

## 6 Outside of time

### Salvage ethnography, self-representation and performing culture

*Wanda Nanibush*

As a young Anishinaabe-kwe (Ojibway woman), I was often gifted with or purchased for myself posters, T-shirts, hats and other products with Edward S. Curtis photographs on them. Sometimes they were coupled with a quotation from a famous ‘chief’ on protecting the environment, the importance of animals or the evils of white man’s capitalism. I saw the photos as part of my ancestral past preserved by Curtis for my generation to reacquaint itself with its pre-contact history. Curtis is one of the most popular sources of images of pre-contact Indigenous cultures both globally and locally. Even an Indigenous person with living relatives, actual ancestral knowledge and contemporary experience to help construct her cultural identity cannot avoid him. The power of his work lies in his expression of an underlying romanticism in our connection to the land; in addition, the sitters are our ancestors.

In this chapter, I analyze Curtis’s film *In the Land of the Head Hunters: A Drama of Primitive Life on the Shores of the North Pacific* (1914) and its multiple reconstructions by anthropologists in the 1970s and 2000s to show shifting attitudes toward romantic representations of Indigeneity and examine Indigenous resistance to the colonial gaze. I will not treat the film as a history of the West Coast or of the Kwakwaka’wakw but as a history of an ethnographic-anthropological colonial imagination of the West Coast and the changing nature of ethnography and anthropology. The film, really many films as it became reedited and renamed in 1973 by Bill Holm and George Quimby and reconstructed by Brad Evans and Aaron Glass in 2008, is mirror to and projection of turn-of-the-twentieth-century colonial settler society and responses to the discipline of anthropology. The recent reconstructions endeavor to reverse Curtis’s narrative of the ‘vanishing Indian’ by foregrounding the agency of Kwakwaka’wakw actors and their descendants. As the film takes on new meanings, however, it becomes a different cultural object for the Kwakwaka’wakw and its non-Indigenous interlocutors. It represents changing attitudes toward intercultural conflict and contact, with the agency of the Kwakwaka’wakw performers and their descendants becoming key to its interpretation. Yet focusing on Indigenous agency (albeit progressive and necessary) does not minimize the danger of reinvesting in the contemporary colonial desire for the authentic Indigenous person who must be a traditionalist. Anthropologists engage contemporary Kwakwaka’wakw who claim the film as part of their history and a

living culture, but Indigenous people who do not want to engage in culture in this way may be seen as not Indigenous enough or have their voices delegitimized.

The desire for authentic Indigenous culture has repercussions for land claims and Indigenous rights as the 'traditional' comes to define access to hunting and fishing rights as well as rights to territory and its use. I cannot go into these connections here, but I challenge the overemphasis on tradition as the marker of who is and is not Indigenous while continuing to honor Indigenous agency in maintaining culture. Would the culture shown in Curtis's film be what would have been salvaged if the Kwakwaka'wakw had their choice and if their culture had not been banned? The real point in looking at the agency of Indigenous subjects of colonial representation is missed when the question of cultural change is not addressed. The choice to salvage or continue an aspect of a culture is the Kwakwaka'wakw people's prerogative.

### Temporality and the 'object' of salvage ethnography

Edward S. Curtis was born in Wisconsin on February 16, 1868, a time when ideas of progress, an expanding colonial frontier and technological development as emblematic of civilization were widely espoused (Davis 1985: 17). As a photographer, Curtis was often hired by promoters of American Western expansion. He travelled with and worked for colonial authorities documenting future resources for exploitation (Davis 1985: 22; Lyman 1982: 25). He used colonial expansion to work on his magnum opus, *The North American Indian* (1907–1930), featuring twenty volumes of text and photographs. He became obsessed with Indigenous peoples and their ceremonies when he saw the Hopi Snake Dance in 1900. There was already a thriving tourist industry where people engaged their fears and fantasies watching what they believed to be the 'dying' or 'vanishing' race of 'Indians.' Curtis' daughter Florence recalls her father saw the Hopi Snake dance as a spiritual ritual that was being destroyed and contaminated by civilization (white, modern, industrial) (Boesen and Graybill 1986: 12).

Curtis combined his interests as a self-taught ethnographer with his desire to make artistic photographs. Photographer Alfred Stieglitz was influential on Curtis's elevation of photography from documentary to art. Photo-artists of the time were experimenting with production techniques like close-ups and lighting, use of soft focus lenses, addition and omission of props and details. They were also experimenting with post-production techniques such as scratching negatives and hand tinting. These experiments furthered the claim that the hand of the artist could be seen in the work, the definition of art. Curtis adopted Stieglitz's pictorialist aesthetic with its evocation of sentimentality and romanticism (Fleming and Luskey 1986: 214; Lyman 1982: 34), creating images of the land as untouched, thus ideologically supporting colonialism.

The commodification of Indigenous Peoples' cultural practices has been constant since the nineteenth century. Walter Benjamin says the sense of historical loss emerging in European capitalization fuelled a fetishism of the new (Buck-Morss 1989: 82). Mechanical reproduction made new things readily accessible and entailed a loss of authenticity in the old, bringing about a commodification of

authenticity. For Benjamin, an object of the past or a work of art is authentic in its unique presence. In mechanical reproduction things are infinitely reproducible and, therefore, not unique. Because the art or object is no longer an original, it is no longer authentic. Yet authenticity itself is a myth; thus, seeking the original as the real object/culture/artwork is an ideological exercise, not a truth-seeking one.

The pursuit of authenticity through commodification of originary cultures led to a nostalgic longing for a simpler pre-industrial life more in touch with nature, as expressed in Curtis's Hopi Snake Dance, for example. Curtis's desire to document Indigenous cultures for posterity was also tied to the drive to *salvage*, to document Aboriginal cultures before they ended, linked to a concomitant construction of the 'Indian' as a 'Noble Savage,' possessing traits lacked by the modern subject. As an object of salvage, Indigenous connections to the spiritual and the natural became central to their construction within the ethnographic imaginary through which Curtis sought to gain legitimacy.

We Indigenous Peoples suffered major losses from colonial expansion, wars and disease; yet by the time Curtis began documentation, our numbers were on the rise. Part and parcel of his conception of our disappearance was the idea that our modernization also meant our disappearance. It was only in our untouched, pre-contact, ahistorical and unchanging state that we were authentic 'Indians.' In his travels, he met modern Indigenous people whose modernity was not to be preserved because 'Indians' having contact with whites were contaminated and ignoble. It is interesting to note that he wanted to preserve Indigenous knowledge but not necessarily Indigenous people. Our disappearance was considered inevitable, but our knowledge had a use-value for the 'new' nations to come. In the general introduction to his life-long project, *The North American Indian*, Curtis argues:

The passing of every old man or woman means the passing of some tradition, some knowledge of sacred rites possessed by no other: consequently the information that is to be gathered, for the benefit of future generations, respecting the mode of life of one of the great races of mankind, must be collected at once or the opportunity will be lost for all time. It is this need that has inspired the present task.

(Curtis 1907–1930: xvii).

Curtis's understanding of time as a linear process with a teleological end—the white man and his progress—means he must argue that the collection of information for future generations is critical.

Curtis made extensive notes on the ceremonies, dress and architecture of the Indigenous nations he photographed. Ceremony as an aspect of governance systems, political practices and economic structures challenged the authority of the new colonial society to govern or make decisions *for* Indigenous people. In articulating the vanishing Indian, Curtis's imaginary played a significant role in showing how important it was to expand and settle westward into supposedly emptying spaces. This narrative of disappearance covered the reality of colonial policy that forced Indigenous Peoples onto reservations, sent children to residential schools

and banned Indigenous ceremonies. All three disciplinary measures were part of a larger colonial policy of assimilation whereby all 'Indians' were 'civilizable' in so far as they rid themselves of their cultures and languages.

By ignoring the policies of assimilation in the communities he visited, Curtis played an active part in constructing the discourse on the authentic Indian. His photos and film become how-to manuals rather than recording devices. This becomes particularly important in the conception of film (discussed later in this chapter). Curtis saw his work as a reconstruction because contact had already 'changed' the 'primitive.' The discourse on authenticity necessitates an ahistorical conceptualization of Indigenous cultures, an unchanging nature, a timeless, or, more accurately, a frozen concept of the time of the Indigenous. Curtis states: 'These pictures were to be transcriptions for future generations that they might behold the Indian as nearly lifelike as possible as he moved about before he ever saw a paleface or knew there was anything human or in nature other than what he himself had seen' (Boesen and Graybill 1986: 13).

The removal of signs of contact also meant the removal of any sign of colonial violence, thereby converting possible guilt into nostalgia. The nostalgia for the lost origins of man is a symptom of the displaced guilt over the destruction of 'primitive' cultures and, by association, the destruction wrought by colonialism, industrialization and urbanization. It marks authentic culture as 'created' at precisely the moment it was said to be vanishing. The nobility of the Indians and the tragedy of their passing created an intrinsically aesthetic and scientific generated 'subject' (read object) for photography and film. Lost in the construction of the authentic Indian was Indigenous subjectivity and the capacity for Indigenous Peoples to represent themselves. Missing also were the processes of violence making artifacts available for salvage.

Constant in all discursive constructions of the Noble Savage or the alterity of Indigenous Peoples in colonial discourse or in the salvage paradigm of ethnology is a systematic appropriation of their cultures, bodies and territories as *objects* of study. Ronald Hawker argues: 'Since colonized societies and the objects they produced were necessarily destroyed by the process of colonization, it was the duty of those at the forefront of modernity's intrusion into the societies of the "less advanced" to vigorously record what colonialism displaced' (Hawker 2003: 26). In short, modern nostalgia for the past was monitored and released through the construction of a record of the colonial 'other' and the 'facts' of its culture.

### **Cinema as a technology of salvage ethnography**

Simply stated, Curtis's film *In the Land of the Head Hunters* illustrates attempts to contain Kwakwaka'wakw communities and their cultural expression. For one thing, the communities are restricted by the conventions of the silent film era; for another, they are rendered visible but temporally distanced and confined within the structures of a primordial past and primitivized in a narrative of war and cannibalism. Finally, the film is structurally limited by the salvage paradigm of representation.

Film inherited from photography the notion of indexicality: because the camera is really there objectively recording what's in front of it, the film is imprinted with reality. Photos and films under this model become a captured real that can be used to reconstruct reality. Yet *In the Land of the Head Hunters* is obviously an interpretation of its maker, a perspective and a frame. The text as document or testament to a past must be conceived as an assemblage with particular effects, not a reproduction of reality, thus problematizing facile notions of the archive's use for resurrecting the past.

By 1911, Hollywood cinema was producing the first wave of Westerns. A demand for representations of 'real' Indians resulted (Gidley 2000: 237; Holm and Quimby 1980: 32). An editorial in *Moving Picture World* on March 4, 1911, says: 'It is hoped that some of our Western manufacturers will yet produce a series of films of REAL Indian life, doing so with the distinct object in view that they are to be of educational value, both for present and future use' (Gidley 2000: 238). This demand for 'real' Indian life influenced Curtis; for promoters/funders of his work, it was considered important for education and national interest. For example, Dr. Walcott of the Smithsonian Institute supported Curtis's film for its recording of the facts of Indian life: 'that part of their life that has passed, is so important to education' (Gidley 2000: 238). When the film screened in Seattle at Moore Theatre in December 1914, the handbill stated: 'Every participant an Indian and Every Incident True To Native Life' (Gidley 2000: 251). *In The Land of The Head Hunters*, completed in 1914, was advertised as an ethnographic film structured around a dramatic narrative of love and war.

The film is set on Vancouver Island in 1792 with a romantic plot loosely based on Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and Longfellow's *The Song of Hiawatha* (Gidley 2000: 232). It focuses on a young Kwakwaka'wakw male, Motana, played by Stanley Hunt, who battles the natural and supernatural throughout. A love triangle centers on Motana's love for Naida, a woman from another village, promised to Yaklus. Naida marries Motana anyway. Yaklus's brother is a sorcerer who attempts to have Motana killed but is murdered by Motana's family instead. Yaklus murders others in revenge and kidnaps Naida. Motana rescues her, and the film closes with Yaklus swallowed by immense rapids.

The film recycles 'signs' of the primitive of the time. It opens with a Kwakwaka'wakw man dressed as a feathered animal standing in a massive canoe and closes with a Kwakwaka'wakw man disappearing into a massive body of water in an ultimately empty landscape. The film contains headhunting, warfare, discipline, loyalty, vision questing, sorcery, beauty and nobility – signs of the contradictory noble and ignoble savage (Pearce 1965).

Curtis uses ethnographic historical reconstruction, a kind of bringing the dead to life, but the reconstruction takes place within a melodramatic framework, a narrative allegory whose structure is one of conflict and closure. The romantic vision of 'Indians' in the film contains no ethnographic narration to explain what is taking place on screen (Geertz 1996). Curtis avoids any frontal placement of the camera, preferring to shoot from side profiles or actors' backs. This gives spectators the sense of happening upon a spontaneous event. The shots are always

medium or long. Characters have no depth, and the narrative is naturalized. The Kwakwaka'wakw stand for all vanishing peoples, and for all authentic displays of ceremony, simply through the camera placements.

Rather than examining the colonial narrative of the vanishing Indian, then, the film mimics and reaffirms it. Johannes Fabian writes: 'The Other's empirical presence turns into his theoretical absence, a conjuring trick which is worked with the help of an array of devices that have the common intent and function to keep the Other outside the Time of anthropology' (Fabian 1983: xi). The act of preserving a culture disengages contemporary culture from the process of being *in* time. The salvaged objects are ruptured from their social contexts, dehistoricized, objectified and reworked within Western meanings. The film places 'primitive' people within the same space as the West but in a different time; this distances the West from the 'primitive' by constructing the latter as visual proof of an earlier stage of development.

Seeking authenticity, Curtis relied on Tlingit/Scottish informant George Hunt to construct a 1792 Kwakwaka'wakw village. Hunt was the primary informant on the Kwakwaka'wakw in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Cannizzo 1983) and had worked for anthropologist Franz Boas as a photographer and informant. He gave a sense of authenticity to any project. In this case, he hired the cast and artists and served as cultural advisor. However, he ultimately criticized Curtis for focusing on spectacle over cultural context and failing to present the Kwakwaka'wakw views on the rituals and ceremonies depicted (Griffiths 2013: 247–248).

The set for *The Head Hunters*, according to Aldona Jonaitis, had a life of its own. The village house fronts were made by the Kwakwaka'wakw, with two interior posts made by famous Kwakwaka'wakw artist Charlie James (1870–1938). The wings on the house posts were made to be interchangeable to represent different family crests without building new sets. The posts eventually became part of Stanley Park in Vancouver. The communities of Alert Bay, Fort Rupert, Kingcome Inlet and others made cedar bark clothing and large cedar bark canoes. Hunt hired actors, costume designers, mask carvers, totem pole carvers, canoe builders and painters (Jonaitis 2006: 205–206). Curtis used the totem poles as inspiring backdrops rather than explanations of cultural difference. A ledger containing Curtis's expenses during the shoot lists over twenty-one masks, new and old. He paid for six large canoes, the largest being fifty feet long, adorned with elaborate carvings such as horned serpents (Holm & Quimby 1980: 52–55).

The truth value of the film as an ethnographic text nullified the subjectivity of the actors and collaborators within the film. At the time, W. Stephen Bush said:

The Indian mind is, I believe, constitutionally incapable of acting; it cannot even grasp the meaning of acting as we understand it. Probably nobody understands this better than Mr. Curtis. The picture speaks volumes of the producers' intimacy with the Indians and his great power over them. They are natural in every move; the grace, the weirdness and the humor of their dances has never been brought home to us like this before.

(Griffiths 2013: 242)

The illusion of naturalness was furthered by the removal of all signs of modernity, but this created a paradox: ‘By giving more attention to topics such as war, romance, and ceremony at the expense of everyday images . . . his film did breathe life into the iconography of Kwakwaka’wakw culture as a result of his decision to commission members of the tribe to construct ornate building facades, totem poles, masks, and costumes’ (ibid: 239).

A bigger irony is the temporality of imagination. Emptying Kwakwaka’wakw of its modern everyday life while using members of the tribe to construct their own no-longer-practiced past turns this into an act of ‘forgetting’ the contestation around the temporality of memory. The fact that the Kwakwaka’wakw form both audience and collaborators forces the film to contend with a whole new set of relations and meanings. The film can be taken up as a reminder of past traditions; for example, the large cedar bark canoes made for the set had not been used for at least a decade. The totems and house front commissioned by Curtis and contracted by Hunt allowed the community time and resources. In other words, they were paid to participate, to re-engage older, out-of-use practices. The film serves as a community document of such practices. Gloria Cranmer Webster, an influential Kwakwaka’wakw curator at the U’mista Cultural Society in Alert Bay, says the vision of those canoes in the water was enough reason to be involved in the film; the rest she calls ‘hokey’ (Russell 1999: 113). According to Jonaitis, ‘The Kwakwaka’wakw found the project important for themselves, for the entire production allowed them to experience if only temporarily and on film, their ancestors’ way of life’ (Jonaitis 2006: 205).

### **Agency and self-representation**

Curtis worked for four years among the Kwakwaka’wakw, producing one film and volume 10 of *The North American Indian*. As Anne Makepeace points out, he was influenced by the writings on the Kwakwaka’wakw by Franz Boas, one of the main interpreters of the meaning of Kwakwaka’wakw art (Makepeace 2002: 118). Brad Evans and Aaron Glass say by the time Curtis arrived, the Kwakwaka’wakw had well-cemented ways of addressing, resisting and using for their benefit the colonial desire to collect and understand their culture. The colonial desire to collect came ‘even as settlers, missionaries, and government agents were committed to eradicating those same elements’ (Evans and Glass 2014: 14–15). According to Catherine Russell, the mere fact that the Indigenous actors understand themselves to be performing constitutes a resistance to contemporary readings of the film:

Instead of a ‘photoplay,’ [Indigenous] audiences may well see a documentary of their performance in a white man’s movie. The film constitutes a living memory of both traditional practices and the colonial containment activated by the rigorous framing and ‘photoplay’ conventions.

(Russell 1999: 112)

Indigenous Peoples performing their cultural practices for international and colonial audiences represent an important part of cinema history generally and ethnographic film specifically. But Indigenous performers known as ‘Indians’ faced the conundrum of maintaining their cultural practices by performing them on stage while having that performance fulfill the desires of a subjugating colonial imagery.

The colonial period of captivity, when Indigenous people were displayed as curiosities and captives, begins the history. From the 1850s to the 1920s, Canada and the United States were constructing identities via discourses of manifest destiny and the separation of savagery from civilization. Manifest destiny is an ideology whereby settlers, artists and governments see Indigenous Peoples as destined to disappear; westward colonial expansion is inevitable and civilization always displaces savagery. Entertainment helped disseminate colonial ideologies. This included world fairs and exhibitions of colonized peoples. The steamship and the railway allowed more extensive trade routes, which the exhibitions used to move peoples from the periphery to the centers of imperial power in Britain, France and Germany. The imperial centers were shown a world where savagery was inside an exhibition and had nothing to do with their own history. Indigenous Peoples were exhibited as exotic, almost disappeared examples of primitive man. The shows helped Europeans imagine Indigenous Peoples as belonging before or outside modernity and urbanization. They were often exhibited alongside technological innovations, further reinforcing the Western man as the innovator, destined for progress. The exhibitions were also used to disseminate racism, whereby another people’s inferiority could be scientifically verified by types of bodies and dress (Maxwell 1999).

By the 1880s, the shows shifted direction, traveling through the colonies. In the colonies, it was much harder to keep the hybridity of the colonial world at bay. The fact that people had been intermarrying for over two hundred years was elided by the display of ‘savagery’ in the exhibitions. The exhibitions also allowed a dehumanization of Indigenous Peoples to help justify colonial expansion (at that time westward).

Cinema inherited this history and became an effective means of dissemination. The presence of Indigenous people in front of and behind the cameras of early cinema complicates this story. Self-representation is emblematic of the cultural moment in which Indigenous modernity seems ‘unexpected.’ Historian Philip Deloria points out the work of Indigenous director James Young Deer – ‘an ambiguous figure, with a shape-shifter’s identity and a hazy history’ – and Lillian St. Cyr, a Ho-Chunk Indian who performed under the name Princess Red Wing (Deloria 2004: 94). For a time in the 1910s, Young Deer was the head of a small studio, and Red Wing was one of the most visible actresses on the screen. Together, the married couple made a series of films that ‘set out to rewrite the white man-Indian narrative structure, using inversions that allowed the films to continue functioning as domestic melodramas’ (Deloria 2004: 97). Deloria carefully situates their films in the context of early film history to show how skilfully Young Deer and Red Wing altered the plots of miscegenation, frontier violence and assimilation. Michelle H. Raheja, in *Reservation Reelism*, maintains Young



Deer and Red Wing were equal to Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks in popularity and power. Young Deer directed for Kalem, Lubin, Biograph, Bison and Vitagraph and was Pathé Frères East Coast studio director in 1910 (Raheja 2013: 24–25). Yet they are not canonized in the same way, and no reviews or articles on *Head Hunters* mention them. They are not the only ones; hundreds of such actors worked in film during the silent era.

Young Deer's film *White Fawn's Devotion* (1910) is about miscegenation; the main family consists of a white father, an Indigenous mother and their daughter. Raheja notes: 'The film is unique in the history of visual images of miscegenation because it does not pathologize the mixed race heteronormative union' (2013: 66). The film also shows how Indigenous families are comfortable in both the urban spaces of modernity and the bastion of cultural renewal, the reservation.

The erasure of these films as Indigenous allows the ethnographic imaginary to define Indigenous cultures. By shifting the focus to the actors and directors, we glimpse the complicated negotiation of contact and the participation of Indigenous people in *shaping* modernity. Cinema as a technology of modernity became a central site for constructing the 'primitive.'<sup>1</sup> But Indigenous peoples are also subjects who negotiate the colonial imaginary and perform modern differently because the dichotomy of primitive and modern is not part of their identity formation or, at least, is always in question and highly visible. Ironically, the performances that perpetuated stereotypes of 'savage Indians' and 'princesses' allowed the maintenance of traditional but banned Indigenous cultural dances and practices. They used the performance of a colonial imaginary to find physical, economic and cultural mobility at the height of colonial material expansion. In the end, while *Head Hunters* opens up the question of Indigenous performers, it cannot be seen as an Indigenously produced film and belongs to ethnographic film history.

### **Reconstructed *Head Hunters*?**

The film did not do well at the box office and would have remained obscure if Bill Holm and George Quimby had not resuscitated it in 1973, renaming it *In The Land of The War Canoes* to remove the obvious racism of its original title (Holm and Quimby 1973). Holm and Quimby worked with the descendants of the original actors to reconstruct the film using the rituals and cultural practices as centerpieces to its new organization. They used the voices of the actors and their descendants, provided more cultural context for the cultural practices and worked with the Kwakwaka'wakw to construct a soundtrack based on cultural songs and music. Pauline Wakeham says:

By reframing Curtis's images in the context of ethnographic documentary, the 1973 version attempts to recuperate the original 1914 film as a valuable document of authentic Kwakiutl [sic] lifeways, thereby overwriting the fact that Curtis's footage is a highly manipulated Euro-American construction of otherness.

(2006: 303)

In trying to regain objectivity, the reconstruction turns to the community for some semblance of truth. But the reconstruction, possibly reflecting its time, ignores the visuality of the film as always already offering truth to a spectator raised without any knowledge of Indigenous Peoples. The value of Indigeneity remains beholden to its supposedly more authentic pre-contact past. Again, the performers *as* performers are lost. The act of preserving a culture removes the Kwakwaka'wakw from modern temporality; the preserved remainders are valued only insofar as they are symbols of the distant past. The salvaged objects are torn from their social contexts, dehistoricized, objectified and reworked within Western meanings.

Holm and Quimby are part of this process, but their return to the culture for verification of the objects' veracity was thought to return the 'Indian' to time. In *Woman, Native, Other*, Trinh T. Minh-ha cautions, 'One cannot seize without smothering, for the will to freeze (capture) brings about a frozen (emptied) object' (Trinh 1989: 61). In *The Land of the War Canoes* froze Kwakwaka'wakw culture in 1792 for many museum displays, including as a permanent exhibition at the Royal British Columbia Museum.

The latest reconstruction is by Aaron Glass, an anthropologist trained at the University of British Columbia whose main fieldwork has been in the Kwakwaka'wakw community in Alert Bay, and Brad Evans, associate professor of English at Rutgers University. Each had made breakthroughs in archival research that allowed them to reconstruct *Head Hunters* with its original musical score, inter-titles and newly discovered scenes. The reconstruction is incomplete because some scenes are lost, but in a radical move, they add production stills so the score can be heard in its entirety and the original narrative structure experienced. Like Holms and Quimby, they worked closely with Kwakwaka'wakw communities. Each screening includes live performances and commentary from the Gwa'wina Dancers considered the best at representing the songs and dances that continue to play a big part of contemporary Kwakwaka'wakw communities. The dancers give context to the film by providing stories of the experience of modernity, assimilation policies and colonization.

Two criticisms of the Holm and Quimby version and the original Curtis versions are rectified: the characters are attributed to the original Kwakwaka'wakw who played the roles, and the film is given cultural context from a Kwakwaka'wakw point of view and academic/institutional context in symposia accompanying screenings. The writing produced for the film highlights the politics of the time, specifically the banning of Indigenous ceremonies and practices. Glass and Evans argue this must have influenced Kwakwaka'wakw participation: they could partake in banned practices for the camera. They also say the 'ethnographic' truth value of the film is unimportant and the film as collaboration is not just a reconstruction of the vanishing Indian:

The film was a joint project from the beginning, a meeting of Edward Curtis and the Kwakwaka'wakw in the shared enterprise of making a motion picture. As such, *Head Hunters* not only throws new light on the development of the motion picture industry. It also documents the extensive and

complex engagement of the Kwakwaka'wakw – and by implication other First Nations – with the most modern of twentieth-century representational forms: the movies.

(Glass, Evans and Sanborn 2015)

For Evans and Glass, *Head Hunters* has documentary aspects in its reconstruction and use of pre-contact Kwakwaka'wakw culture, including 'the handling of the magnificent canoes, the staging of dramatic ceremonials, the reconstructed dress and architecture of daily life in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries' (Evans and Glass 2014: 12). Kwakwaka'wakw ceremonies are dramatic and well suited for filmmaking. Even so:

The very fact that *Head Hunters* was made at all, not to mention that its production involved the self-conscious performance of indigenous past-ness, is an index of an emergent Native modernity at the time, regardless of the fact that its pictorial and narrative content—its staged ethnographic fantasy—erased the visible signs of modern life in the early twentieth century.

(Evans and Glass 2014: 13)

Their intervention accounts for the entanglements of Curtis with the community and shows the latter to have been active participants in the formation of the film's history and the history of film.

The film is not just a colonial document; it also belongs to the history of the Kwakwaka'wakw. It engages multiple histories: one is the Kwakwaka'wakw; another is the history of desire for authentic 'Indians.' Griffiths summarizes: 'Like the operators of natural history museums and world's fair attractions, early commercial filmmakers invited audience members to take up the role of virtual ethnographers' (Griffiths 2013: 172).

Dance and ceremony have always had a privileged spot in the colonial desire to consume the 'other's' difference: 'Because of its kineticism and visual appeal, dance offered a raw, almost tactile representation of 'Indianness' for many turn of the century spectators' (Griffiths 2013: 177). While the film's production may have been collaborative, its spectators had developed a well-honed language for consuming Indigenous alterity, especially through performance, ceremony and dance within a neo-colonial context. This continues today. The context of cultural continuity for traditional art forms whereby they are re-conceived as not past but present, such as the Gwa'wina Dancers' stage performances, does not negate spectators' expectations of Indigenous authenticity as contained within ceremony and dance.

Anne Makepeace's documentary *Coming to Light: Edward S. Curtis and the North American Indians* showcases her research among Indigenous Peoples photographed by Curtis (Makepeace 2000). She wanted to see what they would say about Curtis. In her section on filming *In the Land of the Head Hunters*, the laughter and antics of the cast and crew at Curtis's expense are beautiful moments of agency. For example, Curtis was trying to get a shot of the fifty-foot canoes

coming toward him. He wanted them to paddle to the right, but no one listened. He yelled at them to paddle right, and they did, but one man's boat crashed into a rock. The actors laughed long enough for Curtis to throw the reel of film in the water. Their knowledge of the waterways outweighed his knowledge of shot composition, but they did follow his orders, showing him to be a fool. The cast is said to have had fun on the shoot. Getting paid to perform in lean times and being able to dance and wear ceremonial dress were welcomed.

*Shooting Indians: A Journey with Jeff Thomas*, a documentary by Ali Kazimi, corroborates this assessment in interviews with the actress who played Naida (Kazimi 1997). It is striking how well the Kwakwaka'wakw could navigate and use to their advantage the trope of the vanishing Indian. Instead of saying it is a collaboration, I argue it is a discursive field; the Kwakwaka'wakw were sophisticated and strategic in harnessing the cultural, economic or political for their own purposes. The need to reinforce that 'Indians' do not have to choose between pre-contact culture and contemporary culture, or to say they were part of modernity or are modern, is a sign of continued acceptance of Western ideas of progress and time. If Curtis was not the reference point, but we had focused on a Kwakwaka'wakw artist's work, we would be able to speak to Indigenous conceptions of geological and circular time, as well as culture as something that continually changes.

From the Kwakwaka'wakw performers' point of view, the fact that the actors are their family members introduces time into a static stereotypic image; they are allowed to exist in time, not outside it in some primordial past. The film exists as both colonial self-realization and Indigenous community history. Even as community history, only one aspect of the community is documented and deemed valuable for salvage, however, and Kazimi (1997) elicits a story from Gloria Cranmer Webster about her uncle, who was unable to participate in Curtis's film because he failed to look like the Indian of Curtis's imaginary.

## Conclusions

In this chapter, I have not used the 'real' to critique representation. Rather, different histories, including Curtis and the Kwakwaka'wakw performers, nineteenth-century ethnography and popular culture and twenty-first-century Kwakwaka'wakw communities, become part of a longer neo-colonial discursive formation. But how are some of these histories legitimated while others are silenced or erased? There is authority and power in what is allowed to be said, filmed or written for any time period. The legitimacy of certain knowledges and histories is always a site of conflict within the colonial situation and implies a delegitimization of other forms of knowledge. Today, Indigenous artists are accepted as artists in the mainstream art world, yet there is still much negotiating of how they are seen by non-Indigenous peoples. Marianne Nicolson, a contemporary Kwakwaka'wakw artist, speaks to the necessity of maintaining complexity:

I engage in the exploration of traditional concepts and incorporate contemporary media into the visual presentation of these concepts. While I consider

that the material component of Northwest Coast cultural production is well represented in museums and commercial galleries, I fear that the conceptual foundations of this work are endangered owing to radical acculturation and language loss.

(Nicolson 2015)

For Nicolson, what is ‘endangered’ is located in the silences and absences of legitimate institutional spaces that her work makes present. She wants to maintain the complexity of Indigenous philosophies and practices to avoid the creation of stereotypes or clichés.

We make choices about what cultural practices to continue, but the colonial imaginary interferes with our sovereignty in making those choices. *In the Land of the Head Hunters* illustrates how an art object as an artifact of culture or an archival document is more than one object; it takes on different meanings and serves different interests depending on how it becomes assembled and appropriated. It illustrates the ways knowledge of an art practice or cultural form, down to its most basic description, is and should be contested in meaning.

That a colonial archive like ‘Curtis’ – the man, his products and the events spun from them – is recuperated as *Indigenous* history by some communities does not alter other histories of contemporary neo-colonial and capitalist projects. The film still participates in the commodification of all things Indigenous; it is a cultural storehouse for the ills of modernity and postmodernity. The desire for the ‘primitive’ is alive and well, and the inclusion of Indigenous voices in the film may not be enough; we may also need an accompanying critique of the commodity fetish that is the ‘performing Indian,’ alive, dying or resurrected. Anthropological collaborations may require a concomitant understanding of the diversity of any Kwakwaka’wakw community and a critique of the roles of informants.

Nicolson highlights my anxiety about how we reread the colonial archive by asking *what* differences make a difference (2015). In focusing on conceptualization as a way of returning depth to cultural difference, she questions how our differences have been framed by museums and art galleries, filmmakers and photographers, anthropologists and ethnographers. If the object itself or its record does not hold a definite truth within itself, as I suggest with Curtis, we cannot ask the object to hold a definitive truth about our cultural past. Yet the multitude of engagements communities are making with institutions and our institutionalization of ourselves with our own museology is not simply nostalgia for a lost authenticity. In the conceptualizations by artists like Nicolson or the Gwa’wina Dancers, we are not saying the same things as the colonial archive even though we use the same words. Cultures, even across the same language, are undergoing a process of translation and, therefore, a process of dispersion, deferral and dissemination.

Even a single space can evoke or carry different memories and, it *isn’t the same space* for everyone. For the Kwakwaka’wakw, the film enacts the cultural imaginary of their ancestors, for Hunt’s descendants the film is a home movie, for Curtis it is the primordial past, for Holm it was an ethnographic truth and for

Glass it is a space of collaboration and rethinking modernity. Meanwhile, the Kwakwaka'wakw nations keep living, dancing and being Kwakwaka'wakw in their own lands, something excluded from Curtis's vision.

## Note

- 1 D.W. Griffith made at least eighteen films featuring Indians played by white actors. See Eileen Bowser (1990, 173–177). See also the Library of Congress Paper and Print Collections for a plot description of Indian pictures.

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