Northwest Coast art 'Renaissance' understanding of tradition

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<sup>32</sup> One exception is a sheep horn bowl by Bill Holm, valued at USD \$4,000 and sold for USD \$30,000. The buyers donated the bowl to the Burke Museum immediately after the auction. Their honouring of Holm, his art and his

that is more or less insulated from contemporary indigenous politics, Northwest Coast-style artists seek 'viable,' culturally sanctioned, places from which to work.

I take the notion of a 'viable' place - a social location that in this instance circumvents common understandings about ethnicity and its relation to Northwest Coast objects - from Northwest Coast-style artist Steven Brown, for whom finding viable places are key moments in the history of his practice. Brown began carving under Bill Holm at the Burke Museum of Natural History in Seattle, WA in 1969. While studying anthropology at the University of Washington, Brown was hired to reproduce objects in the Burke Museum's collection for their Northwest Coast education kits, which continue to circulate throughout the state.

Brown spent several years at the Burke, learning to carve by restoring and replicating old Northwest Coast objects. During this time, he also began restoring Northwest Coast art for collectors, and found for himself a niche within the contemporary Native art market that enabled him to sidestep the already burgeoning questions of the cultural appropriateness of White artists practicing Northwest Coast art. While at the Burke, Brown worked on the restoration of the Scow Chiefs' House, installed at the Pacific Science Center. Later in his career, in the 1980s, Brown became increasingly involved in creating replications of totem poles and houses, for Native American communities in SE Alaska.

Prior to this, however, Brown moved to Neah Bay, on the Northwest tip of Washington's Olympic Peninsula in 1974 to teach canoe making as a course operated by the University of Washington. "Neah Bay," Brown remarks,

was the first time I actually lived for any period of time with, the first Native community I actually lived in. That was a real valuable and memorable experience. For me, I learned a lot from it. And among other things I learned that there was a place, a viable place, for people like myself working in Northwest Coast culture within the culture itself.

AC: What is that viable place?

SB: Well, that the skills that I developed out of a personal interest could be of use to and were valued by people within the culture itself. And so the opportunity to work in Neah Bay not only learning about a culture but also conveying it, sharing experience with people who wanted that experience. One of those people, one of the five or six who worked on those canoes still makes them. He most recently made one of the canoes that they use for whaling. And it was an opportunity that I actually worked with him on that one.

(S Brown, pers. comm.)

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scholarly legacy by literally valuing his bowl so highly only to give it away to 'his' institution drew a standing ovation from the audience.

Brown also points out that finding a viable place to work in is an issue that confronts Native artists working within their indigenous tribal style as much as non-Native artists, due to the problematics introduced by producing work based on, for instance, 19<sup>th</sup> century art within a community whose political and social relations have radically changed since that time.

Today's Native culture is not the same as it was fifty years ago or a hundred years ago or more. Where, there was a very stratified society and unless you belonged to the upper level, noble classes, you weren't allowed to do that stuff. And certainly only certain families did this and that and certain skills were *very* closely guarded. Whereas *now*, pretty much anybody with, you know, a little bit of Native blood is, feels that they can participate in any, process. That hasn't always been the case.

(S Brown, pers comm.)

If for Brown, his skills in making the object become a significant agent within his social relations with Native American communities, for Pasco, it is the process of working with the material – knowing how to produce – that prepares the ground for his 'viable place'. However much Pasco is detached from the commercial objects he produces, he endeavours to become comfortable in every regional style and to produce one of each object used in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries in order to contribute to cultural knowledge and revitalization. He has apprenticed countless Native-style and Northwest Coast artists, and is renowned amongst his colleagues for his generosity in sharing his knowledge. While in his individual art production, Pasco does not seek to extend or distribute his objectified agency to its recipient, he comments that

I always learn something so I can teach a class in it. I'm always asked, can you teach a class in whatever? So I started researching, make a few things that would relate to that class. Then I teach the class. I think, anybody. . . that's involved in this artform, or any other aspect of this culture has an obligation to share it.

It's not just the artform, you're getting involved in the culture. They really are part and parcel of the same thing. But if I showed somebody how to do something. . . if they're any good, they develop that. And sometimes, take it a little farther than I have. And then I see how they're doing it, and I develop myself. So by sharing, it bounces back and forth, and it helps the whole movement grow.

(D Pasco, pers comm.)

Sequim WA-based Native-style carver Dale Faulstich has also found a 'viable place' working collaboratively over the last fifteen years with the Jamestown S'Klallam tribe as their "agent in Northwest Coast artwork" ([www.olympen.com/hhtd/jamestown.jpg](http://www.olympen.com/hhtd/jamestown.jpg), see Appendix I) and on their expansive public development projects. Faulstich has already produced nearly all of the art for the Jamestown S'Klallam tribe's 7 Cedars Casino, fronted by seven totem poles and saturated inside with houseposts, panels, and other large scale Northwest Coast art. He has also produced art for the Tribal administrative centre and ceremonial objects for tribal members. He estimates that once the tribe has completed their development plans – including a community centre, Social and

Health Services Building, and a dental centre – it will have the highest density of Native American art in the United States outside of museums, most of it produced by Faulstich.

Faulstich is little interested in the politics of producing Native-style art, which for him are divergent from ‘things in themselves’ - his everyday material production and his research for his work with the Jamestown S’Klallam tribe on traditional S’Klallam art. When I asked about how materiality and the bodily processes of art production might serve to narrow a discursive ethnic divide between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, he emphasized that

You know, the whole political thing, the whole thing about crossing the line. It never enters my thoughts. To me, I’m all involved in producing artwork. I go to work everyday, I’m thinking about what it is I’m making. I’m thinking about ‘what do I have to do today? I have to get this face, how am I going to solve this design problem, how am I going to do that?’

(D Faulstich, pers comm.)

Like Pasco, and echoing the arguments Holm and Reid made in the late 1960s, he argues that the Northwest Coast art form transcends artists’ identities. His position with an official letter of endorsement from the Jamestown S’Klallam Tribe assures that he need not become entangled with ‘political’ issues that do not reflect the ebb and flow of his relations with the Tribe, tribal members, which structure his practice.

Seattle-based Native-style artist Barry Herem is similarly little concerned with the ethnic politics overlaid on (his) Northwest Coast art production and is particularly suspicious of the ethnic cohesion that they presume. Like Steven Brown, who suggests that the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century Northwest Coast art that he restores, replicates, and that inspires him speaks to the relation between humans and their natural world, Herem emphasizes that his extensive experience traveling through the ‘old villages’ of the Northwest Coast by canoe has enabled him to experience the landscape.

You’re up there, really living it. That gave me a lot of feeling for getting past the racial issues. I’ve been out on there on the Coast, in the landscape, way more than anybody else I know.

(B Herem, pers. comm., May 20 2004<sup>33</sup>)

Herem is one of the most formally innovative of the Seattle-based Native-style artists, and emphasizes that much of his work is much inspired by elements of Northwest Coast art, rather than *is* Northwest Coast art. In works such as *Formline Stele* (figure 2.1), Herem explores the abstract elements of Northwest Coast art as shapes “which are so formal and so... philosophic in their formality.” In elaborating on how they are philosophic, Herem discusses, in a very complicated passage, how the historical space of the art’s production remains enigmatic to him

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<sup>33</sup> All quotations from Barry Herem come from our conversation on May 20<sup>th</sup> 2004.

while the “intensity of experience” out of which the art emerges is palpable and unencumbered by historical-cultural particularities. Herem is especially explicit about how his enchantment with 19<sup>th</sup> century Northwest Coast art and the world from which it came emerges from his view that the ‘modern’ (Western) world is altogether too disenchanting and overly rife with ethnic tensions and politics.

I’ve always thought that a classic Northwest Coast chest design, box design, and many of the masks too have a tragic quality to them. It’s not a happy world, those things are emanating from. And, yet it’s a profound world, deeply felt. But, I’ve always seen it as definitely full of, there’s no humanism in the way that we think of it in modern terms. It’s a violent and bad-tempered world out of which that art comes. Something almost unspeakably hostile and strange to us. A lot of that art looks like, I feel like I don’t know anything about that world. It’s another world, but it’s not a nice one, it’s not fun, it’s not beautiful.

I’m not a person who really wants to live in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but, I do have the feeling of... I do share with a lot of these guys<sup>34</sup> a feeling of, what is it, nostalgia, for something pure, less complicated. I don’t think that that would hold up very well in actuality. But those old chest designs, they do come out of a purity of consciousness, an intensity of experience, a universality that is really *really* stunning. I think that if *all* people of real sensibility really looked at a grand old Northwest Coast chest design, that they would find it as universal as I find, as most Westerners find, Bach. Because it plays on some great theme, and that theme is not one of laughter. It is a grave theme. As is Bach’s music. It’s not frivolous.

(B Herem, pers comm.)

For Herem, Northwest Coast objects are thoughtlike (Küchler 2001: 57) and efficacious. Formal elements such as the ovoid contain vast knowledge while their composition within 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century pieces often conveys deep tragedy and human struggle that transcends individual contexts, experiences, and words; it is humanistic. He tries to access what he sees as the ‘purity of consciousness’ out of which Northwest Coast art is developed by studying and producing formline design. His cut-out steel pieces, a new medium also being explored by Robert Davidson (see Duffek 2004: 44) and Coast Salish artist Susan Point, play with the composition and interrelation of positive and negative space and explore whether a ‘positive’ form is one that is drawn or otherwise marked. Is the cut-out Split-U form on the far left of the left totem positive or negative? If what we think of as the production of Northwest Coast art is the marking of positive forms such as ovoids onto a space, the cut-out Split-U offers a vision of Northwest Coast forms as existing in a complex relationship with its site: we see the absent material and the presence of the space in which *Formline Stele* stands.

*Formline Stele* breaks apart the Holmian idea expressed in *Northwest Coast Indian Art and Arts of the Raven* that Northwest Coast art (production) is accessible to all people because of its self-enclosure. The title, *Formline Stele*, not only references the works’ material, steel, but asserts that abstracted formal elements are the

essential components of Northwest Coast art. Showing that Northwest Coast and Native-style art forms are grounded and only seen in the site-specific here and now and arguing the impossibility of closing the forms off from people's participation in their production, Herem's *Formline Stele* and other cut-out works deftly entangle their viewers and spaces and confirm their active engagement with Northwest Coast forms and Native-style art.

### **The Formline as a Technology of Enchantment**

While their work in contemporary, usually Native, contexts provides the viable places for Native-style artists to work from, all cite their greatest artistic inspirations in the form of a historical trajectory that extends to 18<sup>th</sup> century Tlingit and 19<sup>th</sup> century Northern-style art. Brown and Herem both comment that they are captivated by the power within the 'classic' two-dimensional form. It is not the art's representational capacity that so "bewitches" them (B Herem, pers. comm.) as the complexity of the composition and the interplay of the lines and taut or loose curves. Brown concludes "there's something about it, I'm not exactly sure how to put it in words. There's a power, to me, even though it's not as ornate as visually as... say some classic Tsimshian style, mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and all sorts of work where there's tons of fine detail. But" he exalts, "there's something about the proportions" (S Brown, pers. comm.).

Captivation stands at the centre of Native-style production, yet it is an intensity that exceeds representation. It exists only at the borders of what can be spoken, appearing most commonly in the artists' frequent invocation of formlines, the importance placed on getting them right and producing well-made objects. Artists also frequently cite 18<sup>th</sup> Century Tlingit art as the zenith of traditional Northwest Coast art, and emphasize that 'you just gotta do it' to understand Northwest Coast art. These and many other Native-style artists have worked closely and alongside Native American and First Nations artists and communities as apprentices, teachers, and participants. Artists recount that in the studio or carving shed, the 'non-native issue' evaporates in the co-production of Northwest Coast and Native-style art. The pleasure of producing and the knowledge shared amongst the artists take greater political force than do words that overdetermine ethnic difference.

This is because Native-style artists, for the most part, do not see their own production as primarily representational of certain crests, stories, and the lineages and people to which they belong. Whereas they are drawn

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<sup>34</sup> "These guys" references Native-style artists such as Pasco who Herem, quoting Tlingit artist Jim Schoppert, calls 'the preservationists'; in Herem and Schoppert's eyes, they only seek to re-create historical formline design and

in by Northwest Coast two-dimensional design and by producing material culture, they also understand completed objects to be constitutively separate from people<sup>35</sup>. – and it is certainly not the work's representational life or capacity with which the artists are so invested. If objects and people are separate, except in the production of things, people and design enjoy no such detachment. The absorbing interplay of positive and negative spaces within traditional Northwest Coast art design are an exhilarating dualism that draws the artists in as viewers and so captivates them to want to become producers.

Similar to the intricacies of Celtic knotting (Küchler 2001), Trobriand canoe prows (Gell 1992) and other examples of complex ornamentation, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century Northwest Coast design is highly formalized. Every line and formal element is inter-related (R Davidson, pers. comm., June 10 2004); for Native-style artists, looking at what is commonly taken to be particularly well-executed design (where all elements are well proportioned and in balance) involves engaging with the drama staged within the work and the magical virtuosity of its formal composition. It is precisely this efficacy of the art in entrapping them that leads Native-style artists to conclude that the Northwest Coast art form is “world-class art” that is far larger than any individual. Thus the artists stress that they participate in the process of making art rather than the production of objects. Pasco feels that this is a form of culture making, where Northwest Coast-style production acts “as a form of social action. . . in unsettled understandings” (Myers 2002: 275) of Northwest Coast art traditions:

I just, I think you got to do that in order to understand that part of the culture, to help you understand other aspects of the cultures of the Coast. I've tried to weave and do everything, you know. Not to become a weaver but just to understand what it feels like to do that. So, that's kind of what I do. How else can you know? But when I teach, I always tell students, they may be Tlingits or Tsimshians, or Haidas, whatever, S'Klallam, whatever. They want to do their own regional style art. And I always tell them it's always good to learn what something isn't, to help you know what it is. And I really believe that. If they're Salish from down here learn to do Northern, if they're Northern learn some Salish style. Try to do real Bella Bella looking formlines, nice thin clear formlines, learn to do Tlingit formlines. Helps you understand better. I really believe that. Make a Tlingit face mask, well make a Tsimshian face mask first. Just the opposite, convex to concave, you know.

(D Pasco, pers. comm.)

Brown's elaboration on the corporeality of Northwest Coast-style art production stresses the use of indigenous tools. For him, Native-style art making is a profoundly experiential and pleasurable matter, between the producing self and the material, that enables himself and his students to undercut discursive formations of race and aboriginality.

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compositional conventions.

<sup>35</sup> Northwest Coast-style artists recognize that their engagements with Northwest Coast objects are more detached from culture than those of Northwest Coast people. In their work with the Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe (of which Betty Pasco is a member), Duane and Betty Pasco seek to teach their skills in art, language, dancing, and singing to

To actually use the tools, and in particular the original indigenous tools, [and] to make this stuff using grinders and sanders and stuff is not the same experience. It is not the same at all. It might come out looking the same, in many cases you can make it look the same but the experience of it is totally different. So to me, half of the reason that I like to do it is because of the way it feels, regardless if I'm making anything or not. But the experience of adzing, it's kind of musical quality, it's certainly a rhythmic thing and, the movement of the tool, not unlike the movement of notes or parts of an instrument, are actually creating something that *lasts*. And so the whole physical experience of the tools and moving the tools and listening to the wood and the changes, and seeing the changes in the wood as you work, whether you're making something or you're just making chips, is really a complex tactile experience. So I think when a lot of the people that sign up to take classes, that's part of what they're there for.

(S Brown, pers comm.)

Not only does the sensuousness of reproducing traditional forms and formline design entail a performed affiliation with 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century Northwest Coast people, carving large-scale works in cedar embodies the affiliation in material and sensory ways. The logs that become totem poles and houseposts are distributed from the time-places of the indigenous peoples who developed this art form. The cedar fragrance that fills the carving shed is a constant sensory reminder of both this vital historical link with generations of carvers who have worked with and sensed this material, and the co-presence of this material from the pre-contact period (the log) with the artist. It is not only the design forms that have social efficacy in captivating the Native-style artists. The materials are very much co-producers of the art (Yaneva 2003), and must be managed with skill. Faulstich cites the challenges of carving wood - working with all of the individual piece's idiosyncratic properties - as central to the pleasure of carving. Herem extends agency to the formline system itself, that reveals itself when ready:

When I'm at my desk working with these designs, it's always very difficult, I always have to work a lot to finally get, I have to draw 30 times to get a design I finally like. And when I do, I finally feel that the designs themselves - not me - the formline system itself is dispensing intelligence. That I'm tapping, touching something. And when you touch it just right, it comes at you. It, informs you, it fills you and it's rapture. You're lost in the line.

(B Herem pers. comm.)

### **Conclusion: Don't You Handle This Art?**

Art Thompson went to UBC and he had a meeting with Michael Ames and he said, "I want to have a 2 man show." And Mike said, "Great. We'll have it in the back" where they have their shows. [MOA's Gallery 5, their large gallery for temporary exhibitions] He says, "who's the other guy?" he says, "oh, Duane Pasco." Mike says, "I don't know, can't do it." And Art says, "why not?" and Michael says, "we don't, we don't really approve of non-natives having anything to do with Native art." And Art says, "Well what the hell do you think you're doing, being the head of this museum? Handling all this stuff all the time" he says, "well, that's different." But anyway, we didn't have the show.

(D Pasco, pers comm.)

Duane Pasco recalls this conversation occurring in the early 1980s, and his recounting it to me illustrates

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young people in order to facilitate their and their community's engagement with their traditional forms. D Pasco,

my role as researcher and producer of Native Northwest Coast art. It also serves as a parable that underscores how the social relations that I, weighted with my discipline's and institution's history, might try to foster with indigenous artists are no more progressive or productive than those between Native and Northwest Coast-style artists. If I have argued that transcultural Native-style art production performs aboriginality in far more complicated ways than discursive formations of Whiteness and Aboriginality accommodate, narratives such as Pasco's highlight my power to interpellate race and subtly push the artists I interviewed to 'perform' racialized roles as 'White artists' within my research and analysis.

Although on their surface they appear challenging, such narratives of other White interlocuters – 'critical' outsiders – serve to productively locate me within the network of Native/Native-style relations. This is in part because they are so often accompanied by another line of questions about my personal interest in Northwest Coast art. Surely I must like the material to want to engage so deeply with it. Is it even possible to be interested in the history and the discursive life of Northwest Coast art without enjoying the objects themselves? Underlining this point is the question of how one studies material culture without paying due attention to materiality and the everyday work of art-making. Particularly when, as in the case with much Northwest Coast and other artforms that act as technologies of enchantment (see Gell 1992), just looking at the art is no innocuous affair but entails a close and corporeal (if ephemeral) relationship.

Because Northwest Coast-style artists' have played such key roles in both the 'Renaissance' of Northwest Coast art and the current revitalization of art movements within their local Native American communities, they take part in what Myers has termed culture making (Myers 2002). They are critical interlocuters whose work inevitably shapes indigenous and non-indigenous understandings of Northwest Coast art, cultures, and ethnic consciousness. For this reason, we cannot grant their largely traditionalist work the apoliticism that some of them would use their 'viable places' to claim. We also cannot dismiss their production as hobbyism or appropriation – its broad acceptance and influence within Native American communities demands that it be more critically appraised.

Over the last generation, critical cultural anthropologists have mounted powerful critiques of the nostalgia and othering that incited the development of ethnographic museums and collecting practices (see Karp and Lavine 1991; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998) and similarly imbued much early twentieth century anthropological research and textual practices (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Rosaldo 1989). One of this movement's most useful insights was the

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pers. comm.

recognition that anthropological representations are social facts (Rabinow 1986), thoroughly invested with disciplinary norms and epistemological assumptions.

Drawing on these post-colonial analyses of identity and museology (see Clifford 1988; Price 1989) that critiqued the colonial legacy of Western museums and imperialist ways of seeing 'othered' non-Western people, museum and gallery curators found the inclusion of indigenous self-representation in exhibitions, mainly through the extensive use of quotations, an appropriate strategy for conveying contestation, dialogue, and the contemporaneity of Aboriginal peoples. In so doing, these curators and scholars were also responding to First Nations' claims and demands for cultural and political autonomy, including the acceptance of their epistemological frameworks.

I have argued, through examining Rebecca Belmore and Northwest Coast-style artists' art production, that there is always a materiality coexistent with textual expressions of difference "that escapes symbolic recognition" (Marks 2002: xi). While the late 1960s promotion of Northwest Coast objects to 'high art' reveals that a focus on materiality risks universalization and the conflation of difference, I agree with media and film scholar Laura U. Marks that directing one's attention to the lightbulbs puncturing a video installation or the grain on a block of cedar that is about to be carved can lead to an irrefutable and enabling particularism that confirms difference. Material culture scholar and actor network theorist Albena Yaneva (2003) shows how this particularism can be usually harnessed in social analysis: studying how people manage the formal and ascribed attributes of different materials can reveal much about the microprocesses and politics underlying any social interaction.

Belmore, Pasco, Brown, Faulstich, and Herem all work with the agency of materials (including design) and understand their central, if complex and culturally specific, roles in connecting peoples and cultures. A transcultural, kinaesthetic engagement with an object, grounded in a historical and ethnographic understanding of its production and circulation, enables people to ascertain social and cultural difference. In this simple way, objects act micropolitically by engaging people's affect to help them think in ways that transcend staid, named locations and categories.

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## JAMESTOWN S'KLALLAM TRIBE

1033 Old Blyn Highway, Sequim, WA 98382

360/683-1109

FAX 360/681-4643

June 26, 1998

**RE: Letter of Endorsement for Dale Faulstich, Northwest Coast Artist & Woodcarver**

To All Interested Galleries, Art Buyers and Collectors:

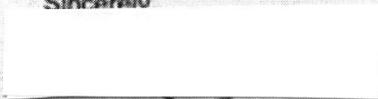
On behalf of the Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe, I am writing to convey our strong support and full endorsement for Dale Faulstich in his role as our agent in Native Northwest Coast artwork. Dale has both a long-standing and special relationship with our Tribe and has collaborated on numerous commissioned artworks over the past 9 years, including totem poles, masks, bent boxes as well as drums and other ceremonial objects. All of his pieces are original designs and reflect his deep understanding of the Northwest Coastal culture, history and art traditions.

The Tribe's commitment and appreciation for Dale's work is reflected throughout our facilities. In addition to our Northwest Coast galleries, his artwork is displayed in our Tribal administrative buildings and our casino operations. We are fortunate to be graced with exquisite and impressive totem poles, carved doors and wall panels and other contemporary pieces.

Additionally, we would like to note his personal contribution in providing training classes and educating our Tribal members in their artist skills. His dedication to our Tribe has helped to enhance and restore our culture in this area. We firmly believe that the quality and integrity of Dale's work is exceptionally sophisticated and is reflective of the Tribal respect for the cultural history in the design and carving style.

The Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe has been extremely honored to work with Dale and we would highly encourage others to explore his work. If you would like additional information or have any questions, please feel free to call me at our Tribal office. Thank you.

Sincerely,

  
W. Ron Allen  
Tribal Chairman/Executive Director

APPENDIX II

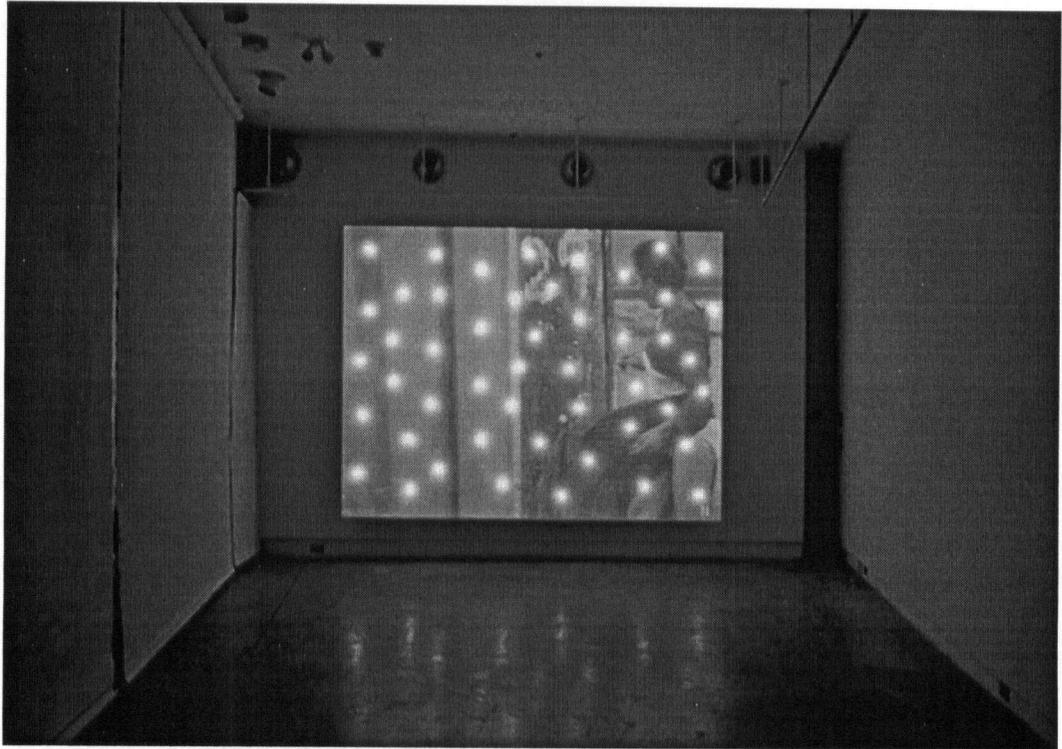


Figure 1.1: Still from *The Named and the Unnamed*. Photo: Howard Ursuliak

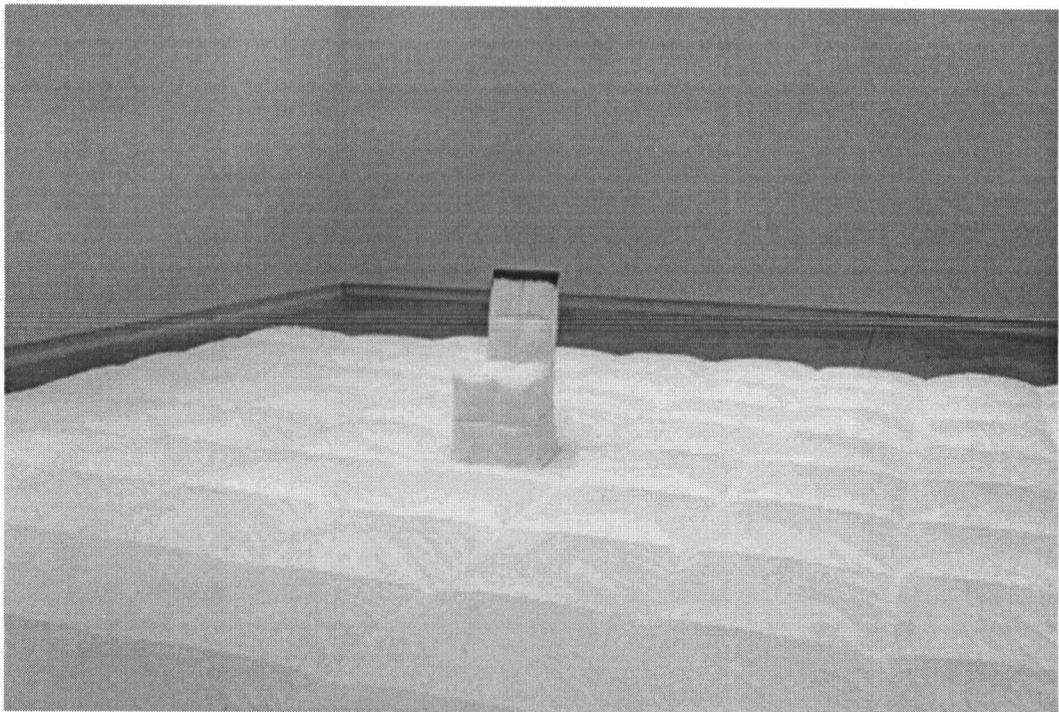


Figure 1.2: *Blood on the Snow*. Photo: Howard Ursuliak

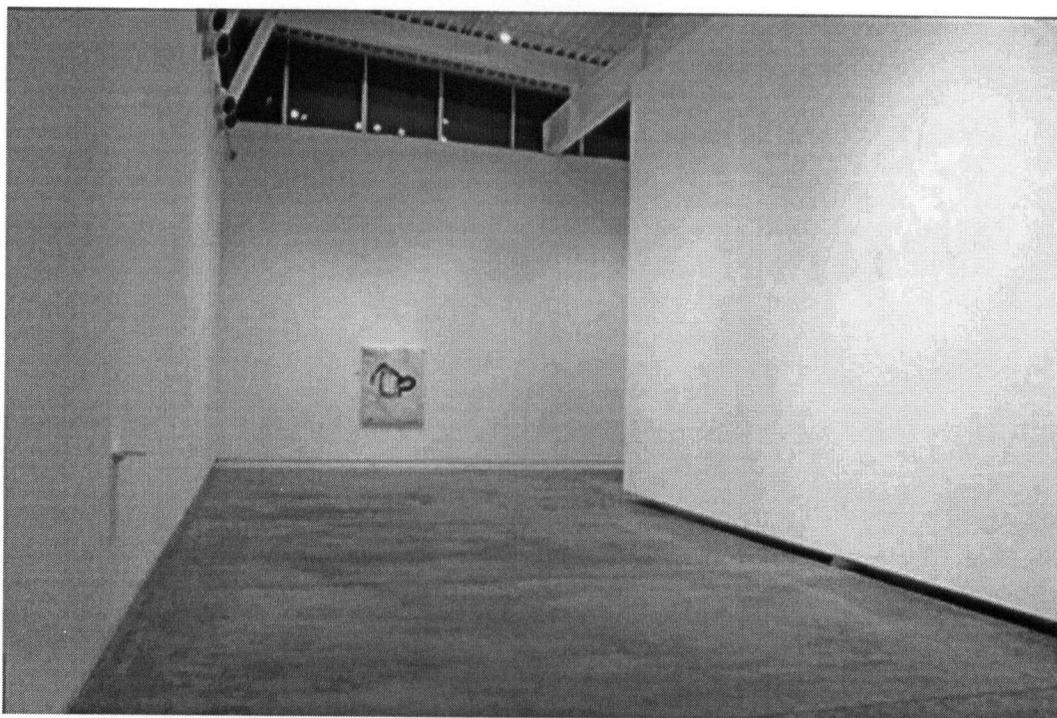


Figure 1.3: *Song* (foreground) and *State of Grace* (background). Photo: Howard Ursuliak

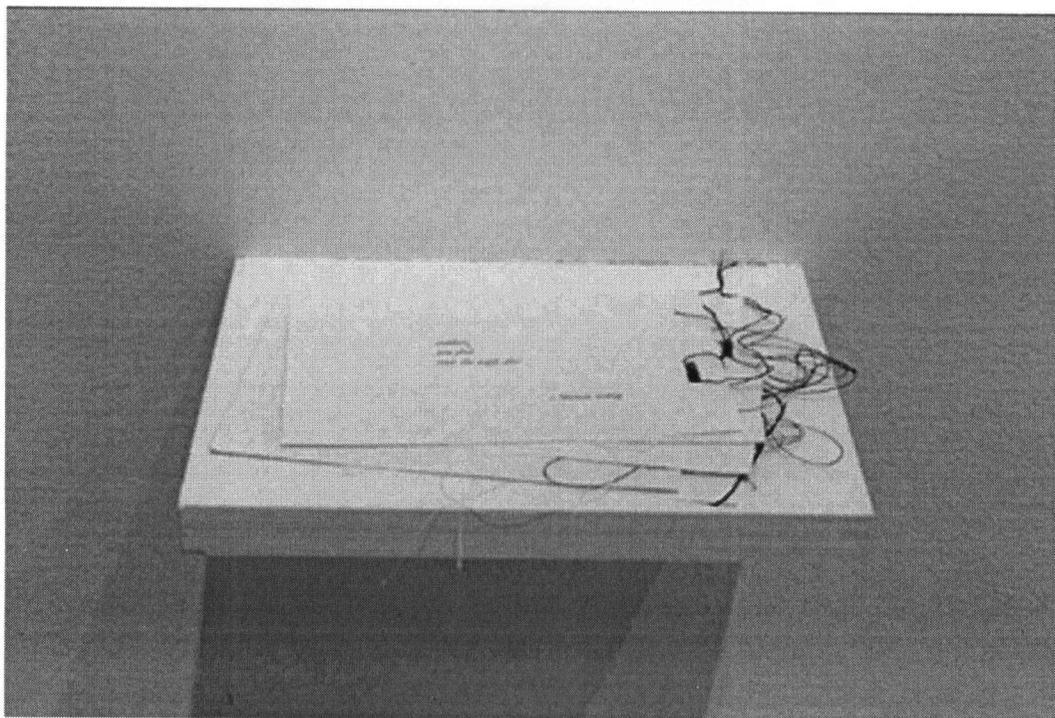


Figure 1.4: *Song* (detail). Photo: Howard Ursuliak



Photo 1.5 *State of Grace*. Photo: Howard Ursuliak



Figure 2.1: *Formline Stele*. Photo: Barry Herem