LOOKING THROUGH WATER:

AN EXHIBITION IN SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CONTEXT

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a multidisciplinary, historically situated analysis of a contemporary art installation exhibited at the University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology (MOA) in 1994. The exhibition, HIGH SLACK, by artist and UBC professor Judith Williams, traced aspects of historical and current relationships between First Nations, British colonists and immigrant British Columbian society, and the land on which we all live.

The exhibition led to a public symposium in November 1994 at the First Nations House of Learning at the University of British Columbia. First Nations and non-aboriginal attendance was high, and the history of contact and conflict between First Nations and European authorities and legal systems was debated. It became clear that a web of cultural, historical, community, representation, and academic issues and politics surrounded HIGH SLACK.

This thesis explores the exhibition's significance in two phases: first, the context of the installation's production; and second, the perspectives, acts, and processes which trace the ways the exhibition was received. This is undertaken using feminist analyses from and in combination with different disciplines' literatures and methodologies, specifically: art history and criticism, anthropology, museum studies, postcolonial theory, cultural studies, anti-racist feminist theory, First Nations studies and writings, and history.

The thesis looks at HIGH SLACK's production by considering relevant contexts. These include: 1) British Columbia's history and political and social ideologies and debates relating to First Nations and their rights; 2) anthropology and the UBC Museum of Anthropology; 3) current

cultural and artistic discourses about First Nations and visual arts; and 4) Judith Williams' production process.

To analyze HIGH SLACK's range of receptions, the thesis looks at the reactions, events, and discussions triggered by it. Important moments and acts of reception include: 1) the artist's interpretations of the exhibition in display at MOA; 2) the perspective of the exhibition's curator, Rosa Ho, within MOA as a site of reception; 3) my own receptions of the installation; 4) written reactions of museum visitors in public-response books in the gallery, and vandalism done to certain works in HIGH SLACK; and 5) the symposium and people's statements and exchanges there.

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Anything I try is made easier by the care, encouragement, and respect shown to me by my partner, Justin Straker. Lorna and Gene Foss were also (as usual) a big help to me through their positivity, interest, and commiserations.

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I think it's important for us to take a look at what the untold stories of British Columbia's history are, and that may be reflected in the Nikai Internment Centre in New Denver. It may be taking a look at the work of the Chinese labourers along the Fraser River. It may be facing the reality that a little girl... could stand on the top floor of her residential school and look out a quarter mile down the road and see her parents' home but not be able to go there for ten months of the year. And I think those are... parts of our history that we have to acknowledge, and that we have to tell.

- Ardyth Cooper, *T'souke* First Nation

From: It's Time: First Nations and the Future of British Columbia, a video produced by the First Nations Summit, 1996, North Vancouver, B.C.

Typographical Note

The proper spelling of the word "Tsilhqot'in" in English includes a circumflex accent over the "s", like this: T̂silhqot'in.

Unfortunately, my word processing program and printer are unable to produce this character, so the word will appear in this thesis as "Tsilhqot'in". It should be remembered, however, that the correct spelling demands the accent over the "s", and I apologize for this shortcoming.

Introduction

It is an afternoon in August, 1994

I have entered a space of cool and quiet and dusk from a space of heat and roar and dazzle. From the movement and boundlessness of outside I arrive in a place of fixity; of boxes and walls and watching: a museum, a building made for looking. (Figure 1)

In the halls and rooms of the museum are sculptures of wood, stone, metal, and glass, paintings on wood, skin, and canvas, paper prints, weaving in tree bark and roots and grasses. There are clothes and dolls and toys and utensils and tools and instruments, too. A person cannot look at it all, cannot see this much.

I am walking into a room - a room filled with words. (Figures 2 & 3) There are colours and objects and images, but looking does not tell me enough. I begin to read in order to understand. I read: "The artist invites the museum visitor to sit in the boat and read the books." The artist is Judith Williams, it says on the wall. The museum is the University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology (MOA). The room full of words is named HIGH SLACK [1], and the boat sculpture with two books in it, where I sit, is called RE:AD°ING. (Figures 4 & 5)

In the first book I open, called Log A: A Voyage Round, I find the voices of George Vancouver and a captain of a Spanish ship. (Figures 6 & 7) I am drawn in because I know the places, up the British Columbia coast, which these men named for themselves in the journals which I read. The area is now called Desolation Sound, after Captain Vancouver's depressed mood as he floated in Teakerne Arm on one particular day [2].

The second book I read, Log B: Rock/Burn, contains photographs of rock paintings made by the First Nations people who had, millennia before, named the places toured by the Europeans. (Figure 8) I recognize these paintings, too. As a child I spent many days on a boat on the coast. Almost every year my family spent August in Desolation Sound. One summer we spent our time climbing up rocks from the water's edge to see the red pigment paintings. We had charcoal and

translucent paper and traced some of what we found. In the word-room, I see names and images familiar from charts and memories, I imagine rocks and water and trees, and I continue reading, attempting to untangle the knot of voices, places, images, and stories encoded in the text.

The words prompt me to remember my child travels and understandings of these particular places. I think about my acceptance of the fact their names were given them by 'explorers' from England and Spain [3]. I think about my willingness to scramble up sandstone and look at the paintings and to record my looking in charcoal and on film... as if I were in a museum. (Figure 9) For me the paintings were evidence of a human history that stretched back beyond my comprehension; I understood them as leftovers of something that existed in the mysterious past. I connected these signs of indigenous inhabitance of the land neither to the irony of the European names on our charts nor to contemporary First Nations communities' never-interrupted inhabitance of the places I visited. (These wonderful places I felt I knew and belonged to) [4]. I knew the people who painted these rocks were not *my* ancestors. Yet I didn't ask myself what the images told me about *how* I and my history - obviously separate from the inhabitance represented by the paintings - know and belong to this land; or relate to its first people.

In the dim room filled with words, I now ask myself. 'Other' questions begin to form, about the many voices layered throughout the room, the histories they messily build, the woman who collected them and the way she presented them here, in this building for looking at the material cultures of some of the peoples who paint(ed) the rocks.

What were my questions, and who or how did I expect to answer them? What I saw in the room full of words, and my unfiltered responses to it, set the terms for the research underpinning this thesis. The artworks themselves, the physical and ideological space in which I viewed them, and my particular positionings as a gendered, raced, classed, and historical human being shaped my perceptions and curiosities in specific ways. The process of my response is part of how this thesis project emerged. The conditions which permitted - or rather, which fabricated - my reception and

the assumptions embedded in it are discussed below, and are a major subject of this thesis, and not just its context.

The Exhibition (Initial Encounter)

The following is an edited description of my first reception of HIGH SLACK, written a few months after seeing it for the first time. It provides some essential information about the works themselves while also conveying my initial interpretations of them:

> Judith Williams' temporary installation, HIGH SLACK, caught my attention because of its form - which was radically different from everything else in the building... The pieces are mainly painted and text-covered screens, which hang like curtains from the ceiling to the floor or from standing structures... and are often combined with colour and black-and-white photographs. The photos sometimes hide behind and sometimes are clearly visible through the painted and text-covered curtains. Often several layers of text are juxtaposed. (Figure 10)
>
> The 'other' main form Williams' works take in HIGH SLACK is the "book work"(Figure 11). In these documents, she combines her own photographs and words with reproductions of illustrations and lengthy exerpts from historical sources and contemporary newspapers. The sources quoted and explored in the art books are, for the most part, also the sources of the majority of text inscribed onto her hanging screens. Her own creative writing also repeats in the books and on the photos and painted curtains.
>
> In order to experience several of the works, I was required to physically interact with them - by sitting down in a wooden boat-bench to access book works (art works containing images and text which are bound like books), pulling a curtain aside or sneaking behind it, or walking into a spiral tunnel. Only after encountering several of the curtain/text/photo works did I begin to understand their general subjects... I sat down at two desks provided to peruse some book works made by Williams. They were tucked away in the back corner, where I think they were *meant* to be approached after struggling with the larger screen works. Here I began my process of putting it all together. Flipping from book to book, I began to see that all of the works were intimately interconnected in subject matter. I started to figure out which works used which sources and to understand the meanings of the cross-references between them... In these book works in particular, Williams exhibits her own process of research on the historical literature of European-First Nations contact and conflict in parts of B.C. in the mid-to-late nineteenth century.

All of the works in the installation use various combinations of the following sources: 1) white-authored journals and memoirs of contact, relations, and conflict with First Nations; 2) white-produced illustrations of First Nations villages; 3) the letters, trial notes and transcripts of Judge Mathew Ballie Begbie; who presided over the hanging of several Tsilhqot'in Nation chiefs in the 1860s; 4) clippings from late-nineteenth-century B.C. newspapers concerning white surveying and 'exploration', contact and conflict with First Nations, and the decimation of First Nations communities by smallpox; 5) late-twentieth-century B.C. newspaper clippings about the 1993 Cariboo-Chilcotin Justice Inquiry and the issue of non-First Nations owned companies' plans to export water encompassed in lands claimed by First Nations; 6) First Nations accounts of contact and conflict with whites; and 7) Judith Williams' own writing and photographs...

The silent dusk of HIGH SLACK is not only a mausoleum of (partial, conflicting and conflict-filled) collective memory. Williams looks around at her/our present and forward to her/our future as well as back at the past [5]. Juxtaposed with voices from and speaking about history are those of contemporary B.C.... They link yesterday's events to today's politics and tomorrow's possibilities. By spotlighting - literally - the 'authoritative' sources of white History and by juxtaposing them with First Nations accounts, current events and political issues, and her own thoughts and images, Williams exposes their prejudice and incompleteness. The injustice, racism, and cultural genocide European-Canadian history both represents and masks is starkly bared under her - and our - scrutiny. The writing is on the wall...

HIGH SLACK and looking through water: Williams' ideas foster my research

At this point, it is important to introduce the artist's impetus in and understanding of the exhibition. Here is Judith Williams' story about her entrance into the aesthetic and imaginative territory that led to HIGH SLACK's display:

> I was a bit goal-less...landscape was my first interest after figural work...on sabbatical I got the idea to paint the surface of the water and through it at once, the two visions...first it was an aesthetic thing; then the names came...my experience of the area was important...I did a group of 40 or 45 paintings directly related to the people of the area...the scale of the landscape is so huge I thought it was impossible at first...then I started to talk to people and so I backed into the Native issue (Judith Williams, personal communication, 1996).

> Walking to Water [exhibited 1996 at the VAG] is a more extreme, *formal* version of what I've been doing [with HIGH SLACK] in the sense that it's... an experiment to play out notions I have about perception, and remembering, and retrieval and of course how that relates to history.... If you look at an object through water, you know how it's always broken up, in fact it's sometimes greatly increased in size, sometimes it looks like it's much closer to you than it is,

> and all those kinds of distortions are going on... water operating like a lens... the only reason to focus on that as a concept was to see that you can look at two things at once... the notion when you're looking through water of seeing both the surface and penetrating the surface *at the same time.* And that has always been a kind of metaphor for HIGH SLACK... (Williams in Foss, 1996: 4).

> I choose the name **HIGH SLACK** for my installation because it is the time when the tide, having risen to [its] highest point for the day, seems to pause before it ebbs. The current calms, one can safely traverse the rapids and [it's] a good time to fish for salmon. (Judith Williams 1994:5).

Williams' description of her journey with HIGH SLACK, and the concepts she developed while producing it and witnessing its receptions, inspired my research. The concept of looking through water provided a direct link to my working understanding of my thesis; and it is also an idea which binds together several of the diverse ways I've tried to understand HIGH SLACK. When I first picked up on this metaphor I was attempting to approximate and report Judy Williams' own understanding of the exhibition. Since then I have discovered the possibility of building on the multi-faceted nature of my research and its results.

Looking through water is a good way to describe the experience of attempting to hover between different methodological and theoretical approaches. It also provides an image to articulate my efforts to read through time, between texts, and between the historical, media, legal, academic, poetic and personal voices in Williams' artworks. The idea of looking at the surface of and through water at once also images the challenge of moving among standpoints outside the installation. There have been connections and disjunctions between the responses of Williams, MOA staff, myself, the statements in the response books, speakers at the symposium (*Tsilhqot'in*, those of other First Nations, and non-Native) and the vandal of HIGH SLACK. For me, it has been only partially possible to look between cultures, across difference within and between women, and into a complicated and extended process of cultural production, negotiation, and reception(s) in this research. Thinking about looking at and through water has helped me to see and explain where my underwater vision can be quite clear, and where only reflection is possible.

Looking through water is a metaphor which permanently ties my thesis to Williams' work on HIGH SLACK. I have used it to think about reading through time, through texts, between

different points of view, between cultures, across difference within and between women, and to experience the artworks themselves with their multiple, fractional layers, their library-like bringing together of primary texts and research and voices - ranging from the historical, media, legal, and academic to the personal.

First Conclusions

How did my early reading of HIGH SLACK as a critical intervention in neo-colonial Canadian politics determine my research aims and methods? I was challenged by the questions and problems that I saw spinning out of that one darkened room. An effort to define my project in the months following my first viewing of the exhibition produced this short-hand list of issues to be investigated:

1. Williams' artistic use of specific histories in relation to an art critical tradition which operates on the idea that real art is not political but 'universal', and in relation to Canadian society's failure to see, hear and acknowledge (in fact, its historically active repression of) First Nations history, culture and art

2. Williams' use of 'non-traditional' (First Nations) art forms

3. Williams' focus on using naturally occurring forms in order to translate her understanding of nature into art

4. Williams' emphasis on the idea that a people's culture, art, and history are inseparable from the landscape in which they live

5. Williams' recognition of the importance of naming in relation to a culture's history in and belonging to a landscape - in this case Europeans renaming landmarks in First Nations' territory after (often hostile) colonials without indigenous permission

6. The relegation of First Nations art, as 'primitive', 'exotic' 'artifact', to anthropology, versus racist-sexist defined art's near monopoly on high-status galleries and art museums: the dominance of the white male Euro-American aesthetic

7. The neglect of First Nations women's art in the context of the dominating culture's attention to First Nations art as a whole

8. The powerful co-existence (co-operation?) of sexism, racism and ethnocentrism in art historical and critical writing and in the art world's institutions, agencies, and markets

9. The issue of racism and ethnocentrism within feminist art scholarship and feminist arts activism: the (non)recognition of diversity and the (non)practice of inclusion
Dealing with the historical sources Williams uses: who writes history? Who gets to rewrite it?

10. The challenges and complexities of my cross-cultural research and the issue of appropriation in feminist art and research

My list of topics reveals two key assumptions that I made when I read the room of words for the first time. It also concretely demonstrates some ways that these assumptions directed my research. The first pivotal assumption was my strong belief, documented in #1, above, that Judy Williams' approach to HIGH SLACK and to other art making in context resembled my own. *I* read feminist critique in the installation, and I read counter-hegemonic political statements in her presentation of colonial and neo-colonial histories. Then I assumed that what I read must have been *meant.* In this way I was able to leave the museum relatively certain that Williams intended HIGH SLACK at least partly as the critique of local European-recorded history and present-day relations of neo-colonialism I took it for. I was equally sure that what I saw as political content and feminist statements in the installation indicated that Williams shared my particular investment in the prominent feminist critique of universalistic conceptions of 'art for art's sake'. As it turns out, I was mistaken.

My second crucial assumption was that the name on the wall of the gallery, Judith Williams, identified a woman of First Nations descent, because of the anthropological setting of the museum. But I was wrong again. From this incorrect presumption flowed my interest in "Williams' use of 'non-traditional' (First Nations) art forms", "the neglect of First Nations women's art in the context of the dominating culture's attention to First Nations art as a whole", and "the challenges and complexities of cross-cultural research and the issue of appropriation". My supposition was no simple mistake, but an idea planted by a tangle of internalized stereotypes *and* a degree of critical awareness of them. How this came about and what it means are issues explored in Chapter 7.

In my own personal universe, my thesis research has resembled a process of learning about

(and partly unlearning) a couple of significant assumptions. In making them, these assumptions felt like natural perceptions – but they were followed by gasp-inducing discoveries and protracted struggles to understand.

Reading HIGH SLACK from a historically- and socially-constructed position

It eventually became clear to me that my assumptions were ends and beginnings. They resulted from my identity and positioning in this time and place. I inhabit a position of relative privilege in a world of unequal and historically-determined relations of power, and my assumptions were informed by both my location in that web of relationships and my analyses of it. My assumptions were also the starting points of my research: they formed the questions I felt I needed to ask and the answers I (erroneously) thought I already had.

For a long time I was very concerned about having no *theory* to accompany this research. It was something I knew I had to acquire, but I wasn't sure how to accomplish this[6]. What I didn't realize was that articulated theories were already embedded in ways that I was thinking about the specifics of the research and the situation. My perceptions of HIGH SLACK and the way I approached the installation - which I *experienced* as an innocent encounter - were formed and conditioned by modes of thinking determined by the way dominant Canadian culture and society (of which I am a member) learns about the world. My own perspective has been formed in relation to this historically-situated world view.

'World view' is a word that is applied most often to 'other' peoples which the dominant society conceives as discrete clumps of difference - defined by their un-belonging to a society claiming to be a universalized standard. This fictional universal whole (which in reality is racially - and culturally - specific and regulated) , which often goes by the names of "Canada" or "society" or "history", supposedly includes and neutrally represents the universal human collective, but actually defines itself against particular 'other' groups, designated by class and gender and sexuality and

(dis)ability as well as by race and ethnicity [7].

I discovered that I actually *had* some theory already for this thesis when I realized that my *authority and permission* to experience an art work in the "ideal" way favoured by the society, i.e. on an individual level, in a humanistic, universalistic frame of mind - the intrepid singular psyche explores a new aesthetic realm - was dictated by how I am identified *in* the society. As a white woman I am assumed (most of the time) to naturally belong to the society's 'mainstream', to represent its values, and to be represented by its institutions and discourses. I am constructed as a culturally - (and racially -) defined insider and my existence is addressed by many art works and by art theory. If I were not white and middle-class, I would experience many more cultural products as excluding me and my engagement with them.

As one belonging to, and raised and educated in the dominating culture, discourses, and institutions, I have always been told, explicitly or by omission of all else, that my situation and history and place in the world - the window from which I look - is the only view on the world. Leaks in this presentation were fairly well mopped up by the 'othering' and particularizing techniques outlined above, i.e. yes, there are 'other' ("primitive", "precapitalist", "third world", "nomadic", "subsistence", you can continue the list...) ways of being, but they are viewed, surveyed, defined, written and lectured about, and dealt with in political and economic as well as academic terms, as deviant, behind, or simply, but wholly and totally, different. This structure of thought is so strong that it became difficult for me to see that *I* have any culture at all. The dominating culture becomes falsely invisible, universalized, and standardized against the 'difference' found in 'others'. My position, in many cases, is that of the blank white page against which the markings of specific culture and historically recognizable worldview become legible. This is the message I received in spite of the relativist tendency of some of my anthropological educators; I was taught about acculturation and enculturation and ethnocentrism, but these terms were rarely applied to *me*. I also received this message despite my feminist awareness and lived knowledge that as a woman I *am* the

particular, the visible, the different, and the deviant against which historical male specificity masquerades and rules as the universal.

Where did my knowledge of feminist theory about 'other'ing go as I looked at Williams' works and thought about what they meant? I think that because my experience *does* match the Eurocentric story of Canadian life well in some ways, combined with the fact that I have been the most eager of students, I had learned my lessons too well, and thus had to unlearn them more consciously than I acquired them. I carried my presumption of culturelessness and belief in universal individualism into my encounter with HIGH SLACK, and into my research about it. My experience of the installation in the very first instance and always after that – thus with effects on my research methods and path - was fundamentally determined by how I am identified in this place, in this body, in this time. It's necessary to factor my positioning in the collective society - therefore my position in systemic relations of inequality - into thinking about how I viewed and related to the installation, to other viewers of the show, and to people who helped me do my research.

I think that two of my new lessons as a white, middle-class, able-bodied, heterosexual girl/woman are important to understanding how my response to HIGH SLACK held to a historically and culturally specific worldview (was and is raced and classed as well as gendered), how and why it has taken a long time for me to understand this in any graspable way, and how my innocences/ignorances, trippings and stumblings, and confrontations are connected to the ideological and theoretical ways I approached the research and the ways I am still re-framing it as I write.

The first new lesson is the one I've been exploring so far: that as a white person who has lived with considerable privilege, it has been easy for me to accept - that is to say it has been difficult to grasp and critique - the message that my culture and world view are universal, natural, and neutral, and represent progress, reason, clarity, history, and humanity.

The second lesson overlaps the first substantially but took on a special articulation and

weight in my life as a student in an art history department. As an undergraduate student, I began to hear and read critiques of the message of European universalism. I began to adopt these arguments and direct them at the education I was receiving in art history. But even as I learned the words ethnocentrism and Eurocentrism and learned how apply the critiques of anti-racism and anti-sexism to the narrow history I was being taught, I failed to understand how close the dominant Euro-story was to my own place in the world and to my own cultural training and apparatus. I didn't *feel* as I do now that my own eyes were viewing windows of the ideology I learned.

Since my first critique of Eurocentric art history came from a jarring sense of being excluded as a possible subject, viewer or writer, and teacher of art because of my gender, I saw myself as *outside* the narrative of art history. As a woman I was one of the ignored and unspoken to. I did begin to articulate and critique the racism of art history - in its neglect of the arts of the majority of the world's people, in its colonialist-structured perceptions of these arts when it did notice non-European forms, and in its arrogant assessments of the use of such forms by "primitivist" Europeans (Gauguin, Picasso, etc.). However, my critiques of art history along these lines were not turned to myself. *My* thorough education in and assimilation of the narrow conception of art history that I was exposed to did not come into question because I was offended by the racializing of the discipline, and I was busy telling myself that the department should be diversifying and teaching about non-European art as well as about art by nonwhites in European and European-dominated places. Since I was critical, and I was an outsider to art history anyway because of its sexism and my femaleness, I was exempt from examination. I failed to see how my white skin and background continued to make me an insider: one whose critical but still functional understanding of art as a universal expression of individual creativity was dictated by a culture which was both *my* specific heritage and a dominating ideology which actively suppressed 'other' approaches to artistic production. Interestingly, I was conscious of analyses of the actual social and historical construction of art as a category of individuality, genius, and inspiration, and, following feminist authors, wrote

critically about the mystification of the arts as a world apart. Still, I operated *within* this framework more than I realized, and I deployed it automatically as I tried to approach HIGH SLACK as a research topic. In fact, I was inside *and* outside the dominant art-historical discourse at the same time, being a European-Canadian *and* a woman, being an art history student who learned her lessons well *and* a feminist critic of my lessons' biases.

It's only in coming to the challenge of writing about my research on HIGH SLACK that the duality of my position - and my vision - has become clear to me. My questions and analysis have followed two divergent paths simultaneously. These paths were cleared by two things: first, my relative belonging in the collective society's dominating culture and the way this belonging has determined my un*self*conscious learning of that culture's univocal (art) history and ideologies; and second, my critical stance toward these lessons, enabled by feminist discourses.

Methodology and dichotomy

I have actually been dealing with *two* dualities, which interrelate in practice: the first being my insider/outsider status in relation to the racism-sexism of traditional art history; the second being two divergent methodological and theoretical approaches to art research. One approach is associated with traditional art history and criticism, the other with social or critical art history (or anthropology and sociology). My current understanding of these dualities forms the framework of this thesis.

The opposition between art-critical/historical and social science methods structured my research process in an important way. I will call the two poles of this pair "hermeneutical" and "analytical" approaches, following Janet Wolff's use of Lucien Goldman's work (1981: 103-4). Wolff defines hermeneutics as "the study, or theory, of interpretation" (98) and uses Goldmann's writing on the plays of Racine to distinguish this focus on *understanding* from efforts to *explain*. A hermeneutical approach to an installation like HIGH SLACK would interpret its content and form,

while an analytical approach would seek to situate the artworks "in the wider structures in which they originate and which they express" - in 'other' words, to view them in a historical location (104). In my research process, I have followed both hermeneutical and analytical approaches.

My art-historical background structured my initial idea for doing research on HIGH SLACK. Believing that my task in graduate research was to generate original ideas and information, I decided that I needed to wring new knowledge out of the art works and their immediate context of display by interviewing the artist and gaining insight into the meaning of the installation by recording her thoughts and then interpreting them, and the artworks, myself. From my background in art history I was used to reading championing monographs of dead artists and famous-person type interviews with those still alive. In contrast, the more critical, socially, historically and politically-grounded analyses of art I *had* read dealt with eras past and with broad tendencies and themes, and I found it difficult to relate these to doing research on a contemporary artist I could talk to personally[8]. Although I wanted part of my study to be a kind of contemporary history of the political issues I thought HIGH SLACK engaged, this aspect seemed like a branch of my *reading* of the art works, i.e. a reinforcement of what I saw as the pieces' meaning, more than an *explanation* of the installation as a result of, and a contributor to, our historical moment and place. I imagined using the public response books in the gallery in a similar way; the comments would gauge the works' effectiveness in communicating the meaning of HIGH SLACK (my reading of it) and would sample visitors' reactions to what I interpreted as the works' message. I envisioned interviews with the artist as my main source of material. My assumption was that telling the truth about the installation's meaning was possible and this was the objective [9]. It seemed like a matter of mining and displaying the artist's intentions, and combining them with my interpretations of the artworks, their textual sources, and the curator's understanding of the installation's significance.

However, as time passed I began to learn a bit about the complexity of the situation surrounding this installation. Context became a crucial consideration as I discovered that my

research plans and requirements were not the only process happening in relation to the installation. There were many relationships and processes developing around HIGH SLACK, before and after the works' exhibition. I thought of asking questions about the terms of the installation's production, negotiation, exhibition, and reception(s). I realized that learning about the artworks was not only an end in itself but also provided a way to think about the society that surrounds it and us, and about some cultural, ideological, and socio-political issues relevant to the installation and its context. I decided that I should talk to people involved in setting up the installation for public viewing and to different people who saw and reacted to it and to issues it brought up. The artist's intentions and works moved off to the side and I began to see HIGH SLACK as a jumping-off point to talking about political, historical and cultural issues.

In this movement my research practice and goals became more attached to a familiar feminist theoretical perspective, one which rejects the myth of objective knowledge (often claimed by white supremacist, classist, and sexist disciplines) and instead insists on the reality of the concealed social construction of knowledge and systems of knowledge. In deciding not to try to find "one interpretation which is better than another" or to recreate "original meanings", I shifted to thinking about how to "correctly locat[e] and thus 'explain'" HIGH SLACK in context. I moved from a focus on hermeneutics to include what Janet Wolff calls a critical sociology of art (1981:105). Wolff says it is the duty of such a study to show the ways communication is "distorted" by its construction in "unequal relations and structures of power in our society" (105). I explored the physical context of HIGH SLACK itself and followed threads from its subject matter and sources to contemporary issues. I found that many of the details surrounding the installation - the conditions of its production and reception and the relationships that did or did not develop alongside it - had everything to do with unequal relations and structures of power in our society.

For example, at a certain point the status and role of a museum of *anthropology* as HIGH SLACK's home arose as a big question mark. The University of British Columbia Museum of

Anthropology holds an important position in the local cultural scene, which is heavily invested in and busily debating about indigenous cultural and artistic production and activity, especially that of 'Northwest Coast' First Nations. Discourse about First Nations' culture and art happens against and is intimately tied to current political struggles and their historic status. Artifacts, such as many of those stored at MOA, are directly connected to the governmental and territorial systems of B.C. First Nations, and therefore to contemporary land claims and treaty negotiations. Control over cultural heritage, production, and representation comes hand in hand with control over land and resources and political self-determination in B.C. today. These links were strengthened in my mind at a meeting held on November 19, 1994 at the University of British Columbia First Nations House of Learning. Entitled Symposium: The Tsilhqot'in War of 1864 & 1993 Cariboo-Chilcotin Justice Inquiry, the gathering witnessed the connectedness of First Nations/British, and First Nations/Canadian, relationships in the past and present. The ways these issues, touched on in HIGH SLACK, were variously taken up by *Tsilhqot'in*, by members of other First Nations, by descendants of British colonists, by judges and lawyers, and by others, made it obvious that there was a lot to *explain* in the installation's birth in and effect on a complex web of relationships. Which relationships? Those between: the non-First Nations artist and people belonging to several First Nations; the artist and the Tsilhqot'in Nation; the artist and MOA; the installation's curator and the artist; the curator and other MOA staff; MOA and the Tsilhqot'in Nation; MOA and UBC; MOA and its public audiences; and between the researcher (me) and the artist, the curator, MOA staff, and members of the Tsilhqot'in Nation; and between the viewers (non-indigenous and indigenous) of HIGH SLACK, one of whom vandalized parts of the installation, and the art itself. These relationships will be explored in the thesis.

Having followed two distinctive research methods so far, I'm not about to abandon their results now. While I have chosen to organize and write using an *analytical* framework and will seek to explain HIGH SLACK in context, there will be places where I will incorporate interpretation of

the artworks as well. One reason I will include some of my own readings is because they shed light on my position in relation to people from whom I tried to learn in my research process. It is important to spotlight *my* location because it is a place formed by unequal, racist relationships that are the result of our colonial history. By looking at a specific story, and in part by talking to people affected by it and by neo-colonial power relations, I have tried to learn about those very unequal relationships. Therefore my own place in these structures must be acknowledged. As Celia Haig-Brown explains, using analyses from Foucault and sociology of knowledge literature, "knowledge is created and recreated in interactions among people" (1995: 14). My interactions with other people in doing research were structured by specific inequalities which relate to B.C.'s colonial past and neo-colonial present. Both in Haig-Brown's study of First Nations control of education and in my project on HIGH SLACK, knowledge *about* power relations is produced in interaction between people operating from different places *in* those unequal relations [10].

My other reason for including some interpretive response to the installation is that I want to recognize the interesting and special aspects of studying a group of artworks. As I've outlined - and experienced - there is a perceived and expected oppositional duality between analytical and hermeneutical approaches to cultural products and processes. Art-critical studies have usually limited themselves to a variety of forms of interpretation, and sociological studies tend to ignore aesthetic discourse. By adopting an analytical approach which *includes* hermeneutical moments, I will call on feminist scholarship's longstanding challenge to sexist and Eurocentric dichotomous thinking.

Feminist theory, dichotomies, and disciplines

European dichotomous models have created hierarchical dualities between concepts imagined to be discrete and absolute opposites, like:

mind / body

good / evil

male / female

white / black

virgin / whore, et cetera.

It has been argued by feminists and others that dichotomies are not a natural state of being but a constructed pattern that grew out of a western tradition of understanding the world by defining and categorizing things that do not necessarily (or ever) *fit* into categories. For something to be defined completely we need to know what it is *not* as much as what it is, and so understanding becomes an exercise in asserting total difference and complete lack of overlap between generated pairs of ideas. In this way the world is divided up into thesis and antithesis. Many have argued that the core of this worldview is Eurocentric patriarchy's deployment of the binary "self/other". Degradations of women by men have been seen as the results of thinking which normalizes the (male) "self" by casting the (female) "other" as the opposite, absence of personhood, and manifestation of absolute difference. Ethnocentric and racist conceptions of the (non-Christian, non-white) "other" can be analyzed in these terms too. Feminist writing from many perspectives has sought to replace such "either/or" thinking with "both/and" reasoning which deals fruitfully with interrelationships, even between *apparently* contradictory ideas or positions. Many theorists strive to see and articulate two sides of a so-called "oppositional" pair at once in order to reach a better, and what is often termed "dialectical", understanding.

My research has combined both sides of a lesser binary: between hermeneutics and analysis. The process has been profoundly multidisciplinary - in what I've read as well as in what I've done and asked. I have drawn ideas and approaches from art: history, art criticism, anthropology, sociology, and history; postcolonial, cultural, museum, literary, and First Nations studies; and anti-racist, Black feminist, Chicana feminist and Third World feminist theory.

For me, the possibility of researching and explaining in a truly multidisciplinary way has

been enabled by women's studies. Feminist scholarship has long emphasized tearing down rigid boundaries between sexist fields of knowledge. The practice of this theory in women's studies has allowed me to suspend and actually forget about arbitrary definitions and divisions between disciplines as I've tried to find a combination of approaches which helps me make sense of a complex and specific situation. The methodology of my research illustrates this fact. I have combined, through a process of making one decision at a time as choices have surfaced, the methods of inquiry of several disciplines.

An investigation of HIGH SLACK's receptions by various museum visitors and the ideologies that informed them became relevant after reading the public response books included in the gallery. In reading these texts I began to ask questions about the Museum of Anthropology as a setting for the installation and about museums and cultural representation in general. Here, where the art works and their contexts meet, an anthropological and museological aspect concentrated.

Historical research became an important focus as I sifted through the references and documents which constructed the histories displayed in HIGH SLACK. I learned about some of the issues and theories of historiography and tried to apply them to the specific colonial and neo-colonial story at hand.

History and anthropology research issues sprang out of the symposium on the Tsilhqot'in War and Cariboo-Chilcotin Justice Inquiry. At this meeting I began to envision a broader scope, realizing that to learn about HIGH SLACK as one part of a developing reality I needed to find out about how 'others' responded to it: how did it fit (or not) into their struggles to understand, rewrite, and live with local histories and current situations? The experience of seeing and listening to so many people affected by or concerned with HIGH SLACK's subject matter sent me looking for ways to talk to 'others' about B.C. history, its echoes in today's politics, HIGH SLACK, MOA, and the symposium.

I spoke to the exhibit's curator, Rosa Ho, and Annie William, a *Tsilhqot'in* woman and former

chief of the *Xeni Gwet'in* (Nemiah people), in an effort to get a glimpse of the web of relationships, dynamics and stories touched by Judy Williams' installation. I thought that although it was impossible to map out all the connections and breaks between art works, institutions, histories, and people, I could learn more from HIGH SLACK's existence and display by sampling 'other's' reactions and explanations. In this way, anthropological/sociological methods - interviews across experience and culture - became important.

Thus, influenced by post-colonial studies, I moved between art criticism, art history, history, sociology and anthropology throughout the research process. To pick up on one important aspect of this interdisciplinary positioning, in later pages I will explore a few selected facets of the discipline of anthropology, with particular reference to its history in Europe and North America. For the purposes of this thesis, I have found that one aspect of this discipline's origins and history is particularly relevant to the case study of a contemporary work such as HIGH SLACK. This aspect has to do with anthropology's historical links with the project and practices of global European colonialism.

I do not suggest that anthropology is the only discipline with past ties to colonialism and an ongoing relationship with concepts rooted in this dominant colonial project, and neither do I intend to convey that anthropology is synonymous with colonialism or that it manifests all its attributes. In fact, anthropology is a *highly* complex and divergent field with many different histories and projects, some of them running directly counter to colonial imperatives - and I have not been *thoroughly* trained in any of them. I therefore want to emphasize that I do not claim or intend to summarize anthropology's histories or meanings as a whole in this thesis. Nevertheless, I believe that to understand what HIGH SLACK's meanings are in its contexts and in the receptions of many of its viewers, anthropology's connections to colonial processes should be explored and foregrounded as *one part* of its heritage - a part which continues to impact variously on projects undertaken within its realm.

A reception theory framework

One of the main points of the thesis is not only to assert but to demonstrate the ways in which HIGH SLACK created and was given new and multiple meanings in its interaction not only with different audiences, but also with a context of shared beliefs and ideologies particular to the 'western'-dominated culture of B.C. This strategy (weaving contextual analysis with 'art criticism' and analysis of different audiences' receptions) is intended to elucidate not only some meanings and functions of the art itself, but also to explore the receptions of different audiences precisely because they tell me things about our cultural, intellectual, and political moment and place, and the debates and ideologies which animate it.

By developing this analysis, I have called on reception theory, as developed in the past couple of decades in art history and cultural studies [11]. To explain my approach, I will refer to Stuart Hall's four-stage theory of communication (comprising production, circulation, use, and reproduction) outlined in his essay "Encoding, Decoding"(1993) [12]. Hall described these stages of communication as "relatively autonomous", indicating that the coding of a message controls its receptions, but not definitively. In his theory, each stage has limits, with the result that while polysemy (multiple meanings being attributed to a message or image) is usual, limitless or free pluralism in audiences' readings is not possible.

Two drawbacks of communications theory which Hall sought to address in this article were its uni-directional linearity, which proposed meanings being transmitted from sender to receiver in an uncomplicated way through the "message", and its "absence of a structured conception of the different moments as a complex structure of relations"(1993:91).

These criticisms have also been levelled by art historians at strictly artist-focussed theories about the effects of an artwork's display which posit a relatively fixed meaning's transferral *from* the artist through the work or exhibition to the audience [13]. I have been working against this kind of linearity in my ideas (developed in the process of research) about a certain amount of (not

necessarily cooperative) co-production of meanings in the interactions *between* researcher and interviewees and between different viewers of HIGH SLACK and their varying responses to it [14]. This process of meaning-production in interaction had limits caused primarily by the interdisciplinarity of my research; my interviewing has not been nearly as intensive or extensive as a purely ethnographic model would require, but more in-depth, broad, and contextualized than most art-historical or art-critical projects would allow. The idea of meanings negotiated in multiple ways and in social interaction links with my insistence on relating the many receptions and moments of meaning-negotiation which HIGH SLACK and my research caused back to an over-arching socio-political structure which positions people in complex relations to each 'other'. These relations are determined by historically-created and circulated ideas about group identity as well as by historically-created inequalities between groups and unequal relations in power between groups and individuals. I have mediated between limitless pluralism and a singular or linear structure of dominant ideology-determined meaning transmission by focussing on a complex of relationships between individuals, groups, and the exhibition, the differences in positioning their encounters uncovered, the range of their receptions, and the ideologies and frameworks their responses interacted with - on different levels and in different ways.

There are places where I differ from Hall's model, and these differences seem to emerge from applying a form of reception theory to HIGH SLACK as a contemporary *art work* (Hall uses television programming as his model) with historical and political implications. He wrote:

> it is... possible and useful to think of this process in terms of a structure produced and sustained through the articulations of linked but distinctive moments - production, circulation, distribution/consumption, reproduction. This would be to think of the process as a 'complex structure in dominance', sustained through the articulation of connected practices, each of which, however, retains its distinctiveness and has its own specific modality, its own forms and conditions of existence (1993:91).

I think this *may* be too deterministic (at least as it applies to an art work such as HIGH SLACK). I do not think it is necessary to endorse post-modernist fantasies about endless variation

and escape from socially-imposed categories of identity, historical-material realities of systemic inequalities, and buttressed meanings reproduced in structures of dominance in order to observe and claim more non-linearity and diversity in receptions and use of this image-text (HIGH SLACK) than this model may allow. However, many aspects of Hall's theory of cultural production and reception seem both to reflect the kind of method I have developed for explaining HIGH SLACK's meanings and functions in its context, and to provide a good base for further exploring reception theory's applicability to contemporary art exhibitions.

Siting my research in history and mapping my theory in context(s)

Methodology, theory, and subject matter are virtually inseparable in this research and its presentation. Political, cultural, and intellectual sensitive spots initiated methodological alterations and learning, and methodological frameworks, limitations, and issues sparked entrance and insights into political, theoretical, ideological, and cultural issues throughout the research and writing. This is reflected in the structure and arguments of the thesis: methodological reflection and commentary intertwines with theoretical, contextual, and historical analysis.

During my research, I have relied on the willingness of certain people to share their time and their thoughts about a project which is very important to them, and which, in my opinion, is important in itself. The decisions of Judith Williams, the exhibition's artist, and Rosa Ho, its curator, to talk about HIGH SLACK with me allowed me to obtain information without which I could not have written the analysis in this thesis, and to which I had no other access. Large parts of this thesis involve my interpretation and explanation of the information, perspectives, and opinions expressed by these two women as well as some communicated to me by Annie William of the *Tsilhqot'in* community of *Xeni Gwet'in*, and others.

My purpose in the thesis is not to examine the actions and thoughts of these women; they are not the subject of this thesis. Rather, I have tried to make use of their experiences and points of

view in order to learn and communicate about important issues and questions related to our society. I have worked to find and explain the links between opinions expressed by these women and the cultural discourses, paradigms, and political ideologies which are relevant to the societal context of HIGH SLACK [15]. I do not offer my analysis of these opinions from the position of a disengaged, critical outsider, since I share Williams' and Ho's interest in HIGH SLACK, in the University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology (MOA) where they were exhibited, and in how the exhibition has been interpreted during its display. My interest is sympathetic. Furthermore, my examination of the individual perspectives and issues surrounding the installation is the project of a *participant* in the discourses which affected HIGH SLACK and which have developed in relation to it, rather than the critique of an observer. As a women's studies researcher, sometime student at MOA, and part-time museum worker, I am very much implicated in the same paradigms and ideologies which I analyze in connection to my conversations with Williams and Ho, and others.

My idea is that those who have come into the orbit of HIGH SLACK and the museum which housed it are forced to engage and come to terms with a certain set of popular and academic, cultural and political discourses and categories. To use the metaphor developed by Williams in her installation, they must somehow negotiate the currents that come with the tides. My research seeks to *locate* the perspectives of these women *within* those popular and academic, cultural and political discourses and categories. I have tried to apply the same attempt at understanding to myself and my own negotiations of broad histories and ideologies that I apply to the information and ideas presented to me by Williams, Ho, William, and others about the exhibition, the Museum of Anthropology, and its social context.

I hope that this approach illuminates aspects of three things: first, the specific issues and debates which are relevant to HIGH SLACK and their implications; second, the ways that these particular issues relate to broader cultural/political/social modes of thought; and third, some ways that these historical, cultural, political, social, and economic structures produce differences between

people.

Doing my research in women's studies has meant that I could translate this multidisciplinary research into an integrated thesis which combines the results of varying research practices as well as theoretical approaches from diverse sources.

Endnotes

1. Judith Williams' exhibition HIGH SLACK ran at the UBC Museum of Anthropology from June 24, 1994 to January 3, 1995. In this thesis I will quote extensively from historical sources used by the artist in the exhibition. Through viewing the installation I was prompted to look at the primary sources myself, but in the thesis I will quote Williams' excerpts of these sources. In some cases I quote directly from the art works in HIGH SLACK, and in others I quote from the book, also called High Slack, which Williams published in 1996.

2. Williams documents this moment in her book (a textual exploration of the 19th-century history traced in the exhibition HIGH SLACK):

> Valdes' *Mexicana* and the *Sutil* were, like Captain George Vancouver' ships *Discovery* and *Chatham*, en route to Nootka Sound on the west coast of Vancouver Island. Their mission was to resolve the "Nootka controversy" between the Spanish and British over which of them had possession of the area – despite the 10,000-year occupation by the people of the area.... Unwell, Vancouver remained on board the Discovery at Teakerne Arm, an West Redonda Island, working on his charts. "Our situation here," he wrote in his log, "is totally desolate." Hence Desolation Sound. But the sailors brewed up spruce beer and, according to Menzies, the ship's doctor, used the lake above Teakerne Falls "as a resort". Desolation Sound indeed! (1996: 15).

3. I use both full quotation marks (" ") and scare quotes (' ') in the thesis. Full quotation marks are used when I am quoting a person or text directly or when I am using a term that I have borrowed from another specific usage. I use scare quotes to indicate that the word or concept inside them should not be taken at face value - that I do not uncritically accept or endorse the concept or label but am making conscious reference to a term or a way that it is commonly used.

4. I use several terms in this thesis to refer to the diverse nations and cultural groups who are the original inhabitants of Canada. "First Nations", "First Peoples", "aboriginal", "indigenous", and "Native" are all used in these pages. I use them interchangeably, and I have chosen to use them all because they are all currently being used by aboriginal people in Canada to represent themselves. Many of these terms have problems associated with them. "Native", "aboriginal" and "indigenous" are terms that have been criticized on the basis that they were imposed by colonizers and immigrants on original peoples and do not reflect either the great diversity among distinct groups of First Peoples or the many ways that these groups have named themselves over time. "First Nations" has come under scrutiny because it is sometimes seen to exclude Inuit and Metis people as well as 'status' aboriginal people who live off-reserve. Wherever possible I use the name of the specific group of people I am referring to, and I have tried to be as up-to-date and accurate as possible with the names and spellings that nations and communities are currently using. As relationships between indigenous groups and the rest of Canadian society change, naming practices

are changing too, and the last several years have seen many groups both shedding and taking on older and newer names and forms of names. For a discussion of naming and indigenous people in Canada, see Patricia Monture's essay, "I Know My Name: A First Nations Woman Speaks" (1993).

5. I use the words "collective", "our", and "society" in this thesis frequently. I am using these words in a specific way which is intended to recognize, rather than obscure or deny, the social and political diversity and dynamics often hidden when these words are used to represent or invoke a monolithic and imagined-to-be-consensus-based whole. In contrast, I use these words only to indicate that at some level, British Columbian and Canadian society does operate and function (or malfunction) as a group. I do not think that the dominant identity (white, male, urban, middle-upper class, heterosexual, etc.) represents, or even tries to represent, all the society's members. In fact, in other pages in the thesis, I describe the ways Canada's assumed monolithic identity actively marginalizes, ignores, and excludes many people according to socially- and historically- constructed categories of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and (dis)ability. When I use the words "our", "collective", and "society", therefore, I am hoping that this critical analysis is read into them. I do not believe that I speak for others in the society.

6. A collection of articles called Give Back: First Nations Perspectives on Cultural Practice, with essays by Maria Campbell, Doreen Jensen, Joy Asham Fedorick, Joane Quick-to-See Smith, Jeanette Armstrong, and Lee Maracle, all First Nations or Metis women, provided me with a range of analyses of colonialism, racism, art history and the contemporary art world, language, writing, and cultural appropriation in Canada. Reading this book was an important moment of reinforcement for me in thinking about 'theory', its role in my research, and what I wanted to do about it. Aware, as I began on my thesis, that I was supposed to *get* some theory, and constantly being pointed and referred to standard theoretical authorities by people and texts, I was confused about how or why it was a necessity or even a good idea to look to these authorities in order to write about struggles and negotiations and connections between aboriginal and non-aboriginal women (and men). While recognizing the *possible* usefulness of non-feminist, widely-established theorists to my explorations, the idea of *always* going to them to explain the processes and issues I was observing seemed undesirable. Part of the reason I wanted to study in a women's studies department was to learn from the writings and perspectives of women and feminists about things that non-feminists have explained for themselves. Weren't there other people I could learn from, especially since my research was an attempt to deal in some ways with local historical and current (mis)representations of people often considered the society's 'other'? As I read Give Back and other books and essays and interviews by aboriginal women (such as Maracle, Armstrong, Campbell, and Alanis Obomsawin), the answer became an obvious "yes".

7. Himani Bannerji and Arun Mukherjee make some interesting points about the racially-defined myth of Canadian identity in their interview called "The Other Family", in Bannerji, 1993.

Sunera Thobani, in a public talk at Simon Fraser University on November 6, 1996, presented her view that a consciously anti-racist approach is required to recognize and understand the dominance and hegemony of white culture-based definitions of nation and society. She pointed out that many words and concepts that are ubiquitous in current public discourse, such as "ethnic" and "multiculturalism", operate to contain the criticisms and equality demands of women colour because they use white middle-class identity as a standard against which 'ethnicity' and 'culture' and 'race' are defined as 'difference' . This has the effect, Thobani argues, of making (white-defined) difference look like the problem, instead of focussing on the failures, limitations, and oppressive effects of inequality-producing power relations, systems and structures in our society. It also leads to specific forms of racism which target "immigrants" and their cultures as threatening the (fictional) unity of Canadian "citizenship" and "national identity" (my notes).

Edward Said has an interesting perspective on cultures' interactions with the actuality of internal cultural complexity and the myth of (culturally and racially) monolithic national identities:

> ...cultures are humanly made structures of both authority and participation, benevolent in what they include, incorporate, and validate, less benevolent in what they exclude and demote.
>
> There is in all nationally defined cultures... an aspiration to sovereignty, to sway, and to dominance.... At the same time, paradoxically, we have never been as aware as we are now of how oddly hybrid historical and cultural experiences are, of how they partake of many often contradictory experiences and domains, cross national boundaries, defy the *police* action of simple dogma and loud patriotism. Far from being unitary or monolithic or autonomous things, cultures actually assume more "foreign" elements, alterities, differences, than they consciously exclude....
>
> These are not nostalgically academic or theoretical questions, for as a brief excursion or two will ascertain, they have important social and political consequences (1993: 15).

8. For examples, see Melissa Dabakis' "Gendered Labour: Norman Rockwell's Rosie the Riveter and the discourses of wartime womanhood"; Barbara Melosh's "Manly Work (Public Art and Masculinity in Depression America"; and Ellen Wiley Todd's "Art, the 'New Woman', and Consumer Culture", all in Melosh, ed., 1993.

9. My assumption was informed by what art historian Janet Wolff calls an author-centred focus on 'correct' textual interpretation:

> E.D. Hirsch has argued strongly in favour of the possibility of valid interpretation... he recognises that there are always problems of interpretation.... Nevertheless, his view is that there is a 'correct' interpretation, which it is the job of... scholarship to attain. This is the author's own original meaning (1981:98).

Wolff contrasts this approach to interpretation with "radical hermeneutics", which "rejects this order of priority", and in some cases reverses it, privileging a reader's/viewer's *over* the producer's intent (99). Wolff herself takes a position between these extremes in defining her approach to reception theory, with which I concur. This paragraph also serves as an alternate way to describe my thesis project with its reception theory framework and focus on contextualization:

> ...authorial meaning does indeed have some sort of priority over other readings, and therefore biographical and other information about authors is relevant for the study of literature [and, I think, art]. But this is not an argument for any kind of 'valid' interpretation.... What is far more important than the fact that, as a... critical exercise, we may attempt to recover an author's meaning, is the fact that this meaning is effectively dead. What an author intended... is... of interest insofar as that original meaning has... informed the present reading of the text.... A sociology of literature [or art]... would incorporate original meaning (and its construction), mediation of that meaning through, for example, a series of critics, and meaning attached to the work by any new reader [viewer], as well as the interrelations between these(1981: 102-3).

10. Haig-Brown studies educational practices as "one of the ways in which power relations [between indigenous and non-indigenous people] have been established and circulated"(16). It is possible to analyze representational practices in museums, galleries, and elsewhere as another mode of articulation of unequal power relations in Canada. Part of my exploration of issues surrounding HIGH SLACK in the following pages will make this connection.

11. Reception theory is applied on a widespread scale in art-historical literature at this point. Many authors introduce the concept of production and reception as part of their basic frameworks for studying art. For example, in On the Margins of Art Worlds, editor Larry Gross introduces the book's contents by writing that:

> Art is a term that has been used in too many ways and applied to too many phenomena to have a simple or consistent meaning. However, common patterns can be discerned. Works of art seem generally to be considered communicative acts, and therefore we can adapt the shorthand definition of a communicative event as involving a *source* who *encodes* a *message* that is *decoded* by a *receiver*; in the case of the arts each of these terms takes on special properties: an *artist creates* a *work of art* that is *appreciated* by an *audience* (1995: 1).

Cultural studies also commonly makes use of reception theory. John Cruz and Justin Lewis outline its application in the area in their collection Viewing, Reading, Listening: Audiences and Cultural Reception:

> Today, questions about audiences (and related notions like interpretive communities, reading formations, reception, and identity formations) loom large within cultural studies... Much of this new interest in audiences has come about through cross-disciplinary convergences among the social sciences and the humanities... Cross-disciplinary cultural analysis now requires a relative openness, in which the capacity to move beyond narrowly defined intellectual borders is both a necessity and a virtue (1994: 1).

12. Stuart Hall's theory in turn drew on art-historical sources, his participation in the Birmingham School, and Barthes and Foucault.

13. In art history, reception theory which investigated changing meanings given to an artwork or exhibition over time or between audience members had its start in T.J. Clark's Image of the People: Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution (London: Thames & Hudson, 1973). It traced the changing receptions of Courbet's *Burial at Ornans*. Variations and elaborations on reception theory are now common in art historical scholarship.

14. Anthropologist Greg Sarris describes many aspects of co-production of meaning between researchers and interviewees. They range from conscious collaboration to cross-cultural misunderstanding producing meanings limited by the researcher's assumptions or lack of knowledge about cultural context or by an interviewee's intentional reticence or misleading. While I am not claiming that the former happened in my thesis research, I think that something akin to the latter did in my attempts to do research with Annie William, a *Tsilhqot'in* woman. I also think that difference in perspective and position between myself and the artist, and between myself and HIGH SLACK's curator, influenced the meanings I was able to take away from our interviews. Sarris writes about the results of an anthropological study of his people, the Kashaya Pomo of California, to indicate that whereas Robert Oswalt may have thought he was presenting traditional Kashaya stories and story-telling structures in all their authenticity and entirety, has was in fact accessing something different:

> He [Oswalt] has information, but it is not engaged with the world from which the information comes.... Any attempt on the part of the fieldworkers to recreate "the native scene" risks the danger of denying the present, of displacing the significance of the fieldworkers' presence and how it affects the speakers' and ultimately the fieldworkers' re-creation.... What resulted was a text that reflected, at least to some degree, that situation [of the fieldwork itself].... [W]hat would emerge... would not be a text native to the Kashaya Pomo but to the Kashaya Pomo and a fieldworker (1993: 21-2).

15. While this *is* my approach, it's important to recognize that by investigating HIGH SLACK's meanings and implications I also must discuss Williams as its maker. While MOA was the context of its receptions and partly of its production, Williams' specific role as the artist is central to both the installation and its display and to this thesis.

Chapter 1: Political contexts of artistic production

Analysis of an art work (such as HIGH SLACK) partly as a manifestation of and collaborator in a culture's changing discourses on chronic and central issues like race, gender, history-telling, and environment can allow for expansion and alteration of perspectives on both art and its contexts. It is with this link in mind that I will briefly outline, as a background summary, some specific cultural and political discourses. I have chosen to refer to those popular conversations and debates which I think a) set the stage for the installation's creation and display, b) affected the way the exhibition actually was produced *and* received, and c) have become a framework for my own analysis of what HIGH SLACK means in context.

Because HIGH SLACK deals in some sense with historical and contemporary relationships between aboriginal people, non-aboriginal people, and the land we all inhabit, it is important to remember the prominence of racist and neo-colonial attitudinal streams which condition these relationships in North America and other settler societies and specifically in B.C. My argument is that the context in which people produced and received the exhibition is soaked through by these kinds of attitudes and issues. In this section I would like to briefly look at B.C.'s general political climate in relation to issues affecting First Nations and First Nations people and the relevance of land claims and treaty-making struggles to aboriginal art.

General Political Climate

B.C.'s general political climate in relation to First Nations should be factored into an understanding of HIGH SLACK's production and meanings to its viewers. Any art work (or other kind of text or representation) which refers to the existence of aboriginal people necessarily evokes and must define its own relationship to a set of politics around First Nations history and rights which seems to be perpetually at a *near*-crisis point in this province. HIGH SLACK functions similarly to B.C. First Nations art in this particular way: although connection to political

relationships between aboriginal and non-aboriginal people *may* be denied, both in fact invoke a specific set of cultural and political assumptions and images linked to the ways immigrant (meaning all non-aboriginals) and indigenous people live together in B.C. While different representations link back to these contextual politics in different ways and on different levels, it is important to remember that the context never fades away. Rather, the ideas that make it up re-circulate constantly, framing and informing the ways artists and viewers produce and receive cultural objects made by First Nations people or referring to First Nations people. In the next pages I'll note some ideas which stand out as major streams of influence in this context, but for now I want to draw a quick, non-comprehensive sketch of the general circumstances of First Nations-immigrant relations and history in B.C.

Relations between British Columbian society, government, and economy and First Nations seem to generally be at a very contentious point - a point where significant movement forward is unlikely without an examination and recognition of things past. While certain processes and relationships are inching towards improvement, overall we seem to be stuck in relative stasis.

In 1992, the Harcourt New Democratic Party provincial government and the federal government set up the B.C.-Treaty Commission to negotiate First Nations land claims in a province where the huge majority of indigenous land was taken without the treaty agreements required by British colonial law prior to the establishment of the province [1]. While the process is still underway and may in the end produce huge benefits for individual First Nations and their relationships with immigrant British Columbians, there are many problems and obstacles. There has been some very vocal opposition among some non-aboriginal people to *any* negotiations with First Nations to recognize land, resource, and compensation rights. In the minds of some, the outright assimilationist policies of the past are the correct approach to the existence of aboriginal people; racism against First Nations is not subtle or passive in B.C. (and other parts of Canada) [2]. The one agreement-in-principle which *has* been reached - between the *Nisga'a* Nation, province, and federal

government, in early 1996 - has been the subject of a large amount of public debate and some vitriol. Certain First Nations, including the Tsilhqot'in National Government, have refused to participate in the three-party treaty talks (First Nation, province, Canada) because the federal government (and, in the past, Britain) have always been recognized (legally) as the sole holders of responsibility and authority over aboriginal people and lands and because to negotiate with the province would undermine the nation-to-nation relationship between Canada and specific First Nations, and therefore also the basis of treaty talks. Finally, the treaty talks' own relation to another on-going process – that of continuing litigation - make the situation very complicated and uncertain. Legal arguments for aboriginal rights to land and to resource use are one of the few options open to First Nations in their struggle for self-determination, and depending on how well treaty-talks proceed and on the judgment handed down by a particular court in a particular year in a particular case, efforts ebb and flow from the legal to the political and back again.

While First Nations may alternate between political and legal means of struggle, the larger Canadian society also uses law and political discourse to defend its interests against the recognition of aboriginal rights to land, resources, self-rule, and compensation. Federal government-employed lawyers have argued in court against aboriginal title to land (for example in Delgamuukw, 1988), politicians and bureaucrats have been known to stir up political "sentiment" in order to keep control over situations in which First Nations people and their supporters threaten the status quo and. On occasion, the police or army have been sent in, as in the "Oka crisis" in Quebec (1990) or the park-occupation at Ipperwash, Ontario (1995) or Gustafsen Lake (1995) and the many road-blocks against development and logging of traditional aboriginal territories here in B.C. Many of the more "newsworthy" clashes between First Nations and non-aboriginal B.C. result from conflicts over how to protect, use, profit from, or split up resources, which in this province tend to be trees, salmon and salmon habitat, and minerals underground, but also include land for developments such as ski resorts, golf courses, and condominiums.

It is interesting to note the way the political and the legal get tangled together, or one masquerades as the other, in these situations. The political protests and actions of First Nations are often forced into a framework of criminality and isolated conflict, as are the effects of political disenfranchisement, such as economic, cultural, psychological, and emotional oppression and depression in some aboriginal communities.

All of this happens in a context characterized by relative inattention to the history between First Nations, colonizers, immigrants, and the land in B.C. Popular media discourse does not emphasize the province's or country's history in these terms. High levels of ignorance lead to the survival of racism against aboriginal people and support for the continuation of policies which have entrenched economic need (by denying land and resource rights and control), political oppression (by denying self-determination and sovereignty) and cultural embattlement (by banning socio-political and cultural traditions - such as the potlatch, until 1951- and use of aboriginal languages, until the closure of the last residential schools, for example) in many First Nations communities.

Land, Resources, Treaties, and First Nations Arts

The importance of the struggle over land and resources for aboriginal-Canadian relations in today's context is not often recognized as a relevant factor in other aspects of First Nations activity and existence and their relationships with non-indigenous society. In fact, First Nations art works are often connected explicitly as well as implicitly to land issues, whether through traditional reference or political assertion [3].

Some of the 'Northwest Coast' First Nations art works - totem and mortuary poles - most prized by the wider non-indigenous society are to family identities, histories and ownership of privileges and rights to resources in specific territories. Some B.C. First Nations are governed through large clans and smaller family units. The rights to use certain parts of a nation's and family's collective territory are passed down by means of narratives, called in the *Gitxsan* tradition the

adaawk. The owner of the *adaawk* is the only person who can tell it at appropriate times and places, such as a potlatch. By telling the family-owned narrative this person affirms the status and rights of the family within one of the houses of the clans. The *adaawk* and their links to names and crests are expressions, and forms in themselves, of government and land-management [4]. Other wood carvings which bear images of clan animals and signs are also fundamentally linked to the specific family history or cultural identity of the artists, and through this to these practices of First Nations government and land ownership. It is problematic to assume that contemporary art works by aboriginal people have lost these connections to use and claims to land and self-government. However, this aspect of First Nations art has been consistently neglected in favour of aestheticizing and ethnographic frameworks.

Some contemporary First Nations artists have taken up the political issues of land exploitation and ownership explicitly in their works. Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun, for example, has produced paintings which refer to and spotlight things like logging practices and pollution problems in B.C. His surrealistic imagery, which uniquely develops traditional B.C. First Nations formline-art, clearly implicates land-rights struggles as a fundamental part of aboriginal-immigrant relationships and as a dynamic relevant to his own art practice as a First Nations painter.

The work of First Nations communities toward healing, their struggles for rights and compensation, and their continuation, nurturing, and sometimes revival of cultural, linguistic, religious, ceremonial, and artistic traditions are not separable trajectories. Projections of First Nations objects which aestheticize or anthropologize them away from the context of land and resource struggles and the relationships they are part of misunderstand the whole situation and ignore the fine webs which connect different aspects of human activity.

Endnotes

1. The rule of Canadian law regarding alienation of territory inhabited by First Nations has been the subject of much debate in the last two decades, especially in relation to Delgamuukw et al. v. the

Queen, the 1987-1990 British Columbia Supreme Court case which saw the *Gitxsan-Wet'suwet'en* claim aboriginal title to their traditional lands. The case was based on the nations' history of inhabitance of the land. The British Crown's own Royal Proclamation of 1763 has also been a centre of discussion, because it was an early colonial recognition of aboriginal title. It stated in part that:

> ...the several Nations or Tribes of Indians with whom We are connected, and who live under our Protection, should not be molested or disturbed in the Possession of such Parts of Our Dominions and Territories as...are preserved to them.... therefore any lands that had not been ceded to or purchased by Us as aforesaid, are reserved to the said Indians. Furthermore, we do hereby strictly forbid, on Pain of our Displeasure, all our loving Subjects from making any Purchases or Settlements whatever, or taking Possession of any of the Lands above reserved, without our especial leave and Licence for that Purpose first obtained. (quoted in Thomas R. Berger, A Long and Terrible Shadow: white values, Native rights in the Americas. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1991: 61-2).

See also Boldt, Menno and J. Anthony Long, 1985, and James S. Frideres, 1988, for historical, legal, and political backgrounds on First Nations-Canadian relationships. J.R. Miller outlines the practical importance of the 1763 Proclamation in his book, Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens:

> The Royal Proclamation of 1763 established the concepts of Indian territory, Indian title, and the necessity of newcomers to arrange the extinguishment of that title by direct negotiations with the crown. Although the Royal Proclamation did not apply everywhere in present-day Canada... it has had an important historical influence throughout Canada. By and large... colonial and then dominion governments operated on the assumption that there was an obligation to negotiate for title to land in their dealings with Indians in Ontario, the prairies, and parts of northern Canada. While governments might have acted as though they could limit Indian self-government in various Gradual Civilizing acts and Indian Acts, they, with the exception of colonial British Columbia, did not pretend that they could simply take territory without prior negotiations with the first occupiers (1989: 258).

2. First Nations and Metis women have written a lot about the realities of anti-aboriginal racism and the contemporary signs of disenfranchisement brought about by colonial policies in Canada. Maria Campbell, Jeanette Armstrong, Lee Maracle, Joane Quick-to-See Smith, Eden Robinson, and others have contributed autobiographical, fictional, and critical accounts of Canadian racism and its practices. Vitriolic opinions about First Nations are common in B.C.'s popular media. Such columns, letters, and reports often make use of entrenched stereotypes about aboriginal people, describe indigenous peoples' relations with the broader society in very shallow and aggressive terms which pit them against everyone else, belittle serious issues, seek to undermine the credibility of First Nations' claims and struggles. Since I began my research on HIGH SLACK I have been collecting examples. Here is one which happens to apply to the Tsilhqot'in Nation specifically:

> The renegade Tsilhqot'in National Government has apparently grown tired of humiliating and intimidating the provincial government. Now it has set its sites [sic] on the department of national defence, and it is threatening force. The militant natives are upset because the army wants to log part of a military reserve in the Chilcotin north of Riske Creek. The army has owned the property... since 1924.... An infestation of fir and mountain pine beetle is threatening timber on the property and it must be logged into submission. To accomplish this, the DND has entered into an agreement with the non-militant Cariboo Tribal Council to log the land, with economic benefits going to native bands that wish to participate.... TNG deputy national chief Ray Hance says the land is traditional Tsilhqot'in territory and his people will do "anything that's necessary" to stop logging.... Thank gawd our peace-keeping troops are battle-hardened from their tours of Bosnia. Looks like we're going to need them right here at home. (Brian Kieran in The Province, Nov. 26, 1995.)

And a more recent and more general statement:

> January 13, 1998: The Financial Post
> NATIVES SHOULD DO THE THANKING
> THE EUROPEAN SETTLEMENT OF NORTH AMERICA AIDED THEIR LIFESTYLE
> By David Frum
> Let the grovelling begin. That, at any rate, seems to be the philosophy of Indian Affairs Minister Jane Stewart. On Wednesday, she rose in the House of Commons to read a "statement of reconciliation". Ostensibly, she was apologizing for one specific public policy: the removal of native children from their reserves in the 1950s and '60s in order to send them to boarding schools that promised to assimilate them into the Canadian mainstream. If that were all the statement said, it would be reasonable enough. But unfortunately, it implies much more than it says and what it implies is an insult to the rest of the Canadian population.... [T]he northern half of North America is one of the harshest, most inclement corners of the globe. ... On this punishing terrain, European [sic] settlers built one of the wealthiest and most technologically sophisticated societies on Earth – also one of the fairest and most humane.... This achievement benefitted native people every bit as much as the descendants of those settlers. If, by some freak of history, the European [sic] settlement of North America had never occurred, native people who are today living in heated houses, travelling by truck and Ski-Doo, treating sickness with modern medicines (at no charge to themselves) and eating hygienic food, would instead be living in miserable frozen shanties, walking in unsoled shoes from one hunting ground to another, desperately attempting to catch their dinner with stone-tipped arrows, and dying by the thousands every time the wind gusted from the north. It's often said that the North American Indians lived in greater harmony with the environment than *we* do [my italics]. That's quite wrong.... The Indians didn't live in harmony with the environment; they lived at the mercy of it. It was the European settlement that rescued them. The descendants of the Europeans have had the good taste never to demand a thank you from the descendants of the aboriginals... at the very least they are entitled to refuse to bow and scrape and abase themselves for the sin of having tamed and civilized this inhospitable land.

3. For an important discussion of First Nations arts in the Canadian context with special consideration of land rights and political issues connected to them, see Marcia Crosby's 1994 University of British Columbia MA thesis, entitled Indian Art/Aboriginal Title (Department of Fine Arts).

4. For details on this system and its links to European anthropology's (mis)understandings of B.C. First Nations art, culture, and government – and its links to land claims processes – see Marjorie Halpin (1994).

Chapter 2: Anthropology, popular discourse, and the UBC Museum of Anthropology as contexts of production

Anthropology's history

Anthropology, as an academic discipline, traces part of its beginnings to 18th and 19th - century European colonialism and the development of a European "scientific" idea that humanity is actually composed of a developmental spectrum of separate "races" which are at different stages of "evolution". Anthropological historian Nicholas Thomas notes in his book Colonialism's Culture that this period in Europe saw a major shift in the ways westerners viewed other people: from a vague religion-centred concept of non-Christians to the birth of "race" as an essentialized, natural-historical category with which to understand and organize different people(1994:90) [1]. (Thomas argues, and I agree, that current concepts of 'race' in white-western dominated societies like Canada are still linked to "natural-historical models that essentialize types" in order to understand human variety) (1994:90). This newly-articulated race-hierarchy of groups of people in the high colonial period produced a set of expectations among scholars in the new discipline of anthropology, among later anthropologists, and among their primarily European readers. These expectations still cling to some parts of anthropological discourse and representation, and are organized around that same evolutionary idea: that humanity is *progressing* through different kinds and scales of culture and economy, away from a time-immemorial natural state and towards a future civilization. The result is that we still find ourselves, as post-colonial theorists have pointed out, bombarded with and being forced to deconstruct ideologies and assumptions which tell us that European society, strongly identified with whiteness, is advanced, civilized, and a strong candidate for owning the future, whereas 'other' societies, including B.C. First Nations, are backward, primitive, and belong to a vanishing past. These concepts do not characterize all anthropological thought, and I don't intend to account for the entire group of histories, traditions, pitfalls, and accomplishments of anthropology, past and present. It is, however, worth noting that concepts related to colonialism and the concurrent development of hierarchical ideas about "race" have been challenged by

anthropologists themselves, and not only in recent years.

This general framework has, nevertheless, expressed itself in some examples of anthropological writing and practice, which have in recent years been consistently criticized from within by anthropologists (such as Nicholas Thomas, James Clifford, and Greg Sarris) and other academics (like Trinh T. Minh-ha, Patricia Dominguez, and Coco Fusco) [2]. These particular anthropological concepts and discourses have affected how people in Canada view and understand First Nations and their material and visual cultures. This is not to say that the discipline of anthropology or its external and internal academic critiques and movements are identical to or interchangeable with popular conceptions of cultures or anthropology itself. My purpose is only to note and show evidence that *part* of anthropology's history and genesis - and present - is linked to colonialism, and that this link also affects broader social discourse about people and their relationships with each other. My point is that these separate discourses *are* historically connected. This is not to say, "They are the same" or to conflate them.

For example, the "ethnographic present" is a term coined to talk about how those cultures most often studied by anthropologists have commonly been described in a way which makes them seem to belong to a time other than the present-becoming-future: that they are floating in a timeless, non-historical *and* non-contemporary past tense when everything was/is understandable, pure, and static. The ethnographic present is closely related to the concept of "salvage paradigm", which has been noticed in many academic and popular descriptions of First Nations in writings and images over the years [3].

Sometimes called the "narrative of loss", this is the idea that 'other' people and their cultures are simply not fit for today's (whenever that happens to be) demands and are on their way out, but there are still enough elders alive or artifacts around that the writer can define and 'save' for posterity the true core of the culture which is 'disappearing'. Which brings up the ideas of "authenticity" and "tradition". These two concepts are often applied to First Nations art in B.C. [4],

which is a problem because, if aboriginal cultures are generally understood to have flourished in the *past* or in some no-time not like the present in which other cultures are seen to survive, and are imagined collectively as disappeared ways of life, then how can any First Nations artist living and producing in 1997 live up to these misguided requirements that their works (or them*selves*) be "authentic" and "traditional" [5]? Under this kind of limitation, who *could* ever produce a culturally "authentic" object? Suzan Dionne Balz' s comment in her 1992 article "The Buying and Selling of Culture and Meaning" sheds light on these concepts and their use. She quotes James Clifford in defining the "salvage paradigm" as the:

> "desire to rescue 'authenticity' out of destructive historical change." What's at issue is a particular global arrangement of time and space... Our dominant temporal sense is historical, assumed to be linear and non-repeatable... In a savage/pastoral setup... [a]uthenticity in culture or art exists just prior to the present - but not so distant or eroded as to make collection or salvage impossible.... Marginal... groups constantly (as the saying goes) enter the modern world... [and] the price is always this: local, distinctive paths through modernity vanish.... (1992: 59).

Balz goes on to address current production of authenticity and inauthenticity in cultural terms:

> Authenticity can be produced as well as salvaged. Clifford gives the example of new forms of Native art and culture... Surely these forms cannot be called 'inauthentic' simply because of their relative newness. What makes them appear to be inauthentic is the placement of 'artifacts' in the ethnographic museums of the dominant culture, a point well made by Rebecca Belmore' self-display as a museum artifact in protest of The Spirit Sings exhibition at the Glenbow Museum in 1988. What imbues them with the smell of inauthenticity is the dominant culture's perception of 'other', and its nostalgic sense of the salvage paradigm (1992:59).

Popularized Primitivism

A highly-popularized facet of the impulse to see B.C. First Nations cultures as traditional, authentic, timeless, and as part of a lost past, is what anthropological and colonial historian Nicholas Thomas calls "primitivism". He describes a contemporary phenomenon in Australia, New Zealand, and the United States as well as Canada which is familiar to most people:

> In Australia, Aboriginal culture is now cherished rather than [derogated]; what is indigenous is identified with the mythological Dreamtime, with the Rainbow Serpent, with spirituality, with

> caring for your relatives, with respect for the Land; with everything that is primordial, metaphysical and natural. In the environmental movement, and in the Green consciousness that has spread well beyond lobby and activist groups, Aboriginal uses of land and resources are idealized as non-destructive and caring.... The 1991 Oscar-winning film, *Dances with Wolves*, ennobles Sioux in opposition to the wholly brutal and degenerate frontier whites.... a plaque commemorating a particular people in what is now British Columbia proclaims nostalgically that the band 'traditionally lived in harmony with nature, respecting and nurturing their world which provided food and shelter'.... primitive spirituality is frequently evoked as a homogenous essence.... one tribal culture is interchangeable with others... all are closer to nature and... even in the contrivance of their art, these natives operate at a natural... level.... Primitivism has always inverted rather than subverted the hierarchies of civility and modernity, and there is nothing novel or surprising here (1994: 28-30) [6].

Primitivism has a tangible presence in popular conceptions of First Nations histories and contemporary existence in Canada and specifically British Columbia. Phrases like "indigenous cultures don't experience time linearly, because everything is circular" and "aboriginal people spiritually understand nature and live as part of the land" are not uncommon. Anthropologist Greg Sarris describes popularization of primitivist discourse in North America through spiritual appropriation:

> The New Age Movement with its appropriation of American Indian religion is a good example of how citizens of a dominant society take what they find – what they came into Indian territory wanting to know – for their own purposes.... the interests nonetheless ultimately result in recreations of Indian life and ideology that may, through the creation of stereotypes and so forth, be damaging in the long run (1993: 71).

Primitivist tendencies inform popular writing and marketing. An advertisement in the September 1997 issue of the popular Canadian magazine Chatelaine, for example, sells a decorative plate with a painting of a woman with long black hair, wearing beaded buckskin and a bison robe, relaxing in a snowy forest with her wolf family. Under the banner of "a union of spirits", The Bradford Exchange of London, Ontario describes the following:

> A beautiful young maiden greets the long-lost wolf brother she raised from a pup and set free. Now he has returned to meet her. Hidden in the web of the woods, five unseen wolf spirits give their blessing.... To Native Americans, the human world, the natural world, and the spirit world are united in one sacred circle of life. Artist Diana Casey portrays this bond in a magical work of hidden-image art.... Best of all – priced at just $44.95... [7].

I do not want to dismiss real aspects of aboriginal cultures' specific cosmologies, practices, and

religions, but it seems clear that this kind of attention to First Nations people is not usually attention to them as they really are and to their own statements and actions, but more often to a generalized ideal of a mythic, homogenous 'Nativeness'. The polarization of popular opinion about First Nations between a focus on aboriginal communities as pathological and indigenous claims to land and resources as threatening and unjustified on one hand; and primitivizing paternalism on the other, leaves too little room for real contemporary First Nations people and for dialogue between them - through writing, speech, law, action, art - with everyone else.

Museums, anthropology, and colonialism

MOA is an important link in a network of places and contexts in which representations of cultures are displayed and cultural meanings are manufactured. This institution reflects and engages with current discourses not just on 'anthropology' and 'art' but about particular cultures and histories, and about *power*. To understand what power relations have to do with *anthropology* museums and their charge to display cultures, I need to revisit a bit more of the discipline's heritage.

Anthropology has a historical relationship with processes of global European colonialism. The field developed in part as the academic – 'scientific' – branch of Europe's project to acquire and settle the 'uninhabited' and 'uncivilised' tracts of the planet. It was at this time that many ethnologists began to investigate, document, and evaluate those people 'found' by 'explorers' and missionaries specifically for the European audience back home. Much of this project to learn about different peoples and to transmit information back to the audiences of the imperial centre is, no doubt, attributable to human beings' curiosity about each other and their common impulse to gain knowledge and communicate.

On the other hand, some early anthropologists specifically framed their learning projects as sources of information for colonial regimes to use to better control "native" populations who were then being incorporated into the new empires. Others, who did not imagine their projects as tools

of imperial rule, nevertheless portrayed global peoples to European audiences in ways that reinforced forms of racism and that often revealed more about European attitudes towards different people than about the societies themselves.

In his article, "The 'Relevance' of Anthropology", Jack Stauder also connects British anthropology's development to European colonialism by explaining the rise and rationalization of early British anthropology as a self-styled 'scientific' aid to the colonialist project. He reports that in their enthusiasm to prove the field's value as an applied science, the new anthropologists concerned themselves "with questions of race and slavery" – producing journals "filled with articles making recommendations on these questions" in order to "be of some utility to the interests involved in the expansion of European power around the globe". In later years of the 19th century, according to Stauder, the growing discipline shifted focus slightly. Following changing historical conditions, as Britain put into practice imperial rule over many territories with indigenous populations, anthropology's proponents "hoped to ally the new science of man not with controversial popular causes, as had been the case in the pro- and anti-slavery debates earlier in the century, but with the science of good government, specifically the administration of colonial peoples"(1993: 408-9). This link was not significantly altered over the years. In 1926 the International African Institute was founded, funded by all the colonial governments in Africa and the British and French home governments and missionary organizations, and governed by former colonial administrators, missionary heads, and academics. This organization has played an important role in social science research, financing and publishing African ethnographies and producing a prominent anthropological journal since the 1930s (1993: 415). Stauder argues that historical demands and pitches for "an anthropology useful to British imperialism" were determining factors in the theoretical bent of British anthropology, which has expressed itself in the prominent – and at times dominant – school of 'functionalism' (417). Furthermore, Stauder traces a similar relationship between contemporary anthropology and current global neo-colonialisms (420).

The relationship between Europe's colonialism and early and current forms of anthropology has been pointed out by other writers who work both inside and outside of the discipline. Patricia R. Dominguez connects the genesis of the field to a very specific moment:

> The emergence of anthropology did not come about in the 19th century by accident. The expression of European colonialism, the growth of an almost unbending faith in science, the combined condescension and universalization inherent in global, all-encompassing theories of biological and social evolution, and the successful domination of much of the world's political economy by 19th-century Euro-American capitalism made the emergence of academic anthropology not only possible but highly likely. It is likewise difficult to imagine that anthropology – the self-styled "science of man" dedicated to the study of humanity by the self-conscious study of others – could have arisen in any other era. The same goes for the rise of public museums, the scramble for ethnographic artifacts and the emergence and popularity of world fairs in the 19th century. They took the world as their unit... and authority, right and responsibility as moral corollaries of superiority (1987) [8].

Museums with ethnological collections have been storehouses not only of objects gathered in part through colonial forays, but also of the power to characterize and explain what these objects mean in the world. Deborah Root pinpoints the relationship between empire-maintenance, subjugation of colonized peoples, collection-building and display, and anthropological modes of explanation:

> Museums can truly be thought of as cannibal institutions: large edifices containing stuffed animals and the paraphernalia of cultures believed to be dead or dying, all organized according to the current scientific theory. Here the process and display of consumption are played out in one of their purest forms, the consumption of culture supposedly taking place for lofty motives rather than the market, at least according to the myths of science. In a very emphatic sense the museum is the institution where the colonizing nations seek to display their power over life and death, over the past and over all former empires, and over those they have conquered (1996: 108).

It seems evident that this is a generally accurate description of where many museums began and how they developed. Former MOA director, Michael Ames, connected this history to contemporary issues at this particular museum in a 1990 article, "Cultural empowerment and museums: opening up anthropology through collaboration". He wrote:

Whether a work by a contemporary First Nations artist is displayed in a museum of art or

> anthropology is, from the perspective of those included and excluded, as much about status as it is about aesthetics. As a First Nations educator said during a talk he gave recently at the Museum of Anthropology, "the concept of a museum of anthropology is the creation of the dominant White society, but the content of the museum is the creation of the dominated Native peoples". ... It is helpful to understand where Native Americans are coming from as well as where they are going. Where they want to go is towards greater degrees of self-determination. High on their agendas are land claims, economic self-sufficiency, control over their own agendas and welfare, and then issues relating to museums. Where they are coming from is a history of colonial domination (1990: 159-60).

Root's description is fortunately not *as* accurate a statement about where a museum like MOA is today - and especially about where it is headed in the future. Especially through practices of consultation and cooperation with individuals and communities, workers at MOA are finding new ways to define the institution and its role. This is not to say that all links between anthropology, Europe's global colonization, and museums have been broken. At a time when relationships between "third world"/"developing" and "first world"/"industrialized" nations are becoming increasingly exploitative through now-globalizing market capitalism forced primarily upon formerly-colonized nations by organizations (such as the International Monetary Fund and World Bank) controlled by former-colonizer countries, it is more important than ever to remember that our collective context is linked to power relationships established in the past. Anthropologists do not continue to operate in a primary framework of 'salvage' of cultures 'disappearing' under colonialism. In fact, anthropologists along with other theorists have articulated many new critiques of stereotypical and otherwise problematic discourses about 'other' peoples. However, that does not change the fact that the cultural groups which have produced the majority of the collections of the UBC Museum of Anthropology continue to suffer and resist the effects of an unbroken, if altered, history of inequitable treatment by the Canadian government and society.

UBC Museum of Anthropology

I must place the Museum of Anthropology (MOA) in this contextual grid according to its identity as an institution primarily dealing with the art and material cultures of people often

collectively called 'indigenous' (that is, those indigenous to North and South American, African, South Pacific, and Asia) and those usually grouped as 'Oriental civilizations'. It is true that in specific practical terms, many (but not all) exhibits at MOA continue to be structured and presented according to white-western cultural assumptions and expectations about what should be seen in such a museum and how it should be represented. In this sense, western museum expectations still operate as the universal, the neutral, and the organizing eye of collections and representation. At the same time, much internal work has been and continues to be done on complicating and multiplying the perspectives informing practices of display in the museum; including active partnerships with First Nations on exhibits. These have involved changing the practical details as well as the general outlines of exhibitions according to the different perspectives, preferences, and goals of the partners in the processes.

I need to introduce Celia Haig-Brown's concept of "research as chat" to explain how I learned - in an informal, piecemeal way – some relevant things about MOA and the way it functions as a link in a matrix of cultural and political contexts, discourses, and institutions. I learned about a few aspects of the museum from a loose grouping of many people with very different perspectives with whom I became acquainted over the last few years. These people included present and past staff, faculty, current and former students, and external observers. Haig-Brown writes that "Informal interviews, what I have come to call 'research as chat,' are... important in... research. These may occur at any time, once a researcher becomes familiar to and with the other people" (1995: 31).

One way that "research as chat" became an (unplanned) part of my learning - but not of my formal research - was through personal conversations with various people about their experiences of MOA. I came to be in places where I was exposed to such commentaries through an interesting set of circumstances, which deserves disclosure itself before I continue. After one term of study at MOA, I applied through a federally-funded program for an internship, and received a position during the summer of 1996 at a local community museum, the West Vancouver Museum &

Archives. In this job – in which I was paid by MOA and supervised by West Vancouver Museum staff - I worked almost entirely with people trained at MOA who still had active ties with that institution. In June 1996, the Canadian Museums Association held its annual conference in Vancouver. I volunteered at the conference as part of my internship and was exposed to more discussions by MOA staff and students and discussions about MOA, both formal and informal, at the event. The effect of all this was that I was either spending time learning at MOA or working for the museum around people who are deeply affected by it from January 1996 to September 1996. Combined with the continuation of my own formal research with Rosa Ho, which wasn't completed until the spring of 1997, a contract job which I held at the West Vancouver Museum & Archives from January to June 1997, and another job there since October 1997, my exposure to a variety of perspectives on MOA has been considerable. During this time I have heard small parts of different individuals' very diverse perspectives on MOA.

I have not done any formally structured research on the museum; and I never approached anybody about using the bits and pieces I have learned about MOA through various exchanges and situations. It is impossible to include observations I have been privy to or have made myself which were culled from what Haig-Brown calls 'research as chat', since none of these conversations were structured, acknowledged, or agreed to as formal research. In consideration of this fact, I have decided more than once to completely avoid mentioning the fact that perspectives and information have come to me in this way. The problem with this decision is that although not proposed or carried out as formalized research, these conversations and commentaries have given me perspectives and information which have affected and framed the ways I am now able to understand the complexities and qualities of MOA as a central context to HIGH SLACK's receptions and my study. Therefore, it seems dishonest to withhold this particular aspect of my learning process.

Another reason it's important to acknowledge this aspect of my study is that passing over it would tend to hide my own involvement (as a student and part-time museum worker) in the issues

and contexts which I am trying to learn something about: although still an outsider to MOA, I am not a passive, impartial observer, but someone who has researched one of its exhibits, engaged with its teaching, and been employed out of the process. This is why I mention: a) my internal debate over what to do with "research as chat"; b) the ways I am personally implicated in the institution and circumstances on which I may otherwise, inaccurately, be understood to comment as a detached 'third party' in my writing; and c) some examples of the kind of thing I have learned myself as a participant in the context of MOA and my other museum work. I will not include comments or information gleaned informally from other people, since I neither requested nor received their permission to use their perspectives in any way other than personally.

There are many strengths and positive aspects and effects of the work that is done at MOA. These have been noted by many people other than me. In a 1987 discussion of museum anthropology and appropriative representation practices, anthropologist James Clifford referred to MOA as a model of a museum moving in a self-examining and progressive direction which addresses recent academic and political critiques of museums' and anthropology's connections to colonial and neo-colonial patterns and relationships. He said that

> [s]ome very interesting things are happening to museums in the Pacific Northwest Coast, especially in Vancouver. Those cultures that Edward Curtis [a turn-of-the-century photographer of indigenous peoples] said were vanishing didn't vanish: Northwest Indian [sic] art, especially Kwakiutl art, of superb quality is being produced right now. There's a museum in Vancouver involved with the native communities around it – sculptors working in the museum from models, older objects circulating out for use in potlatches, etc. Half of this is a liberal extension on the part of the curators, but the other half comes of pressure from native artists who go to [the] museum not simply to admire old work but to make new work. So new tribal works go into the ethnographic museum, old tribal works circulate out. The objects came to the museum in the first place to be preserved against all decay – the old salvage mode of ethnography. Now in some new historical moment a new pattern of reappropriation occurs (1987).

MOA curators and other staff are interacting with First Nations communities and individuals in changing and diversifying ways. Some of these work towards reappropriation – if not of objects or use of objects in the museum's collection, then of the means and forms of representing those objects and the cultures which produced them in exhibitions inside the

museum. I'll give a few examples.

MOA purchases the works of contemporary First Nations artists. Acquisitions, whether masks, large-scale sculpture, or basketry, for example, are made by artists from First Nations all over B.C. Some new works that have entered MOA's collection recently have done so on the grounds that their artists retain rights to the object. While ownership of the object is gained by the museum, the artist retains copyright, moral right, and the right to borrow the work for personal, ceremonial, display, and other purposes. Such works move between MOA storage or display and First Nations use.

First Nations curators have created numerous exhibitions at MOA which complicate the dominating society's conceptions of aboriginal arts, cultures, and authenticity [9]. Examples of consultation and co-operation with local First Nations through negotiated agreements have increased in number and form in recent years, yielding more partnerships and sharing of control over archaeological digs and museum exhibitions about them, such as in the case of "From Under the Delta" in 1996. Near the same time, *Musqueam*, *Sto:lo*, and *Saanich* artists, and artist Lyle Wilson, were commissioned by the museum to make works that were inspired by, or which replicate Coast Salish ancient artifacts, which were exhibited alongside the original objects and fragments. The resulting exhibition, "Written in the Earth", was developed by MOA in partnership with the Musqueam Nation. Museum staff, *Musqueam* people, and individuals from other communities worked together to determine the appearance and content of the exhibition.

At the same time that new and more equitable relationships and arrangements are being forged between MOA and the communities whose cultural objects it houses, challenges remain on both small and large scales. As in many human situations, problematic moments and actions are sometimes overlooked and remain unexplored.

During my short course of studies at MOA, I heard a few remarks which I considered to be either ethnocentric or reinforcing of racist stereotypes about aboriginal people. Despite a classroom

culture full of widespread, repeated, and conscious acknowledgements of the value and necessity of First Nations perspectives and contributions to museum practice as well as sophisticated discussion of material deconstructing colonialist, racist and primitivist discourses, I witnessed a few examples of these kinds of attitudes in a short-term involvement inside MOA. I offer this observation without citing specific evidence, and with the intention neither of undercutting people involved with MOA or the work done there, nor of pointing out hypocrisy from a (seemingly) safe distance. Instead I want to point out that although workers in an institution like MOA have diverse and critical intentions and practices, they remain as unable to extricate themselves from a broader cultural matrix that deals in an intricate currency of 'white-down' racism (one based on hundreds of years of colonial and neo-colonial practices and ideologies) as I show *myself* to be in other places in this thesis. (See the Introduction and Chapter 7.) Historically-created relationships, disciplines, and ideologies - still affected by neo-colonial dynamics - have material effects on the practices of anthropology museum workers and students. As far as I can tell, there is no way to leave behind this historical and cultural context. Since there is no escape, I think it's important to circle back on the patterns, subtleties, and mechanisms of how these influences come into play in specific situations.

Some comments I heard drew me back to these intricacies. They snapped my attention to the complexity of MOA as an institution made up of many people. They related this complexity to MOA's almost iconic importance in B.C. as a highly valued image in itself and as an authoritative representer of many cultures, but especially of the indigenous cultures of this province.

They also reminded me that the museum's internal complexity and external symbolic importance are aspects of its embededness in a wider historical, cultural, and ideological context. MOA cannot be understood as separate from its time, place, and discipline(s). This may seem obvious but I have found that when a person gets up really close to the museum (and this is probably true of many institutions like it), it becomes more difficult for her/his/my eyes to see its

limits and therefore for her/his/my mind to remember that it exists inside an environment of which it is part and not against some backdrop which acts as mere scenery. The power to explain and display primarily colonized cultures and their objects operates at MOA in a direct relationship with the contemporary communities whose cultures are exhibited. This power also functions in a broader socio-cultural environment which still takes for granted the right of the dominating society to own and look at the treasures of the groups it continues to dominate politically and economically. It is a challenge to notice the ways that work in museums interacts with pervasive political patterns and facts. Deborah Root, a Toronto teacher of art history and post-colonial theory, says it is very hard to keep an eye on these kinds of links: "... it is difficult to maintain a conceptual framework that recognizes sites of dominance and authority and that is able to call these into question. A process of naturalization renders authority shifting, even invisible"(1996: 15).

From my very limited observations and filtered information about MOA, I would say that the naturalization of the present order of authority and power which Root points out presents a challenge to workers and students inside a museum like MOA to develop a practice that consistently notes and interrogates sites and instances of dominance. This also means that the tide may be against those who are not in authority and notice or seek to address established relationships and attitudes.

Endnotes

1. Anthropologist Nicholas Thomas traces this shift and anthropology's development in the Western-European world view:

> ...in premodern European discourses, non-Western peoples tend to be characterized... as a lack or poorer form of the values of the centre. From this perspective, discussion of representations of 'the Other' is almost misleading in so far as it implies recognition of a distinctive types; what I suggest is that pagans were conceivable primarily as incomplete or imperfect forms, rather than as 'peoples' of a comprehensibly distinct kind.... over the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, early ethnological texts began to describe 'Indians' possessing identities that were more singular than those of generalized pagans or infidels, but it is really not until the mid- to late eighteenth century that figures of inadequacy are subordinated to a distinctively anthropological discourse, which registers a variety of human races or peoples, who are mapped and ranked... in an evolutionary natural history.... an analogy between human varieties and animal species.... enabled particular peoples to be seen as distinctive and

> essentially different (rather than, or as well as, being... less advanced types than... Christian humanity). [This] tells of a shift from the absence of 'the Other' (as a being accorded any singular character) to a worldview that imagines a plurality of different races (1994: 71).

2. Modes of thought which combine race identities with primitivist and salvage paradigm discourses are also prominent in areas where art paradigms and traditionally-anthropological realms converge, as anthropologist James Clifford pointed out with reference to a range of mid-1980s exhibits in New York which displayed art works from different parts of the globe. His article, "Histories of the Tribal and the Modern", focussed on the Museum of Modern Art's show, " 'Primitivism' in 20th-Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and Modern". He argues that it juxtaposed 'modern' western artworks with "primitive" societies' objects in a way that demonstrated "not any essential affinity between tribal and modern, but rather the desire and power of the modern West to collect the world" (1985: 176).

3. See James Clifford, Virginia R. Dominguez, and Trinh T. Minh-ha, 1987, and Marianna Torgovnick, 1990. For a somewhat problematic but interesting discussion, see Robert Fulford's article "The Trouble with Emily", *Canadian Art* Vol 10 #4:33-39, especially his quotations of Marcia Crosby's concept of the "Imaginary Indian".

4. Martha Black traces the tendency to construct B.C. First Nations and their objects as materializations of authenticity back to the turn of the century in her article "Display & Captures". She writes that photographs taken around 1900 of coastal First Nations people and objects "illustrate... transformation" by showing "artworks moving into a new context" and illuminating "a discourse (or, more accurately, a negotiation) in native art history". She suggests that such photographs imagined cultural objects out of their production and use contexts and into a new realm:

> It is the power of the photograph to authenticate an object that has interested historians of native art. Historic photographs of artworks in situ have been used to show function, provenance and original condition – qualities associated with the notion of authenticity (1992: 68 & 70).

5. As Nicholas Thomas notes,

> the celebration of authentic Aborigines or Navajo fixes the proper identity of those peoples in their preservation of and display of a folkloric and primitivized culture and [derogates] and marginalizes urbanized or apparently acculturated members of these populations who speak English, lack ethnic dress, do not obviously conduct ceremonies and do not count as real natives to the same extent as those who continue to live in the bush and practise something closer to traditional subsistence. Compared with, and at times comparing themselves with, the "real Aborigines", Aboriginal people are caught between the attribution of unchanging essences (with the implication of an inability to change) and the reproach of 'inauthenticity' (1994:30).

6. Gareth Griffiths further outlines the effects of primitivizing discourse in Australia, and characterizes it as an integral part of oppressive discourses with their roots in the colonial period:

> Australian Aboriginal peoples may increasingly wish to assert their sense of the local... as a recuperative strategy in the face of the erasure of difference characteristic of colonialist representation. But such representations subsumed by the white media under a mythologised and fetishised sign of the 'authentic' can also be used to create a privileged hierarchy of Australian Aboriginal voice... it may [also] construct a belief in the society at large that issues of recovered 'traditional' rights are of a different order of equity from the right to general social justice and equality.... these representations need also to be addressed through their reflection

> of a larger practice within colonialist discourse, a practice in which the possibilities of subaltern speech are contained by the discourse of the oppressor, and in which the writing of the Australian Aboriginal under the sign of 'authenticity' is an act of 'liberal' discursive violence, parallel in many ways to the inscription of the 'native' (indigene) under the sign of the savage (1995: 238).

7. I found another very odd mainstream media use of stereotypically primitivist traits in a sports column written by Archie MacDonald in the Vancouver Sun headlined "Grizzlies dial 12,624 to get NBA franchise for Vancouver worshippers" (December 21, 1994). It reads in part:

> Ancient totem poles in the Museum of Anthropology gazed down upon a ritual Tuesday that must have looked every bit as strange as anything that ever occurred in Indian villages on the misty West Coast. A tall man – the big chief? – stood on a stage nestled among the carvings and produced a huge card with a mysterious number.... We are an NBA city, announced the tall chief... Shoppers Drug Mart is one powerful medicine man. To gain entry into the sacred NBA lodge several questions had to be answered... would the villagers in Vancouver buy enough tickets to unlock the doors to the world of slam dunk? They made it with 11 days to spare on the doomsday clock. They even brought their modern version of a totem pole. A two-story inflatable Grizzly bear clutching a basket ball.

This article also indicates the iconic status of the UBC Museum of Anthropology in the popular imagination as the symbol for the authentic indigenous culture of the region.

8. See Trinh T. Minh-ha's text Woman, Native, Other for a complex assessment of anthropology's historical ties to racism, sexism, and colonialism; especially the chapter entitled: "The Language of Nativism: Anthropology as a Scientific Conversation of Man with Man" (1989: 47-76).

9. Doreen Jensen (*Gitxsan*) and Gerald McMaster (of the Plains Cree nation called *Nehiyawuk*) are both artists and curators who have done exhibitions at MOA. Jensen curated "Robes of Power" in 1986 and McMaster presented his work in "Savage Graces" in 1992. Many other First Nations people have created, overseen, and worked on MOA exhibitions. These exhibits have challenged the meanings usually ascribed to displays of First Nations material culture in various ways. McMaster's show explicitly and ironically named and deconstructed stereotypes commonly held about indigenous people in North America.

Chapter 3: Art-ideological context of HIGH SLACK's production

Canadian collective society's dominant narratives about and uses of First Nations cultural and aesthetic objects are discourses which overlap issues taken up in HIGH SLACK and which are relevant to the museum context of its display. There are three phenomena I would like to discuss in relation to this connection. First, the commodification of indigenous cultures and cultural products forms a significant stream in this society's current interactions with First Nations people, cultures, histories, and issues, as indigenous images and concepts are popularized. This contemporary pattern is relevant to HIGH SLACK's production and meanings at this historical moment. Second, debates about cultural appropriation have been prevalent in Canada in relation to First Nations arts (visual, literary, and other) and in relation to non-indigenous people's engagements with First Nations cultures and histories. Third, certain definitions and traditions of 'art' itself intersect with racism in our context, and this affects how First Nations art is displayed and dealt with in our museums and galleries, and also affects HIGH SLACK's meaning in interaction with First Nations objects and the Museum of Anthropology.

Commodification of 'other' cultures and First Nations arts

In B.C. we live with a visible level of wide-spread appropriation of First Nations visual culture. Driving around Vancouver one is likely to see variations on and allusions to 'Northwest Coast' imagery advertising businesses on store fronts, decorating bridges as street banners, and appearing on major professional sports franchises' uniforms. I think that as a collective we claim First Nations attributes (as we choose to portray them) as a picturesque and tourist-attracting aspect of our history, 'natural' habitat, and material culture[1]. An integral part of this incorporation is widespread use of aboriginal imagery and forms to sell other things, but also a connected tendency to market - isolate, aestheticize, and glamourize - an idea of the cultures *themselves*[2]. This is not to say that every entrance of First Nations art or forms or imagery into the capitalist marketplace is

appropriative or wrong. There are many instances of First Nations-controlled businesses which creatively and successfully share and profit from these aspects of their cultures (one example is Dorothy Grant's Vancouver-based fashion design business). There are, in fact, many aboriginal people making a living this way, in better and in worse circumstances which would require a specific and contextualized consideration to describe. On the other hand, exploitative commodification of things associated with First Nations is a trend which plays a major role in structuring how the wider society sees aboriginal people and their cultures and objects: as dead, consumable, contextless products. Deborah Root relates this impulse to commodify to old relations of looking and consuming established through colonialism and anthropological collecting:

> By linking the development of an aesthetic of exoticism in the West to colonial power, I am not suggesting that cultures or aesthetic forms exist in isolation, untouched by contact from the outside. Cultures are never pure, and there have always been contact and exchange of ideas between peoples. Notions of cultural purity can, as with ethnic and gender identities, imply fixity and suggest that we are all supposed to remain wholly within an abstraction imagined as our own culture. Notions of exoticism relate to the colonial process in one extremely obvious way: The aesthetic codes of former colonies tend to be appropriated and rendered exotic in the West (1996: 48)...
> The British Columbia tourist office recognizes that Native arts and cultures are one of the province's prime selling points... and it comes as no surprise that in tourist advertisements Native cultures appear an integral part of the natural beauty of the landscape. The Native culture marketed to tourists almost always appears in its past of apolitical incarnations and spotlights traditional arts and crafts.... Native culture is presented as something that continues to live, yet is nonetheless anchored firmly in the past. Many municipalities in the province display totem poles (more properly, family or clan crest poles) in local parks, and traditional-style ravens and thunderbirds abound on souvenir objects such as mugs and tea towels.... Native art enters the national or international market through the tourist industry... Although the contemporary Native carver of a commissioned crest pole is usually paid reasonably well for the work, as are the artists creating supermarket sculpture and jewelry, Native people are not as a rule consulted or compensated when clan designs are used on tourist or other objects. The traditional design forms are considered by many... to be part of the broader... heritage of British Columbia and so available for appropriation. These designs appear all over public buildings in Vancouver and Victoria (and in Seattle, Portland, and Anchorage) as a way of symbolizing the regional character of the area.... Appropriation occurs because cultural difference can be bought and sold in the marketplace(1996: 68).

Appropriation debates and practices in British Columbia

What is appropriation about in reference to cultural representation, and why is this word

related to cultural and representational issues in British Columbia? The idea of cultural appropriation as it is generally used in B.C. can't be understood outside of relationships of power which continue to flow from the lasting effects and dynamics of colonization of this part of the world.

Appropriation is generally understood as taking someone else's property for one's own use, and cultural appropriation refers to this kind of taking for cultural or artistic production. This includes the adoption of concepts, practices and property which are part of the worldview and history of one group of people by someone outside of that culture. Typically the kinds of 'things' appropriated are concrete *signs* of the culture being borrowed from: images, stories, religious practices, art forms, clothing, language, etc. (Other forms of appropriation include the act of speaking - or attempting to speak - *for* First Nations people.) This kind of assuming of cultural traits or property can become very complicated and fraught with problems in a society like ours [3]. This is because Canada is a settler state whose foundation is a prolonged colonization process at the heart of which was and is the forceful appropriation of aboriginal peoples' wealth, land, labour, and autonomy. Historically, the people who colonized B.C. (their governments and churches and businesses) have sustained efforts to appropriate (or sometimes just eliminate) without permission many aspects of aboriginal life - material and immaterial. Under these circumstances, how would any non-aboriginal 'borrowing' of indigenous culture be other than tainted (perhaps not permanently but certainly as long as dominating relationships continue) by the unresolved exploitations of the past and present?[4]

First Nations cultures - especially the 'Northwest Coast' cultures of B.C. - are commonly treated by non-First Nations society like communal libraries that anyone has the right to walk into, peruse, and claim parts of. It is *because* of profound current power inequities between aboriginal people and white-dominated non-aboriginal society that we collectively have maintained access to First Nations cultures via representations in museums, galleries, popular culture, and mass media as

a 'natural' part of the 'national heritage' while simultaneously refusing to deal with another part of our legacy: the political and economic crises generated by the remains of colonialism [5].

It does not make any sense to attempt to reverse this historical situation, so that the 'right' to speak about anything related to First Nations is out of bounds for all those without indigenous heritage. With this step we are back to the boxes dictated by racist categorization and formidably unequal power relationships - we accept the terms of the game [6]. Taking on the idea that it is always appropriative or wrong for non-indigenous people to attempt to speak about the relationship between immigrants and First Peoples would mean forgetting the responsibility part of what it means to own something. Making issues related to First Nations and to colonial and post- or neo-colonial relationships out of bounds for the large majority of people in Canada means removing their obligation as well as their right to deal with these issues. Naming all issues in this realm as the exclusive property of First Nations lets everyone else off the hook, and manifests as a blame-the-victim attitude, in which those who have suffered historical injustices are held responsible for educating their oppressors as well as making all the change. This mechanism has taken place with feminist struggles: sexist systems and relationships are labelled "women's issues" in a fairly successful strategy of containment.

Two important events in 1986 helped to shape the subsequent cultural appropriation debate in British Columbia's museum and arts communities. One was the production and display of a UBC Museum of Anthropology exhibition on artist Jack Shadbolt by curator Marjorie Halpin. This exhibition focussed on Shadbolt's imagery relating to Northwest Coast First Nations art, and included clear references to specific historic works by First Nations artists which were borrowed from a number of significant public and private collections in North America and displayed in the exhibit. Doreen Jensen, a *Gitxsan* artist, curator, and writer, wrote an article about the Shadbolt show in which she argued that Shadbolt, as an outsider to the specific First Nations culture in question, represented its imagery in a way which showed a misunderstanding of it - a misreading

which made a person from that culture feel uncomfortable. Another important event in 1986 was the exhibition The Spirit Sings, presented at the Glenbow Museum in Calgary. It raised issues of voice appropriation - especially questions about which objects made by aboriginal people for various purposes, including sacred ones, are appropriate for display, and which objects should not be shown publicly. Following these events and debate over them, the issue of cultural appropriation became very important amongst museum workers, academics in anthropology and the arts, writers and commentators on the arts and contemporary culture, and artists.

The loudest histories of "ourselves" in Canada, and the ones that we hear most often (the ones many children are taught in school, for example) are heroic narratives of European 'explorers', colonizers, administrators, traders, and settlers. These histories have treated aboriginal people as incidentals, for the most part. Sometimes indigenous people have been imagined as unused resources like the mountains to be mined, the rivers to be fished, and the forests to be cut: part of the vast emptiness available when Europeans got here. Sometimes First Nations people were documented as exotic specimens, sometimes as dangerous or degenerate elements [7]. Whatever the case, the norm has been their partial erasure as actors in the meetings, negotiations, relationships and conflicts of the past. Obscurred as historical and contemporary *people*, First Nations often tend to re-emerge from the mists of time as long-gone but once authentically noble or savage entities: as eternally primitive 'others' who by some mysterious form of suspended animation continue to represent a lost, pure past. This is the context in which their cultural forms have most often been collected, displayed, and explained, and a major way in which they have been officially visible.

In the interest of avoiding a simplistic analysis of the dynamics outlined above, I'd like to note that I don't see the groups identified as monolithic [8]. The unequal power relationships described are in fact interrupted, complicated, and contested. These relations are not static, the inequalities are neither total nor perfectly maintained and resistance to them is never fully contained [9].

It does make sense to be critically thinking about the ways that someone like Williams speaks about issues related to First Nations. To me, it seems clear that the basic story which is re-told, re-imaged, displayed, and discussed in the various works in HIGH SLACK is part of the histories of both 'parties' involved: the *Tsilhqot'in* and other First Nations, and the colonists. In the installation, fractured, multiple narratives of intercultural meetings and cooperations as well as violent conflict are traced. The story written on the screen walls of the gallery was one *about* this relationship between original peoples and new-comers. The process of British Columbia's colonization, the writing of its history, and relationships between its past and present are at issue in the artworks. To believe that these processes and relationships are *about* First Nations people is to ignore, first: the participation of colonizing people in the history told; and second: the implications of the colonists' historical behaviour for non-indigenous Canadians who are living in relationship to First Nations in the present. The Tsilhqot'in War, the gold rush that prompted it, and the results of both were about the interactions - the co-operations and the clashes - of peoples in a context of global colonialism: a collective story if there ever was one.

I have thought a lot about the idea of shared history. It may seem like going to great lengths to rationalize a self-evident answer to the appropriation question in the case of HIGH SLACK.

A particular confluence of feminist and anti-racist thinking about difference has led me to try to examine HIGH SLACK as an installation which avoids being appropriative because of its focus on a shared history and present. At the same time, the installation retells these stories in the complex settings which must be factored into a reading of the works. One of these contexts is the University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology and its significance; another is the broader political and social context of North America which, as feminist writers like Joyce Ladner point out, images difference as deviance simply because the normal and the human is so narrowly and vigilantly defined as white and male (1992: 125-7).

Feminists have long argued that an important part of the 'othering' process that posits man

as the universal and superior (or "structuring norm") and subordinates woman as the particular and inferior is the assignment of absolute difference to the female. (Women's common attributes can be seen as deviant *from* something only if the human norm is exclusively defined by what is specifically male.) And so it happens that difference is understood as a *characteristic* of woman, rather than as an effect of a mode of thinking that relies on absolute hierarchical binaries to understand the world.

Feminist-antiracist analyses make it equally clear that difference itself between people is thought of and treated as a "problem" *only* when it is subsumed into a self=good; so other=bad structure. Again the differences between the self and the 'other' are attributed to the essence of the 'other' rather than to the self's organization of a diversity of people and is seen as problematic (because difference tells the self that the 'other' is not the self, and so is bad). The newly manufactured 'problem' is attached to the 'nature' or 'essence' of the 'other', not to the system that defines anything different from the self as deviant: systems like sexism, racism, classism, heterosexism, ableism. Because the constructed 'other'ness of certain groups is posed as the problem, diverting attention from the systems of thought and practice which devalue them, it is assumed that the responsibility to solve 'their' problems is solely theirs [10].

Canadian society's public discourses tend to imagine aboriginal people as manifesting this kind of problematized difference. They often headline indigenous communities in ways that mirror African American feminist Joyce Ladner's descriptions of popular conceptions of "pathological" black communities in the U.S.A.(1992: 125-7). The same conceptual trick made it possible for the problem of legal systems that treated women as property to be re-packaged as the "woman question", makes it easy to reassign things like men's violence toward women and the gender wage-gap to women's responsibility through an insistence on "women's issues", and turns the effects of the Indian Act, broken and never-made treaties, and the reserve system into "the Indian problem' , in times past, and now "native issues". Real problems in aboriginal communities are in this sense racialized: naturalized to some monolithic, essential, and fictive aboriginal way of being. It is a small

step from 'finding' (manufacturing) deviance in the nature of the 'other' to viewing any difficulties they meet as their fault and therefore their burden.

'Art', race, and First Nations arts

Art discourse, like a certain stream of anthropological tradition, has often contributed to a racialized and differentiated reception of the objects of different people and cultures [11]. Charleen Touchette, a writer of Native American heritage, asserts that, for example,

> [e]xamples of women artists and multicultural artists sharing the experience of discrimination abounds in art disciplines that have been traditionally defined as craft such as fiber art, pottery, and wearable art. Hierarchical distinctions between "high art" and crafts are used by the mainstream art apparatus to systematically exclude artists in these disciplines in both groups (1994: 202).

Common discursive racist and sexist dichotomies have in fact created enduring schisms between art and anthropology, between an 'art work' and an 'artifact'; between 'high art' and applied 'craft'; between public and domestic arts; between fine/universal art and objects specific to a differentiated culture; between modern and ancient art; between innovation and tradition; and between avant-garde and conventional work [12]. (For specific illustrations of these pairs' prominence and use, see Chapter 6.) 'Art' has traditionally been defined away from women and from men of indigenous cultures and of colour. Art forms of people of colour, indigenous people, and white women have often been theorized, displayed, bought and sold, and valued (or not) as objects *other* than *objets d'art.* Although these definitions are consistently and increasingly being challenged and changed, anthropology, ethnography, and natural history museums, craft museums and fairs and stores, tourist shops, heritage villages and community history museums are still full of 'non-art' things made by European women and all those labeled culturally 'other', while art galleries and art museums are still populated, out of demographic proportion, by the works of white men [13].

Racialized hierarchization of arts and cultural production is visible in Canada and B.C. The ways that First Nations art has been written about, displayed, viewed, and marketed here owe much

to this structure. First Nations arts have tended to be understood, evaluated, and bought and sold as other, or less, than the generalized category of 'fine art'. This does not mean that they have not been highly sought or valued. Both locally and globally, B.C. First Nations art is sought and prized by many, and certain artists' works are collected for enormous amounts of money. However, aboriginal-made objects and images are often still segregated in galleries, shops and museums which specialize in a category of cultural production that is defined *'racially'*, and "First Nations art" still stands as a distinct category. This is evidence that collectively we still operate in a mode that defines and separates people and their art according to a hierarchy of racist and sexist categories [14].

While critiques of this segregated situation need to be made, it's important to remember that in a racist context, the First-Nations-dedicated (or "tribal art"-dedicated, or whatever) spaces, although defined racially in a hierarchical framework, are at least places where First Nations people can show their work to the public and gain recognition and a living. Many articles on appropriation and racism in Canada point out this dynamic [15]. Display spaces whose contents are racialized and anthropologized have functioned as places of opportunity for self-representation for aboriginal artists and curators in a society that consistently denies indigenous people the resources and venues to speak and be heard, whether it be in writing and publishing, or in politics, or in art production, or other forms.

Endnotes

1. Terrie Goldie describes this aspect of non-indigenous society's relation to indigenous people in settler states:

> Australians, New Zealanders, and Canadians have, and long have had, a clear agenda to erase [their] separation of belonging. The white Canadian looks at the Indian. The Indian is Other and therefore alien. But the Indian is indigenous and therefore cannot be alien. So the Canadian must be alien. But how can the Canadian be alien within Canada?... The white culture can attempt to incorporate the Other, superficially through beaded moccasins and names like Mohawk Motors, or with much more sophistication, through the novels of Rudy Wiebe. Conversely, the white culture may reject the indigene: 'This country really began with the arrival of the whites.' (1995: 234).

2. Kathy McCloskey looks at this tendency, which she calls "artistic imperialism", with special reference to the history of Navajo women's weavings and their trade with newcomers. Her article

outlines many of the main conditions for the ways indigenous arts have been conceptualized and used by the broader cultures. She argues that:

> merchant capital articulated with patriarchy and the art/craft distinction to distort the economic contributions of Navajo weavers... artistic imperialism overshadowed the silent and unrecognized transformation that took place when Native production was appropriated by colonial merchants. The Western distinction between art and craft served to legitimize the devaluation of indigenous creations that accompanied their commodification (1995: 98).

Barbara A. Babcock, in her article "Marketing Maria : The Tribal Artist in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", discusses some of the "political and economic causes and consequences" of the displacement, dehistoricization, and romanticization of "conflict, ethnicity, and poverty through the figures of Pueblo women artisans shaping mud into 'classic' forms" which she describes as being maintained by Anglo-American consumers (1995: 125).

3. For a thorough, precisely contextualized, and brilliant discussion of politics related to appropriation and identity in an intercultural setting, see art historian Coco Fusco's book English is Broken Here: Notes on Political Fusions in the Americas, especially the chapters entitled: "Passionate Irreverence: the Cultural Politics of Identity", "The Other History of Intercultural Performance", and "Who's Doin' the Twist? – Notes Toward a Politics of Appropriation"(1995).

4. The point I need to establish is that in the time and place we're in - enmeshed as we are in relationships which flow from rather than break from a collective history of near-complete domination of aboriginal people by immigrants to the continent - 'borrowing' from First Nations cultures, traditions, histories, and self-representations is not a viable option. First of all, to borrow something you need to get permission. This detail is important: in an ideal British Columbia, in which groups of people could share land, wealth, power, and respect equitably and cooperatively, it would be possible to freely borrow and lend bits of our separate heritages amongst ourselves. It's not the appropriation *itself* - the taking/borrowing/using for oneself - that is the problem. (Indeed, appropriation of images and language has also been used as a resistance strategy by marginalized groups of people.) However, at this juncture in history and in this place, so much forceful taking has gone on - and so little has been done to even out the imbalance of power that the taking created - that 'borrowing' bits and pieces from the cultures of those who have been colonized cannot be anything like a free and equal exchange. Having recognized these conditions of internal relations in our society, it's quite difficult to imagine a situation in which the appropriation of First Nations cultural property or concepts by a member of the dominating, non-indigenous group could be anything other than *mis*appropriation.

5. This has happened especially in international moments when Canada represents itself to the rest of the world. One examples is the Expo '67 World Fair at Montreal, where one of the first prominent exhibitions of 'Northwest Coast' First Nations art was held, showing works by Bill Reid and Robert Davidson. (This event was described by Audrey Hawthorn, in her book A Labour of Love: The Making of the Museum of Anthropology, UBC the First Three Decades 1947-1976, 1993.) Marcia Crosby's 1994 University of British Columbia MA thesis (Department of Fine Arts), Indian Art/Aboriginal Title, outlines this tendency and gives specific examples of the way it functions in Canada. Julia V. Emberly traces this mechanism of incorporation in Canadian historiography as well in her book Thresholds of Difference in the chapter entitled "A Gift for Languages: Native Women and the Textual Economy of the Colonial Archive":

> No longer an official colony Canada is now a postcolonial nation-state. Focusing on the colonial and postcolonial relations between Canada and England, however, often occludes the internal colonization of Native people living within Canada. Dispossession and marginalization still characterize the cultural, economic, and political existence of both rural and urban Native

people. The utopic desire on the part of the discipline of history to establish national statehood, in the history of a country such as Canada as the centre and origin of its own historical making, is carried through a reading of the colonial archive as *l'histoire totale* (1993:101-102).

6. As Trinh Minh-ha has noted, reliance on categorical and essentialized definitions of difference has affected cultural appropriation debates in recent years. I think that we should focus on the complexities, possibilities, and limitations of the context at hand when we consider appropriation. I agree with Trinh that relying on monolithic, dichotomous identity categories in order to sort out who may speak about what is a dead end:

> ... where should the dividing line between outsider and insider stop? How should it be defined? By skin colour (no blacks should make films on yellows)? By language (only Fulani can talk about Fulani, a Bassari is a foreigner here)? By nation (only Vietnamese can produce work on Vietnam)? By geography (in the North-South setting, East is East and East can't meet West)? Or by political affinity (Third World on Third World counter First and Second Worlds)? What about those with hyphenated identities and hybrid realities? (1995: 217).

7. Heather Dawkins traces some specific examples of the latter kind of representation in her article on artist Paul Kane's *The Wanderings of an Artist among the Indians of North America* (1851):

> The written text registers Kane's unease, and even repulsion, in a way that neither the paintings nor sketches do. Chapter XII, for example, describes... the barbarous language of [the Chinook] tribe ("the horrible, harsh, spluttering sounds which proceed from their throats, apparently unguided either by tongue or lip"); and their "filthy" habits ("their persons abounding with vermin and one of the chief amusements consists in picking these disgusting insects from each other's heads and eating them").... the specificity of tribal cultures is set off by the constants of "savage" behaviour. According to the text these are laziness, filthiness, uncontrollable gambling, and alcohol addiction, the latter "turning savages into dangerous animals"(1986:26).

Dawkins connects this kind of portrayal of knowledge of the 'Indian other' to the operation of colonial power: "Clearly this archive is not a sketch of life as it really was... but neither is it simply the perception of Indians through European filters. Kane's gaze, of observation and of knowledge, his sketches, paintings, and writings are deeply implicated in, and constitutive of, power"(27). Production of certain kinds of knowledge about the other operates as a mechanism of colonial (and neo-colonial) power. Other theorists make this link in post-colonial societies. Homi Bhabha writes about the functions of the "colonial discourse as an apparatus of power" in The Location of Culture. He says that the colonial discourse's

> predominant strategic function is the creation of a space for a 'subject peoples' through the production of knowledge in terms of which surveillance is exercised and a complex form of pleasure/unpleasure is incited. It seeks authorization for its strategies by the production of knowledges of colonizer and colonized which are stereotypical but antithetically evaluated. The objective of the colonial discourse is to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest.... colonial discourse produces the colonized as a social reality which is at once an 'other' and yet entirely knowable and visible. (1994: 70-71).

8. As Edward Said asks in Culture and Imperialism,

> Can one speak of imperialism as being so ingrained in [even] nineteenth-century Europe as to have become indistinguishable from the culture as a whole?.... such concepts as "imperialism" have a generalized quality that masks with an unacceptable vagueness the interesting heterogeneity of Western metropolitan cultures"(1993:162).

9. Furthermore, Canada's colonizing and neo-colonial relationships do not form a two-way street. It's a more like an intersection at rush hour when the traffic lights are out. Writers in Canada, as in other settler societies, have pointed out that aboriginal people are not the only ones to be consistently wiped from or misrepresented in Canadian history and Canadian collective identity. All non-indigenous Canadians were at some point immigrants, but in the Canadian social context the name of 'immigrant' has been racialized, allowing those of (especially British and French) European ancestry to speak for a nation that has always been made up of indigenous people and immigrants from all over the globe. People of colour in Canada are consistently represented as newcomers and non-Canadians, no matter how long their roots are in this culture and society. Interestingly, they are subjected to forms of visibility which are similar to the prominent ethnographic displays of First Nations people. While the cultural productions of indigenous peoples, suspended in the "ethnographic present", have sometimes been included in the dominating society's narrative of national heritage, aspects of non-European and non-First Nations cultures have been appropriated to uphold a favourite national story about tolerance of 'other' ethnicities within the multicultural fold of the 'two founding nations'.

10. My belief is that a focus on shared circumstances – on the histories and structures which link different groups' experiences – redirects attention away from those people imaged as problems back to shared responsibility. I think that HIGH SLACK set off down this road. Audre Lorde described what there is to work against:

> Traditionally... it is the members of the oppressed, objectified groups who are expected to stretch out and bridge the gap between the actualities of our lives and the consciousness of our oppressor .... I am responsible for educating teachers who dismiss my children's culture in school. Black and Third World people are expected to educate white people as to our humanity. Women are expected to educate men. Lesbians and gay men are expected to educate the heterosexual world. The oppressors maintain their position and evade responsibility for their own actions. There is a constant drain of energy which might be better used in redefining ourselves and devising realistic scenarios for altering the present and constructing the future(1990: 281).

11. *Gitxsan* artist, curator, and writer Doreen Jensen is well known for her analysis of 'race' defined art categories and their meanings. As Vancouver art critic Robin Laurence noted in her review of the recent Vancouver Art Gallery show "topographies: aspects of recent B.C. art", of which Jensen was a curator:

> If topographies is more than an exercise in tokenism... we will know that Doreen Jensen's impassioned arguments against the hierarchical and racist distinctions between high art and craft, between the contemporary and the traditional, have been heard and understood. We'll reflect on her observations about how those in power fashion an aesthetic, a notion of quality, that perpetuates their power (The Georgia Straight, October 31-November 7, 1996).

Jensen has written that:

> As Aboriginal Artists, we need to reclaim our own identities... We need to put aside titles that have been imposed on our creativity – titles that serve the needs of other people. For too long our Art has been situated in the realm of anthropology by a discourse that validates only white Artists. Today there are many Art forms of the First Nations which are still not being recognized. Think of the exquisite sea grass baskets from the West Coast of Vancouver Island, the quill work and moose hair tufting Arts of the people east of the Rockies, and ceremonial robes, woven and appliqued throughout North America. Not surprisingly, these exquisite works of Art are mainly done by women (1992:18).

12. Disciplinary categorizations of different people's art and cultural production along cultural and racialized lines has been noted by artists, art critics and historians, and anthropologists. In The Traffic in Culture: Realigning Art and Anthropology, edited by George E. Marcus and Fred R. Meyers, this differentiated categorization is addressed and broken down. In the introduction, the authors write that:

> In contrast to a previous paradigmatic anthropology of art that was concerned principally with mediating non-Western objects and aesthetics to Western audiences, the work here engages Western art worlds themselves, casting a critical light on mediation itself, and proposes a renegotiation of the relationship between art and anthropology. The need for such a renegotiation is clear.... So much of the traditional anthropological concern with "art" has focussed in one way or another on whether a separate domain of aesthetic objects (or practices) exists in different cultures... Western critics also have been deeply involved in challenging the universality and essentialism of the category of art...(1995:1).

And in his essay in the book, "Representing Culture: The Production of Discourse(s) for Aboriginal Acrylic Paintings", Meyers makes the important point that:

> Aboriginal objects are not simply or necessarily excluded by Western art critical categories; they may in fact contribute to or challenge these discourses for the interpretation of cultural activity in productive ways. They can hardly do so, however, if anthropological interpretation accepts a stable category of "art" as its horizon of translation(1995:59-60).

13. Larry Gross describes the cultural specificity, conceptual limitations, and segregative effects of western society's category "art" in his introduction to the book On the Margins of Art Worlds:

> Art is the product of human skill, but because not all manufactured products are given this honorific title, other criteria must be involved in this designation. In its modern use the term is applied primarily to the products of a set of activities known collectively as the *fine arts*. Some of these were presided over by Muses postulated by the ancient Greeks: poetry, dance, tragedy; others (for example, painting, sculpture, architecture) were joined to the concept of fine arts through a long process that culminated in the eighteenth century and was codified in Diderot' *Encyclopedie* and the newly emerging philosophy of aesthetics... More recently the practitioners of new media – photography, film, video – have aspired to be included in this honored grouping.
>
> The modern Western designation of the *fine*, or *high*, arts expresses a distinction drawn between these exalted domains of cultural production and others that might reasonably be included but are disqualified on various grounds. Most notably excluded are those performers and products whose appeal may be too broad - the *popular*, or *low*, arts – or too utilitarian, such as crafts. It had often been noted that these exclusions follow – and reinforce – lines of class and gender privilege(1995: 1).

John Yau's 1990 article in the collection Out There: Marginalizartion and Contemporary Cultures elaborates on specific historical examples to generate an analysis of western art history's race-isms.

14. In a 1989 speech given at the opening of "Diversities", an exhibition of work by George Littlechild, Jane Ash Poitras, and Joane Cardinal-Schubert at the Glenbow museum in Calgary, Cardinal-Schubert offered this critique of dominant 'race'-based categorizations of art within a reflection on Canadian racism in her experience:

> You all have made me different. You have taught me about the discipline of art and being a professional and to me that means it is art hat is shown in the category "New Alberta Art."... What I have a problem with is the categorization of Native Artist in a museum that does not separate other Canadian artists in exhibitions according to their race. It seems Native people cannot do anything without that adjective in front of their name (1991: 10).

15. Lee Maracle and Joy Asham Fedorick make the point that cultural appropriation would not be so central to the problem of aboriginal people's representation if aboriginal people were allowed more public space to make their voices heard. They indicate that the dynamic that really counts is the systemic racism and neo-colonial structures which deny adequate means and opportunities to First Nations writers, artists, musicians, leaders, and other people to speak publicly about themselves and the world around them. Maracle sees the reality of racism as a separate issue from appropriation of culture:

> I have said consistently... that you can't appropriate anybody's voice. You can prevent them from being published. I'm speaking personally, of my own experience. Sojourner's Truth was not published at first because the stories were too controversial.... The World War II story – my earlier attempts to publish it were met with "it's not culturally mythical enough" – it seems too real.... Bobbi Lee was too political to be autobiography. And so on and so forth. Lots of reasons that people could come up with for not publishing our work, and of course, that's been our history.... The request to move over and not take up our space is a different one. That is not [about] appropriation of voice. That's just move over and let us sit at the same table(Kelly: 1994: 82-83).

Joy Asham Fedorick says something similar in her article "Fencepost Sitting and How I Fell Off to One Side":

> ... it is not the dominant culture and language that are in fear of demise. Don't force us over the buffalo jump to cultural extinction, either through watering down our cultural integrity or making us survive culturally anemic. When you have let us write our own hundreds and thousands of books, filled concert halls, galleries, stages with our cultural expression, then, and only then, when our culture surrounds us, living, breathing, acting, developing, secure: then [the situation will be righted].... for those of you who want to know what we are like, let us tell you (1992: 42).

This article is an insightful and challenging consideration of appropriation, and includes a useful and incisive "SELF-CENSORSHIP CHECKLIST", which is worth a look for anyone interested in these issues.

Chapter 4: The artist's process of production

Judith Williams talked about many connections between the outside world and her production process (including personal and aesthetic exploration as well as extensive historical research). Three considerations of Williams seemed especially important and interesting to me in shaping and determining the final shape and scope of HIGH SLACK. They are: first, the artist's attention to and recognition of the historical context of the subject matter she engaged with; second, Williams' knowledge of the history of MOA's site and her connection of this story and the physical evidence of this history to themes outlined in the exhibition; and third, her negotiation of the issue of cultural appropriation in her production of the installation. I use these production moments to learn about British Columbia's historical, cultural, and socio-political contexts and about how context and the "communicative circuit" of art production and receptions are linked.

Stuart Hall, in his essay called "Encoding/Decoding", outlined a form of reception theory which I find useful to thinking about HIGH SLACK's process of production and moments of reception. Though, as mentioned, he applies his theory to television programming, his ideas are equally - though not identically - applicable to the production and receptions of a contemporary art work like HIGH SLACK. One idea emphasized by Hall (that reflects a direction or method which I have developed organically in the process of my thesis research) is that it is necessary to link the facts of a "message's" production and receptions to prevalent social ideologies and discourses, and to the power-relations associated with these, which are encoded in accepted "rules" of operation and institutional structures:

> though the production structures of [contemporary art] originate the [art] discourse, they do not constitute a closed system. They draw topics, treatments, agendas, events... images of the audience, 'definitions of the situation' from other sources and other discursive formations within the wider socio-cultural and political structure of which they are a differentiated part.... to borrow Marx's terms - circulation and reception are, indeed, 'moments' of the production process in [art] and are reincorporated, via a number of skewed and structured 'feedbacks', into the production process.... Production and reception of the [art] message are not, therefore, identical, but they are related: they are differentiated moments within the totality formed by the social relations of the communicative process as a whole(1993:92-3).

It is with this reasoning that I present Williams' negotiations with historical and cultural issues, agendas, knowledges, and ideologies in her production of HIGH SLACK, and use them to reach into debates which are relevant and current in the broader social context.

Judith Williams has touched on complex historical, social, and cultural issues at other moments in her artistic career. Her November 1991 exhibition at the Surrey Art Gallery, entitled "Whose Story Is This?", emerged at an earlier stage of the years-long research that was to produce HIGH SLACK in 1994. In this exhibit she displayed works concerned with tracing colonists' relations to British Columbia's land and sea scapes, their contacts with First Nations, and one particular result of these contacts: the devastating spread of smallpox among aboriginal people and subsequent huge loss of First Nations population during B.C.'s colonial period. In previous projects, such as WHITE RAISER, RED REAPER, DARK WINNOWER OF GRAIN, 1981 (at the Burnaby Art Gallery), and REFLECTION/EXTENSION, 1983 (shown at the Surrey Art Gallery and Charles H. Scott Gallery), Williams dealt with historically and geographically-situated subject matter. In the first she approached a group of body imagery she witnessed in the Gynecological Display of the Museum of Science and Technology and at a medical museum, *La Specola*, both in Florence. The series of images of wombs and birthing included in the exhibit caused some heated speculation in some quarters about her personal and political views on women and their reproductive roles. In the second she explored the material evidence of the life a woman named Dorothy whom she knew and who lived at Refuge Cove in Desolation Sound, where Williams lives during part of each year. Williams' work in general seems to have been overtly based on the site and circumstances of her own life, experiences, and community in Desolation Sound. Her relationships with a range of people have apparently directly informed her artistic projects and research.

Historical contexts

The contexts, patterns, and collective assumptions which were outlined in Chapter 1 informed HIGH SLACK's production (and reception, for that matter) generally and specifically.

The centrality of the issue of who controls land and resources in B.C. to understanding the province's history and current path is recognized in HIGH SLACK. Un-treatied European settling and road-building in *Tsilhqot'in* territory in the 1860s was an overriding cause of the Tsilhqot'in War, and this fact is alluded to in text in the painting/sculpture called High Slack:

> SIGNED YESTERDAY, BETWEEN COL. MOODY + A. WADDINGTON, AN AGREEMENT FOR COMPLETION, IN 10 MONTHS, OF A MULE-TRAIL FROM BUTE INLET TO THE GOLD FIELDS...
> WE SHALL SEND SICKNESS INTO THE COUNTRY: THE CHILCOTINS WILL DIE!... IN OUR COUNTRY - YOU OWE US BREAD!... LAHASSA?IN SAID: "THEY STEAL OUR LAND, HUNT OUR GAME, BRING MADNESS WITH WHISKEY - DEATH WITH SMALLPOX... (MARCH 1864)

The ways that non-indigenous infringement on traditional First Nations territory happens today was brought by Williams right into the space of the installation. The book work called Water Damage tells the story of a non-aboriginal-owned company seeking in 1990-91 to export water within the claimed territory of a First Nation to the United States. In each case, in the 1860s and 130 years later, profit was the motive behind conflict over natural resources between immigrants and indigenous people. Williams displayed the changing context of this kind of encroachment: accomplished as colonial state-sanctioned ventures in the last century, and as capital enterprise in the later 20th century.

Site-specific production, the history of place, and 'self/other' conflict

One aspect of HIGH SLACK's production, if it had been fully realized, would have made further historical and political connections between the exhibition and its context of production in

Canadian society. This was Williams' work on an out-of-doors component to the installation. Had it been installed, this component would have made a concrete link between the colonial-period historical narratives traced in the show and Williams' understanding of self/other dichotomies in those histories and our cultural, social, and natural contexts.

Williams was very interested in using the history of the Museum of Anthropology's physical site to create this failed component of HIGH SLACK. The building's architect, Arthur Erickson, had researched, used, and preserved the structure that had been in place on the spot where the museum was constructed – a World War II gun emplacement intended to protect the coast from the feared possibility of Japanese attack.

As Williams noted (in personal communication, January 1998), few people know about this history of the museum site, and it is rarely considered in relation to the present institution that sits there. The artist mobilized this physical history and connected it to the complex, conflicted histories and contemporary issues traced in HIGH SLACK. Williams told me that the planned artwork, which was to sit outside the gallery, visible from its windows, on top of the old battlements, would have linked the history of conflict between *Tsilhqot'in* people and British colonizers explored inside the gallery to a more recent example of western societies' history of war and fear of the 'other'. This was intended to disrupt viewers' likely categorization of the Tsilhqot'in War narrative as 'Native history/issues' and to refocus the audience on the questionable history of the rest Canadian society as a collective and its relationships with 'other' people. One of the desks included in the installation was to sit facing the exterior art work (Figure 12). The idea was that the latter would be directly visible as a visitor read through Williams' book works documenting aspects of colonial history in B.C. and aspects of current relationships between First Nations and the dominant society.

This part of the exhibition did not happen for two reasons. First, the veteran group that has control over the World War II gun emplacements and storage spaces outside the gallery where HIGH SLACK was located refused to allow it after Williams and the museum sought their

permission. Second, a tinted film was applied to the gallery's floor-to-ceiling windows, obscurring the view to outside. This was mounted in order to protect the works inside from ultraviolet light because of Williams' difficulty in getting permission from a local community museum to use an old writing desk from their collection in the exhibit because of conservation concerns about light levels. In the end, Williams decided to have the desk replicated, but the coloured film had already been mounted on the windows at quite an expense to the museum.

Her original idea was to create a moment of reflection on the collective society's dependence on self/other dichotomies, and to point out the similarities in our collective behaviour in different historical periods. She talked about the fear of what and who has traditionally been defined as 'other' in white-western societies – and how that was manifested through kinds of *hysteria* in both colonial relations with First Nations in the nineteenth century as well as in twentieth-century decisions to point guns at the 'Orient'. This was also Williams' reason for using photographs of the battlement's underground tunnels, which lie directly under the museum, taken by MOA designer David Cunningham (personal communication, January 1998). (Figure 13)

The politics of appropriation and HIGH SLACK' s production

Our collective society's debate over cultural and voice appropriation and how this tendency relates to our understanding, treatment and use of First Nations art forms, stories, cultural, and religious practices directly *informed* HIGH SLACK's production and content.

If appropriation is about violations of *ownership*, whether of land, objects, or stories, for instance, and whether by literal seizure or representation, it's important to think about the rights *and* responsibility of ownership. The rights of *owning* something include having access to it and the privilege of claiming it, but also involve care of it and an obligation to it. Appropriation becomes an issue in the case of HIGH SLACK because of the history re-told within the exhibition. Because Williams is not an aboriginal person, and because her reconstructed stories weave the words of

indigenous people and Europeans (spoken in the nineteenth century and before) together with her own writing, questions about who is using whose voices in the installation, and to what ends, have arisen.

The challenge for me in this perspective is to be sure that these questions open up debate, thought and understanding, rather than closing things down. This is where it's important to insist on a non-categorical analysis which leaves room for the real complexity and contradictions of relationships between people in a complicated and messy world. The reason we need to question how, where, and when non-First Nations people choose to speak about their relationships to indigenous people and issues is not because they are not aboriginal (because they are different, and belong in the opposite category). It's because they are entwined in a historical relationship with First Nations that has traditionally made it their 'right' to speak about and on behalf of colonized and subjugated peoples who have been denied all sorts of things including the space to speak for themselves.

The anti-racist feminist stream of thought outlined in relation to the appropriation debate in Chapter 3 sheds some light on the way HIGH SLACK engages the issue of appropriation in a racially-hierarchized environment. HIGH SLACK re-presents a history including encounters *between* First Nations cultures and European cultures in a way that exposes some of the long-term effects of colonial meetings and relationships. In this representation Judith Williams implicitly rejects the assumption that First Nations' difficulties are due to their 'different nature' and are 'their problem' [1]. Williams' artworks trace a web of events and conditions as the *results* of historical relationships based on a colonial system and context. The installation, by re-imaging collective participation in our history, discloses that we share rights and responsibilities not only to past events and their repercussions, but also in the present and future.

Implicitly, Williams deals with the meeting of two cultures and the long-term results of this meeting. Borrowing from anti-racist/feminist critiques of self/other structures, my argument is that

investigating and criticizing the historical relationships between First Nations and non-indigenous Canada should not be constructed as the task of aboriginal people. Canadians of immigrant descent have at least as much responsibility to interrogate the past and continuing relations between their society and First Nations as do those of aboriginal descent.

My argument is also that Williams took up a particular strand of this responsibility in the installation's production in three interesting ways, each addressing aspects of the racial politics of B.C. history and art. First, she indicted the self/other dynamic of domination explored above within the specific history traced in HIGH SLACK:

> We [Europeans] were coming to this enormous place, huge chunks of it were untouched and unoccupied and we had an opportunity at that point to engage with the people who were here and learn from them and they could learn from us. But, for the most part, we didn't do that. We came and claimed and took because we misunderstood what was here.... I hope we can see the events as being about us - the collective us. Terrible misunderstandings like the Chilcotin 'War' are mirrored all around us any time one person or group seeks to dominate or subdue another... High Slack is about the problem of seeing things in terms of me and the other. By the other I mean whatever is viewed as outside the self - be it animal, human or land" (In Peter Wilson, 1994.

Second, she also seemed convinced that challenging the labelling of colonial histories as indigenous history and property moves us collectively closer to accepting the responsibilities of recognizing what has gone before and dealing with its contemporary results:

> ...when you get into an area like that, say with smallpox, how can you say whose history that is? Native people want to claim it as their history, but I'm very very insistent that it's *our* history, right, in the sense that *we* have to own up to it being our history as well as *their* history, and *only* then we can actually resolve the issues, I think (Foss 1996: 2) [2].

Third, Williams' experience of doing research for HIGH SLACK and of producing the individual works was so permeated by cultural politics surrounding aboriginal/non-aboriginal relationships, specifically the ambiguous dynamics of appropriation, that she felt compelled to take up these issues directly in the installation. She did this in two book works which are in fact intended to introduce the exhibition and in turn *inform* viewers' experiences of the space and words and images within it. In these works, the spectrum of Canadian society's receptions (and uses) of First

Nations cultural products - from respectful to anthropologizing to profiteering to patronizing to appropriative - meets a contemporary art work designed for display in a building (MOA) heavily implicated in this same set of cultural politics. In a wooden sculpture which was part of HIGH SLACK, called RE:AD°ING, which was a focus of Williams' earlier exhibition at the Surrey Art Gallery in 1990, historical and contemporary politics converge on the issue of appropriation. (The Surrey exhibition was in fact named "Whose Story is This?" in direct reference to the struggle over ownership of narratives: both historical and cultural (Rosenberg, 1990).) Two book works, A Voyage Round (Log A) and Rock/Burn (Log B), are propped on the desk-sculpture, which is roughly shaped like a miniature Spanish ship and houses two benches for sitting and reading.

A Voyage Round (Log A) combines excerpts from the travel diaries of George Vancouver and a Spanish Captain, Valdes. The entries display these men's divergent perceptions of the landscape and peoples of British Columbia's coast. There are also photographs taken by Williams in the Desolation Sound area of people on its shores and waters and of material remains of First Nations inhabitance, illustrations of indigenous villages and artifacts from the 'explorer's' diaries, and pieces of the botanist Archibald Menzies' diary, which document his reactions to the same landscape (Figures 14-22). Williams explained to me that the repetition of a photographic image of a person driving a boat was a conscious strategy to get her reader/viewer to make an assumption dictated by dominant gender stereotypes, and then to be confronted with that assumption and expectation through a visual revelation at the end of the volume. She said,

> [T]here were women who signed their [art]work 'J. Williams' so that you couldn't tell if it was a man or a woman. And... it would not occur to me to ever do that, actually, but it's interesting... Log A for instance is about the projection onto the image of a person driving the boat which looks like a man, and then at the very end, it turns around and is a woman. And that was a very deliberate hook to say, 'Look what you just did. You just did what the explorers did. You projected onto a situation what you thought was there.' And that's the first theme in the exhibition. Now if people don't get it... [t]hat their projections are part of what I'm talking about, then what can I do? So certainly, *I'm* not going to give them all the clues. I want them to figure things *out*. So... if they come to the end and they've spent the *entire* exhibit thinking that I'm a Native person and they *suddenly* realize I'm a white person, well then good (Foss 1996:39).

Williams' visual trickery was explicitly constructed to force viewers to acknowledge that their own perceptions are not neutral but informed and conditioned by collective, and often unconscious, 'common-sense' assumptions. The exhibition documents relationships between groups of people as they've happened over time *in a specific landscape* and also hints, through devices like the one in Log A, that such relationships continue to draw on and produce assumptions and stereotypes. She aims at assumptions about gender in Log A, and in the exhibit as a whole is concerned about dominant perceptions of the nature of the relationships between indigenous and colonizing/immigrant peoples and 'their' land and histories. A question is implied throughout: whose story *is* this to tell at the Museum of Anthropology - the story of the colonization of B.C.'s land and people?

In Rock/Burn (Log B) Williams engages even more precisely with the mechanics of appropriation in B.C.'s contexts of relationships between peoples and the land. In one of our conversations, Judith told me that appropriation was an issue she faced directly and personally when she was doing research in the landscape as well as in the archives for the exhibit:

> JW: [Log B] is all *about* appropriation. I mean, anybody who accuses me of appropriation *certainly* better read that book, where you know... the guilt is overwhelming ... And questioning the ways through or whether I can even use the image of those pictographs. And I hope that people would see that right there I was in a dilemma.
>
> CF: Well, the repetition of "whose story is this?" is kind of a clue.
>
> JW: But you know... that *I* was in a dilemma (Foss 1996: 13).

In Log B, Williams intersperses her own poetic narrative of internal debate over her right to capture and reproduce images of First Nations rock paintings in Desolation Sound with photographic images. What's interesting to me is that she perceived a need to send a message in the exhibit itself about the fact and danger of appropriation and the identity politics and assumptions which underlie it as a current issue in B.C. While she might have kept her struggles with this issue private, after making decisions about what material and methods would or would not be appropriative in this context, she chose to exhibit the debate itself.

The narratives in both Logs are reflexive stories, which are meant to reveal both Williams'

interactions with these issues and the *audience's* entanglement in the same relationships. Her placement of these conversations and tricks at the entrance to the gallery is significant: she hoped to *inform* people's viewing of the entirety of the show with a particular set of questions and cautions. RE:AD°ING is also an invitation to participate in the installation, because a person has to climb into the sculpture to see the books properly. This device really does implicate the viewer, who is often placed in a passive position in relation to art works which hang on walls or stand on pedestals away from human touch. With this work, a viewer first has to accept the invitation to climb into and sit down in a sculpture in order to look at the books. (A sign saying "The artist invites the museum visitor to sit in the boat and read the books" was included in HIGH SLACK's gallery space). Next, for the viewer, comes the task of following ideas through the pages of the volumes. This requires detective work. The book works, with their combinations of disparate voices and images, demand curiosity and investigation and active figuring out. This investment of the viewer's attention to decoding the narrative and to deciphering the point of view of the voices that speak has the effect of ensnaring her/him in the dynamics unfolding in the books. Here is the interior discussion - which Williams described as "guilty" - that the viewer finds in the text of Rock/Burn (Log B). (Figures 23 - 31).

> I don't know what happened / I had them when I started / I have all the rest - / Every one. / It's strange / I don't know where they went, / I had them - / the prints show that. / I remember, / it was just after lunch. / On the way from Klaoitsis / to Karlukwees, / I saw the ships burning / in the rock. / It was hard to get a sharp picture, / the tide was turning. / the sea was choppy and the / boat moved constantly. / I climbed onto the cliff. / It's always deep water below / I was too close, / I stood where the painter stood, / the image wouldn't focus. / I did take the pictures, / I tried to keep my balance. / I do have another set, / but the negatives I want / were taken at noon when a light / cloud hangs over the territory. / They seem more important than / the others. / I could go again, / It wasn't the same later that day, / There is constant movement. / I'd like to go back. / I don't know what happened, / I'm trying to keep my balance. / I valued those negatives more / than all the others. / They were perfect. / I have a box of our images / and a box of theirs, / we saw ourselves / we saw what they saw / the light will be different. / There was a ship - a sound. / A thick white mass rolled over the sea. / I could hear / I couldn't see. / I know where I began, / I can't understand how I got lost, / There was nothing. / Something is missing. / It's not clear what happened... / Perhaps they weren't mine to take. / What is this? / Whose was it? / Whose is it? / Whose story is this? / Nothing - / I could see nothing / the negatives are definitely gone. / The fog has lifted. / There is a ship, / the sun... / What is photographed is not what is remembered. / Whose story

was this? / The rock did burn... / I'm sure of it. / (the whole world is secretly on fire) / I saw the ships / (If you want, you can burn... / if you want...)

While tracing this narrative of self-doubt and open uncertainty about whose right it is to claim and represent the historical images, the viewer sits in a representation of an 'explorer's' ship and is privy to the perceptions of the navigators and re-namers of the land and waters. S/he sits in a boat-sculpture and flips through images of a contemporary man - no, a *woman* - driving a boat through the same waters travelled by Vancouver and Valdes. S/he occupies a ship-boat and reads this explicitly self-questioning dialogue about the coming of the ships and a recent boat-exploration of the land, with its paintings of the ships of the past.

Assessing appropriation
(some current approaches and their convergence with HIGH SLACK)

Here are some guidelines which address the issue of appropriation in relation to aspects of aboriginal cultures in British Columbia in the 1990s. They have been widely circulated and discussed.

1. Do not talk about or use North American history and cultural products before the arrival of Europeans.

2. Avoid employing traits, forms, and content of indigenous cultures.

3. Collaborate instead.

These are a set of insights which have been developed, through a lengthy struggle, in a specific historical context which has been rife with reckless mis-appropriation, assimilation and commodification of some of the traits, images, stories, and objects of First Nations cultures. These guidelines address, in other words, real and complex interactions between groups in unequal relations in power, and attempt to translate an understanding of these inequities and complexities into specific practices.

They are, therefore, good guidelines with sound backgrounds and rationales. But there is an

important ever-present condition with rules: their users must *understand* their rationales and origins in order to practice them with the original intent and to good effect. Like any other rules, the appropriation-avoidance rules can (and have and do) become empty and even destructive when they're used out of fear or habit (even where there's good will) rather than thought and engagement with real and difficult issues and relationships.

I have seen these guidelines used in ways that have convinced me that simply deploying one of them as a challenge to someone who is working on a project related to First Peoples does *not* make a valid critique. Charging that somebody "didn't collaborate" does not constitute a considered evaluation. These guidelines are not only sometimes used in superficial or rote ways, but also can be used in ways that actually obscure real patterns and challenges and choices which face us in our relationships. Here are some examples of this dynamic in connection to HIGH SLACK.

Example A) I've heard some isolated criticism of HIGH SLACK for Williams' "lack of collaboration with the *Tsilhqot'in*". Williams was open to acknowledging to me that she "would probably do the whole thing differently another time" (Foss 1996: 29). She emphasized, given this acknowledgement, that she "*backed* into the subject matter"(Foss 1996: 1). What happened was that she discovered for herself in a round-about way a history local to her home about which she didn't know much. (An improvisational process of research is surely as valid as a planned foray into a history project. It is by following threads as we touch on them that we all are drawn to learn.) Given this context, injecting "collaboration" into a process simply because it is a rule, irrespective of the circumstances, would not help to deal with the complexities of appropriation issues. In the case of HIGH SLACK, and probably in others too, requesting collaboration from indigenous people would not necessarily be a desirable or suitable way to solve the appropriation threat. Collaboration means active partnership, and translates into *a lot* of work and commitment from aboriginal people in practice. Asking for collaboration on whatever project is at hand no matter what the circumstances ignores the possibility that the proposed collaborators may have no particular interest

in it; and ignores the fact that aboriginal people choose their own priorities for work and partnership from amongst a sea of challenges and tasks related to working with the dominant society [3]. Williams was concerned about this during HIGH SLACK's production and display:

> ...They were presented with a kind of *fait accomplit* and they would have liked to have had I think more input at an earlier stage, and I understand that. And perhaps if we hadn't backed into this subject matter that would have been handled a bit differently. But, we were kind of *all* the way into it...The negotiations with the museum on Rosa's part to even *do* this was, you know, a big deal. So that once that we got - it would probably have taken us another five years to do it the way maybe we should have. And I'm willing to say that if - you know, if I started over again, I would do this differently... if I had been in slightly different circumstances, I probably would have liked to have a different relationship with the people. A more personal one. And I think that they would too....
> ... it really involves a *range* of Native groups. And I think that unless we acknowledge that... it is not Native problems, it is not Native history, it's *our* history, and I mean everybody's, then I think that we have got a place... that's level, that we can work with. But notions of separation... I notice one thing: people like Loretta Todd, who's a very active Native feminist and film-maker no longer is willing to say that Native people are the only exclusive users of the material; she's been very emphatic in issues to do with making films and things like that and... there is a changing notion there. There's a lot of knee-jerk reactions about appropriation, and... coming from a feminist background I was sympathetic to leaving things alone, but I thought it was better for me to say what I have to say and then allow [the *Tsilhqot'in*] the symposium for them to say what they wanted to say. Instead of some simplistic notion of saying, you know, 'come and help me with my project'. I thought that's just insulting. And they do too, by the way - I mean they don't want that any more than I think that it's right... (Foss 1996: 23).

The Tsilhqot'in War/Justice Inquiry symposium was actually one of two events originally envisioned as concurrent facets of the installation's display at the museum. While the November symposium focussed on past and present aspects of *Tsilhqot'in*/non-First Nations relationships which are explored in the exhibition, the other meeting was supposed to pick up on another event and debate alluded to by Williams in an artist's book, a controversy over a non-Native owned business deciding to sell (for export to the United States) water falling in the territory of a coastal First Nation. Williams explained to me that:

> ... we wanted to have *another* symposium on the issue of water export...and that didn't work at all. ...that was *very* disappointing to me. ...I thought we had a hold of *another* issue that was contemporary, right?.... We wanted to have these two events which would have increased the Native involvement. (Foss 1996: 25).

For the *Tsilhqot'in*, the issue of trust was certainly also important, although there was never an

indication that a lack of trust characterized their interactions with Judith Williams. In general, though, academics do not have a spotless record of being responsible to groups of people and communities they use for research. I've been told by more than one person that the Tsilhqot'in Nation experienced this kind of breakdown at one time; an anthropologist who came into their communities to do research and who seemed to be entering into an agreement to maintain a long-term relationship then cut off ties after his/her work was complete, giving back little or nothing to the communities involved.

The lesson I learn from the critiques about a lack of collaboration is that no rule is universally applicable or sensible; that we must always look to the context, relationships, and specific issues surrounding each project involving material or actions which may seem in danger of being appropriative.

Another important thing to say is: why should we assume that there's not a lot of work to be done on the First Peoples-Canadian relationship, historical and contemporary, by *non*-indigenous people - work that may not involve indigenous people's direct participation? Part of the responsibility belongs to non-aboriginal people, after all. This general argument is one articulated in streams of anti-racist feminism. It is often assumed in Canadian society that anti-racism work for whites amounts to 'helping' non-whites with 'their' problems. Anti-racist feminists argue strongly that a crucial part of white responsibility vis-a-vis racism involves self-education.

Example B) Williams, as I've already mentioned, made a choice to abide by the first guideline in my list. She chose to represent only what she defined as post-European contact, non-sacred, and often "modern" (which I understood to mean contemporary or very recent) indigenous rock paintings in Log B. She elaborated on this decision:

> ...There was other material I wanted to use. I wanted at various times to use first contact myths, but rejected those and it *hurt* me a lot to reject them because they were *so* beautiful, and I wanted to work with the people, you know, who they came from. But I decided in the end that I wouldn't even use them. And that was painful, because they were so wonderful. You know, their recordings of their first sightings of the boats, and things like that.

CF: ...And that choice was motivated by?

JW: I just felt that that really *was* appropriation, whereas these other things are... from the public records; they are from trials, statements by Native people that have been published; they aren't stuff that just *exclusively* belongs in one tribal area. They are our combined history. So I tried to only take material that fell in that category. Just as I only used pictographs and petroglyphs for instance if they are modern... if I could feel they're non-sacred or they have been overpainted or used in some kind of way that takes them out of the belonging of the purely Native experience. So, those are the kinds of parameters I set myself, and... Actually, if you look at what I did, I was being very careful. (Foss 1996: 3&4)

There are very good reasons for these parameters and for Williams' considered observance of them, and I would not argue she could have considered using pre-colonial material. But at the same time, I think it is relevant here to recall some popular and problematic broader societal assumptions. Often accompanying a generalized reliance on the idea that pre-contact material is out-of-bounds for non-indigenous people is still the notion of a past and now-disappeared Native 'primitive nature', or 'pre-contamination authenticity': in other words, a 1990s version of the noble savage stereotype. It's sometimes in the name of this 'cultural purity', and not because of any recognition of inherent rights to ownership, guardianship, and representation, that pre-colonial material is protected as the property of aboriginal people. I am not arguing that Williams' decision to avoid using pre-contact rock paintings falls into this trap - only that this larger collective tendency should be seen in relation to the decisions she had to make in negotiating the appropriation issue.

It's important to keep this general inclination in mind because we may be able to learn from it. What are the implications of this reasoning? Because Europeans are around when something is painted does that mean it becomes less claimable as aboriginal property and not subject to the requirement of explicit permission to be used by a non-indigenous person? What happens to the integrity of Native rights of ownership when and after outsiders arrive? Why?

Williams consulted people on appropriation issues as she put the installation together. She was advised by MOA staff regarding whose voices she used, and how she used them, in the artworks. She told me that:

> I was somewhat advised in my behaviour in all this by a woman named Doreen Jensen.... I've consulted Doreen at various times; she spoke at the opening of my exhibition... I also sought a bit of advice from Marcia Crosby.... I gave her the material from the books that I had then made, and said... 'What do you think?'. And she said 'I just don't think you've got a problem.'... .... Michael Ames [then director of MOA] I think was very careful about us being clear on whose voice was speaking at given times. I thought he was right. He pulled me up rather abruptly at one point but it was more in terms like, "It's not clear who's talking here" and I thought he was right about that. So that was good. But he didn't say, "Don't do this" and he didn't say "Get more people involved in this". He didn't say *anything* like that... (Foss 1996: 3 & 29).

This kind of precaution and negotiation about how an individual uses the voices of other people is necessary. It makes sense especially when we consider that in Williams' textual combination of voices, she makes references to a web of contentious historical and political issues and dynamics which continue to be spun today - and in which she herself, and visitors to MOA (including me), are caught. Williams is censured by some, however, for even getting *into* this subject matter - and inside this museum. This does not make sense to me. Is the Chilcotin War not part of her (and my) larger history? Why don't we have to own it, to own up to it, to know it, and to relate it to our surroundings now? Why is that a *Tsilhqot'in* job and one for the professional historians only? [4].

Endnotes

1. Williams made some comments related to this idea in our April 1996 interview:

> It's interesting because everybody assumes that this is - this installation was about the *Tsilhqot'in*, but actually if you look at the material, it's only part of what was there.... I did talk a little bit with some *Tsilhqot'in* people, I talked to some *Klahoose* people, and I talked to some *Homalko* people... So I didn't see it as a one-sided thing. There [were] a number of groups of people involved.... And, it just happened the *Tsilhqot'ins* were the people involved in the massacre itself although there were other Native people involved in the whole thing but they were peripheral and not accused by anybody of having killed anybody. So the focus tends to be on the *Tsilhqot'ins.* (Foss 1996: 28&29).

2. On the other hand, and at the same time, "Williams emphasizes that High Slack is not about native/white relations but about the state of being present in the landscape" (Peter Wilson, 1994). She differed from my reference to HIGH SLACK as an exhibition that is 'critical' of conventional history and politics:

> CF: ...so [in HIGH SLACK] we've got these multiple voices that are talking to each

other, that are singing to each other, that are creating a story that gets multiplied in lots of ways because they're talking to each other.

JW: That's right.

CF: Okay. Like I said, one of the ways I was looking at it was more of an authoritative relationship, or a critique of an authoritative relationship between -

JW: Yes, I think it's probably a bit of a mistake to think of HIGH SLACK as a critique. Because... when you teach as much as I do, and particularly in this department [Fine Arts]... it was all critique there for a while... to the point of just total boredom. I'm not so interested in a critique of society. I'm interested in individual action and I'm interested in creative solutions to problems. My instinct is very seldom to be critical... my interest is to find something positive in a situation and go with that. That's in almost all circumstances. And so, I'm not a person who so much was trying to critique what happened in various circumstances, such as the Tsilhqot'in War, but in a range of circumstances, as to *expose* them.... In order to provide a kind of series of platforms to look at those situations with the hope that something positive comes out of it (Foss 1996: 15).

These statements, placed side by side, highlight the complexity of Williams' vision as she put together the exhibition. What's interesting is that in practice and in some of her comments about HIGH SLACK, Williams is so clearly critical of what she identifies as an unequal self/'other' structure. Others who have written about the exhibit have certainly interpreted the works as political and critical in some way:

> She conveys, throughout the literal layering of images and texts... the different and sometimes conflicting conditions by which we construct history and interpret landscape. She also draws parallels between historic confrontations between native and European peoples and contemporary disputes over natural resources and native land claims (Laurence,1994).

3. This is not to say that collaboration between non-indigenous and aboriginal people is an unimportant idea or process. It has become an important concept precisely because it does encourage cross-communication and makes a space for aboriginal people to share knowledge and exert control over activities which would otherwise be in the hands of people who rarely bother to ask First Nations who have a stake in an issue, resource, or property, for example for their opinions, expertise, or participation.

Collaboration as a hard and fast rule also runs the risk of creating tokenism. Real collaboration means working in an equal partnership, where priority-setting, planning, work, and credit for work are shared. Sometimes, however, efforts at collaboration reinforce inequalities by "inviting" people's participation in already determined projects with pre-established priorities, goals, and methods, and then, after hearing a certain amount of input, failing to hand over real space for contributions and cooperation. This phenomenon has been noted in some collaborative efforts undertaken by white middle class-dominated feminist organizations to work with women of colour, aboriginal women, or women with disabilities, for example.

4. There is another level of debate here, which refers to our historical and current cultural and political context. This is the fact that institutions like UBC MOA have functioned as places of opportunity for self-representation for aboriginal artists and curators in a society that consistently denies indigenous people the resources and venues to speak and be heard, whether it be in writing and publishing, or in politics, or in art production, or other forms. This situation has led some to question whether it is ever a good idea to give the rare space that *is* available to some First Nations

people to a member of the dominating culture, or to approve or encourage non-indigenous speakers' statements on situations which need to be publicly addressed and acknowledged as of concern to aboriginal people by aboriginal people. Williams recognized this issue in an interview, noting that it's important to see that:

> with what we did at the museum, we primed a pump, which I think has been very productive for the *Tsilhqot'in* people. But of course... what they do with it is entirely their business. I mean, I'm certainly not involved in anything to do with their land claims or anything like that. There's certainly information in my book that supports their land claim, but *not* just the *Tsilhqot'in*. It supports the land claims of say the Homathko people... no-one *ever* wants to talk about the fact that... we're proving where those people lived, or *I* am, in ways that are very helpful to them. But then it's up to them what they do with it... Native people now are in the position to do this work themselves (Foss 1996: 3).

Chapter 5: The artist's reception and my reflections

As the artist, Judith Williams played a central and obvious role in HIGH SLACK's *production.* My research interview with her produced some information about aspects of this process of production, which were reported in Chapter 4. Other parts of our conversations, it seemed to me, produced information and perspectives which illuminated her *reception* of the installation more than they did her earlier *intentions* in its production.

In our conversations, Williams discussed HIGH SLACK with me partly in direct response to my questions and ideas, and also in response to the comments and reactions of a network of other people who viewed her works. I see these particular, in the specific context of my research, as functioning as re-interpretations of the show and the events and processes around it, so I will not treat them as a direct conduit to, or impartial meter of, the factors, concerns, and attitudes which contributed to the installation's production and display. These specific aspects of my research with Williams did not uncover the actual conditions and intentions behind the show's production. Rather, they manufactured an occasion for the artist to re-encounter the exhibition and comment on it from a point in its post-display life - and a point in her relationship with it as a work with an existence of its own in context and in the minds of others.

This is not to suggest that Williams altered the work or her thoughts about it to suit a new viewer or situation. Rather, alongside her original intentions and meanings for the work and its context she seems to have developed more ways to think about the installation and the situation and events surrounding it (MOA, the public symposium, the publication of her own book on the histories hinted at in HIGH SLACK) in active relation to the work's context and to moments like the one my research offered.

In conversations and one formal interview with me, and in newspaper articles and the November 1994 public symposium program, Williams, reflecting on HIGH SLACK, sometimes drew the kind of connections and conclusions that might be expected of a viewer looking at the

exhibition in combination with the issues and events surrounding it. Like other audience members whose responses are discussed in this thesis, she talked about HIGH SLACK *partly* in relation to other viewers' responses and comments. Also like me and other viewers, she seems in places to have made sense of the installation's context and meanings in relation to certain relevant socio-cultural ideologies and contexts.

I have examined the links forged between my readings of the exhibition and these kinds of ideologies and contexts, and have investigated the connections between the responses of other museum visitors and these discourses. Similarly, it is my intention here to analyze the comments Williams made in our discussions by relating them to these prevalent undercurrents and frameworks. I have organized her and my comments around two discursive themes: first, defining art, politics, and theory; and second, defining anthropology against art. Williams' understandings of her role as an artist is explored within a discussion of now-traditional modern-period European frameworks which separate "art" from socio-political issues. Her description of her installation in the context of showing at and working with MOA comes into focus with a critical analysis of the still standing discursive dichotomy between art and anthropology.

Of course, as a researcher and writer, I select and interpret what seem to be important points and themes from *my* point of view. As an active participant in a conversation rather than a detached listener, my selections and emphases (and my analyses of my selections) are bound to be different from what the other participant, Williams, would choose. I want to recognize here an important aspect of our conversations - that of the relationship between myself as researcher, graduate student, and younger person (than Williams) and Judith Williams as subject of research, professor, and older (than me) woman. In point of fact, my research for this thesis has led me (retrospectively) to interpret my relation to this artist as both a subject of research and the bearer of an "expert" opinion with whom I have negotiated and from whom I am trying to build knowledge.

We all inhabit specific positions of power and lack of power in a society which structures

relationships between people hierarchically. In the case of my conversations with Judy Williams, I have been in a position of somewhat less authority because of my age and student status in relation to her professorship and seniority. This power dynamic was complicated - but not necessarily balanced - by another fact: as a researcher, I asked for Williams' trust in sharing her thoughts with me in the mutual recognition that I would be writing about them in a published document with a an official academic status[1].

In other parts of my research, my position takes on meaning in a totally different set of relations. What is common to all of my attempts to learn something about HIGH SLACK by talking to people is that these inescapable relations of power were palpably present, relevant, and have shaped what this thesis can be. My purpose is to acknowledge the historically and socially-structured differences between myself and the women I've interacted with, whether the artist Judith Williams, the curator Rosa Ho, or Annie William of the *Tsilhqot'in* community of *Xeni Gwet'in*. It's important to reflect on the meaning of these differences, considering the context of my research on an art project which itself engages local colonial histories and neo-colonial present-day politics in a culturally and politically charged institution.

Art for art's sake?

In my conversations with her, Judith Williams explained that looking at and being in "landscape" was the act and experience which started her work on what became HIGH SLACK. One summer in Desolation Sound, she contemplated the way her sight could rest on the ocean's surface and reach its depths at once. She has since emphasized that it was this *looking*, understood as an aesthetic experience, which led to her questions and research about Desolation Sound and its history, not the reverse.

> Judith Williams: ...I *backed* into the subject matter. I was looking for landscape, and I just simply started to ask myself questions. The thing that you have to acknowledge, and not very many people are willing to - you know on both sides - is the moment you look at the landscape

here and start asking questions about it, the first layer you go through maybe is… the last two hundred years but you are *instantly*, as far as history goes, back with Native peoples' occupation of the landscape.

As a matter of fact, interestingly enough, if you pursue that long enough you go right through *their* occupation of the landscape back to the geology and the formation of the landscape which is an area that I'm interested in now. But you can't escape that occupation which is at least 10,000 years old, and that *fascinated* me.

...the area that I backed into... had to do with my asking questions about the landscape and the names of the landscape and then thinking, "Oh, okay I want to find out what the Native names for the places are" and asking Native people what the names of the places were too as well as looking up the white naming of things. We discovered that all their names are based on usage and... that became a fascinating thing... and something that I wanted to pursue and I think any curious person would, right?

So naturally you come up against... the area of Native-white interaction at that point and because I was looking at what actually caused the Native cultures to start to disintegrate, I looked at smallpox. I found a chart from Wilson Duff [a former, long-time, UBC Museum of Anthropology academic] explaining the loss of population in 1862 and I was really taken aback, because once you look at the figures - it just happened that they did two censuses and they have the figures - you see that it wasn't *just* the impact of the white culture that caused the breakdown. It was loss of population, and loss of the integrity of culture. Now *that's* a very interesting thing. And so I pursued the history of smallpox. *That* was how I got started in dealing with this area. And I read up on smallpox, and I read the microfiche copy of the... Victoria paper, the *Times-Colonist*, for 1862. I read all of it.

Chantell Foss: I noticed that in your artist's book. That's an amazing amount of reading...

JW: As I was reading the articles on smallpox... other things that were on the page would catch my eye, naturally; what else happened *that day*. And what started to develop as I read was this plan to build a road up [Bute] inlet. And so... every time I saw those I started to read that and there was this story unfolding about a territory that was very *close* to me, up the coast, and I thought "Well *that's* interesting, because I probably can *go* there", not knowing how difficult it was to go there. And then of course I discovered that there had been this terrible massacre, and then the pursuit and trial, and then the hanging of these people [five *Tsilhqot'in* Nation chiefs]. And I thought "this is an amazing story" (Foss 1996: 1).

This narrative is a key to Williams' understanding of what HIGH SLACK, in the end, is all about. It clearly has been a very important point to her that the project be defined as a personal exploration, sourced in and articulated through an aesthetic journey that *led to* historical, theoretical, and political explorations [2].

Another interesting statement of Williams' sheds more light on her understanding of the relationship between aesthetic considerations and subject matter (typically separated and understood

as opposites, as 'form' and 'content', in white-western art discourse) in HIGH SLACK:

I think sometimes it's easy to think that I'm totally subject-oriented. But no good artist is only subject-oriented... there has to be *form* involved, and... the two are *not separate*. And I think that's a mistake that's made by art historians and critics, et cetera at the moment, of focussing - of assuming that artwork is *transparent*, and that you can go right to the subject (Foss 1996: 5).

Her conscious emphasis on the idea that form and content are not separable or opposed, but rather intertwined as one in art work, as a medium of communication, is a position whose meaning becomes clearer in relation to white-western narratives about the nature and status of fine art. The narratives that currently dominate in North American visual arts institutions and discourses tend to a) understand art's content and context as a separate concern from the form that it takes and to b) privilege form as the designator of 'art', and devalue content as less relevant – or even irrelevant - to art-making. Williams' descriptions interact interestingly with this ideological and historical background. In the first and last sentences of Williams' statement above, she makes it clear that as an artist she seeks to distance herself from an *exclusive* focus on subject-matter. The second sentence states that content alone cannot make good art or a good artist. Williams also stated that, in her opinion, neither can form alone make good art.

Defining art *against* concern with historical context, theory and socio-politics is a view of art which has been strong in the white-dominated western world since the nineteenth century (and the advent of 'modernism' in white-western culture). I am thinking of the organizing principles of art which conceptualize subject matter and form (defined as the purely aesthetic characteristics of an object or image) as separable concerns, and which subordinate content to form. In the white-European and Euro-American world, art has been defined in this period (especially in its romances with Impressionism, Post-Impressionism, the two-dimensional painted surface, and abstraction) through its *formal* characteristics and an insistence on its separation not only from its subject or content, but equally from other human concerns and activity [3]. Williams' definition of her art-

making process (and of "good" art in general) makes reference on one level to this overarching cultural and historical discourse. She defines her position about the characteristics and purpose of art in relation to – and in some opposition to, insofar as she indicated that she values content and refuses the now-traditional western opposition between form and content.

This ideological negotiation is relevant to Williams' reception of HIGH SLACK's display partly because she was exposed to and responded to other people's receptions (including my own) which focussed primarily on one element of this pairing or the other. Many viewers had strong reactions to the installation's subject matter, prompting Williams to define her relationship and the art works' connections to historical and contemporary issues; and many viewers articulated strong reactions to its form as well, which sparked reflection on her reasons behind her working method and assessment of its success.

My intention here as well is to use Williams' negotiation to question the dichotomous logic which imagines 'form' and 'content' as opposed; and which emphasizes the one as the measure of good art, and often characterizes the other as irrelevant to art or actively detracting from it. In my efforts to understand Williams' perspectives on this issue, I am inclined to follow her lead when she states that "the two are *not separate*" (April 18, 1996: 5). I think it's necessary to move outside of the form/content opposition to reach a place where these aspects of artistic production can really be seen to intertwine in ways that challenge and expand now-traditional art definitions.

It is interesting that I - following feminist critiques of art history - immediately read into Judith Williams' 1994 installation a challenge to this discourse of what defines art, and then found that Williams had a view of politics, critique, and feminism and their relation to art that differs significantly from my reception of HIGH SLACK. Williams produced an exhibition which is intertwined with a complex of historical, social, and political issues, and she views HIGH SLACK as a starting place for a communication and negotiation process that could accurately be described as political. The artist herself, in contrast, defines the situation as something different from "political".

"Political" is a word she does not associate with her understanding of the show as "a set of positions from which to look at [historical and contemporary] aggression and see it for the error it is and to see duality [in any situation] as the misleader it is."(personal communication, January, 1998).

HIGH SLACK displayed a shifting, complex subjectivity on the artist's part, which interacted with and explored historical and contemporary contextual issues by visual means. Cultural and political narratives and relationships are traced through the texts and images of HIGH SLACK; they are self-evident, if somewhat ambiguous and encoded, as is demonstrated in the written responses of several museum visitors who recorded their thoughts about the show. Here are some examples of the ways viewers read HIGH SLACK as an art installation which (successfully) weaves itself into historical, cultural, and political matters:

> ...The layering of 19th and 20th C[entury] materials really shows how little our attitudes towards and expectations of this small piece of the world have changed over all the generations of white contact... - John and Merrilyn (41)
> I very much appreciate the research you undertook, a fascinating re-consideration of historical events & issues that contribute to the construction of what B.C. is today, affects our reading of the land and the environment... - Henry Tsang (55)
>
> 28th July - very powerful, I loved it. It brought me back to the past and projected what the future is... and could be. It takes time to feel all of this... - Denise Stewart (85)
>
> ... It reveals a deep understanding of the problems and contradictions involved in representing the "other" and appropriately presents these concerns in a form which complicates and fragments ideas, and challenges the assumption that something as complex as this issue could be understood simply by reading an "expert" account or relying on conventional curatorial techniques. This is the best attempt I have seen to chart the murky and often misunderstood area of race relations... the impression I take away from this exhibit is that our attitudes as western, "civilized" people towards history & other races are often indicative of our own desire to own something rather than to try and understand it - Australian exchange student @ U of Mass (158)
>
> ... this matter of discovering how we, as the human species, can best live on the Earth in a spirit of respect and, indeed, love for one another, is the dominant question of our time... the record of non-native and First Nations contact in B.C. is a miserable one - Correction begins with awareness. Your installation... provides an opportunity for such awareness to begin. It is surely now the responsibility of visitors to this installation to accept what you have offered and begin their own personal journeys of awareness - leading to, I hope, a more just society in our common future. - Paul B. Ohannesian (sp?) (II: 1)

Perhaps the kind of consciously historically situated subjectivity and complex interaction with issues and relationships evident in Williams' exhibition have moved beyond the scope of her – and the wider culture's - ideological apparatus for defining art. The active engagements with questions and contexts that are visible in the installation were not elaborated by Williams in her verbal descriptions of her art-making, and remain present on the level of a latent potential. They are veiled by the discourse she has developed to negotiate the terms of a paradigm of art that has been dominant for a century. If Williams was practising outside of this paradigm, she nevertheless worked with it in her own reception of the works.

I have been wondering why. Could it be that the traditional art framework is perceived as (more) safe? I think this may be true, as Williams made it clear to me in our interview that she considered showing art that may be labelled 'political' or 'theoretical' or especially 'didactic' to make an artist extremely vulnerable: "some exceptionally talented people manage to pull [an illustration of theory] off and do good work, but even their work is labelled 'propaganda' by their colleagues" (personal communication, February 7, 1997). However, the reality is that the traditional western paradigm that defines art and determines artistic merit through aesthetic form - torn from content and context – is also *not* a particularly safe home for Williams' work. As she told me, over the years her works have been read in a spectrum of ways as forays into non-aesthetic territory - whether it be in the diverse and questioning receptions of HIGH SLACK, by reviewers, museum visitors, researchers like me, curators, or people who attended the public symposium, or more simplistic and bombastic (and misguided) reactions like that of Art Perry to her "White raiser, Red reaper, Dark winnower of grain" show, in 1981. (His dismissive attack was entitled "Artist obsessed with suffering and woman's role".)

Another possibility for explaining the difference between the kind of political implications and historical commentary read into HIGH SLACK by viewers, on the one hand, and Williams' own definitions of HIGH SLACK and herself as an artist, on the other, may be buried in this

statement (first mentioned in the Introduction), taken from the artist's introduction to the November 1994 public symposium program:

> I choose the name **HIGH SLACK** for my installation because it is the time when the tide, having risen to [its] highest point for the day, seems to pause before it ebbs. The current calms, one can safely traverse the rapids and [it's] a good time to fish for salmon. It is time to change the way we view the "other".... May this event be a pause in the volatile social currents - a time for mutual recognition and understanding (Williams 1994:5).

I had always read this paragraph as a consciously political statement - as a confirmation that social, historical, and political issues are a central part of what HIGH SLACK is about. It seemed to reinforce the political implications and acknowledgements in the statement made by Rosa Ho on behalf of the Museum of Anthropology in the same program:

> [Williams] discovered that individuals like Robert Homfray and Alfred Waddington, whose names have been immortalized on channels, mountains and canyons, have left behind stories, and continuing effects for today. The Tsilhqot'in War of 1864, and the 1993 Cariboo-Chilcotin Justice Inquiry are two such historically linked episodes. The knowledge and importance of the War to the present day *Tsilhqot'in*, and the perspectives of the First Nations peoples of the Cariboo-Chilcotin region on the justice system are either absent or remain significantly under represented in the archives, in public knowledge, and government policies. In organizing this symposium, the Museum is seizing the opportunity for ourselves and others to learn more from the participating panelists about some historical and contemporary issues which have deep social and political implications for government, native, and non-native relations in British Columbia (Williams 1994: vii).

Having since talked to Williams about art and politics, this reading of her statement became more difficult to maintain. Looking at her words again, however, I think that there may be more to say about this ambiguity.

I had taken this excerpt to mean that Williams acknowledged and addressed the "volatile social currents" in her artwork. It turns out, I think, that the part about a "pause" and temporary calm and safety instead is the core of her vision. If I take this statement more seriously and more specifically, it becomes clearer that while Williams asserts that there are important relationships and issues ("currents") out there, at the same time she says that these currents can be calmed: the social, cultural, and political context can be *suspended* while thinking and talking about it, in a moment when

the rapids of history and politics abate.

Williams' later elaboration on this subject holds further interest. She noted that: "I see all human activity as simply one of the natural forms like the tide, and so the form of human activity goes through flows and fluxes and changes and evolution and... deaths. [I see these all as] natural forms. We are less important than we think"(personal communication, January 1998).

One thing I've learned in doing the research for this thesis is that it is not possible to suspend those tides - and I don't think a slack tide exists when it comes to historical socio-political relationships and the way we all are positioned in them. The currents never pause long enough for cultural and political differences to rest; we must continually negotiate them. I think it's necessary to understand that we are floating on them, directed by them, and not in control of them. None of us can extricate ourselves from the contexts we live in and/or the issues we touch on in our work, and they remain and function no matter how we choose to engage with them or whether we try to ignore them. It may be that this is a different way of talking about something similar to what Williams is concerned with in her focus on particular human activity as not only historically- or culturally- but also physically- and naturally-rooted acts.

Art? Anthropology?

Judith Williams' understandings of the University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology form an important context for thinking about how HIGH SLACK has been received and represented in a specific cultural and political milieu. This is another area where my attempts to fit Williams' explanations of her work and her concerns into the contexts *I* see as important have been dotted with contradictions and holes. By taking one large step back from the perspectives and opinions she expressed to me, however, some previously confusing statements have come into a new focus. I will try to sharpen my focus here by exploring the framework of yet another dichotomy commonly used to isolate what we call 'art'.

As previously discussed, conceptualizing art in general by defining it against the concerns of anthropology is a practice rooted in the historical racializing of humankind and our cultural products.

In recent times - especially in the last decade - the problem of ethnocentrism in art scholarship and the art world in general has been confronted directly by a variety of artists and writers. Charleen Touchette's article, "Multicultural Strategies for Aesthetic Revolution in the Twenty-First Century", is a comprehensive and incisive consideration of the combined effects of sexism and racism in the sphere of cultural production. In it, Touchette, an American artist and teacher of "fractional" aboriginal heritage, poses a challenge to feminist art historians, art critics, artists, curators, dealers, etc.: the creation of a credible global aesthetic that embraces cultural diversity. She writes that:

> the very concept of a dominant aesthetic and the hierarchical thinking that it fuels must be relinquished. The current dominant aesthetic is a narrow view that reflects the cultural values and goals of only a small part of the world body. Rather than a mainstream, it is a small tributary that wields a disproportional amount of power because of its unequal share of economic and political resources garnered through hundreds of years of cultural imperialism (1994: 184).

Touchette identifies a current trend toward the recognition and encouragement of multiculturalism in art criticism, institutions and agencies, but simultaneously worries that unless people work for real change in the next few years, this positive trend will degenerate into a passing infatuation for the 'mainstream' (in eds. Freuh, Langer, Raven 1994: 185). Her writing proposes a giant shift in the focus of feminist as well as non-feminist art historians and encourages art historians, critics, artists, collectors, etc. to make the egalitarian aesthetic revolution she envisions a reality. My focus here on the racialized placement of First Nations art in places like MOA instead of "art" galleries is directly related to Touchette's critiques and demands. (Canada's National Gallery displayed its collection of First Nations art at the time of my 1993 visit in the basement, mostly in glass cases. The treatment of these works as 'artifacts' was in high contrast to the spacious, open 'masterpiece' type display accorded the works of artists of European descent, on the upper floors. It should be noted, however, that there have been major exhibitions of aboriginal art works 'upstairs' since; for example,

"Land, Spirit, Power", co-curated by Robert Houle, Charlotte Townsend-Gault, and Diana Nemiroff.) I am leading here to a consideration of the importance of HIGH SLACK's setting, physical and historical. The Museum of Anthropology and current cultural beliefs about First Nations art, culture, and political struggles are important access points to understanding how Williams' exhibition relates to this society's (binary) definitions and uses of "art" and "anthropology".

As a viewer, I was immediately impressed by the amount, thoroughness and subtlety of Williams' historical and contemporary research on HIGH SLACK. My impression in 1994 - and my opinion today - is that the works in the installation demonstrate and lay out complex and multiple understandings of one moment in B.C.'s history and its expansive future implications. This presentation of research meshes in an interesting way with Williams' working definitions of MOA, the art therein, and the cultures represented there. I will present some exchanges from our conversation, and respond to the issues that surface in them:

> Judith Williams: ...I consider the great art of this area to be in the museum [MOA], in the sense that what you have there is the product of a very elaborate, highly developed culture. It had its own iconography, its own style of art, its own methodology, its own concepts, and *there it is*.... And we can go down and look at it, or we can even, in a few cases, and I've been lucky to go places where it still exists in situ. Which is why I like pictographs and petroglyphs, because there they *are*. And I have been *stunned* by some of the things I've seen.... So for *me*, that - I remember one of the first trips I made up coast was with Liz Magor and her husband and mine and we went in two boats, and when we came back she was talking to someone and she said, "Sandy, you've go to go; it's like going to Greece." And I feel the *same* way, that there's a *great* culture, and the thought of being able to make work, you know, in juxtaposition to that great culture, is an *enormous* privilege. And I valued it at the time, *more* than I valued exhibiting at the Vancouver Art Gallery. And that is *not* to say that I do not value exhibiting at the VAG - I do, and I'm very very delighted to be able to go *on* and put a piece there... I value that experience highly. But with the work I was doing at the time, it seemed to me that it belonged at the museum [MOA]. And it belonged where you could look at this older form of art and then suddenly there's this completely different kind of thing. But it... bears some relationship to the other.
>
> Chantell Foss: To establish the relationship between what you're doing -
>
> JW: - Yeah... I just think you're looking at work of a *very* very highly developed order (Foss 1996: 34).

Williams' description of First Nations cultural production indicates one way she has mediated a thread of thought which is common in public thinking about aboriginal people in B.C. The thought I'm referring to is that indigenous cultures - or at least the pure or most celebrated forms of them - are things of the past. As I outlined in Chapter 2, Europeans, including those who came to B.C., have constructed "narratives of loss" around indigenous people. The perceptions of early anthropologists such as 'father-of-ethnography' Franz Boas revolved around the expectation that the cultures and peoples of the coast were disappearing. Emily Carr documented the arts and communities of First Nations partly with the idea that soon there would be nothing to record [4]. Even though by now it is obvious that these nations and cultures have *not* disappeared and will continue to survive and change, however scathed by colonialism, the framework which imagines their demise has not disappeared either. It exists in the organization of some anthropological endeavours, and it lives in our society's public imaginings of indigenous people particularly of Canada, the United states, South America, and Australia. Williams' description of MOA and the objects it exists to display reveals one way that she negotiated this particular current discourse as an artist [5]. It is important in relation to this discourse to be clear about the fact that since very near its beginnings, MOA has commissioned new works by First Nations artists as well as their restoration skills. In 1949, following research for a Royal Commission on the State of the Arts in Canada, the museum began to acquire new works by aboriginal artists (Hawthorn, 1993: 6-8). Consequently, MOA's collection of contemporary art is large and impressive. In fact, this aspect of its activities is an important example of one of the ways the museum's has attempted to move away from some traditional anthropological approaches to its collections and the people who made them. This facet of MOA is also one of the things it is best known for as an institution.

> CF: ... I was curious about what kind of process you went through in terms of the ways that you were identified as... an individual inside the gallery. Because there was some information given about you from the letters that were excerpted... And I know those weren't all your decisions... So I just wondered ... what you thought about that individual identification....

> JW: ...I don't see it as very important. ...the museum was set up with no information *at all* except those books, and... I always *liked* that. Well the public has kind of forced them into the position of explaining things a little bit more, but still there's not very much information there. I *like* that. The information is there in those books; if you're curious enough you can go and look them up, but you're not given very much. And I stuck to that. It was Vivianne [Gosselin, a MOA intern at the time] who wanted all that other stuff. And I thought that she misunderstood what the museum was about. And how it had been first set up. ...It wasn't a literary culture, it's an iconographic culture, and that's what you're supposed to be doing. And I... in some sense... would have preferred to be *almost* anonymous. I mean, it *wasn't* about *me*. And... so... the less information the better (Foss 1996: 36-37).

In this exchange, I find evidence of Williams' active grappling with historical Euro-North American tendencies to make diverse indigenous cultures into one, which can be characterized simply. Despite this society's long-standing tendency to homogenize indigenous cultures (for example, grouping the diverse nations inhabiting the west coast and some inlying regions of North America from Alaska to Oregon together as "Northwest Coast" culture) it is inaccurate to characterize B.C. First Nations as a monolithic culture: the reality is a complex range of cultures, languages, and traditions which draw on a wide spectrum of sources and influences. When this heterogeneous reality is invoked in any context without a focus on its complexity, what happens? Williams rightly pointed out in our conversation that there were and are great differences in the past and present between indigenous cultures and immigrant cultures which *need* to be acknowledged, appreciated, and understood. To her insight I would add that to describe B.C. First Nations' cultures as iconographic versus literary is somewhat imprecise. These cultures also are and have been oral, narrative, historical and ceremonial in practice; and First Nations people have adopted and adapted to a wide variety of forms of expression, cultural and otherwise.

Williams' ideas, quoted above, about providing cultural and political contexts in the museum reveals her on-going and active negotiations of different ideas about the value and meaning of art. She explained demands for increased information interpreting objects in the museum by referring to a public who are not so fluent in ideas about experiencing art works aesthetically. One interesting thing about her explanation is that a very strong voice among those recommending more contextual

information in MOA has come from the First Nations people whose cultures and selves are on display in this building. Williams acknowledged this aspect of representational practices at MOA, but was not completely convinced of their value:

> With the exhibition before me, which had been curated by a First Nations person.... as you came in the door there was a *huge wall* covered with stuff to read which was explaining the exhibition.... Now, I *dislike* didactic panels like that; I like to keep them to a minimum. And [I] don't really want them there. It's okay to have a little something, you know, but nothing much(Foss 1996: 37).

One thing that Williams told me in our interview was that "[t]here's all kinds of museums all over the world. They show all kinds of things, right? This happens to be an anthropology museum" (Foss 1996: 37). As far as I can tell, MOA doesn't just happen to be an anthropology museum, but is defined partly in opposition to art museums because of its focus on First Nations cultures. My experience of the museum (which lead me to do this thesis research rather than just view the work and read the explanatory panels) tells me that all kinds of museums do not really show all kinds of things: art museums still show more things by white males than by any other group; while anthropology, folk art, craft, natural history, and community museums show many more things made by women, and men of colour. Museums are segregated to widely varying and very much changing degrees, and we cannot collectively ignore the specific context in which MOA collects and displays. Canadian society is not a context of infinite, relativist difference, or a smorgasbord. It's an effectively organized structure which weaves together systems of oppression which still operate in our society.

Since it was recognized, people have begun to chip away at this structure, which leads me to a consideration of another statement of Williams':

> And... so for *me*, who *I* was, I thought, was irrelevant. *Why* does it matter? It matters to people who care about these things but it doesn't matter to me. So, if somebody perceives me as a Native person, then they read the work from direction x. If somebody perceives me as a Chinese person, then they perceive it from direction y. If somebody perceives me as, you

> know, the WASP that I am... (laughing), by no choice of mine, right, then they read it in another way. But *I* think that those are *racist* attitudes (Foss 1996: 37).

In my mind, HIGH SLACK may actually be *part* of that chipping away at inegalitarian strucutres. However, that doesn't necessarily mean that who Williams is as an individual was irrelevant. Her statement is interesting because she seems to have been supposing, for the sake of argument, that you could see anyone's art at MOA at any time - a full diversity of world cultures. This isn't the reality, and I am left wondering if this kind of formulation *may* distract us from the history and context of this institution and others like it in North America.

I think that in her own committed and complex process of research work, production work, and interpretation work on HIGH SLACK, Williams has worked to understand and negotiate the dynamics and meanings of racial relationships and histories - materialized in dichotomies like that between "art" and "anthropology" - by emphasizing the potential of cross-cultural understanding and communication based on a concept of human, individual interaction. This is reflected in her call for a calming of "volatile social currents" at the public symposium, and in her preference for working individually with (First Nations) acquaintances in longer-term relationships which focus on personal connections rather than approaching issues related to First Nations/non-aboriginal relations head-on or in group negotiations. A focus on cross-cultural, interpersonal communication is, I think, a viable, ethical, and mutually-beneficial approach to cultural work. What I'm interested in is allowing a historically and politically-based analysis of the realities of racialized relationships and structures to happen alongside more personal tangents. It would be a mistake for us as a society, I believe, to disallow identification and discussion of 'race' and racism in favour of an exclusive focus on human-equality discourse.

The thorough and complex display of research, conflicting narratives, and references to historical and contemporary political context in HIGH SLACK got me thinking that Williams *might* be interested in offering audiences contextual information - especially in such a museum setting into

which some people carry a wide range of paternalist, exoticizing, primitivizing, and even racist stereotypes about aboriginal people. Her thorough recognition of historical and contemporary relationships between First Nations and dominating B.C. society and stereotypes of aboriginal people in the installation led me to think that she would recognize the relevance of these relations and ideologies to the circumstances of her work's display at the Museum of Anthropology. In the larger social context, accurate information about and from First Nations which reflects the complexity of their relationships is scarce.

The contextual and explanatory information which is offered about most of the objects in MOA's collection is usually very abbreviated (depending on several factors including when an item was catalogued, who catalogued it, and the presence of a large backlog of collections) Most often the culture and place of the artist's origin, the title, date and medium of the piece, and the way that it came into MOA's collection are recorded (figure 38).

As I try to understand the ways Williams has negotiated the complex cultural and representation issues and politics in question here, I attempt to negotiate the same set of issues myself. I think I have learned the most by remembering the specific effects of colonial relationships and contextual racism in venues like MOA, and the relevance of the political and cultural context of the museum to HIGH SLACK, and its display at MOA. My writing about Williams' receptions of the exhibition in its context are aimed at recalling and better understanding those relationships and issues.

Endnotes

1. Feminist social scientist Shulamit Reinharz calls this "interviewing up" (1992: 30).

2. On the matter of Williams' description of the centrality of aesthetic experience, formal concerns, and methodological process to HIGH SLACK's production and meanings, she later emphasized to me that:

Looking at the water two ways at once provided a methodology and what I had been looking for was a *form*, a new method, of making art that came out of the landscape itself, and was not a

culturally imported form. It led to the whole thing – all the techniques of working with tarps, the spiral, the form the books took – are all related to finding *form* and method in the landscape itself (personal communication, January 1998).

3. Timothy Van Laar and Leonard Diepeveen note in their book, Active Sights: Art as Social Interaction, that

> One of the myths about art is that it is separate from ordinary human activity. Art, the story goes, is an object of contemplation, serenely situated within the sheltering walls of the museum or gallery. ... Artworks are things that do not have a function except, perhaps, to give aesthetic pleasure (1998:2).
>
> For many artists and critics during the first two-thirds of the twentieth century, formalism seemed to provide... a consensus. Formalism was the most widely advocated approach to understanding art... It is a way of giving primacy to the formal elements of a work (line, texture, shape, colour) over questions of a work's social context... In a wold where Leon Golub paints violent images of mercenaries and interrogators while Jeff Koons exhibits floral puppies, a formalist approach is woefully inadequate. Indeed, this approach has limited appeal even for critiquing purely abstract art; it has even less use in the highly ideological, referential world where much contemporary painting and photography is to be found.... In addition to muting the role of intention in art, formalism has had institutional effects.... A typical American art school program offers undergraduate courses in such areas as figure drawing, watercolour, lithography, and bronze casting, but few – if any – in the politics or sociology of art, semiotics, or art theory.... This inadequate handling of issues that describe the meaning and social function of artworks is unfortunate, especially since the signs of a postformalist age are everywhere. Highly political art fills our galleries... Such artworks counter the late-formalist notion of technique as content (1998: 13-16).

About the origins of the idea of the romantic genius artist and its connections to formalism, Larry Gross writes that:

> European societies in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries underwent a series of radical transformations....In the realm of the arts these shifts are reflected in the increasing focus on the individuality of the artist and of artistic creation. The seeds planted in the Renaissance bore fruit in the eighteenth century and gave birth to the romantic concept of the artist.... A great work of art thus came to be defined as the product of creative genius that transcends tradition and convention in the fulfillment if its inspiration. Achievement in art comes to be identified with innovation, as the artist's genius is manifested in the originality of style and execution. ... (1995: 2-3).

4. Robert Fulford quotes from a lecture given by Carr in Victoria in the 1930s:

> They ["the natives"] saw, heard, smelled, felt, tasted, [nature]... They looked upon animals... as their own kindred. Certain of the animals were more than that: they were their totems and were regarded by them with superstitious reverence and awe.

Fulford continues:

> When she described this... every verb she used was in the past tense. Finally she mentioned the artists of the present, 1935. She acknowledged that some still carved well, "but the objective and desire has gone out of their work". They no longer believed in the power of the totem. "The greatness of their art has died with their belief in these things." Reading, writing, and "modern ways" had irreparably broken their concentration on art. By the end of her talk it was clear that she was speaking a lament for a dead culture, one which she had been fortunate enough to glimpse and portray in its dying moments" (1993: 35 & 37).

5. There is another level of debate here, which refers to our historical and current cultural and

political context. This is the fact that institutions like UBC MOA have functioned as places of opportunity for self-representation for aboriginal artists and curators in a society that consistently denies indigenous people the resources and venues to speak and be heard, whether it be in writing and publishing, or in politics, or in art production, or other forms. This situation has led some to question whether it is ever a good idea to give the rare space that *is* available to some First Nations people to a member of the dominating culture, or to approve or encourage non-indigenous speakers' statements on situations which need to be publicly addressed and acknowledged as of concern to aboriginal people by aboriginal people. Williams recognized this issue in an interview, noting that it's important to see that:

> with what we did at the museum, we primed a pump, which I think has been very productive for the *Tsilhqot'in* people. But of course... what they do with it is entirely their business. I mean, I'm certainly not involved in anything to do with their land claims or anything like that. There's certainly information in my book that supports their land claim, but *not* just the *Tsilhqot'in.* It supports the land claims of say the Homathko people... no-one *ever* wants to talk about the fact that... we're proving where those people lived, or *I* am, in ways that are very helpful to them. But then it's up to them what they do with it... Native people now are in the position to do this work themselves(April 19, 1996: pg.)

Chapter 6: UBC Museum of Anthropology as a context of reception

Curating art at MOA

One way to look at HIGH SLACK is as a case study for issues around how Canada's dominating culture and its institutions – among which must be counted UBC's Museum of Anthropology (MOA) - represent and work with First Nations. One important part of the installation planned by the artist was to bring people from both sides of this general relationship and from many different positions inside and outside of the museum, university, B.C.'s Lower Mainland, and particular cultural groups together to talk about a specific history which is part of B.C.'s colonial past and neo-colonial present. The public symposium at which this happened was itself a result of certain relationships (between MOA staff and Judith Williams, and between Williams and *Tsilhqot'in* people). It was also a catalyst to further negotiations and relationships: between MOA staff, Williams and the Tsilhqot'in National Government, as well as between all the people listed above and myself as a researcher. In this discussion, I will relate some comments and perspectives shared in an interview with Rosa Ho (HIGH SLACK's curator) to contexts, issues, and relationships that I identify as factors affecting the installation's production, display, and results in reception.

First, a methodological foreword is in order. As I have explained in the introduction to this thesis, my research has been fundamentally multi-disciplinary in method as well as in theory. In general, it would be accurate to say that I have hovered somewhere between contemporary art history ends and means, on the one hand, and the framework and methods of critical anthropology on the other. This placement between disciplines (and borrowing significantly from other disciplines as well) has been very fruitful for thinking about HIGH SLACK as an interesting thread in a web of historical, theoretical, cultural, and socio-political issues and relationships. Due mostly to my inexperience and still-develping skills as a researcher and research planner, and also because of the relative lack of previous examples or models for this kind of integrated research, this position has also yielded its own limits.

One of these limits is that although I have based much of my research on conversations with people involved or interested in HIGH SLACK, the public symposium it prompted, and the museum which was its context of display, my interview research had neither the range nor the depth

expected of ethnographic study (with its "research-participant" history). My research has gone beyond the terms of the typical art-criticism interview, which usually solicits and directly presents the answers of an artist to a critic's questions in a short format without much theoretical or contextual framework. However, my interviewing has not approached the scale or thoroughness of an ethnographic model. My main sources of information have been Judith Williams and Rosa Ho, and I have done only one formal interview (and had several informal chats) with each.

This is important to note especially in reference to this chapter, in which I undertake to consider a few aspects of the Museum of Anthropology's functioning and meanings as an institution. My interest in the museum as a context - theoretical, cultural, and political - grew *in the process* of learning more about HIGH SLACK and seeking to explain it in its relevant contexts. I had not planned (and was not able, in the circumstances) to perform the type of research (such as interviews with many more staff members at MOA, research with students and liaisons, and more in-depth work with Williams and Ho) that would be necessary to really follow up on the range of things MOA might mean as a context for Williams' work. This, of course, impacts on my ability to present a thorough portrait of MOA as HIGH SLACK's central context, and has meant that I had to choose to leave unexplored certain topics which I find interesting and relevant, but on which I have not done adequate research.

In Chapter 2, I explained the Museum of Anthropology as a context and producer of cultural and political discourses which contributed to and shaped the conditions of HIGH SLACK's production. I hoped to show that the realities of neo-colonial, racial, cultural, and academic politics and power relationships do not exist separately from what happens inside MOA (or any of this society's institutions). This may seem like a crude statement when one thinks about the fact that such politics are actually - diversely and unevenly, but often directly, critically, and progressively - addressed as part of the work that's done at MOA. But various kinds of acknowledgement and addressing of such politics don't lead automatically to a maintained attention to how those politics are perpetuated and continued inside one's walls, inside one's projects and classrooms, and to how one is operated by *them*. It is quite possible to acknowledge the reality of these struggles while keeping them at a distance from oneself, as a kind of static backdrop for work that has been defined

and settled into as progressive and working against negative conditions and attitudes which are *outside*. I think this was part of what Rosa Ho was trying to get at when she described how:

> Often we come to our work with a lot of missionary zeal. We think that we can liberate, (laughing) or we can undo harm, or redress past wrong. I think one of the most *poignant* comments [given at the public symposium held in November 1994], and it still haunts me today, was that one of the chiefs, Gerald Johnny, said something to this effect: 'Why is this symposium being held today? Why are these bitter experiences and very traumatic points of history being raised again, to what end?' And it was such a powerful mirror that was held up because it confronted my own 'do good' intention, if you will. Before we had a chance to congratulate ourselves, to say 'Isn't this great what we've done!'. By this chief's remarks, we were made to think about whose agenda was being served (Foss 1997: 8).

Sometimes problematic attitudes and patterns are recognized as internal to anthropology or specifically to museum studies, as well as existing in the broader societal context. But again (as noted in the Introduction), it is possible to deconstruct racist/neo-colonialist tendencies inside an institution like MOA and act in accordance with those tendencies at the same time, either by acting out unequal relationships or through complicity with them for the sake of self-preservation, among other motives. Deborah Root describes this possibility as a fact among museum academics in Canada. The gradual and uneven character of change in practice in response to change in theory and abstract politics is illustrated by this comment in her book Cannibal Culture:

> In the last few years there has been a flurry of critiques of museums... Many of those who write these works are in the business. For example, Michael Ames, [past] director of the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia, has written a book about problems of representation and cultural difference in contemporary anthropology museums. The attempts by many of these writers to rehabilitate the museum and render it postcolonial are often the result of a genuine unease with the colonial history of ethnographic museums, but few suggest a wholesale dismantling of museums and a return of ceremonial and other objects back to the people who made and used them and who need them to survive spiritually (1996:109).

However, while Root's analysis may be (or may have been) generally accurate, it is important to note that according to Rosa Ho, repatriation work is actively underway at the Royal British Columbia Museum, the Canadian Museum of Civilization, and UBC Museum of Anthropology [1].

In this chapter, then, I will try to explore connections between the broader social and historical context, issues and relationships that are specific to MOA, and those that, within the museum's context, are specific to HIGH SLACK. These issues include discussions about the

streaming of western-based knowledges into separate disciplines, the interactions of hierarchy (by which I specifically mean a power structure that orders people according to rank, giving a lot of power to certain people and very little power to others, in a static system of regulated authority) and disciplinary structures with the development of academic expertise in a public institution like MOA, and the relations between all these issues and the institution's responsibilities to the communities surrounding it. A convergence of these issues was brought about by HIGH SLACK, the symposium that followed it, and partly also by understandings of the project and symposium presented by Ho in her interview with me [2]. In my understanding, this project functioned as an institutional self-challenge which opened, through community participation in the public symposium, the issue of contemporary relations with and responsibilities to communities.

Institutional Challenges to Disciplinary Knowledges

Like other fields created by and operating in the western academic order, anthropology has been separated from other explanatory systems as a free-standing discipline. Therefore, its subject matter and methods have been considered distinct from other pursuits of knowledge. It seems to me that when white-western culture combined the disciplinary segregation predominant in our universities (which organizes areas of study into totally separate and more often than not opposing endeavours) with the effects of anthropology's early development as an aspect of historical European colonialism, i.e. charged with figuring out, publicly representing, and preserving aspects of overrun cultures for display, it set us up for the (sometimes very productive) intellectual turmoil and disciplinary debates and politics evident at MOA. As I've mentioned previously, anthropology has often been defined against 'art'. This is also the case, to widely variable degrees depending on whom you talk to and in what circumstances, at MOA. One example of this tendency surfaced in the matter of curator Rosa Ho's hiring onto MOA staff in 1988. In an interview, Judith Williams explained the situation to me this way:

> What happened was, Rosa was the director... of the Surrey Art Gallery, and so she certainly knew about my work, and then she came to [MOA], and I invited her to come and visit me in my studio one day, just because we knew each other. I didn't have a plan. So she came, and I started to talk to her about the work that I had been doing. And then she came back again, I think. And... she said, "You know, I think this is what I've been hired to *do* down there..." And

> in a way it was a bit provocative of her because she had been hired - and there was a lot of resistance to her being hired, she probably hasn't told you that, because people were saying, "What do we need with an art historian?"...And... she was hired to focus... [on the interrelationship between art and anthropology]... she saw herself as being hired to make a bridge between contemporary art and whatnot, and here I *was*. And so *she* saw it as a natural thing to do (Foss 1996: 33)

Ho herself also identified disciplinary tensions between art-critical or art-historical approaches and anthropological understandings as having an effect on her hiring and the institutional reception of her hiring, telling me that "I started working at the museum... in January 1988. And... I was the first curator hired who's not an anthropologist and that's certainly – it's a known factor" (interview: 2). She also emphasized that these tensions had a particular relevance to the work and context of MOA as a whole at that time. Her analysis of these strains will be examined a little later.

In my opinion, tensions bubbling up between anthropology and art in this situation have their source in two places. First, the ideological separation of the two realms as independent disciplines has some relevance. Both fields have some stock in defining themselves against the other - art history and especially criticism having eschewed cultural, social, and political contexts, and anthropology studying objects as manifestations of cultural orders (most often, in the past anyway, those cultures grouped as 'other' to the western-based discipline) more than as reflections or comments on contemporary aesthetic, socio-political, or other concerns. I think intellectual and ideological debate between 'art' and 'artifact', resulting in part from such divisions, came into play at the time of Ho's hiring. Second, the entrance of contemporary (or history of) art-trained workers into MOA articulates a threat that goes beyond disciplinary differences. As Patricia Dominguez and Deborah Root both noted, anthropology's traditional claim to know and explain cultures and their artifacts - now being not only partly relinquished but also actively critiqued from inside by anthropologists - came from a colonially-established authority and power which viewed perusal, study, ownership, and display of the 'other's' cultural production as a sign and prerogative of European superiority over other 'races', civilizations, and cultures. Anthropology still has some authority to display, explain, and represent these materials and their cultural sources. Art-historical and art-critical perspectives, although not totally free of racist and culturally-biased assumptions, do present challenges to anthropology's discourse for explaining material collections. As people trained

in art disciplines enter the anthropological realm at MOA, the frameworks of both those arriving and the anthropological institution are evidently confronted and questioned.

Disciplinary boundaries were a matter of explicit debate when Rosa Ho started her work at the Museum of Anthropology. The debates affected both Ho's personal reception into the museum and her learning there and the general working context of the museum – its projects, goals, and methods. Here I would like to give some information on the circumstances at the time (in 1988) because they have not resolved themselves (although they may have receded in visibility) and because they continue to inform not just Ho's museum practice but also the conceptual and political climate which houses the very diverse projects undertaken at MOA – including HIGH SLACK.

On the intellectual and political context of her work's beginning at MOA, and the relevance since then of disciplinary boundaries' intersections with the politics of artists' and museums' appropriations of aboriginal images, voices and histories, Rosa told me the following:

> For a long time, art has been studied for its aesthetics and connoisseurship reasons. When I first arrived at the Museum of Anthropology, studying art for its own sake was coming into question. It was at the juncture where art and cultural contexts began to intermingle. You, coming from art history as well, probably understand that context has been a taboo subject in that discipline. It was seen to be condescending and obfuscating of the individual artist's achievements. The meeting point between art and cultural context was not a comfortable one. Those who have been living in a certain realm are now confronted with cultural meaning- and some are beginning to recognize how cultural meanings in fact are very important. The place between art and culture was where the museum felt it was really poised to foster dialogue. When I first started at the museum, this kind of dialogue was a new subject for me as well, as I had never studied anthropology. When I first started to investigate tension, discord and conflict between cultural context and art, I started from looking at it from different disciplinary perspectives. We did quite a few programmes around the core issues that way. When Judy invited me to her studio shortly after I started at the museum in 1988, the work she showed me at the time came from the path she has taken- literally, on boat and foot- criss-crossing other people's histories [and] disciplinary boundaries. She came upon middens, grave sites, and pictographs. It seemed fitting to me at the time that exhibiting her work was an opportunity for the museum to feature a contemporary artist who was wrestling with similar issues but through the landscape, and its different embedded and overlaid histories (Foss 1996: 3).

Here Ho is tracing her own learning about the disciplinary conflicts that seem inevitable at a museum which was originally conceived as anthropological (including ethnological and archaeological branches), and which has responded to the need to deal with the cultural, social, political, and intellectual implications of being this kind of institution in a context which is alive with

debate and struggle over the meanings and importance of the kind of cultural objects which it owns, cares for, and displays.

Many factors have combined in B.C., and in Canada generally, to question First Nations objects' classification as anthropological, and these objects have thus begun to be moved out of strictly anthropological territory. The critical and commercial success of such objects and images as artistic products has been an important factor. Along with strong critiques of the traditional anthropological project from 'third-world' academics, feminists, aboriginal people, anthropologists, and others, widespread recognition of indigenous *arts* – especially 'Northwest Coast' forms – has created alternatives to anthropology's definition of First-Nations-made objects as "material culture". (However, as Ho later pointed out to me, art galleries have continued to limit 'ethnographical art' in their collections and exhibitions programming.) The trend that Ho noted, towards the confrontation of art and cultural context analyses and practices, has only increased since her hiring at MOA. Ruth Phillips, the recently-appointed director of the museum, is an art historian rather than an anthropologist and brings knowledge of contemporary artists and histories of First Nations art in the North American marketplace from her former position at Carleton University.

It is interesting to hear that Ho's background in a contemporary art paradigm led her to organize her earliest First Nations arts programming at MOA in a way that respected the lines drawn between academic disciplines, and treated different approaches to the museum's subject matter as independent trajectories. At a later point in her work at MOA, HIGH SLACK seems to have provided an important occasion for Ho to go in a different direction in her analysis and negotiation of disciplinary issues. She linked the crossing of disciplinary boundaries - via Williams' interdisciplinary work - to historical and contemporary issues which are omnipresent at MOA: aboriginal peoples' cultural heritage, territory, and histories. Williams' research seems to have provided an opportune and motivating spark to Ho's decision to curate an exhibition which confronts and challenges the borderlines and simmering conflicts between different disciplinary and theoretical perspectives. It is of further interest that both of these aspects of HIGH SLACK which appealed to Ho as a curator – the artist's crossing of disciplinary borders *and* the work's direct

address of First Nations histories in relation to colonial and current B.C. society – brought about only consternation among some staff and viewers.

Ho named the convergence of conflicts between western-based disciplines, and tensions between various disciplinary specialists and First Nations people over care and representation of their objects and cultures, as the place where MOA attempted to begin explorations of a range of issues. It is also the place where both she and Judith Williams found impetus and direction for the development of HIGH SLACK. Both Ho and Williams – from their very different perspectives - told me similar stories about one concrete way that the museum attempted to initiate an interrogation of disciplinary approaches and turfs and about how they in turn affected relationships with First Nations people and objects:

> RH: Another reason for opposition is the fact that this exhibition is also about an artist's particular concern as a contemporary artist. Contemporary art speaks to very few people *anyways*. When the museum chose to present a contemporary art exhibition that's also veering into First Nations history, it raised many concerns, which Judith recognized as well. How do you deal with voice? How do you deal with a very specific history? She also participated in... a committee that Dr. Ames [then MOA director] and I thought would provide a forum – given that the time was 1988... for a group of people sitting down together from anthropology, art history, visual arts, and First Nations background to talk through their respective views. We really didn't set out the topic of appropriation but we did try to address it.... Judith participated in these discussions; therefore she certainly became more aware of the different issues that First Nations brought to the discussion (Foss 1997: 4).

> JW: I was on... an ad hoc committee on art and anthropology at the museum. ... they had a panel of people. There was myself and art historian John O'Brien from my the UBC Fine Arts department. ...Doreen Jensen, and Leona Sparrow from *Musqueam*... an archaeologist, Michael Ames, the head of museum, Rosa,... Ron Hamilton, a *Nuu-chah-nulth* artist... Anyway the idea was we would discuss all this...because they were trying to consider their relationship to art. The archaeologist announced at the very beginning: "I don't want anything that I have to do with called art". Right? So that was his *statement*, it was like, this stuff is not art, it's artifact... Anthropologist Marjorie [Halpin] was on the panel. She talked about her training... and it was very interesting and I think helped us all understand. And then my exhibition kind of came along with that (Foss 1996: 33).

Looking at what these two women told me at different times, it is revealing that both of them firmly link debates over disciplines and dividing up knowledges, defining First Nations collections at MOA as 'artifact' or 'art', and negotiations between disciplinary professionals and aboriginal communities with the development of HIGH SLACK as a work that addresses these very issues both directly and obliquely.

One of the most interesting things that Rosa Ho shared with me was a further phase of her learning about the issue of disciplinary difference and how it relates to her work at MOA that resulted from her work on HIGH SLACK. More recently she has moved away from defining tensions between art-based and culture-based approaches as a problem understandable through disciplinarity at all. The framework that she has adopted seems to responsd to the distinction I made earlier in relation to the apparent academic-department mode of the museum's operation. The tension I located was between academic endeavours (which have often rested on a claim of natural and justified isolation – as "theory", which Ho below calls "modernism" or "contemporary art" - from the implications of the external world) and museum work, which necessitates communication with and respect for contemporary communities. This certainly seems to be the tension that has informed Ho's current concept of what matters in her own practice:

> ...you bring what you know – from the position that you know it. My first meeting with Judy [Williams] very very early on - I was *just* beginning to learn about the subject. I started with an *entirely* Western world-view. To me, bringing change to understanding First Nations art was modernism, contemporary art, or to address *issues* posed by outsiders. In hindsight I think this project with Judy started out as a project with a contemporary artist. By the time I finished with it, I came away with a different appreciation of the project for me. The culminating point was the *Tsilhqot'in* symposium. I now realize what happened was that Judith [Williams] became the vehicle that brought *me* – mostly me, not MOA, because MOA is not a unitary place – to understand the perceived conflict between art and anthropology. To me their disciplinary differences are *not* really the issue. The issues were about working with a community, reflecting its understanding of its own history. *That* is the issue, and that's what I learned... For me, working on a project is like taking a path. You start in from *what* you know, and from what you can bring to it. It is often a *long* trip , a long slow journey, and sometimes a difficult one. I'm framing it in terms of how I see what *my* work at this museum could be about - that is to respond to, or to be able to reflect how a community wishes to represent itself (Foss 1997: 5).

A further example illustrates the process of this change:

> Most recently we've been discussing how to present tours. For example, it was brought to our attention that – the method of comparing and contrasting, a very common way of explaining things which is used in the West, was not a strategy that First Nations people feel comfortable with. There has been a lot of resistance, myself included initially, about rethinking this methodology for our tours. Including indignant retorts like, 'what do you mean?' (laughing). This example is an instructive way of bringing home a certain point. I think it's so important to hear things that you feel uncomfortable with, before you are even aware of your own defensiveness. You made a really good point about how you should not ask your subject for responses that are more suitable for other people. Interviewers must be prepared to reflect on the answers to their questions, particularly the ones they are not looking for. If one is not prepared to hear what one's not expecting, then the question should not have been asked in the

> first place. It is only when one recognizes when one is an obstacle rather than an asset in one's work that personal growth and institutional change could take place (Foss 1997: 8).

Ho's description of her learning process as a journey interests me because she fully acknowledges that unequal relations in power get obscurred, their real meanings and importance shadowed, when Eurocentric organizations of knowledges are allowed to prevail to the point of dominance. Understanding the challenge as finding ways to share power and control over cultural/visual representations, programming, and care of objects with communities certainly homes right in on the crux of how to *practise* well, and it bypasses fairly simplistic questions like "is it anthropology or art?" which may, as Ho asserted, re-inscribe Eurocentric paradigms which divide knowledge into discrete properties and approaches – archaeology, art criticism, ethnology – and act as distraction from the task at hand. As an observer it is interesting to note the ways I agree with her after some time struggling to understand the disciplinary (and historically racialized) divide between the subjects of art and anthropology and their relevance to HIGH SLACK's life at MOA. I recall my own early belief that the solution to the western system's racially (and gender)-determined segregation of cultural objects into separate streams of 'fine art' and 'ethnological artifact' or 'craft' lay in 'promoting' the latter up the European-manufactured hierarchical ladder to 'art' status. It took me some time to realize that this trick indeed reinforced European paradigms which separate and hierarchize the 'aesthetic' from the rest of life. This 'solution' also has the effect of decorating, sugarcoating, and hiding the violence and power relationships behind contemporary society's ability to view and consume other people's cultural objects [3].

In the end, Ho pinpoints the real issue – the "site of dominance", in Root's words – as the struggle for control over *self*-representation by communities whose cultures have for years been locked away and explained by primarily non-indigenous professionals on a university campus. Ho recognized that this struggle has less to do with theoretical debates over methodological and theoretical differences *between* art criticism and anthropology than it has to do with questioning the discourses of both in relation to how First Nations objects and cultures have been represented. As Root explains,

> an aestheticized taste for societies far removed from where we actually are can become a way of never having to put the assumptions of our own culture into question or recognize what

> constitutes the line of demarcations between inside and outside, here and there. The Westerner remains in charge, and the outside remains inside... The regard for difference can... become another way to control what has been determined to fall into the category marked "foreign"; certainly this can be its effect on the ground, especially when people are stripped of their art and ceremonial objects so that Western admirers can look at them in conveniently located museums. In this was appreciation... becomes no more than another manifestation of the colonial mentality"(1996:21).

By referring to the will of contemporary communities, Ho also implies an analysis of the ways that aestheticist and ethnological treatments of a *Tsilhqot'in* basket, for example, which I will explore below, have been determined by a colonial relationship that has everything to do with power and control. Under what circumstances would it be necessary to outreach to aboriginal communities to develop better approaches to their representation? How did the basket find its way into a glass case so far from its maker's family in the first place? Why is it sitting on a shelf under professionally-determined light levels instead of holding something in someone's home? Why is the information in the entry about it written by a (likely but not necessarily non-indigenous) cataloguer instead of by its maker or inheritor? Who owns this basket? Who can look at it without driving hours down the highway? Who is chosen to tell the looker what the basket is? All these questions are not accidents, but logical results of B.C.'s colonial past and neo-colonial present.

Another of Ho's comments sheds light on this relationship between museum collections, acquired in the past and present, and the power dynamics to which they relate:

> If you look at the *Tsilhqot'in* collection at our Museum, it is mostly baskets. They have come... from very early white settlers. Without HIGH SLACK and Judith as a vehicle, the history of the [*Tsilhqot'in*] people as discussed in the symposium would never have been brought out through usual collection research on these particular baskets. If we traced back to who donated them, as opposed to the basket makers whose names were unrecorded, the family might still exist. But there is little likelihood for us to trace the individuals who made the baskets. It so happened that the *Tsilhqot'in* war became very topical. The Christmas before the exhibition opened [1992]... the attorney general of B.C. issued an apology to the *Tsilhqot'in*. In the spring of '93, the Chilcotin Justice Inquiry report came out. In the symposium we made a point of addressing something very recent as well as historical events. The Justice Inquiry started with the *Tsilhqot'in* war as the first major issue about justice and fairness within the European justice system and its impact on First Nations. Since past and present events intertwined, [HIGH SLACK and the symposium] was an important opportunity to bring different historic moments and the people connected to this area of the museum's collection together (Foss 1997: 7).

In this statement Ho not only advocates bringing contemporary communities and ethnological collections together, but also celebrates the way that the exhibition related MOA's collections to contemporary political issues through a colonial history that connects them together. Her comments made me remember my own stumbling onto *Tsilhqot'in* baskets in the visible storage area of MOA. Realizing that I was looking at *Tsilhqot'in* basketry, I experienced a moment of revelation as my mind replayed the *Tsilhqot'in* faces and voices that I had learned from so recently. Their diverse words – their histories and arguments and testimonies – wove themselves into the walls of the baskets, and I knew that I would never again be able to see or imagine the works housed at MOA, old or new, without a close awareness of the histories of their communities of origin and of their contemporary homes. I wondered what it must be like for a *Tsilhqot'in* woman to walk into the museum after the long trip all the way from the Chilcotin to talk about her people's history and find these baskets sitting here [4].

The process of putting together HIGH SLACK and following it up with a symposium, no matter what its unanswered questions, is what led to Ho's – and my own – recognition of the importance of moving from disciplinary debate to a focus on past and present relationships between MOA and other communities of people. This came about as a direct result of the process of communication and work with *Tsilhqot'in* communities and people, and of hearing the stories and analyses *they* brought to UBC. As Ho noted,

> The fact that so many *Tsilhqot'in* came that far to Vancouver in bad weather to be part of the symposium, to talk about their history attested to the fact that *Tsilhqot'in* history was very important to its people. Because we worked with the *Tsilhqot'in* from the very beginning. They published an article about the symposium in Wolf Howls [a *Tsilhqot'in* journal which went door to door to all the *Tsilhqot'in* communities]. It was with the *Tsilhqot'in* 's full political and administrative support that so many of their people knew about the conference to come all that way (Foss1997: 7).

I expect that this lesson and the process it prompted and continued is likely to lead to more examinations of practice and theory on the part of both Ho, the Museum of Anthropology, and myself.

The Symposium: whose success, whose business?

Ho's evaluation of cultural and representation politics as they are played out at MOA is based on testing them through a framework of "working with communities". This is the basis on which she has now come to question whether holding a public symposium to deal with the issues surrounding HIGH SLACK was "any of our business". It's a question she leaves open, saying:

> In hindsight, and even after when we talked to the *Tsilhqot'in* again, they said there was a lot of good feedback even though people felt that the symposium should have been held in their territory. With Chief Gerald Johnny's remark still imprinted in my head, I think that it might have been something to consider: that organizing the symposium was *not our business at all* (Foss 1997:8).

I will leave this question more open than closed, after proposing the idea that the symposium was a good thing in the end if something – some constructive effect or process – emerges from it. I appreciate an intercultural event open to cross-communication which has the effect of bringing contemporary art into direct contact with discussion and contemplation of current and historical events and relationships, and, equally importantly, which brings together people who are usually kept apart by the categorical lines drawn between them and the unequal relationships through which they must try to relate. My critiques of culturally-specific, almost globally-dominating divisions between supposedly universal and objectively expressive fine art and other realms of human activity do lead to an interest in pieces of work, events, and practices which, through various kinds of tightrope-walking between and across disciplines, snap the taut strings meant to contain 'art' and 'life'.

That doesn't settle the matter, however. Here are some aspects of the symposium itself, accomplishments prompted by it, and possibilities opened through it which seem constructive to me:

- The symposium was incredibly well-attended by *Tsilhqot'in* and other First Nations people. Many participants, such as Chief Gerald Johnny (*Tsilhqot'in*), Annie William (former *Tsilhqot'in* chief at *Xeni Gwet'in* or Nemiah), Chief Thomas Billyboy, *Tsilhqot'in* chief at *'Esdilagh* (Alexandria), Chief Francis Laceese, *Tsilhqot'in* chief at *Tl'esqox* (Toosey), Cassidy Sill, chief of the Southern Carrier community of Ulkatcho, Mary Williams (Ulkatcho), Nancy Sandy, Shuswap Nation and Williams Lake Band, and others, chose to speak publicly about the issues in question. It was obvious that a lot of people felt that the gathering was a useful forum in which to talk about very serious histories and relationships. As Judith Williams noted, "the degree to

which *Tsilhqot'in* people spoke in public at the symposium was a very positive outcome.... the judges were amazed, after their experience at the [1993 Cariboo-Chilcotin] justice inquiry, at the degree to which *Tsilhqot'in* people took this chance to speak" (personal communication, 1996).

- *Tsilhqot'in* individuals expressed that hearing their histories publicly told at the symposium was a valuable, healing, and validating act and experience in itself.

- At the symposium, the opportunity was provided and taken to address the benefits and disappointments of the provincial 1993 Cariboo-Chilcotin Justice Inquiry. Speakers commented on its impact or lack of impact in their communities, and linked it with historical events and the importance of history-telling. Judith Williams thought that there were some negative parallels between the justice inquiry and the symposium for some First Nations participants: "the *Tsilhqot'in* were disappointed...they wanted decisions on the spot...it was the same with the justice report...the notion of how things work is that something should be *decided*...with the bureaucracy involved, things were deadened...not enough happened". On the other hand, she noted that this negative aspect of the two processes opened up the possibility in some people's minds of further opportunities for discussion and cooperative work: "Annie William said at the time that we should have another one in a year. She saw already that the process would have to be continued..." (personal communication, 1996).

- Judith Williams' book on the Tsilhqot'in War and surrounding period, also titled High Slack, which was written after the symposium and based on her own research, was well-received and considered useful and partly remediary of Mel Rothenburger's 1970s history (The Chilcotin War) by at least some *Tsilhqot'in* people, according to a review in Wolf Howls, a *Tsilhqot'in* journal. Williams felt that she could have written a *better* book with access to the symposium videotapes. However, she emphasized to me that she thought this suspended situation could be an opportunity for *Tsilhqot'in* people to follow up on the history-telling which happened at the symposium. The appearance of Williams' history, combined with the symposium activity, may lend momentum to long-sustained community histories re-emerging in more places, times, and forms, and to more purposes [5].

- Discussion at the symposium itself seemed to galvanize some actions in *Tsilhqot'in* communities to obtain more equal control over representations of the *Tsilhqot'in* Nation in public historical sources. Some participants discussed, during the symposium session, mounting an effort to have Rothenburger's book removed from public libraries in the Chilcotin region, and in this way publicly addressed the domination of partial histories over collective understandings of the region's past and present.

- The videotapes of the symposium are a new document of *Tsilhqot'in* histories and explanations of history-telling in the context of present-day BC; their circulation and display is under the control of the *Tsilhqot'in* Nation. It may well be that a use deemed valuable by *Tsilhqot'in* people will be found within *Tsilhqot'in* communities; in any case the decision of what to do with this new document now rests with these communities' government. Control over self-representations is something that First Nations are still fighting for in this country, and the power to represent is not merely cosmetic or symbolic, but a fundamental part of oppression and resistance to oppression. *Tsilhqot'in* control over the symposium videotapes represents a real sharing of power between the institution normally – and exclusively – licensed to represent the culture and history of the anthropological 'other' and a group whose public representation is usually deemed the responsibility and right of that institution.

Knowing and being known: anthropology and expertise

disciplines and expertise

A side-effect of western thought's general attempt to partition knowledges into independent streams or disciplines is *specialization*. Specialization is not always a problem, and things would not necessarily be better if *everyone* were pushed toward generalism in the same way we are now pushed to specialize so that we can claim expertise. My point is that, as feminist academics have long pointed out, disciplinary boundaries tend to falsely separate issues and structures which are actually closely related to each other in the reality of people's lives. This separation combines with (at least) two important aspects of this society's organization: a) unequal relationships in power which are structured according to historical terms of discrimination like gender, race, sexuality, class, and (dis)ability, creating hierarchies among people; and b) commodification of recognized fields of knowledge. Together, these factors produce a situation in which it's easy to believe and act as if only those who have 'proven' themselves expert on something - and who are in a position to have the *means* to do this - know anything or are worth listening to [6]. The structures and values of many of our large institutions and systems like education, law, business, and government, are *encoded* with overlapping ideologies and pracitces of racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, and ableism current in Canadian society. This means that forms of exlusion and inequality are present not only as personl acts or attitudes, but also as structural and systemic barriers and mechanisms of oppression. Thus the standards, policies and organization of our collective institutions - which claim neutrality

and fairness - function as what have been termed "gatekeepers" for many professions and positions of power. Historical inequalities between groups of people affect who is able to access professional status and the power of expertise; and at the same time the qualifications, processes, and resources required to *become* professional or expert often act as mechanisms of exclusion and oppression, i.e. "gatekeepers", in themselves.

This phenomenon, and its idealization in the culture, which I'll call *expertism*, produces an interesting situation. The people who have been able to jump through a prescribed number and kind of disciplinary hoops (and who agree to uphold the tenets of a field) are seen to have knowledge about things that lie in the territory of that field. People who don't have the credentials (whose 'standards' are set most often by experts whose interests liein the profession) are sometimes treated as if they know very little; or if their knowledge is recognized it is given less credence and authority than that of experts. The result usually is that those defined as expert have relatively more power and control over many streams of knowledge and kinds of practice; especially in their public representation.

Although men of colour and aboriginal men, all women, people with disabilities, openly gay people, and people from poor or working-class backgrounds have increasingly infiltrated and succeeded in all professions, including those requiring costly training and accorded popular prestige, equitable representation of a diversity of people in roles considered worthy of "experts" is by no means a reality. An examination of the possible effects of ideologies and practices of sexism, racism, etc. on work undertaken in institutions such as MOA and on the ways it is carried out within a professional setting follows from this connection. This means thinking about not only what specific current practices are and how/if they manifest current forms and strucutres of discrimination; but also looking at who has been able to enter into positions of authority in such institutions and whether past systems and forms of oppression (which include historical colonial policies and their carry-overs and chronic maldistribution of resources, wealth and access to education as well as instances of overt discrimination) continue to have an impact on an institution's shape, identity, organization, and work.

academic expertise and MOA

In my brief hands-on experience as a student there, I personally was surprised by the degree of specialized departmentalization of different kinds of museum work (such as curation, conservation, and design) at MOA specifically *because* of my exposure to several people's descriptions of its freedom from these apparatuses. While it may well be true that disciplinary boundaries and emphasis on expertise are much firmer at other museums, I especially noticed instances of divisions of labour and thought and large differences in authority because of the statements (which I've discussed in early pages) of several staff and former students about horizontality and tendencies toward collaborations in the museum. I was interested in the emphasis placed by students as well as some staff on professionalism and expertise in matters of representation and working in museums during my coursework at MOA. Rosa Ho indicated to me that the professional power of curators at MOA is undergoing transformation and reduction:

> I think what has changed so much in the last nine years since I've worked at MOA is that... the older system, which involved the curator making all the decisions, all the judgments, and *unquestioning* so is now changing. and that turned [into] going down many many paths, you know some as long as HIGH SLACK and... *I* have come to a point where.... the plan is that your practice is informed by what you're listening to and what you're hearing (Foss 1997: 9).

My discussion of expertism is not meant to discredit or ignore the possibility and the reality of positive change through analyzing and sharing the disciplinary authority to contribute to and have some control over museum research and representations.

The Vancouver Museum has recently shown an exhibition, called "Through My Eyes", which speaks to the relevance of tensions between expert disciplines' knowledges about First Nations collections and how these knowings can miss or completely misinterpret indigenous explanations and uses of objects. This particular exhibit, like recent exhibits at MOA as well, uses First Nations people's comments to represent and explain the objects it displays to the public, and in doing so acknowledged that museum experts are not the only source of valid and important information about First Nations products [7]. The issue of re-appropriation of cultural objects back to aboriginal communities, and how and when the experts invested in caring for them their way will recognize indigenous rights and abilities to house this 'material culture' themselves, is a further step

in the dismantling of the system of expertism. (When governments and the public will see fit to fund more First Nations buildings and training, etc. probably needed to make this happen in general is another question) [8].

Deborah Root makes a comment about the role of the anthropology museum that that is relevant to these considerations:

> The notions that other cultures exist as objects of study, that the museum has a responsibility to salvage aspects of cultures under pressure from colonialism, that the spectator's perusal of this display of culture constitutes some form of understanding, and indeed that understanding must be mediated by experts enforce the separation between them and us... Most museum people, no matter how critical of the colonial history of the museum, continue to subscribe to notions of science and of expertise, which continue to maintain that objects are best off in places where they can be seen by white people, even if certain objects were not intended to be displayed. Most contend that the museum is the site where these objects can be properly looked after. And most continue to maintain a notion of the authentic object, which precludes in advance the substitution of reproductions in museum displays (1996: 109).

This recalls Rosa Ho's question: whose agenda is being served in museum exhibitions and programs? For whom is it best that these collections remain intact in the museums where they are presently housed?

There is a historically-constructed line - because those who in the past *have* been able to enter the professions in question have not generally been those whose objects have been collected for ethnological display - between those who have more control over the representations MOA creates and those who have less latitude and say in the debates over the museum's projects and development. As I've mentioned and as Ho emphasized, these types of boundaries have been increasingly crossed, although not destroyed completely. The full-time curator positions of Ho herself (who is of Chinese descent) and Pam Brown (a *Heiltsuk* woman), and the temporary appointment of Lynn Hill, a Mohawk woman who will begin a two-year, Canada Council funded, First Nations curatorial residency at MOA in April 1998, are evidence of the way this process is unfolding at MOA.

It is worth recalling here that anthropological "science"' played a key role in coining the concept of cultures, and did so within a significant shift in European thought, brought about by the colonial period, in which a new - and soon to be globally dominant - concept of "race" was forged.

This is not to say that other forms and sources of racism are not relevant to a consideration of racism in general in Canada, or that racism is a monolithic ideology or behaviour involving "bad" complicitous individuals only. Structures, practices, concepts, and mechanisms of racism are multiple and change over time, on collective and individual levels. However, naming white-supremacist racism as an important framework of Canada's historical and contemporary society, and naming its historically- and culturally-specific source in a global process with local manifestations is important. This is why I use the term "racialization". Complex relationships and issues are often simplistically explained as "racial" - and people are labelled by their perceived "race" - through an acceptance of and dependence on the *naturalness* of categories of race. This naturalness was *fabricated* by a European scientific discourse with close ties to global colonialism and capitalism. It is this concept of (a biological order of) races, which is historically and culturally distinct from the many other forms of racist practice among people, that informed the determinist "white-down" racism that was mobilized in colonial times and that still structures the dominant forms of racism in contemporary Canadian society. This does not lead to ignoring the complex reality of racism in Canada, and does not lead to an externalization of the issues and practices of racism. It traces the relevance of past and present frameworks and dominant systems of racism to our particular circumstances (including my own).

I am not arguing that the scientific and colonial origins of anthropology wholly determine the limits and possibilities of anthropological theory and practice in later years. These origins are common to *many* aspects of white-western academic thought, including art history, the one I have been mostly trained in, and to many aspects of western/northern relations with people of other parts of the globe. Many critiques of race-ist and neo-colonial tendencies in recent anthropology and other theoretical fields have in fact been written by anthropologists. Discourses about 'cultures' have expanded and shifted to include the study of white-western cultures, which traditionally participated in anthropology only as the studier and audience of knowledge about 'other' cultures. However, 'cultural' discourse in anthropology has not completely shed its beginnings. The effects of the racialization of people by colonizing powers are materially manifest in anthropology museums, where the broad relation of colonizer/studier/knower/collector to

colonized/studied/known/collected is still evident in the simple fact of which people's objects make up the majority of their collections. Deborah Root believes that contemporary museum anthropology squirms away from the issue of its discipline's and practices' connection to past and present colonial relations, with their ties to racialized practices: "Most exhibitions of so-called ethnographic cultures elide colonialism altogether, preferring an idealized space untouched by capital and bad taste..." (1996:109).

expertise, disciplinary corssings, and HIGH SLACK

It is interesting that Rosa Ho reported that some MOA staff's criticism of HIGH SLACK were based on the idea that the responsibility of representation was in the hands of an artist who exhibited a lack of expertise in their fields, and a disregard for the way things should be done in the museum profession. Here is a bit of our conversation:

> CF: I'm curious about the opposition that you did come up against with HIGH SLACK. I don't know what the details of that opposition were. I'm not necessarily looking for the details, but it seems to me that if you're giving me the information that the institution was recognizing that there were... some real boundaries to be investigated if not jumped between art and anthropology and different ways of representing some of this work... I'm trying to reconcile that agenda being open and recognized with some of the different reactions to the... exhibits that have happened.
> RH: In hindsight I don't think they are as significant to me now. The opposition we encountered at the time was basic human behaviour and reaction to the work of an artist who was not a trained archaeologist, veering into that disciplinary domain. An archaeologist looking at this exhibition proposal, of course they could only look at it through their glasses. I think there were also other underlying reasons. Perceived disciplinary boundaries were certainly an issue. It was not so much that their territory was trespassed - or even misrepresented. Rather, a source of knowledge being inadequately, or amateurishly, or naively incorporated. I think now that my colleagues were quite entitled to their opinions... Any time you are interpreting or drawing from someone else's expertise; whether it is about food or what have you, every specialist will have their own views on how one should go about itFoss 1997: 4).

To some degree, I think Ho's description of expertise-based opposition to Williams' work as human nature and individual rigour may tend to elide a possible implication of their criticism of the research and presentation of HIGH SLACK. While Ho recognized her colleagues' fear of misuse of information derived from their specific , I do not think that their criticisms can be fully explained by

universal or individual human behaviour. They are linked in some way to the context of the disciplinary system and its emphasis on expertise outlined above.

I do not mean to suggest that my definition of expertism provides a full explanation for the internal criticism directed at HIGH SLACK. The situation was more complex. Ho noted that there is (at least) one other important context to which criticism of HIGH SLACK should be linked. This is the context of contemporary art, in which Williams' work does stand out as a difficult example. HIGH SLACK required a lot of time and attention from its viewers. It was not a straightforward representation or one that was easy to decode. In fact, it demanded a fair bit of detective work. As I describe in chapter 8, visitors to the museum remarked voluminously on this character of the installation in the public response books provided. Ho's perspective is that her colleagues at MOA similarly struggled to come to terms with this aspect of HIGH SLACK. Her conclusion was that she could not expect them to address the installation in the terms of contemporary art discourse. She identified this situation as a disciplinary gap that was not bridged:

> ...there are disciplinary boundaries for sure, but I think at the time perhaps the most... stumbling problems people may have [had] internally [involved] contemporary art, period... It is tough; contemporary art *is* very difficult. Contemporary art speaks to very few people *anyway*, and so yes, one issue has to do with contemporary art *per se*, and secondarily, contemporary art that's also veering into First Nations history (Foss 1997: 4).

Where these boundaries became irrelevant and so were subject to crossing, as Ho pointed out, was at the public symposium. One of the special aspects of this event was the degree to which it was attended by a broad range of academics from the university community, with the positive result that active connections between art practice, anthropology, law, and political science, to name a few, were made. Judith Williams' express plan for this symposium was that *Tsilhqot'in* people have a chance to publicly address the issues surrounding her installation in a context available to and impacting on the university and related audiences of students, researchers, lawyers, and journalists, and the *Tsilhqot'in* themselves, etc. This public gathering, conceived of as a conscious extension of a contemporary art work, provided a rare and valuable forum not only for the discussion of diverse historical and political issues, but also for interaction among personal perspectives and diverse disciplines and contexts.

Endnotes

1. Ho told me that the Royal British Columbia Museum and Canadian Museum of Civilization have been required to respond to repatriation requests as part of the B.C. provincial-federal-first nations treaty-making process initiated in 1993 by the Harcourt-led provincial New Democratic Party government and in relation to any specific and comprehensive aboriginal land claims. The UBC Museum of Anthropology has developed a repatriation document and has a repatriation committee headed by Miriam Clavir, the museum conservator. Ho noted that two different sets of objects have recently been returned to their originators/owners - one to a family and another to the Zuni people - and that further requests have been received by the museum. It is worth noting that since I began my research repatriation of cultural materials has emerged as an issue for public debate in popular discourse as well. In 1995, The Vancouver Sun ran two major stories by Douglas Todd on particular repatriation fights (February 22, on the front page, and December 16, as the cover story for the Saturday Review). The cases involved "the descendants of 19th-century West Coast missionaries such as United Church icon Thomas Crosby and Anglican rector Robert Dundas [who were] busy selling off Haida, Tsimshian, and Kwakiutl rattles, clan masks, dancing blankets, animal crests and numerous other pieces" (December 16).

2. The organization of the public symposium was firstly Williams' idea. The actual format, implementation, and participation evolved through consultation and research work by Ho and then-MOA intern Greg Brass with the Tsilhqot'in National Government and other resource people. Ho herself saw the symposium planning as the kind of mutually respectful and power-sharing relationship that brings about shared ownership of a project and its outcome. (See her statements in the text, beginning "...you bring what you know" and "The fact that so many" for more on her ideas about the symposium's significance.)

3. In her article entitled "Art History", *Gitxsan* artist and curator Doreen Jensen takes apart Europeans' culturally-specific tendency to arbitrarily separate the 'artistic' from the rest of human production and work, and describes the ways that the imposition of this view on the objects of cultures which do not share it has negative effects on the production, appreciation, and understanding of First Nations arts. Deborah Root's analysis that "ideas of beauty... have been abstracted from their social and cultural matrix, imagined as something separate and transcendent that makes all the violence and repressions of history thinkable"(1992:18) has helped me to think about the ways both beautiful-individual-artwork treatment and cultural/ceremonial-significance explanations of First Nations objects obscure some of the reasons that they are in anthropology museums in the first place, which are rooted at least partly in the oppressive colonial (and neo-colonial) policies and practices of B.C.'s history.

4. Greg Sarris writes about material culture's inseparability from contextual history and academic tendencies to attempt this separation in his book, Keeping Slug Woman Alive. His analysis brings an important context to Rosa Ho's comments and my new perceptions of the *Tsilhqot'in* baskets in MOA's collection. In a discussion of external constructs of commodified and museum-displayed Pomo basektry, he emphasizes that:

> What is not asked [about the baskets] – perhaps because the answer has been successfully swept into the corners of a political unconsciousness and thus assumed in a vague way – is what happened and continues to happen that allows one group of people to discuss the artifacts of another people separate from the people themselves? I know we often have no living representatives to speak for the artifacts, but is this not further reason to remind ourselves of the question? It seems that the shift from "cult value" to "exhibition value" displaces the basket's historical testimony... and this displacement not only maintains a separation of the

> spectator from the world and history out of which the baskets were created but also precipitates a closed cycle of presentation and discussion about the basketry itself.... It is virutally impossible for the spectator today, viewing the baskets in... museums quite removed from the Pomo [or Tsilhqot'in] themselves, to see them as much more than autonomous pieces of art. This autonomy eclipses the possibility of understanding the forces – those in which the spectator is immanently involved – of history.... We immediately forget *how* we are looking (1993: 53-4, 55, 57).

The public symposium based on HIGH SLACK brought MOA's displays and the forces of history and community context into connection. *How* I was seeing the baskets in visible storage was brought into sharp focus because of the event.

5. Part of the Wolf Howls review of *High Slack*, "*High Slack* book gives insight into Chilcotin War of 1864", reads:

> TNG [Tsilhqot'in National Government] historian and former UBC professor Brian Mayne's impression of the book is: "It is a useful collection of most of the primary resource materials relating to the wr that are available in the written record. Although the book has some weaknesses, some of which will annoy most Tsilhqot'in readers, if is much better than what is presently available. The publication of *High Slack* means that Mel Rothenberger's *The Chiloctin War* can - and should - immediately be removed from the school asn placed in stroage by the libraries, or at least moved into the fiction section. Instead of reaching conclusions, *High Slack* asks questions. The author identifies and awaits the major component of the story that is missing, that which has been sustained by the oral tradition of the Tsilhqot'in Nation. She acknowledges that the rest of the story can only be supplied by the *Tsilhqot'in*, in whatever way they may choose"...

6. My emphasis on disciplinary specialization and its relationships to expertise, hierarchical structures, and professionalism emerged not from Rosa Ho's comments or analysis in our research interview, but from connections I myself made between our discussion and my other, separate experiences of MOA (such as those I accumulated as a student at the museum). As a student at MOA, involved in curating an exhibition with other members of my class, I noticed that ideals of "expertise" and "being expert", "professionalism", and aspirations to specialization were expressed regularly.

7. "Through My Eyes" (on which I have done no formal research) is *not* an isolated example, but part of a movement in critical anthropology and museum representation of 'other' people's cultural objects which has also been evident in projects at MOA. This trend is toward recognizing, implicitly and explicitly in the language of exhibitions, certain aspects of this kind of public display.

First is the understanding that the 'voices' which characterize the texts and images that represent and explain collections to the public should be identified and particularized as belonging to an individual perspective resulting from historical positioning. This is a movement away from curatorial texts and illustrations which invoke or leave undisturbed a pose of authoritative, universalized institutional knowledge about whatever is being viewed.

Second is a further step along this path. If the aura and belief in a neutral, omniscient institutional explanation is deconstructed, and it's understood that historical, cultural, and personal biases in museum representations need to be recognized and explicitly identified, the question of which set of biases be allowed to explain objects to the public arises. If curatorship represents individual and historical positionings and perspectives on a display rather than a universal academic knowledge and expertise, what argument can be made that a professional curator should be the only person who gives voice to an exhibit? What knowledges might - or should - other people, such as

the group who originated objects to be displayed, be able to use in representing different museum collections?

This is the question behind "Through My Eyes" and other recent exhibitions of First Nations objects in which an acknowledgement has been made that it makes sense, both in terms of cultural accuracy and in terms of colonized peoples' struggle to gain the right to represent themselves, for First Nations people to choose how to explain objects of their own cultures. It is also being understood that it is important for aboriginal people's knowledge and explanatory rights to be recognized openly in institutions which often hold collections which the First Nations themselves no longer have – and no longer have partly *because* they are sitting instead in places like the Vancouver Museum, the Museum of Anthropology, the Royal British Columbia Museum in Victoria, the National Gallery and Museum of Civilization in Ottawa, and museums in New York, Berlin, and other cities.

Of course, movements and gestures in this direction are variably successful and go to varying lengths. While it may be a positive step for First Nations people to be quoted in explanatory text (called "labels") about First Nations cultural objects in displays like "Through My Eyes" and other recent exhibitions (including one I participated in, in 1996, as one of 30 or so curators in an anthropology course at UBC MOA, in which we quoted First Nations artists), there are other levels and processes of control of public representation which may or may not be opened up to aboriginal people in different exhibitions and museums. These include not only decisions about how to visually display objects and images (in what kind of case, with what colours and lighting, sound, illustrations, or text, and in what kind of space), but also issues of how to select objects for public display, how to do and present research on them, of how to frame their display conceptually, and how to clean, display, and store them safely and correctly - which are called "conservation" issues.

8. There are a growing number of First Nations cultural centres in B.C. where art and cultural objects are displayed by the communities themselves.

Chapter 7: My receptions as a viewer create meanings for HIGH SLACK

As I mentioned in the Introduction, culturally and historically specific assumptions were inherent in my own reading of HIGH SLACK in its museum context. When I walked into the MOA gallery where Williams' work was on display, these assumptions combined with my particular critical - and specifically feminist - perspectives to create a complex experience for me. Later I learned how much my perceptions and interpretations varied from those of other people, including Williams herself. Confrontations with facts about HIGH SLACK which contradicted my personal receptions of it, and discussions about the work's meanings in interaction with the intentions of its producer as well as other viewers of the work, have provided ways to investigate how my assumptions and readings fit in with and shed light on the cultural and social environment of which I am a member.

In fact, it has been precisely *through* facing and trying to understand difference between my interpretations of HIGH SLACK's meanings and function and those of Williams, Rosa Ho, viewers who wrote comments in the public response books, and symposium participants, that I have learned about how different points of view and interpretations are created by and negotiated through our positions (feminist student, artist, curator, museum visitor, *Tsilhqot'in* chief...) in a historical, social and political context. Looking carefully at these relationships of difference has helped me to build bridges of analysis and understanding a) between my views and the views of others b) between all of our understandings and the context which we live inside, and c) between the art work itself and this context [1].

Therefore, in the following pages I will explore my individual re-inventions of HIGH SLACK by considering them especially in relation to the statements of the artist and to the wider historical context that I inhabit and that inhabits me. Specifically, I will explore my interpretations of the installation as three things: first, an art work by a First Nations woman; second, a feminist work; and third, an anti-colonial work.

Several months ago, (over three years after viewing HIGH SLACK for the first time and commencing my M.A. research) I was sitting in the archives of the UBC Museum of Anthropology, re-reading the public response books which I had initially encountered as part of HIGH SLACK's display. I flipped through the pages of the two volumes full of hundreds of viewers' reactions and analyses of Williams' installation, getting a general feeling for the range of emotions, evaluations, and assumptions they presented. I read and began to analyze some of the responses of other people to HIGH SLACK. As the broad outlines of a range of reactions emerged, I felt tapped into the emotions and assumptions of strangers who often wrote very bluntly and expressively about the installation and the museum in a way that the freedom to choose anonymity or named presence, and the chance to directly address an artist, institution and other audience members seems to encourage. It was with a jolt of surprise and belated recollection that I recognized my own (anonymous) comment. Before I realized that I was reading myself, I perceived myself as an unknown stranger and registered my words without any sense of identification with them or understanding of their perspective. It was like peeking over the shoulder of another version of myself, and it was a moment that allowed an unusual kind of perspective on my own reactions - one unattached to identification, empathy, or defensiveness. This moment also recalled some crucial aspects of my first reading of HIGH SLACK as a viewer. (I choose to explore them here because they help me articulate some of the things and ways I have learned from HIGH SLACK and the people in its web.) Here's what I wrote in August 1994, in direct response to a visitor who wrote: "complete and utter crap! This is an anthropology museum not an interpretive art gallery!"(II: 20) and to other commentators who, I had felt at the time of writing, asked repeatedly for more ancient Native "tools" and "artifacts" that would tell them about "their" history. Like some other MOA visitors, I wrote more in response to other people's comments than to HIGH SLACK itself:

> The anger is these pages is so transparent it almost doesn't deserve comment. Why are we so obsessed with the line our dominant white culture has drawn between "art" (white) and "artifact, craft" (non-white)? Why are you so pissed off when a native woman dares to cross over your mental line in the sand? These cultures (represented in this museum) are as alive and contemporary as white North-American "culture". They are not curiosities from the past. (II: 20)

Reception through interaction

acting in context

Aside from some embarrassment about my decision to make a *speech* in the response book, I want to note three things about this paragraph of mine, because they lead to an analysis of aspects of my first reception of HIGH SLACK which have taught me some good lessons. (In analyzing my earlier responses from my present point of view, I don't intend to imply that now I've figured everything out. The thesis has really been a continual process of learning which will not end because it's "finished". It's an ongoing process.) I will pursue this discussion in a dialectic form - in a conversation with myself. In all three cases, I will first describe and question my previous viewpoint or assumption, and then attempt to answer myself now.

1. *In pointing out the racialization of the contents of the museum by critiquing the hierarchical duality maintained in people's minds between an art object and an anthropological artifact, I took my cue from other comments in the response books. Many comments simplistically aligned "artifacts" with "Native culture and history" and let this body of stuff function as a foil for Williams' work, which was credited and more often discredited - in contrast - as "modern art". Looking now at my assertion that there was a clear-cut dichotomy being created in the response book discourse between "non-white" artifact and "white" art, I wonder how critical I was really being, and how much my own perceptions of a static racial division between cultural products of different groups were shaped by the same structure. In my centering of whiteness, within my critique of racialized operating definitions of 'art' and 'non-art', how far did I actually go in deconstructing the apparatus I was angry at?*

Thinking about these questions, I have realized that my comments are explained by a context within a context. I picture myself writing my statement inside a painted wooden egg floating inside another.

The larger context has to do with divisions between cultural products of groups and individuals and the way they are defined through the concept of 'race'. I absorbed and reproduced this racialization of cultural products to a certain degree in: a) structuring my critique through the 'white' - 'non-white' dichotomy, which had the effect of re-centering Eurocentric definitions of 'art' and 'non-art' which themselves use racist logic; and, b) re-invoking racial lines though repetition of their terms rather than deconstructing 'race' as a social, historical creation and *not* a 'natural' reality.

The smaller context involves acknowledging my critical point of view on these matters.

Although, as I'll discuss a little later, I implicated myself in a not fully explored assumption that this Museum of Anthropology represented First Nations art and culture, I used language that pin-points race as an issue. I indicated my awareness that 'race', as a constructed category of hierarchization, was mobilized not only in other peoples' perceptions of MOA and its contents, but also was also a factor in determining what and who is exhibited at MOA in the first place. This museum *is* primarily a space for the exhibition of both older and contemporary art by First Nations individuals. Unequal, racialized colonial and neo-colonial relationships play a large role in dictating the composition of the collections of MOA.

I re-created <u>HIGH SLACK</u> as: the work of a woman of First Nations descent (learning from others)

2. *In my comment I aired my assumption that the name on the wall - "Judith Williams" - belonged to a woman of First Nations background. Why did I make this leap of imagination? What context - and what attitude or analysis on my part within my context - made my assumption happen?*

I was impressed by <u>HIGH SLACK</u> immediately because such prominent installations by women artists in major museums are still not commonplace. My thinking about this was informed by my background in art history and my familiarity with the sexism which still structures art history, criticism, museum curation practices, and the art market. My assignment of an aboriginal heritage to the name on the gallery wall in the moment of my first look at <u>HIGH SLACK</u> flowed particularly from just having viewed exhibition work by an anthropology class at MOA. (The course, which I later took, is called "The Anthropology of Public Representation".) I was really interested by the work this class did with arresting red panels which asked questions directly of museum visitors about what was being represented (or not) and how.

The displays which this class had mounted reminded me that the sexism which still affects and even structures critical and academic responses and attention (or lack of attention) to female artists in general applies equally - if not more strongly - to receptions and study of First Nations art. One of their provocative sites noted the lack of works by First Nations women on display at MOA, and the anonymity of many artifacts actually created by indigenous women, the obscurring of women's presence. The display sensitized me to the exclusion of First Nations women artists from anthropological and art-critical writing and curation on 'Northwest Coast' art, and to the ways this

exclusion affected my experience as a visitor wandering through the building. Walking away from this exhibit into HIGH SLACK's gallery, I slipped right into a mode of interpreting the installation as some kind of addressing of the exclusion of First Nations women that the anthropology students had laid out for me. The show immediately functioned for me as a kind of antidote to the erasure of women pointed out in the permanent displays of First Nations sculptures, masks, and jewelry. This does not explain why I failed to stumble onto the possibility that my assumption about Williams' identity may be wrong until well after I had walked back to the parking lot. For this explanation I turn to both my critical reading of MOA as a space intended for contemporary indigenous art in a racist overall context, and to my less critical incorporation and deployment of a popular (and at least somewhat accurate) idea that this museum - of *anthropology* - represents aboriginal cultures.

Racist and sexist assumptions do still actively structure the way we, collectively, view and recognize art and the contexts in which it is displayed. As we saw in chapter 4, Judith Williams interpreted MOA visitors' receptions of HIGH SLACK as a parallel to the assumptions made by critics in the past about paintings signed only with initials. Then, people thought that if an artist was officially ungendered, and if the context of the work was recognized as *art-related*, then the artist must be male. Similarly, some people thought that if an artist was officially un-raced, and if the context was framed as *anthropological* in B.C., then the artist must be aboriginal. I don't know how many people who saw HIGH SLACK at MOA assumed its maker was of indigenous descent; I do know that I did. Williams was prepared for this assumption. Her preparation speaks to its currency, and also to the degree to which racial/ethnic categories, in an over-arching hierarchy which posits European as neutral and universal, support a 'self'/'other' division between art and anthropological artifact. My own assumption that Williams was of aboriginal descent speaks partly to my internalization of art/anthropology and white/non-white structures and reveals my investment in what I expected to find in which museum. My assumptions speak to the commonly unmarked identity and supposedly *neutral* racial positioning of whites in 'art' spaces, and the *marked*, cultural/anthropological object status of art made by different people.

recalling a living history

3. *I made it clear in my written response that my belief at the time was that the UBC Museum of Anthropology represents (at least primarily) aboriginal cultures. What led me to state this so categorically? How accurate was my statement, and what does this tell me about the museum and the context in which it operates? To the degree that my inference was inaccurate, what is the source of my perception, which was apparently shared by a lot of other people who put their reactions to HIGH SLACK in writing?*

I find it interesting to recall that the display work of the anthropology class I referred to before intervened especially in the representational styles and narratives of two particular spaces in MOA. These well-known areas of the museum are the "Great Hall" (figure 36), which houses MOA's collection of monumental-scale 'Northwest Coast' First Nations art, and the "Masterpiece Gallery", whose function is summarized in its name. This was another space containing objects exclusively made by members of B.C. First Nations - with the added selective component of defining through its displays the 'apex' of the 'creative expression' of the artists of this very specific range of cultures. Together with the nook which houses Haida artist Bill Reid's famous sculpture of the *Raven and First Men*, these two spaces *define* MOA in most visitors' minds, and have given the museum an iconic status on a fairly broad level. The museum is collectively held as an icon partly because of the unique and impressive relationship between architecture and objects at MOA, especially in these spaces. Arthur Erikson's design for the building is unique, and the magnificence of the large-scale works on display is dramatically emphasized by its big, open, day-lit spaces. More importantly, MOA's iconic identity and status reflects a popular assumption about this museum's role to authoritatively and fully represent the commonly romanticized and fetishized indigenous cultures of B.C..

The point I am making here is that MOA's role is generally understood to be the representation and explanation of (especially 'Northwest Coast') First Nations cultures through display of objects. Another point to make is that I, as part of a larger cultural context, absorbed and applied this general assumption in my August 1994 visit to the museum - to the point that I made the name Judith Williams stand for a woman of indigenous descent by a kind of default. I was operating on an unarticulated -and unrecognized - notion that unless given contrary evidence, the objects and artists inside the building's walls were of First Nations, simply because that's the subject

of this museum. Except that it's *not* so simple. It is true that there is a large degree of accuracy in this assumption; as I've outlined, in practice much of MOA's collection and exhibition and programming work revolves around the First Nations of this province. What this correlation between assumption and reality escapes is the bigger-picture question of *why* it is true and seemed "common sense" to me and so many others that B.C.'s major anthropology museum has as its subject First Nations objects and cultures. What can I learn about myself, the museum, and our context from my assumption, its accuracy or inaccuracy, and its source?

I think that both my assumption about MOA's contents and its broad correlation with what actually happens at MOA have a common source. Why would B.C.'s major anthropology museum's collection be full of First Nations objects? Why would I and other visitors find this proper, or 'natural'? To answer the first question I will point, once again, to the region's history and to the importance and influence of the colonial and neo-colonial relationships established and maintained between aboriginal peoples and: first Britain, then Canada and British Columbia. Although objects in MOA's collections have found their way inside the museum in a variety of ways, it is difficult (and ridiculous, in my opinion) to try to argue that the colonial relationship, which has disempowered First Nations in relation to settler/immigrant society, should be considered as anything other than a major factor in the building of MOA's collections and role.

The fact that MOA mostly shows First Nations artists and objects in its (con)temporary exhibits and permanent collections is not a pattern I can or would seek to explain as solely a continuation of colonial patronage or the relegation of First Nations artists to an anthropology space. MOA's current collection and exhibition practices also represent an attempt to deal with the externally-structured and unequal relationships between the institution and First Nations, and count toward an effort to improve and equalize these relations.

In reply to my second question I will remind myself that in the 19th century anthropology established itself by offering its methods in service of documenting and explaining the societies of indigenous peoples then being colonized by European nations. It is not surprising, then, that not many people (including me, for a long time) really notice patterns in what and who is represented in a museum like MOA, and that fewer still challenge these patterns. (See Chapter 2 for a more

detailed discussion of British anthropology's roots in the colonial project.)

In conclusion, I want to emphasize that I brought with me to MOA an understanding of the racializing of anthropological territory and its (perforated) separateness from 'art', and that I recognized that a generally sexist vision has organized the special discourse and market of 'Northwest Coast' First Nations art within the realm of anthropology. My awareness of these structures did not stop me from hauling the entire contraption into the museum with me, and out again as I thought over HIGH SLACK, however. If I could see the racism in the art/anthropology divide as well the sexism in the art/craft duality, why did it surprise me to think: "Judith Williams might not be an aboriginal woman's name!"? The answer is that I failed to *shed* the assumptions that I critiqued.

I re-created HIGH SLACK as:
a work of feminist content and intent

When I first looked at the histories re-presented in HIGH SLACK, and read the words and images on and under screens and in the pages of the bookworks, I thought I detected feminist commentary on women's places in colonist-written records and women's real historical roles and relations with colonists in B.C. The historical material chosen by Williams for the artworks places First Nations women in the material surroundings of their contested land [2]. In different places in the room I found references to: their generous attempts to feed lost and needy Europeans in underground homes despite hardship; their belongings found on the ground after the killings which lead to the war; and their testifying about their roles as witnesses to colonial war events as they worked on the land. For example:

The text of HOIST, taken from Robert Homfray's "A Winter' s Journey of 1861", reads:

> [...] INSIDE / WAS AN OLD WOMAN / + A SMALL FIRE / WE HAD WITH US / A SMALL PIECE OF BREAD - + I OFFERED IT TO THEM. / THEY REFUSED TO EAT IT UNTIL WE CONSUMED SOME FIRST / HOWEVER, / THE OLD LADY / SEEMED PLEASED - / SHE OPENED A WOODEN BOX / + EMPTIED THE CONTENTS / INTO A DISH

IT WAS A TOKEN OF / HER FRIENDLY FEELINGS / THE SMELL WAS INDESCRIBABLE. / SHE HANDED ME THE DISH...

In the spiral painting High Slack, words from European records of the scene of the massacre and Williams' own words refer to the presence of First Nations women. Williams included the following words from the site report:

THE WOMEN... WERE BETTER FED... THE PRICE OF PROSTITUTION WAS ENOUGH TO EAT.[...]
THE BODY OF BREWSTER[...] WAS FOUND[...] A WOMAN'S BOOT[...] FOUND.

Williams' own text partially reads:

[...] (IT WAS WELL KNOWN THAT THESE PEOPLE WERE LITTLE REMOVED FROM STARVATION) / NOBODY SAYS / WHOSE FAULT A MAN WAS KILLED... / ...A WOMAN'S BOOT... / ... HOW I LOST THE NAMES OF WOMEN... / WE WON... / (THE WAR?)... [...] / (THE NAMES OF...

In one of the bookworks, 1861-1864: A Likeness, Judge Matthew Ballie Begbie's notes on the testimony of a *Tsilhqot'in* woman named Nancy, the wife of farmer William Manning, in the case of *Regina v. Tahpit*, was reproduced, as was some testimony of another First Nations woman called *Il-se-dlout-nell*. Nancy recalled that:

> ...Manning was working outside the house. Two Indian women came & told me the Indians were coming to kill him & advised me to leave for fear of being hurt. Manning asked why the 2 women were speaking. I told him they said the Indians had killed all the whites at Homalco and would come & kill him. He said, 'I don't believe the Chilcotins will hurt me. I have known them long, they like me & will give me the land.'.... We went into the house & had dinner. Afterwards, Manning went out. An old woman came & said, 'Perhaps they will kill you also. You had better go.' Manning said, 'You tell me this because you wish to leave me.' I said, 'No, you have plenty of flour which the savages will take - you take what money you have & go to Alexis.' Another woman, *Ah-tit*, came & said, 'Don't stop, come with me.' I went with her about 50 yards - heard a shot - looked round & saw Manning lying on the ground. *Thapit* (the prisoner) has previously been a long time on the ground. (It appears to have been formerly a constant camping place of *Tahpit* & his tribe, but Manning had driven them off, & taken possession of the spring. - MBB)... I saw him kill Manning - It was a little above the house, outside... (Williams 1996: 81).

Il-se-dlout-nell said that she:

> Was at Manning's house the day of the murder. Saw the prisoner there. Two Indians went from the lodge to kill Manning. I and two other women went to get wood... I heard *Tahpit* say, 'All the Indians urge me to kill Manning & Annahim does too.' That was all I heard. They

> both had guns. I heard a shot fired presently... I saw Manning's body - it was quite dead - There were many Indians there... (Williams 1996: 82).

These passages hint at some of the ways that First Nations women were present as historical witnesses and actors and suggest some ways they related to the colonists (as wives, prostitutes, and strangers, friendly and wary), to First Nations men (as allies and as informers) and to each other (as friends and co-workers). The inclusion of these references, and especially their visual juxtaposition with male- and European- dominated records the period and events, led me to believe that a feminist-framed questioning of the ways the colonial history of this province has been constructed and re-told was undertaken in the installation.

Statements such as the following by Williams *outside* of the exhibition (in her written introduction to the 1994 symposium program and in my own research interview with her) convinced me further that the references to women in the show could be read as feminist content, intent, and critique. First, from the program:

> The mistreatment of women by the road crew is presently being suggested as a hither-to ignored **major** source of the conflict. Oblique references to the presence of women at the site of the massacre are to be found over and over in the archival material but no names are mentioned and there was no attempt to follow up on this clue. Rape has not been, until very recently, considered a war crime but more in the nature of "collateral damage".... And naturally, I wanted to know what happened to the women and children during what must have been a terrifying time (Williams 1994: 3&4).

And from our conversation:

CF: ... the press release that MOA sent out.... frames HIGH SLACK as two things. It calls it art, but it also calls it history. It says that... it's "a departure from traditional presentations of research" and that it's "a series of proposals for how we might look at historical material in relation to contemporary issues".... I wondered whether you would describe what you were doing as partially... historical research and presentation.... does that have anything to do with what you're up to?

JW: Well, certainly.... number one: there's no sensible woman artist who doesn't view art history with a jaundiced eye. If you look at something, and you're missing - something that proposes to be whole, and it's missing a chunk, you're *bound* to be cynical. Okay, then you look at history *per se*, and you think "well, that's a little bit like it, it's all about *war*, and all about what these guys did, and what were the women and kids doing anyway?". And so, I would think most women who think about it at all are very jaundiced in their view of history. And I'm one of those people, you know. At a certain point I resolved *to doubt* that I was being told the truth. So, once you find yourself in that position... then you can look at what you're given as history.... (Foss 1996:16).

These statements encouraged me to think that the references to women in the exhibition were included strategically and framed critically, as an intervention in the narrative spun by accepted history meant to call attention to the race- and gender-based exclusion of First Nations women's voices in B.C. histories.

Furthermore, the historical *Tsilhqot'in* testimony displayed in HIGH SLACK and the stories of *Tsilhqot'in* people at a public symposium held in November 1994 emphasizing two themes elided by white-written histories of these events pointing to two causes for the 1864 Tsilhqot'in War: the illegal and war-like act of the annexation of *Tsilhqot'in* territory by surveyors and ranchers; and the mistreatment and rape of *Tsilhqot'in* women by immigrants to the Chilcotin Plateau reinforced my conviction that HIGH SLACK was a feminist revision of B.C. history.

Other statements that Williams has made to me, however, complicate and even contradict the re-invention of the show which I've outlined. What jars and complicates my ability to come away with a consolidated feminist reading is the artist's identification with apolitical art and her concern to distance herself from being aligned with any historical movement. Here is a statement which tuned me into the existence of this difference between our understandings:

> ...I never saw my primary subject matter or... *project* as specifically directed there[to feminism]... so that's why I would make a distinction between being a feminist and being a feminist artist. *However*, my work has often been *interpreted* in this light, and I think maybe quite *rightly* in some cases... (Foss 1996: 18) [3].

I have struggled to reconcile statements like this with what *I* read as plainly feminist use of references to women in HIGH SLACK and statements critical of the exclusion of women in colonial history-telling. Apparently there is a gap between Williams' positions, definitions, and interpretations and my re-creation of HIGH SLACK, which exhibits *my* positions and definitions. Looking at the comments she made in our interview, it seems clear that Williams defines feminism and feminist art in a very different way from me. Both "feminist art" and "feminism" seem to be very *specific* concepts in her statements. In our conversation, she defined feminist art as: art pre-

determined and begun explicitly as a politically feminist project, and art with female subject matter and which is exclusively appropriate to female subject matter. Upon reflection, it's not surprising that Williams distances HIGH SLACK as well as other exhibitions she has done from (her definition of) feminism itself and feminist art, although she agreed that interpretations locating feminist elements in them are accurate and credible.

Politics and theory have since the beginning of the modern period been defined as opposites of 'art' in Western collective culture, and in much of art discourse, 'politics' seems to be defined as a very specific kind of activity with a limited range of appropriate concerns. Feminist discourse, on the other hand, has long elaborated on the idea that political issues and action permeate every aspect of our lives, and I realize that this had been my assumption in my research with Williams and her installation. And from *my* point of view, I would say that "the personal (and everything else, including art) is political"; and thus feminism and feminist art making are inseparable. In effect, I tried to talk to Williams about my reading of a kind of politics in her work which she doesn't necessarily call or recognize as politics; and in response she made it clear that she does not operate as "political", "theoretical", or "feminist" (which functions as a subdivision of political) as *she* defines these modes.

Here I am trying to consider Williams' interpretations, within an effort to expose and explore my own assumptions and mental framework, by exhibiting the gap between our receptions of HIGH SLACK and between our negotiations of (and positions in) a grid of cultural, political, social, and theoretical definitions and ideologies.

The differences between Williams' understandings and practices of "feminism" or "politics" or "art" and my own *may* be partly explained as a generation gap or by the historical supercession of high modernism by a 1990s-generated, self-consciously feminist articulation of post-(colonial-, structural-)isms. I don't want to posit my own positioning (or Williams', for that matter) as neutral,

universal, or correct. The web of definitions and concepts which I re-encountered in my interviews with Williams also positions me.

Georgina Born, in her ethnographic study of the *Institut de Recherche et Coordination Acoustique/Musique*, a "large computer music research and production institute in Paris", uses an approach which she calls "critical hermeneutics" in her research, citing the "historicity and the socioculturally sited character" of her own interpretations(10). The method I have developed to analyze the commentaries and perspectives of others in *relation* to my own positions and certain contexts and ideologies falls along these lines. This passage, describing Born's critical hermeneutics, could have been written about my multidisciplinary project:

> ...this does not amount to a surrender of any claims to approaching objectivity or imply that the status of my discourse is no different from that of the subjects whom I have studied. By moving "beyond" their discourse in order to trace its embededness in certain historical and contemporary social and cultural formations, and by moving "behind" and "across" their discourse in order to elucidate its gaps and contradictions, I have attempted to analyze forces that are not readily perceivable by those subjects. Given that the subjects at issue are themselves... intellectuals with their own complex grasp of the problems being discussed in the study, there is the potential for a profound tension between my interpretation and those of my informants. Given also that the cultural and historical problems being addressed are long-term and intractable ones, it would be naive to think this tension could be resolved in any short-term manner... (1995: 10).

I would add that my discussion goes further than a recognition of the "historicity and socioculturally sited character" of my interpretations to actually explore *my* receptions of HIGH SLACK and interactions with the issues and relationships it involves in a way and to an extent that parallels my tracing of the embededness of *others'* (such as Williams', Ho's, and the museum visitors') discourses in the same social and cultural formations.

I re-created HIGH SLACK as:
an anti-colonial work which dealt with identity, history, and 'belonging' to a place

relationships and history in coastal British Columbia

My initial experience of HIGH SLACK was one of being put in an accountable position and posited as a *participant* in continuing threads of the colonial histories happening *in a specific place* which are presented in the installation.

In the bookworks entitled Voyage Round, Rock/Burn, 1861-1864: A Likeness, and Water Damage, and in the painting Naming Names: A Scent of Roses, differences and continuities in old and new, colonial and indigenous relationships with the topography of B.C. are explored. Williams plays out relationships with land in what she calls human and "geological" time, using the image of a midden to think about her historical research and the ways that human history is *in* and part of the land. She displays, in one sense, First Nations' ancient, historical, contemporary, and future inhabitance of the land, and overlays it with immigrant society's beginnings in the European colonial project. The colonizers' (re-)naming of local landscapes is dissected in the painting, as Williams explained to me:

> ...And then in Rose Spit [Naming Names: A Scent of Roses] ... you know it was *ironic*, the way the naming had gone, and what the original name was, and that the site of the Haida origin myth is a *very* very important place, and here it just gets named after a stupid politician of *no importance whatsoever*, and most of the naming went like that. And... so it was kind of like saying, you know, the irony of the naming process that we adopted when there already were all these names... (Foss 1996:14). (Figure 37).

Moving through the installation, I found reproductions of some Europeans' reactions to the "desolate" land, and their recordings of First Nations villages within the landscape, which were at the time newly devastated by smallpox. Williams' installation provided a window on these colonists' view of the land, and showed that they perceived the landscape as empty *despite* the towns, the people, the trails, and the resistance they found when they pushed the gold road up Bute Inlet through *Tsilhqot'in* territory. Williams used a variety of sources in the exhibition texts (including information about a strange natural phenomenon called "Bute Wax" in the waters north of

Desolation Sound that no-one can explain) to contrast and connect (at least) two divergent human relationships to the land. For lack of a better term, I'll call one of these relationships the "history of First Nations in relation to the land", although this term is a false generalization given the many distinct indigenous nations in B.C. I'll call the other relationship "Canadian relations with the land", instead of "colonial" or "non-First Nations", to emphasize the impact of the nation-claims of the new (colonial) authorities on the destiny of the land and both First Nations people's and immigrants' relations to it. The installation hints at some ways these relationships to the land have manifested themselves in particular historical times and places, connects political and social history to this in-the-land history, and draws a link between the incidents of the past and the context of the present.

Interestingly, these two streams of relationships to the land are seen and represented by an artist whose knowledge of their history, as I indicated earlier, comes directly from her *personal* inhabitance of the landscape in question: Williams has spent months at a time in Desolation Sound, just south of Bute Inlet, since early childhood [4].

My receptions of HIGH SLACK were shaped and complicated because of my own experiences in Desolation Sound. As I've mentioned, from childhood I've spent time on boats on the coast and every year my family used to spend Augusts in the Desolation Sound area. So in the MOA gallery, I saw the *names* and imaged the places in my head and pursued the bookworks and layers of text partly because of my own emotional attachments to the landscape in question. Poking my way through historical and contemporary records of peoples' relations with land for which I harbour a sense of belonging and people's relations with each other in this context, my own history and its connections with the stories intertwined in HIGH SLACK came into a kind of focus for me.

One moment of clarity happened as I sat in the wooden boat-shaped bench/sculpture called RE:AD°ING, in order to read LOG: A: "A Voyage Round" and LOG: B: "Rock/Burn". The former volume is dominated by excerpts from 'explorers" memoirs, which are full of references to the landscape, weather, latitudes and longitudes, each other (the Spanish and the English), and the

'Indians'. Flipping through the pages of text, which are interspersed with photos of contemporary life on the B.C. coast and many other images, I - sitting in a boat that looks much more like a European corvette than a dugout canoe - was put in the position of the European 'explorers', especially since no First Nations voices emerge from the pages to counter or balance the portraits drawn of them by the English and the Spaniards. The first-person diary form of the Europeans' narratives increases the feeling of collusion with the authors. It was as if I were looking over Vancouver's shoulder as he wrote the words, his descriptions affording my only window onto the moment and place in question. It was like peeping through a key-hole with somebody else's glasses on: I imagined a tiny circle of light and colour in which ships tossed in storms, canoes approached from shore, "trinkets" were traded and muskets displayed. All around the tiny circle of activity was a tunnel of blackness. Beyond the fish-bowl visions of Vancouver or his Spanish counterpart, no further questions can be asked - because there are no alternative voices to hear in the impenetrable dark which surrounds them. While European images of B.C. people and lands speak in isolation in these books, *Tsilhqot'in* and other First Nations speakers are quoted in other parts of the installation, raising the question of how different cultures and societies have met on this land and water. Looking at the works together, my mind wandered to my own experience of this part of the world, and began to explore the question of how my personal and cultural/social history follows on or parallels the voyages and perceptions of early colonials. I thought about how my own world and culture imagines First Nations and how it portrays and uses their traditional territories, and saw that we collectively are not so far removed from somebody like Vancouver's appraisal and actions [5].

an anti-colonial work?

HIGH SLACK made me see some of the history and conflict of a landscape, and in this way it was a powerful critique of white ignorance and amnesia. But *how* was this exhibit critical? Judith Williams was ambivalent about art as authoritative critique. The same difference that distanced my

reading of HIGH SLACK as feminist work from Williams' definition of the art *away* from a feminist project also separated my reading of HIGH SLACK as an anti-colonial work which critiques external relationships from Williams' definition of the installation as non-critique and as individual intervention/vision:

> CF: ...Like I said, one of the ways I was looking at it was more of an authoritative relationship, or a critique of an authoritative relationship between - [I was going to say Tsilhqot'in and other First Nations groups and the white majority in the past, but this also could and should refer to the present - there was and is a power imbalance to document and recognize.]
>
> JW: - Yes, I think it's probably a bit of a mistake to think of HIGH SLACK as a critique. Because... the notion - when you teach as much as I do, and particularly in this department....it was all critique there for a while... to the point of just total boredom. I'm not so interested in a critique of society. I'm interested in individual action and I'm interested in creative solutions to problems. My instinct is very seldom to be critical.... my interest is to find something positive in a situation and go with that. That's in almost all circumstances. And so, I'm not a person who so much was trying to critique what happened in various circumstances, such as the Tsilhqot'in War, but in a range of circumstances, as to *expose* them. Right? In order to provide a kind of series of platforms to look at those situations with the hope that something positive comes out of it. And so using the spiral form, which is an enormously productive form in nature, right?.... It's because it's a *growth* form (Foss 1996: 15& 16).

Instead of critique, Williams wanted a plurality of voices:

> JW: ...it's taken me a long time to get that language floating around like that. And I think that that's the way for me to amplify that... what is being said is *not* authoritative, it is simply something that's passing through the air. ...most of HIGH SLACK was envisioned as a kind of opera...
>
> CF: ...You've given me some clues about the way my reading was different from what you were trying to say, or from the kind of reading or from the kind of vision you had of it... about the voices in cacophony kind of, or orchestra.
>
> JW: I don't think of cacophony, in fact I think... it's actually very organized, but the organization is not of a conventional type.... I think that there [are] interactions that are caused this way that take me beyond my conscious self, and I like those accidents to happen because they take me further. And so layering allows a whole bunch of things to happen, but it's not exactly haphazard.
>
> CF: ...so we've got these multiple voices that are talking to each other, that are singing to each other that are creating a story that gets multiplied in lots of ways because they're talking to each other.
>
> JW: That's right. (Foss 1996: 15)

I understand now that at this point in our interview I was trying to get Williams to talk about the raced, colonialism-based conflict which is part of both the structure of the history she researched and portrayed at MOA and of our current society. Here is an opening to explore the tension which I've noted between two things. On the one hand is my reading of HIGH SLACK as a politically and theoretically (as well as aesthetically) valuable and insightful installation which deals directly, if not simply, with past and present socio-political issues of direct relevance to the context of MOA and to current cultural politics. On the other hand is Williams' decision not to speak in any of those terms explicitly. While Williams did not talk about the fact that there *were* really two sides in this historical relationship which is maintained in other forms today (structured and defined by European colonialism), this dichotomy cannot be avoided.

I do not seek to invalidate Williams' approach in HIGH SLACK; I think one of many things it did was communicate very valuable things about historical and current relationships in B.C. between groups of people and the land. In one sense it's not so relevant whether these things are communicated *because of* the artist's intentions.

It is, furthermore, a relevant approach to insist on the floating, shifting, ambiguous, and suspended aspects of histories and identities. These kinds of investigations inject a much needed breath of historicity, specificity and recognition of resistances and differences into understandings of history which have sometimes tended to re-privilege the (race and gender) categories, for example, which they seek to critique and deconstruct. Taking *for granted* groupings of people around constructed definitions of race, gender, class, sexuality, etc., has sometimes led to seeing complex relationships exclusively as clear-cut conflict between racially-defined monolithic blocks of whites and 'Natives', or class-defined blocks of workers and capitalists, or conventional-gender defined monoliths of women and men [6]. William's emphasis on ambiguity, movement, diversity and gaps in information and conflicting accounts is very useful *within* a recognition of the broader historical structures which not only provide a background to, but also create and affect, human situations and

actions. Maybe this is where and why Williams' emphasis on non-critique and non-authority presents important questions.

It *is* a misrepresentation of historical reality and complexity to rely on generalized (and human-made) groupings of human beings (and relationships between them) to explain collective behaviour and issues. This leads to over-simplification of heterogeneous and changing situations, and a taking-for-granted of categories, concepts, and thought-systems which may themselves be in need of examination and dismantling - such as race-ism ("black" and "white"), (neo)colonialism ("conquered/colonized" and "victor/colonizer"), or sex-ism ("woman" and "man").

To my mind, it is also misrepresentative of human historical complexity - and of the particular colonial history traced by Williams - to focus exclusively on the idea of lack of authority and unregulated diversity in individual or group identities and actions and their relative freedom from systematized relationships between people. This can have the effect of denying that the variety of human interactions evident in HIGH SLACK's story (oppressions, resistances, understandings, and conflicts) were shaped by and undertaken in an ideological framework of racism and that the material reality of a near-global historical relationship of colonialism caused mass death, misappropriation of land, wealth, and independence, and systematic oppression of indigenous peoples. Clearly, colonial authority has been created and enforced in this situation.

In history and in the present, these systematic historical relationships are not air-tight, and as Williams showed in her tracing of events, people find room to wiggle and resist, unevenly and sometimes ambiguously, in the tightest regulatory framework of colonial rule. On the other hand, historical and current systems of ideology and oppression (which are often different versions of a similar concept or relationship) both limit and construct what is *possible* for humans who live within them to do and be.

HIGH SLACK may not constitute the counter-colonial discourse which I "found" in my first reception of the installation. The multiple (sometimes overlapping and sometimes

contradictory) meanings given it by its viewers' interpretations preclude such a simple conclusion. I think that part of this complexity in people's receptions of HIGH SLACK is due to the exhibition's interesting relationship to the society's dominant meanings for art, B.C.'s history, First Nations cultures and rights, and the Museum of Anthropology. These are the meanings which I outlined in previous chapters on the context of HIGH SLACK's production and the moments and acts of its receptions. Williams' exhibition poses enough of a challenge to dominant meanings, and works against them sufficiently, to produce an especially broad and conflicted range of receptions. It may well be that HIGH SLACK interrupts the naturalized codes and culturally-constructed dominant meanings which Stuart Hall describes here:

> Polysemy [multiple meanings for a message] must not... be confused with pluralism.... Any society/culture tends, with varying degrees of closure, to impose its classifications of the social and cultural and political world. These constitute a *dominant cultural order*, though it is neither univocal or uncontested. This question of the 'structure of discourses in dominance' is a crucial point. The different areas of social life appear to be mapped out into discursive domains, hierarchically organized into *dominant* or *preferred meanings*. New, problematic or troubling events [or 'messages'], which breach our expectancies and run counter to our 'common-sense constructs', to our 'taken-for-granted' knowledge of social structures, must be assigned to their discursive domains before they can be said to 'make sense'... The domains of 'preferred meanings' have the whole social order embedded in them as a set of meanings, practices and beliefs: the everyday knowledge of social structures... the rank order of power and interest and the structure of legitimations, limits and sanctions. Thus to clarify a 'misunderstanding' at the connotative level, we must refer, *through* the codes, to the orders of social life, of economic and political power and of ideology (1993: 98-99).

I have tried with my own reading of the installation to detect HIGH SLACK's counter-discursive moments and meanings. I have done this by considering the art works with extensive reference to the broader contexts in which they were displayed (historical and contemporary, cultural and political) – or, as Hall would have it, by referring, through the dominant codes, to the orders of social life, of economic and political power and of ideology.

Endnotes

1. It's also important that I acknowledge another reason that I analyze my re-creations of HIGH SLACK in dialogue with Judith Williams' statements in public documents and our research

interview. This chapter's narrative and theory developed in relation to the idea - traditional to Western culture - that an art work's fixed and correct meaning in the world is defined by the artist's original intention. While many historians, theorists, critics, and artists have moved to a more flexible account of how art means (including the recognition of factors like historical change affecting interpretation and the multiplicity of meaning created by different viewers' readings of the same work), the idea of a fixed and authoritative meaning originating in the artist still has some currency (see my discussion of reception theory in the Introduction). This currency is illustrated in the shape of this chapter. It reflects my negotiations with a) cultural discourses about where a work's 'real' meaning lies, and with b) disciplinary traditions of what a visual art-centred study is charged with doing - i.e. unearthing this 'real', intentional meaning. My working position, which I hope is also reflected in the chapter's final shape, is that an artist's intentions and interpretations should have a privileged - but not totally authoritative - presence in a study of an art work's meanings. They should be understood as an essential *part* of an art work's functions and meanings in different people's minds and in the contexts (historical, political, social, theoretical, economic...) of its public display.

2. Her historical quotations combined materials from: the trial notes and journal entries of Judge Matthew Ballie Begbie; the diaries of George Vancouver and a Spanish sailor, Valdez; the Victoria Times-Colonist, The Vancouver Sun, and other 19th and 20th-century newspapers' coverage of smallpox epidemics, of the Tsilhqot'in War, and early 1990s scuffles over a company's plan to export water in the traditional territory of a First Nation; and contemporary interviews with First Nations people.

3. Williams continued, defining feminist art as work appropriate exclusively to female subject matter:

> I did this huge show ["White raiser, Red reaper, Dark winnower of grain"]... years and years ago... which involved images of birthing.... And it was a very volatile affair - a lot of criticism ...it was interpreted as a feminist exhibition, but in fact there were lots of images of dissected male bodies and no-one ever talked about them. But my nature would never have been to make a work just about these images of birthing; it was both sides of it... And that's why I make the distinction(Foss 1996:18)...
> ... I think it's interesting to look at [a former exhibit] "Reflection-Extension" and there's a couple of works that Liz Magor did on the same woman. And in both cases... we're certainly interested in Dorothy because she's a *woman*, and we're interested in Dorothy's *life* as the life of a woman. But the projects are not... purely feminist projects. Because we could have been taking a man's life, if you see what I mean. (Foss 1996: 18)

Other comments Williams made in our conversation which clarified her relationship to feminism and her definition of the concept were:

> CF: ...you... told me that people [have] interpret[ed] what you're doing as feminist, especially the "Red reaper"... that show.
>
> JW: Yes, and there were real elements of that there, but, you know, I didn't start - you know I didn't start to make work about women or particularly feminist at all. ... So that's why - I suspect a lot of people, well some people, of course, just will not join the club, and so they just refuse to be part of those movements. And I didn't feel hostile at all... I had too many connections with the women in those areas and I have lots of respect for what they've done (Foss 1996: 19).

4. As noted previously, Williams began her work on HIGH SLACK not through an interest in First Nations issues or colonial history or anthropology but through looking at the ocean's surface and depth. This looking at the "'land" led her to notice the names on maps of the area, and to relate this to the history of colonial contact and relationships, the history of smallpox and the massive death it caused in all of B.C., and the stories in HIGH SLACK involving a handful of explorers, surveyors, law men, and their journals and notes. (She started reading newspapers from certain years in the 1860s and kept finding references to epidemics and then to road-building into the northern gold fields.)

5. Williams' comment in the program for the 1994 symposium on the historical documents used in HIGH SLACK and what they tell us about colonial-indigenous relationships and both groups' relations to the land is relevant to my personal re-creation of the installation as a discourse calling me to an examination of my own history and the ways it intersects with past and present dynamics:

> The Victoria newspapers of 1862 are mesmerizing and moving to read. The local news [tells] the horrifying tale of the arrival and passage through the province of a smallpox epidemic that killed over half of the native population - **and** - news of Waddington's road building. One is stunned by the enthusiasm of the colonists for development and the despair of the native people. The white residents of Victoria find the presence of the rapidly dying tribes a[n] impediment to their occupation of the land. The native villages that had accumulated around Victoria since the gold rush were burnt and the people packed their belongings and headed home up-coast thereby spreading the disease from one end of the coast to the other. Letters to the editor veer between desire to rid the city of the dying native people and those who warn of the consequences of a land grab. John Ronson, editor of the New Westminster paper The British Columbian, and later a Governor of the province, wrote:
>
> > "We are quite aware that there are those amongst us who are disposed to ignore altogether the rights of the Indian and their claims on us - who hold the American doctrine of "manifest destiny" in the most fatal form, and say that the native tribes will die off to make way for the Anglo-Saxon race... Very different however, are the views and sentiments held in reference to the Indians by the British government. The representatives of the Government may not, in every instance, faithfully delineate the Imperial mind in this respect.
> > Depend on it, for every acre of land we obtain by improper means we will have to pay for dearly in the end, and every wrong committed upon those poor people will be visited on our heads..."
>
> The colonists were full of ambition to open up the interior to get at the gold fields. Surveyors were sent up every inlet. One party penetrated to Nancoolten, a Tsilhqot'in village of 30 houses. Two of that party took sick. Chief Annahiem offered to look after them not knowing those 2 men had smallpox. The village, when visited 1 year later, was a charnel house with one occupant. It was at this time that Jim Taylor, and a trader named Angus MacLeod, are reported, by surveyor Francis Poole, to have gone to Nancoolten, retrieved the blankets from the dead and resold them to other Indians...
> The period of time from 1861 to 1864 was, I believe, significant in hardening attitudes that have shaped the way we exploit both people and the resources in this province and has divided the occupants of the land. To the *Tsilhqot'in* people the events of the 1860s are today's news - the past corrodes the present. They, like I, and many others... wish and believe that this is a moment - a pause in conflicting currents - in which stories can be told and patterns of behaviour altered (Williams, 1994: 2, 4).

6. Nicholas Thomas notes this tendency in the case of understandings of the "colonizer" and "colonized" in Colonialism's Culture:

> ...why deny complexity and agency to those accused of denying them to others?. ... much writing on colonialism homogenizes 'the colonizers'... a historical or archaeological differentiation of representational epistemes establishes that colonialism cannot be seen as a historical unity. ... colonizing was an array of religious, commercial, administrative and exploratory projects (1994: 61&97).

Chapter 8: Viewing as Discourse:
Museum of Anthropology's visitors' receptions (reception as event and act)

The public response books

One mode in which HIGH SLACK's reception was formalized was through public response books included in its gallery space. In these books, hundreds of visitors to the museum commented on HIGH SLACK or on the host institution.

Public response books - or walls, or rooms - are now common in museums and galleries, and many visitors spend as much time perusing the comments of other viewers as they do contemplating the exhibits so carefully engineered to communicate to them. (This is one way among many that art works gain their meaning through social interaction.)

Although often taken for guests books or graffiti space, viewer response mechanisms have proven to add an interesting dimension to museums and galleries: abundant discourse between viewers themselves and direct engagements with artists and curators often create an entirely new facet to an exhibit. Responses that may not otherwise be articulated find voice, upon invitation, and encourage further commentary and discourse in spaces which have often, traditionally, limited people to silent observation without interaction. Of course, many museum visitors talk to each other about their reactions to exhibits, but public response venues inside gallery spaces seem to spark a broad sharing of perspectives in direct relation to a display and its context, in addition to private discussions that may take place outside the walls of an exhibition.

In this chapter I make use of the two large volumes of written responses to HIGH SLACK during its display at MOA in 1994. These responses cover a wide range of reactions to HIGH SLACK, as their writers tried to make sense of the installation in relation to its concrete context (the museum) and its abstract backdrop (contemporary popular concepts of art, anthropology, and history, to name a few features of this mental landscape). I try to identify, explain, and illustrate streams of thought which are dominant in our collective culture, and certain ideological dichotomies within those streams, in my analysis of entries in the public response books.

In the following pages I will discuss visitors' receptions of HIGH SLACK as re-creations of the installation. The large majority of people who wrote in the response books seemed to experience the installation as an event which stood out for them in some way - as an occasion to

encounter something new and an opportunity to respond, in the moment, by accepting, rejecting, extolling, or chastising it. In their written comments, these viewers recorded their confrontations with the exhibition as moments which allowed them to act - to re-create the works and their relationships to them [1].

By this I am referring to the idea that an art work's meaning is not fixed: that an image's or represenation's significance does not permanently accord either with its creator's intentions or with the determinations of those usually understood to be expert or authoritative in locating the import and message of a cultural product - a curator, critic, or historian. The point is that there is no single import or message to locate: any representation's meaning is multiple and in flux (see Introduction). Privileging the purposes of the artist or the interpretation or analysis of an academic as an approximation of a work's true meaning over the readings and evaluations of everyone else doesn't make a lot of sense [2]. The way an art work operates and means depends on who is doing the looking, touching, or listening - and when and where. In the act of viewing, the audience of a representation re-creates it in a way that makes sense to her/him. This does not mean that the public reception of an art work is a matter of purely individual, personal phenomena. Historical, cultural, and ideological currents and structures affect and set up a range of possible responses to an object or image. This also does not mean that any one reading of a work is as valid or defensible as any other. But it does mean that one is as *real* as the next; they all are out there and they all require attention [3].

My question is: If, in their readings and analyses and evaluations, each viewer of HIGH SLACK re-creates the installation's meaning, how *did* visitors who chose to record their comments in the public books receive HIGH SLACK ? My interest is in selectively documenting a spectrum of audience reactions, and in thinking about what ideas (what 'common-sense' assumptions) may relate to the copious pages of commentary. In general, people were less interested in explaining themselves than in venting frustration or bliss, and defining their terms and their perspectives and explaining their pronouncements was not a high priority. Therefore, in many cases, my thinking about implicit assumptions and definitions will have to amount to speculation. However, I feel there is enough material - enough repetition, enough explanation, enough discourse - in these

volumes to allow me to trace some broad outlines of some ways that viewers received HIGH SLACK.

I have not attempted an exhaustive summary or analysis of the entire contents of the public response books which were made available in HIGH SLACK's gallery. As Rosa Ho points out in her article on "Savage Graces", a MOA exhibit she co-curated with Gerald McMaster, broad or specific categorization and statistical analysis-type breakdowns of viewer reactions to a museum exhibition do not necessarily tell us much about the discourses a piece may create, about the subtleties and assumptions of the comments which make them up, or the ways viewers relate to each other's comments in building the discontinuous conversation recorded in a public response book. They may in fact reinforce simplistic dualistic concepts of audience responses as, for example, 'favourable and unfavourable', or 'serious and superficial'. A survey of thumbs-up or thumbs-down reactions to HIGH SLACK would represent the opinions of only those visitors who decided to commit their comments to public record, and would not lead us very far in trying to think about how viewer comments reflect or reflect on contextual issues or interact with the installation or each other's written responses [4].

I will note that there was a very wide spectrum of responses to HIGH SLACK which seemed widely diverse not only in their evaluations of the exhibition but also in their kinds and levels of engagement with what was actually there. I have therefore adopted an approach which is similar to Ho's: I have chosen certain streams of commentary to explore, not only because they are prominently represented in the books, but also because they illustrate a range of assumptions and beliefs about contemporary art, anthropology museums, and the two coming together in HIGH SLACK. On this basis, there are several currents in the public responses which I will not pursue. These include notes of simple congratulation from anonymous viewers and from visitors who obviously have some personal relationship with Williams herself (some writers are apparently members of her artistic community or circle). Other veins of thought which I have not included are very specific comments on particularized aesthetic aspects of the show, very off-hand dismissals of HIGH SLACK's seriousness, and comments in languages (other than English and French) which I cannot read.

HIGH SLACK as what? (the role of dichotomy)

As various writers (many of them feminists) have explored (and as I've noted elsewhere in this thesis), dichotomies characterize a whole lot of thinking which takes place in the ongoing western tradition. This binary-opposition mental structure makes the world understandable by manufacturing pairs of things which are made to (and then *seem naturally* to) be each other's opposites, thereby defining through a determination of what one *is* and the 'other' *is not*. Typically, in the dominant western-European world-view and its global offshoots, hierarchy is thrown into the mix, so that instead of just "A vs. not-A", we get "Good vs. Bad", or actually Good.
Bad

Thus we are left with 'self' over 'other', 'male' over 'female', 'white' over 'black', etc.

As I read through the public response books from HIGH SLACK, it became pretty obvious that forms of such hierarchically-dichotomous habits were being applied in people's re-creations of the installation. Often, instead of just describing their reactions to aspects of the show (or for that matter evaluating or describing aspects of the show itself) writers summarized their responses by defining HIGH SLACK as belonging on one side or another of some familiar and entrenched binary oppositions. Not all viewers used one of these apparatuses to structure or validate their feelings and ideas, but the 'A vs. not-A' concept, replete with hierarchical "Good vs. Bad' variations, was ever-present in the books. Its presence was not an under-current either, but a streaming system that was consciously evoked on the surface - as the proper ordering of things which was being trespassed in HIGH SLACK, as legitimizing evidence for evaluative opinions, and sometimes as a structure requiring examination and critique.

These are some of the opposed pairs which surfaced in the two comment books. These pairs are conceptually linked, and in the commentaries operate in reference to each other, not in isolation. The first terms ideologically aligned against the second terms as follows:

Art/anthropology

non-aboriginal/ 'Native'

European/ "other" cultures

individual/collective

Art work/artifact

aesthetics/culture

elitist/accessible

ambiguous, unintelligible/clear, explainable

puposeless/useful

progress or innovation/tradition

new-fangled/august

Modern/ancient

present/past

I found many comments in which forms of these binaries seemed to operate. I'll explore the relevance of these oppositions to audience commentaries on HIGH SLACK in the following sections by discussing only a few specific responses and simply documenting others which seem to enlist the dichotomy in similar - or different - ways. This is to allow for a reasonably concise discussion, but also to reflect the fact that without further information about writers' perspectives and motives, I am limited to an exploration of written comments only one step removed from speculation. I therefore want to leave some space for the comments to speak for themselves, in juxtaposition (and in conversation, as in many cases they are), and to leave some room for other interpretations of the discourses created in the public response books.

The presence of (hierarchical) dichotomy as the basic structure for many people's evaluation of HIGH SLACK became evident in a pattern in which many people characterized the installation as incompatible with the Museum of Anthropology's purpose, and its being "out of place" beside the rest of MOA's exhibitions. HIGH SLACK was defined *against* the other contents of this museum, and, more specifically, in opposition to qualities and categories acclaimed as appropriate to MOA and its collections.

HIGH SLACK as :
new-fangled versus august
Modern versus ancient
present versus past

In oppositional relation to evaluations of MOA's contents as august, deserving reverence, ancient, and representative of the past of certain cultures, attacks on modern art in general were given as an implicit or explicit rationale for disapproval of HIGH SLACK. *Age* is an important factor in this conception of the collections and work proper to MOA. The externally-imposed definitions of cultural 'authenticity' which have been pressed upon the 'other' people whose material cultures make up MOA's collections are evident in some viewers' identification of 'true' nativeness with a lost, pre-colonial past, thereby removing colonial-period and current works from what is recognized as 'authentically' aboriginal, or even valid art.

As noted, the assumption behind this relegation to the past of the cultural purity of 'others' is directly connected to the racist classification systems of early evolutionary and anthropological 'sciences'. Cultures foreign to Europeans were posited as 'earlier' moments or stages of human evolution, with European economy, culture, and society fixed as a universal human peak of progress rather than a specific cultural development among many. In a precursor of and persistent variation on this theme, some Europeans with sympathy for the Enlightenment idea of the "Noble Savage" have come to see European civilization as the ultimate degeneration of a universal human state of natural being – brought on primarily by technological and industrial "progress" and social change. The natural state of humanity, form which "modern" society was imagined to have fallen, was, for these disillusioned people, embodied by societies who lived in different ways [5]. Their ways of living were defined by what they were understood to *lack* compared to Europe, e.g. technology, industry, literacy, recognizable religion, money, murder, and mayhem, instead of by what they practiced, and so the placement of these peoples on a lower rung of a progressive ladder of human beings remained in place. To people like the disillusioned Post-Impressionist painter Gauguin, people like Tahitians were not a model and a haven because they represented a realistic present and future alternative way of living, but because they symbolized a return to undeveloped and undirtied natural 'man', the garden of Eden, and the time before time.

Non-European peoples in this and similar fantasies are denied a recognition of their real, historical and contemporary culture, economy, and existence. A version of this colonial period Noble Savage concept is very much alive at the very end of the 20th century, and is played out over

and over in contemporary North American cultures, especially on the capitalist market [6]. A certain stream of commentary in the HIGH SLACK response books bears witness to the relevance of an identification of First Nations peoples with a lost, natural, primitive past to viewers' reactions to HIGH SLACK and its display at MOA. The following comments reveal that HIGH SLACK tended to be viewed as a "modern/istic", unproven kind of endeavour coming from and dealing with the present, in contrast with the "august" and authentic aboriginal past experience, represented at MOA through history and (old) art and tools:

> Such august company - and out of place. Boring! - Larry L (11).
>
> Very beautiful and enjoyable to experience. But I must wonder what all this is doing in a museum of anthropology. I and my guests came to see and experience Native history through display of their art and tools not some modernistic interpretation - anonymous (50)
> July 13
> Interested in reading J.W.'s info. re trips up B.C. Coast. The installation is very dark - were the Indians really like this? - Jean Robinson (54)
>
> We are from Japan. We are happy to be here but we feel kind of sad because we are losing the traditional works the natives had made. - anonymous (95).
>
> This seems more like modern art. It gives me a sad impression - signed (illegible) (114)
>
> ... It had a strong emotional impact, and it struck me as the spiritual side of these peoples [rather] than the material, "live to survive" side they must have had. - signed (illegible) (116).
>
> Spray paint and petrochemical plastic netting - highly toxic, not natural; does not resemble this region's people, landscape, language, lifestyle... - Barbara Vandeten Sept. 24 (II: 17)

Through emphasis on words like "history" and "traditional" and through consistent use of the past tense - "works the natives *had* made", "the material, 'live to survive' side they must *have had*" - these commentators seem to keep the indigenous peoples whose histories and objects they observe (or wish to observe) at arm's length from the here and now which they inhabit. There seems to be little recognition throughout the response books that many First Nations objects in the museum's collections are recent and contemporary works. Passing comments and evaluative statements imply that many writers assumed that everything displayed at the museum is old, and on display because it was dug up or rescued from decay by anthropologists for a contemporary audience to appreciate.

The last comment, which may refer to *present* forms of B.C. First Nations "people, landscape, language, lifestyle", nevertheless requires that a representation of histories of aboriginal people conform to a resemblance of the way she perceives their language and lives, which is as "natural" and paired with the "landscape". Without being able to divine this writer's intention, I can only say that an objection to the use of unnatural, toxic, modern-era materials to represent First Nations people makes me wonder about a possible relegation of indigenous peoples to a past, "natural" state, to which the materials of contemporary people - yes, spray-paint and plastic - is denied.

It's the *dichotomizing* itself of a cultural, material, traditional, collective "Native" past (as represented ethnologically in the museum) with HIGH SLACK as an expression of aesthetic, theoretical, "modern"-ness which seems to determine the nature and meaning of both sides of the dichotomy for most of these writers. Williams' work is defined in opposition to the expected, and is evaluated negatively or positively on this basis. Many respondents complained about the installation on the foundation of its perceived categorical difference from "the rest" of MOA's exhibitions, but some heralded HIGH SLACK using the same binary-creating reasoning. While several of the above commentators use their (mis)perception of all First Nations objects as ancient artifacts (as the kinds of artifacts *assumed* to be appropriate to the purview of ethnology) to discredit Williams' work as new-fangled nonsense, others use the same perception of indigenous material as ethnological record to envision HIGH SLACK as the "spiritual" as *opposed* to the "material, 'live to survive' " record which aboriginal objects are *taken* to represent.

HIGH SLACK as:
individual versus collective (i.e. "Native")

Generalized references to "Natives" and "these peoples" in visitors' comments represent another facet of the dichotomy structuring aboriginal peoples as past-tense and properly explained by anthropological means. Despite the fact that many objects in MOA's collection are works of contemporary art, bought and commissioned from individual practitioners, many visitors perceive (re-create) the objects on display at MOA solely as products of very broadly defined collective cultures, or more often of one massive group imagined as "Natives". Anthropology, in fact, does

consciously deal with collectives as opposed to individuals. This fact is not what I am critiquing, especially given that my thesis is based on the assumption that it is necessary to look at and take responsibility for our collective histories and behaviours as a society made up of different groups of people.

What interests me in the response books is a significant number of visitors' tendency to automatically attribute objects to a massive (and fictive) homogenized group called "Natives" more often than to a particular nation, community, or person. While it's true that many older First Nations works in MOA's collections are anonymous, there are many other objects, from the turn of the century until the present, which are openly attributed to individuals. In the face of this, it's interesting to note the persistence of visitors' identification of objects as "Haida" or "Native". Here are two examples:

> Very beautiful and enjoyable to experience. But I must wonder what all this is doing in a museum of anthropology. I and my guests came to see and experience Native history through display of <u>their</u> art and tools not some modernistic interpretation - anonymous (50)
> July 13

> We are from Japan. We are happy to be here but we feel kind of sad because we are losing the traditional works the natives had made. - anonymous (95).

I think this emphasis on the collective and cultural when it comes to aboriginal objects relates to the general acceptance of anthropology's appropriateness to the job of telling the public about "Natives" as undifferentiated members of a 'race'. This is in stark contrast to our normal insistence on the supremacy of the individual when it comes to defining works as 'art' - which as we have seen are so stringently separated out from the anthropological realm.

<u>HIGH SLACK</u> as:
puposeless versus useful

I also link anthropology's logic and dominance in representations of indigenous peoples to the defining contrast made in some comments between <u>HIGH SLACK</u> as "modern" art (a purely aesthetic object) and '<u>their</u> art and tools" (functional objects) as representations of a material way of

life. One writer's understanding of HIGH SLACK as the "spiritual" opposite of the material, "live to survive" side" accorded to "Native" people makes use of the ideological line drawn between 'art' on one hand and 'anthropology' on the 'other'. The objects in MOA were taken by some to reflect only the material, practical, and ceremonial natures (*versus* the aesthetic, artistic or spiritual aspects) of the societies on display. The societies on display were simultaneously taken to be the proper subject of a system of explanation (anthropology) which focuses on the material, practical, cultural, and ceremonial before it concerns itself with aesthetic and spiritual concerns [7]. This is no surprise given the context the visitors were speaking in and to: the university-based, self-designated Museum of Anthropology. Yet the links and assumptions require notice and thought.

HIGH SLACK as:
aesthetics versus culture
European versus 'other' cultures
non-aboriginal versus 'Native'
elitist versus accessible
ambiguous, unintelligible versus clear, explainable

HIGH SLACK was often re-created in public responses as lacking *ethnographic* explanatory clarity or power. In her book Cannibal Culture, art historian Deborah Root describes the job of an anthropology museum as explicating the "dead" - making 'other' (especially colonized) cultures seem fully exposed and transparent to the western voyeur [8]. Many HIGH SLACK visitors' written comments make it clear that the display and explanation particularly of First Nations peoples' arts, cultures, and pasts is what they expect at MOA. ("It's so motivating to learn about Natives" - anonymous, II: 41) [9]. Some found the absence of explanation in these terms in HIGH SLACK disturbing. Here are some responses to the installation which clarify the range of visitor's conceptions of the museum and their interpretations of Williams' work according to their expectations of MOA:

> Seems not to relate to rest of museum. More a political sentiment than a record of living. Extraneous. - KTC [sp?] 6/23/94 (11)

> This exhibit has not moved me (a citizen born in this province) to study & further understand the native history & culture. In fact it's quite a negative effect & should be removed. - MM (69)

> I think I have a bad attitude about this museum. I like those books that people write their comments in better than I like any of the exhibits. I went on the tour... and I felt that the guide didn't tell me enough about the people who made the art forms. Why did these people have so much time to carve? What was their life like? Was it war-like? I think so... - Rob Taylor (165)

In a few cases anger was directed at Williams and HIGH SLACK as well as at MOA in general for the difficulty and ambiguity of the works. There was resentment at the effort, time and concentration required to decipher what was being said and explored, and a co-expectation of authoritative explanation of purpose and significance (such as can be found in the ethnographic catalogue entries for objects in visible storage). Many expressed frustration about an exhibition which required some thought, and was not directly communicative of a single and clear message, about the lack of a unifying and authoritative explanation, and about the necessity for personal interpretation and analysis. A few revolted against the entire project by rejecting the requirement that they figure out what was going on:

> The text being illegible makes it hard to derive any meaning from this installation. What are you trying to say about european accounts of North American exploration? Very confusing. - David Foster (14).
>
> Tell us what they are don't make us Look it up!! - anonymous (22)
>
> WHAT THE FUCK IS IT ALL ABOUT IS IT A DIARY OR IS IT MADE UP WE CAN'T EVEN READ IT AN EXPLANATION WOULD BE NICE FOR ALL US UNGIFTED PEOPLE - anonymous (II: 4)

A variation on these objections included statements of curiosity and appreciation which were thwarted but not destroyed by frustration or confusion. These respondents showed interest in Williams' methods, or in parts of the show's content – interest which was stopped short because of a lack of understanding of the real 'purpose' or 'message'. This kind of response bridges expression of outright frustration and dismissal of the works because of their complicated nature and fully appreciative engagements with its complexities and ambiguities - of which there were also plenty. Here is a comment that was written in response to David Foster's question, above, and that completes the bridge I refer to:

> It was difficult to read. However, this gave me a larger opportunity to expand. I had to focus into the exhibit and let it speak to me... - Amanda (14)

Other commentators took similar positions:

> It's another kind of art - why not! Must people always understand it? I think they must not! - Dagmar (80).
>
> Complaining without understanding - is not the right way to comment [on] this exhibit!... - anonymous (141)
>
> I can see how persons not knowing the history of BC and the first peoples might be confused by this exhibit. The arrival of the whites and the subsequent events - and knowledge thereof assists an understanding of this moving exhibit - anonymous (143)

Some visitors who wrote in the response books were critical of fellow viewers' expectations that 'other' ("third-world" and non-"North American") peoples' objects and cultures be displayed and explained to them - they questioned whether many objects belong at MOA at all:

> It's a disgrace to steal all these objects from the third world and to leave them to die in misery - anonymous (translated from French) (94)
>
> Next to this was the following response:
>
> Yes, I know, the French are thieves but I'm sorry, I can't help but extend the list of the dissatisfied. There are thousands of fabulous objects which "decay" in drawers or in concrete corners for the pleasure of some when numerous tribes can only dream of their totems and sacred objects. Unfortunately, the concrete [of the museum's construction] ruins the ambience. Only the objects are beautiful. - Mareva (sp?) (translated from French) (94).
>
> ...North Americans should sometimes realize that the work of the world is not their own (lots of Czech & Slovak & East European Ceramics in Vancouver) - signed (illegible) (84)

And, in response to this comment, someone wrote: "Yet another example of ethnocentric hypocrisy!" -anonymous.

HIGH SLACK as:
Art versus anthropology (art versus culture)
(gallery versus museum)
Art work versus artifact
progress or innovation versus tradition

Some viewers, both young and old (children's comments and graffiti about their museum visits are an interesting aspect of these response books which is not explored here) ignored HIGH SLACK and responded to MOA as a whole or to the exhibits by which they seemed to be most affected or impressed - the displays which in fact defined the museum for them:

> I really liked your totem poles and the Raven and the first men, and I also liked your hats that the Haida made!! - Stephen Sperling
>
> Native
> Beautiful ^ works of art - Jackie Jaecket (92)
>
> It is creative. People should open their minds & not be so negative. It is different & different can be good. - anonymous
> [in response:]
> I think the Raven and first men is best - anonymous (146)

These kinds of responses reinscribe MOA as an anthropological space with an ethnographic assignment. Peeking at the cultures of 'others' - especially the 'past' of 'others' - is reinforced as many people's understanding of what is done at MOA in these comments.

This is not said to undermine the honest enthusiasm and openness expressed by many MOA visitors about the objects and representations of people and cultures in the museum - but rather to make sense of this enthusiasm in its context, and to look at the assumptions behind it and the structure and mechanics of how this enthusiastic looking is made possible and defined as 'anthropological'. The framing of legitimate looking and legitimate objects of the gaze as *anthropological* closes down people's ability and willingness to give attention to endeavours (such as HIGH SLACK, SAVAGE GRACES: *after images*, and other works) which cross and confuse the lines between cross-cultural anthropology, contemporary art, and cultural commentary.

Judith Williams understood that an explanatory display of First Nations cultural artifacts as the subject of an authoritative anthropological voice is the primary expectation of most MOA visitors. She told me that

> ... the museum, you've got to understand, in its press release, tried to deal with people's *expectations*. That was their *biggest* problem, from their point of view, is people that expect totem poles, but then what's this over here? So they try, you know, if they can, to give people some help. (Interview, April 1996: pg.)

Here are some examples of comments on HIGH SLACK which rely upon and reassert an opposition between the 'anthropological' and the 'artistic':

> This is an interesting [exhibit?], but isn't its place rather in a museum of modern art? 3/08/94 - J.B. (translated from French) (97)
>
> I think that this exhibit does not belong in an anthropological museum (or any other museum for that matter). I fail to see the beauty or meaning of empty disconnected phrases... - anonymous (111).
>
> The whole museum requires a good curator to sort out what is important & what is a masterpiece (though cultural significance of the objects is the most significant aspect)... - anonymous (128)
>
> Very out of place considering the rest of the exhibit. Would be better off somewhere else - signed (illegible) (159)
>
> THIS IS A MUSEUM RIGHT? - JESSICA MCKEE PS WHY DON'T YOU PUT SOME TAGS ON EVERYTHING! (II: 7)
>
> What's next MTV @ the MOA? - jb 10/1/94 (II: 18)
>
> Complete and utter crap. This is an anthropology museum not an interpretive art gallery! - signed (illegible) (II: 20)
>
> This belongs in an art gallery, not a Museum of Anthropology. - Reginald (last name illegible) (II: 21)
>
> Interesting exhibit in an anthropology museum. I didn't like it. I much prefer the carvings & artwork elsewhere... - Z. Ahmed (II: 36)

In emphasizing this *art versus anthropology* dichotomous theme in some visitors' responses, I do not intend to imply that art and anthropology *are* actually opposites. My whole purpose is to untangle and break down this structure by exhibiting and exploring it. In this sense, my approach to the art/anthropology binary is similar to my analysis of every other binary I name and investigate in this chapter. Outlining the views of visitors and general perceptions of the two disciplines does not mean that I endorse them. On the contrary, I am questioning them while recognizing the prominence of the binary assumption which seems to structure them.

The role of colonial relationships in the establishment of institutions like MOA is pertinent to the above comments. I think it's safe to say that, like other anthropological institutions in settler

states, MOA was created as a safe haven for objects understood to be salvaged from dying peoples and certain decay, and as an exotic house of wonders for those taking over the land and the future of B.C. - European immigrants. Looking at what visitors reflect about whom and how MOA exhibits, it's clear that this assumption about audience has stayed in place. The objects of both First Nations and other people commonly called "indigenous", and of what are usually called "civilizations", such as China and India and Japan - but rarely Europe - are explicated at MOA for a viewer who seems to be posited as a universal-human-type looker. By paying attention to the history of anthropology museums, and the practice of MOA in particular, I notice that the viewers here (including the Japanese visitors) respond as they are actually treated and talked to, i.e. as a European-descended observer and consumer of the cultures of 'the world'.

On the other hand, several commentators commended the relevance of HIGH SLACK to the museum's work and questioned the line in the sand drawn by some between legitimate and natural anthropological viewing of First Nations artifacts' "cultural significance" and the inappropriate need to engage with "unimportant" works of "interpretation" . These comments tend to break down what we have seen to be well-established dichotomies between artistic and anthropological, aesthetic and cultural, art and artifact:

> The techniques and the subject matter suit the museum context - well done to the curator or whoever else organized it all - AS (130)
>
> Are not artifacts art Ross?... Why can't we learn from contemporary works? - anonymous (II: 6), in response to:
> ... This is a museum, not a bloody art gallery. If Miss Williams wants this displayed for people to see (though I don't know why they would want to!) then let her try finding a spot for it in an art gallery. Good luck. What the fuck is this supposed to be anyway. I know I must be stupid and ignorant because I can grasp the "deep" inner meaning, but I don't care. I would much rather see some different selections from visible storage occupying this space. This is a waste of space. Why not use this to display some artifacts we might learn from? - Ross McElroy
>
> Sept. 21
> Great reactions at the least
> Art/history/culture/anthropology
> Fine lines between them once we start interpreting. - L. Clarke (II: 16)
>
> The museum is not one dimensional - great. - anonymous (II: 53)

HIGH SLACK as:
bad art/insignificant versus good art/masterpiece
ugly versus beautiful
unintelligible versus comprehensible
historical & specific versus timeless & universal
intellectual or theoretical versus self-explanatory or expressive

I found a surprising amount of generalized hostility without explanation in commentators' responses to HIGH SLACK. Although some criticism was unstructured, some used the mechanism of binary opposition to rationalize their negative evaluations of the installation:. They re-created HIGH SLACK as illegitimate and meaningless through an appeal to a standard category of "good art" or "the masterpiece", defined as that which is timelessly and universally recognized as beautiful and meaningful. Here are some of the ways that certain viewers wrote off the exhibition:

"Junk art" at its worst. Pretentious. - Al (11)

WASTE OF PUBLIC MONEY - VERY BAD ART. - anonymous (14).

I found the comments in this book more interesting than the garbage art displayed - signed (illegible) (21)
I agree - anonymous (21)

What a waste of Bug Screen! - anonymous
Waste of ink! - anonymous
I agree!! - anonymous (26)

PUT THIS BOOK UP AS ART!! - anonymous (33)

The real test is: would we dig this up in 400 years & put it in a museum? I don't think so. It's nothing more than poorly written poetry stenciled on a bug screen. Come on let's create masterpieces that survive the test of time. - Jack (last name illegible) 7-2-94 (35).

A total waste of money. This display is lacking lasting, enduring depth that art is truly timeless & brilliant has... - RG (? illegible) (42)

I didn't understand anything... I'm sorry but this is milk for an elite of intellectuals and has no business being here - signed (illegible) (translated from French) (90).

This is not yet a masterpiece. - SD (123)

Is this a masterpiece???? - anonymous
What is missing? - anonymous (127)

It's just plain & simple bad art! Boring, ugly & a waste of taxpayers $. Anthropologists - get real - don't intellectualize garbage - we're sick of it! - anonymous (134)

> Trash! Get it out of here! - signed (illegible) (145)
>
> You can't get the message across if the method you use automatically makes people switch off - anonymous (68)

This last comment is an interesting observation, and it is clear that a certain number of people did "switch off" because of the format of HIGH SLACK and its visual ambiguity. The question is: why? I think there are several interrelated factors at work here. Dichotomies structure all of them. As I've already noted, some people seemed affronted to find what they would define as contemporary art in a space determined to be properly anthropological. Others understood the installation as an elitist irrelevance, as opposed to the comprehensible and instructive displays suitable to MOA. Still others recited the attributes of a 'masterpiece' as a way to state without explanation that HIGH SLACK doesn't measure up, and instead belongs in the opposite category of "junk" or "trash" or "not masterpiece" or "bad art". (That the list of attributes of the masterpiece - timelessness, universality, expressiveness, 'depth', 'beauty' - is itself a product and ideology of a particular culture is unrecognized.)

Some commentators received HIGH SLACK as a project lacking depth and integration of aesthetic skill with wisdom about the world and her subject matter:

> I enjoyed looking at the bug screen. A similar effect can be seen at Lumberland. - anonymous (43)
>
> Graphic design surface design photography - all the elements of the course I teach on - but is it art? - Alan Dark (83)
>
> ... No depth of learning or understanding, no imagination... Her ignorance is apparent in the letter on the left [excerpts from letters written by Williams to museum staff were exhibited in the gallery]... if I judge that 99% of modern art is dross I'm probably right but trite: 99% of the art of all ages is dross insofar as it's not craft. So if something I can't understand, without the standard cultural reference points, is to engage my attention it must show craft, thought & knowledge. Deconstruct this & there's nothing left. - Niall MacKay (161)

On the other hand, there were those viewers who valued HIGH SLACK on the same terms used by some to dismiss it:

> A beautiful show - I thought I was at MoMA in NYC ... as it is conceptually & artistically very beautiful, dynamic and personal... - signed (illegible) (77))

> In the other room I was asked to give my opinion as to what a masterpiece was. I wanted to say that a masterpiece was a piece which was made with the full spirit and at the same time; when viewed, could move another spirit completely. This is a masterpiece. Thank you. - Signed (illegible) (165)
>
> This has to be the best part of the whole thing - signed (illegible) (II: 71)

The classification of "good art" used to categorically exclude Williams' work by several viewers was mobilized by these commentators to praise the installation. While some invoked "masterpiece" to scorn and differentiate HIGH SLACK, others named this category in order to include by association Williams' work on the valued side of a "good art/ junk art" polarity.

An undercurrent of people's use of "good art/ bad art" dichotomies focussed on the connection between creating an exhibition and spending money, and respond to HIGH SLACK as a waste of money:

> I hope no tax money was used to create this exhibit! - signed (illegible) 7/1/94 (31)
>
> It is a waste of money and time, you can hardly read anything. What a load of sh..!! A waste of bug net. - Jenny (44)
>
> ... In 100 years this display will have long since paid for a new house in Vancouver with the proceeds, laughing all the way to the bank. - RG (? illegible) (42).

These comments are interesting in that they probably reflect social ideologies that money is the real measure and reward of good things. Their writers create new meanings for HIGH SLACK (as a waste of tax money), and also re-invent MOA (inaccurately) as a lucrative, profit-making venue. In these last comments Williams herself is received as a parasitical force sucking up government funds and visitors' money or an entrepreneur making a profit from the installation.

HIGH SLACK as:
scholarship or philosophy versus 'art'

Another current of re-creation of the installation was to align it with academic research and presentation. Sometimes this interpretation of the exhibit was credited as authoritative or insightful: "...the world is on fire; this... university has produced an intellectual statement worth

publishing at long last. The brilliance of Williams' conception is astounding – anonymous" (1-2). At other times it was critiqued, in opposition to 'real' art, as overly intellectualizing or unemotional: "This is so detached that [it] is NON-SENSE - not a VISION". - R. Slaught (sp.?) (10). In several critiques, HIGH SLACK was defined as archives or scholarship in specific contrast to 'art'.

Williams' works were posited by visitors to MOA as related to several kinds of scholarship: 1) history-telling; 2) post-modern or post-colonial deconstructions of texts and 'otherness'; and 3) a combination of sociology and philosophy to do with 'race relations' and 'the nature of humanity':

history-telling

...The layering of 19th and 20th C[entury] materials really shows how little our attitudes towards and expectations of this small piece of the world have changed over all the generations of white contact... - John and Merrilyn (41)

July 9, 1994
The time slipped away as we read your words and others' words and viewed the past through your gauze of interpretation. Judith, the vermilion snail is my preferred area & the power of the devastation that occurred in the historical period you recall comes through... you've gone out of yourself into the otherness of that other time... Have we any of us gone beyond the violence and misunderstanding you've recorded? Another jolt for us! - Maeve Wiegand (sp?) (48)

I very much appreciate the research you undertook, a fascinating re-consideration of historical events & issues that contribute to the construction of what B.C. is today, affects our reading of the land and the environment... expansive... - Henry Tsang (55)

Interesting that I saw this exhibit just when I was starting to read E.H. Carr "What is History?" - anonymous (107)

Very unusual evocation of time - truly becoming our STORY. Very quiet, yet haunting... The layering, the drapery, the simple ambiguity is quite special... - a history student, August '94 (118)

... this matter of discovering how we, as the human species, can best live on the Earth in a spirit of respect and, indeed, love for one another, is the dominant question of our time... I am already aware, through UBC History Professor Diane Newell's recently-published Tangled Webs of History, that the record of non-native and First Nations contact in B.C. is a miserable one - Correction begins with awareness. Your installation, like Dr. Newell's book, provides an opportunity for such awareness to begin. It is surely now the responsibility of visitors to this installation to accept what you have offered and begin their own personal journeys of awareness - leading to, I hope, a more just society in our common future. - Paul B. Ohannesian (sp?) (II: 1)

post-modern and post-colonial deconstruction of text and the 'other'

An interesting, post-modern comment on multimedic text... - anonymous (31)

> The mesh screen bearing a vivid narrative text is highly effective in communicating the drama of cultural "otherness" - anonymous (43)
>
> ... It reveals a deep understanding of the problems and contradictions involved in representing the "other" and appropriately presents these concerns in a form which complicates and fragments ideas, and challenges the assumption that something as complex as this issue could be understood simply by reading an "expert" account or relying on conventional curatorial techniques. This is the best attempt I have seen to chart the murky and often misunderstood area of race relations... the impression I take away from this exhibit is that our attitudes as western, "civilized" people towards history & other races are often indicative of our own desire to own something rather than to try and understand it - Australian exchange student @ U of Mass (158)

philosophy/sociology of human reality and possibility

> 12 July 1994
> The moiré of nets and layers of screen are a moving symbol of people's mis- and not-understanding and or cultural differences... it's an incredible feat of craftspersonship and thought... Very beautiful, in my opinion. The texts, in that they are difficult to discern, give us the symbol of just that - Joan Ross Bloedel (51).
>
> 28th July - very powerful, I loved it. It brought me back to the past and projected what the future is... and could be. It takes time to feel all of this... - Denise Stewart (85)
>
> I appreciate the juxtaposition of First Peoples & Westerners' misunderstandings about the nature of humanity... Each perhaps feels the other loving or cruel, depending on the glimpse given - Anita Albertson (121)

Many MOA visitors posited Williams' work as an intellectual, theoretical piece, for example:

> Although formally, the exhibit is clever and involving, I don't feel drawn into the context, I find myself reading the text, analyzing the layers... I do feel whispered to, but I don't feel that this exhibit has helped me make those connections to the layered past & present of B.C. Instead I have read & wandered my way through a smattering of pages torn from archives - anonymous (138)

Some even defined it as non-art purely on this basis. This disqualification of HIGH SLACK as 'art' on the foundation of a *lack* of vision or emotional power leads back to a more basic hierarchical dichotomy in western thought: that of *reason versus emotion*, which relies on a separation of *mind versus body*. Not everyone detected a lack of emotion in HIGH SLACK, however.

HIGH SLACK as thought-provoking, curious, and *emotional*

Some people who recorded their reactions to the show in the public response books defined their experience of the works entirely through emotional terms:

> The "snail" piece: moving - a solid perennial form into which the simultaneous multiplicities surface and dissolve (Pat Adams, 6/21/94) (7).
>
> Very moving. One needs to spend time in the exhibit to appreciate it. - Caroline Fafard (15)
>
> I agree with all those who say this piece is moving. I was particularly impressed with the large painting which I could have spent a long time contemplating... - anonymous (19)
>
> THANK YOU FOR THE VOICES - anonymous (20)
>
> It seethes with power & mystery I imagined a wind blowing, the smell of sea, corpses adrift, memories of screams ringing in our deadened ears the land and sea bear the weight of too many corpses & tears, the tears make the tides; when will it ebb? - S. Deplantier (27)
>
> This woman is mad w[ith] visions that have no boundaries. Even words can't hold the meanings & don't. - Marjorie Rebeino (28).
>
> My stomach was in a knot as I walked through this exhibit... gbw 30 June/94 (31)
>
> Judith Williams' work is completely engrossing. Moving layers weaving [in] & out, textures, colours each moving closer & further away, much like our memories, our history. Fleeting, yet permanent. A highly charged space... - anonymous (34)
>
> Reference to fading memory through light in use of mesh and our probable lack of familiarity with the text [interests?] me to learn more... - signed (illegible) (34)
>
> Impossible NOT to feel sad, moved and thoughtful about B.C.'s history and peoples. - anonymous (63)
>
> I am so sour from what I [have] seen in the MOA. I feel so little now. It is a strong piece as far as describing fear goes... - anonymous (83)
>
> ... Somehow I feel that showing in such a literal way that 'history is a construct, a junction of positions' is not quite enough. Of course voices got lost at those junctions... You examine the layers, add on rather than deconstruct - But is there more that I am missing?... - Sarah Jim (137)
>
> Very moving - a dreamlike clarity, and marriage of word-image-object - anonymous (II: 3)
>
> 23 Sept. 94 Very innovative design - too much feeling comes out of the words. Beautiful, horrible, tragic. - Kimmie Wright (II: 16)

Many of these comments indicate an appreciation of and engagement with the form and content of Williams' works. These responses indicated fruitful involvement with both the material presented and the form. It is interesting that the writers often implicated emotions and emotional effect to describe their evaluations and analyses of the works' meanings. Being "moved", for these on-lookers, seems to have either sparked, resulted from, or accompanied an exploration of the installation. I think this way of describing a constructive engagement with HIGH SLACK also depends to some degree on the same requirement of art used by others to discredit the installation's effect: the eliciting of emotions.

HIGH SLACK as politics/political inspiration/"political correctness"

The tendency to register the installation as political commentary came in two forms. Some constructed this contemporary art installation as a valid and valuable form of political thought - a contribution to current debates and to the condition of our collective society. Some cited it as inspiration for practice as well as thought, and related it to very broad social justice issues and movements relevant to geographically disparate cultures. Others re-created HIGH SLACK as politics in order to define it away from valid art - in yet another binary trick - or simply to argue with the politics which they perceived in it. These comments also came from people belonging and relating to a variety of global societies. Here are some examples of MOA visitors' conception of HIGH SLACK as politics:

> ...More a political sentiment than a record of living. Extraneous. - KTC (?) 6/23/94 (11)
>
> Almost all the indian people [sic] I have worked with and known are calm, warm, kind, peaceful, and proud. But the first results of our collision with them were inevitable. I get a certain pleasure out of contemplating the next meeting... - Bob (last name illegible) (48)
>
> Today - I love my neighbour as myself! Thank you so much - KY 1994 (II: 3)
>
> What... are they prejudiced against white people here? - anonymous (II: 10)
>
> It has a dreamlike quality that causes you to think and opens an awareness of a totally different kind of lifestyle. A wonderful exhibit one that I hope will travel where millions of people can see it and be influenced. - anonymous (II: 11)

... this to me is about edges and borders as places of transition and (paradoxically) continuity at the helm of change... - Lela Van Weeden (sp?) (II: 33)

12/8/94 I have sad & complicated thoughts upon seeing & experiencing the exhibit. To myself, it is strange having seen the old artwork (if such may be said), the new artwork (this) & know the spirits behind the old & new 1st peoples who speak/ feel to me/ work through me like meaning behind the words of poetry. The strange feeling is confusing & fruitful & has no ending but more wonder about the verities of human existence & awe at the ancestral spirits of our nature becoming aware of its place in the Greater Spirit (the Anima Mundi) - Suzan (II: 84)

... an introspective, culturally - environmentally - artistic perspective of time: place: understanding - I applaud this work and the contribution to this area - my understanding and perspective has been gloriously expanded... J. Depew Nov. 26 1994 (II: 89)

The images brought about are very powerful, I hope people take advantage of the message - anonymous (II: 94)
Dec 24. An hour of reflection... on the wonder of the history of this part of our country - has raised the issue in our eyes of past events - viewed justly or unjustly - and a rekindled impetus to see in this day that we can live harmoniously together - Roz & Vaino Latuala (II: 94)

There were a few comments which (cynically) constructed the installation as the materialization of a specific and local set of cultural politics. Some explained the existence and display of HIGH SLACK purely as the result of meaningless political trends determining who is paid to make art about what:

Is Judith Williams a Native Woman? If [she is] Native no problem w[ith] funding the installation. If White, she must do an installation on Native American experience - 'other'wise no money. As an artist, I too must live by the fashionable. That's why I'm cleaning up w[ith] Lesbian Greeting cards. Money rules... - Barbara Yuko (II: 33)

This comment dovetails with a current which focusses on money and funding in the response books, and reinforces the society's generally accepted (if not acknowledged or named) racialized separation of First Nations concerns, 'experience', interests, cultures, and histories from those of everyone else. The writer frames a potentially interesting question about the installation's content, authorship, and context of display in cynical terms which reduce the situation to simplistic dichotomous categories of self/'other'. These are used to isolate racial ("Native/Native American") and sexual ("Lesbian") 'others' to whom money, in the viewer's imagination, flows exclusively and uninterrupted because of political "fashion".

Written comments on HIGH SLACK found in the public response books created an important way to explore the issue of what this exhibition *meant* in physical, historical, and cultural

context. The spectrum of receptions recorded in the volumes revealed that art works have flexible meanings because of people's acts of reception within their own contexts. The range of voices in the books also illuminate particular underlying cultural concepts which influenced the ways people thought about HIGH SLACK. The installation, which reflected on historical and contemporary human relationships and politics in a specific place, elicited certain tendencies of the way this society organizes knowledge about art, history, anthropology, museums, and different people.

The prominence of dichotomous reasoning in the subtext of many viewers' responses is interesting in itself. Commentators critiqued as well as mobilized a variety of dualistic pairs in their receptions of Williams' work. The dualism which informs many viewers' responses to HIGH SLACK (structured according to ideologies that have dominated and influenced western cultures in the past century at least) points out some characteristics of our society's vision of art's function and value, museums' roles, and anthropology's meanings. The contentious presence of dualism also illustrates that HIGH SLACK interacted with and challenged these ideologies in viewers' experiences.

Vandalism as an act of reception

The preceding receptions of HIGH SLACK are typical of contemporary art installations in established museums: people looked and went away without comment, people looked and discussed the show with others, and people looked and wrote down their thoughts in public response books. Other receptions of HIGH SLACK are less common occurrences: my academic research, for example, or the public symposium on historical and contemporary political and legal topics related to the artworks. One viewers' - or group of viewers' - response to the exhibition was registered in a mode that is rarer still. At some point in the autumn of 1994, HIGH SLACK was vandalized. There is not much to be known about this act of reception, as I found out in my April 1996 interview with Judith Williams:

CF: The vandalization of HIGH SLACK... has any information come to light on that?

JW: No.... nothing has happened, and in fact, I just simply put it behind myself...

CF: ... I ... came back to the museum to write... some more notes [in December 1994], and it was blocked off and so I had to get a security person to take me in.

JW: Yeah - the vandalism was *extremely* interesting. It was very thoughtfully done. It was *not* random; it was done with a close reading of the words. Whoever did it knew exactly what they were doing; it was very deliberate; it was very carefully done.... in conjunction with certain words.... So it was done with considerable intelligence and... it was not just a vandal. It was somebody who knew they had no intention of hurting anything else in the museum; there were no signs of damage of any kind except for these very specific things. The biggest damage was done [on the spiral work entitled High Slack] next to... the phrase about the *Tsilhqot'in* involved in the massacre cutting out the heart of the man who was the head, and ripping out the heart. And it had been cut and then ripped like that to... illustrate the [the words].... So somebody knew what they were doing.... of course nobody likes their work to be hurt but... it was kind of an *interesting* aspect. But I was of a mind at that point, I had been *so engaged* in the *negotiative* aspect of things, that I really *had* decided that everything that was involved in the piece was part of the piece. So I was less disturbed and distraught about the thing than the people at the museum, even. I just took it as *part* of the piece.

...CF: ...somebody told me... that your office was also vandalized? Is that true?

JW: We *thought* that somebody had tried to get in here.... - it looked like somebody had attacked the glass. With something sharp... I had a guy who was working with me... and he was very alarmed. But there was... not another sign of anything happening (Foss 1996: 30-1).

The vandalism done to the installation included several incisions cut into the mesh screens and silk panel mentioned by Williams. The slices were so precise and discreet that when they were discovered no-one could be sure how long they had been there; they may have gone unnoticed for some time. For this reason, and because the damage was inflicted in such an organized, deliberate, and precise way, it seems more like an act of commentary than one of outright destruction. There was no attempt to ruin any of the individual works or the installation as a whole, and no gestures toward inhibiting or blocking its messages, meaning, or existence. This vandalism seems to me better understood as a reception of HIGH SLACK which falls on (one extreme of) the continuum of responses put into motion and recorded by other museum visitors. Although the vandalism indicated some kind of response to specific aspects of historical references to First Nations-European conflict in the artworks, the precise meaning of the gesture is not clear. What is clear is

that someone felt strongly enough about the issues to violate the installation and to risk criminal charges if caught.

Endnotes

1. The historical, socio-political, art, and anthropology contexts which I explain as relevant to HIGH SLACK's production in Chapters 1, 2 and 3 were confirmed as factors affecting the range of the exhibition's receptions in this part of my study. Major themes developed in my description of the discourses related to HIGH SLACK's creation and display also surfaced in the written comments of MOA visitors in the response books (as well as in my own receptions and the receptions of Rosa Ho and Judith Williams).

2. Art historian Janet Wolff suggests a balance between the artist' role as producer with the reality of multiple receptions:

> ...authorial meaning does indeed have some sort of priority over other readings, and therefore biographical and other information about authors is relevant for the study of literature [and, I think, art]. But this is not an argument for any kind of 'valid' interpretation.... What is far more important than the fact that, as a... critical exercise, we may attempt to recover an author's meaning, is the fact that this meaning is effectively dead. What an author intended... is... of interest insofar as that original meaning has... informed the present reading of the text.... A sociology of literature [or art]... would incorporate original meaning (and its construction), mediation of that meaning through, for example, a series of critics, and meaning attached to the work by any new reader [viewer], as well as the interrelations between these(1981: 102-3).

3. These ideas about how meanings of art works are determined, circulated, and altered have been extensively developed in art historical scholarship by people such as Janet Wolff, among many others; and similar reception theories have been articulated in cultural studies as well, by Stuart Hall and others.

4. Ho analyzes some comments made by viewers in response to this 1993 exhibition. She has some interesting things to say about the conversations created by this means - now common in many museums, which I will quote here because they parallel my own approach to analyzing some responses to HIGH SLACK. Ho writes:

> In the examples I have selected to accompany this article, I not only attempt to present a range of personal thoughts and political convictions, but also to juxtapose responses in order to show that many statements and counter statements either contradict or support the position of earlier or later ones... It is tempting to tally the responses into positive or negative camps, and to tabulate some... statistical probability which is correct nineteen times out of twenty. But what does such a statistical analysis mean when the debate and dialogue between the writers and McMaster, and among the writers themselves, are complex and the ideological position taken changes according to the subject concerned, or to whom the comment is intended? What is a positive response? Positive for whom? About what? Similarly, what is negative? To think of the comments in binary terms is really to perpetuate power relationships of polarized views instead of resolutions...(1993-94: 22).

5. The historical western Noble Savage concept is explained by Nicholas Thomas in his book, Colonialism's Culture. 1994: 22, 99-104.

6. See Chapter 2 for a discussion of "primitivism" and the contemporary consumption of indigenous cultures.

7. While anthropologists studying 'Northwest Coast' First Nations have developed a prevalent discourse about the aesthetic characteristics of art from these cultures, producing a focus on the expertise shown in formline-composition, this aspect is still secondary to anthropology's primary concern with material culture and its representation of practical and cultural ways of life.

8. Root traces this tendency in Cannibal Culture on pages 108-9 and 116-118, in her chapter called "Art and Taxidermy: The Warehouse of Treasures".

9. Here it's interesting to consider the international diversity of MOA's visiting audience, and the ways that a person's nationality, culture, and context may affect what s/he expects the "University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology" to represent. There is not enough information in the response books for me to attempt to draw conclusions about differences or continuities between the expectations and responses of local, Canadian, and international visitors. While I am under the impression that the idea that 'Nativeness' is on display at MOA is strong among visitors who live in B.C., I can't say whether that's actually true (those who write in the response books are a fraction of the exhibit's viewers and many comment anonymously, let alone telling me where they live), or what this might be due to if it is true. Of course, MOA has a strong reputation for its First Nations collections, and in its publicity this aspect of the institution's identity - its aboriginal collections and its work with First Nations artists and communities - is foremost. While I was busy wondering if people from other countries held less of an image of the West coast 'Native' as the museum's subject (object?), I ran into one or two comments from international visitors which indicated that their understanding of the museum indeed paralleled this image. For example:

> We are from Japan. We are happy to be here but we feel kind of sad because we are losing the traditional works the natives had made. - anonymous (95).

Chapter 9: First Nations Visitors as Speaking Subjects (receptions in public dialogue/receptions in research)

Unlike many other exhibitions, HIGH SLACK was also received in a formal, structured, and collective way. This happened at a one-day symposium, entitled "The Tsilhqot'in War of 1864 & the 1993 Cariboo-Chilcotin Justice Inquiry". The meeting was held on November 19, 1994 at the UBC First Nations House of Learning; it was co-sponsored by the House of Learning and organized by MOA. It is important to note that this lively symposium formed an essential part of HIGH SLACK's *production* process. It was planned early in the exhibition project as an extension and complication of the meanings of the art works themselves, and as a forum to include responses to the art works as an integral part of the exhibition. Williams told me that:

> ... from the very beginning, it was my notion that there would be occasion for the people who were related to the issues that were in the show to speak their own mind.... that was right there from the beginning. (Foss 1996: 25) [1].

I want to focus on understanding the symposium as a site crucial to two separate reception processes. The first reception moment was the discussion at the symposium of HIGH SLACK as a group of art works that taps into current and historical political issues. The second reception process involved responses to my attempt to build a feminist research project on the base of the exhibition and the events and relationships it prompted. The issues that I have struggled with most – and most fruitfully – throughout my research are part of this discussion. They include complex and fuzzy concepts, such as: difference, silence (or refusal), 'failure' in research, identity, subject positions, and subjectivity. I realize that these words can be vague in their connotations and effect. They are used in so many ways at different times and to different ends. In the following pages I will try to clarify and elaborate on my understandings of these words. I will explain how they relate to aspects of HIGH SLACK's reception and my study of that process.

HIGH SLACK: historical materials and narratives

At the symposium, I was engaged by the histories and analyses of the war and the inquiry

presented by *Tsilhqot'in* women and men, as well as members of other First Nations. These presentations showed their varied links with subjects in HIGH SLACK. Some were directly related, some were more distantly linked, and others became connected incidentally.

As I've described previously, the works in HIGH SLACK, and the textual quotations within them, have a range of subjects and sources that cluster around the period and events of B.C.'s colonization. Two sources appear repeatedly. One is the diary of a British man called Robert Homfray, who was hired by Alfred Waddington, a member of the Victoria Legislature, to survey a road from a coastal inlet to the gold fields of the interior Cariboo-Chilcotin plateau in 1861(Figure 32). The other is the record of an 1864 trial presided over by Judge Matthew Ballie Begbie, who was known as the "Hanging Judge", not least because of the results of this trial.

Passages from these writings and others were stencilled across the ephemeral netting used in the installation, and reprinted in the leaves of four artist's book works. The (obviously carefully selected) quotations from the texts were fragmented and juxtaposed with each other, with the artist's words, with painted panels, and with photographic images of the long-inhabited land referred to in the words. The effect of this deliberate visual comparison is that the historical voices hover in relation to one another and offer up the gaps between their perspectives and the 'facts' - which brings me back to the deadly events of 1864. Here's what is generally agreed upon: After Homfray's disastrous 1861 winter journey between Victoria and Bute Inlet, which was survived only with life-saving help from local First Nations, another road crew was sent by Waddington into the highlands above the coast. They were attacked by members of the *Tsilhqot'in* Nation in *Tsilhqot'in* territory in April 1864. The event, with some others surrounding it, became known as the Chilcotin War. The uprising was followed by Begbie's trial and the hanging in 1864 and 1865 of six *Tsilhqot'in* men (*Lhassas?in*, *Piell*, *Tellot*, *Chedekki*, *Chayssus*, *Tahpit*) a generation of that nation's leadership (Williams, 1996:55). Judge Begbie wrote to Governor Seymour that "the blood of 21 whites calls for retribution. And these fellows are cruel murdering pirates taking life and making slaves in the same

spirit in which you or I would go out after partridges or rabbit shooting" (Letter to Governor Frederick Seymour from Judge Matthew B. Begbie, 30 September 1864; Provincial Archives of British Columbia, reproduced in Williams, 1994: 23).

While there is general agreement on this sparse narrative, many aspects of the story are matters of debate – and not only what could be called "the details". Conflict arose at the symposium over beliefs about the basic causes and long-term effects of the series of violent events that together made a colonial war. I will explore the meanings of this conflict momentarily, in a discussion of what I'm calling "historical difference" and "power difference". Right now my purposes are to provide the essential historical background for this exploration, and especially to point out that the schisms which appeared at the symposium reflected, almost mirror-like, the visual juxtapositions in voices and perspectives fabricated by Williams in HIGH SLACK itself. Williams conceived of this weaving of different voices as an "opera", to the point of envisioning the following:

> ...the boat is a duet. And it was always thought of in terms of almost an operatic thing, of two people sitting, each reading something different... if I had my druthers, they would be singing it – literally... it was operatic in intent, and in fact we worked with a theatre person to see if we could present a lot of this material at the opening, but the person who was writing the script was *so racist*, unconsciously so, that I just rejected the whole thing. I just couldn't get him to understand some of the things he was doing and I couldn't get him to include the female voices the way I wanted, so I just pulled the plug. But, when I made the boat piece, which was one of the earliest pieces I did, I always saw it in terms of two people sitting, both reading something different, and those voices intertwined (Foss 1996: 13).

It strikes me that the symposium attained a multi-vocal, if somewhat dissonant, parallel to Williams' description of the "intertwined" historical narratives (imagined as melodies) in HIGH SLACK.

Although I witnessed some connections between the stories and forms deployed by Williams and the different things First Nations people had to say at the symposium, direct reference to the artworks was minimal. While the installation clearly was a catalyst to the discussion, whether its actual content, style, or approach was an inspiration was not evident and not explored. Nobody to my knowledge saw this movement away from HIGH SLACK as a problem. The title of the

symposium alone ("The Tsilhqot'in War of 1864 & the 1993 Cariboo-Chilcotin Justice Inquiry"), makes no mention of the exhibition itself, and confirms that it was intended as a forum connected to but not centred on the art works or even the museum [2].

The gaps as much as the links between the history traced by Williams in HIGH SLACK and the histories told by symposium speakers prompted my interest in doing research on the artworks and the situation developing before my eyes. Perspectives and 'facts', taken from authoritative historical sources (written material from the provincial archives) and called into question by Williams, were further destabilized in relation to the histories sustained by aboriginal people and re-told to the large symposium audience. For me, hearing direct exchanges of histories and perspectives between different people was compelling. As the conversations began and ended, I wanted to know more about two relationships involving continuity and disjunction. These were: first, the relationship between Williams' installation and the discussion happening in the symposium; and second, the distance between the differing histories and perspectives (which obviously had *something* to do with Native/non-Native relations) that ran smack into each other at the symposium. Sitting in a room full of *Tsilhqot'in* and other First Nations people as well as non-indigenous people, it became apparent that if I wanted to learn about these relationships I would need to ask questions of some of the people sitting around me.

Another reason to talk to *Tsilhqot'in* people who expressed interest in the symposium surfaced as I sat and listened. It came from the voices I heard at the meeting and from my own feminist reading of what I saw as Williams' critical re-presentation of women's historical voices and presences in her artworks. I decided to try to talk to a few women who were at the gathering about the specific references to women in the installation and about the symposium itself. What were their thoughts about how the artworks and symposium reflected women's participation in the life of the First Nations involved in this particular colonial history - in the past and in the present?

The symposium prompts and resonates in my research

Following up on these convictions and questions became both a mostly frustrated and an entirely fruitful experience. The research I envisioned did not happen, but the gap left by its absence has taught me important things about 'failure' and feminist academic research; about silence and refusal. Here are the ways my plan did not work. I wanted to view some videotapes that were taken of the (public) symposium, to verify my own notes, and to attempt to track down the name of one young *Tsilhqot'in* woman who spoke two important things. First, she publicly claimed her own heritage through the war histories told by her nation's chiefs during the day's proceedings; and second, she talked about the contemporary legacy of colonial processes in B.C. and its personal effects in her life (Foss 1994: 7). I would have liked to do an interview with this woman. After some searching, however, I found out that following negotiations between the Tsilhqot'in National Government and the Museum of Anthropology, the Nation had withheld permission for the videotapes to be viewed, edited, and distributed, although I understood this to be the intended purpose of filming the event [3]. Through my research, nevertheless, I did manage to speak several times to a woman, Annie William, who is a former chief of the *Tsilhqot'in* community in the Nemiah Valley which is called *Xeni Gwet'in*. She expressed interest in my questions and outlook, but eventually let me know that she could not decide to talk to me about the history of the war and the issues it brings up without the consensus of her community. For her, a personal, individual decision about participating in my research was not an option; she would inevitably have to bring a collective responsibility to the task of publicly representing histories relevant to her people. She told me that if we *could* create a situation that would make her participation possible, we would need an agreement that the *Tsilhqot'in* Nation would get copyright privileges to the results of the (what would end up being cooperative) research. I also sent letters to *Tsilhqot'in* government offices (following the advice of Rosa Ho and of staff of other museums with whom I was working) describing my research and asking to be contacted by anyone who might be interested in talking to me about it. I received no

replies.

In the next pages I will describe what I have learned both in spite of and because of the 'failures' of my research plan. I will report and examine differences which I observed in action at the symposium, and which formed one way that HIGH SLACK was received as an artwork - in active debate if not as the centre of attention. I understand these differences to be about and produced by history-telling and power structures. This will lead to a consideration of how and why it was that the research I planned with *Tsilhqot'in* women did not materialize, i.e. what is there to learn from refusals and silence in response to my inquiries? Finally, I will explain what 'difference', 'identity', and 'subjectivity' have come to mean to me, in relation to my experiences of the symposium and of my long research process with and without *Tsilhqot'in* people.

differences: history and power

I think that what I am calling "historical" and "power" differences are likely relevant to many feminist research projects. These concepts and the realities they denote have been sites of struggle and learning in my exploration of the implications of the symposium discourses, and deserve some attention and explanation. Here, I must reconnect the symposium debates and the differences they illuminated to their catalyst, Williams' installation. Later, I will try to link them to their sources.

In one work in HIGH SLACK (the title work), the testimony of European settlers about their relations with *Tsilhqot'in* people is contrasted starkly with *Tsilhqot'in* statements. The words, painted on screens, are all taken from historical writings, colour-coded grey for European words and yellow for indigenous ones (figures 33-35). The excerpts from colonists' histories echo Judge Matthew Ballie Begbie's judgement on the killings which made the Tsilhqot'in War. Among the words on the screen are:

> "YOU STOLE THE FLOUR!", and "I'M WRITING DOWN YOUR NAMES!" as well as: "THE BODY OF BREWSTER, THE FOREMAN, WAS FOUND...A LARGE INCISION

IN HIS SIDE - THE HEART REMOVED - PERHAPS ATE - AS VENGEANCE", and:
"THE WOMEN, BREW[ster] WROTE, WERE BETTER FED - THE PRICE OF PROSTITUTION, WAS ENOUGH TO EAT."

These quotations reveal the colonizers' assertion of authority over indigenous people, and emphasize a then prominent view of the *Tsilhqot'in* as particularly criminal and primitive people. They also communicate the silence that the newcomers maintained about the complex causes of the war. Governor Seymour wrote to the British Secretary of State for the Colonies that "It suited our purpose to treat officially these successive acts of violence as isolated massacres, but there is no objection to our now avowing [that] an Indian insurrection existed" (Letter from Governor Frederick Seymour to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, the Duke of Newcastle, 9 September 1864; reproduced in Williams, 1994: 17). The crisis was treated as a criminal matter in all respects. The colonists' interest as a group was to imagine the incident as murder caused by savagery rather than a war resulting from their own presence and actions in the 'new world'. This strategic conception of the killings lived on to frame an accepted history which obscures the context of the conflict. The *Tsilhqot'in* text in the painting reflects on exactly this context. The words in yellow include:

"IN OUR COUNTRY - YOU OWE US BREAD!", and:
"WHEN THE WHITES ATE, CHEDDEKI TESTIFIED, THEY GAVE FOOD TO THE CHILDREN - BREWSTER TOOK IT AWAY FROM THEM AND THREW IT IN THE FIRE",

and:

"LHASSAS?IN SAID: 'THEY STEAL OUR LAND, HUNT OUR GAME, BRING MADNESS WITH WHISKEY - DEATH WITH SMALLPOX - KILL ALL THE WHITES!' (MARCH 1864)",

(Cheddeki was later hanged, and Lhassas?in , the principal war chief of the *Tsilhqot'in*, was also hanged. The *Tsilhqot'in* have lately lobbied for Mount Waddington, a major landmark in the Chilcotin region and in the province of BC, to be renamed Mount Lhassas?in.) These quotations show that during and immediately following the conflict the *Tsilhqot'in* challenged the history being

written about them in public and administrative discourses. Speakers at the 1994 symposium confirmed that this challenge did not end. Annie William, for example, said that the "books on the war, and the archival and religious groups' documents are only a guess in the dark of what the war was about" (Foss 1994). Judith Williams' word montage highlights the fact that an indigenous version of events was always available and spoken, but was made subordinated knowledge through the mechanics of power relationships which deny equal rights for all to represent themselves and write our collective history [4].

The November 1994 symposium, with its agenda to address the contested history of the Tsilhqot'in War and the 1993 provincial Cariboo-Chilcotin Justice Inquiry, which examined the relationship between *Tsilhqot'in* and the Canadian legal system including the 1864 hangings, became a site for the re-hashing of the history in question. The issues discussed were precisely the ones spelled out on Williams' screens. Conversation centred on accounts of the war and the continuing tensions and injustices between immigrant and indigenous people in the Williams Lake area which were so painfully exposed during the justice inquiry. But discussions also connected the 1864 war to the inquiry through time and circled widely around these specific topics, thereby touching on a patch of current issues whose long roots are entangled in the process of colonization of the area.

Talk at the symposium focussed on the differences between indigenous and immigrant war histories, on the dominance of white-authored versions over aboriginal stories, on the effects of this domination, and on parallel and related inequalities in relationships between *Tsilhqot'ins* (and other First Nations people) and non-indigenous British Columbians. There was significance in the urgency of this debate, and in the fact that it was taken up so earnestly in a museum-sponsored meeting which people reached only by driving hundreds of miles through a blizzard. I am convinced that this is a sign that our collective history of the Tsilhqot'in War – and by extension many of our histories of the colonial period here – still subordinate 'other' knowledges, still require challenging, and still have real effects on people in a society which hasn't fully addressed its past.

Tsilhqot'in people's participation and words at the symposium indicated that the equal right to *be heard* speaking histories and to represent our society are still denied to aboriginal people.

In fact, Annie William spoke about this state of affairs – differences in history-telling and their relationship to historical and current power imbalances - in her presentation. She said that most *Tsilhqot'in* people are "uncomfortable speaking about the war, as they have been told not to talk about it" because of a real fear of a repetition of similar violence over a century later. She told the audience that the war is a "not talked about subject" which is raised only by "elders in the evening, in the quiet, in private", and that the "elders still don't want to talk about it, so it will take time for the story to come out, because of fear of retaliation". Her comments on the fear of reprisal for telling a history differently included an indictment of the punitive function and impact on First Nations of negative media coverage on aboriginal communities' high rates of drug and alcohol use. In the context of such negative and stereotyping public discourse about First Nations, it becomes even more difficult for aboriginal people to feel confident that they will be respected rather than attacked for their speech.

Some aboriginal people spoke about the surveyors' 1860s trespass without permission on what even Queen Victoria recognized as Native land. British law acknowledged aboriginal title and required treaties to extinguish it. These speakers [Thomas Billyboy, *Tsilhqot'in* chief at *'Esdilagh* (Alexandria), Ray Hance, co-administrator of the Tsilhqot'in National Government and advisor on Natural Resources, and Cassidy Sill, chief of the Southern Carrier community of Ulkatcho, which borders *Tsilhqot'in* territory and has a four-century alliance with them] highlighted the importance of *Tsilhqot'in* national ownership of and relationship to the land itself, as well as the fact that "non-Native peoples have since the eighteenth century ignored their own law"(Cassidy Sill in Foss 1994: 5). Their understanding had been and remained that the surveyors were intruding by pushing through a road without treaty or even permission, and by doing so committed an act of war. Chief Thomas Billyboy said that the "war was trespassing" and that the *Tsilhqot'in* fighters "were protecting

their land, food, people, and home. They had six-foot bows to protect their land." He emphasized the importance of the *Tsilhqot'in* language and said that the warriors' "names are connected to the land... their names backed up those who looked out for the land". Their names are "messengers", "telling us what these guys were made of" and how they protected the homeland of younger generations. He also brought up another cause for the killings: "The daughter of a great man was taken; they had to protect their land through their medicine... they used their medicine to keep people out, and after all these years we still have it"(Quotations from Foss 1994: 2-3). As Williams wrote in her symposium program introduction, "the mistreatment of women by the road crew is presently being suggested as a hither-to ignored major source of the conflict. Oblique references to the presence of women at the site of the massacre are to be found over and over in the archival material but no names are mentioned and there was no attempt [by historians writing on the war] to follow up on this clue"(Williams 1994:3). Annie William emphasized that *Tsilhqot'in* women's role in general in the war has been neglected in available written histories. She said that women made important contributions and carried the responsibilities of "raising children and teaching their language and ways of life" to younger generations. Women's work to preserve traditions was portrayed by her as an essential foundation for the survival of *Tsilhqot'in* communities and their resistance to the interference of outsiders in the past and present. There is a direct link here between preserving traditions and defending land rights: William said that one of the traditions preserved by women is that of "protecting the land, which happened in 1864" and which continues. According to William, the Nemiah band (the *Xeni Gwet'in*) are lucky because their territory is still in the wilderness and so they are able to protect the land from logging through injunctions and land-use declarations derived from long-established *Tsilhqot'in* ways of life(Foss 1994: 3).

Other speakers talked about the huge blow and continued threat of epidemic which whites brought to their territory. Cassidy Sill said that in 1862 and 1863, smallpox ravaged the community at Nimpo Lake, which is in his fishing lands. There, "smallpox infected blankets were traded" to his

people, and a village of about 2,000 people was reduced to less than 20 survivors. He said that "this was among the major causes of the war", and that a mix of Nuxalk, Southern Carrier, Northern Carrier, and *Tsilhqot'in* people live in the area now because of smallpox's devastation of aboriginal populations(Foss 1994:7).

Some participants criticized the fact that the authoritative book on the war continued to be one they considered racist and inaccurate [5]. Mel Rothenburger, author of this book (The Chilcotin War) and a descendant of a man (Donald McLean) killed in the war, protested what he dismissed as new, politically convenient, and false re-writings of duly established facts [6]. Rothenburger defended his use of racist terminology in his history by saying that it was used in historical context and did not reflect his own attitudes. As for the immediate indications of historical difference between people at the symposium – and the increasing signs that the histories available in the provincial archives and his book are not in fact exhaustive or even thorough – Rothenburger wrote off these complexities as a questionable "revision" project of his "factual and honest scholarship". He said that there was ample evidence for the "murders" and confessions to them, and that the "theories" of provocation and motivation are secondary because "there is no evidence available"(Foss 1994:11).

This raised the interesting question of whose history became official and whose is labeled revisionist when both stories have been maintained for over 130 years. Beyond platitudes about the 'winners' writing history [7], it is interesting to look at the many complex ways – *historically* as well as physically, sexually, culturally, economically, or legally - that dominance of an indigenous group by non-aboriginal society is maintained. Rothenburger, who freely stated his personal bias ("I'm here to defend Donald McLean", Foss 1994:11), nevertheless tapped into the ethnocentric 'standards' of western academic historical 'evidence' in an attempt to defend a partial and politically charged history from questioning; and sought to redefine it as neutral and complete [8]. Who determines, today, what qualifies as historical evidence? Why can the author of a history book feel comfortable dismissing out of hand a group of oral histories that he has never heard? (As Thomas Billyboy said

in reply to Rothenburger's judgement, "my speaking was my history, from the heart"(Foss 1994:13.) Through time, history and power became one. Unequal relationships in power made the obscurring of the indigenous history possible, and the prolonged suppression of that history and its widespread telling reinforces and recreates inequalities between *Tsilhqot'in* (and other First Nations) and non-indigenous people in B.C.

Some *Tsilhqot'ins* at the symposium discussed a project to get Rothenburger's book out of their libraries as a concrete step toward correcting the contemporary effects of historical injustices and unjust history-telling [9]. Rothenburger held to the view that the killings were simple criminal murders, saying that there was "no provocation whatsoever" for the deaths of some men in a survey pack train and calling the uprising a matter of Lhassas?in's group being "a minority faction" – that "it was not colonists versus Chilcotins"(Foss 1994:11). The parallel between his position and the stance of white administrators and settlers over a hundred years earlier is striking.

In response to his dismissal of the *Tsilhqot'in* histories presented and his demand for an apology ("You want a pardon - will you apologize to descendants of colonists?", Foss 1994:11), some *Tsilhqot'in* people offered critiques of the simplistic and partial tendencies of settler-authored history. One woman said that this history has "always been only one half – the white half" and that it "needs to be filled in" and *Tsilhqot'in* voices need to be heard, too, for it to be righted (Foss 1994:14). Another – the young woman whom I wanted to locate through the videotapes – called our attention to the real, continuing effects of historical as well as other kinds of domination of First Nations communities and families. She pointed to the importance of being able to claim her own history through the histories told by the chiefs at the meeting. She made a clear connection between her need to claim her history in this public forum and the personal damage wrought by a matrix of oppressive (neo-colonial) mechanisms in her life by saying to Rothenburger: "Can I ask you for an apology for my pain, for my inability to speak my language?... Think about it... is this fair?"(Foss 1994: 13). In the end, the same chasm between colonial and indigenous accounts and authority that

marked the nineteenth-century historical sources cleaved the 1994 symposium.

Another contribution to the symposium which made me see the intricacy of this particular intercultural encounter and its relevance to wider and historically-created power relationships was the message of *Tsilhqot'in* Chief Gerald Johnny. He stood up to speak on behalf of one of his elders who could not be at the symposium. (Despite blizzards a huge number of *Tsilhqot'in* people, including almost every chief, made the drive from their communities near Williams Lake to UBC's campus. But not everybody who wanted to was able to attend.) He was enthusiastic about the opportunity to talk collectively and constructively that the symposium presented and expressed appreciation for the contributions of the speakers, but asked critical questions about the nature of the event and its place in broader patterns. He was concerned about the site of the meeting being so far from *Tsilhqot'in* communities and the difficulties this raised for all members of those communities to participate. He asked questions about who was able to take control over planning such events, about how it is that their agendas are set, saying that it was good that we were talking about important things, but a problem that such occasions were typically organized by non-aboriginal people in big cities. Chief Johnny's questions pointed both inward at the symposium itself and outward at the context - the political, economic, and social conditions and their origination in unequal neo-colonial relationships –which affected where and how the gathering came about, and of which the audience needed to be mindful.

silence, refusals... failure?

Silence can be a plan
rigorously executed

the blueprint to a life

It is a presence
it has a history a form

Do not confuse it
with any kind of absence

-Adrienne Rich (1980): 539)

Power and historical differences that were cemented in the events and history-writing of 1864 re-surfaced in my own research process as well as at the symposium. I began my work in women's studies expecting to have to deal with difference. The kind of difference I anticipated, however, was not the kind I encountered. Because I wanted to do research with *Tsilhqot'in* people who attended the symposium and because I have no First Nations heritage, let alone *Tsilhqot'in* background, my worries and plans centred on understanding and working through 'cultural difference'. Little did I know that this would turn out to be a minor concern. It's true that if I had been able to do substantial research in partnership with *Tsilhqot'in* people I would have had to face and learn about the cultural differences between us. However, I didn't get anywhere near that process, because there were several hurdles in the way that I was unable to jump. It turned out that these hurdles, born of historical and power differences, presented a multitude of lessons as I tried to figure out a sticky web of relationships created through time and across historical and power difference.

It took me a while to figure out what the refusals to facilitate my research on my terms meant. I believe now that the silences and conditions I encountered have valuable implications. They pointed out that aboriginal self-representation and history-telling is very risky in an environment that continues to undermine First Nations perspectives and rights. Although the

details of the ways the *Tsilhqot'in* have chosen to exert some control over the telling of their histories may seem odd, e.g. the videotapes and the copyright issue, the positions they take come from experience of the impact that historical narratives can make on their lives and their relationships with the larger society. There hasn't been a respectful and equitable space available for *Tsilhqot'in* people to tell and have value attached to their history outside their communities. Just because this vacuum has been mitigated somewhat by the agitation of First Nations people and outside interest in historical and current relationships between them and the rest of the population doesn't mean that the tiny places that are opening will be attractive venues for them to speak and to share with a wider audience. Sometimes these opportunities might be useful (for example, on occasions such as the symposium), and sometimes they might not be suitable (in situations such as my research project).

The case of the videotapes is interesting in this light. While the symposium was extraordinary in that so many *Tsilhqot'in* people chose to attend and speak in public, and in that this translated into an intercultural conversation in which people actively listened, learned, and exchanged ideas, the results of the event didn't follow seamlessly from the rapport established there or from the way things were planned. Just as there were reasons for the openness at the symposium (all of which I am not privy to, but which included perceptive agenda organization, and a rightness of time and place given the state of external processes like the Justice Inquiry), there are reasons that permission for editing and distributing the videotapes was withheld. This refusal – and resulting silence – can be partly explained by the same reasons I have given for the voicing of histories and analyses at the symposium. Perhaps the symposium was a safe and opportune place for speech to *Tsilhqot'in* people in the moment, but, exported out of context after the fact into the rest of the world, the same history-telling and idea-sharing may be seen to produce too much potential for misrepresentation of (or reprisals against) what was said and those who spoke. We need look no farther than the words of some symposium participants, cited above, to see that fear of stereotyping

and hostility towards First Nations people is ever present. And a glance at current mainstream media reporting and popular Canadian conceptions of aboriginal people, land claims, struggles, and rights confirms that such fears are reasonable. (See Chapter 1 for a summary of this context.) Unequal power relationships which are demonstrated and reinforced in the history books and hinted at in Williams' artworks are not a thing of the past. As anthropologist Greg Sarris writes,

> The possibility of open cross-cultural communication productive for both cultures usually will be strained, even in safer, postcolonial, and more comfortably pluralistic contexts, by the history of domination and subjugation and the persistent patterns of intercultural communication associated with that history (1993: 68).

The caution of the Tsilhqot'in National Government in the matter of the symposium videotapes is parallel to Annie William's refusal to participate in my research. Her decision was made through an analysis of how this research would be affected, in its production and reception, by the limitations, expectations, and inequitable power dynamics of the society we live in. Here are my notes on the conversation in which Annie William declined to do a research interview with me:

> I talked to Annie today, Friday Oct 18, 1996. I had offered her some written information about my research and my interests in our previous conversation, so that she could make an informed decision about participating in my research. Today she told me that she had received and read my letter with this information (see appendix). She said that considering the kind of information I was asking for, she would need to go to the chief and council to talk about making public the things I'm interested in (the history of the Tsilhqot'in War, her responses to the November 1994 symposium and to HIGH SLACK, her thoughts about the Museum of Anthropology, and about art, history-making, and women's role in history). She said that if I published this kind of information in my thesis, the Tsilhqot'in National Government would probably be interested in having copyright over it, i.e. they would have ownership rights over knowledge they helped to produce for public consumption. She said she is very interested in the issues I brought up in my letter but the lack of free time in her life, and these considerations make it difficult for her to participate. I told her that I wanted to hear about what *she* considered important or interesting, and only if she thought it was worth her while. I explained that I thought *I* could learn something, and could benefit, and so could my colleagues, teachers, the university, women's studies, etc., but there was no point in me taking up her time if there was no benefit from her point of view. I said that I didn't want to impose my own agenda or take up her time when it's useless or a problem for her, so that she should call me only if and when she thought it was a good time. She said that's what she had decided, and that she'd get in touch with me if she had some time to think - as she had only been able to read my letter once quickly and then had to put it aside.... I told her that if we didn't do any research together, I would write the thesis myself with literary research and interviews with the artist and curator, and tell the story of my contact with her but leave the whole area of questions from her point of view out. She said that would be okay. I said, if it's not the time, or the right situation

> to do this, so be it - let me know. She also said that it was important to avoid getting into a situation where she was the *only* person giving out this information - when other people weren't invited or allowed to contribute to the research. I made it clear that I appreciated and respected the complicated nature of the situation. ...I also told her that I wasn't sure whether anyone would be interested in talking about this but that I wanted to be open to anyone who was and that I understood that there were some complicated and sensitive negotiation processes happening right now, so I thought the best way to proceed was to formally contact the Tsilhqot'in National Government and the community government offices and explain myself as openly as possible.

My conversation with William revealed tensions (not necessarily negative) between her interest in my questions and her awareness of the ways her belonging to a particular collective, which she would bear the responsibility of representing, positions her. Her participation wasn't simply an individual decision, involving a consideration of what interest, benefit, and risk would be involved for her personally in talking to me. In a purposeful assessment of – and deliberate reference to - current political circumstances and processes, she determined that participation in my research would have to be collectively decided, precisely because it would be likely to have a collective impact [10]. Greg Sarris, a man with Pomo (a group indigenous to California) roots, tells a story about his aunt Mabel McKay, a Pomo elder, religious leader, and famous basket maker, which helps me understand William's reasoning. He writes that

> [t]o gather materials to make the baskets art historians and basket specialists admire so, Mabel must search roadside ditches or ask permission to enter private property where her ancestors in large numbers gathered freely to dig sedge root and cut willow and redbud. Clearly, for Mabel a discussion about the material aspects of her basketry cannot be separated from a discussion of other things, history among them (1993: 30).

It is apparent that it is equally impossible for Annie William to separate talking to me about a piece of contemporary art or the histories it tells from a discussion of the restrictions of current political pressures and relationships, including collective permission and control (through copyright) over public knowledge.

It is clear that specificities of time and place create and limit the ways people with shared histories (to varying extents) but different cultural, material, and political realities can come together and speak. It is obvious that what has not been done with the video tapes, the existence of

copyright concerns over my potential research with Annie William, and the tensions Annie expressed between individual and collective decisions to participate in my research are expressions of real concerns over how people and issues are represented and over how knowledge is produced in a context charged with historical and contemporary inequalities and struggles between the dominating non-indigenous society and aboriginal peoples.

I think it's important to say one thing about academic projects. I see ways that (especially feminist) research can help us learn about the matrix of relationships that we live in by intercepting complex situations (or not, depending on what people will welcome in the circumstances). But at the same time, some parts of academic process and demands can close up openings that may exist - even in women's studies. In my case, there were several factors that prevented me from doing research in a way that would have worked *with* and beyond, rather than against and in isolation from, the historical and power differences I've outlined so far. For one, the external relationships and processes that I wanted to intercept are not on my schedule. They are long-term negotiations. Judith Williams shares this realization:

> ...I don't have any *negative* feelings about the negotiations with the *Tsilhqot'in*s, it's just that I'm a bit exhausted (laughing), because it's gone on and on and on.... It's a year and a half, and we still haven't edited the tapes. But maybe - maybe that's the *story*. I mean at one point I thought that, as an artist, I mean maybe the work is *about* the negotiation. And that *that's* the story.... that documenting the negotiation like that is as important a story as any other story (Foss 1996:25).

As a graduate student, I do not have the time, employment security, resources, or money to follow and participate in these negotiations in a way that would allow for a building of trust and a cooperative learning and knowledge-producing relationship with someone like Annie William and the people whom she indicated should not be left out of a process of thinking about *Tsilhqot'in* history in B.C. and where it leaves us today. However, I do have the opportunity to engage with the refusals in my path [11]. The *Tsilhqot'in* have learned the hard way that even academics who do have the money and time to create on-going and mutually beneficial relationships do not always reciprocate the effort and trust invested by those who participate in academic inquiries. As the gaps

in my planned research attest, the *Tsilhqot'in* are very careful as a result. Judith Williams told me that:

> [The *Tsilhqot'in*] don't particularly like to deal with strangers; they like to make friends, and kind of work that way. But they're very *hurt* if the people who *become* their friends then take the material and then go away. They have a complaint about a particular person who did something like this. And they're not saying that I did that; they're saying that this person did this research in this kind of way and then they went away and they never came back. And that hurts their feelings, and I think that it might hurt mine, too, you know? So, it's *tricky* (Foss 1996:23).

Part of my attempt to understand the meaning of the refusals and silences I've encountered involves a recognition and respect for what Williams calls the "importance of the long story of negotiation" [12]. Another part of it demands seeing this negotiation story against the appropriate backdrop - the multiple contexts I referred to earlier. When these contexts are factored into the narrative I've outlined of refusals to participate in publication of videotapes and of 'failed' research, a space opens up to think about what the consequent silences about nineteenth-century history and intercultural events and processes in the 1990s tell us not only about the mechanics and conditions of (feminist) academic work, but also about what feminist scholarship understands refusals to speak and choices to be silent to mean.

I have moved some distance from my original understandings of HIGH SLACK, in which I translated the installation through a concept of 'giving voice'. I felt that the 'other' voices – those of aboriginal people and especially of indigenous women – had been 'erased' from a wholly dominating white-authored history, and that their voices were *restored* as an oppositional discourse in the paintings/sculptures and book works.

I have encountered several assertions that feminist scholarship has tended to conflate speech (or using one's 'voice') with agency (the ability to act) or subjectivity (the ability a person has to feel and think). Kamala Visweswaran has noted that "[s]peech has... been seen as the privileged catalyst of agency; lack of speech as the absence of agency"(1994:68-9). Others have noticed this blurring of voice and agency/subjectivity [13]. bell hooks has criticized white western feminism's obsession with silence *as* women's speech under patriarchy. She says that this model (and its logical conclusion of

positing coming-to-voice as emancipation) does not account for typical characterizations and regulations of African-American women's *speech* rather than their silence [14]. Laura Suski's critique of the common feminist aim to move to "a better, more inclusive voice" points out the shortcomings of a singular focus on eradicating silence as a means to creating feminist change [15]. Kamala Viveswaran observes that feminist scholars have "come to doubt the university rescue mission in search of the voiceless"(1994:69). However, Suski's argument that feminist theory's focus on eradicating silence leads to the assumption that if a person doesn't speak, she's an object and not a subject is still accurate. She points out a continuing reliance on false dichotomies which posit silence as void, absence, and passiveness; and voice as presence, power, and action. Jane Papart similarly points out that a common presumption that the silencing of women (or of other people *understood* to be disempowered) is *the* problem leads to a belief that the solution is for the liberated/expert knower to aid speech by 'giving' voice. The underlying assumption is, of course, that people who are not heard by certain people do not speak (1997). In aligning myself with this critique, I am recognizing that "[a]cts of omission are as important as the acts of comission constructing the analysis" (Visweswaran, 1994:48).

It is certain, as Papart pointed out, that speech and silence are not given the same weight in our context. Silence is assumed to signal absence of meaning and thought, and so is written off, along with the people who keep it. I would like to explore a little further Annie William's response to my approaches, using the above ideas as well as some of Kamala Viveswaran's insights to explain the meanings I now see in William's silence – and her explanations of it.

Annie William went out of her way to enumerate and explain to me the constraints on her speech. She named at different times her various responsibilities to her community [16] and the community's concerns over how knowledge is produced about it. Nowhere in these explanations for her refusal to participate in my research at the moment can I find a lack of agency or subjectivity. There is no voiceless, and thus powerless, 'other' victim here ('woman' or 'native'). William's choice

to be silent is no sign of absence, but an indication of the realities of a climate of cultural and historical (and political, economic, and legal) attrition where First Nations are concerned. What she told me in our brief conversations was not what I asked. She refused to speak in response to my questions. Visweswaran had a similar experience with a woman who refused to be "subject(ed)"(48):

> This is the story of a woman who would not talk to me – who refused, in short, to be my subject... She is no longer a puzzle for me to solve, but a woman with her reasons, not so unlike me... In interrupting a Western (sometime feminist) project of subject retrieval, recognition of the partially understood is not simply strategy but accountability to my subjects; partial knowledge is not so much choice as necessity (1994: 50, 60).

Viveswaran also writes that

> who said what to whom is... important, for knowledge is... relational. Here the "truth" is refracted through a series of unequal relationships in power.... we should be attentive to silence as a marker of women's agency... Perhaps then, a feminist ethnography can take the silences among women as the central site for the analysis of power between them. We can begin to shape a notion of agency that, while it privileges speaking, is not reducible to it. My aim is to theorize a kind of agency in which resistance can be framed by silence, a refusal to speak... Often our theorization is limited in its formulation of resistance as speech (1994:50-1) [17].

As a member of a marginalized group which is actively and variously fighting for historical recognition, land, resources, and self-determination in a climate of ambivalence (if not hostility) and lack of collectively-defined rights and responsibilities, Annie William made a careful choice about how best to deal with hegemonic institutions (MOA, universities) and their representatives (me, among others) by considering the possible results of sharing information. Her final silence gauges (among other things which I don't know about) the state of power relationships which enmesh us both – but in different ways – and which come between us.

difference, identity... subject position or subjectivity?

> **Identities are stories we tell about history, a retelling of the past....**
> **identity... is conjectural... continually in process, as much a matter of becoming as being.**
>
> - Stuart Hall, 1994: 137.

When I thought about the gap between Annie William and me, I learned that my concepts and awareness were not up to the job of understanding the breach that *was* there. I needed to re-examine my ideas about difference in order to grasp difference's meaning in this context that was new to me. When I bumped into the failures of my planned research, I was forced to ask myself some questions. First, I said to myself, "Why are these opportunities falling through?". Then I asked myself, "Well, what am I supposed to do now?". I was puzzled by the prospect that the research wouldn't work out the way I had carefully proposed. I had prepared for a form and function of difference that had little to do with the complex character of the difference that appeared. My third thought was, "I suppose I have to learn from what didn't happen as well as what did." Soon enough, with the help of the definition of difference that Trinh Minh-ha gives in her book Woman, Native, Other, I started to question what had really transpired. I quickly came to believe that my problem was not as simple as expecting cultural difference and instead facing a totally different species of difference. It seems that I had fallen into the snare described by Trinh this way:

> "[D]ifference" is essentially "division" in the understanding of many. It is no more than a tool of self-defense and conquest. You and I might as well not walk into this semantic trap which sets us up against each other as expected by a certain ideology of separatism(1989: 82).

From a polarizing, sexist, Eurocentric organization of the world – a tradition of thought which comprehends "differences made *between* entities... as absolute presences – hence the notions of *pure origin* and *true* self"(Trinh, 1989: 90), I believe I had learned to expect certain differences

between me and others and to accept that these differences would be absolute. I did understand difference as something dividing and as defining the person I attached it to, whether that was me or someone else. I realized that my strategies to deal with and analyze differences were to either be mystified by them or to somehow try to reconcile them into sameness. I had absorbed the idea that difference separates completely, and to communicate across it, it's necessary to shout across a great distance or, better yet, make it go away.

I have sought to throw out the concept that diverse experiences and points of view need to be reconciled in order for things to be learned well. Instead, I'm trying to use the concept, to quote Trinh again, that difference is something to be "grasped *both between* and *within* entities, each of these being understood as multiple presence [her italics]". My experiences have told me that I needed a new way to describe differences surfacing in my research that were *not* binary, *not* absolute, and *not* individual. I had found out myself that, as Trinh puts it, "the line dividing I and not-I, us and them, or him and her is not (cannot) always (be) as clear as we would like it to be. Despite our desperate, eternal attempt to separate, contain, and mend, categories always leak"(1989: 94). I discovered that I am living in a hard to see but strong web of differences which are related and connected to each other by many threads. This web of difference and relationships is spun from a history made through broad relationships in power, and from unequal relationships created by history. When Annie William spoke to me about the reasons she was reluctant to help me with my research, it had the effect of pointing out how and where we are differently stuck in this web. She elucidated, as Greg Sarris puts it, that although we both participate in a certain context, "she and her interlocutor... are not operating from the rules and premises of the same primary framework"(1993: 24).

I have attempted to build a realistic and flexible response to the fact of difference which the refusals in my research path have illuminated. I want to replace a project of *solving* difference with one of analyzing difference. One way to do this seems to be by consciously working with complex relationships involving difference between.

At the symposium, I listened carefully to a history told by chief Thomas Billyboy and found that his way of speaking to the audience resisted my habitual note-taking. I was unable to organize his story so that I could write it down in my own language. Our terms were not the same; I could not make his history fit my requirements to make sense out of it, i.e. chronology, names and places, a linear narrative with beginning and end. I kept bouncing around with his stories to different times, places, and themes ("Where is he going with this?", I wondered). Finally, I put my pencil down and just listened. When I did that, I realized that my student way of listening wasn't capable of hearing what he was trying to say. His story did not fit my structure. It was a new feeling for me, and one which brought to me a new respect for 'cultural difference'. I would have said before this moment that cultural differences exist. However, I'm not sure if I had ever before experienced such a dislocation, such a proof, which made me aware of my own cultural and historical frameworks; they became visible, palpable. Greg Sarris' meditation on his Aunt Mabel's stories could have been written about my listening to Billyboy:

> A story may be beautiful in and of itself, but it is not timeless. The interlocutor's experience is not displaced... it is held up, and therefore affirmed, juxtaposed not to show how one experience or world view is better than the other but to expose the tension between them... Mabel's talk provides her interlocutors [an] opportunity to see the constructedness of their own culture and history as they are confronted by what in her world does not make sense to them... Dialogue is essential here, dialogue that interrupts and disrupts pre-conceived notions, that can open the intermingling of the multiple voices and histories within and between people" (1993:32-33).

While it was important for me to witness the limits of my own way of hearing and thinking and to understand the reality of other ways of being, I stopped there. Reading Trinh Minh-ha (and others) has made me realize that I ignored another aspect of that experience - the part when I just sat and listened and had the sense that I was hearing in a new way, the part when I felt I understood. To quote Trinh, it was a "critical difference from myself" that I felt, meaning " that I am not i, am within and without i. I/i can be I or i, you and me both involved" (1989:90). It was my shifting, multiple presence – and the falseness of my assumption that *my* self is static, single, and completely circumscribed by how the world sees me - that I experienced.

Gayatri Spivak has named a pattern which I think I fell into: "The person who knows has all the problems of selfhood. The person who is known seems not to have a problematic self" (1990: 66). While I experienced my own multiplicity and mobility acutely, I failed to extend the same complexity to Billyboy. I was distracted by the 'evidence' of 'cultural difference', managing to squeeze a complex moment that fundamentally challenged my thinking about difference and self back into a narrow box of categorical 'cultural difference' and always-same, unitary 'self' defined wholly by "difference reduced to identity-authenticity"(1989: 89). I slipped away from the implications of the moment by re-assigning to Billyboy a stable cultural essence. Wondering now what he might have to say to me if I told him about the conclusions I left the House of Learning with that day, I imagine that his response might not be so different from Trinh's statement that 'other' women (and men) are often seen as embodiments of pure difference itself, as authentic emblems of un-likeness:

> Now, i am not only given the permission to open up and talk, i am also encouraged to express my difference. My audience expects and demands it; otherwise people would feel as if they have been cheated: We did not come to hear a Third World member speak about the First (?) World, We came to listen to that voice of difference likely to bring us *what we can't have* [her italics](1989: 88).

There is more than a little irony in my maneuver, since it was through Chief Billyboy's willingness to challenge Eurocentric histories in a public symposium and his ability to communicate his history to a cross-cultural audience which prompted the opening of my static identity into a more complex, shifting way of understanding myself and my interactions with other people in the world. Greg Sarris writes that,

> in understanding another person and culture you must simultaneously understand yourself. The process is ongoing, an endeavor aimed not at a final transparent understanding of the Other or of the self, but at continued communication(1993: 6)

It's true that for me, a better understanding of my 'self' came through being stretched to hear what Billyboy said.

> And thus we come to [the] question: "What is the moral content of your identity?" It is another way of raising the question of how radically democratic you are when you talk about defining

> your identity, especially in relation to [a radically inegalitarian distribution of resources]. If this is important, it is because one of the most disturbing things about identity talk - especially in America, but my hunch is, it is true around the world - is that when people speak about identity, they always begin by talking about the victims. Having a conference on race? Bring on the Black folk. We do not want to invite some White racists so they can lay bare the internal dynamics of what it is to be a White racist. No. Having a conference on gender? Bring on women. As if Whiteness is not as fundamentally constructed within the discourse of race as Blackness is. As if maleness is not as fundamentally structured in the discourse of gender as is femaleness, or woman. As if straightness were inscribed into the nature of things, and those who are not straight have to provide some account of their identity. No, let us talk about identity-from-above as well as identity-from-below. That is something rarely stressed, rarely examined, rarely specified. We need to get a handle on how this Whiteness, maleness, and straightness functions over time and space in relation to Blackness or Brownness or Yellowness or womanness or gayness or lesbianness and so on (Cornel West, 1995: 17).

Cornel West's statement is helpful to me. His point that 'White', 'male', and 'straight' are equally constructed and active categories as 'Black', 'female', and 'gay' calls into question the way that identity and difference surfaced in *my* research as I confronted the possibility of communicating with the cultural 'other': Native people. Difference and culture surfaced only with *their* presence in *my* proposed study, and to be truthful, I noticed and wrote about cultural difference only when thinking about how to listen to/understand them. They were different from me (defined as a member of dominant Canadian society) and so they were *difference* to me. My training in the dominating ethnocentric culture led me to inscribe monolithically different identities to some of the people I was exposed to. As I began to envision my project as a link in an already existing and expanding web of relationships, and myself as a participant in a situation versus an external observer, I've come to see and articulate the differences between all the people in HIGH SLACK's temporary orbit, on both sides of the non-Native/Native and White/non-White divides. My experiences as a researcher have forced me to really understand (as opposed to reciting the claim) that difference and visible identity are not the special property of the 'other' - the *Tsilhqot'in* in this case. Being forced to gather up my own identities has allowed me to see myself as different and as multiple/shifting in relations of power. It has also helped me to extend that self-analysis to those I previously imaged as: culture, identity, specificity, and difference. In the following paragraphs I will examine these understandings more closely in an attempt to find a balance between rigid 'subject positions' which make the self

into a frozen specimen and postmodernist concepts which imagine selves as free-floating astronauts in a zero-gravity environment.

the specimen self is chloroformed, pinned and labelled

'Locating oneself', or naming one's positions, privileges, and background has come to be a common part of feminist writing and discussion. Kamala Visweswaran says that "[i]t has become almost commonplace to rehearse inventories that begin with middle-class and end with Western or Western-educated" (1994: 48-9).

Born of critiques of white western feminism which pointed to ignorance of racism, classism, heterosexism, and ableism within it, the intention behind naming differences between women and naming one's own position in the world was presumably to a) respect real differences among women and recognize their effects and b) eradicate the 'isms' listed above by confronting inequalities between women and investigating how the 'isms' operate in their relationships. My first encounter with this practice came in my first graduate women's studies course. Discussions about naming and locating identities and privileges were challenging and fruitful for me as I began to wake to the complications of HIGH SLACK and the symposium. But by the end of the course I began to feel that my classmates and some of the authors whose work we were reading were trapping themselves and me in a maze which never really led anywhere – or at least didn't seem to lead all that often to dealing with difference or taking steps toward equality. The ever-growing lists of identity markers according to gender, class, race, ethnic, religious, sexual, and (dis)ability categories rapidly began to sound like incantations which were performed and then disregarded in discussion. They began to sound like detached insurance policies or disclaimers of responsibility because of the way they often failed to enter a writer's or speaker's main argument. My reaction to all this remained just a warning feeling at the time, as I could find no way to make sense of this practice in any satisfying way. In the meantime, experiences of my research process combined with the theories of certain feminist academics have helped me find and describe my problem with the reductive effects of using lists of

categories to define our 'selves'. One day it dawned on me that it's difficult, or even impossible, to effectively critique and break down a hierarchical ordering of human beings by recycling the falsely separating categories of that hierarchy. In Audre Lorde's well-known words, "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house"(1983: 99). Repeating the ways the world's eyes see me ("I'm a white, middlish-class, heterosexual woman without disabilities. I'm a...") may help me to keep an eye on my privilege, but it leads nowhere beyond that. And, it allows me to believe that I am cut off from everybody else by granting me no potential for awareness or mobility beyond those boxes, which are defined by a doctrine of absolute separation. The complexity of my own subjectivity and my responsibility to the complexity of others is denied by this formula.

I agree with Trinh that,

> Essential difference allows those who rely on it to rest reassuringly on its gamut of fixed notions. Any mutation in identity, in essence, in regularity, and even in physical place poses a problem, if not a threat, in terms of classification and control. If you can't locate the other, how are you to locate yourself?(1995: 217).

How does a system of identification which denies any meeting-place between the differently-positioned improve or complicate or even explore our understanding of identity and difference? I am already well-trained by a racist and sexist conceptual separation and hierarchization of human beings to think that I am *like* other 'straight, white...' women and *unlike* everyone else on the planet. Do I need or want a white-western feminist formulation to teach me the same thing? I've already described some ways that relying on this kind of categorical thinking in my research has closed doors that were just beginning to creak open for me. I'm not interested in being limited and deceived by a definition of difference *as* identity which "remains within the boundary of that which distinguishes one identity from another... X must be X, Y must be Y, and X *cannot* be Y" (Trinh, 1989: 95).

the astronaut self splits up and hits the road
(boldly going where no one has gone before?)

Post-modernist theorists have created an alternative to static subject position understandings

of identity and difference. It is a universe where there is no 'self', but 'selves', and where these selves rove freely, inhabiting a plethora of differences and identities. It's a relativist kind of place, where 'things' (people, for example) move and have meaning in loose, undetermined relationships with each other. Cultural critic Susan Bordo summarizes its tendencies in this way:

> All the elements of... "postmodern conversation" - intoxication with individual choice... delight with the piquancy of particularity and mistrust of pattern and seeming coherence, celebration of "difference" along with an absence of critical perspective differentiating and weighting "differences"... all have become recognizable and familiar elements of much of contemporary intellectual discourse.... these elements are not merely embodied... but are explicitly thematized and *celebrated* - as inaugurating new constructions of the self, no longer caught in the mythology of the unified subject, embracing of multiplicity, challenging the dreary and moralizing generalizations about gender, race, and so forth that have so preoccupied liberal and left humanism (1993: 276).

The astronaut self can be an effective antidote to the rigid category-thinking I described above, in that it may cancel out the specimen self, but it has problems making sense of the world and relationships that humans actually live in. It has been seen as only partially useful by many feminists, who point out its difficulties in explaining with accuracy or insight the social, political, economic, cultural, sexual, intellectual, etc. phenomena and relationships which create inequality for many here on earth. I have interest in certain aspects of postmodernist theory which say that one person thinks and feels about the world and its inhabitants in at least somewhat different ways at different times and places, that as humans we live through shifting, mobile, overlapping, and even contradictory "subjectivities". Trinh describes it this way: "I" [this is her name for the 'self'] is, therefore, not a unified subject, a fixed identity, or that solid mass covered with layers of superficialities one has gradually to peel off before one can see its true face. "I" is, itself, *infinite layers* (1989: 94).

This means that we do not each nurture and protect one ever-present, never-changing essence of ourselves throughout life and every situation and relationship we come to, but rather a *range* of modes of perceiving, thinking about, and acting in our lives, which are created and affected by the circumstances we find ourselves in and learn from. When I think about my perception of the world and being in it – and especially when I am shaken awake in moments such as listening to

Chief Billyboy's history or Annie William's decision – this conception of 'identity' suits my memories and awareness. However, I share the hesitations of many writers to adopt a full-blown version of selves without limit, restraint, or context. There are dangers in simply accepting – or setting loose – a free-ranging, limitless idea of (a lack of) self. Kamala Visweswaran warns that:

> a generalized hybridity [of identity], coupled with theories of multiple positioning, runs the risk of inaugurating, once again, the freely choosing modal subject that is at once everywhere and nowhere. While all identities may ultimately be multiple and shifting, surely there are also hierarchies of hybridity. Not all identities are equally hybrid, for some have little choice about the political processes determining their hybridization. ...identities are determined by the political exigencies of history(1994: 132).

In fact, both Visweswaran and scholar Dorinne Kondo have decided that the solution is to combine a recognition that people's subjectivities cannot be fully described by subject position categorizations with the caution that external conditions prevent us from being space-travellers who can bravely go willy-nilly to whatever galaxy we please. Visweswaran writes that "a feminist [study] can consider how identities are multiple, contradictory, partial, and strategic. ...[T]he subject herself represents a constellation of conflicting social, linguistic, and political forces" (50), and Kondo believes that accounts that rely completely on concepts of the self or notions of personhood,

> with no reference to the contradictions and multiplicities within 'a' self, the practices creating selves in concrete situations, or the larger historical, political, and institutional processes shaping those selves, decontextualize... an abstract notion of essential selfhood (1990:302)

Similarly, Jane Papart concluded in her 1997 paper that there is a need to examine structures of power more deeply and to bring such an examination together with some postmodernist notions about fluidity and multiplicity of the 'self'. In my struggle to figure out 'difference' and its relationship to identity and subjectivity, I have come in a roundabout way to a comparable understanding. Flexibility and complication in how we understand our 'selves' needs to mesh with an acceptance that ideological, historical and material conditions of our lives make the postmodernist 'astronaut within' as much a deception as the fixed and single essence of self.

the flexible self finds room to wiggle (but no ejection seat)

With the recognition that neither the hierarchy of subject-boxes nor the context-less sea of selves are very good options comes a place to (under)stand. It is what Viveswaran describes here that I want to avoid by ferreting out a middle ground:

> a generalized "exploration" of pluralist, postindustrial, late-twentieth-century society... leads to a notion of "trying on identities" which obscures the fact that identities, no matter how strategically deployed, are not always chosen, but are in fact constituted by relations of power always historically determined"(1994:8).

She suggests, and I agree, that a useful replacement would be:

> an understanding of the relationship between subjects and their histories as complex and shifting, yet not "free"... this concept must be carefully specified, used to describe moments, social formations, subject positions and practices which arise out of an unfolding axis of colonization/decolonization, interwoven with the unfolding of other axes, in uneven, unequal power relations with one another (1994:11).

In my writing about the November 1994 symposium and my research process which flowed out of it, I have tried to describe the ways that my understanding of my subjectivity (and the subjectivities of others) has been tied to my history and my culture's history. My interactions with *Tsilhqot'in* people have been inscribed in a continually unfolding axis of colonization/decolonization, with its array of unequal relations in power. These interactions lead me to argue that it is possible and desirable to combine a recognition of multiple, shifting selves that are re-created in process and action with an analysis of and constant attention to the structure and dynamics of historically-made and entrenched (but not static) webs of power in which people feel, think, struggle, and live.

Susan Bordo takes an interesting position on the issue of how to properly understand identity, difference, and power. She writes that

> ... [a] conception of "power" [as] a terrain without hills and valleys, where all "forces" have become "resources" - reflects a very common postmodern misappropriation of Foucault. [Cultural critic John] Fiske conceives of power as the possession of individuals or groups, something they "have" - a conception Foucault take great pains to criticize - rather than (as in Foucault's reconstruction) a dynamic of non-centralized forces, its dominant historical forms attaining their hegemony, not from magisterial design or decree, but through multiple "processes, of different origin and scattered location," regulating and normalizing the most intimate and minute elements of the construction of time, space, desire, embodiment. This conception of power does not entail that there are no dominant positions, social structures or

> ideologies emerging from the play of forces; the fact that power is not held by any *one* does not entail that it is equally held by *all*. It is "held" by no one; rather, people and groups are positioned differentially within it...
>
> For some postmodern theorists... resistance is imagined as the refusal to embody any positioned subjectivity at all; what is celebrated is continual creative escape from location, containment and definition. ...we must move beyond (1993: 276-281).

Bordo's point is that no matter how much fun it might be to imagine "continual creative escape from location, containment and definition", since it is impossible to suspend the power relations of race, gender, and other facets of externally-assigned identity, it is misleading and dangerous to ignore them or pretend that they can be slipped away from by anybody. The stories I have told about the symposium and my research confirm the absence of an ejection seat to catapult a person out of the historical relations that shape the ways she 'is' and the ways she can relate to others.

Analyzing and being guided by the historical embededness and messy complexity of 'subjectivity' or the 'self', and paying attention to how the long life-expectancy of socio-political relationships relate to how we understand difference and its relationship to identity, may even be useful in imagining feminist academic projects which can incorporate rather than work against the terms of the broad relationships and structures which concern us, while allowing for movement within difference.

Endnotes

1. The Tsilhqot'in War/Justice Inquiry symposium was in fact one of two events originally envisioned as concurrent facets of the installation's display at the museum. While the November symposium focussed on past and present aspects of *Tsilhqot'in*/non-First Nations relationships which are explored in the exhibition, the other meeting was supposed to pick up on another event and debate alluded to by Williams in an artist's book. This was a controversy over a non-Native owned business deciding to sell (for export to the United States) water falling in the territory of a coastal First Nation. Williams explained to me that:

> ... we wanted to have *another* symposium on the issue of water export, and that really *was* based on a friendship, and that didn't work at all. So, there, you know, this was with the Klahoose people, who are my closest neighbours up the coast, and... I wanted to do something with Cathy Francis who is the chief there, and I knew Cathy. We weren't close friends, but I knew her... and... was sure that something could happen there. But... she was so busy with other

> negotiations that she said "I just can't do it all", you know? And that was the end of that. And I thought that was - that was *very* disappointing to me, because Rosa and I had gone to see her and I was impressed with the way Cathy behaved, and I thought she could handle a public situation, and I thought she would be good. And I thought we had a hold of *another* issue that was contemporary, right?.... We wanted to have these two events which would have increased the Native involvement (Foss 1996:25).

2. Williams' wish to expand the potential effects of her exhibition by creating a forum with the specific purpose of soliciting First Nations responses to the issues she touched on in HIGH SLACK overlaps with some of her other perceptions about art-making and its connection to relationships between people. She told me that:

> I'm entering into a relationship with a... woman, and I want to work with her. But my relationship with her... is different. She's my friend.... I think she may also be a little more sophisticated about these matters. She taught school for twenty-five years, and she's a literate sort of person, even though she's spent her entire life in a small village. But I just think that she understands... a little bit better about what an artist is. I may be wrong, maybe she doesn't , but I think she does. And... she has a curiosity about art, and I didn't find with the people at the symposium for instance, that they were interested in what I had done. They were interested in presenting their story. And that was *fine* with me, by the way. I mean I didn't feel that that was incorrect. I just noticed that (Foss 1996: 23)...
> I discovered a series of stories. These I have gathered into... a book in the installation. But I wanted to know more – I wanted to hear the other side – to hear the voices that were missing – not just those of participants, but also those of the innocent victims. I wanted to hear what the *Tsilhqot'in* and Homalco (*Homathqox*) people had to say. I was amazed, on one occasion, when Pete Harry a Homalco man told me the complete and accurate story of the "Massacre" as it had come down in his tribe from the man who, he said, 'had escaped from the killings'... History was as close to me as was Pete telling me the story (Williams, 1994: 4).

3. Judith Williams told me this story about the videotapes in our interview of April, 1996:

> I had no bad dealings with those people [the *Tsilhqot'in*] during the exhibition and no bad dealings up to and including the symposium. Where they put their foot down was in permission to edit the tapes. Now they weren't nasty there, they just said they wanted their rights. And Rosa [Ho, the exhibition's curator] wanted very much to do that whole thing straight. So we just slowed right down, we didn't touch the tapes, we didn't do anything.... We said, "No, we'll wait, we will negotiate with you, and we will wait for your opinions". Well, we've been waiting and waiting, and finally... I had to acknowledge that I - there was a limit to my resources, and so I said to them, "Alright, you can have the tapes". Which is quite a concession for an artist, by the way... and the guy who made the tapes himself, Ray Hall, he said, "Okay, well, we'll give them". As soon as we said that, it seemed like the answer was... "Now, we want the tapes and we want absolute control" - well who does the work here?.
> ...And so I think it's a big matter of trust, and... in a funny kind of way they wanted us to do all these things but they only wanted us to do it when they absolutely trust us. And it's taking a long time to develop that... And... I suppose it's been a bit frustrating, but it's not like I don't understand. I see what's going on, and I can't even argue against it. It seems reasonable (Foss 1996: 23).

4. All First Nations are forced to struggle with the issue of self-representation in a hostile environment. Different communities and individuals have sought to create representations of

themselves – for their own people and for the wider society – in different ways. It is worth noting that the *Tsilhqot'in* have gone about this in several ways. One way is the *Tsilhqot'in* Nation journal, Wolf Howls, which presents news, stories, events, and images of things important to *Tsilhqot'in* communities. Another way came about in partnership with an outsider. The Nemiah Valley community – *Xeni Gwet'in* – cooperated with journalist and writer Terry Glavin to produce a book about the community and its history in 1992, entitled Nemiah: the unconquered country.

5. According to Brain Mayne, Advisor on Education and Culture for the Tsilhqot'in National Government, Rothenburger's book relies wholly on two sources: material from the BC Archives and an account of the war published in London by an Anglican priest named Reverend Robert Christopher Lundin Brown. He was asked by Judge Matthew Ballie Begbie to minister to the *Tsilhqot'in* men whom Begbie had condemned to death, and subsequently published Klatsassan in 1872 and Klatsassan, and other reminiscences of missionary life in British Columbia in 1873. Other writings on the war are few, but include: a 1972 UBC MA Thesis by Edward Sleigh Hewlett, entitled Chilcotin Uprising: A Study of Indian-White Relations in Nineteenth Century British Columbia, and a fictional account, called River of Tears, by Maud Emery, 1992.

6. Here things got *really* interesting: historical crosscurrents whipped up a storm. Mel Rothenburger's great grandfather, Donald McLean, was a very prominent British Columbian until his death during the Tsilhqot'in War. Popularly storied to have killed many aboriginal people himself, McLean had six children including a daughter, Annie, with a First Nations woman named Sophia McLean. Their sons Allen, Charlie, and Archie became an 'outlaw' gang. The "Wild McLeans" – these three and their friend, Alex Hare - killed a provincial policeman named Johnnie Ussher and a shepherd named James Kelly. The brothers had apparently determined to go after a successful Kamloops entrepreneur, magistrate and Member of Provincial Parliament named J.A. Mara for impregnating and then firing their sister Annie from her job as his chambermaid. (Annie's baby's father was recorded as "unknown".) The McLeans went on to uncontrolled violence, but after the murders, Allen tried to convince the indigenous people of Douglas Lake to join in a new uprising against the whites. Their council turned him down but gave the fugitives shelter nearby. They were soon held under siege by a police posse in a cabin for a few days, captured, and hanged after not one but two trials in New Westminster on January 31, 1881 (Bowering, 1996: 173-6, 190-2). At the UBC symposium, Mel Rothenburger stated to the audience that Donald McLean never killed anyone. His assertion came in response to Judith Williams' discussion of the trustworthiness of Judge Begbie's *Tsilhqot'in* trial notes. She felt that Rothenburger seemed to rely on these notes and to claim that parts of them were false at the same time; and said that if one accepts them as factual, one must accept the statements within them about death-threats made by whites. Williams also said that a religious person living in the area of McLean's ranch clearly noted his killings. As she pointed out, it became a question of historical proof or disproof (Foss 1994: 12). It was also a fascinating and meaningful intersection of historical relationships and their contemporary effects.

7. It is my argument that a facet of settler British Columbian society's general domination over aboriginal people is accomplished through historical domination; gatekeepers of official history have ensured the marginalization of indigenous histories and thereby contribute to the oppression of aboriginal groups. While many speakers at the symposium concurred with this reading, pointing out the effects of racism in accepted histories, they also differentiated their understandings from a simplistic opposition between 'winners' and 'losers' in the Tsilhqot'in War and all that followed it. In her emphasis on her community's successful maintenance of traditional ways of life and their resistance to white encroachment on their land whether through settlement or logging, Annie William asserted that it is a misunderstanding to see the *Tsilhqot'in* as losers (Foss 1994: 4-5). Lawyer Louise Mandell noted that current legal cases will only serve to *confirm* and protect the fact that the

Chilcotin Valley belongs to these people (Foss 1994: 5). The day's discussion also confirmed the fact that the *Tsilhqot'in* have maintained their own histories, irrespective of outside recognition or ignorance. In my mind this example of an historically dominating relationship shows the importance of focussing on the specifics of any inequality in power. Attention to such detail reminds me that powerful/powerless dichotomies are no more valid than male/female or white/black polarities, and that dominating relationships are always complex and marked by resistance as well as victimization. Categorical thinking which pits the oppressor against the oppressed hides the fact that neither are monolithic in status, attitude, or actions.

8. I think that an analysis of current cultural and historical crisis made by Cornel West sheds some light on what was going on in this exchange about what makes histories racist or partial, legitimate or revisionist. He wrote that "the decolonization of the Third World associated with the historical agency of those... exploited, devalued and degraded by European civilization" makes a radical reordering of canons necessary. (1987: 194.)

9. A *Tsilhqot'in* chief asked Rothenburger if he had consulted any *Tsilhqot'in* chiefs during the writing of his 'authoritative' book, and said that "it hurts, because it's my ancestors you're talking about". Chief Thomas Billyboy said that "the book should be taken off the library shelf" because "it has hurt too many" and was "not done with our permission"(Foss 1994: 13). A man named Iver Meyers [note: this spelling is by ear and may not be correct], of the *Xeni Gwet'in* (Nemiah band), also took up this issue, saying that Rothenburger's perspective is racist and underestimates the genocide by disease undergone by First Nations. He said that there's a "need to tell the whole truth, that thousands of *Tsilhqot'in* people died from two whites trading". He recognized that nineteen white people died, but said that "the *Tsilhqot'in* were friendly to the whites until they were mistreated... wives and young girls were raped... That story is not told in that book" (Foss 1994: 12).

10. Here it may be interesting to note the particular relevance of collective identities and actions – through usage of the term nations – to aboriginal struggles for land, resources, and self-determination in contemporary British Columbia and Canada. From the common (but not universal) adoption of the term "First Nations" to the building of indigenous land-claims arguments on the basis of the crown's obligation to nation-to-nation treaty negotiations, *collective* history and action plays an important role in aboriginal claims. This is meaningful at a time of general "lapse into a kind of individual pluralism rather than a necessary restitution of the collective" and "multiplication of private memories demanding individual histories"(Nora, 1989).

11. I am also presented with the opportunity to think about how academic discourse structures 'successful' and 'failed' research, and how feminist scholarship has dealt with (adopted, compromised, or rejected?) these definitions. I think this is important because behind these definitions are assumptions which dictate what we set as our goals as women's studies researchers and what we envision the purpose and measure of our projects to be. Whether or not I am able to commit to attempting to develop a long-term, cooperative project with certain people or groups that would have benefits for me and for feminist scholarship as well as for other participants is one question. Barriers to my capacity for this kind of work include a lack of the kind of status within academic structures that is required by the groups who still have money to give.

So another question is: how do feminist academics and students project and plan our work? To what end? Are we generally aiming for results similar to what traditional academic 'standards' define as successful ('product'-oriented, answer-giving, new knowledge-producing, finite, and discrete chunks of research)? Do we believe that this approach to knowledge is of any use to us? What uses of knowledge *do* we have in mind? To what extent are we working toward established and standardized academic aims, and what effects does this have on the possibility of doing research

like what would be required to work with a situation like the one I've been studying? I will borrow a question from anthropologist Greg Sarris, who thinks that studies of 'other' peoples and cultures are in need of more "interruption and risk": "How do scholars see beyond the norms they use to frame the experiences of others unless those norms are interrupted and exposed so that scholars are vulnerable, seeing what they think as possibly wrong, or at least limited?" (1993: 29). Do our models allow for attempts to intercept and participate in long-term, complex, immediately unsolvable negotiations? Is a focus on process and on moments and methods of resistance dreamable in our context?

Kamala Visweswaran asks a question of anthropology which I would like to direct to feminist researchers, myself included: "If we have learned anything from anthropology's encounter with colonialism, the question is not really whether anthropologists can represent people better, but whether we can be accountable to people's own struggles for self-representation and self-determination" (1994: 32).

Further, to what degree is academic feminism invested in traditional understandings of expertise and academic professionalism, and how does this dictate what kind of research is possible or eliminated when only a very small group of women ends up having the credentials necessary to merit the research jobs, money, resources, and trust to produce studies that would be considered legitimate?

12. In Woman, Native, Other (1989), Trinh T. Minh-ha writes about the story without end:

> Truth does not make sense; it exceeds meaning and exceeds measure. It exceeds all regimes of truth. So, when we insist on telling over and over again, we insist on repetition in re-creation (and vice-versa)... on distributing the story into smaller proportions that will correspond to the capacity of absorption of our mouths, the capacity of vision of our eyes, and the capacity of bearing of our bodies. Each story is at once a fragment and a whole; a whole within a whole (123).
>
> A story is *not* just a story. Once the forces have been aroused and set into motion, they can't simply be stopped at someone's request. Once told, the story is bound to circulate; humanized, it may have a temporary end, but its effects linger on and its end is never truly an end (133).
>
> The story is beautiful, because or therefore it unwinds like a thread. A long thread, for there is no end in sight. Or the end she reaches actually leads to another end, another opening (149).

I want to point out the relevance of Trinh's concept to Williams' understanding of the MOA-Tsilhqot'in National Government negotiation story as a story "as important as any other" and as an integral, essential part of what HIGH SLACK is finally about.

I also think that Trinh's imagining of a story without end, as outlined in the above quotations, may be a useful way to imagine feminist research projects which work with rather than in suspension of or against long-term negotiations and social, political, and cultural processes. I have often worried that I am responsible for pulling off the impossible feat of grasping the totality of the issues surrounding HIGH SLACK and pronouncing the truth of the matter in my research. I see my research as one piece of a large, unstable puzzle: once my knobby piece is in place, the whole thing may crumble around the edges or get warped, but my piece will still exist and be connected to other pieces. Even if my piece gets dislodged, it will still have shapes on its borders that will fit with other bits. Nothing could persuade me more than the endless complications and implications of the web of relationships and issues surrounding this exhibition that "[t]ruth does not make sense; it exceeds meaning and exceeds measure". My project becomes a way of writing a part of the story without end in small proportions that will correspond to the capacity of absorption of my mouth, the capacity of vision of my eyes, and the capacity of bearing of my body. I know already that "once told, the story is bound to circulate...its effects linger on and its end is never truly an end", because

my research itself *is* a lingering effect of the stories of others.

13. This does not mean that 'voice' is a useless concept to feminism and to women's paths to self-assertion and empowered consciousness. Many women writers, including bell hooks and several women of aboriginal descent in Canada as well as white women, have used the idea and practice of coming to voice to emancipatory ends, whether through verbal speech or writing. hooks says that she learned resistance to gender stereotypes, enforced roles, and punishments for transgression through "talking back" and writing. She notes that

> writing was a way to capture speech, to hold onto it, to keep it close. And so I wrote down bits and pieces of conversations, confessing in cheap diaries... expressing the intensity of my sorrow, the anguish of speech... The fear of exposure, the fear that one's deepest emotions and innermost thoughts would be dismissed... felt by so many young girls keeping diaries, keeping and hiding speech, seems to me now one of the barriers that women have needed and need to destroy so that we are no longer pushed into secrecy or silence (1990:338).

As other theorists point out, however, secrecy and silence are not always rightly interpreted as passive – as being silenced – as silence and secrecy can also be chosen as paths of resistance, as can speech. Maria Campbell shares the importance of coming to voice through writing for her in her 1992 article about resisting racism, "Strategies for Survival":

> I didn't start writing, making films or working in theatre because of the need to create. I did that because In needed to survive... I wrote my first book in 1969... I was a single mother with four children to support. I was very poor with no skills... I needed someone to talk to and there was nobody around. I decided to write. I made the paper my friend, and talked to it. The result of that is my first book, Halfbreed... What that book did was give me life. It helped me through a healing process, to understand where I was coming from. It helped me to stop blaming the victim, and start blaming the criminal. It helped me to realize that it wasn't my fault, that racism was real, that you could reach out and touch it, and that a lot of what happened in my life was a result of racism. Through writing Halfbreed, I was able to analyze my life and my community, and to analyze the community around me (1992: 7).

Lee Maracle, another Metis woman, outlines a similar process of empowerment through speech/writing:

> I began writing stories... to save my sanity. Poetry and the comfort of my diaries – my books of madness I called them – where truth rolled out of my inner self, began to re-shape me. I could not make Ray [her husband] understand that I did not really want to write, I needed to. In my diary, I faced my womanhood, indigenous womanhood. I faced my inner hate, my anger and the desertion of myself from our way of being (1990: 230).

14. In her article "Talking Back", hooks described the systematic punishments she received for being a girl child who refused to be silent. She described the African-American community of her youth as viewing the voices of women as "background music audible but not acknowledged as significant speech", in contrast to notions of women's speech *as silence* (1990: 337-340).

15. Suski, unlike some others, does not see postmodernist formulations of the 'self' as an antidote to static subject/object, speech/silence structures. She described postmodernist theories as retaining the voice/silence dichotomy, despite their much-talked-about impulse to fragment and multiply subjectivities and voices. Drawing from examples from 'development' anthropology discourse, she showed that postmodernism can *assume* and assign marginality to people such as female workers in the 'informal' sector of capitalist economies, reinforcing powerful/powerless polarities and re-relegating certain women to silence and absence (1997).

16. William subtly subverted any expectation I may have had about getting 'the *Tsilhqot'in* woman's perspective' by referring consistently to her chiefs and council and to other people's right to participate. By the time I spoke to her about this I had realized that there was no such thing to 'retrieve'. My ongoing education in anti-racist feminism had taught me about a particular mechanism of racism which bars any person deemed a 'minority' from speaking as an individual or in any other way than a representative of their externally-assigned category, whether that be 'non-whites' or 'aboriginal people' or 'Muslims' or whatever else. In a talk at Simon Fraser University on November 6, 1996, Ruth Wynn Woodward Chair Sunera Thobani recalled being asked, when she was president of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women if "an immigrant woman can represent Canadian women", but noted that no one ever doubted that she could represent all immigrant women or women of colour. It is very interesting to me to note that Annie William's communication *seemed* carefully geared to break down any assumptions about one 'other' person speaking on behalf of all 'other' people who may be categorized by the world as 'like' her. Greg Sarris notes a similar tendency in his Aunt Mabel McKay's "talk". Sarris says that McKay's "talk" "makes the interlocutor immediately aware of the present context and the other ways the interlocutor may be framing her world, which does not close the discourse but exposes the chasms between two interpretive worlds over which the discourse must continue" (1993: 23).

17. In reflection on the long-term story of negotiation that I encountered in this research, and the limitations of the ways feminist academic projects are (can be?) envisioned and implemented, I would add one thing to Viveswaran's description of knowledge as "relational" and "temporal". I would like to emphasize another kind of temporality – not so much in the sense of historical specificity and shifting, multiple identities, which is Visweswaran's meaning (1994:50-1) - but in that what may not be spoken or 'produced' as knowledge at one time may occur at another, depending on current circumstances but *also* on relationship-building processes themselves and how these may make space for knowledge to grow over longer periods of time. Trust weighs in here heavily, and I have heard repeatedly that it is a prime consideration in the possibility of any cooperative research with *Tsilhqot'ins*.

Conclusion

Taking our bearings: Who are we? Bearing/baring ourselves in historical, ideological, cultural, and socio-political context

HIGH SLACK itself, and the events and processes it involved, provided an opportunity for the creation of new meanings and kinds of connection through communication between people. A matrix of questions, themes, histories, debates, theories, academic disciplines, points of view, practices, and goals were brought into interaction through this exhibition. In this very *specific* context, what do our representations and actions tell us about ourselves? While some connections between people and ideas were established across great difference through HIGH SLACK at certain moments in the public response books, at the public symposium, and in my conversations with Rosa Ho and Judith Williams, for example, at other times the opportunity for connection and collaboration never went beyond its potential, as in the planned but never accomplished public symposium on current conflicts over natural resources between First Nations and non-aboriginal society and business, and in my research with Annie William and other members of the *Tsilhqot'in* Nation.

My contention has been not just that HIGH SLACK created a context-within-a-context where communication across difference became possible though unevenly pursued and accomplished, but that the *differences* themselves - and the *real* potential for bridging these gaps in the world that we inhabit – are always created and limited by our collective acts and our stories about ourselves in history and in the present. As I've attempted to demonstrate, ideologies inform our current understandings of a whole scheme of subjects include things like the function of art, the business of anthropology, museums' purposes, and First Nations histories and rights. These ideologies restricted as well as facilitated the exhibition's production and display, people's responses to it, and people's interactions with each other that were occasioned by it. These ideological beliefs and structures have a history themselves in our collective past actions and understandings, and flow from the past into the present to affect our behaviours now - and, in our actions, the ways we define ourselves today.

In this thesis I have used HIGH SLACK as a compass as well as a meeting place. The exhibition traced some of our collective history in the ways we have related to each other and to the

land we inhabit; and pointed to voices, silences, and issues which are sites of pain and conflict, on the one hand, and offer the possibility of change, on the other. By reporting and studying the ways that history was addressed in HIGH SLACK, the ways that HIGH SLACK's history was interpreted and used by others, and the ways that HIGH SLACK's history integrates with a broader history of colonialism, post- or neo-colonial relations, western academic disciplines (especially art and anthropology), feminist and post-colonial theories, and our contemporary social, economic, political, cultural, and ideological contexts, I have attempted to show how one group of artworks in a particular venue of display can reveal the interconnectedness of human activities in this place, across time and cultures, and help us to situate ourselves in a more complex and accurate vision of our time and place.

Production and receptions in historical context

HIGH SLACK functioned in part as an occasion for the production of new meanings and processes of communication by means of social interaction, allowing a moment of understanding about how we operate, individually and collectively, in a complex grouping of contexts and ideologies. The installation traced local histories in a way that pointed to important issues and processes in our contemporary reality, producing a visible connection between our actions today and their relationship to the past.

My goal of increasing the complexity and specificity of our knowledge of our historically-sited context, and locating and describing the ways that contextual factors shape and direct our projects and practices, has allowed me to develop an understanding of historical, cultural, political, social, and academic conditions and change. HIGH SLACK has functioned as a triple case study in these terms.

To reiterate, first, I have come to see the exhibition as a project which in its own way worked to increase the complexity of our collective knowledge of our historical and current contexts.

Second, as a complex contemporary visual art work publicly dealing with colonial histories in an anthropology museum, Williams' installation crossed boundaries between realms usually kept relatively separate. It functioned in this sense as a challenge to the limits of present academic and professional, cultural, political, and community practice and interaction.

Thirdly, studying HIGH SLACK with a context-based approach has enabled me to measure and describe the state of social and political debates, of cultural ideologies, and of academic discourses. By investigating a network of contexts and factors which influenced the exhibition's production and by tracing a spectrum of receptions of HIGH SLACK and their connections to contextual discourses and histories, I have tried to draw conclusions from Williams' project and its circumstances. Beyond that, I have tried to explore what the exhibition communicates about the time, place, and relationships in which it was created and viewed. My thesis is, in this way, an effort at contemporary history.

A large part of the thesis is dedicated to finding and analyzing the links between aspects of HIGH SLACK's production and receptions and wider contextual issues, in order to reveal things about the patterns in those issues in a new moment and way. At other points, I hope the text points in a slightly different direction - away from present circumstances to future possibility. There are a few areas where I see this research as having the potential to help push open doors which are still half-closed:

1. The organic interdisciplinarity of this (feminist) academic research project was instrumental to my ability to consider a range of issues, texts, and theories which were relevant and very important to my case study. Combining art history, sociology, anthropology, museum studies, and history was what allowed my case study to broaden into contemporary history. Perhaps an

increased emphasis on interdisciplinarity - its scope and shape dictated by the details and context of the subject in question – as afforded by women's studies could help other researchers to discover new and useful combinations of theory and method beyond what is prescribed by one field.

2. The process of my research as I have described its lessons, openings, and closures, points (not for the first time) to the importance of avoiding generalizations of theory, method or practice in situations involving intercultural cooperation or work across other kinds of difference between people who occupy varying positions in historical relationships and current power structures. I have learned that generalizations and attempts to apply overarching theories to a study such as mine on HIGH SLACK can mask the complexity and richness of a case where different contexts, issues, points of view, and receptions are woven intricately together. It's crucial to give primary attention to the *specific* history in question, the precise relationships at hand, and the contexts and debates affecting them. The need to take cues from these realities and how they are dealt with by others is one of the major conclusions I draw from this research.

3. I see two particular groups of literature as especially relevant and helpful to this task. Post-colonial studies is an area in which a great deal of scrupulously historically-sited theory tends to combine various disciplinary approaches with a focus on systems of power and inequality. This literature has provided me with important ways to relate a contemporary art work to ongoing societal relationships and discourses. Cultural studies, with its capacity for factoring popular cultural phenomena into social and political histories, may provide further ideas for understanding art exhibitions as social, political, and/or cultural acts in specific contexts. I think there is more to learn from visual arts projects about their social, cultural, and political functions. They seem to operate differently from other modes of production or intervention more typically studied as politically- and socially-active (like fiction, life-writing, poetry, certain genres of film and video, magazine or zine publishing), but they require an approach which goes beyond those outlined by art criticism. Art historian Coco Fusco's book English is Broken Here is a model of writing that integrates art,

culture, politics, history, and social theory, as are Greg Sarris' "anthropological" text Keeping Slug Woman Alive and Deborah Root's study, Cannibal Culture.

4. Feminist theory's ongoing grappling with voice, silence, and women's subjectivities, which I write about in Chapter 5, may offer new ways to facilitate (feminist) cultural research and equality-seeking cultural collaboration with individuals and groups positioned differently in power relationships. Greg Sarris writes that:

> ... an understanding of the dynamics of any resistance movement... depends on who is doing the study, what the context and circumstances are, and which methods are being employed. Any perspective has its limitations. Representatives from the dominant culture exploring the resistance of a subjugated people are likely to see little more than what those people choose or can afford to show them (1993: 68).

Combining interdisciplinary flexibility with respect for and new (feminist) ways of thinking about and dealing with silence, resistance, and other challenges of communication across the differences among people may be an avenue of possibility. Again in Sarris' words,

> [I]f there are black holes of uncertainty, borders and obstacles that seem impossible to cross, we must not only continue to question and to talk to one another – art historian, linguist, and anthropologist alike – but remember our own limitations and accept difference for what it is, an indication of the distance we have yet to travel by means of... sensitivity to the Other and to the history... that accounts for the world[s] from which [people] speak(1993: 59).

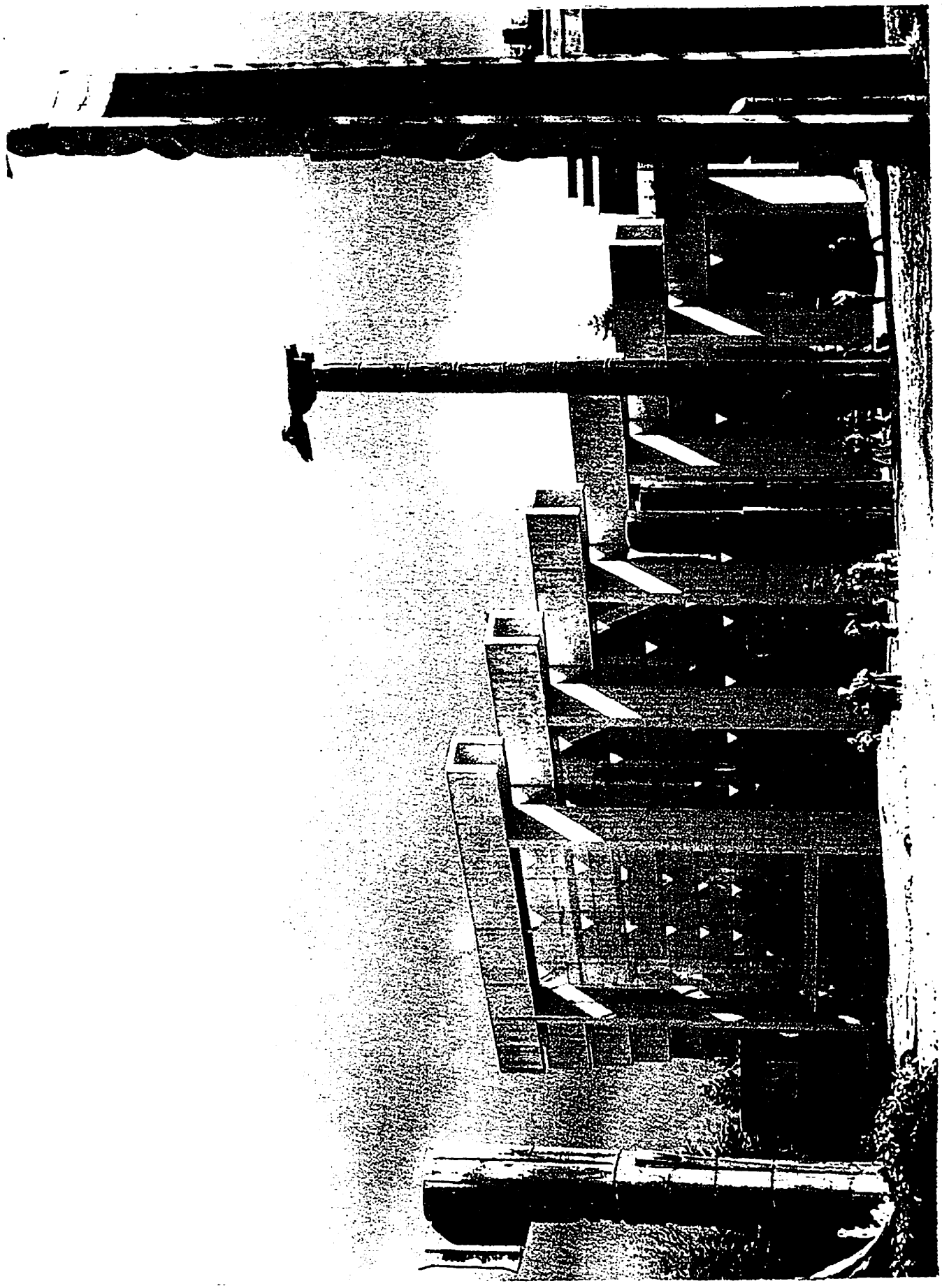
5. The development of feminist theories on the subjects of "difference" and "subjectivity" is also an interesting stream of analysis in relation to cultural production. Many art-historical studies utilize production and reception frameworks to observe and anticipate that meanings for art are re-created by different audiences and audience members in interaction with each other and with socio-cultural ideologies - and not in isolation. I have attempted to trace the connections between political and cultural contexts and the ways people produced and received HIGH SLACK; and I have tried to do research with people who are positioned differently in our collective society's structure (and learn from its results). Two things have become obvious. First, dominant social ideologies and structures do condition people's receptions of art works. Second, people's positions in social relationships - many shaped by historical inequalities - affect their receptions of artworks, but also

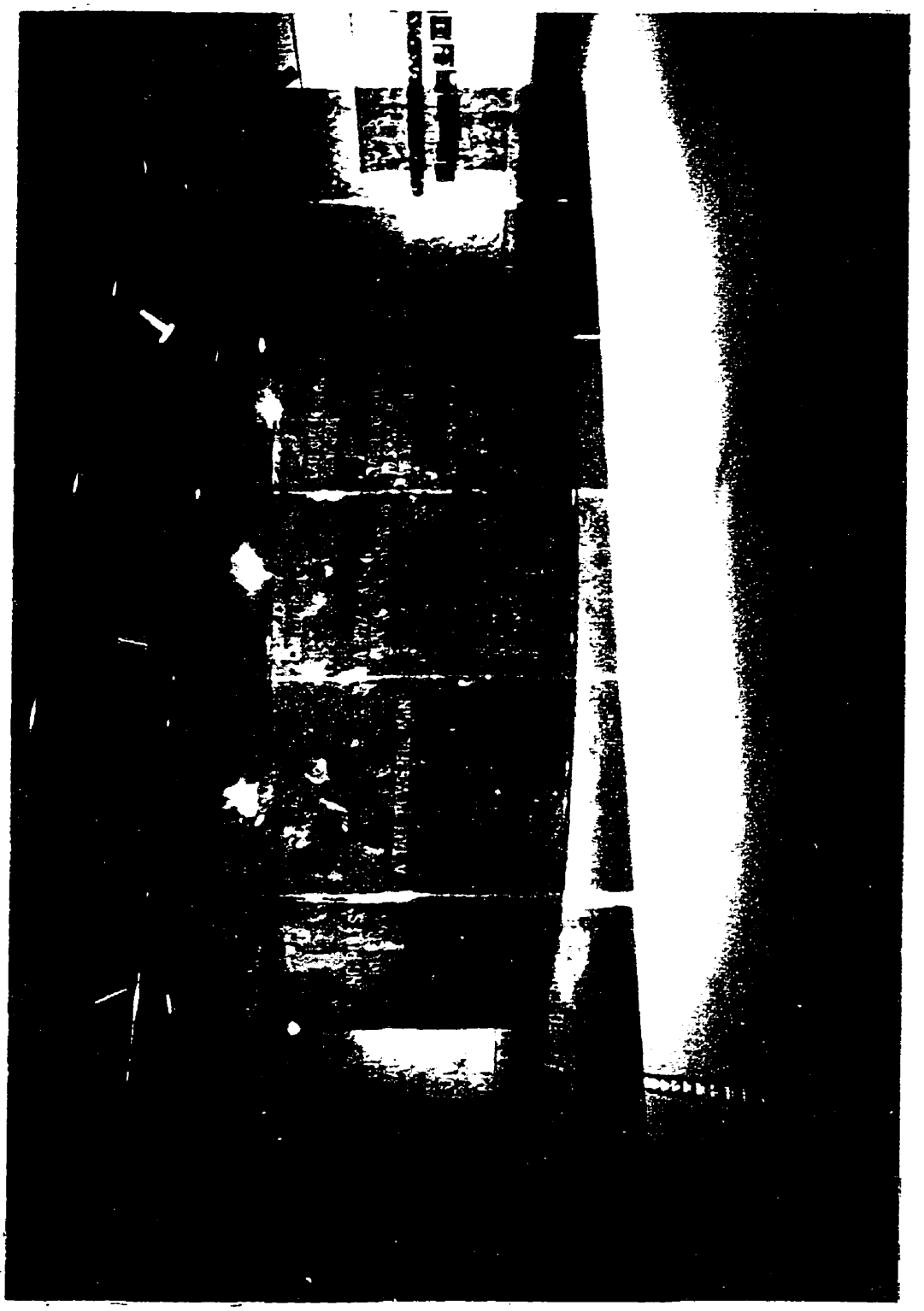
affect their decisions about how or whether to engage with other audience members in negotiating meanings for artworks and drawing conclusions from them. Feminist theories on difference and subjectivity, as they work to balance recent ideas about the mobility and multiplicity of self/subjectivity with constant attention to the realities of historically and systemically-established categories of difference and relationships of inequality, might offer a new dimension - or at least a new complexity - to studies of how art functions and what it can mean in people's minds and lives.

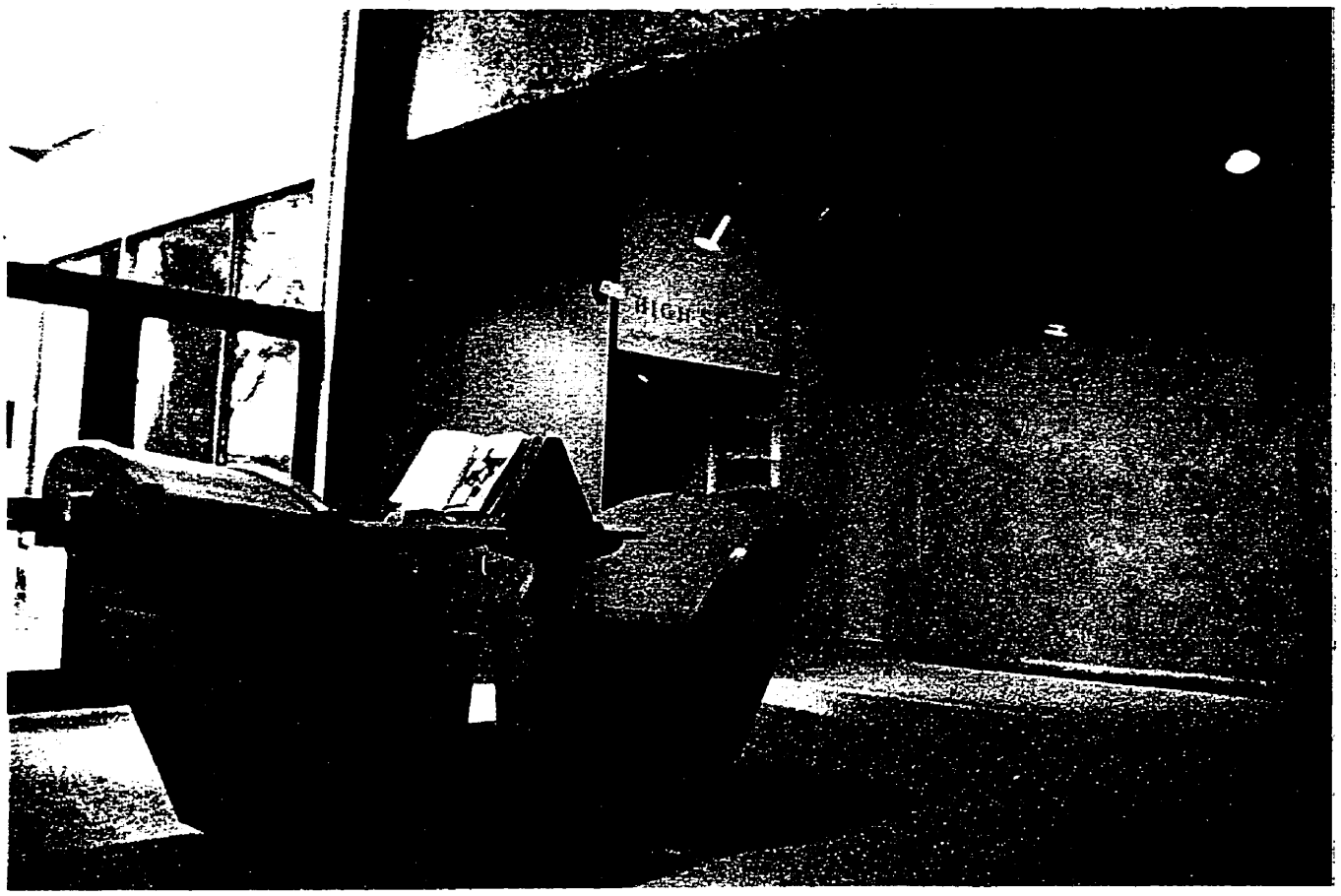
6. Relating theory to everyday practice is a challenge - and one that feminist writers are fond of confronting. This thesis stops short of making specific "new" recommendations for practice in one of the contexts it investigates - the museum - because I have learned my lesson about the importance of looking at each situation in its specific context and history and relationships. At the same time, this lesson could function as a recommendation of sorts; it echoes Rosa Ho's emphasis on working in a focussed way with particular communities and learning through processes of consultation and mutual respect. My insistence on continually linking HIGH SLACK (in its moments of production and reception) back to social, cultural, and political contexts is an attempt to strike a balance between acknowledging and respecting the ambiguity, complexity, and specialness of the *particular* while remembering that it is also related to and shaped by broader, more generally present patterns and relationships.

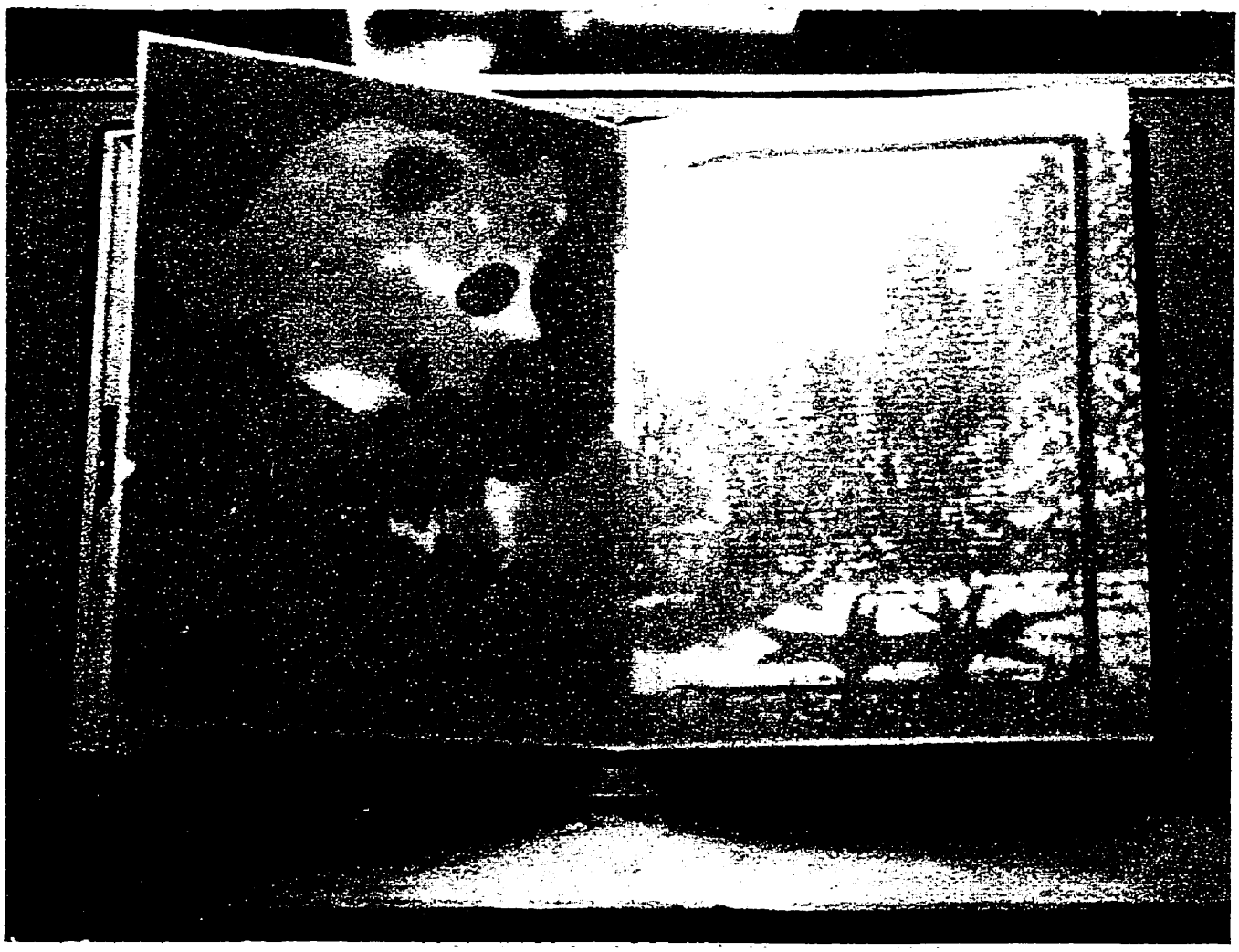
My overall goal in the thesis has been summarized helpfully by Greg Sarris. His multidisciplinary and multi-focal study looks at relationships between his indigenous culture and external discourses (academic and popular) which imagine his culture – often without attention to the history shared between them. He explores, and I have aspired to trace:

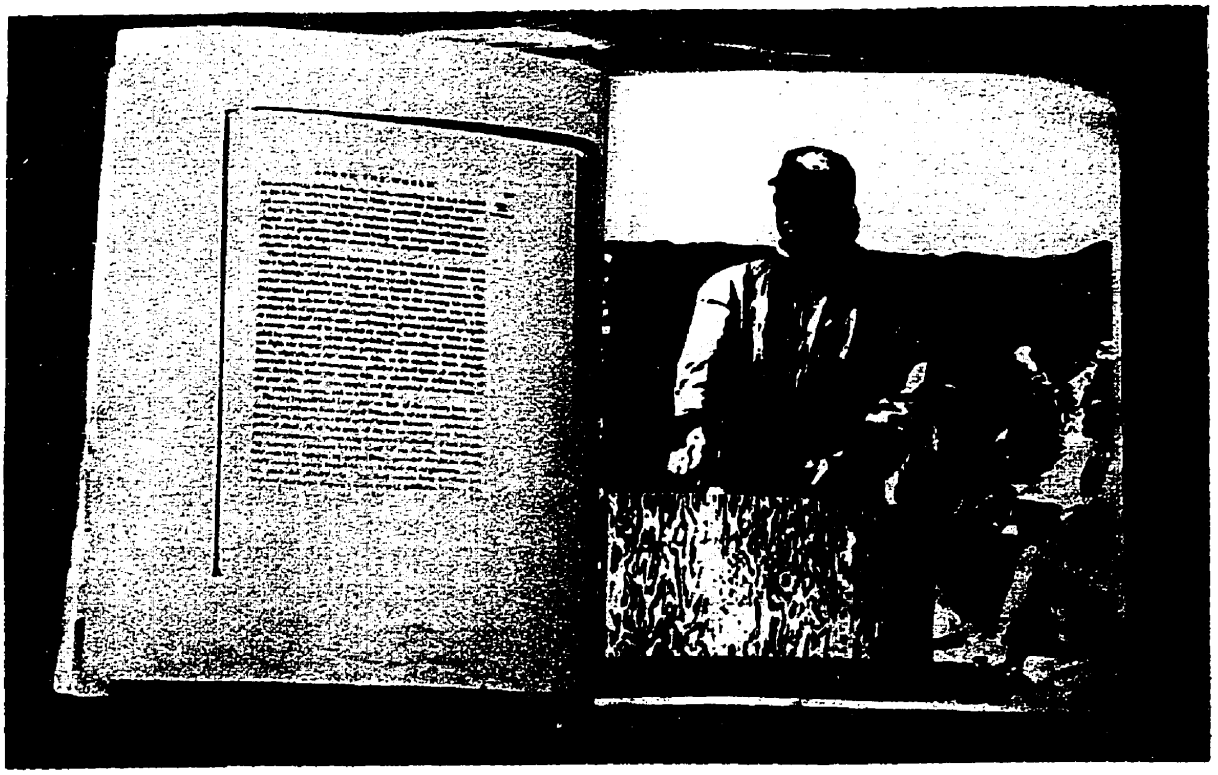
> a specific kind of dialogue, or conversation, that can open the intermingling of the multiple voices within and between people and the texts they encounter, enabling people to see and hear the ways various voices intersect and overlap, the ways they have been repressed or held down because of certain social or political circumstances, and the ways they can be talked about and explored (1993: 5).

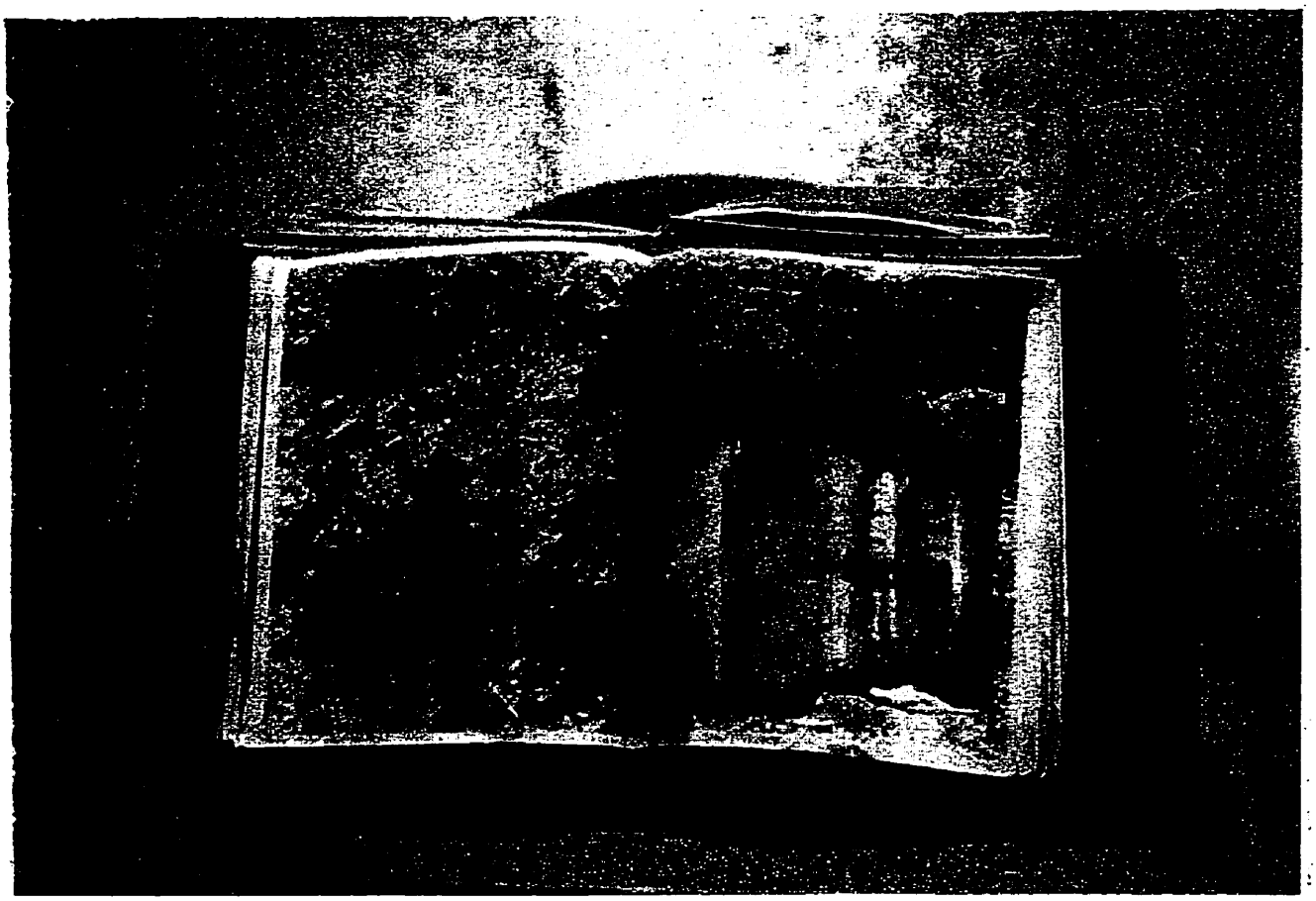


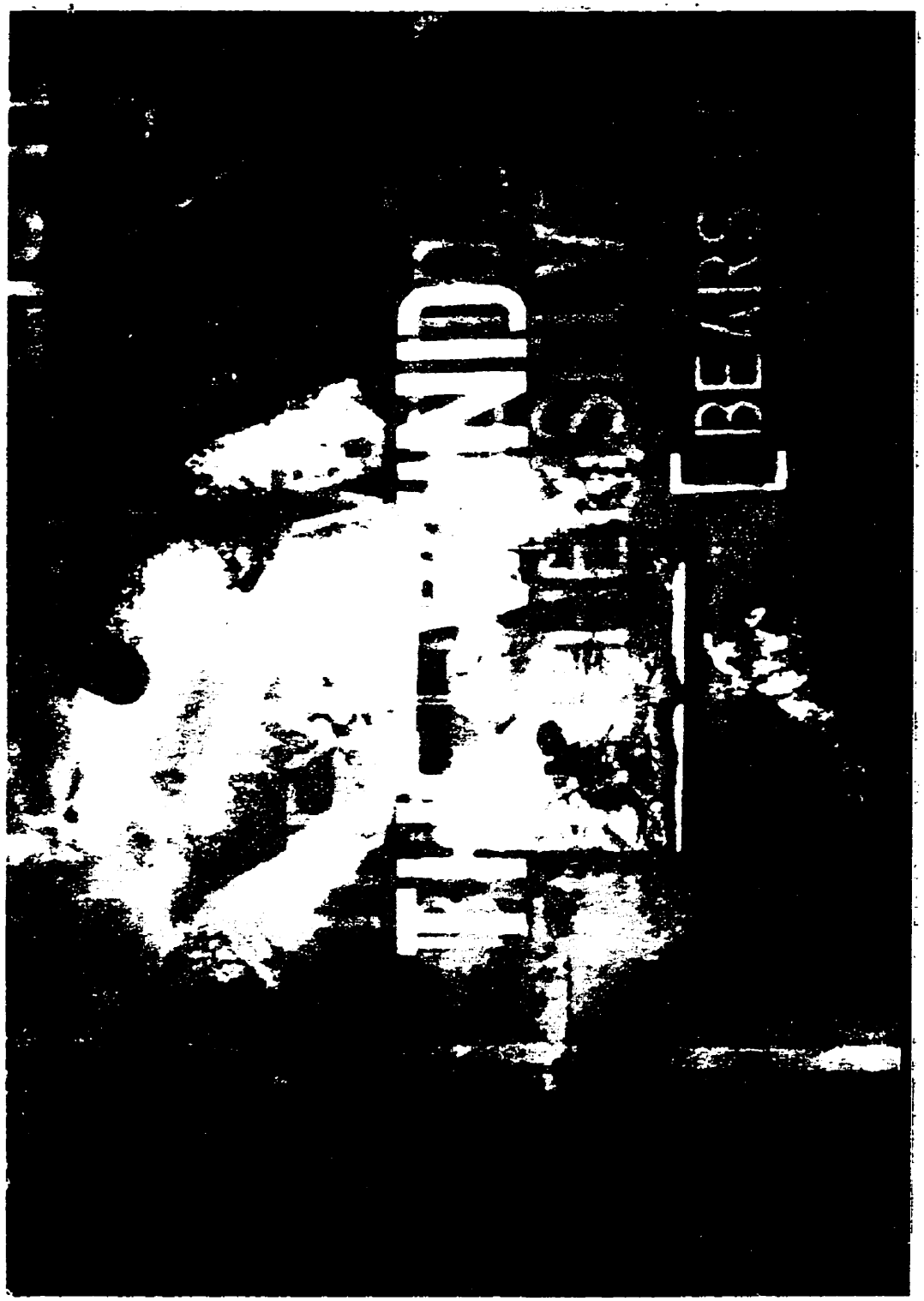


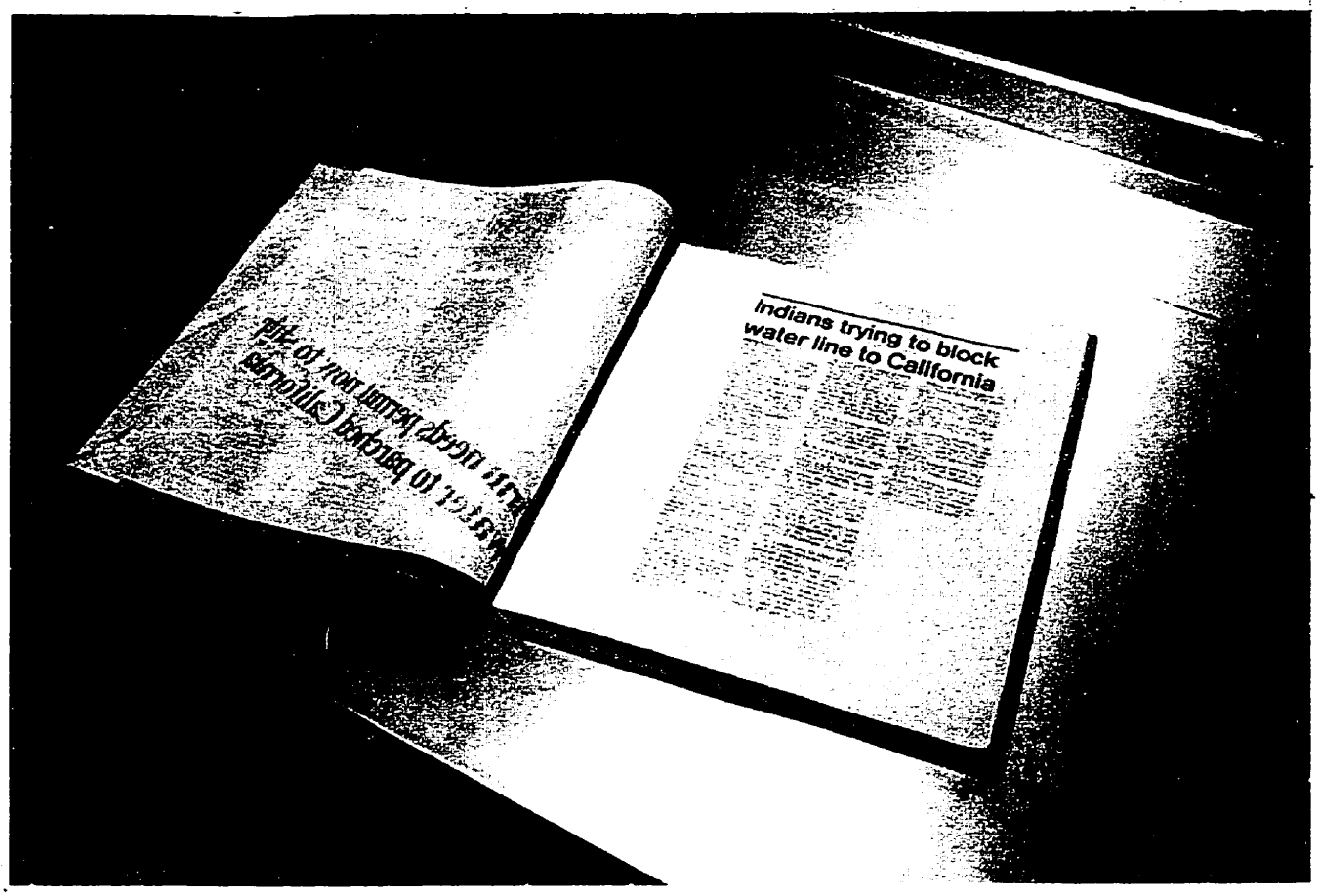


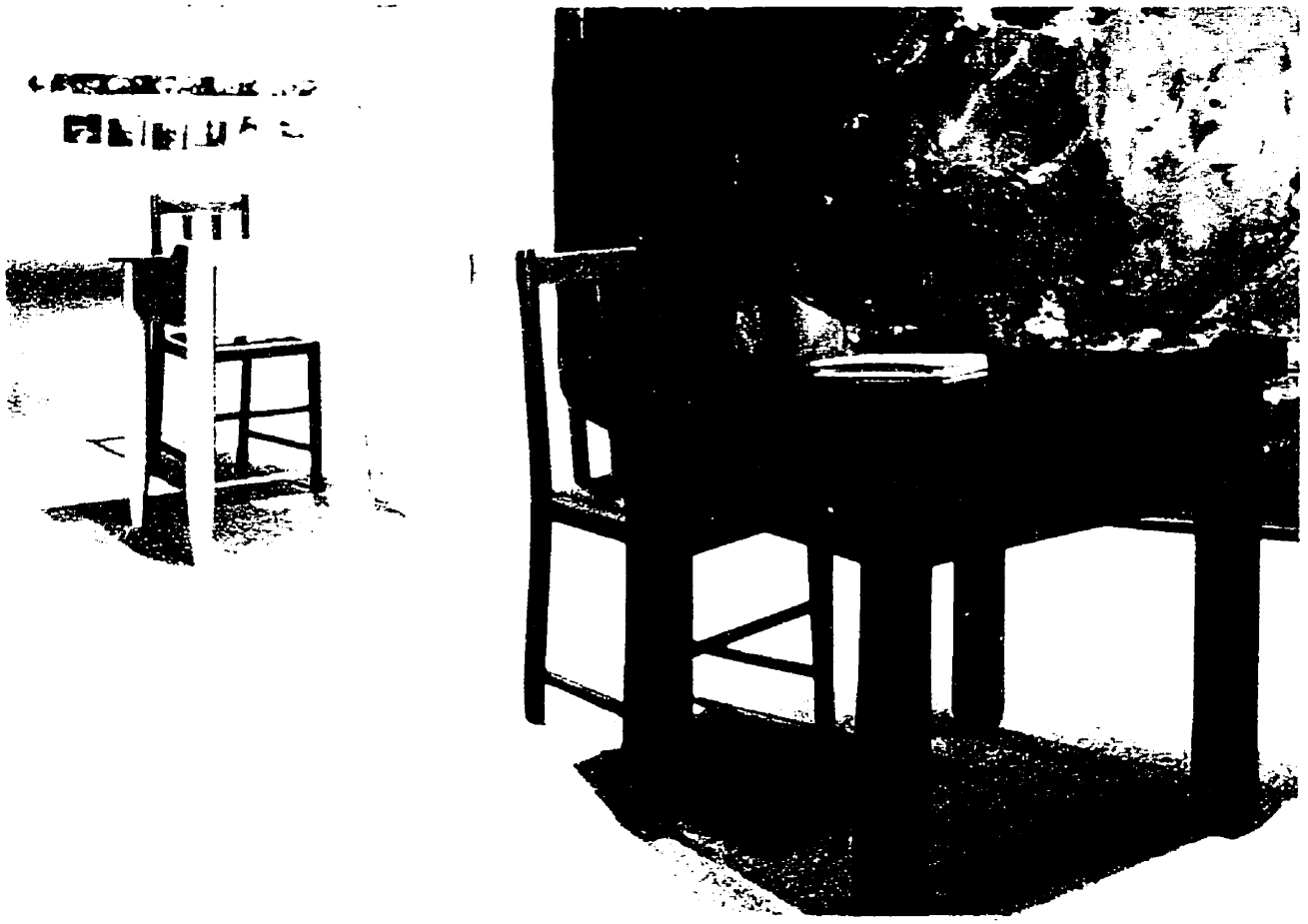


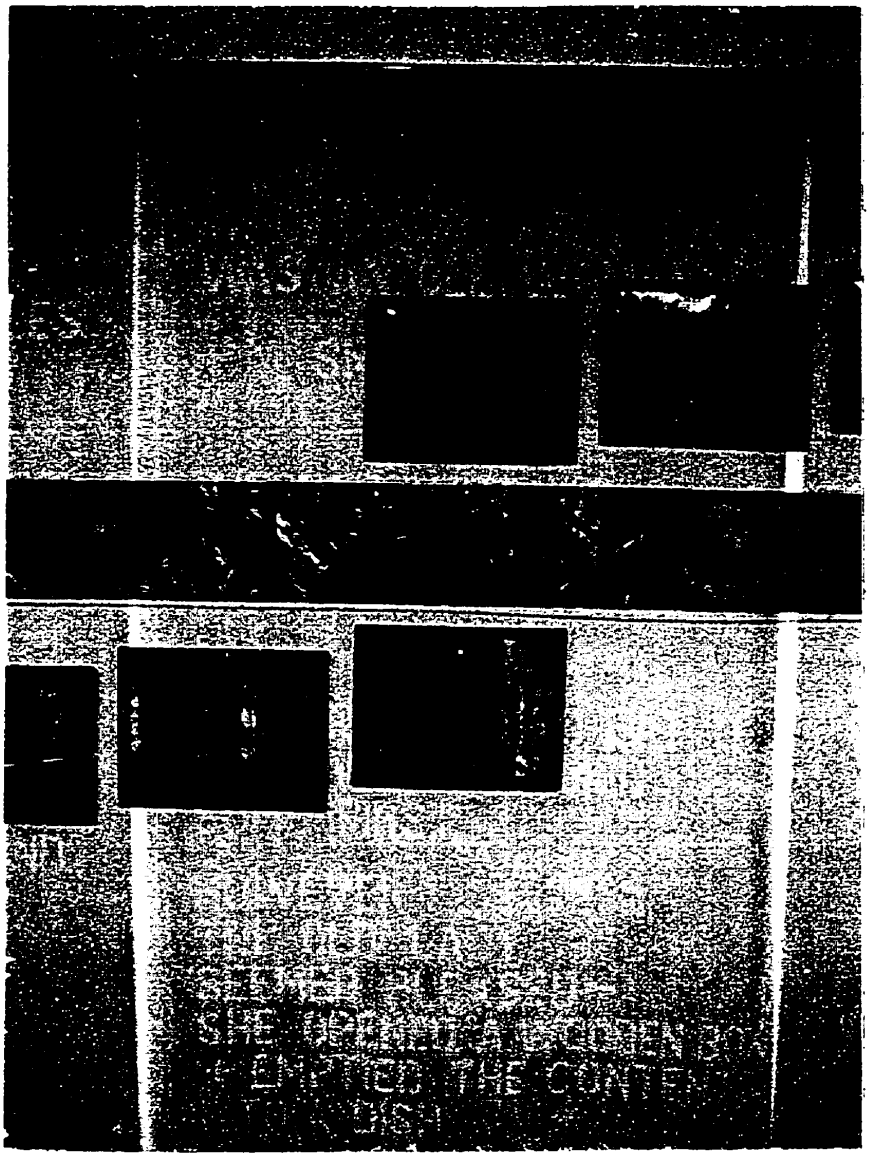





BEARS


Indians trying to block
water line to California





CHAPTER IX

Valdés goes in the launch and explores Tabla and Arco channels and the entrances near.—The English are not prepared to leave unexplored the channels which we had already visited, on the ground that to do so would not be in accordance with their instructions.—Galiano explores the continent from Point Aarmiento to Tabla channel.—Vernaci and Salamanca continue the examination to beyond Angostura de los Comandantes.

THE dawn was fine, and methods were taken to combine our activities with those of the English. Captain Vancouver proposed to send out three expeditions, each consisting of two boats, in different directions, and Galiano suggested to him that we should have charge of one of these. Valdés therefore set out at nine in the morning in the launch of the *Mexicana* with provisions for eight days, and made his way along the channel which afterwards received the name of Tabla, his duty being to explore that part of it which lay towards the east.

At nightfall Valdés returned in the launch, having explored a considerable arm of the sea, which he called Tabla, because on the coast to the east he had seen on the shore a kind of wooden plank, on which were drawn various geographical figures, as was clear from the sketch which he made of it. This channel at first seemed to be of considerable importance and to extend for several leagues, but Valdés soon found that its end came when he least expected it, in just the same way as we had found in the case of the arm of the Floridablanca channel, to which this channel was similar both in the character of its shores and in its depth. He also visited the neighbouring channels, which are filled for the most part with small islands of little height, and he saw some abandoned settlements without having met a single native beyond them.

On his return from the examination of the arm of the sea called Tabla, Valdés met Mr. Pujet, second lieutenant of the *Discovery*, who was also on his way to explore the same channel, and although he told him that it was blocked, the English officer continued to go to explore it for himself.

In view of this, we explained to Captain Vancouver that the way in which exploration could be accelerated would be for us to repose complete confidence in one another and that so far as we were concerned, he could count on absolute frankness. Mr. Vancouver, however, replied that while he had always the most complete confidence in our work, he did not feel himself to be free from the responsibility if he did not see everything for himself, since it was expressly laid down in his instructions that he was to explore all the channels along the coast from 45° to Cook River.

From the twenty-eighth of June to the first of July we replenished our water and wood, and undertook astronomical observations for the rectification of the chronometers. The wind varied greatly in its direction and strength; at times, when it was south-east, it caused us to yaw until we were in forty fathoms' depth. The tide was very irregular, the wind having much effect both upon its strength and upon its duration. When it blew from the south-east the current flowed rapidly from this direction, and when the wind remained steady from that quarter the water rose and fell without changing its course. This phenomenon was also noticed in the channels of the Strait of Magellan, where there has been noticed a difference of five fathoms in two hours, without any change in the direction of the tide.

On the second of July, the weather was lovely, and in the afternoon

/After quitting this Bay we followd the same Shore which still trended North Eastward & soon after passed by a narrow Channel on the inside of a Cluster of steep rocky Islands wooded with Pines, but did not proceed above a league when at the farther end of these Islands we came to a small Cove in the bottom of which the picturesque ruins of a deserted Village placd on the summit of an elevated projecting Rock excited our curiosity & induced us to land close to it to view its structure.

This Rock was inaccessable on every side except a narrow pass from the Land by means of steps that admitted only one person to ascend at a time & which seemd to be well guarded in case of an attack, for right over it a large Maple Tree diffused its spreading branches in such an advantageous manner as to afford an easy & ready access from the summit of the Rock to a conceald place amongst its branches, where a small party could watch unobservd & defend the Pass with great ease. We found the top of the Rock nearly level & wholly occupied with the skeletons of Houses - irregularly arrangd & very crouded;in some places the space was enlargd by strong scaffolds projecting over the Rock & supporting Houses apparently well securd - These also acted as a defence by increasing the natural strength of the place & rendering it still more secure & inaccessable. From the fresh appearance of every thing about this Village & the intollerable stench it would seem as if it had been very lately occupied by the Natives. The narrow Lanes between the Houses were full of filth & nastiness & swarmd with myriads of Fleas which fixd themselves on our Shoes Stockings & cloths in such incredible number that the whole party was obligd to quit the rock in great precipitation, leaving the remainder of these Assailants in full posession of their Garrison without the least desire of facing again such troublesome enemy. We no sooner got to the Water side than some immediately stripped themselves

1778. June.

skilfully contrived, and so firmly and well executed, as rendered it difficult to be considered the work of the untutored tribes we had been accustomed to meet; had not their broken arms and implements, with parts of their manufactured garments, plainly evinced its inhabitants to be of the same race.

Whilst examining these abandoned dwellings, and admiring the rude shield projected for their defence, our gentlemen were suddenly assailed by an unexpected numerous enemy, whose legions made so furious an attack upon each of their persons, that unable to vanquish their foes, or to sustain the conflict, they rushed up to their necks in water. This expedient, however, proved ineffectual; nor was it until after all their clothes were boiled, that they were disengaged from an immense hord of fleas, which they had disturbed by examining too minutely the filthy garments and apparel of the late inhabitants.

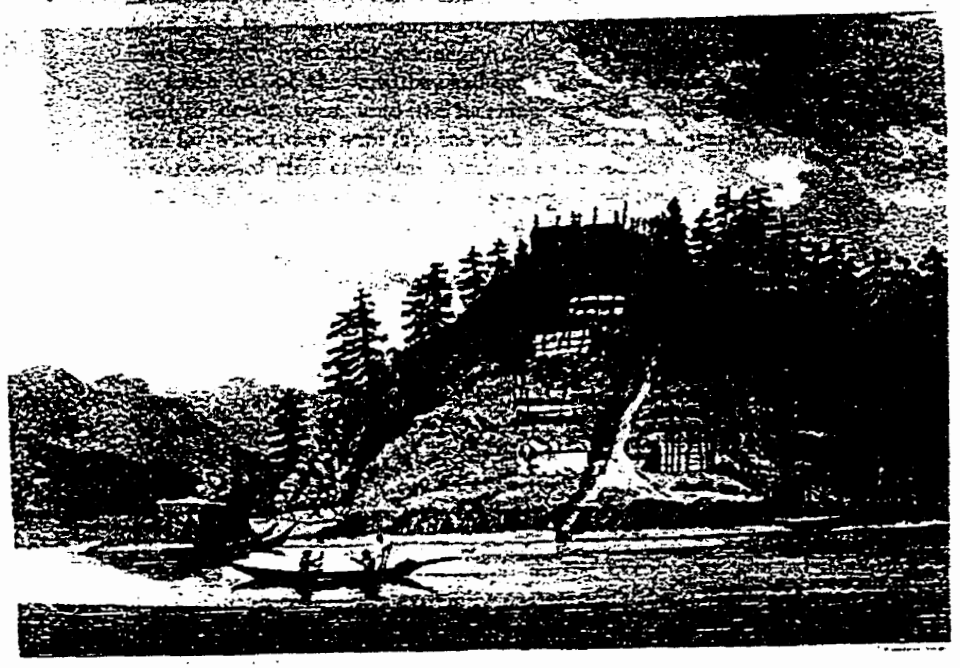
July. Sunday 5.

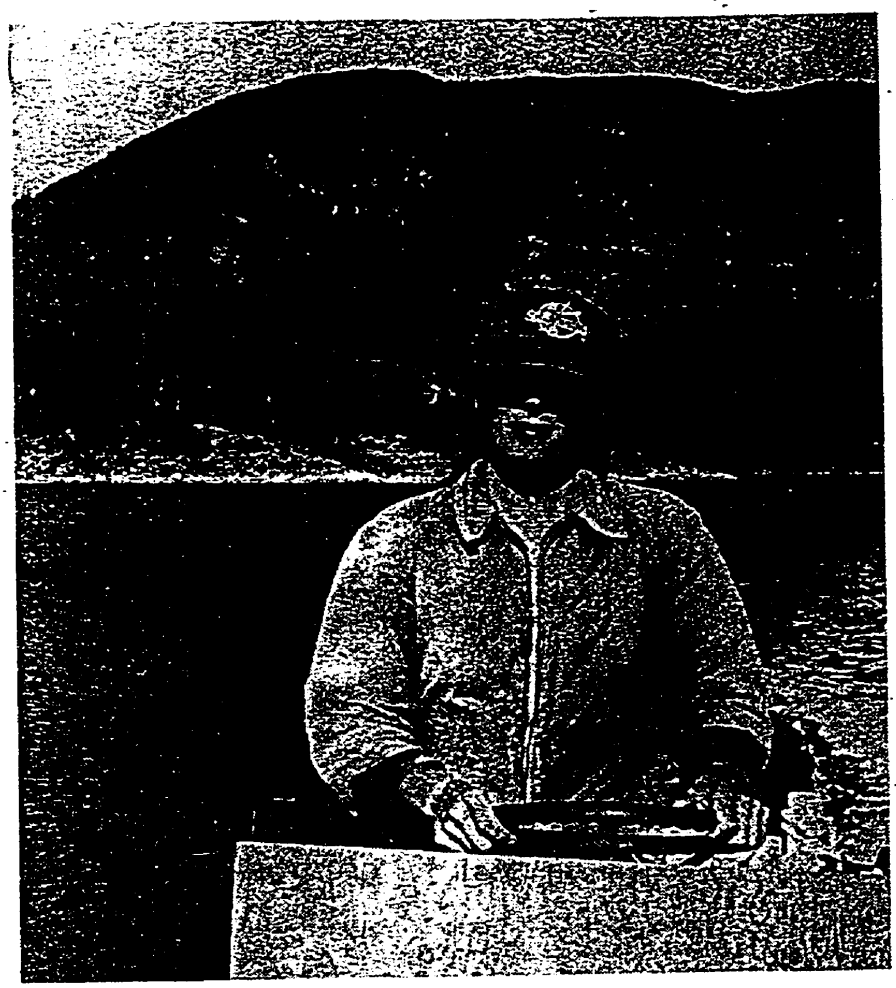
The weather continued very rainy and unpleasant until the forenoon of the 5th of July, when on its clearing up, Mr. Puget and Mr. Whidbey were again dispatched, to execute the task I had the preceding day attempted; as likewise to gain some information of the southern side of the gulph, and the broken country, which existed between it and our present anchorage.

The securities about the head of the Discovery being constantly out of repair, our carpenters were now employed on that service; and, here also, we brewed some spruce-beer, which was excellent.

Monday 6.

The next day in the afternoon, Mr. Johnstone returned, who, after having met Sen^{r} Valdes, as before stated; abandoned his pursuit of that which appeared to him to be the main shore leading to the eastward, and prosecuted his researches in the opposite direction, leading to the west, s.w. and to the north, in a channel of an irregular width, where, after examining a small opening, in a northerly direction, he shortly discovered another, about two miles wide, in latitude 50° 21′, longitude 235° 9′; along which, he kept the starboard or eastern shore on board; which was compact; but the western side, for some miles on which some fires were observed, seemed somewhat divided by water. This inlet, in general, from one to two miles wide, led them in an irregular northern direction to





which can be used for recording and the choice
se available. A basic record should consist of
aphs treated for long-term storage (see below),
d accurate scale drawings, as well as notes on
cal condition. It should also include any earlier

In general, photographing rock art is not easy.
llegible or inaccessible, the weather conditions
ill often dictate whether such a method of recording
t light conditions have a large effect on the
se light is preferable to direct sunlight even if
ht does not match that of the film. In extreme
, it may be better to use a tungsten-balanced
ather than daylight film.

sky to offer better conditions for photography
ays the same results could be obtained using
f frosted polyester sheets (Kodak No. 140 7659)
f cloth, where either is practical. Direct,
out the detail of the rock
design ... mineral deposit is
... e excellent

... irregular, diffusely
ucing a "flat" ... acts like a
... surface and the

of ... t important, yet some
... orage of the photographic records.
... ecause they are superior to panchro-
... raph against the rock back...
... realized that colour emulsions
... depending on the type of emulsion,
... r of times ... are projected, the
... to 40 years ... many instances
... will deteriorate


I was too close
I stood where the
stood,
The image

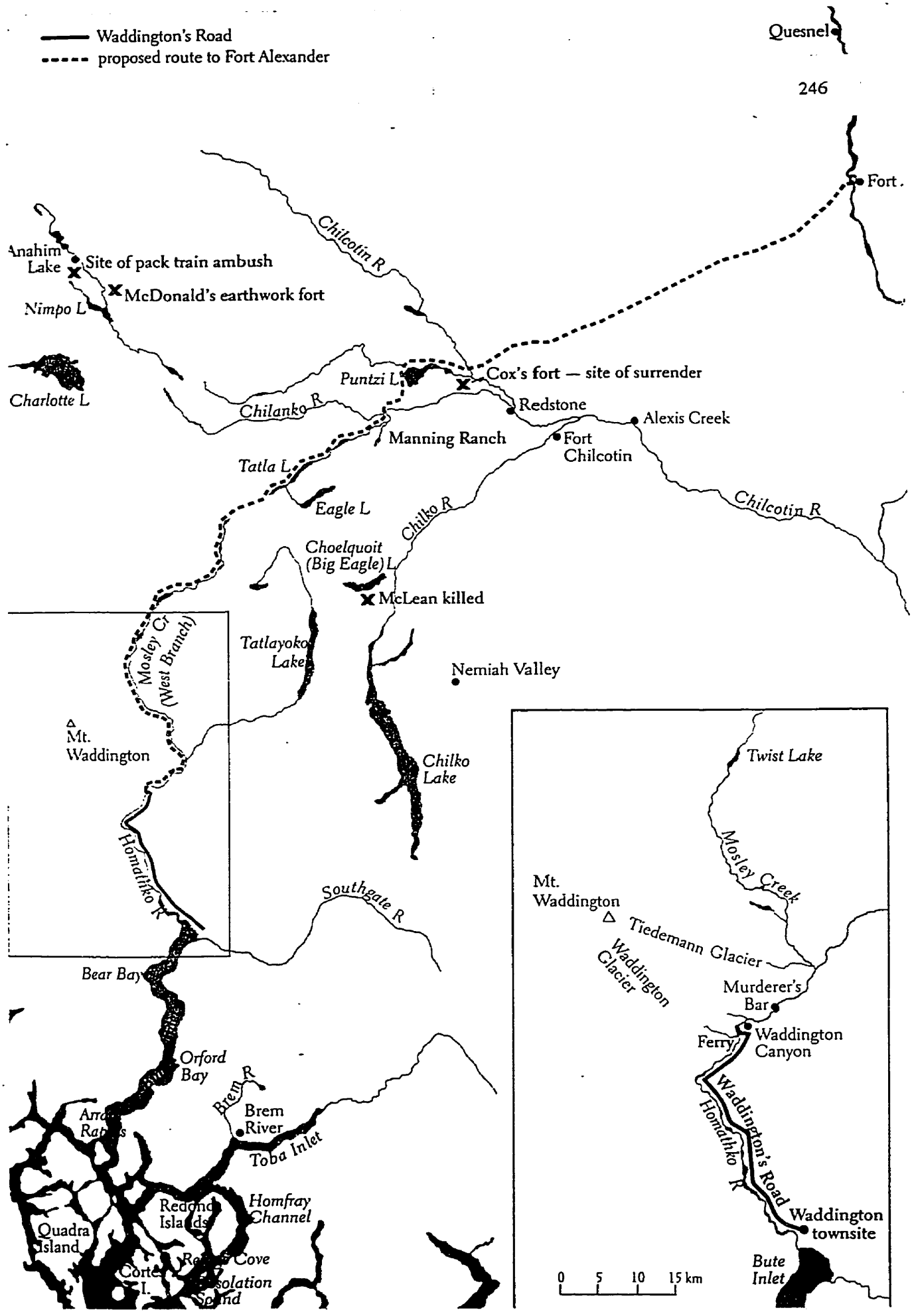

I have a box of our images
and a box of theirs.

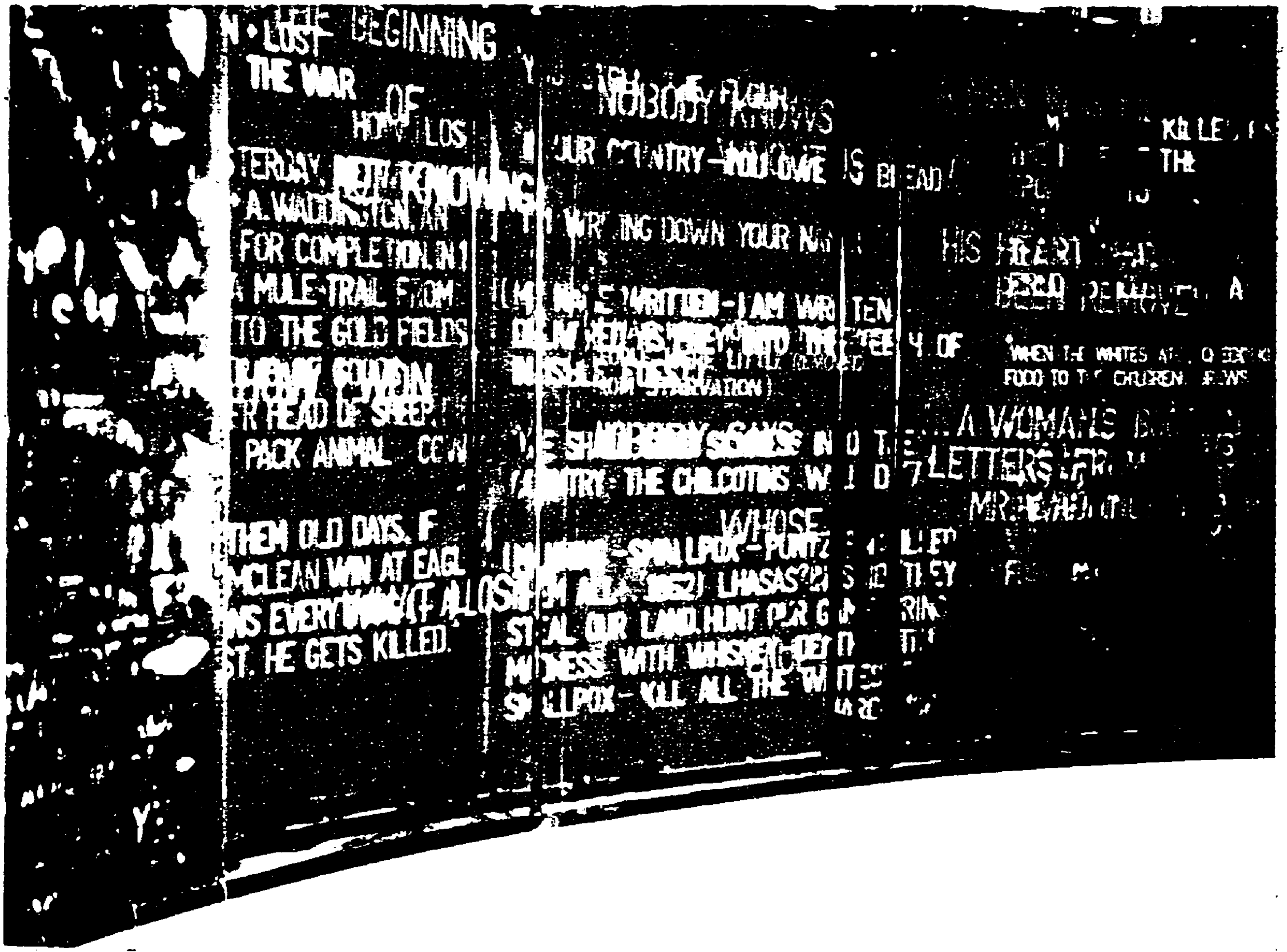

Perhaps they weren't mine
to take...

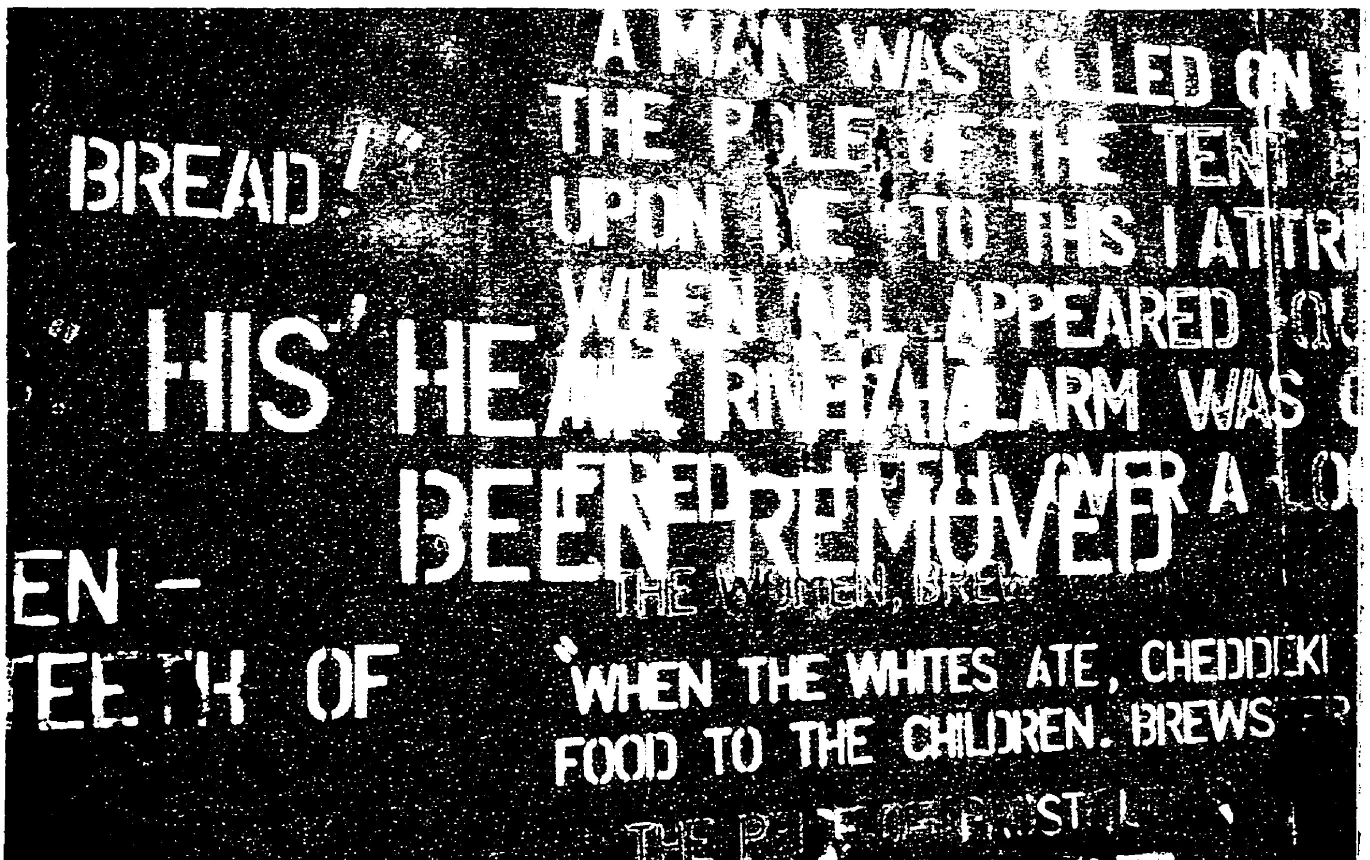

We saw ourselves
We saw what they saw
The

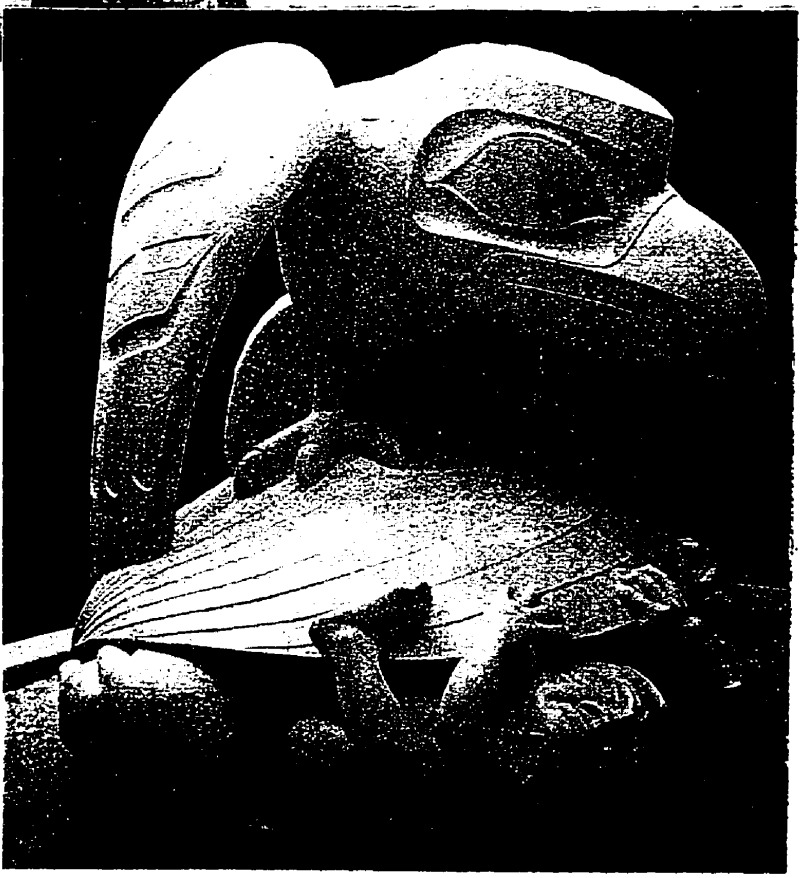

What is this ?
Whose was it ?
Whose work?

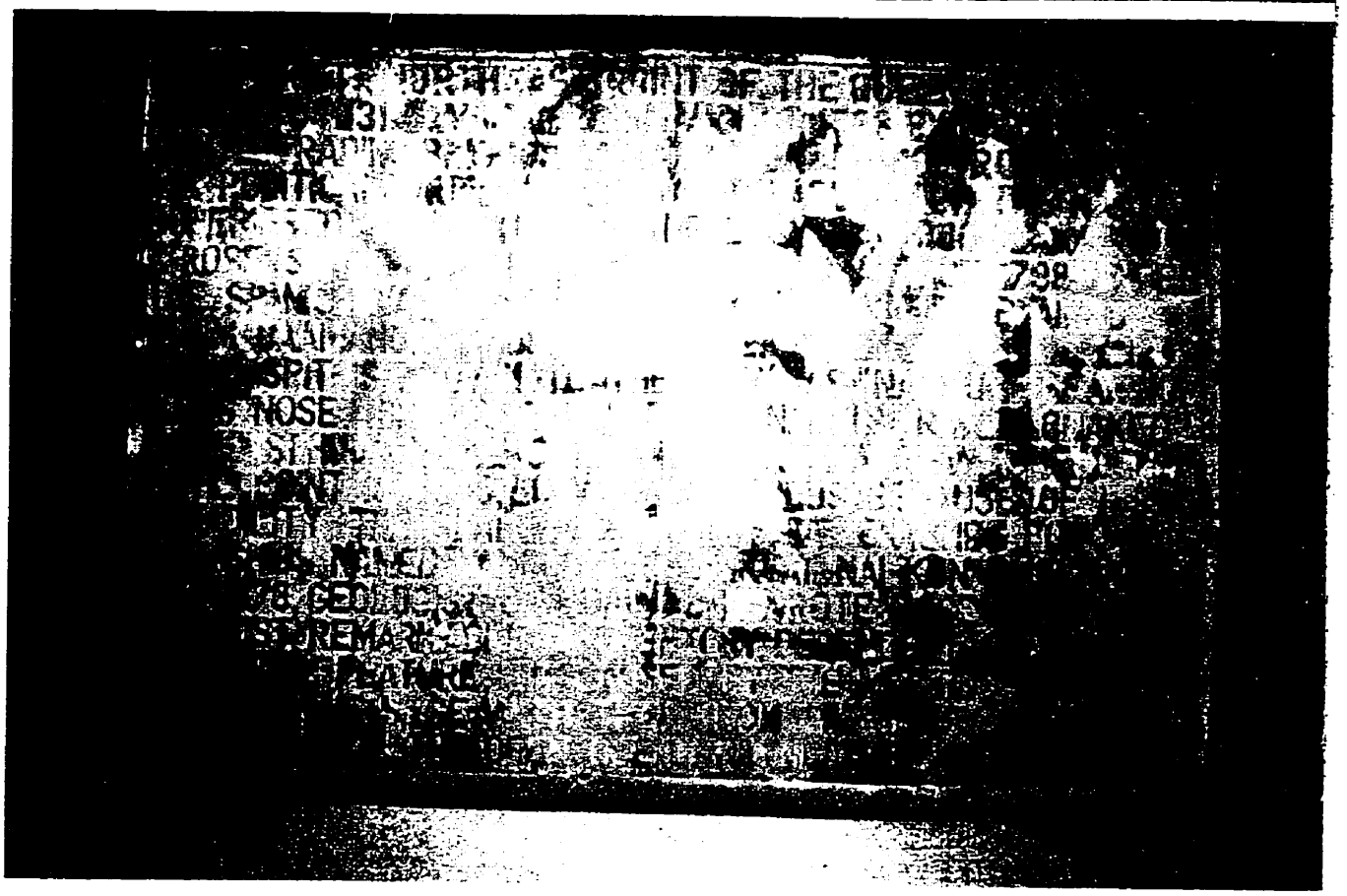
story is this


Waddington's Road
proposed route to Fort Alexander
Quesnel
Fort
Chilcotin R
Anahim Lake
Site of pack train ambush
McDonald's earthwork fort
Nimpo L
Charlotte L
Puntzi L
Cox's fort — site of surrender
Chilanko R
Redstone
Alexis Creek
Manning Ranch
Fort Chilcotin
Tatla L
Eagle L
Chilko R
Chilcotin R
Choelquoit (Big Eagle) L
McLean killed
Mosley Cr (West Branch)
Tatlayoko Lake
Nemiah Valley
Mt. Waddington
Chilko Lake
Homathko R
Southgate R
Bear Bay
Orford Bay
Brem R
Brem River
Toba Inlet
Homfray Channel
Quadra Island
Cortes I.
Twist Lake
Mosley Creek
Tiedemann Glacier
Waddington Glacier
Murderer's Bar
Ferry
Waddington Canyon
Waddington's Road
Waddington townsite
Bute Inlet
0 5 10 15 km


THE WAR
NOBODY KNOWS
FOR COMPLETION IN 1
A MULE-TRAIL FROM
TO THE GOLD FIELDS
PACK ANIMAL
WRITING DOWN YOUR NA
THE CHILCOTINS
WHOSE
ST. HE GETS KILLED.
HIS HEART
LETTERS
WHEN THE WHITES ATE
FOOD TO THE CHILDREN.


A MAN WAS KILLED ON
THE POLE OF THE TENT
UPON
TO THIS I ATTR
APPEARED
BREAD!"
HIS' HEA
ALARM WAS
BEEN REMOVED
EN -
TEETH OF
WHEN THE WHITES ATE, CHEDDEKI
FOOD TO THE CHILDREN. BREWS

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CATALOGUE NUMBER: NB11.366

OBJECT NAME: COVERED ANTLER BASKETRY

COLOUR:	LIGHT BROWN;BROWN-YELLOW;DARK BROWN;PURPLE; BLUE;GREEN
MEASUREMENTS:	WIDTH: 42 CM HEIGHT: 34 CM DEPTH: 34 CM
MATERIALS:	LEAF, GRASS;BARK, CEDAR;ANTLER, DEER
ARTIST:	LOUIE, MARION
ORIGIN-GEOGRAPHIC REGION:	NORTH AMERICA
ORIGIN-COUNTRY:	CANADA
ORIGIN-PROVINCE TERRITORY:	BRITISH COLUMBIA
CULTURAL CLASSIFICATION:	NORTHWEST COAST
CULTURE:	NUU-CHAH-NULTH
PRODUCTION DATE:	CIRCA 1975 A.D.
SOURCE OF OBJECT:	TOUCHIE, HAROLD
MODE OF ACQUISITION:	PURCHASE
ACQUISITION DATE:	1992
SOURCE OF FUNDS:	MUSEUM OF ANTHROPOLOGY SHOP VOLUNTEERS
CURRENT CONDITION:	GOOD

Appendix A

Statement of Research Verification

As an interview participant in Chantell Foss' Master of Arts thesis for Simon Fraser University, I would like to confirm that the quotations Chantell Foss cited from my interview with her have been corrected, modified and approved by me. The quoted excerpts and additional information provided by me contained in the thesis reflect the most accurate and current information concerning the topics and contexts discussed in Chantell Foss' thesis.

Since Chantell Foss' thesis is the best and most complete context for the information I provided, we both agree to abide by our original agreement that the typed transcripts and tape-recorded interview be destroyed upon Chantell Foss' successful completion of the requirements for her thesis.

Rosa Ho Date: April 2/98

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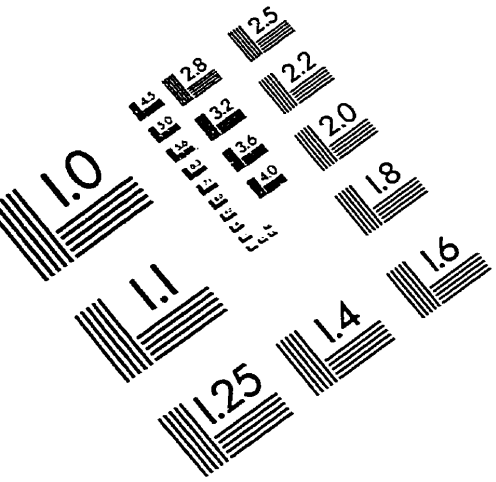

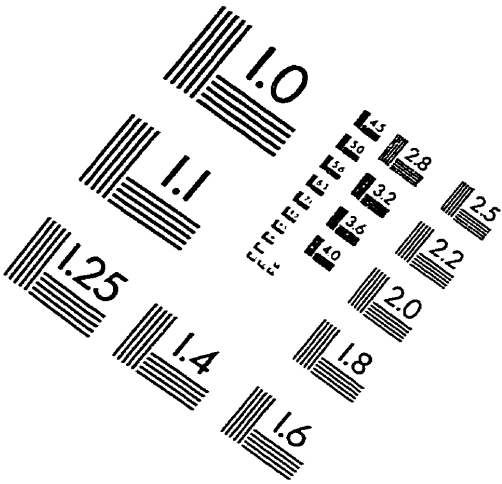

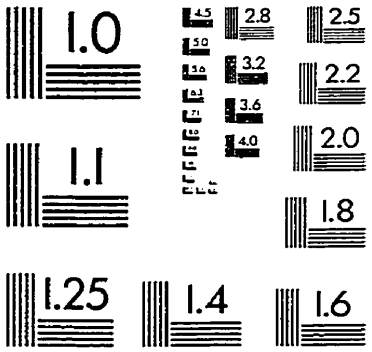

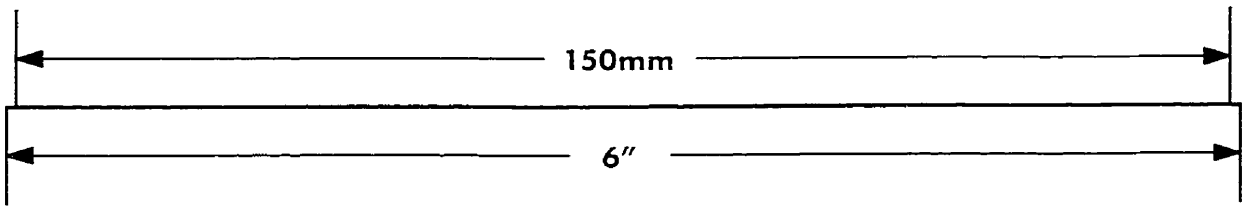

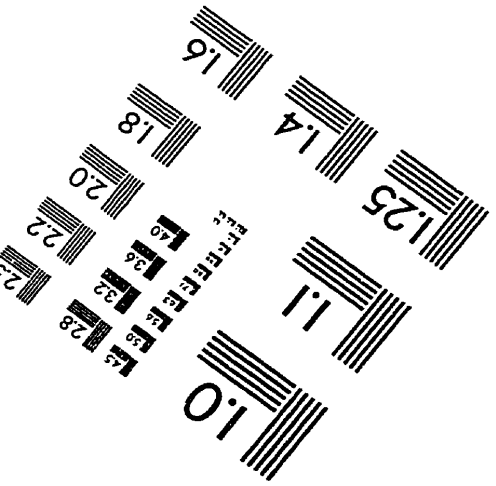

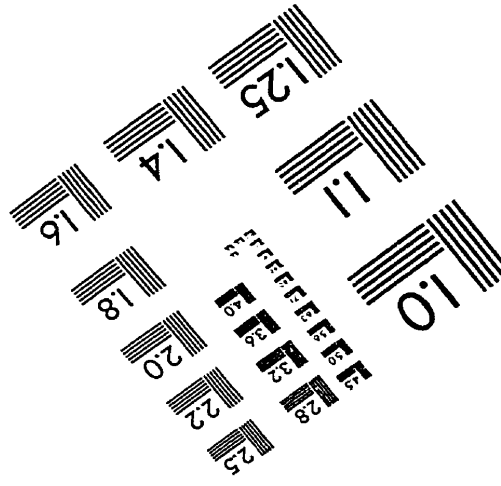

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