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Theatres of Contact: The Kwakwaka'wakw Meet Colonialism in British Columbia and at the Chicago World's Fair

Ten thousand spectators gathered on a hot August evening in 1893 at the Chicago World's Fair. Inside the stifling hall of the 'Cavern of the Cliff,' under the glare of electric lights, the audience watched the Kwakwaka'wakw performers from Vancouver Island.¹ That night the troupe presented a version of the *hamatsa*, or cannibal dance, spiritually and politically one of their most important initiation rites. When the two main performers stepped to the side of the stage and pulled off their shirts, the audience assumed the performance had ended. At that moment, however, the rest of the troupe surrounded the two young men and began singing and chanting to the beat of a drum. Horror-struck spectators watched as the troupe's leader, George Hunt, used a razor to slash four deep gashes across the back of each initiate. Neither man flinched as Hunt lifted the loose strips of flesh off their backs, slid ropes beneath them, and tied the ends together. As several performers yanked violently on the loops of rope, attempting to tear the flesh loose, the intensity of the singing increased. The initiates finally grabbed the ropes themselves, ripping the flesh from their backs. When George Hunt reappeared on stage and calmly offered his arm to one of the initiates, the performance

1 The people today known as the Kwakwaka'wakw have historically been referred to by non-Aboriginal people as the (Southern) Kwakiutl, Kwakiutl, or Kwagiulth, more correctly refers to a confederacy of previously four, now three, Kwakwaka'wakw groups who moved to Fort Rupert at its founding, and to their dialect of the Kwak'waka language. Kwakwaka'wakw means, roughly, 'those who speak Kwak'waka.' It is the term First Nations people from Fort Rupert (Kwagiulth) Alert Bay (Nimpkish), Cape Mudge (Lekwiltok), Knight Inlet (Mamallikulla), and surrounding areas prefer to use to describe themselves, and it is the term I will use in this article. See Peter Macnair, 'From Kwakiutl to Kwakwaka'wakw,' in R. Bruce Morrison and C. Roderick Wilson, eds., *Native Peoples: The Canadian Experience*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart 1995), 586-605. For the readers' convenience, a non-technical phonetic reading of Kwakwaka'wakw is 'Kwakwa-you-wok.'

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reached a fever-pitch. The young Kwakwaka'wakw man sank his teeth into Hunt's arm until he was dragged away, apparently having bitten off a piece of flesh as large as a silver dollar.

The spectators in Chicago watched with a mixture of fascination and revulsion as the most lurid imaginings of wild and savage Indians played out before their eyes. Yet even as the Kwakwaka'wakw enacted a drama that reinforced non-Aboriginal society's most entrenched stereotypes about Aboriginal peoples, they simultaneously declared both their cultural persistence and their political defiance. Kwakwaka'wakw people had struggled with the colonial forces of capitalism, Christianity, and civilization long before 1893. The performers' trip to the Chicago World's Fair placed this conflict on a global stage, in ways that proved even more unsettling to Canadian authorities than were the theatrical scenes of cannibalism and mutilation to the startled fair-goers.

The Kwakwaka'wakw were at the centre of an ideological dispute within colonial society. While late nineteenth-century anthropologists encouraged Aboriginal people to re-enact the most 'traditional' elements of their cultures, missionaries and government officials pressured them to abandon 'tradition' and instead exhibit 'civilized' traits inculcated by years of assimilation policies. The Kwakwaka'wakw performers in Chicago successfully played these colonial viewpoints off against each other in a manner that furthered their own interest in controlling the direction and pace of change in their lives. Understanding the Aboriginal meanings and objectives behind the Kwakwaka'wakw drama requires an appreciation of multiple colonial contexts. After examining the Kwakwaka'wakw performance within the frame of the colonial ideology of late nineteenth-century world's fairs, I will switch lenses to look at Kwakwaka'wakw life under Canadian colonialism. When I return to the Chicago fair grounds, the stakes for Aboriginal performers and colonial authorities alike will be clear. Contextualizing the Chicago performances illuminates the complex decisions made by the Kwakwaka'wakw performers and provides a glimpse at their creative responses to colonialism. These responses cannot be classified within conventional interpretations of authenticity and tradition, and they indicate the need for new conceptual categories for interpreting Aboriginal history.

The Kwakwaka'wakw attended the fair as part of the Northwest Coast exhibit organized by anthropologist Franz Boas. In turn, this exhibit was part of the larger anthropology display designed by

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Frederic Ward Putnam, curator and professor at the Peabody Museum at Harvard University and head of the fair's Ethnology Department. By participating in this exhibit, the Kwakwaka'wakw situated themselves in a different context from many of the fair's other 'live exhibits' who lived on the Midway or were affiliated with a particular national or state exhibit, a distinction that ultimately proved significant. Putnam envisioned the Northwest Coast exhibit as a replicated space where the Kwakwaka'wakw could 'live under normal conditions in their natural habitations during the six months of the Exposition.'² This meant that during their time in Chicago, the Kwakwaka'wakw occupied Northwest Coast-style cedar plank houses imported from British Columbia. Cedar canoes, cedar bark blankets and headrings, masks, and totem poles also travelled to Chicago as part of the organizers' attempt to mimic 'normal' conditions.

Only the most naive observer could have believed that performing for thousands of visitors a day and living under the gaze of more than 27 million fair-goers were 'normal' occurrences for the Kwakwaka'wakw. The impossibility of reproducing normal conditions did not deter Putnam and the organizers of the anthropology exhibit, because what they were really attempting to create was not something normal in the sense of 'everyday,' so much as something 'authentic.' Indeed, many everyday aspects of late nineteenth-century Kwakwaka'wakw life had to be omitted for the purposes of authentic anthropological representation. Hudson's Bay wool blankets were one such normal or everyday element the exhibit's organizers excluded in favour of supposedly more authentic cedar-bark blankets.

Putnam's assumption that authentic conditions equalled normal conditions for Aboriginal people grew out of the specific imperial agenda of the late nineteenth century. Canadian missionaries and federal officials shared the ideological basis of Putnam's assumptions, although they disagreed with his anthropological perspective in other fundamental ways. The two viewpoints, one invested in the representation of Aboriginal peoples as traditional and the other in their transformation into Canadians, were animated by the same dichotomies of traditional/modern and Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal. These dichotomies shaped both groups' ways of seeing the peoples of the world, rendering it impossible for Aboriginal people to be both

² Rossiter Johnson, ed., *A History of the World's Columbian Exposition Held in Chicago in 1893* (New York: D. Appleton 1897), 2: 315.

Aboriginal and modern at the same time.³ Widespread belief in the existence of an authentic Aboriginal culture – a culture that could be captured in static representations such as ethnographic texts, museum cases, or stylized performances – straitjacketed the possible range of Aboriginal identity because it held Aboriginal people to ahistorical standards that were not attainable. The notion that Indian identity consisted of and could be identified by a timeless, bounded set of anthropologically defined cultural characteristics relegated Aboriginal people to the past and denied them a role in the future. Aboriginal peoples inevitably deviated from their prescribed cultural set in part because they had not defined the set themselves, but, more important, because no culture ever conforms to a set of itemized traits. All cultures change and evolve over time, a fact that often goes uncontested when the culture in question is the dominant one. In the eyes of white immigrants to colonial British Columbia, however, Aboriginal people who deviated from the standard measurement of Indian-ness forfeited their identity as Indians. As scholar James Clifford points out, colonizing powers routinely attempt to deny marginal peoples their distinct histories and to prevent them from inventing their own local futures. According to colonizers, writes Clifford, ‘what is different about [marginal peoples] remains tied to traditional pasts, inherited structures that either resist or yield to the new but cannot produce it.’⁴ Such colonial reasoning is rooted in the historical tendency of dominant, non-Aboriginal societies to cast Aboriginal peoples in terms of the dual dichotomies of the authentic and traditional versus the inauthentic and modern. These contrived dichotomies structured the exhibits at the fair in 1893 and remain implicit in many modern conceptions of Aboriginal peoples today.

A close examination of the Kwakwaka'wakw and of their experience at the fair demonstrates that the poles of this dichotomy are not the only two possibilities; indeed, they are not even the two most likely ones. Ethnographic tours are a visible example of the syncretic blends of ‘modern’ (non-Aboriginal) labour and ‘traditional’ (Aboriginal) culture that Aboriginal peoples have fashioned for centuries. The Kwakwaka'wakw performance in Chicago was not simply a commercialized corruption of traditional practice but, simultaneously, both traditional ritual *and* modern labour – a manifestation of colonial displacement *and* an assertion of Aboriginal mobility. The Kwakwaka'wakw example demonstrates that

3 I am indebted to Tina Loo for her insights on this point.

4 James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1988), 5

'traditional' and 'modern' are not the mutually exclusive alternatives we often assume them to be. Rather, they are imagined ideals of cultural practice, neither of which is ever completely achieved. The Kwakwaka'wakw performers were neither resisting nor yielding; they were producing something new.

This idea of dynamic Aboriginal culture was beyond the imagination of colonial society. The dichotomy between traditional and modern was ideologically entrenched, and also politically useful. The anthropological construction of authentic Aboriginal culture provided colonial governments and expansionists with scientifically based, and thus seemingly objective and respectable, rationalizations for their displacement and marginalization of Aboriginal people. To fair-goers and organizers, the Kwakwaka'wakw were a 'live exhibit,' part of what G. Brown Good, assistant secretary at the Smithsonian, called the 'illustrated encyclopedia of civilization'⁵ compiled on the fairgrounds to demonstrate the superiority of the white race and Western culture. Exhibits of Aboriginal people were particularly meaningful during this period when Americans and Canadians were displacing Aboriginal peoples in the name of Western expansion and national development. Through their graphic display of Aboriginal authenticity alongside, and inseparable from, Aboriginal savagery, the live-exhibits illustrated the political and moral necessity of government 'civilizing' policies such as removal, reservations, religious conversion, and assimilation through education.

The growing literature on world's fairs has focused on these important issues of power, representation, and colonialism. It has, however, left unaddressed the question of what 'being exhibited' meant to Aboriginal performers.⁶ Why, we must ask, did Aboriginal people agree to play parts in spectacles that today seem demeaning and objectifying? To understand why the Kwakwaka'wakw chose to

5 Quoted in Robert Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1984), 45

6 See, for example, Rydell, *All the World's a Fair*; Robert W. Rydell and Nancy Gwinn, eds., *Fair Representations: World's Fairs and the Modern World* (Amsterdam: VU University Press 1994); Paul Greenhalgh, *Ephemeral Vistas: The Expositions Universelles, Great Expositions, and World's Fairs, 1851-1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 1988); and Curtis M. Hinsley, 'The World as Marketplace: Commodification of the Exotic at the World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1893,' in Ivan Karp and Stevan Lavine, eds., *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press 1991), 344-65. One scholar who has considered the meaning of performances for Native Americans is L.G. Moses, in his study of Wild West shows: *Wild West Shows and the Images of American Indians, 1883-1933* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press 1996).

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perform in Chicago and to realize what really happened during the cannibal dance, we must look 'backstage' to the local political, economic, social, and cultural context of their home on the Northwest Coast in British Columbia.

Kwakwaka'wakw people still live today along the coast of northern Vancouver Island from Campbell River to Cape Cook and along the mainland fjords opposite Campbell River north to Smith Sound. They first encountered Europeans in the 1790s, when ships plying the maritime fur trade began arriving on the coast. Large numbers of immigrants did not arrive in the colony of British Columbia until the second half of the nineteenth century. Even then, the majority did not settle in Kwakwaka'wakw territory. During this period, the most significant newcomers for the Kwakwaka'wakw were missionaries and government officials. In 1878 the Reverend Alfred J. Hall, of the Anglican Church Missionary Society (CMS), opened a mission among the Kwakwaka'wakw; in 1879 federal government surveyors allotted reserves to the Kwakwaka'wakw; and in 1881 George Blenkinsop, the Indian agent representing the federal Department of Indian Affairs (DIA), opened an administrative and regulatory office in the newly established Kwawkewlth Agency. Examining the relationship between the Kwakwaka'wakw and these colonial representatives helps reveal the process of cultural adaptation that the Kwakwaka'wakw undertook. It also shows that Hall and the Canadian government, rather than thousands of Chicago fair-goers, were the intended audience of the Kwakwaka'wakw performers at the World's Fair.

Missionary and government forces in British Columbia mounted a joint assault on Aboriginal life. Unwilling to accept Aboriginal economies and cultural values, which were structured around extended kinship and inherited rights to specific resource sites, Christian missionaries and government officials attempted to instill in Aboriginal people a Western work ethic and a capitalist spirit. They sought to effect cultural as well as religious conversions. As early as 1881, over 60 per cent of the province's Aboriginal population was nominally Christian; by 1904 this figure had grown to 90 per cent.⁷ The ensuing struggles between missionaries and Aboriginal people centred less on the issue of conversion itself than on questions of Aboriginal self-control and self-definition in the ideological and

7 R.C. Harris, *The Resettlement of British Columbia: Essays on Colonialism and Geographical Change* (Vancouver: UBC Press 1997), 149; Wilson Duff, *The Indian History of British Columbia*, vol. 1: *The Impact of the White Man* (Victoria, BC: Provincial Museum of British Columbia 1964), 87

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material realms.

Acquisition and control of land were the bedrock of colonial policy. Two Kwagiulth communities at Fort Rupert (established in 1849) signed land cession treaties with Governor Douglas in 1851, but the rest of Kwakwaka'wakw traditional territory remained untreated, as did most land in British Columbia. Reserves were allotted to the Kwakwaka'wakw through the federally appointed Indian Reserve Commission, and a succession of commissioners handled the allocation of reserves to the Kwakwaka'wakw in a haphazard and confused manner. Although first allotted in 1879, the Kwakwaka'wakw reserves were not confirmed until 1895. The commission did not consult the Kwakwaka'wakw and misallocated land on several occasions. Kwakwaka'wakw groups repeatedly registered their understandable dissatisfaction with this process to the Indian agent, and then again in their testimony to the McKenna-McBride Royal Commission, set up in 1913 to investigate Indian affairs in British Columbia.⁸

The Kwakwaka'wakw expressed similar dissatisfaction with the missionaries who came to work among them. In the decade before Hall's arrival, a succession of Roman Catholic priests had tried and failed to sustain a mission among the Kwakwaka'wakw.⁹ Hall was no more successful than his Catholic predecessors. Contemporary observers and recent historians alike have characterized his attempts to convert the Kwakwaka'wakw as unsuccessful and ineffective. 'The mission seems to have little influence here,' observed Franz Boas on visiting Alert Bay in 1886.¹⁰ In 1894 the situation remained much the

8 British Columbia Archives (BCA), Add. MSS. 728, Pidcock Family, box 1, vol. 3, Reginald Heber Pidcock Diary, 17 Aug. 1888; National Archives of Canada (NA), Department of Indian Affairs (DIA), Record Group 10 (RG 10), vol. 1648, Kwakwaka'wakw Agency, Alert Bay Letterbook, 1891-1899, R.H. Pidcock to A.W. Vowell, 19 May 1896; NA, DIA, RG 10, vol. 1648, R.H. Pidcock to A.W. Vowell, Agent's report for April 1896; Robert Galois, *Kwakwaka'wakw Settlements 1775-1920: A Geographical Analysis and Gazetteer* (Vancouver: UBC Press 1994), 32-3; Today, the issue of land remains unresolved, although Kwakwaka'wakw people have at last been admitted to the land treaty negotiations process. On the land question in British Columbia, see Paul Tennant, *Aboriginal People and Politics: The Indian Land Question in British Columbia, 1849-1989* (Vancouver: UBC Press 1990).

9 NA, Church Missionary Society (CMS), Correspondence 'Letterbooks, Despatches,' reel A-76, Hall to Wright, 11 June 1878 (hereafter cited as NA, CMS, Letterbooks)

10 Franz Boas, *The Ethnography of Franz Boas: Letters and Diaries of Franz Boas, Written on the Northwest Coast from 1886 to 1931*, edited by Ronald P. Rohner, translated by Hedy Parker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1969), 44; George M. Dawson, 'Notes and Observations on the Kwakiol People and the Adjacent Coasts,' in *Proceedings and Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada for the Year 1887* (Montreal: Dawson Brothers 1888), 87; Theodore C. Hinckley and Caryl

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same. As Indian agent at the time, Reginald H. Pidcock admitted in a letter to his superior, the Indian superintendent of British Columbia, 'the Missionaries, Roman Catholic and Protestant have each in turn endeavoured to do something with the Indians, but so far unsuccessfully.'¹¹ Hall's own words are perhaps the most telling of all: in 1895, seventeen years after his arrival among the Kwakwaka'wakw, he regretfully admitted that 'four out of every five heathen in British Columbia are in our district.'¹² These numbers belie the reality that many Kwakwaka'wakw were willing to incorporate aspects of Christianity into their lives. But for Hall, Christianity was an either-or proposition: he insisted on conversion on *his* terms, and this the Kwakwaka'wakw refused.

Throughout much of the province, the gift-exchange ceremony known as the potlatch was a focal point of the struggle between Aboriginal people and colonial society. This was particularly true for the Kwakwaka'wakw. Historically, the Kwakwaka'wakw potlatched to mark any one of a variety of community rituals, including marriages, coming-of-age ceremonies, public apologies, debt repayment, and winter ceremonials. Property distribution and feasting were important components of potlatches. The specific dances and ceremonies performed at a given potlatch depended on the occasion and the ritual prerogatives of the host. For the Kwakwaka'wakw, potlatches enacted the symbiotic relationship between the social, natural, and supernatural worlds. They legitimated and confirmed the links between resource rights, social hierarchy, and supernatural ancestry.¹³

Hinckley, 'Ivan Petroff's Journal of a Trip to Alaska in 1878,' *Journal of the West* 5 (1966): 44; Barry Gough, 'A Priest versus the Potlatch: The Reverend Alfred James Hall and the Fort Rupert Kwakiutl, 1878-1880,' *Journal of the Canadian Church Historical Society* 24 (Oct. 1982), 75.

11 NA, DIA, RG 10, vol. 1648, R.H. Pidcock to A.W. Vowell, Indian Superintendent of British Columbia, 28 April 1894

12 NA, CMS Correspondence, 'Precis Books, North Pacific Mission,' reel A-121, Hall to CMS, 10 July 1895 (hereafter cited as NA, CMS, 'Precis')

13 Perhaps no indigenous practice has been interpreted, reinterpreted, and misinterpreted as often as the potlatch. Indeed, the effort to define the potlatch has itself been part of the colonial mission. On the discursive construction of the potlatch, see Christopher Bracken, *The Potlatch Papers: A Colonial Case History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1997). For a sampling of the secondary literature on the Kwakwaka'wakw potlatch, see Helen Codere, *Fighting with Property: A Study of Kwakiutl Potlatching and Warfare 1792-1930* (New York: J.J. Augustin 1950); Philip Drucker and Robert F. Heizer, *To Make My Name Good: A Reexamination of the Southern Kwakiutl Potlatch* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1967); Irving Goldman, *The Mouth of Heaven: An Introduction to Kwakiutl Religious Thought* (New York: John Wiley 1975); Aldona Jonaitis, ed., *Chiefly Feasts: The Enduring*

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Hall was ready to fight the potlatch from the day he arrived among the Kwakwaka'wakw, having spent the previous year in Metlakatla assisting prominent missionary and vehement anti-potlatch crusader William Duncan. Hall was transferred to Fort Rupert in 1878, after he lost control of a nativistic revival movement inspired by his fervent preaching style.¹⁴ Blenkinsop began his tenure as Indian agent similarly armed against the potlatch. His opposition would have been unsurprising to many Kwakwaka'wakw, as Blenkinsop had previously been the Hudson's Bay Company officer in charge of Fort Rupert and had played a key role in a violent incident that resulted in the destruction of two Nuwitti villages by British gunboats in 1850.¹⁵ In 1884 the Canadian government fortified missionary campaigns against the potlatch by amending the Indian Act to outlaw the practice. For a variety of reasons, including public opinion and imprecise wording, the law proved almost impossible to enforce. Most Indian Affairs representatives in British Columbia, from the Indian superintendent in Victoria to the Indian agents in the field, made little attempt to prosecute people for potlatching. The succession of Indian agents, beginning with Blenkinsop and followed by Pidcock, who served the Kwakwaka'wakw were the exception to this laissez-faire rule, as they attempted to enforce the law against the potlatch with a zeal unmatched in other parts of the province.¹⁶

Hall and the Indian agents failed to appreciate Aboriginal meanings of the potlatch and found it offensive on at least two

Kwakiutl Potlatch (New York: American Museum of Natural History 1991); Joseph Masco, "'It Is a Strict Law That Bids Us Dance": Cosmologies, Colonialism, and Ritual Authority in the Kwakwaka'wakw Potlatch, 1849–1922,' *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 37, 1 (1995): 41–75; Daisy Sewid-Smith, *Prosecution or Persecution* (Cape Mudge, BC: Nu-Yum-Baleess Society 1979); Stanley Walens, *Feasting with Cannibals: An Essay on Kwakiutl Cosmology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1981); Gloria Cranmer Webster, 'Kwakiutl since 1980,' in Wayne Suttles, ed., *The Northwest Coast*, vol. 7, William G. Sturtevant, gen. ed., *The Handbook of North American Indians* (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution 1990), 387–90.

14 Peter Murray, *The Devil and Mr. Duncan* (Victoria: Sono Nis Press 1985), 124–6; Jean Usher, *William Duncan of Metlakatla* (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada 1974) 96–7; Andrew Rettig, 'A Nativistic Movement at Metlakatla Mission,' *BC Studies* 46 (summer 1980): 28–39

15 On the Nuwitti incident, see Barry Gough, *Gunboat Frontier: British Maritime Authority and Northwest Coast Indians, 1846–1890* (Vancouver: UBC Press 1984), 41–8; and Robin Fisher, *Contact and Conflict: Indian-European Relations in British Columbia, 1774–1890*, 2nd ed. (Vancouver: UBC Press 1992), 50–3; and Galois, *Kwakwa ka wakw Settlements*, 423–6.

16 Douglas Cole and Ira Chaikin, *An Iron Hand upon the People: The Law against the Potlatch on the Northwest Coast* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre 1990), 37–8, 66

counts. First, the potlatch involved theatrical renditions of cannibalism and death that non-Aboriginal people on the Northwest coast found as horrifying and savage as would the Chicago spectators in 1893. The most prominent ritual, at least to non-Aboriginal people, was the *hamatsa*, or cannibal dance, a rite in which a young initiate who had been possessed by a supernatural cannibal spirit was tamed and reintegrated into the community. After learning the appropriate songs and dances during an extended period of seclusion, the initiate returned to the village craving human flesh. The succeeding stages of the ceremony brought the *hamatsa* under control, soothing his madness, and drawing him back into the social community. In spiritual terms, the *hamatsa* vividly demonstrated the danger of disrupting the careful balance between human desire and socio-moral requirement.¹⁷ In material terms, it secured a young man's inherited social rank and publicly acknowledged his entitlement to the accompanying material resources. Thus, a rite that spoke to non-Aboriginal society of social chaos, uncontrolled depravity, and savagery was, in fact, premised on the exorcism of these same destructive, anti-social, traits. This distinction was difficult even for those with years of experience among the Kwakwaka'wakw to grasp. Blenkinsop and Pidcock remained unsympathetic after decades on the Northwest Coast, and, in 1893, Hall's understanding of the indigenous meanings behind the *hamatsa* was no better than when he arrived in 1878.

The second aspect of the potlatch that offended non-Aboriginal society had more to do with the ceremony's structure than its content. Potlatches drew Aboriginal people away from their homes, and thus from the influence of missionaries and government officials. For months at a time, Aboriginal people did not earn wages, but feasted and gave away large amounts of property. On an ideological level, potlatches affronted the Protestant values of progress, industry, thrift, and sobriety; they seemed fundamentally opposed to the accumulation of wealth and the workings of capitalist markets.

On a material level, potlatches, or rather the mobility they engendered, impeded the implementation of colonial policies. Potlatch gatherings frequently foiled agents' attempts to inspect their

17 Walens, *Feasting with Cannibals*, 68. Whether flesh was actually consumed during these ceremonies is the subject of much unresolved debate. Certainly a great deal of theatrics were involved, as was true in much Kwakwaka'wakw ceremonial life. Drucker and Heizer make the crucial point here that 'whether real or make believe, the performances rarely failed to shock and horrify white spectators.' Drucker and Heizer, *To Make My Name Good*, 32, n14

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Aboriginal 'charges.' They often made arduous canoe trips to villages, only to find the site deserted and the population dispersed. A typical example was Pidcock's discovery, on arriving at Nuwitti village in June 1888, 'that nearly all the Newitti's had gone the previous day to Kos-ki-mo,' where they were joined by people from Fort Rupert.¹⁸ Similarly, for Hall, the absence of his would-be congregation repeatedly confounded his missionizing efforts. In 1879 he wrote from Fort Rupert that, 'although I have been here ten months the people have not spent more than four of these months at this camp ... For the third time since my stay here all the Indians have cleared out to visit other villages for the purpose of receiving blankets.'¹⁹ And in 1880 he lamented: 'The great part of the Fort Rupert Indians went to Zou-Witty River in June and did not return till November. They have again left to spend a month at Alert Bay. These migratory habits are a great hindrance to the work of the Mission - it especially checks our school work.'²⁰ In 1880 Hall moved his mission to Alert Bay, where he was similarly frustrated by Aboriginal mobility, even after he constructed a sawmill to 'induce the young men to stay, instead of going to Victoria.'²¹

Hall associated women's mobility, in particular, with prostitution, and he found it immoral. He cited the potlatch as 'the reason the men send their wives and even daughters South [to Victoria] to make money by the prostitution of their own flesh and blood, which money is exchanged in Victoria for blankets.'²² Hall seemed to measure the depravity of women by the number of blankets with which they returned: 'One woman has been known to bring back seven bales at one time,'²³ he commented for effect. Hall's attitude resonated with the age-old colonial belief that Aboriginal women needed to be rescued from Aboriginal men, and his assessment of Aboriginal prostitution was undoubtedly exaggerated.²⁴ Literary scholar

18 Pidcock Diary, 31 May and 1 June 1888

19 NA, CMS Correspondence, 'Original Letters, Correspondence, etc.,' Incoming 1881-1900, reel A-106, Hall to Wright, 13 Jan. 1879 (hereafter cited as NA, CMS, 'Original')

20 NA, CMS, 'Original,' reel A-106, Hall to CMS, 16 March 1880

21 NA, CMS, 'Precis,' reel A-121, Hall to CMS, 7 Oct. 1884

22 NA, CMS, 'Original,' reel A-106, Hall to Wright, 11 June 1878

23 Ibid.

24 Bracken, *Potlatch Papers*, 49. For an analysis that traces this discourse from the seventeenth century forward, see David D. Smits, "'The Squaw Drudge': A Prime Index of Savagism," *Ethnohistory* 29 (1982): 281-306. On Aboriginal women and sexuality in British Columbia, see Jean Barman, 'Taming Aboriginal Sexuality: Gender, Power, and Race in British Columbia, 1850-1900,' *BC Studies* 115-16 (autumn/winter 1997/8): 237-66.

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Christopher Bracken's suggestion that 'there is no reason to assume that Hall's "facts" correspond to the events they claim to describe'²⁵ goes too far, however. Hall was correct in his belief that many Aboriginal women worked as prostitutes in Victoria. His error lay in the assumption that prostitution was the *only* economic opportunity available to them in the colonial city. Douglas Cole and Ira Chaikin's observation that 'the Kwakiutl were behind few others in exploiting the economic opportunities offered by the European economy'²⁶ holds for both women and men. Some women worked in Victoria as washer-women, while others joined male relatives who were departing for jobs fishing and canning on the Fraser River or picking hops in the Puget Sound fields. Kwakwaka'wakw men also found work as loggers and as sealers. Men who hired onto sealing expeditions sometimes travelled as far as Japan and Hawaii.²⁷ By 1893 many Kwakwaka'wakw were well accustomed to combining travel and wage labour.

It is telling that Hall was as critical of this cycle of migratory wage labour as he was of the migratory potlatch cycle. The absences from Fort Rupert he complained of in 1880 were likely not the result of potlatches, but of seasonal work, as were many of the trips to Victoria that he hoped to forestall by constructing a sawmill. Hall criticized *all* absences from the villages, summer wage-earning sojourns as well as winter potlatching trips. For all of Hall's moralizing about the depravity of savage life and the sins of idleness, it was his lack of control over the Kwakwaka'wakw that disturbed him most, leading him to condemn all non-sedentary activities. For Hall, potlatches, prostitution, migratory wage labour, and trips to the Chicago World's Fair were dangerous because of their common characteristic: they all entailed a modicum of freedom from his authority in particular, and from colonial power in general.

Within this context, mobility was a central ingredient of the Kwak-

25 Bracken, *Potlatch Papers*, 132

26 Cole and Chaikin, *An Iron Hand*, 62

27 Canada, *Sessional Papers (SP)*, 1884, no. 4, Department of Indian Affairs (DIA), *Annual Report (AR)*, 1883, lxii, 48; *SP*, 1892, no. 14, DIA, *AR*, 1891, 119; Cole and Chaikin, *An Iron Hand*, 62; John Lutz, 'After the Fur Trade: The Aboriginal Labouring Class of British Columbia, 1849-1890,' *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*, ns, vol. 3 (1992): 69-93; and Rolf Knight, *Indians at Work: An Informal History of Native Indian Labour in British Columbia, 1858-1930* (Vancouver: New Star Books 1978). Prostitution and other wage labour opportunities were not necessarily mutually exclusive. Kyuquot women from the west coast of Vancouver Island, for example, apparently combined prostitution with work in the hop fields of western Washington. W.W. Elmendorf, *The Structure of Twana Culture* (Pullman: Washington State University 1960), 298

wakaka'wakw's threatened economic and cultural autonomy, and they clung to it tenaciously. Even after eighteen years of work among the Kwakwaka'wakw, Hall was unable to stem the patterns of mobility that proliferated with the growth of the capitalist wage economy.²⁸ The timing of the industrial cycle of wage labour conveniently matched the cycle of older migrations for food and resource collection, and usually did not interfere with the winter ceremonial season. More significantly, the opportunities presented by the new economy were too profitable for the Kwakwaka'wakw to forgo. The wages they earned were crucial for their material survival. By making calculated and informed decisions, Kwakwaka'wakw families could string together a variety of seasonal jobs that acted as a kind of insurance for one another. If the summer fishery on the Fraser failed, a family could hope to make up lost wages at the Puget Sound hop fields. In years when wages were high throughout all sectors of the economy, it was possible to accumulate a substantial income.

As important as the wages themselves was the freedom of choice they enabled. Hall could not control how the Kwakwaka'wakw spent their money any more than he could control how they earned it. There were probably as many consumer strategies among the Kwakwaka'wakw as there were wage-earners. Yet a significant number of Kwakwaka'wakw chose to spend their earnings perpetuating the potlatch system, a practice that pleased storekeepers and traders as much as it frustrated Hall. Wages made consumer goods more accessible, and potlatch exchanges consequently grew, rather than diminished, as thousands of manufactured items, particularly Hudson's Bay blankets, replaced the cedar blankets and carvings that the Kwakwaka'wakw had previously exchanged. Historically, mobility had been significant for drawing kin together from different villages. It now took on added resonance by providing the Kwakwaka'wakw with an important measure of economic and cultural independence from the mounting assimilationist pressures of colonial agents. The ability to control their own movements and their own earnings allowed Kwakwaka'wakw families to chart their own paths of change and continuity as their personal circumstances and preferences dictated.

28 This failure is clear from Hall's letter to the *Victoria Weekly Colonist*, 19 March 1896. NA, DIA, RG 10, vol. 3628, file 6244-1, 'Potlatch - attempts to curtail, 1883-1899'

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There are other signs that the Kwakwaka'wakw resisted Hall's prescriptive vision. Before his first year in Fort Rupert was up, Hall wrote that 'there is some strong opposition to my work especially from the big Chief and a few elders.'²⁹ He even resorted to incarcerating members of his would-be congregation for various infractions, many of which were alcohol related. An earlier dispute between provincial and federal authorities over responsibility for enforcement of the federal Indian Act had left federal Indian agents without access to provincial gaols or court houses.³⁰ Hall collaborated with Indian agent Pidcock, and in March 1888 the church began to double as a prison.³¹ This spatial conflation of sin and salvation must have sent a telling message to the Kwakwaka'wakw whom Hall was attempting to lure to Sunday services.

Hall misinterpreted the Kwakwaka'wakw's refusal to conform to his Protestant, sedentary vision of civilization as a mark of their attachment to superstition and tradition and of their opposition to modernity and change. He was typical of non-Aboriginal society in this tendency to see a stark dichotomy between a static 'traditional' Aboriginal culture and a progressive, dynamic modern 'civilization.' Yet for most Kwakwaka'wakw, interaction with the colonial world was more than a defensive reaction aimed at preserving static tradition. Indeed, the Kwakwaka'wakw repeatedly asserted their right to a future in which they engaged with non-Aboriginal society, but still retained their self-defined Kwakwaka'wakw identity and culture. Hall had hoped that 'civilized' wage labour would create civilized wage labourers, that cause would lead directly to effect. But the multiplicity of uses to which the Kwakwaka'wakw put their wages did not conform to Hall's vision of civilized workers. Instead of becoming sedentary, many Kwakwaka'wakw travelled farther and more frequently afield. Instead of finding permanent year-round work and accumulating their wages, they spent or saved according to their own agendas, and invested more often in potlatch goods than in the new church Hall wanted to build.³² To Hall's chagrin, instead of

29 NA, CMS, 'Original,' reel A-106, Hall to Fenn, 16 Dec. 1878

30 Canada, *SP*, 1886, no. 4, DIA, *AR*, 1885, lvi; Cole and Chaikin, *An Iron Hand*, 34

31 NA, CMS, 'Precis,' reel A-121, S.A. Spencer to CMS, 8 March 1888

32 Emmet Duncan shows that less than \$90 of the more than \$1400 cost of the church was donated by the Kwakwaka'wakw, at a time when the Kwakwaka'wakw were potlatching great amounts of wealth (circa 1893). Emmet Duncan, "'A Wretched Giving Away System' or 'A Strict Law Bids us Dance': Interaction, Conflict, and Re-invention, A New Perspective on the Southern Kwakwaka'wakw Potlatch," (BA Honours essay, University of British Columbia 1994), 55; see also Codere, *Fighting*

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supplanting the potlatch economy, the wage economy encouraged it to flourish in new ways, even as the potlatch encouraged increasing Aboriginal involvement in 'modern' wage labour.

The Kwakwaka'wakw who invested their wages in potlatch goods were not simply resisting change or modernity. Rather, they were asserting their right to find a place for themselves within modernity. While most Kwakwaka'wakw refused to contribute to the church Hall wanted to build in Alert Bay, they were willing to contribute to a school.³³ Many Kwakwaka'wakw believed they had much to gain from education, despite the risk of putting their children in non-Aboriginal hands. They understood that in the increasingly 'Westernized' environment of late nineteenth-century British Columbia, their survival and independence hinged on literacy, and evidence abounds that literacy was a skill they strategically sought to acquire. Kwakwaka'wakw communities often took the initiative themselves in requesting teachers. In 1885 several villages offered to build schools in exchange for a teacher.³⁴ In 1889 a chief at Mamalilikulla in Lower Knight Inlet offered \$100 towards the building of a church if a teacher were sent to his village.³⁵ Even Hall admitted that, despite the Kwakwaka'wakw's consistent resistance to Christianity, 'about the desire to learn and to read there can be no doubt.'³⁶

As the Kwakwaka'wakw embraced education and capitalist wages, they also found a use for some of the trappings of the colonial government. In an attempt to curtail the potlatch, a local Indian agent, probably Blenkinsop, had appointed some Kwakwaka'wakw men as anti-potlatch police officers and adorned them with the appropriate symbols of colonial power: a uniform and a Union Jack. But as Franz Boas witnessed at a potlatch in 1886, the Kwakwaka'wakw turned this plan on its head: 'In the lead was the chief, a man certainly over sixty. He had been given a uniform by the Indian agent so that he could serve as policeman and keep order, and especially, prevent the holding of large festivals. In order to carry out his duty he wore the uniform and carried the British flag, which he declared with the greatest pride had been given him by the king.'³⁷

with Property, 96–7.

33 *Ibid.*, 53–5

34 NA, CMS, 'Precis,' reel A-121, Hall to CMS, 16 May 1885

35 NA, CMS, 'Original,' reel A-123, Hall to CMS, 1 Feb. 1889

36 NA, CMS, 'Original,' reel A-124, Hall to CMS, 1 March 1879

37 Boas, *Ethnography of Franz Boas*, 35. It is unlikely that this man actually received the flag from the 'king,' since Queen Victoria had been on the British throne since

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Rather than impeding the potlatch proceedings, the Kwakwaka'wakw 'police officer' participated in the ceremony and used his uniform to augment the authority and solemnity of the occasion. The Kwakwaka'wakw had incorporated a symbol of colonial society into the very ceremony that colonial leaders most wanted to destroy.

From the perspective of federal officials, reports of such events indicated the failure of attempts to foster internal surveillance among the Kwakwaka'wakw and encouraged the implementation of more efficient mechanisms of law enforcement. Ottawa and Victoria resolved their dispute over responsibility for enforcing the Indian Act in 1888 when the province agreed to administer the act in exchange for money collected from fines under its liquor clauses.³⁸ By December of that same year, the provincial government had begun building a gaol and had stationed a white police officer in Alert Bay. The gaol augmented the Indian agent's authority and also relieved Hall's church of its double duty as house of worship and house of incarceration. Concurrent with the construction of the gaol, Pidcock moved the offices for the Kwakwaka'wakw Agency from Fort Rupert to a building in Alert Bay adjacent to Hall's mission. Pidcock and his family were already close friends with the Halls. Pidcock's visits to Alert Bay regularly included many hours at the mission, drinking tea and playing checkers with Hall, and some, if not all, members of the Pidcock family often stayed there.³⁹ Putting the agency office next to the mission gave spatial expression to the deep-rooted alliance between the representatives of the sacred and the secular colonial power with whom the Kwakwaka'wakw had the most direct contact. Hall was optimistic that this new arrangement would convert local Aboriginal people into 'a goodly band of Christian Indians.'⁴⁰ The new architectural arrangement would have sent a clear message to those who passed by the dual structure, or who heard it described at potlatch, cannery, or hop field gatherings. Not surprisingly, many Aboriginal people viewed these developments with apprehension. A group from Alert Bay expressed their disapproval to Pidcock one evening in July 1888, while he was staying at the mission. Pidcock recorded the incident in his journal: 'After dinner a lot of Indians came up and said they did not want me to build a house there, long

1837. It is unclear whether it was the chief or Boas (who translated the chief's words from Kwak'waka) who made this mistake about the sex of the English monarch.

38 Cole and Chaikin, *An Iron Hand*, 34

39 Pidcock Diary, 21, 22, 24, 26, and 27 March, 31 July, 26 Aug., and 21 Dec. 1888

40 NA, CMS, 'Original,' reel A-123, Hall to CMS, 19 Dec. 1888

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Jim an independent fellow, being their spokesman. They also objected to a jail being built and in fact said they would leave if I came to live there.⁴¹ Little did Pidcock or any of the protesters know at the time that some would make it as far as Chicago.

Not long after the administrative changes of 1888, the Kwakwaka'wakw articulated their most direct challenge to Hall and his narrow vision. In May 1890 a group of young Kwakwaka'wakw noblemen petitioned Hall's superior in London to have him replaced with a missionary who would educate them with the skills they needed to survive in the changing colonial world. Turning Hall's Christian rhetoric against him, the noblemen complained to the Church Missionary Society that Hall was more interested in making profits in his store than in teaching them. The petitioners wrote: 'We cannot respect [Hall] because he is only a trader, and tries to make money in his store. We do not like him and we would ask you to change him, and put some good man here in his place for your society, and if you do so, we all promise to come to church and get all our friends to do so.'⁴² Significantly, the Kwakwaka'wakw were not asking for a return to some mythic past without Europeans, or even without missionaries. They were asking for a missionary who would give them the tools, particularly literacy and education, that they and their children needed to thrive economically and culturally, not one who wanted to turn them into subservient dependents. They were asking for a missionary who was sympathetic rather than hostile towards their culture. They wanted 'white' skills, not so they could become white, but so they could survive in a white world.

By the end of the century the Kwakwaka'wakw were adept at turning the non-Aboriginal economy back on itself. They frequently drew on opportunities available only because of contact with non-Aboriginal society, at the same time as they buttressed their cultural autonomy against threats posed by those opportunities. While we might find this ironic, Hall and Canadian government officials found it infuriating. This local history of pragmatism and confidence in confronting colonial society was the context from which the Kwakwaka'wakw performers emerged when they left Vancouver Island for Chicago in March 1893.

When George Hunt began recruiting performers for the World's Fair on behalf of Boas and Putnam, he offered the Kwakwaka'wakw more than a unique and exciting wage-earning possibility. He also

41 Pidcock Diary, 31 July 1888

42 NA, CMS, 'Original,' reel A-123, Alert Bay Indians to CMS, 10 May 1890

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offered them an opportunity to enact their rejection of assimilationist programs on an international stage. The Chicago fair was not the first such opportunity the Kwakwaka'wakw had considered. In 1885 Norwegian collectors Adrian and Phillip Jacobsen unsuccessfully attempted to recruit eleven Kwakwaka'wakw for a European tour. Journalists attributed the Kwakwaka'wakw refusal to a fear of Europe fostered by Hall, who told them that 'they would be sold as slaves in Europe and never see the shores of their native land again.'⁴³ Hall's warning was a scare tactic fabricated to induce the group to stay at home, but it resonated with the historical legacy of European kidnappings of Aboriginal people that dated back to the sixteenth-century voyages of Jacques Cartier and Martin Frobisher. The Jacobsens salvaged their expedition without recourse to coercion, however. They recruited nine willing Bella Coola, who toured Germany for over a year, and returned to British Columbia in August 1886.

The favourable reports of these returning Bella Coola may have helped convince the Kwakwaka'wakw to disregard Hall's continued opposition in 1893.⁴⁴ While such communication between the Bella Coola and the Kwakwaka'wakw is plausible, it is likely that differences in local conditions between 1885 and 1893 also informed the Kwakwaka'wakw decision to ignore Hall's disapproval the second time around. In 1885 the potlatch law had just been promulgated, but in 1888 the first arrest and summary conviction under this law were carried out against a Kwakwaka'wakw man named Hamasak. Although he was later released on a *habeas corpus* defence, his arrest and harsh sentence to six months in gaol impressed on the Kwakwaka'wakw that legal coercion had supplanted moral suasion. The stakes had risen. These events were the incentive for the Kwakwaka'wakw to defy Hall more forcefully than before.

Hunt's personal influence was another important factor. By the time he began recruiting performers for Chicago on behalf of Boas and Putnam, Hunt already had a long history of involvement with ethnographers and of antagonism towards Hall.⁴⁵ Among the Kwak-

43 Quoted in Douglas Cole, *Captured Heritage: The Scramble for Northwest Coast Artifacts* (Seattle: University of Washington Press 1985), 68

44 Ibid., 131; Ira Jacknis, 'Storage Box of Tradition: Museums, Anthropologists, and Kwakiutl Art, 1881-1981' (PhD dissertation, University of Chicago 1989), 339-40

45 Cole, *Captured Heritage*, 131. In the late 1880s at least two outbreaks of hostility occurred between Hall and Hunt: the first was a confrontation at the funeral of the Kwaguilth chief, Suk-ur-ti, when George and Eli Hunt spoke out against Hall's

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waka'wakw, the Hunt family set a prominent example of the possibilities for both embracing the new and preserving the old. This syncretic facility frustrated Hall. He complained that although Hunt's parents, a Scottish fur trader and a Tlingit woman, were baptized and professed to be Christians, they continued to potlatch. Worse still, others followed their example. Hall reported that when he urged the Kwakwaka'wakw to stop potlatching, they 'invariably refer[red] to the action of this family and [said] the trader is a wise man and he would not allow his family to "potlatch" if it were contrary to Christianity.'⁴⁶ Although many Kwakwaka'wakw found it reasonable and possible 'to hold Christianity with one hand and still retain their "potlatching" by which they live,'⁴⁷ Hall found it incomprehensible. George Hunt had grown up as a 'cultural broker,' facilitating Aboriginal manipulations of colonial forms. It was eminently appropriate that he should assemble and lead a tour that epitomized this process.

The Kwakwaka'wakw performers - nine men, five women (including two married couples), a five-year-old girl, and an eighteen-month-old boy - sailed along with George Hunt and the Scottish trader and collector James Deans from Vancouver Island to Vancouver aboard the *St Danube* on 29 March 1893. The group arrived in Chicago after travelling by railway across the continent.⁴⁸ Only two members of the Chicago troupe were Nimpkish from Alert Bay, where Hall lived and ran his school and mission, while the rest came from tribes in the surrounding villages.⁴⁹ This fact could be interpreted as an indication of Hall's success at dissuading people from going to Chicago, although it more likely reflects the dispersion of ritual knowledge across Kwakwaka'wakw territory. As anthropologist Ira Jacknis points out, Alert Bay had never been a traditional village site, and 'the more "traditionalist" Kwakiutl

attempt to use the gathering as an opportunity to preach for his own cause; the second was a protracted but ultimately unsuccessful campaign, in which several members of the Hunt family were closely involved, to remove Hall from his post. Pidcock Diary, 19-20 May 1888; NA, CMS, 'Original,' reel A-123. On George Hunt's role as ethnographer and cultural broker, see Ira Jacknis, 'George Hunt, Collector of Indian Specimens,' in Jonaitis, *Chiefly Feasts*, 177-226, and Jeanne Cannizzo, 'George Hunt and the Invention of Kwakiutl Culture,' *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 20, 1 (1983): 44-58.

46 NA, CMS, 'Original,' reel A-106, Hall to Wright, 20 Aug. 1880

47 Ibid.

48 NA, DIA, RG 10, vol. 1648, Pidcock to Vowell, 16 May 1893

49 Ibid., vol. 3865, file 85,529, 'Correspondence re: request to establish an Indian exhibit at the World's Columbian Exposition, 1893,' Hall to Vankoughnet, 24 Aug. 1893

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[Kwakwaka'wakw] tended to live in outlying villages.⁵⁰ Besides the two Nimpkish from Alert Bay, the other members of the Chicago troupe were from the Kwaguilth and Gwetela (Fort Rupert), Tlatlasikwala and Nakomgilisila (Nuwitti), and Koskimo (Quatsino Sound) tribes.⁵¹

Of the troupe's various promoters and detractors, including Boas, Putnam, Hall, and the Indian Affairs officials, none individualized the 'live exhibits' by keeping a list of their names. Consequently, the identities of the troupe's members can only be gathered piecemeal from scattered sources. Hunt, who acted as both manager and interpreter, was accompanied by several of his family members from Fort Rupert, including his eldest son, David, his father-in-law, MÉ'lid, and his brother William. Also from Fort Rupert was Chief Johnny Wanuk and his wife, Dōqwāyis. According to Boas, Chief Wanuk was 'head of the Chicago group,' but it was his wife's performances that were featured in several newspaper accounts, which variously misspelled her name as Taquasay, Toquaysa, or Toquasa. Dōqwāyis and Chief Wanuk brought their young son, Kroskirass, with them to Chicago and included him in the public performances. The performers from Koskimo on the west coast of Vancouver Island included a man named Hais haxēsaQEmē and two women, Quany and Whane, one of whom was married to William Hunt. From Nuwitti came John Drabble, who reappears in the historical record among those arrested in the wake of Dan Cranmer's 1922 potlatch. Rachel Drabble, whose Aboriginal name was LaLahlewildzemkæ, and who would live to be the last surviving member of the Chicago troupe, accompanied her husband, John, to Chicago. An apparently well-known and respected man, identified by Kwakwaka'wakw artist Mungo Martin as 'King Tom' and by Boas as 'my old interpreter, Tom,' also joined the group, as did Tom's brother Qlū'Lelas. These brothers were members of the Tlatlasikwala tribe from Nuwitti. The trip to the fair seems to have had an indelible effect on the identity of at least one performer, who was known ever after as 'Chicago Jim.' The fifth woman in the group may have been an individual named Malete or Matele, although the source that cites this name fails to specify the individual's sex.⁵²

50 Jacknis, 'Storage Box,' 223

51 Ibid., 340

52 Where applicable, the orthography of Kwakwaka'wakw names has been retained from the original source cited. Ira Jacknis, 'Northwest Coast Indian Culture and the World's Columbian Exposition,' in David Hurst Thomas, ed., *Columbian Conse-*

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The Kwakwaka'wakw performers lived in the livestock pavilion until they assembled the Northwest Coast cedar-plank houses that were to be their residence for the duration of the fair. The houses were physical expressions of the authenticity with which Putnam and Boas were so concerned. Rather than constructing replicas of Northwest Coast houses, a Kwakwaka'wakw house from Nuwitti and a Haida house from Skidegate were disassembled and shipped in pieces to Chicago. One of the first 'performances' of the Kwakwaka'wakw – and here the line between performance and labour truly blurs – was to (re)construct the buildings. In the midst of the so-called White City, where *everything* was new and modern, the need to *reconstruct* the buildings for the ethnological exhibition, rather than constructing them anew, underscored the message that Aboriginal people were not of the present, but of the past. The absence of Haida performers to give life to the Haida house was a regrettable slip in the authentic facade. Some Haida and Tsimpshaan did, in fact, ask Putnam whether they could join the Chicago exhibit, but Indian Affairs officials, exercising their authority as legal guardians under the Indian Act, refused permission when Putnam declined to pay the expenses and wages of these groups as he had promised to do for the Kwakwaka'wakw.⁵³

According to George Hunt's daughter, Mrs Tom Johnson, it did not take the Kwakwaka'wakw troupe long to complete their house.⁵⁴

quences: The Spanish Borderlands in Pan-American Perspective (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press 1991), 103, 342; Royal British Columbia Museum (RBCM), Other Museums Photographs, Binder 3, photograph N751, no. 6339, Peabody Museum, Harvard, Bill Holm to Elizabeth Virolainen, 13 March 1981; Boas, *Ethnography of Franz Boas*, 152; Smithsonian Institution, *Thirty-fifth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology (BAE), 1913–1914* (Washington: GPO 1921), Part 2, 1113; *Chicago Tribune*, 6 and 7 May and 30 July 1893; *Chicago Daily Inter Ocean*, 12 April and 7 May 1893; *Chicago Times*, 7 May 1893; Marius C. Barbeau, *Totem Poles*, 2 vols. (Ottawa: King's Printer 1950), 682; Judith A. Gray, *The Federal Cylinder Project: A Guide to Field Cylinder Collections in Federal Agencies* (Washington: American Folklife Center 1988), 3: 145; Contemporary Chicago newspaper accounts gave alternative Aboriginal names for some of the male performers: Himasehq, a 'Clacasequala'; Hamisila, the 'official mouthpiece' of the house-opening ceremonial; Hawmissilat!, who responded on behalf of guests at the house-opening performance; Numokevis, whose name meant 'the only one on earth'; and Thakoagyila, whose name meant 'making copper.' These names are probably duplicate references to the men cited above by their non-Aboriginal names.

53 NA, DIA, RG 10, vol. 3865, file 85,529, Putnam to Vowell, 24 Sept. 1892; unidentified addressee to Vowell, 9 Nov. 1892

54 'Franz Boas and the Kwakiutl: Interview with Mrs. Tom Johnson,' in June Helm, ed., *Pioneers of American Anthropology: The Uses of Biography* (Seattle: University of

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They built a mock village facing the water, as was typical of Northwest Coast villages, with the fairground's South Pond standing in for British Columbia's Johnstone and Queen Charlotte Straits. They raised totem poles and pulled canoes up on the pond's sloping shore in front of the houses to add to the verisimilitude. The 'crests of the [house's] owner,' the thunderbird and the moon, were painted above and on either side of the front entrance, and the house posts were carved in the typical manner. The house itself was said to have belonged to a member of the Ne-ens-sha *numaym* of the Nakanigylisala tribe from Nuwitti,⁵⁵ and may actually have belonged to John Drabble or one of the other troupe members from Nuwitti.

Once the building was physically ready, the Kwakwaka'wakw needed to prepare it spiritually. Combining this custom with public performance, the group conducted the appropriate house-naming and dedication ceremonies.⁵⁶ Their subsequent daily enactment of Kwakwaka'wakw life included dancing and singing, as well as carving and basket weaving. The items they made were available for sale. For Putnam, this simulated marketplace was an effective blend of the exoticism of tourism with the authenticity of anthropology. 'There is no doubt,' he wrote, 'that this sale of native manufactures by the natives themselves, dressed in native costume and living in their habitations and largely negotiating by sign language, will form a special attraction to visitors [who will purchase the goods] in the same way that a traveller going to their respective countries would purchase a few articles from their wigwams or tepees.'⁵⁷ For the Aboriginal artists, these sales added an important source of income to the already considerable wages they earned by performing.⁵⁸ In their transplanted home, the Kwakwaka'wakw combined theatre, workplace, marketplace, and residence under one roof. As Mrs Johnson remembers, the performers 'used to use [the house] for

Washington Press 1966), 214

55 Johnson, *History of the World's Columbian Exposition*, 2: 355

56 Ibid.; 'Round the Totem Pole,' *Chicago Times*, 7 May 1893; *Chicago Daily Inter Ocean*, 7 May 1893; *Chicago Tribune*, 7 May 1893; Jacknis, 'Storage Box,' 343

57 Quoted in Jacknis, 'Storage Box,' 341-2

58 Profits from the sale of Kwakwaka'wakw items were divided three ways, with one-half going to the performers, one-quarter to George Hunt, and one-quarter to the Ethnology Department. Jacknis, 'Storage Box,' 342. The Kwakwaka'wakw were well paid at \$20 per month for seven and a half months. By comparison, a group of Inuit from Labrador who came to perform at the fair received just \$100 dollars for a two-year touring engagement. *New York Times*, 10 April 1893, 1

everything.⁵⁹

The Kwakwaka'wakw troupe also spent time working directly with ethnographers. George Hunt, Maleté, and perhaps other group members as well recorded Kwakwaka'wakw songs on the new gramophone cylinders for a project organized by Boas and musicologist John C. Fillmore. The fair was also a time during which Hunt, under Boas's tutelage, could continue to learn techniques for writing Kwak'waka using phonetic script. Boas relied on Hunt to send him ethnographic texts, and thus the fair was a crucial marker in the on-going collaboration between the two men.

The Kwakwaka'wakw site was part of what one reporter referred to as the fair's 'great aboriginal encampment,'⁶⁰ bounded on one end by the government school house, typifying civilization. Next came the 'Esquimau village, and, in order, Crees from Manitoba, Penobscots from Maine, Iroquois from New York, Quackuhls [Kwakwaka'wakw], Chippewas from Minnesota, Winnebagos from Wisconsin, Sioux, Blackfeet, Nez Percés and other tribes from the far west.' South American indigenous peoples followed: 'Arrawacs and Savanah Indians from British Guinea and natives of Bolivia and other States.' Ruins from Yucatan provided the finale.⁶¹ Given their close quarters and their similar programs, contact among these groups was inevitable, although the extent of communication between the Kwakwaka'wakw and the other groups remains uncertain. Such contact was clearly meaningful for the Kwakwaka'wakw performers at the 1904 fair in St Louis. In his autobiography, Charles Nowell, a Kwakwaka'wakw chief from Fort Rupert, details his friendship there with 'a little African pygmy.'⁶² And Gloria Cranmer Webster has described the performance at a late twentieth-century potlatch of a *sudi* dance 'that had been brought back by the Da'naxda'w of New Vancouver, who went to the World's Fair in St. Louis in 1904. There, they met Sioux people who gave them the dance.'⁶³ Of greater concern to colonial officials than the exchange of cultural information was the potential exchange of political information. Aboriginal peoples certainly discussed politics when they gathered in British Columbia. 'Rumors of the Metlakahtla land troubles and of the

59 'Franz Boas and the Kwakiutl,' 214

60 'All Kinds of Indians,' Chicago *Daily Inter Ocean*, 20 June 1893

61 Anon, 'James Deans and His Company of Indians,' *American Antiquarian and Oriental Journal* 15 (1893): 186

62 Clellan S. Ford, *Smoke from Their Fires: The Life of a Kwakiutl Chief* (New Haven: Yale University Press 1941), 187-90

63 Jonaitis, *Chiefly Feasts*, 242

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North-west rebellion have been talked over at all their little feasts, and not often with credit to the white man,' wrote one Vancouver Island Indian agent in 1885.⁶⁴ Similar sorts of political or cultural exchanges between the Kwakwaka'wakw and other Native American groups in Chicago remain an intriguing possibility.

The Canadian government was concerned, and with good reason, about the Kwakwaka'wakw presence at the fair. Canadian officials sought to represent their young country as a progressive society that had domesticated the land and the more than 50,000 Aboriginal people who had been 'Confederated' along with the North-West Territories and British Columbia in 1870 and 1871, respectively.⁶⁵ Canada created its own 'live exhibit' of Aboriginal peoples, one that told a very different story from the Kwakwaka'wakw exhibit. The Canadian Department of Indian Affairs sent rotations of Aboriginal children from eight government residential schools, dressed as examples of supposedly successful civilization and assimilation policies. The children were displayed in a mock schoolroom, where they could be seen working at various tasks. The exhibit's organizer boasted that 'these children were born in tepees amid savage surroundings, and during the continuance of the Fair, day after day, they could be seen printing, making shoes, sewing, knitting, weaving and spinning.'⁶⁶ Although the absence of academic lessons from this schoolroom is conspicuous, it was consistent with Canadian residential schools' emphasis on industrial over scholastic education. The products of the students' work were displayed and sold in the Indian Tepee in the Canadian Department of the Manufactures Building. The boys also operated a printing press, with which they produced *The Canadian Indian*, a pamphlet probably written by Indian agent Charles de Cazes, the government representative in charge of the children. The pamphlet offered a blunt synopsis of the exhibit's intent: 'to make known the steps by which the Canadian people have to a large extent succeeded in giving the aboriginal tribes their civilization with its advantages, in return for the lands they have received from them.'⁶⁷ Organizers hoped the exhibit would illustrate that the transition from savage past to civilized present had taken

64 Canada, *SP*, 1886, no. 4, DIA, *AR*, 1885, 81

65 Gerald A. Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies: A History* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press 1984), 137; Jean Barman, *The West beyond the West: A History of British Columbia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1991), 363

66 Canada, *SP*, 1895, no. 14, DIA, *AR*, 1894, xviii

67 *The Canadian Indian*, 15 Sept. 1893

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place in western Canada easily and without bloodshed.

Agricultural exhibits reinforced the message conveyed by the exhibit of the residential school children. Displays of bountiful yields of high-quality wheat and other grains demonstrated that the Canadian North-West was not a primitive desert, but a civilized garden. Establishing its status as 'civilized' was important to Canada, a new country in need of immigrants and investment capital. As one Canadian reporter observed, fair visitors would expect to see the products of a 'barbarous country' when they came to the Canadian exhibit, and the need to confound these expectations was urgent. 'The World's Fair is little more than a gigantic advertising scheme,' he wrote, 'and the result cannot be otherwise than the greatest national advertisement Canada has ever had.'⁶⁸ Visitors were persuaded; they were impressed by the natural abundance of the Canadian North-West and its apparent ability to support 'prosperous millions.' One visitor from Montreal wrote in the guest book, 'I think that the North West Territory exhibit will be extremely instrumental in the colonization of that vast country.'⁶⁹

For Canadian exhibitors, the issue of Aboriginal representation was at the centre of the fair's nationalist spirit. Indian policy had long been one of the measuring sticks by which Canada asserted its moral superiority to the United States, claiming to have at once both a more humane and a more successful method of civilizing Aboriginal peoples. As historian Douglas Owsram has shown, 'in the United States many politicians pointed to Canada as the proof of the fact that the United States could, in fact, do better. In Canada people pointed to the experience as proof that they were, in fact, better.'⁷⁰ The exhibit of residential school students was typical of Canada's impulse to compare itself with the United States. Hayter Reed, the Indian commissioner for the North-West Territories, conceived of the Canadian exhibit of residential school students only on learning that the US Bureau of Indian Affairs planned to exhibit a model Indian school filled with model Indian students.⁷¹

The 'uncivilized' Kwakwaka'wakw, shrouded in Putnam's and Boas' carefully constructed image of authenticity, created highly

68 *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 2 Aug. 1893

69 NA, MG 55/29, no. 8, Visitors' Register of the North-West Territories Exhibit at Chicago World's Fair

70 Douglas Robb Owsram, 'White Savagery: Some Canadian Reactions to American Indian Policy, 1867-1885' (MA thesis, Queen's University 1971), 6

71 NA, DIA, RG 10, vol. 3865, file 85,529, T.J. Morgan to Hayter Reed, 12 Sept. 1892

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visible and irreconcilable contradictions for Canadian image and policy makers. Canadian officials were well aware of the precarious nature of the image they had constructed for Chicago. Their exhibit's depiction of agricultural plenty and prosperous assimilation masked the dispossession, disease, and dependence of Aboriginal peoples on the Canadian prairies. The model residential school students that the Department of Indian Affairs displayed so proudly similarly masked the cultural violence and emotional and material deprivation that students suffered. Battleford Industrial Institute sent several children to Chicago, two of whom returned to Canada to work in residential schools themselves, one as a nurse and one as a seamstress.⁷² During this period, Battleford was also the site of a 'good deal of sickness' among the students which often resulted in death.⁷³ The story was much the same for other residential schools that sent 'model' students to Chicago.⁷⁴ The counter-image presented by the Kwakwaka'wakw had the potential to undermine Canada's peaceful, civilized facade. Both Hall and Indian agent Pidcock had tried to dissuade the Kwakwaka'wakw from leaving Vancouver Island for Chicago.⁷⁵ By the time of the Kwakwaka'wakw's climactic cannibal performance, they would wish they had tried harder.

The graphic and spectacular *hamatsa* performance was carefully timed. On a daily basis since they had arrived in Chicago in March, the Kwakwaka'wakw staged less controversial versions of the

72 Canada, *SP*, 1895, no. 14, *DIA, AR*, 1894, 151

73 *Ibid.*, 1896, no. 14, *DIA, AR*, 1895, 49

74 Institutions that sent children included the schools at Qu'Appelle, Battleford, Elkhorn, Regina, St Boniface, and St Paul. Administrators' boast that the cost per capita at the Qu'Appelle Industrial school had 'been every year much lower than at any other industrial school in the Territories' almost assuredly indicated that the children there went hungry and cold. *Manitoba Free Press*, 21 Feb. 1894. At St Boniface Industrial School, forty-four of fifty-seven discharges between 1890 and 1893 were related to death or illness of either students or parents, or dissatisfaction with the school. Canada, *DIA, SP*, 1894, no. 14 *AR*, 1893. Conditions were little better for the children's parents. In the year before the fair, while Reed was occupied with raising more money for the Chicago exhibit, he was at the same time reducing food rations to reserve inhabitants who may well have been parents of the children sent to Chicago. The primary rations consisted of 0.9 ounces of bacon and 3.5 ounces of flour per person per day. NA, Hayter Reed Correspondence, John Ross, Indian Agent, to Reed, 28 Dec. 1892. On residential schools across Canada, see J.R. Miller, *Shingwauk's Vision: A History of Native Residential Schools* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1996).

75 NA, *DIA, RG* 10, vol. 3865, file 85,529, Hall to Vankoughnet, 24 Aug. 1893; Pidcock to A.W. Vowell, Indian superintendent of BC, 18 Oct. 1893

hamatsa, as well as other spectacular war dances inspired by the winter spirit, *Winalagalis*, Warrior-of-the-World: the *tuxw'id*, the *'ma'maka*, and the *hawinalal*. All these dances featured graphic theatrics of blood and violence. The *'ma'maka*, or thrower dance, was vividly described by a reporter for the *New York Tribune*: the dancer 'went through most violent contortions, in imitation of retching. Finally he was supposed to vomit blood, and with this came release from the malevolent spirit.'⁷⁶

The Kwakwaka'wakw had already created a public stir during the Victoria Day celebrations at the fair in May. Accounts of the event reflected just the sort of image of Canada that Canadian officials wanted to discourage. The reporter for the *New York Times* described the 'boatload of braves of Quackuhl Indians who have been brought from their primitive home on Vancouver Island, British Columbia' as part of a 'queer looking and almost extinct race of North American Indians' who 'stood up and howled and danced to the jingle of the tambourine in the chief's hands.' Canadian officials reading the article must have winced as they read on: 'Several thousand visitors were quickly drawn to the scene. The throng of spectators could not understand why the British flag should be floating over such a fierce and savage looking lot.'⁷⁷ Whatever uneasiness the Victoria Day performance generated among the ranks of Canadian profiteers, politicians, and bureaucrats, it paled next to what the Kwakwaka'wakw held in store for August, on the eve of the fair's 'Great Britain Day.' The eyes of the public and the media were trained on all representatives from different countries of the British Empire. Officials, desiring 'to make the demonstration as imposing as possible,' carefully planned the proceedings to include a grand parade, a martial display, and the singing of 'patriotic songs.'⁷⁸ Canada had excluded the Kwakwaka'wakw from its contribution to these imperial displays. The Kwakwaka'wakw, however, ensured that their place in the empire would not be overlooked.

The Kwakwaka'wakw had a live audience of 10,000 people for their 'brutal exhibition,'⁷⁹ as one reporter dubbed the performance. It

76 'Folk-Music at the Fair: Cannibal Songs of the Indians,' *New York Tribune*, 6 Aug. 1893. For descriptions of these dances as they were performed on the Northwest Coast, see Franz Boas, *The Social Organization and the Secret Societies of the Kwakiutl Indians* (New York: Johnson Reprint Company 1970), 485-97, and Jonaitis, *Chiefly Feasts*, 100.

77 *New York Times*, 25 May 1893

78 *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 19 Aug. 1893

79 *London Sunday Times*, 20 Aug. 1893

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raised a public outcry and received major press coverage in the *New York Times* and *The Sunday Times* of London. Whatever their degree of exaggeration, these accounts had tremendous impact. Judging by the newspapers' inflated language, which incorrectly labelled it a 'sun dance,' the performance seems to have been a cross between the *hqwinalal* and *hamatsa* dances. The account in the London paper was particularly graphic:

[The performers] began a queer sort of monotonous chant, interrupted at times by a peculiar low wailing cry to the dull beat of an Indian music drum. George Hunt then produced a sharp knife and two pieces of rope. He cut four deep gashes in the back of [Two-Bites and Strong Back] just between the shoulder blades. Raising the flesh he passed the ropes beneath the loose strips and tied the ends firmly together. Two-Bites and Strong-Back standing motionless as statues during the operation. The low monotonous chant of the Indians, squatting in a great half circle, now became wilder and more vehement. Several Indians rushed to the center of the platform and seizing the ends of the ropes, pulled them violently, uttering loud cries ... During a pause Two Bites and Strong Back attached stout ropes to the ends of the small ones passed through their backs, and throwing their weight upon them, tore them from their fleshy fastenings. By this time the expression of Two-Bites face was that of a famished wolf. His eyes gathered like those of a furious wild animal, and, kneeling on the platform, he uttered hoarse cries. Two Indians sprang upon him and caught him by the shoulders. He turned on them, snapping and snarling like a mad dog, until George Hunt, the interpreter, walked over and extended to him his bare arm. Two-Bites gave a dismal howl, and fastened on it with his teeth, making them meet in the flesh. It was with difficulty, after being dragged half-away across the platform, that he could be induced to relinquish his hold, when it was discovered that a piece had been bitten out of Hunt's arm as large as a silver dollar; but the interpreter smiled and showed no signs of pain.⁸⁰

On furlough in London at the time, Hall read this account of his congregation members the following morning in the London *Sunday Times*. He had previously been censured for his inability to control the mobility of the Kwakwaka'wakw.⁸¹ The appearance of the Kwakwaka'wakw on the Chicago stage, the most public world stage imaginable, dramatically revealed that after more than a decade of

80 Ibid.

81 NA, CMS, 'Precis,' reel A-121, 1 Feb. 1882

work, Hall still had not succeeded in his mission to sedentarize, civilize, and Christianize. Outraged and embarrassed, Hall wrote to the Canadian officials demanding that they stop the Kwakwaka'wakw performances immediately. Invoking the American comparison, he complained that whereas the US government exhibited signs of its successful civilization programs in its industrial school exhibits, the Kwakwaka'wakw representatives from Canada 'were chosen by Dr. Boaz [sic] because [they were] the most degraded he could find in the Dominion.'⁸² Hall's letter was above all a self-indictment, since these 'most degraded' of Indians were his own flock of fifteen years. Although the fair's imperialist juxtaposition of savage and civilized Indians ultimately supported Hall's own ideological and political ends, he bristled when the means to those ends undermined his reputation.

Canadian policy and image makers were similarly outraged, although on a less personal level than Hall. The cannibal dance was not the image of a progressive, dynamic, civilized society they needed to attract settlement and investment to the West. The Kwakwaka'wakw were not the Indians they wanted the world to see. In the flurry of correspondence that ensued among Lawrence Vankoughnet, the deputy superintendent general of Indian affairs, A.W. Vowell, the provincial Indian superintendent for British Columbia, and Indian agent Pidcock, each man defensively attempted to absolve himself of responsibility, proclaiming his unconditional disapproval of such performances. Eventually, officials admitted that 'the Department unfortunately cannot invoke the law to prevent or put a stop to the disgraceful scenes referred to, as the law of Canada which prohibits the celebration of such orgies in British Columbia is of course inoperative while the Indians are in the United States.'⁸³ Since the Kwakwaka'wakw were in Chicago not as part of the Canadian exhibit, but under the auspices of the Hunt/Boas/Putnam anthropology team, the Canadian government was powerless to cancel their engagement. Removed from a national context, the Kwakwaka'wakw appropriated the Chicago stage to fashion a response to government and church attempts to destroy their way of life. In this instance the primitivist discourse that separated Aboriginal people from national histories worked to the Kwakwaka'wakw's advantage.

After the fair, Canadian officials attempted to ensure that this

82 NA, DIA, RG 10, vol. 3865, file 85,529, Hall to Vankoughnet, 24 Aug. 1893

83 Ibid., Vankoughnet to Larke, 6 Sept. 1893

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embarrassment could not happen again. In the years following the fair, Indian Affairs officials routinely denied requests by various promoters and anthropologists to take Canadian indigenous peoples on ethnographic or performance tours.⁸⁴ The 1895 amendment, which the Department of Indian Affairs hoped would make the anti-potlatch law enforceable, included precise definitions of what did and did not constitute acceptable Aboriginal performance. It banned all 'savage' performances, with the exception of presentations at agricultural shows or exhibitions, since agriculture was widely held to be the distinguishing mark of civilization.⁸⁵ When Indian Affairs granted permission for the Stony from Alberta to perform at a Wild West Show in Banff in 1915, it was on the condition that 'the Indians do not appear in aboriginal costume.'⁸⁶ Canadian officials took seriously the lesson they learned from Chicago's public relations debacle.

The Kwakwaka'wakw performances in Chicago dramatized the ability of Aboriginal people to react creatively to Canadian colonialism. By 1893 the Kwakwaka'wakw had demonstrated an extraordinary ability to combine tactics that non-Aboriginal people found an incomprehensible and frustrating mixture of the 'traditional' and the 'modern.' Yet, as the Kwakwaka'wakw made clear to Hall over the course of their relationship, and as the performers told the world when they appeared on stage in Chicago, they found this dichotomy false and irrelevant. They used modern, capitalist wage labour to reinforce the potlatch, the most anti-capitalist and supposedly most traditional of practices. They turned aspects of the potlatch itself *into* wage labour by commodifying their dances for the Chicago audience. The trip to Chicago was like a trip to the Washington State hop fields or the Fraser River canneries, and, as was typical of Aboriginal migrant workers, several members of the group, including George Hunt, John Drabble, and Johnny Wanuk, spent their 'modern' wages hosting large potlatches once they returned home. As Hunt later explained to Boas, 'When we came

84 Ibid., vol. 3629, file 6244-2, 'Potlatch - attempts to curtail, 1899-1915'; vol. 4010, file 253-430, 'Exhibitions - Indians travelling to - correspondence, 1904-1939'; E. Brian Titley, *A Narrow Vision: Duncan Campbell Scott and the Administration of Indian Affairs in Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press 1986), 172, 222n45

85 Tina Loo, 'Dan Cranmer's Potlatch: Law as Coercion, Symbol, and Rhetoric in British Columbia, 1884-1951,' *Canadian Historical Review* 73, 2 (1992): 142

86 NA, RG 10, vol. 4010, file 253,430, J.D. McLean to J.W. Waddy, Indian Agent, Stony Agency, 4 March 1915

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back to Fort Rupert, Wāg'ides [Johnny Wanuk] went into his house, and he said at once that he would buy oil with the money that he had obtained, paid by you, Dr. Boas. Then he gave a grease feast to all the tribes.⁸⁷

The trip to Chicago differed from canning salmon or picking hops, however, in its direct commodification of Kwakwaka'wakw cultural practice. This process of commodification misled reporters then, just as it sometimes misleads observers now, to assume that the commercial performances were a mark of cultural capitulation and that the Kwakwaka'wakw performers had been beaten down by colonialism to such an extent that they were reduced to performing shadows of their former cultural glory – and thus were no longer 'real' or 'authentic' Indians. As one reporter at the fair put it, 'back of the [Kwakwaka'wakw performance] was some ancient superstition, some mythological occurrence, which is now forgotten, or but half-remembered.'⁸⁸ This reporter's conclusions were rooted in the assumption that Aboriginal people must be either 'traditional' or 'modern,' and that their identity as Aboriginal hinged on remaining 'traditional.'

Certainly, transposing dances from a winter Aboriginal setting on the Northwest Coast to a non-Aboriginal, summer stage in the American Midwest required that the Kwakwaka'wakw compromise many conventions of their traditional mytho-social order, at least as that order has been delineated by anthropologists from Franz Boas forward. Yet it was not the first time the Kwakwaka'wakw had made such compromises, nor would it be the last. Survival under colonialism *required* compromises. These compromises were not necessarily symptoms of cultural decline, and they could often be signs of cultural resiliency. A Koskimo chief articulated his understanding of the relationship between tradition and change in a speech during the 1894 winter ceremonial. He acknowledged: 'My grandfather's rules were strict, but those of my father were a little less rigid. Our rules of the winter ceremonial are much less strict than those of olden times.' He then urged his audience to listen carefully and take notice of speeches he had learned from his great-grandfather, who, in turn, had received them at the beginning of the world from the Maker of Dances. The chief identified the man who

87 Jacknis, 'Storage Box,' 342; Franz Boas, *Kwakiutl Ethnography*, edited by Helen Codere (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1966), 191; Jonaitis, *Chiefly Feasts*, 117–33; Smithsonian, *Thirty-fifth Annual Report of the BAE*, Part 2, 1114

88 *New York Tribune*, 6 Aug. 1893

would inherit the cedar bent box that contained important spiritual items, including the red cedar bark for the *hamatsa* ceremony.⁸⁹ Changes in ritual practice that made it 'less strict' did not indicate that ceremonials were dying out, but instead helped ensure they would survive as markers of inherited tradition for coming generations.

Despite the spatial, seasonal, and social recontextualization that marked the Chicago performances, significant elements of continuity linked the Kwakwaka'wakw's local stage with their international one. The consumption of oolichan oil and the exchange of gifts that followed the house-opening ceremony in Chicago were two examples. The ceremony itself was a third. The house originated in Nuwitti, and the Kwakwaka'wakw performed a house-opening specifically associated with the Nuwitti and Koskimo tribes.⁹⁰

The identity of the performers was another element of continuity between the two contexts. Historically, the right to perform certain dances was an inherited privilege usually confirmed in public at a feast or potlatch. Evidence indicates that the Chicago troupe included high-ranking Kwakwaka'wakw with hereditary rights to the dances they performed. This is not surprising, since anthropologists up and down the Northwest Coast usually relied on a narrow group of high-ranking individuals as informants, suppliers, and performers – a generalization that is especially true of world's fairs.⁹¹ In response to the disruptive influences of disease and capitalism on the Aboriginal economy, elites sought new ways, including the sale of artwork, to acquire the wealth necessary to potlatch and retain their hereditary positions.⁹² It was easier for people who already knew the dances to perform in Chicago, and it may also have been less culturally threatening to the community as a whole, since the dances, although far removed from home, were not displaced from their hereditary owners. Well past the turn of the century, the requirements of ritual ownership survived to a degree that often frustrated Boas, who complained in 1923 that 'everywhere on the coast everybody is afraid

89 Franz Boas, *Kwakiutl Ethnography*, 224

90 *Chicago Daily Inter Ocean*, 7 May 1893; *Chicago Tribune*, 7 May 1893; Boas, *Social Organization*, 482–3; Boas, *Kwakiutl Ethnography*, 400–7

91 Jacknis, 'Storage Box,' 118. For further examples of this trend, see Ford, *Smoke from Their Fires*, 186–92; Johan Adrian Jacobsen, *Alaskan Voyage, 1881–1883: An Expedition to the Northwest Coast of America*, translated by Erna Gunther (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1977), 74–5; and Gloria Cranmer Webster, 'Chiefly Feasts,' *Curator* 35, 4 (1992): 249.

92 Aldona Jonaitis, 'Chiefly Feasts,' *Curator* 35, 4 (1992): 257

to tell something that does not belong to his family. That makes my work so hard.⁹³ Concern for hereditary ownership of dances and rituals is still apparent today at dance performances in Alert Bay, where the young performers are careful to explain how they have inherited or obtained permission to perform each dance.

Of the Chicago group, David Hunt was one member known to have had a legitimate claim to the *hamatsa* dance, although he had not yet been initiated when he performed at the fair. His initiation as *hamatsa* took place in Fort Rupert the following winter, during the large potlatch that his father, George Hunt, hosted with his Chicago earnings.⁹⁴ Another member of the troupe, Dōqwāyis, was correctly identified in Chicago newspapers as a woman of high rank. Dōqwāyis traced her status, which reporters variously labelled 'princess,' 'Queen,' or 'chiefess,' to her position as daughter of Chief Dōqwāyis of the Numaym DzEndzEnx'q'ayo. When George Hunt later collected family histories for Boas, he described her as a 'princess' or 'queen.' Hunt also distinguished between 'Dōqwāyis,' which was her 'chief's name' inherited on the death of her father, and her 'princess name,' which was māxūlayugwa.⁹⁵

The shift from the local to the international stage also created an opening for new performers to synthesize change with continuity. For example, Chief Johnny Wanuk owed his title as chief not to a high-ranking family background (which he lacked), but to his marriage to Dōqwāyis. According to George Hunt, 'this is called by the Indians a-newly-made-chief.' The title of chief placed Wanuk within the pool of high-ranking anthropological informants and performers and thus probably facilitated his admittance into the Chicago group. As George Hunt wrote to Boas: 'I only wish you to know that Wāg'ides [Johnny Wanuk] probably thought that you considered him a real chief.' Through his unconventional marriage, Wanuk had entered the ranks of Kwakwaka'wakw nobility before his trip to Chicago. At the grease feast that Wanuk hosted with his Chicago earnings, Dōqwāyis 'gave him the marriage name

93 Ronald P. Rohner, 'Franz Boas: Ethnographer on the Northwest Coast,' in Helm, ed., *Pioneers of American Anthropology*, 195

94 Jonaitis, *Chiefly Feasts*, 133. Similarly, the performances of a Kwakwaka'wakw man at the St Louis World's Fair in 1905 indicate that he was not merely *playing hamatsa* but 'was a Hamatsa.' Ford, *Smoke from Their Fires*, 186–90 (emphasis added)

95 *Chicago Tribune*, 6 May 1893; *Chicago Tribune*, 7 May 1893; *Chicago Daily Inter Ocean*, 7 May 1893; Smithsonian, *Thirty-fifth Annual Report of the BAE*, Part 2, 1110–3

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Kwākūx-âlas for the feast name of her husband.’⁹⁶ The hereditary rights of his wife helped Wanuk strengthen his position as ‘newly made-chief’ through the ‘traditional’ means of a grease feast, which he paid for with ‘modern’ wages.

Whatever cultural alterations the Chicago performances engendered, the winter ceremonial retained its sacred character, and the potlatch remained (as it does today) a central cultural institution for Kwakwaka’wakw peoples. The long tradition of theatre and performance in Kwakwaka’wakw pre-colonial culture facilitated the adaptation of sacred dances to the secular context in Chicago. Speaking to the question why the Kwakwaka’wakw participated in Edward Curtis’s 1914 film, *In the Land of the Headhunters*, anthropologist Bill Holm remarked: ‘Kwakiutl are pretty much masters of drama. That’s a very important part of their ceremonial life. They recognize it themselves. They recognize that the dancers who participate are actors.’⁹⁷ As anthropologist Helen Codere has written, the theatrical character of the winter ceremonials is apparent ‘in a mere listing of their prominent features: performances polished by rehearsal, costumed dancers in carved and painted masks of wood, songs and song leaders, an impressive variety of musical instruments, and elaborate stage devices such as trap doors.’ This history of dramatization in Kwakwaka’wakw ritual does not, as Codere and other scholars have gone on to claim, diminish its sacred character.⁹⁸ But the Kwakwaka’wakw appreciation of simulations as legitimate may have predisposed them towards adapting sacred winter dances from the Northwest Coast to the secular summer stage in Chicago.

Before 1893 the Kwakwaka’wakw had been assimilating imported ‘modern’ practices with ‘traditional’ indigenous ones for decades. In the process of negotiating a cultural identity that was simultaneously ‘authentic’ and dynamic, they made choices and concessions, both conscious and unconscious, sometimes strategic, sometimes sentimental. Individuals and groups carefully considered which beliefs and practices could be compromised in order to preserve what they deemed the most important aspects of their identity. The

96 Smithsonian, *Thirty-fifth Annual Report of the BAE*, Part 2, 1114

97 *The Shadow Catcher: Edward S. Curtis and the North American Indian*, directed by T. McLuhan (1982), Mystic Fire Video, 1993

98 Codere, *Fighting with Property*, 6. On other elements of drama in Kwakwaka’wakw culture, see Helen Codere, ‘Kwakiutl: Traditional Culture,’ in Suttles, ed., *Handbook of North American Indians*, 369. On the sacred nature of Kwakwaka’wakw drama, see Goldman, *Mouth of Heaven*, 102, 104.

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Kwakwaka'wakw's use of wages was a widespread example of this process. At the World's Columbian Exposition, the Kwakwaka'wakw performers carried this process to a new level by transposing their demonstration of political defiance and cultural persistence onto the public world stage in front of an international audience. It was not just the Kwakwaka'wakw who went 'on tour'; their struggle with Hall and Indian Affairs went on tour as well. Their performances in Chicago fused cultural tradition, modern labour, and political protest.

The results of this endeavour were double edged. At the same time that the Kwakwaka'wakw ingeniously found a way to combine cultural affirmation with adaptation, they also contributed to the identification of Kwakwaka'wakw culture as a static relic of the past. The performance of the *hamatsa* dance on 19 August 1893 was both traditional ritual and modern labour, but non-Aboriginal audience members saw only its traditional aspect. Stripped of its larger context, the performance affirmed many of the audience member's basest stereotypes about Aboriginal people and reinforced their belief in the opposition between traditional and modern.

In the long run, the survival of these oppositional categories had serious consequences.⁹⁹ Aboriginal people who dealt successfully with the non-Aboriginal culture and economy did not fit the circumscribed definition of the 'traditional Indian' and were seen as having forfeited their authentic Aboriginal qualifications. Successfully modern Indians were not Indians at all; they were assimilated. Others were all too Indian, and were relegated to a noble and tragic past. 'Vanishing Indians' were the only ones with legitimate claims to Aboriginal rights, while those who survived into modernity were alienated from these rights. This sort of double jeopardy, faced by Aboriginal peoples across the continent, resulted from non-Aboriginal society's success at casting all discussions about Aboriginal peoples along the parallel dichotomies of traditional versus modern and authentic versus inauthentic.

In the nineteenth century the Kwakwaka'wakw struggled not against change itself, but against the colonial newcomers who

99 This phenomenon, whereby a project for the commercialization of an ethnic culture works against the group for which it is supposed to generate economic revenue and greater cultural understanding, has been discussed by Sarah Deutsch, in relation to Hispanics in the American Southwest, and by Kay Anderson, in relation to Vancouver's Chinese community. Sarah Deutsch, *No Separate Refuge* (New York: Oxford University Press 1987); Kay Anderson, *Vancouver's Chinatown* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press 1991).

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attempted to dictate the terms of that change. In British Columbia today, the Kwakwaka'wakw and other First Nations continue to assert their right to self-determination. In response, many non-Aboriginal people continue to invoke static categories of authentic and traditional 'Indian-ness' to delimit Aboriginal peoples' possibilities and straightjacket their autonomy. If the critical issues of land claims and self-government are to be resolved, we need to relinquish the historically entrenched 'either-or' definition of what it means to be Aboriginal. The time is long past due that we listen to what the Kwakwaka'wakw told the world in Chicago over a century ago.

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