The Kwakwə̕ka’wakw Potlatch Collection and its Many Social Contexts: Constructing a Collection’s Object Biography

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Masters of Museum Studies
Faculty of Information
University of Toronto

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Abstract

In 1921, the Canadian government confiscated over 400 pieces of Kwakwaka’wakw potlatch regalia and placed it in three large museums. In 1967 the Kwakwaka’wakw initiated a long process of repatriation resulting in the majority of the collection returning to two Kwakwaka’wakw cultural centres over the last four decades. Through the theoretical framework of object biography and using the museum register as a tool to reconstruct the lives of the potlatch regalia, this thesis explores the multiple paths, diversions and oscillations between objecthood and subjecthood that the collection has undergone. This thesis constructs an exhibition history for the regalia, examines processes of institutional forgetting, and adds multiple layers of meaning to the collection’s biography by attending to the post-repatriation life of the objects. By revisiting this pivotal Canadian case, diversions are emphasized as important moments in the creation of subjecthood and objecthood for museum objects.
Acknowledgments

First and foremost I would like to thank Sarah Holland, who introduced me to this collection in her UVIC museum studies class in 2010, continued to encourage me over the years, and who invited me into her home in Alert Bay for what would be a life-changing experience. To Juanita Johnston for her archival research and patience in answering my never-ending questions. To Trevor Isaac whose passion for practicing and sharing his art and culture is truly inspirational.

This thesis would not have been possible without the continued support of my supervisor Dr. Cara Krmpotich who has helped me navigate this complex history and always been a constant source of advice, encouragement, and inspiration. I would also like to thank Dr. Lena Mortensen for her thought-provoking comments, and Dr. Aldona Jonaitis for her invaluable contributions.

My many thanks go to the archivists and museum staff members at the following institutions for their help with finding archival information used in this thesis:

Jonathan Wise, Reference Archivist, Library, Archives and Documentation Services, Canadian Museum of Civilization
Sandra Parrish, Associate Director/ Collections Manager, Museum at Campbell River
Tricia Walker, Manager, Registration Department, Royal Ontario Museum
Angela Raljic, Database Technician, World Cultures, Royal Ontario Museum
Nadja Roby, Head, Liaison and Research, Ethnology Collection, Canadian Museum of Civilization
Kelly Cameron, Senior Collections Analyst, Ethnology, Canadian Museum of Civilization
Kelly-Ann Turkington, Permissions/Licensing Officer, Royal British Columbia Museum
Stephanie Alder, Archives and Records Manager, Central Archive, The British Museum
Jennifer Longon, Archives and Research Library, New Brunswick Museum
Kenlyn Collins, Librarian, Winnipeg Art Gallery
Becky Boughner, Curatorial Assistant, Museum London
Erica Douglas, Intern, Art Gallery of Windsor
Wendy Gomoll, Acting Archives Technician, Art Gallery of Ontario
Sean Weaver, Photographer, Art Gallery of Ontario
Jessica Stewart, Library Assistant, National Gallery of Canada
Michael William, Library, National Gallery of Canada
Betty Murphy, Assistant Librarian, Billie Jane Baguley Library and Archives, Heard Museum, Phoenix, Arizona
Debbie Lindsay, CBC Digital Archives
Linda Cobon, Manager, Records and Archives, Exhibition Place, Toronto.
Christine Schindler, Archives Coordinator, Stratford Festival
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“A mask is history in object form.”
- Trevor Isaac, Collections and Education Assistant, U’mista Cultural Centre

Introduction

This thesis examines the life history of what has become known as the potlatch collection, a collection of Kwakw’kawakw ceremonial regalia that was the subject of the first major repatriation of First Nations material heritage from Canadian museums. By using archival materials to explore the object biography of this collection, the life history developed through this research reveals moments in which the collection’s objecthood and subjecthood are illuminated through diversions, or moments of crisis and creativity, which alter an object’s path. Tracing the collection’s biography from its confiscation by the Canadian government in 1921 when it became a collection, to its contemporary significance in two Kwakw’kawakw cultural centres in Alert Bay and Cape Mudge, British Columbia, allows us to understand the diverse and often contested meanings of objects as they move through time and space.

The Kwakw’kawakw: Those who speak Kwak’wala

Kwakw’kawakw refers to the group of First Nations who speak the language Kwak’wala. Within the Kwakw’kawakw, seventeen nations inhabit territory on northeastern Vancouver Island, the adjacent mainland and the islands in between (Isaac 36, 2011). The Kwakw’kawakw are one of the most highly studied groups of First Nations in North America with many anthropologists, including those employed by museums, conducting intensive studies of Kwakw’kawakw culture and society. Collectors from European and North American museums visited Kwakw’kawakw territory extensively in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century to collect ceremonial regalia, totem poles, tools, and clothing as well as record languages and photograph the Kwakw’kawakw people. This scramble to collect the material
culture of the Kwakẉa’wakw and all Northwest Coast First Nations was motivated by the belief that First Nations people were disappearing, soon to be gone forever. Franz Boas’ specific focus on Kwakẉa’wakw culture and explanation of secret societies, rituals, and cultural beliefs no doubt also contributed to museums actively collecting Kwakẉa’wakw objects. Museums and their staff took it upon themselves to preserve evidence of these disappearing people in their museums, and there was stiff competition between museum collectors to create the most comprehensive collection in their museum (Cole 1995). Epidemics of disease introduced by settlers, combined with processes of assimilation enforced by missionaries and Canadian federal laws, resulted in a population decline and the loss of many forms of First Nations cultural expression. Kwak’wala language was forbidden, children were taken from their families to be “civilized” in residential schools, men and women went to work in canneries and fisheries, and the potlatch was prohibited in 1884 under Section 149 of the Indian Act. The potlatch was banned by the Department of Indian Affairs as it was thought to be an obstacle in the “civilizing” of First Nations. To Euro-Canadians, the redistribution of wealth to others was the antithesis of a capitalist agenda. Potlatches were seen as a waste of resources materially and financially while they also removed a large amount of the workforce from canneries and fisheries during the winter months.

The Kwakẉa’wakw continued to potlatch in secret, limited forms to avoid detection from the Indian Agents. Many ceremonies were forgotten but the Kwakẉa’wakw continued to use potlatches to mourn the dead, transfer titles and privileges, name children and hold marriage ceremonies (Webster 1992, 34). Many artists such as Willie Seaweed and Mungo Martin continued to produce their art throughout this time. In 1951 the potlatch ban was deleted from the Indian Act and the Kwakẉa’wakw and other First Nations on the west coast underwent what is referred to as a “renaissance” of art and culture (Jacknis 2002). Cultural revitalization programs such as language classes, carving programs, and dance groups were established throughout the next fifty years (Jacknis 2002). When I visited Alert Bay, the home of the ’Namgis Nation, I found it to be full of art and celebration. Alert Bay is a community rich in history and culture with a strong sense of community and family. Cultural revival has long been a part of Alert Bay’s history as it has been home to some significant leaders who have ensured their culture is preserved. After suffering from extensive political, economic, and cultural
oppression, cultural continuity continues to be a central and vital part of ‘Namgis identity. From my experience I found that the people that live there are dedicated to ensuring their songs, stories, dances, art and ceremonies are revived and passed down to future generations.

First Nation’s material culture arrived in museums through a variety of avenues, moral and immoral, legal and illegal. A history of museum collecting on the Northwest Coast (see Cole 1985) covers collecting practices from commissions to grave-robbing. The potlatch collection, however, was unique because it was confiscated under Section 149 of the Indian Act, which made potlatching a criminal offence in 1884. In 1921, ‘Namgis Chief Dan Cranmer held a potlatch on Village Island, a remote island off the east coast of Vancouver Island, British Columbia. Hundreds of people attended the potlatch and thousands of dollars of goods were given as gifts to them for witnessing the event (the practice of potlatching is discussed further in chapter 2). Unbeknownst to the participants, Indian Agent, William Halliday and RCMP Sergeant Donald Angermann had informants at the potlatch who immediately reported the proceedings to Agent Halliday and the RCMP. Forty-five people were arrested and charged with acts such as singing, dancing, and giving gifts. Halliday and Angermann made an agreement with those charged that they would suspend the charges if they and their families surrendered their potlatch regalia. The ‘Namgis, Mamalilikala and Weka’yi tribes (now Nations) agreed, surrendering their regalia which numbered approximately 450 pieces. Some individuals refused and were sent to Oakalla Prison Farm for between two and six months. These tribes’ property became known as the potlatch collection after it was sent to the Victoria Memorial Museum (now the Canadian Museum of Civilization), the Royal Ontario Museum and the Museum of the American Indian (now National Museum of American Indian). There the collection stayed until 1979 when the CMC repatriated their portion of the collection to Kwakwaka’wakw territory to be placed in the Kwagiulth Museum (opened 1979) and U’mista Cultural Centre (opened 1980). In 1988 the Royal Ontario Museum followed suit, repatriating their portion of the collection, and in 1993 and 2002 the National Museum of the American Indian.

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1 Weka’yi, or We Wai Kai, refers to the Kwakwaka’wakw band which lives at Cape Mudge on Quadra Island. Ligwilda’xw, Laich-kwil-tach, or Lekwiltok has been used in previous publications to refer to this band, but the term Ligwilda’xw, Laich-kwil-tach, or Lekwiltok is a collective term that is used to refer to the bands which reside in Cape Mudge, Campbell River, and the Discovery islands area.
Indian returned their portion to the Kwakwaka’wakw. The collection is now housed in the two cultural centres operated by the ‘Namgis and We’ka’yi of Cape Mudge themselves.

This repatriation has been written about extensively in the past both by the Kwakwaka’wakw themselves and within academia. Previous research from non-Kwakwaka’wakw academics has focused on the historical and legal characteristics of the collection’s confiscation (Cole and Chaikin 1990; Cole 1991, 1995; ), the repatriation negotiations with the CMC and the ROM as a landmark event that set a Canadian precedent (Cole 1995; Jacknis 2000, 2002), the initial impact of the repatriation on the Kwakwaka’wakw, and the physical display and interpretation of the collection in the two cultural centres (Clifford 1991; Saunders 1995; Mauze 2003). Kwakwaka’wakw academics and community members have focused on the importance of the repatriation as a sense of justice, healing, knowledge repatriation and cultural continuity (Webster 1988, 1991, 1992, 1995; Bell et.al 2008; Sanborn 2009). Still, there are substantial gaps in this published history, such as the period between confiscation and repatriation, and an understanding of the repatriation from the perspective of the returning institutions. Exploring the period of time in which the collection was in museums will provide insight into the activity and agency of museum objects. Discussing repatriation from the perspective of returning museums after an extended period allows us to understand the professional and institutional conflicts that arise due to repatriation, as well as the impact repatriation has on collections, research, and exhibition potential. To address these gaps, I adopt an object biography approach to trace the changing roles of the potlatch collection from the moment of confiscation to the contemporary role the collection plays today. Understanding the collection through object biography allows us to comprehend the complex historical and cultural identities museum objects have the potential to carry. Throughout the life history, the collection’s identity is augmented by allowing it to develop multiple relationships with a wide variety of people, places and things.

By using object biography as a theoretical tool, I am able to resituate events in the collection’s life history as diversions, or turning points, which reveal moments of increased and decreased subjecthood and objecthood. Diversions, according to Appadurai are moments of crisis or creativity which change an object’s path, meaning its accepted physical, social and cultural trajectory (1986, 20). Object biography, which in the past has been used to explore the
life history of singular objects (see Seip 1999; Peers 1999), I use here to trace the history of a collection as a whole, essentially reframing the collection as an object. Exploring the period of time between the collection’s confiscation and repatriation reveals an extensive exhibition history in which parts of the collection have been exhibited in locations such as Hamburg, Paris, Ottawa, Montreal, Phoenix and within significant exhibitions such as the Seattle World’s Fair (1962) and Arts of the Raven (1967). This exhibition history also reveals that the collection’s specific history as regalia confiscated under the potlatch ban had largely been erased, ostensibly making the collection indistinguishable from other Kwakwaka’wakw material culture in museum collections. I propose that the erasure of the specific history of the collection was a result of a gradual process of institutional forgetting forged by the continuous translation and reproduction of associated information in the museum register. According to Swinney (2012), the museum register refers not only to the physical records of the collection (ie. accession records) but also to the information often stored in the individuals who have encountered an object or collection of objects. Once those individuals are no longer associated with the museum, through resignation, retirement or death, that information leaves with them. The potlatch collection suffered from this institutional forgetting to the point that when repatriation negotiations were initiated, some museum staff were not aware of its existence in their collection.

Repatriation, in the collection’s life history, plays an important but not definitive role. I situate the repatriation as a diversion which reunites the collection with its specific history and with its ability to form multiple meaningful relationships involving family histories, origin stories, ‘namimas (kin groups) and ceremonial contexts. The post-repatriation life of the collection in Kwakwaka’wakw territory fully demonstrates the extent to which museum objects throughout their biographies can accumulate, develop and maintain relationships across space and time. The potlatch collection is demonstrative of the often-damaging effect that the removal of material culture from First Nations communities and subsequent transferral into museums, in combination with other assimilationist practices of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, had on the cultural continuity of First Nations. While the Kwakwaka’wakw never stopped potlatching, parts of the potlatch collection are sadly missing relevant information. The contemporary role of the collection, however, forms an important part of Kwakwaka’wakw
cultural identity and continues to live on in familial and ceremonial contexts. The collection inhabits multiple social contexts at any one time to various degrees. An object in the collection may be an educational tool, a ceremonial object, a Kwakw̓a’wakw object, a museum object, an artistic object, a mnemonic device and a family treasure. Understanding the ways in which this collection has developed these social identities allows us to imagine the potential for museum objects to tell much richer, complex stories through the development of these partnerships.

**Methodology**

The museum register, according to Swinney includes not only the documents and textual practices associated with collections but also the actors and actants that have encountered collections in their pre-museum and museum life (2012). Following Swinney’s concept of the museum register, I examined archival documents and interviewed current museum staff to recreate the missing years of the collection’s biography and to understand institutional perspectives toward the collection. Archival materials expose how the collection was recorded and remembered by the institutions that it came into contact with throughout its life history. The main source of archival material was the Canadian Museum of Civilization Archives. The CMC and its earlier iterations has had the most prolonged relationship with the collection and the Kwakw̓a’wakw and, as a federal institution with a professional standard archive, they have the most detailed information on the confiscation and repatriation available. The range of archival documents consulted includes object lists, newspaper articles, correspondence, interdepartmental memorandums from the period of confiscation, repatriation and beyond. The catalogue records and loan documents for the collection held at the CMC were the initial source of information for developing the exhibition history presented in chapter three. I also engaged in archival research at the Royal Ontario Museum, however due to the nature of the ROM and their lack of a centralized archive, less information was found relating to the case. Archival material referenced from the ROM also included correspondence and memorandums from the period of confiscation and repatriation, as well as catalogue records and loan documents related to the exhibition history of the ROM’s portion of the collection. The remainder of information gathered for the exhibition history came from published exhibition catalogues or archival materials sought from the institutions that hosted the exhibitions.
The exhibition history I explore in this thesis only focuses on the parts of the collection held at the CMC and the ROM. The NMAI’s policy on researcher access to information on repatriated materials is such that in order to gain access to the archival material I was required to gain approval from the Kwakwaka’wakw. The Kwakwaka’wakw consists of seventeen separate nations so gaining approval from all seventeen nations was not possible within the time frame for this research project. This restricted access policy is a way of respecting the First Nations and Native American ownership of not only the repatriated artifact, but also all the information associated with that artifact. Exploring the exhibition history of the collection when it was held at the MAI (now NMAI) would be an interesting area of future research.

As an equally important data-gathering method, I was able to visit Alert Bay on Cormorant Island for a period of six days. During my time in Alert Bay, I stayed with Sarah Holland, Director of U’mista Cultural Centre.\(^2\) I spent time in the galleries, attended any events occurring at the Centre, helped with collections management tasks and engaged in situated semi-formal interviews with three staff members. Information gleaned from U’mista’s newsletters, annual reports, my observations and quotes from the interviews provided much of the material used to determine the ongoing contemporary role of the collection in Alert Bay. I was able to visit Cape Mudge, the location of the second cultural centre holding the potlatch collection briefly on the way back from Alert Bay. While there I was able to view the collection and also share my research findings with staff and Board members at Nuyumbalees Cultural Centre, however because of my prolonged connection with U’mista the majority of my discussion on the contemporary role of the collection stems from U’mista and Alert Bay. This research trip was an invaluable experience as I was able to physically see the collection and was better able to situate it in such a historically and culturally rich village. Not only did I learn more about the collection itself, but I was able to gain a better grasp of the role the collection and U’mista Cultural Centre plays for the ‘Namgis and the community of Alert Bay overall.

\(^2\) Sarah Holland is the first non-Kwakwaka’wakw Director of the U’Mista Cultural Centre and the first Director with formal museum training. It is important to U’Mista Cultural Centre that their staff consists of Kwakwaka’wakw people as a way of supporting their community. Sarah Holland was hired on a short-term basis to help develop U’Mista from a museological standpoint. This includes capacity building, staff training, fundraising, and building U’Mista’s image on an international scale.
Kwak'wala and Kwakw’ka’wakw Voice

Wherever possible throughout this thesis I have attempted to privilege the Kwak’wala terms and spelling describing material heritage and cultural practices. In some circumstances this has not been possible, most notably in Chapter three where some pieces of regalia are simply classed as ‘unknown mask’ or ‘bird mask’ for example. These are instances in which I do not have access to Nuyumbalees Cultural Centre catalogue records, and where I have had to rely on the descriptions of the masks in the archival exhibition-related material. Throughout my thesis, I have also included excerpts from several Kwak’wa’ka’wakw people’s biographies as a way to incorporate a Kwak’wa’ka’wakw perspective into this research. As a non-Kwak’wa’ka’wakw researcher, I have tried to take every opportunity to include a Kwak’wa’ka’wakw perspective, recognizing of course that these are individuals who do not necessarily represent a singular or unified Kwak’wa’ka’wakw perspective. Indeed, the Kwak’wa’ka’wakw are composed of seventeen independent nations with various degrees of attachment and familiarity with the potlatch collection.

In addition to quoted materials from interviews with U’mista staff, Kwakwa’ka’wakw voices can also be found in the archival materials as letter writers, negotiators, and museum visitors. The presence or absence of Kwakwa’ka’wakw voices within the museum register is an important component of the register itself and mark moments of crisis or diversions.

Analysis

I examined my textual materials for evidence of shifts in meaning through personal opinions expressed, ways in which the collection is discussed, and the terminology used. Within the archival materials, specifically the correspondence between museum staff, I looked at the terminology used to discuss the collection as I found that word choice was often representative of how the authors conceived of the collection. There is, for example, a distinct shift in language that indicates when the objects’ primary identities as confiscated properties are transformed into a primary identity as a collection. I use these individuals’ perspectives to discuss shifts in the collection’s meaning. Within the content of the correspondence I looked for themes relating to the collection’s role both within the museum and authors’ opinions as museum professionals. The archival material and published sources related to the exhibition
history of the collection were examined for the types and depth of information provided. For example, exhibit catalogue entries that had incorrect information or non-existent information further pointed towards the process of institutional forgetting. I looked at interview transcripts to determine the contemporary uses of the collection and to gain a better understanding of the continued significance of the collection to the community. The interviews were especially useful in understanding the multiple identities the collection now inhabits in contemporary ’Namgis life.

Organization of the Thesis

Chapter one begins with the published history of the potlatch collection confiscation and repatriation. This serves as both a literature review and a way to situate and analyze the ways in which the collection has been written about over a thirty-five year period. The authors included range from Kwakwaka’wakw scholars and community members to historians, lawyers and anthropologists. Next, I review relevant literature related to object biography theory and subjecthood, two theoretical approaches that frame this research. Understanding objects not as mere material entities, but as active carriers and creators of relationships is instrumental to understanding the potential role of museum objects. I analyze these concepts by drawing on prominent theorists such as Appadurai (1986) and Kopytoff (1986) to comprehend the concepts of life histories, paths, diversions, and processes of singularization. I balance this theoretical framework by including the work of Gosden and Marshall (1999), and Gosden, Larson and Petch (2007) to understand specifically the construction of museum collections and how object biography can be used as a tool to better understand them. Seip (1999), Peers (1999) and Phillips (2011) are discussed as three examples in which object biography is engaged to trace the evolving roles and meanings of individual objects as they travel throughout their life history. I then turn to Maureen Matthew’s (2013) framing of Marilyn Strathern’s concepts of objecthood and personhood to develop the parameters of my study. I resituate objecthood/personhood as objecthood/subjecthood as a way to understand the movement of Kwakwaka’wakw potlatch regalia throughout its life history.

The chapters that follow are organized chronologically to align with the object biography framework. Chapter two begins with an examination of the potlatch as an important
social, cultural, economic and legal institution in Kwakwaka’wakw and Northwest Coast society. I discuss the potlatch prohibition in detail to provide context for the case at hand: Dan Cranmer’s 1921 potlatch and the confiscation of the collection. I then begin to discuss the first diversion of the collection from individually owned potlatch regalia to a collection of museum objects. I analyse archival material to trace the shifts in the ways the collection was discussed. These shifts are situated as a crisis in the biography that led to a significant diversion in the collection’s life history.

Chapter three looks at the collection’s biography between 1927 and 1979. This period of the collection’s history has not previously been discussed, perhaps because it was not perceived to be as important as understanding the social and cultural oppression of the Kwakwaka’wakw and the process of repatriation negotiations in order to rectify this oppression. This chapter provides a chronological examination of the exhibitions in which parts of the collection have been displayed. I analyse the thematic organization of each exhibition using archival materials and exhibition catalogues in order to understand the historical and cultural significances accumulated throughout these interactions. By examining the source material, I conclude that the specific history of the collection as a confiscated group of regalia was lost throughout a process of information reproduction and translation in the museum register. This gradual erasure of the collection’s identity was subsequently reproduced in these exhibitions until it was indistinguishable from other Kwakwaka’wakw material culture in museum collections. The collection’s degree of subjecthood during this period is complex in that its connections with its confiscation history, family history, ceremonial history and community history is dramatically reduced while it simultaneously accumulates connections with people, places, and other museum objects by means of exhibition.

In chapter four, I use archival correspondence to trace the shifts in objecthood and subjecthood when repatriation requests are made by the Kwakwaka’wakw to the National Museum of Canada. During the periods of repatriation negotiation, the collection oscillates between notions of objecthood and subjecthood. I argue that the collection displays its objecthood in this period because it is discussed as physical, material objects that can be owned and acted upon by subjects. At the same time, it is also demonstrating an increased degree of subjecthood because the repatriation request has reunited the collection with its specific
history as a confiscated collection, its connections with Kwakwaka’wakw families, origin stories and ceremonial contexts. This chapter also demonstrates the National Museum’s perspective on repatriation and over time illuminates how attitudes towards repatriation can change with increased information, the development of a long-term relationship with a source community, and the presence of key individuals within institutions.

Chapter five examines the repatriation of the remainder of the collection from the Royal Ontario Museum and the National Museum of the American Indian throughout two decades (1980’s to the early 2000’s). My exploration uses archival material and published sources assessing the additional challenges to these repatriations and the ways in which the Kwakwaka’wakw responded. Looking at the three main repatriations of the collection throughout the seventies, eighties, nineties and early 2000’s demonstrates how repatriation has changed over time, and how it is perceived differently depending on the institutions involved. The complexity of repatriation, as an issue that affects museums and their stakeholders, is revealed throughout this chapter and the next.

Chapter six brings to light the several smaller repatriations or returns of individual objects from institutions and private collectors which had journeyed away from the National Museum of the American Indian during the mid-twentieth century. The range of responses from individuals and institutions included in this chapter again demonstrates the often idiosyncratic nature of each repatriation. This chapter emphasizes the continued importance of these repatriations to the community of Alert Bay by exploring the positions these returned objects have in the community. Each piece of regalia that is returned home is celebrated in the Big House. These celebrations, instigated by the repatriation, create an opportunity to tell the history of Kwakwaka’wakw cultural and social oppression, the confiscation, and Kwakwaka’wakw resistance and cultural continuity with the community cementing it as part of Kwakwaka’wakw cultural identity and family histories. In this way the collection is active in that it is a mnemonic device of a specific event, an educational resource, a historical document, and part of a family’s history.

Chapter seven looks at the contemporary roles of the collection in Alert Bay. It begins by exploring the collection situated within U’mista Cultural Centre as a central community hub.
Through personal observations and anecdotes taken from interviews with staff at U’mista Cultural Centre I attempt to determine the multiple roles the collection holds at any one time. The display of the collection in Dresden, Germany in 2011 is a unique and pivotal moment in the collection’s biography that reveals the complexity of the collection’s role as museum objects. As museum objects, the collection is utilized in ways which emphasize its intangible heritage as interpreted by the Kwakwaka’wakw themselves. The collection negotiates many social contexts at once, apart from being museum objects, they are educational objects, historic documents, ceremonial objects, mnemonic devices and artistic objects. These multiple contexts are revealed through the ways in which the collection is used in the community, including being presented at potlatches and replicated by artists. The collection demonstrates its highest degree of subjecthood in that it is actively maintaining relationships with a wide variety of people, places and things through these multiple social contexts.
Chapter One: A Published History of the Potlatch Collection, Literature Review, and Analytical Framework

The Potlatch Collection Repatriation: A Published History

The potlatch collection has been written about extensively by non-Kwakwaka’wakw and Kwakwaka’wakw historians, anthropologists, lawyers, and museologists. In order to understand the areas of focus and exclusion within this published history I have grouped them into three themes: historical accounts, comparative analyses of the cultural centres and repatriation as necessary to cultural revival. These are not distinctly defined categories and many of the authors discuss a range of issues and interpretations associated with the case.

Establishing the historical, political, and legal proceedings of both the confiscation and the repatriation are necessary to understanding the complexity of this case. Cole and Chaikin’s (1990) explorations provide a detailed account of the practice of the potlatch on the Northwest Coast post-European contact and discuss the environment in which the potlatch prohibition came to be part of the Indian Act in 1884. Their contribution provides a political and social perspective of potlatch prohibition situated in the government’s larger policy of assimilation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Their approach provides a strongly historical account of the law and the ways in which it was resisted. Within their book, they discuss the surrender of the materials which were to become the potlatch collection as a pinnacle point in the struggle against potlatch prohibition. The persecution of participants was the largest implementation of the law in Canadian history.

Cole’s second contribution (1995) moves away from this historical legal perspective and instead situates the confiscation and repatriation in a larger account of nineteenth and twentieth century museum collecting practices on the Northwest Coast. His densely detailed book explores the intensive period of “field” collection in the nineteenth century that was fuelled by the belief that First Nation’s cultures were disappearing either through the rapid decrease in population or the belief that First Nations were quickly becoming assimilated into mainstream Euro-Canadian society. Museums wanted to preserve as much “evidence” of their existence as they could. Cole’s discussion of the potlatch collection confiscation focuses on
historical and factual information surrounding the prohibition of the potlatch, confiscation of regalia, and subsequent museum negotiations associated with the repatriation. Like Cole and Chaikin (1990) he discusses the confiscation of the potlatch collection as a pivotal moment in resistance to the potlatch prohibition and an alternate form of “field collection.”

Unlike Cole (1995) and Cole and Chaikin (1990), Ira Jacknis’ first contribution grows from the repatriation collection itself. Jacknis’s (2000) account examines the potlatch regalia confiscation and subsequent repatriation as a form of social drama. Borrowed from Victor Turner, Jacknis uses this model to demonstrate the case study as moving through periods of breach, crisis, redressive action, and reintegration. Jacknis’s use of the social drama model is especially useful to the biographical approach utilized in this study because it supports an understanding of the collection and repatriation history as a changing process informed by many different invested parties over a long period of time.

His second contribution (2002) examines a one-hundred year history of encounters between anthropologists, museums and the Kwak’wa’wakw from an anthropological perspective. Jacknis situates both the confiscation and the repatriation of the potlatch collection to Alert Bay and Cape Mudge within a larger history of museological representations of Kwak’wa’wakw culture, the “renaissance” of Kwak’wa’wakw art in the mid-twentieth century, contemporary cultural revival programs and relationships between museums and the Kwak’wa’wakw. Jacknis revisits his exploration of the potlatch collection as a social drama and pays special attention to the establishment of the U’mista and Nuyumbalees cultural centres as new forms of indigenous cultural self-expression utilized by the Kwak’wa’wakw communities within which they reside. This account provides the historical and cultural background for the case while also analyzing the complexities of Kwak’wa’wakw cultural identity presented in both museums and Kwak’wa’wakw cultural centres.

The comparison of the two Kwak’wa’wakw cultural centres and their representation of Kwak’wa’wakw culture is prevalent across literature devoted to the potlatch collection. James Clifford’s *Four Northwest Coast Museums* (1991) engages in a comparison of U’mista Cultural Centre and the Kwagiulth Museum (now Nuyumbalees Cultural Centre) with two large, urban museums; the Museum of Anthropology in Vancouver and the Royal British Columbia Museum.
in Victoria. His discussion looks at the different ways the four institutions interpret Northwest Coast culture and the different stories and messages they communicate. His examination explores the regionalist, historical, and artistic methods shared by all four institutions and teases out some of the more personal, community-based connections the cultural centres embody. This article traces the collection through its confiscation, repatriation and display in the two cultural centres and focuses on what this journey has meant for Kwakwaka’wakw identity. Clifford concludes that no one type of museum or method of display can fully represent the complex meanings and contexts of the objects on display (1991, 242).

Like Clifford, Saunders (1995) discusses the presentation and interpretation of the potlatch collection by comparing the interpretive choices of aboriginal cultural centres to those of conventional museums. Comparing the two methods of display and representation in the two cultural centres, Saunders feels that both cultural centres’ methods of display make the collection inaccessible to a non-Kwakwaka’wakw viewer and are in her view, decontextualized commemorations of colonial injustice (1995, 46) and meant to shame it’s white audience (1995 49-50). She acknowledges that the Kwagiulth museum focuses on maintaining family distinctions (1995, 45-47) while U’mista almost sacralises their collection through display techniques (1995, 49). Her conclusion is that neither the Kwagiulth Museum nor the U’mista Cultural Centre represents an authentic identity (1995, 51), but I would ask, what does “authentic” identity look like? Her analysis of the re-display of the regalia leads her to state that because the regalia are not identifiable, lacking a timeless monumentality, history, and extending living memory “they are denied the poetry, mysticism, surreal presence and the transcendental genius of the productions in the museums of natural history” (1995, 51).

Saunders’ second contribution (1997) explores the role of the potlatch collection in constructing a distinct Kwakwaka’wakw “ethnie” – a self-conscious cultural value. She argues that a Kwakwaka’wakw ethnie is dependent upon the repatriation of the potlatch regalia as an emblem of colonial persecution, the ethnography of Franz Boas as a sign of authenticity and the consolidation and essentializing of identity through “ethnic art” (1997, 85). She recounts the episodes of confiscation, repatriation, and display and focuses on what these encounters mean in terms of two competing Kwakwaka’wakw identities: national and ethnic. She uses a
comparative analyses of both cultural centres to explore the different ways in which the Kwakwaka’wakw ethnie is developed at each.

Marie Mauzé, a prominent French anthropologist, also engages in a detailed description of the Kwagiulth Museum and the U’mista Cultural Centre and the methods they use to display their portions of the collection (2003). She compares the different ways each institution has chosen to represent Kwakwaka’wakw culture through the presentation of the potlatch collection and examines the ways each institution has chosen, or not chosen, to interact with museology as a whole. She argues that both institutions have very different stories to tell: the Kwagiulth Museum focuses on maintaining family hierarchy and rank through the display of regalia, while U’mista uses the collection to tell a story of colonial suppression, resistance and survival (2003, 507-513). She concludes that each institution represents Kwakwaka’wakw culture as authentically as possible but like Saunders questions the levels of accessibility for both Kwakwaka’wakw and non-Kwakwaka’wakw audiences.³

In contrast to these sources, all penned by non-Kwakwaka’wakw, Kwakwaka’wakw have also been active in shaping the scholarly record and museum profession’s understanding of the potlatch collection through discussions of the repatriation’s role in cultural revitalization. Andrea Sanborn, a former director of the U’mista Cultural Centre, discusses one piece of the confiscated collection - a transformation mask in the collections of the British Museum - returned on long-term loan to the U’mista Cultural Centre in 2005. Sanborn emphasizes the healing power of repatriation to a community whose culture was disrupted by the Canadian government, missionaries and residential schooling. She maintains that the very soul of their “culture remains fragmented until all the pieces can be reunited, repatriated and returned home” (2009, 81). Sanborn concludes by calling on museums to create an open dialogue with those requesting repatriation as she witnessed a greater level of understanding between the British Museum and the Kwakwaka’wakw when more information was shared between the two parties (Sanborn 2009, 86).

³ Since Clifford (1991), Saunders (1995, 1997), and Mauzé’s (2003) articles both the U’Mista Cultural Centre and the Nuyumbalees Cultural Centre’s galleries have been redisplayed and reinterpreted.
Gloria Cranmer Webster, daughter of Chief Dan Cranmer whose potlatch was the focus of the 1921 confiscation, is a former curator at the U’mista Cultural Centre and played an important role in the negotiations to return the potlatch regalia from Ottawa and Toronto. She has written several articles over the last four decades on the process of the repatriation case, challenges they have faced along the way, and the importance of returning the collection to the community (Webster 1988, 1992, 1995). In 1995, she wrote an article for the University of British Columbia Law Review that underlined the political and legal challenges they faced in requesting the return of the collection, which included researching the legality of the confiscation. Webster co-curated an exhibition with Aldona Jonaitis called Chiefly Feasts: The Enduring Kwakiutl Potlatch and contributed an essay to the catalogue on the contemporary Kwakwaka’wakw potlatch (1991). She describes how the potlatch has changed since the potlatch law was dropped from the Indian Act in 1951. Webster was also frequently quoted in two films produced by U’mista Cultural Centre. Potlatch: A Strict Law Bids Us Dance (1975) discusses potlatch prohibition, while the second, Box of Treasures (Olin and U’mista Cultural Centre 1983), examined the repatriation of the collection and the opening of the U’mista Cultural Centre. Webster’s articles and involvement in the two films provide a Kwakwaka’wakw perspective on the importance of the repatriation and development of a cultural institution.

Webster’s early and passionate emphasis on the meanings of the potlatch collection for Kwakwaka’wakw is echoed in Sanborn’s more recent writings. In addition to her account of the transformation mask loan, Sanborn collaborated with Catherine Bell, Heather Raven, and Heather McCuaig in 2008 to explore Kwakwaka’wakw community members’ perspectives on the protection and repatriation of Kwakwaka’wakw cultural heritage. Through engaging in focus groups, they were able to determine the meaning of concepts such as cultural property, or cultural heritage, to measure the importance of language in cultural revival, and to assess the importance of the potlatch in Kwakwaka’wakw society and its evolution through time. The emphasis is on the ways in which the community has had to negotiate new ways of communicating and passing down culture which have emerged as a result of cultural disruption due to forced assimilation. Participants in the focus groups also felt that Canadian museums still have a large role to play in restoring the potlatch to its proper place through the repatriation of artefacts and knowledge (Bell, McCuaig and Sanborn 2008, 74). In addition, they call on the
Canadian government to acknowledge potlatch prohibition was wrong and to take a more active role in facilitating repatriation and preventing objects of cultural importance from leaving the country (2008, 41, 86). Bell, McCuaig and Sanborn’s contribution provides the most contemporary, detailed exploration of Kwakwaka’wakw perspectives on their cultural heritage.

As a body of literature, the explorations of the potlatch repatriation case serve a dual nature. They provide invaluable information on the potlatch repatriation case itself, but they also form a historical document of the ways in which scholarly and community perceptions of the case have shifted over almost four decades. An examination of these scholarly contributions reveals gaps in the literature as well as areas of focus. Throughout these explorations and reflections, the writers have examined several large themes including: the historical events that led to the collection’s surrender; the impact of potlatch prohibition on the Kwakwaka’wakw as part of a larger program of assimilation; the political upheaval which surrounded the repatriation of the collection; the Kwakwaka’wakw cultural revival and healing which resulted from the objects returning home; and the differing ways the two cultural centres chose to display and interpret their portions of the collection. The ways in which these aspects are discussed at times reflect the larger socio-political environment and the background of the individual writers. Many of the writers touch on some, if not all of these aspects in their work; however, there are substantial gaps in the documentation. Lacking from this overview is a detailed examination of the collection itself and the roles it played throughout its life history when it was not the subject of the country’s largest repatriation of the time. While the collection is large and complex, there was a tendency to discuss it as an entity that was representative of other political and social issues. The impact of the repatriation on the Kwakwaka’wakw is discussed at length but nowhere is the impact of the repatriation on the museums discussed. The impact of repatriation on returning institutions is something that has been neglected in repatriation literature generally perhaps because it is not seen as necessary, either then or now. The priority has been with the receiving source community, their processes of decolonization, cultural revival, and healing, whereas any focus on the effects on the museum may have been seen as insensitive or perpetuating an imbalanced representation. Additionally, if a returning museum were to express that they experienced no negative effects from repatriating objects from their collection, they could be perceived to be exposing
themselves to more repatriation requests, essentially “opening the floodgates.” Still, the museum field stands to benefit from a discussion of the long-term implications of repatriation on returning institutions. After many repatriations both in Canada and internationally, there has been no evidence that repatriation will result in source communities flooding into museums and emptying them of their collections. Museums themselves are better able to understand their roles in assisting in cultural perpetuation and continuity through repatriation and the development of reciprocal relationships with source communities. As I demonstrate in this thesis, the archival records of repatriation negotiations can also illuminate how institutional positions on repatriation shift through time and the ways repatriating artefacts can have a lasting influence on the kinds of projects museum staff take on, and even the kinds of departments that are part of the museum.

**Object Biography- A Literature Review**

The interpretation of museum objects usually focuses on the meanings of objects before they entered the museum, highlighting the materials used to make the object, the areas of life the object would be used in, and what the meaning would have been to those who interacted with it. Object biography has been adopted within museology as a means of uncovering the longer and often more complicated lives of objects that also included shifting meanings during times of collection, display, and even deaccession or repatriation.

Object biography can be thought of as an examination of an object or group of objects in much the same way we would explore a person’s life. An object’s biography might begin with its inception, creation or fabrication, or even its raw materials, and would trace its movements throughout space and time, exploring the changes it experiences both materially and semantically. Also important to consider here, and instrumental to this research project, is that an object’s meaning may vary at any one time depending on the perspective or value system of an invested party. Object biography, as a tool allows us to explore the complexity that is an object’s, or group of objects’, life history from a multiplicity of perspectives. In addition, object biography allows us to explore the impact an object or group of objects has had on the people it interacts with. It is these interactions, between objects and people that I will explore in this thesis.
A discussion of object biography must include Arjun Appadurai (1986) whose perspective on commodities helped inform object biography. Appadurai states that economic exchange creates value and that value is embodied in commodities that are exchanged. What creates the link between exchange and value is politics, broadly speaking (1986, 3). He elaborates on this origin of value by saying that meanings are inscribed in forms, uses, and trajectories; through these we can interpret human transactions and calculations that enliven things. Even from a theoretical view, people encode things with significance and from a methodological view, things in motion illuminate human and social contexts (1986, 5). He argues that the term “commodity” has been associated with the capitalist system of exchanging goods for money, but in fact, commodities refer to any object that has the potential to enter a commodity phase and be exchanged at some point in its existence, not necessarily for money. Appadurai describes three phases of a commodity’s social life as well as some different types of commodities that may vary from our expected definition. Important to this research is Appadurai’s concepts of paths and diversions which he borrowed from Nancy Munn (1983). Paths refer to accepted physical, social and cultural trajectories for commodities while diversions refer to movements off of these paths (1986, 20). A diversion is always a sign of creativity or crisis such as economic hardship, warfare, plunder, theft (Appadurai 1986, 27). Tourist art can be seen as an example of material culture that’s has experienced a diversion via creativity, and some may argue economic hardship. Appadurai’s approach is instrumental in exploring the moments in which the potlatch collection as a whole, becomes a commodity and when its trajectories follow accepted paths or unanticipated diversions.

Another influential scholar who takes the notion of object biography further is Igor Kopytoff (1986, 64) who posits that the commodity should be seen as a phase, rather than a type of object, and that objects can move into and out of this phase multiple times in their life history. Kopytoff’s model of object biography is especially applicable to this research project because it emphasizes a life history as a process. Kopytoff, who was instrumental in creating object biography as a theoretical tool, argues that a biographical approach can reveal how objects are culturally redefined (1986, 67). Objects, such as those in the potlatch collection, move throughout different societies and different realms of value and commoditization that complicate the collection’s biography. Redefinition is an important factor for Kopytoff. His
concept of singularization, in which objects are pulled out of their normal commodity sphere to
mark them as un-exchangeable, singular, unique and incomparable, is especially useful in
analysing the life history of the potlatch collection (1986, 74). The optimal example of
singularization is the museum object, but whereas in the past entering the museum may have
been seen as a final diversion in an object’s biography, by drawing on Kopytoff,
museumification is not necessarily the final word. “In the homogenized world of commodities,”
writes Kopytoff (1986, 90), “an eventful biography of a thing becomes the story of the various
singularizations of it, of classifications and reclassifications in an uncertain world of categories
whose importance shifts with every minor change in context.” It is these shifts I explore.

Chris Gosden and Yvonne Marshall co-edited an edition of World Archaeology that
focused on object biography. Gosden and Marshall’s introduction reviews seminal contributions
to the theory of object biography. They discuss concepts such as “use life” introduced by
Tringham (1994, 175) which focuses on changes to the morphological or functional
characteristics of an object or artefact following use, such as the grinding down of a stone
(Gosden and Marshall 1999, 169). It is important to note here though, that this approach still
maintains the passivity of objects in contrast to the subjectivity of the people acting upon them.
Gosden and Marshall also introduce Tringham’s (1994, 1995) concept of “life history” that seeks
to “understand the way objects become invested with meaning through the social interactions
they are caught up in. These meanings change and are renegotiated through the life of the
object” (Gosden and Marshall 1999, 169-170). Moving from objects being passive to more
active in their biographies, Gosden and Marshall look at the work of Strathern (1988), whose
focus is on the Melanesian view of gifts which is intricately linked to those who made them and
gave them. The Melanesians with whom Strathern worked saw gifts as objects that are invested
with parts of those people who gifted them, and so, those parts of people travel around with
the gift. She refers to this concept as ‘dividuals,’ emphasizing the complexities of objects and
their meanings. Gell (1998) further emphasizes an object’s potential to be active in his
contribution about art objects that he feels “can be seen as social actors, in that they construct
and influence the field of social action” (Gosden and Marshall 1999, 173).

Laura Peers’ (1999) and Lisa Seip’s (1999) contributions to Gosden and Marshall’s
journal are especially useful to my research as they form two examples of object biography
used in a museological setting. Peers’ contribution traces a Metis octopus bag in the Pitt Rivers Museum from its fabrication to its place now in the museum’s collection. A close biographical approach such as Peers’ allows the readers to explore a multitude of stories and meanings involved with cross-cultural interactions that occurred during the fur trade and beyond. Peers emphasizes the importance of examining moments of intersection through object biography, where objects, like people, experience encounters with a wide range of people and places. As Peers points out, the octopus bag has been a gift, a memento mori, a souvenir, a curio, a commodity, a specimen and a primary source (Peers 1999, 289). My research parallels Peers’ in many ways, namely the multiplicity of categories an object can inhabit throughout its life history. Similar to Peers, I explore the many shifts in meaning the potlatch collection has undergone since its creation as a collection.

Similar to Peers, Seip’s (1999) article traces the journey of a Nuxalk mask as it moved from ceremonial regalia to museum object. Not only did it move geographically, but it also underwent several transformations in meaning, from ceremonial object, to commodity, to ethnological specimen, to museum object. Seip’s discussion ends with an analysis of museum objects as decontextualized as either an ethnological specimen or art object, with a meaning intrinsic to the object (Seip 1999, 283). I argue that this is not necessarily the case and that objects’ movement into museums should be seen as a recontextualization rather than decontextualization, and additionally, as only one part of an object’s journey.

Ruth Phillips (2011) adopts a slightly different approach on object biography in which she traces the global travels of a Mi’kmaq coat now in the collection of Museum Victoria, Australia. The coat was likely presented as a symbolic representation of the adoption of Moses Perley, an Indian Commissioner, into the Miramachi and Restigouche in 1841. It was then given to S.D.S. Huyghue, a writer and amateur ethnologist who donated it to Museum Victoria when he immigrated to Australia. Her approach includes a discussion of the significances that objects accumulate during their life history, and pays attention to the importance these significances may have to museum communities who have legitimate rights and interests in accessing global material culture (Phillips 2011, 135). Phillips brings to light the complex issues arising around the repatriation request made by the Millbrook Nation for the coat. The request did not invoke notions of illegality, sacred property, or cultural patrimony, but rather focused on retrieving the
community’s cultural knowledge lost to museums, and so occupied a grey area in repatriation negotiations (Phillips 2011, 134). Especially relevant to this research is Phillips’ discussion of how to value the intentions of the actors in the coat’s past and how this repatriation would impact museum communities. Her work questions whether we, as a museum field, can pursue cosmopolitan values and comparative projects of study at the same time as we respond to postcolonial demands of Indigenous and other colonized peoples in an increasingly globalized environment (Phillips 2011, 153).

Building on these contributions to object biography theory I endeavor to trace the potlatch collection’s life history beginning from the time it was consolidated into a collection to its present status in two cultural centres. The object biography case studies presented above use the actual object as a primary source, whereas I use traces of the collection found in archival sources. In my reading of the entire collection as an object, I privilege the paths and diversions over the material properties of the objects in order to understand how meanings shifted across spaces, times and contexts.

**Applying the Framework: Object Biography Theory, Subjecthood and the Potlatch Collection**

Kopytoff’s concept of singularization describes a condition in which objects are pulled out of their normal commodity sphere to be deemed un-exchangeable, singular, unique and incomparable. However, Kopytoff does not stipulate that an object that has been singularized, cannot have more than one meaning or social context. Museum objects can be an example of singularization. In most cases, the movement of an object into a museum marks it as a unique object, highly valued and unlikely to be exchanged. However, sometimes museums collected objects which were representative of a type of object and having multiples of a type of object was valued. Current perspectives see museum objects as able to hold multiple social identities – the museum context being an identity itself - while still being singularized. They can represent a museum object and a Kwakwaka’wakw ceremonial object. The weight of these social contexts may differ. The capacity of an object to hold dual social contexts in the first half of the twentieth century may have been restricted, with the weight of the “museum object” context

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4 Museums often collected duplicates of certain objects, such as tools, to establish the defining characteristics of an object, and to determine variations and adaptations.
outweighing its Kwakwaka’wakw ceremonial context. The potlatch collection when it entered the museum was, in a way, singularized as it was removed from its circulation sphere, the potlatch. This sphere may not have been a sphere in which objects were exchanged for money, but where they circulated through a system of inheritance (see Boas 1897 for a discussion of the potlatch as an investment of property). Once in the museum, however, their specific identities connected to the potlatch ban and confiscation were effectively erased by a continual process of translation and reproduction of catalogue information. The potlatch collection then, was not singularized to the degree it could have been if the connection to the specific history of the objects had been maintained, in turn maintaining its “prestige”. By this, I mean that the disassociation of the collection with its history of potlatch prohibition and subsequent confiscation rendered it undistinguishable from other Kwakwaka’wakw museum collections allowing each piece to function as an “Indian object,” dance object, mask, or artwork, decreasing its level of “prestige”.

Maureen Matthews’ concept of personhood is derived from Strathern’s work in Melanesia and her own research with Ojibwe drums and Anishinaabe notions of personhood. Referring to Strathern’s landmark book *The Gender of the Gift* (1999), Matthews reframes Strathern’s assertion when Matthews says people exist as ‘dividuals’ and that each person’s social being is fragmented and distributed throughout society; their personhood is constituted by the sum of their multiple vibrant relationships, not a reflexive idea of self-worth (Matthews 2013, 3). Strathern argues that persons, or in this case objects, are most ‘thing-like’ when they are regarded as unitary, whole, and abstracted from all social contexts but one, and most ‘person-like’ (partible) when they are engaged across a plethora of relationships in multiple contexts (Strathern 1999, 228). Matthews elaborates further when she says:

If artefacts are ‘dividuals,’ then it follows that they exhibit maximal personhood and have the greatest capacity to act in the world when their multiple relationships are expressed and acknowledged. Their personhood is augmented by the breadth and vibrancy of their relationships and objects with numerous active relationships, with source communities, research communities, and visitor communities are objects with maximal personhood, least constrained by colonial processes. On the other hand, artefacts are at their most vulnerable object-like mode when they are subject to taxonomic ordering, cultural delimiting and property claims. (Matthews 2013, 4)
Strathern’s and Matthews’ notions of objecthood and personhood stem from two cultural perspectives in which objects, material things, can be seen as persons. This does not apply to a Kwakwaka’wakw framework in quite the same way. Instead we can re-situate this concept as subjecthood rather than personhood. Subjecthood suggests a condition of an object which has fluid, multiple identities formed by multiple active relationships such as Matthews and Strathern attribute to personhood, but does not refer to the belief that an object can have animacy. Strathern’s and Matthews’ concepts of objecthood define a condition in which an object has a singular social context, purpose, or identity. Reminding us that objecthood does not equate to inactivity, Philip Deloria states “Objects do not simply wait to be perceived. They have curious autonomies of their own. We might think usefully, then, not of ‘perceiving,’ but of ‘meeting with objects,’ or ‘engaging objects,’ or even ‘confronting objects.’ And being confronted by them. Objects are not docile, they are surprisingly active” (Deloria 2010, 14).

Is Kopytov’s concept of singularization, then, the same as objecthood? Objecthood is a nature of a material thing that may fluctuate in significance throughout an object’s biography, whereas singularization is a phase that an object may pass through multiple times during its life history. Matthews’ notion of objecthood requires a single social context and a limited capacity to act whereas singularization refers to an object’s status – removed from the circulation sphere – it does not necessarily have a single social context but definitely has a limited capacity to act.

To return to Matthews framing of objecthood, I would argue that the potlatch collection is most object-like when it is in the ROM and CMC’s collections, subject to taxonomic ordering, cataloguing, exhibiting etc. The collection did not remain unused and static as many have been led to believe (See Sewid in CMC Archives VII-E-35M B465 F-11; Saunders 1995 40-41, 47; Webster 1995), but had a substantial exhibition history during it’s time in the CMC and the

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5 There are instances when masks do become animated, namely when they are danced in a potlatch, but the mask itself as a physical object is not believed to be inhabited by an individual spirit, such as an ancestor. Regalia which is made for use in a potlatch is considered sacred to the Kwakwaka’wakw and it is bound by strict cultural and spiritual protocols regarding care and storage. For example, potlatch regalia is always wrapped in a blanket and stored in a bentwood box. Beaks of the hamsaml are tied shut because it is believed that if the beak snaps closed outside of a potlatch, the sound will summon Baxwbakwulanuxsiwe’, the great man-eating spirit from the north end of the world (Juanita Johnston, pers. comm. May 14th, 2013).
ROM. Nevertheless, their activity as museum objects had a limited range of social contexts, namely those associated with museums, exhibition and museums visitors. For the most part, the exhibitions varied only slightly in their thematic organization. The collection was re-contextualized throughout the exhibition history to suit the themes of the exhibitions and thus accumulated other connections with people, places, and other museum objects. On one hand, then, the collection’s subjecthood in terms of its museum-related relationships increased during this period, however, the collection’s potential to develop multiple social contexts was restricted by the erasure of its specific history within the museum register.

When the repatriation requests were made, the collection was reunited with its specific history as a confiscated collection, its relationships with its owners and with its communities of origin. Its subjecthood and its capacity to act is increased through the renewal of these relationships, however, like Matthews argues, this is a moment when the collection also displays its objecthood (see Figure 1). The collection’s objecthood is evident at this point because its identity is being informed by the debate over the legal ownership of the regalia between the museums and the Kwakwaka’wakw, and later between the Kwakwaka’wakw themselves. The collection’s objecthood is also reflected in the debate over where the collections should ultimately be located. Ownership debates can reduce an object down to its “thing-ness,” in that it is a physical, material thing which can be acted upon by subjects. At the same time, the recognition of contested ownership and its legal history expands the social contexts attached to the collection by the museum and thus increases its subjecthood. The period of time when negotiations were occurring over the repatriation of the collection forms a phase of the collection’s biography when it continually oscillates between conditions of objecthood and subjecthood.

The collection reaches its fullest potential in terms of subjecthood when it is physically repatriated (see Figure 1). The post-repatriation life of the potlatch collection has the greatest capacity for subjecthood because the objects are reacquainted with their community, the descendants of their owners, and their specific history as a confiscated collection. In this case, the collection continues to be an assemblage of museum objects on display in the community for Kwakwaka’wakw and non-Kwakwaka’wakw visitors and researchers, and available for loan to other cultural institutions. The collection is also used by the community members in
potlatches. The role of the potlatch collection as museum objects in Kwakwaka’wakw territory and cultural centres is very different to their role as museum objects in the CMC and ROM. Rather than representing a story of Canada’s aboriginal cultures, or of Northwest Coast cultural practices, they tell a story involving multiple social contexts such as family, ‘namima, the potlatch, the potlatch ban, attempted cultural assimilation, cultural survival and revival, repatriation, and contemporary Kwakwaka’wakw culture. The collection’s contemporary position allows it to inhabit multiple roles and identities at any one time. These social contexts may not hold equal weight at all times, but they exist simultaneously. The collection’s multiple

![Image of diagram]

**Figure 1. The Subjecthood and Objecthood of the Potlatch Collection.**

The relationship between community-related subjecthood, museum-related subjecthood and objecthood demonstrated over time from the confiscation in 1922 to present day.

**Community-related subjecthood:** multiple relationships with communities, original owners, families, ‘namimmas, artists, carvers, potlatches, ceremonial uses.

**Museum-related subjecthood:** relationships with exhibit-related museum staff, visitors, researchers, exhibit locations, exhibit themes and other objects included in the exhibitions.

**Objecthood:** a condition in which an object has a singular social context, purpose, or identity and a limited range of relationships.
social contexts did not hold equal weight while in museums in the first half of the twentieth century, as they have the potential to do so now.

Appadurai’s concepts of paths and diversions provide a useful framework for tracing the collection’s movements between moments of objecthood and subjecthood and moments when it embodies both of these conditions simultaneously. Diversions are illuminating moments that can reveal changes or shifts in subjecthood, but do not necessarily always increase subjecthood. For example, a diversion occurs when the potlatch collection is confiscated and moved into the museum, turning ceremonial regalia into museum objects. This diversion decreased the collection’s potential to maintain multiple social contexts, though it allows for the creation of other social contexts, albeit limited ones (see Figure 1). A diversion occurs when the collection is repatriated, resulting in the return of the collection to Kwakwaka’wakw territory but maintaining its role as museum objects. This diversion resulted in an increase in subjecthood for the collection, restoring its relationships with the community and its capacity to have multiple social contexts. Diversions then, do not create subjecthood, but are moments of change and transition that may or may not influence the relationships active in sustaining subjecthood.

The trajectory of an object’s biography can be conceived of in multiple ways: an object can travel one path at a time whilst holding multiple social contexts, or an object can travel multiple paths with their own social contexts simultaneously. Paths, despite the terminology, do not necessarily refer to physical, or geographical locations or movements, but rather can refer to the roles or significances an object can hold for multiple invested parties at any one time. For example, if a museum object is also used ceremonially, these two functions or significances can be seen as a single path with dual social contexts or two paths depending on the perspective of the viewer/participant.

Using object biography theory as a tool to trace the life history of an entire collection will allow me to examine the shifts in the collection’s objecthood and subjecthood using paths and diversions as defining points. Objecthood, the nature of a thing when it is restricted to a singular social context and has a limited capacity to act, and subjecthood, the nature of a thing when it is allowed to form multiple relationships and embody fluid identities, are key aspects of
understanding this collection as it traverses multiple paths and diversions. Singularization will also be a key component to understanding how objects change in significance depending on the value systems they are embedded in. Using this theoretical framework I will explore the potlatch collection’s life history and the ways in which objecthood, subjecthood and singularization factor in to its complex biography beginning with its first diversion at confiscation, until its movement along a new path as museum exhibition material and to its 2011 display in Dresden Germany, in the exhibition The Power of Giving and finally the most recent expected repatriation from the Horniman Museum.

Chapter Two: Diversion from Regalia to Museum Collection

This chapter will address the first diversion in the potlatch collection’s object biography which occurs when the collection is confiscated in 1921 and becomes a museum collection. In order to understand the complexities of this first diversion, I have situated it within a description of the potlatch and its prohibition under the Indian Act, as well as an account of Dan Cranmer’s 1921 potlatch.

The Potlatch and Potlatch Prohibition

The potlatch, a political, economic, cultural and social institution, is a central part of Northwest coast First Nations social structure. A potlatch is “an occasion when a traditional name, rank or hereditary privilege was claimed through dances, speeches and the distribution of property to those invited” (Cole and Chaikin 1990, 5). Potlatches were hosted by powerful chiefs and their families who displayed their hereditary rights to certain songs, dances, masks, crests, and stories in front of their guests. The guests were given gifts from the hosting family as a form of payment for witnessing the events, as public display was the only way to validate a claim (Jonaitis 2006, 7). The giving away of wealth is one of the most important aspects of potlatches, for the more a chief would give away, the more wealthy he was deemed to be. A chief was said to acquire prestige through distribution of wealth to others, essentially making himself materially poor, but highly honourable. In this way, potlatches were essential to the continuity of Kwakwakawakw society, a chief depended on the labour and support of his ‘namima to provide the goods to be distributed at a potlatch and the commoners in the ‘namima depended
on the Chief to govern, provide favourable living conditions, and ensure the spiritual well-being of the ‘namima (Masco 1995, 48; Isaac 2011, 40). Potlatches often lasted for several days and included grand feasts. It was important to maintain rank at potlatches, which was reflected in seating arrangements and food distribution. “All elements of Kwakw̱a’wakw life culminated in the potlatch. Spiritual, economic, judicial, social and political organization, performing arts and the major events of an individual’s life were all integral parts of the potlatch…Reasons to potlatch included naming, marriages, births, initiation into secret societies and other ceremonial transfers” (Isaac 2011, 38). Each coastal group practised potlatching in their own ways, for different reasons, and in different forms. The Kwakw̱a’wakw potlatch was known to be a lavish affair and marriage held an important role in potlatches. For the Kwakw̱a’wakw, marriage was a way of attaining rank and privileges for both women and men and their subsequent children, so multiple marriages were common (Jonaitis 2006, 107).

The potlatch saw significant change and adaptation after contact with Europeans. Depopulation from disease, the decrease of inter-tribal warfare, and the increased availability of surplus wealth meant that not only powerful chiefs and their families could host potlatches, but so too could men lower in the ranking system. Lower ranking men used potlatches to gain status and power in the community, material wealth was given away in increased quantities and value (Jonaitis 2006, 120). Missionaries and Indian agents opposed the potlatch as they felt it was an obstacle in the “civilizing” of First Nations. Cole and Chaikin highlight three main categories of Euro-Canadian disapproval: health, morality and economics (1990, 18-20). Indian agents and missionaries objected to the potlatch because they felt it was the main source of population decline. George Blenkinsop, agent to the Kwakw̱a’wakw, claimed that potlatches required large amounts of people to be in close quarters at a time when disease was widespread (Cole and Chaikin 1990, 18). Potlatches included religious and ceremonial expressions that were at odds with Christianity, specifically secret society dances that appeared to include the biting or eating of dogs, human flesh or corpses, and therefore were deemed immoral and savage. More importantly to the argument, the potlatch disrupted agricultural work and removed large numbers of people from canneries and fisheries as well as children from school. Most objectionable was the “wasteful” hoarding and then distribution of wealth to
others, which was the antithesis of capitalist values held by the west (Cole and Chaikin 1990, 19-20).

Under recommendations by Indian agents and missionaries the Prime Minister tabled legislation in the House of Commons on February 12, 1884 making it a misdemeanor to participate in a potlatch or tamananawas (secret society) dance with a sentence of imprisonment between two and six months. The law was to be implemented on January 1\textsuperscript{st}, 1885 (Troutman 2011, 43). The vague wording of the law, lack of assistance from the provincial government, and lack of funds from the federal government made the law almost impossible to enforce. Potlatching had decreased in some areas but continued just as strong in other areas, or stronger in the case of the Kwakwa'wakw (Webster 1992). The potlatch law was amended in 1895 to become more specific. The amended version stated that:

\begin{quote}
any person who celebrated or assisted or encouraged another to celebrate any Indian festival, dance or other ceremony of which the giving away or paying or giving back of money, goods, or articles of any sort forms a part, or is a feature, whether such a gift of money, goods, or articles takes place before, at, or after the celebration of the same was guilty of an indictable defense. (Cole and Chaikin 1990, 43)
\end{quote}

A handful of people were arrested after the law was amended, but generally, the law still had little support from the provincial government and the general public because the potlatch was coming to be seen as harmless in some areas due to Christian conversion of many First Nations communities (Cole and Chaikin 1990, 44-55). Those arrested were not convicted as judges had difficulty seeing the potlatch as a crime. In some communities, the potlatch ceased to exist because of Christianity, not because of the law. But in others, it continued openly or went underground, disguised as other festivities. The Kwakwa'wakw, however, continued to celebrate the potlatch stronger than ever. It was the public’s opinion that the potlatch was best not to be interfered with, and interference would cause more trouble than harm (Cole and Chaikin 1990, 51). Edward Sapir, Director of the Victoria Memorial Museum in Ottawa, defended the potlatch to the government along with letters of support from every major Northwest Coast anthropologist in Canada and the United States including Franz Boas of Columbia University, John Swanton of the Bureau of American Ethnology, Harlan I. Smith of the Ottawa museum and J.A Teit, Charles Hill-Tout, and C.F. Newcombe (Cole and Chaikin 1990, 101; and see CMC Archives E2008.3 B911 F10 for Sapir’s letter imploring Boas to write a letter
of support). In 1906, William Halliday became the new Indian Agent at the Kwakewlth Agency, but it was not until 1913 when Duncan Campbell Scott became Deputy Superintendent of Indian Affairs that the policy of persuasion, rather than enforcement used by his predecessors, was stamped out. Scott made a small but important change to the Indian Act, making engaging in a potlatch a summary rather than indictable offence, meaning it would not have to be tried in a provincial court. This change placed all the power in the Indian Agents who were now, effectively, prosecutor and judge, making convictions much more likely (Troutman 2011, 45).

On January 19th 1919, Likiosa (Johnnie Seaweed) and Kwosteetsas (Japanese Charlie) were charged under the potlatch law for exchanging a bridal price. In March 1919, Chief Harry Mountain, John McDougall, Isaac, and Chief August of the Klawatala were charged with potlatching. At the trial Halliday, acting as Justice, adjourned the case against the four Mamalilikala tribesmen under the understanding that they, and the seventy-five people of their band, would sign an agreement promising not to potlatch anymore. They signed this agreement to avoid imprisonment and under the assumption that their request of an investigation into the potlatch law would be upheld (it was not) (Cole and Chaikin 1990, 111-115). Halliday and Scott called this agreement a great moral victory and believed that potlatching would cease to be practiced by the Kwakwaka’wakw. By 1921, however, an additional eight Kwakwaka’wakw had been sentenced and imprisoned at Oakalla prison farm in Burnaby. Potlatching was continuing (Cole and Chaikin 1990, 118).

**Dan Cranmer’s Potlatch**

In December 1921, Chief Dan Cranmer hosted a large potlatch on Village Island to repay the bride price of his wife, Emma Cranmer. Between three and four hundred people attended, feeling safe from police detection in this remote location. Some converted Kwakwaka’wakw were also in attendance and had become informants for the police (Webster 1995, 138). Cranmer’s potlatch was the largest ever recorded on the central coast, with Cranmer giving away large amounts of extravagant gifts such as canoes, pool tables, gas boats, sewing machines, gramophones, trunks, violins, bedsteads, blankets, and cash (Dan Cranmer quoted in Codere 1966, 116-118). With the help of RCMP Sergeant Donald Angermann, forty-five people were named and charged with acts such as singing, dancing, making speeches, and giving and receiving gifts. The trial took place in Alert Bay with William Halliday as Justice and Sgt.
Angermann as prosecution. The suggestion of an agreement not to potlatch was proposed but Sgt. Angermann refused as he argued it had not been upheld in the past. He suggested that suspended sentences could be exchanged for the “voluntary” surrender of all potlatch related paraphernalia. This agreement extended to the families of the charged as well (Webster 1995, 138). Virtually all the Cape Mudge Weka’yi, Village Island Mamalilišala and Alert Bay ’Namgis agreed, but the Fort Ruperts refused. Twenty-two people were sentenced to two or six month sentences in Oakhalla prison farm (Cole and Chaikin 1990, 122). The potlatch regalia was collected by Halliday and Angermann and stored in Halliday’s woodshed. Harry Assu, who was only seventeen at the time recounts his memories of the regalia leaving Cape Mudge:

The scow came around from the cannery and put in at the village to pick up the big pile of masks and headdresses and belts and coppers – everything we had for potlatching. I saw it pull out across Discovery Passage to the Campbell River side where more stuff was loaded on the Princess Beatrice for the trip to Alert Bay. Alert Bay was where the potlatch gear was gathered together. It came mainly from our villages around here and from Alert Bay and Village Island. It was sent to the museums in Ottawa from Alert Bay by the Indian agent. Our old people who watched the barge pull out from shore with all their masks on it said: ‘There is nothing left now. We might as well go home.’ When we say ‘go home’ it means to die. (Assu and Inglis 1989, 104)

The surrendered regalia included masks, rattles, whistles, coppers, and dance costumes. The regalia was then moved to the Alert Bay parish hall and put on display and a small admission was charged (Jacknis 2002, 346). The new home for the regalia was to be the Victoria Memorial Museum (now the Canadian Museum of Civilization), but it was to remain property of Department of Indian Affairs under the direction of Duncan Campbell Scott (CMC Archives E2010.14 B13 F3-4).

**Confiscation as Crisis: The Diversion from Regalia to Museum Objects**

Referring back to Appadurai’s concepts of paths and diversions (see page 19), the potlatch regalia undergoes many diversions and reclassifications throughout its biography. Arguably, the potlatch collection was born out of a diversion: when individual pieces of family-owned regalia transitioned into a collective entity.

Before the regalia was surrendered it held a very important role in Kwakwaka’wakw society. As discussed earlier, potlatch regalia is closely associated with family histories, origin
stories, social rank and privileges. The owners controlled access to this regalia. It was highly prized as a property and only those who had inherited the right to wear or dance the regalia could do so. Regalia would be stored in the owner’s house often in large carved chests called k’awat’si – or “boxes of treasures” (Joseph 28, 1998). The protocol and significance surrounding masks is described by Robert Joseph, providing insight into how Kwakwaka’wakw regard regalia, wealth, and status objects more broadly:

When a bride brings masks as part of her dowry, they come both literally and figuratively in these prized containers. The metaphor expands when the masks are danced and the ceremonial house itself becomes a box of treasures...Traditionally and ritually, masks should always be guarded, always be hidden away. Masks are never shown until they are actually danced on the floor of the ceremonial house or used in the community. (Joseph 28, 1998)

Before the regalia was surrendered and displayed in the parish hall, it had its own meanings and significance to the family that owned it. A specific person carved, wove or painted each object. The regalia could have been recently made, or many generations of a family may have danced with these objects at specific potlatches in different villages, passing them down from father to son and through marriage between families. The regalia also possessed material evidence of use such as stains, repairs, frayed fibres on the rigging, and coppers with broken off sections representing displays of a Chief’s political power and status. The regalia had its own role in an equally valid realm of exchange within Kwakwaka’wakw society before its transfer into non-Kwakwaka’wakw hands. The forced surrender of the collection by the Kwakwaka’wakw to Halliday and Angermann served as a moment of crisis necessary for a diversion to occur. This moment of crisis recontextualized the material from one realm of exchange, and indeed one culture and value system, to another. It is important to remember, however, that even though the regalia physically moved into the hands of the Department of Indian Affairs and eventually three large urban museums, it continued to exist in the memories

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6 Coppers are flat sheets of beaten copper cut in the shape of shields with T-shaped ridges. They ranged in size from six inches to two and a half feet high. They were often painted or incised with clan crests or ancestral symbols of their first owners. Each copper had its own identity expressed in its name (Alfred, Reid and Smith 2004, 105). At the time they were confiscated, coppers “could attain a value of several thousand contemporary dollars and their owners enjoyed a corresponding amount of public credit. The owners could keep them, but in general they were destined to change hands in the course of potlatches, sold or given away whole or in fragments” (Levi-Strauss 1982, 135).
of the Kwakwaka’wakw people who had lost their material (see Potlatch: A Strict Law Bids us Dance, 1975; Assu and Inglis 1989).

Correspondence between Halliday and Scott, and Scott and Sapir before and directly after the surrender of the potlatch material provides evidence of a fundamental shift - recognized subconsciously perhaps by the writers - from individually owned potlatch regalia to a collective commodity (also observed by Saunders 1997, 99). In a letter to Scott on March 1st 1922, Halliday includes a copy of the agreement written by himself and Sgt. Angermann for the accused to sign that includes the “voluntary” surrender of the potlatch material:

...And furthermore in token of our good faith in this our agreement we voluntarily surrender to the Department of Indian Affairs through its representative the Indian Agent all our potlatch paraphernalia to wit: - coppers, dancing masks and costumes, head dresses and all other articles used solely for potlatch purposes. All of the above articles are to be disposed of by the Department of Indian Affairs and all funds received therefor [sic] to be returned to the original owners.

We further agree that all the above properties shall be surrendered to the Indian Agent on or before the 25th day of March 1922. (Emphasis added) (CMC archives VII-E-35M B465 F1-1)

The use of the words paraphernalia, articles, and properties emphasizes the writers understandings of these objects within Western notions of ownership and objecthood. The language used in this agreement and subsequent actions suggest that to Halliday, Angermann, and Scott, the regalia was conceived of as an alienable commodity, exchangeable for a monetary value, which was assumed to be an acceptable compensation. To the original owners, however, the regalia’s primary value was tied to intangibles: inherited privileges; ancestral beings; as evidence of political events and as commemorative objects of historic accomplishments. The loss of the potlatch regalia was not only a material loss, but also represented the suppression of Kwakwaka’wakw forms of social, cultural, and economic organization. The materiality of the regalia was not as important as the rights that were associated with it, so even though the material object left Kwakwaka’wakw ownership, the rights associated with that object remained property of the original owners (Webster 1995, 141). Objecthood and the differing roles objects play in people’s lives is a reoccurring theme throughout this exploration.
A letter written from Halliday to Scott on the 10th of April, 1922 reveals a shift in language from the above example. The letter was written shortly after the regalia had come into Halliday’s possession and demonstrates a shift in his perception of the material.

With regard to the material surrendered, I may say that I have piled in my woodshed at the present time at least 300 cubic feet of potlatch material consisting of masks, head dresses and various other potlatch gear. Some of these masks are five to six feet long and are intended to go over the whole person of the dancer but I have not yet had time to tabulate everything. I have arranged with the Anglican church to obtain the use of the parish hall to open this stuff up and tabulate it on the condition that we allow it to be put on exhibition for a couple of days to pay for the use of the hall. It will be a very valuable and very rare collection and should command good prices for museum purposes and would recommend steps be taken to acquaint various museums in Canada of the fact that this material is available so that we may preserve it in our own country and not allow it all to go to the United States. Many of the American museums would simply jump at the chance of obtaining it. When the exhibit is arranged I purpose (sic) taking a number of photographs of the various gear as there may never be another opportunity to obtain such pictures. (Emphasis added, CMC archives VII-E-35M B465 F1-1)

The letter continues:

With regard to the coppers surrendered I have a unique collection of them which have been properly tagged and have obtained from the owners of them the price which they paid for them for potlatch purposes. The prices run from $245.00 to $10,500 and it was a great sacrifice on the part of the owners to surrender them in the way it was done. No museum collector would ever pay anything like what the Indians consider face value of these coppers and a financial loss must inevitably result to the owners of these coppers. I should be very glad to receive your instructions in regards to the whole exhibit. (Emphasis added, CMC archives VII-E-35M B465 F1-1)

By using such terms as valuable, rare, unique, collection, and exhibit we can deduce that in the eyes of Halliday and Scott, the potlatch material had begun its shift from privately owned, ceremonial regalia to a circulating collection.

This is a moment where the collection assumed multiple roles to multiple people; it was simultaneously a commodity, a historic document, and ethnological specimen, whilst maintaining its role as family-owned potlatch regalia. As a commodity, Halliday desired it be exchanged for money; he wanted a museum to purchase the collection. Upon entering a museum, its commodity identity eased as it underwent yet another shift towards museum object. Determining the value of the regalia surrendered seems to be a reoccurring theme in
these letters and of utmost importance as the writers were tabulating a compensation amount for those who had surrendered the material. Halliday’s discussion of the regalia as *very valuable* and *rare* doubtless reflects his awareness of the hive of museum collecting which had occurred along the northern Pacific coast in North America in the late nineteenth century and was beginning to slow down in the early twentieth century (Cole 1995). Canadian museums were slow to begin collecting and a collection of this size and importance would have been important to the museum community.

Halliday insisted on photographing the collection while it was on display in the parish hall, as he argued there would probably never be another opportunity to do so (CMC Archives VII-E-35M B465 F1-1). However, the display of ceremonial regalia to the public in this manner was disrespectful to Kwakw̱ən̓ax̱ala’wakw people. Masks were not meant to be seen at any time other than when they were being danced at a feast or potlatch:
It was not common for us to display our ceremonial masks and regalia anywhere other than in our ceremony. It was distressing for our people to see them on public display after confiscation. The masks and regalia are normally kept carefully wrapped, in our box of treasures until the next ceremony. Yet they were placed on display, and an Indian Agent charged admission to see them (Sanborn 2009, 83)

Public display of the regalia as documented in the photographs is a physical manifestation of the material beginning its recontextualization into a consolidated collection and simultaneously into museum objects. The collection’s purpose in this moment is to be displayed and viewed by the public as specimens of Kwakwaka’wakw material culture and evidence of a successful enforcement of the potlatch law.

During the display of the regalia in the parish hall, Halliday was visited by prominent collector George Heye of the Museum of the American Indian in New York. Heye wanted to look at the collection and purchased 33 pieces for a price of $291.00 (CMC archives VII-E-35M B465 F1-1). In a letter to Scott on September 6th, 1922 Halliday described the Heye purchase
and his reasons for doing so. He states: “I showed him part of what we had with the idea as much as possible of finding out the value of the exhibit from a museum collector’s point of view” (CMC archives VII-E-35M B465 F1-1). Again, this passage points to the importance of determining the financial value of the collection in the museum field. Halliday was concerned with getting the highest possible amount of compensation for the Kwakwaka'wakw while Scott was outraged at Halliday’s actions. In a letter dated September 20th, 1922 Scott remonstrates Halliday:

In view of the definite instructions given you in official letter of June 6th, last regarding the disposal of these articles, the Department is at a loss to understand your action in disposing of them without authority, more especially in view of the fact that they are to be taken to the United States, when they should have remained in our Canadian museum. (CMC archives VII-E-35M B465 F1-1)

Scott’s remarks point out yet another interest in the collection at this point. His disapproval of part of the collection leaving the country was likely because it was property of the Department of Indian Affairs, but more importantly, that it had become part of an emerging Canadian history and material culture. To the Department of Indian Affairs, the collection was considered evidence of a “disappearing race” that once inhabited land that is now Canadian. The objects in the collection underwent a transition into specimens of this “disappearing race,” evidence of a culture that was thought to have been assimilated into Canadian society. The appropriation of First Nations cultures into Canadian national identity is an aspect of this collection that will reappear later in this collection’s biography.

The collection next travelled over 4000km to Ottawa, literally removing it from its sociocultural context and recontextualizing it as a museum object. Once the remainder of the collection arrived at Victoria Memorial Museum in Ottawa, Director Edward Sapir set about the task of valuing the collection in comparison with prices paid by other museums for similar material. Sapir came to an amount of $1456.00 for the potlatch regalia not including the coppers (CMC archives VII-E-35M B465 F-2). To the Kwakwaka'wakw, the coppers were the most valuable both financially and in terms of power and status in the community. Halliday recorded the owners, names of the coppers and the value of the coppers when they were surrendered and this information is included on Sapir’s list, however no compensation was ever received for the coppers because of a disjuncture in value systems between the
Kwakwaka’wakw and the museum field. This disjuncture is evident in a letter between Sapir and Scott dated March 14th 1923: “You may remember I placed no valuation on these [coppers] as I realized that their value in the minds of the Indians bare no relation to the value as mere objects of ethnological specimens” (Emphasis added) CMC archives VII-E-35M B465 F1-1). This difference in perspective in regards to value is further revealed in Halliday’s discussion of the affair in his book Potlatch and Totem. He recalls:

Some of the things for which good prices were paid, the ordinary individual would not consider worth anything at all, while some of the things were more or less new and though in many instances were much better looking, they only brought fair to low prices, as to those learned in the antiquities of the Indians they had little value. (Halliday 1935)

For museum staff and collectors in this time period there was greater value in pieces that were older and deemed to be “authentic” and “traditional” (Cole 1995). Contemporary pieces or pieces which showed any evidence of European technology or materials were seen as lesser arts and therefore less valuable as ethnological specimens. The use of the word antiquities signals that Halliday has already subsumed the potlatch regalia into the realm of historical museum objects that were valuable based on their ability to represent traditional Kwakwaka’wakw society in a taxonomic system of culture, and not as objects that were in continual use.

In correspondence between Sapir, Scott, and Charles Trick Currelly, Director of the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, we see the collection discussed in language that clearly defines it as museum objects and artefacts, namely as ethnological specimens. On October 3rd 1922, Scott received a letter from Currelly. Currelly was pleading his case for receipt of part of the collection:

...Mr. Halliday, the Indian Agent of Alert Bay, confiscated a number of Indian dancing masks, red cedar dancing boxes, old stone axes, old coppers etc...As the Ottawa collection is already so large, and as we are the other big museum in the country, I should be exceedingly grateful if it were possible to move in this direction, so that the things were sent on to us. (CMC Archives E2010.14 B13 F3-4)

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Currelly’s request for a portion of the collection points again to the collecting environment in the early twentieth century. As already mentioned, Canadian museums were relatively late in forming ethnological collections from the Northwest Coast compared to American and European museums (Cole 1995). Currelly’s request suggests he recognized that this was a significant collection, which technically was already retrieved from the community. Acquiring part of this collection would have been invaluable to the ROM’s growing collection and help solidify its position as an important player within the museum landscape.

**Becoming Museum Objects**

When an object becomes a museum object, it undergoes a major disruption in its biography (cf. Seip 1999). When the potlatch regalia transitioned briefly into a commodity it moved from one world of exchange to another, but when the collection became a museum collection it was again singularized, which to Kopytoff essentially means removing an object from its path or sphere of existence and raising its status (1988, 74). While this may be true for a museological perspective, it is unlikely that the transition of the potlatch regalia into museum objects was seen this way by the Kwakwaka’wakw. Russell Belk states that

> when an object enters a collection it often becomes immune from monetary valuation, since the collector values it instead for its contribution to the collection. Since collected objects that once had a functional use are no longer used for that purpose, the use value of the object is reconfigured and converted to more symbolic value…objects within a collection are recontextualized and elevated to a place of reverence. (Belk 2006, 541)

Historically, museum objects were demarcated as objects with aesthetic, artistic, cultural and historical value to be preserved for perpetuity for the public; their status has been elevated as unique, singular, and highly valuable. Value here refers to financial value but more importantly as research value, display value and educational value. It is important to note however, that when museums were collecting “evidence” of a culture, multiples of an object were often collected to both establish the defining characteristics of a particular object and also to observe variations and adaptations.

This transition in terms of ethnography is clearly defined by Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett when she says, “Ethnographic artefacts are objects of ethnography. They are artefacts created by ethnographers. Objects become ethnographic by virtue of being defined,
segmented, detached, and carried away by ethnographers” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1990, 387). While the potlatch collection was not actively collected by ethnographers, it still underwent the same intentional recontextualization into ethnographic objects by those involved. While some may view the transition of objects into a museum as a process of decontextualization, and as potentially the last stage of an object’s life history (Seip 1999), a museum object need not be perceived as static. Gosden and Knowles emphasize an object’s constant state of becoming:

The physical circumstances of the object change continuously, but so also do its sets of significances as it accumulates a history. It is possible, when records are made, to reconstruct this history, which carries with it the lives of those involved with the object. An object is best viewed as indicative of process, rather than static relations, and this process is ongoing in the museum as elsewhere, so that there is a series of continuous social relations surrounding the object connecting ‘field’ and ‘museum’. (Gosden and Knowles 2001, 4-5)

If we reconsider a museum as an active, living place rather than a place where objects are frozen in time, we can see how museums play a much more active role in the lives of objects. “The Museum is not an enclosed container for inert objects – it is a launching place for anthropological adventures into the past and, indeed, the future. To study a museum is to study an endlessly shifting assortment of people and things. Its possibilities are infinite” (Gosden, Larson and Petch 2007, 6). Objects enter into museums with complex histories of production, use, and exchange and continue to accumulate histories and meanings throughout their time in the museum through research, exhibits, and interpretation. In more recent years, long-term loans, permanent loans, handling sessions with communities and repatriation allow objects to be even more active within their roles as museum objects and subsequently allow museum objects to move in and out of the singularization process of the museum. Objects in a post-colonial museum can, essentially, hold dual or multiple roles and navigate simultaneously between museums and communities instead of being either distinctly museum objects or community objects. While the potlatch collection may enter into the Victoria Memorial Museum, Royal Ontario Museum, and Museum of the American Indian in the traditional sense of a museum object, with its purpose being solely to fill the role of ethnological specimen and to engage in research and exhibition, its life history becomes much more complex throughout time.
At the Victoria Memorial Museum, Sapir used Halliday’s object lists arranged by original owner to divide the collection into three groups: objects reserved for the Victoria Memorial Museum, objects reserved for the Royal Ontario Museum, and nine objects reserved for Duncan Campbell Scott’s personal collection to be stored in his office. How Sapir came to these allocations is unclear in the correspondence, the Victoria Memorial Museum did have a Northwest Coast collection so it is logical that he retained those pieces which would best complement the museum’s current collection. The objects reserved for the two museums are singularized as museum objects, but the materials reserved for Scott’s personal collection inhabit a slightly different role. Scott had travelled extensively to reserves in Canada and had accumulated a personal collection representing his work and travels (CMC Archives VII-E-35M B466 F1-4). Not much is known about exactly how the nine objects from the potlatch regalia in Scott’s personal collection were used during their time in his office. From the limited mention of this portion of the collection in archival sources, it seems it was displayed in Scott’s personal office or in the office of the Department of Indian Affairs along with pieces from other areas of Canada. Why did Scott feel the need to designate nine pieces of potlatch regalia for his personal collection? Did he appreciate the aesthetic beauty and skill of Kwakwaka’wakw design? Did he have a particular interest in Kwakwaka’wakw cultural expression, spiritual systems, or social organization? From his strong objections to the potlatch and his actions to abolish it, it is also highly plausible that the selection and display of Scott’s portion were trophies of his moral victory in defeating the potlatch and his work to assimilate First Nations people across Canada.

This portion of the potlatch regalia reserved for Scott was diverted from the path of the rest of the collection to become a souvenir of Scott’s work and travels. Sapir chose quite significant pieces from the collection for Scott including a Hamsiwe’ supernatural man-eating bird mask and an Echo mask (CMC Archives I-A-205M B716 F7). These must have been very impressive displayed in his office, and although they were not directly collected by Scott, he had a large role to play in their surrender and acquisition by the Department of Indian Affairs. Similar to the collection of spoils of war, they were evidence of his supposed success. After his death, the nine pieces of potlatch regalia were donated to the Victoria Memorial Museum in 1932 along with the rest of his First Nations collection (CMC Archives I-A-205M B716 F7).
Chapter Three: Objects in Action, an Exhibition History 1927-1979

As introduced in the last chapter, the potlatch regalia has moved along its trajectory from being individually owned potlatch regalia which experienced a moment of crisis through confiscation, resulting in a diversion to becoming a collection of museum objects. The next stage of its life history includes the movement of parts of the collection around the world in various manifestations. Though this is not necessarily any different to what any other museum object does, it is important to distinguish this segment of the collection’s biography as significant because it forms a previously neglected part of the collection’s biography, and because it demonstrates an understanding of the active roles museum objects play during their time in a museum.

If we think of museums not as storehouses of inert objects but as active contributors and receivers of information, we can begin to understand the agency of objects held within them. “If a single object can pass through numerous hands before becoming absorbed into the Museum’s collections,” write Gosden, Larson, Petch (2007, 5), “then the Museum as a whole encompasses a series of vast, complicated networks of people, many of whom would never have come into contact, or come to value their contact, had it not been for objects.” Beyond this “pre-museum” life, objects can continue to accumulate histories and meanings through internal exhibitions, travelling exhibitions and research projects.

Once the confiscated objects were accepted into the museum, the archival traces of the potlatch regalia became sparse. The role of large urban museums in the early twentieth century, such as the three involved in this case (CMC ROM and MAI), was to exhibit specimens, provide objects for scholarly research, and act as repositories for a country’s treasures. Published accounts of the potlatch collection state that the collection was shipped and then stored in the museums, uncrated, for the next five decades (Saunders 1995, 40-41; 47, Webster 1995). Correspondence between CMC staff and government officials in the early 1960s reinforces this notion that the collection remained static, un-exhibited and unused during its time at the museum. In addition, in a letter from Denis B. Alsford, Curator of Collections at the National Museum to Don Assu, Chair of the Cape Mudge Band Council in 1977, he proclaims:
The collection has been set aside in the Reserve Storage area for some years now, and we do not regard it as being part of our collections. It is not used for exhibitions, research or any other reason, and if we receive any requests to see it or photograph it or any part of it, we refuse and suggest that the request be sent to the Band Councils. (CMC Archives E2010.14 B13 F3)

It is not clear from Alsford’s letter whether the above actions were a recent development or if he was inferring that the collection had been restricted in these ways during its entire stay in the museum. A closer examination of catalogue cards at the Canadian Museum of Civilization and the Royal Ontario Museum, however, reveals pockets of activity within the museums’ portions of the collection. These pockets of activity exist in the documentary traces of the collection that make up the museum register. Referencing prominent theorists such as Kopytoff, Latour, and Alberti, Swinney describes the museum register as:

> those documents and textual practices that construct collections and that record the career trajectories, or biographies, of objects, and the networks of actors and actants (sensu Latour 2005) – including makers, users, collectors, agents, dealers, conservators, shippers, preparators, curators, tools, machines, preservatives, inks, paints, packing materials and collecting apparatus of all kinds – with which they engage, in their pre-museum and intra-museum careers. (Swinney 2012, 31)

Beginning with the CMC’s catalogue cards, the exhibition history of portions of the collection manifested itself through traces found in exhibition catalogues, newsletters, loan documents and the hosting institutions’ archives. Generally, record keeping in museums in the early twentieth century was not as detailed as the level of record keeping museums engage in today, however I found several instances where pieces of the collection travelled to various locations across Canada, the United States, Germany, and France for exhibition, publication, and appearance in television and film.

In the CMC and ROM’s records, we can begin to put together traces of the collection’s movement. In some of the catalogue cards, locations and dates of loans are marked down. The information is very brief but it provides a starting point for the objects’ movement throughout their time at the CMC and the ROM. There are large gaps in time however, where none of the objects were recorded as loaned or exhibited. This may be a result of a lack of documentation or it could reflect larger trends in exhibit subject matter as well as socio-political events of the time. For example, the Victoria Memorial Museum, which became the National Museum of
Canada in 1927 (now the CMC), was reduced in its operations during the Second World War. Between 1939 and 1946 the federal Topographical Services branch occupied part of the museum’s building, meaning that all of the museum’s exhibits closed down except those on the ground floor, and staff were redistributed to other government branches until the war was over (Canadian Museum of Civilization, History of the Canadian Museum of Civilization). Disruptions in the museum’s operations such as this could explain the large gaps in activity of the collection. The exhibition history I present here is not necessarily a complete account of the collection’s movement, but it does represent a compilation of information that happened to be recorded by museum staff over the years. It is probable that there are instances in which the exhibition or use of parts of the potlatch collection were not recorded. Most likely these instances include the use of the potlatch collection in permanent exhibitions or internal temporary exhibitions in the holding museums.

Some of the pieces in the two museums’ collections travelled to multiple places at multiple times throughout the 56 and 66 year period at the CMC and ROM respectively. In this chapter, I discuss the exhibitions chronologically as a way to examine situations in which the objects came together and accumulated new significances. Within the discussion of each exhibit, I have listed the objects from the CMC or ROM’s collection and include their accession numbers. The CMC’s accession numbers follow the format of VII-E-*** and the ROM’s accession numbers have two formats, HN *** and 923.26.**. I have also included the U’mista Cultural Centre’s accession numbers where possible in order to establish a way to trace the objects as they move through collections and provide as continuous a record of the collection as possible. I have privileged the Kwak’wala names and the Kwak’waka’wakw terminology for the regalia wherever possible.

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8 There are several references to exhibitions in the catalogue records for the potlatch collection once held at the CMC for which no further information could be found. A list of these exhibitions is found in Appendix A. Further study of these exhibits would help complete this aspect of the collection’s object biography.

9 Nuyumbalees Cultural Centres accession numbers and collection’s records were not available at the time of writing.
The earliest sign of activity recorded within the CMC’s portion of the potlatch regalia occurs in 1927, when at least four masks from the potlatch collection were loaned to the National Gallery in Ottawa. These masks included:

- Nułamał Fool mask (VII-E-584; UCC-80.01.148) previously owned by Bond Sound
- Hamsiwe’ Supernatural Man-Eating Bird Headdress (VII-E-617; UCC-80.01.001) previously owned by Abraham
- Killer Whale mask (VII-E-482; UCC-80.01.002) previously owned by Alex Corrie, attributed to Mungo Martin by Peter Macnair
- Hamsiwe’ Supernatural Man-Eating Bird headdress (VII-E-616; UCC-80.01.020)

The masks were displayed in an exhibit called the *Exhibition of Canadian West Coast Art Native and Modern* at the National Gallery from November 20th, 1927 to December 31st, 1927. The exhibit then travelled to the Art Gallery of Toronto (now Art Gallery of Ontario) and the Art Association of Montreal in 1928. This exhibit was organized by the hosting institutions in conjunction with the National Museum. In the introduction to the exhibition pamphlet Eric Brown, then Director of the National Gallery, states that the purpose of this exhibition was for the first time to:

> combine the art work of the Canadian West Coast tribes with that of our more sophisticated artists in an endeavor to analyse their relationships to one another, if such exist, and particularly to enable this primitive and interesting art to take a definite place as one of the most valuable of Canada’s artistic productions. (Exhibition of Canadian West Coast Art Native and Modern 1927, 2)

The purpose was to exhibit totem poles, canoes, masks, headdresses, carved chests, argillite carvings and chilkat robes alongside contemporary art by Canadian artists such as Emily Carr, Lawren Harris, Edwin H. Holgate, A.Y. Jackson, Paul Kane, J.E.H. MacDonald, and F.H. Varley in order to establish Northwest Coast art as distinctly Canadian, literally derived from the Canadian landscape. Marius Barbeau, in his short contribution to the catalogue, notes “a

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10 Unfortunately there was not a detailed list of the objects included in this exhibit. The only list I found was included in correspondence between W.H. Collins, Acting Director of the National Museum and Edward R. Greig, Curator at the Art Gallery of Toronto 1927. This list simply included the number of each type of object the National Museum agreed to loan to the Art Gallery of Toronto, for example “Wooden masks about 15” (AGO Archives A-08.05, 11. Exhibitions: Curatorial 1928). The masks from the potlatch collection were identified by myself using several photographs of the exhibition both at the National Gallery of Canada in 1927 and the Art Gallery of Toronto in 1928. The identity of these masks was confirmed by Juanita Johnston, Collections Manager and Assistant Director at U’Mista Cultural Centre in April 2013.
commendable feature of this aboriginal art for us is that it is truly Canadian in its inspiration. It has sprung up wholly from the soil and the sea within our national boundaries” (Exhibition of Canadian West Coast Art Native and Modern 1927, 4). Here the masks from the potlatch collection became an example of Northwest Coast art, to be appreciated for its aesthetic qualities, and subsumed into Canadian national identity. Indeed, Barbeau’s discussion of the works included in the exhibition reflected the common hierarchy of skill often imposed on distinct artistic styles of Northwest Coast groups:

The North and the South stand in marked contrast. Their local traditions and aims differed. The skill of their craftsmen was hardly comparable. The Haidas, the Tsimsyan [sic] and the Tlingit, to the north, were by far the best carvers and weavers. Their style was smooth, elaborate and refined. Their most accomplished artists have left works of art that count among the outstanding creations of mankind in the sphere of plastic or decorative beauty. The southern tribes, on the other hand (the Kwakiutl and Nootka), could not boast of like refinement. The beings they represent on their belongings often are monsters; their features are highly conventional and grotesque. When they depict animals, the contortions of the face and the body usually belong to caricature rather than sincere realism. (Exhibition of Canadian West Coast Art Native and Modern 1927, 3)

Barbeau’s initial discussion of Northwest coast art is in past tense - as a dying artistic tradition left behind by accomplished artists - and then suddenly switches halfway through, discussing the art and the artists in present tense, perhaps betraying his own knowledge as an anthropologist that these art forms and cultural expressions had not disappeared. Barbeau’s statement also points to the recognition of larger distinctions between language and cultural groups, but distinctions between bands are lost. Kwakwaka’wakw masks were placed on an aesthetic hierarchy based on judgements related to sophistication and civilization.

This early exhibition is recognized as the first exhibition in North America to display Northwest Coast artefacts as art. In his book The Storage Box of Tradition, Ira Jacknis discusses the exhibition and remarks, “what is so distinctive about the display is the very stark and modern look of the installation. Photographs show that native artefacts were hung on walls or placed on pedestals. There were very few cases and minimal labels. Such exhibit techniques clearly allied the show to art rather than anthropological museums” (Jacknis 2002, 121). This kind of minimalist display was used to push the viewer to consider the masks, spoons, and blankets as feats of artistic skill in their own right. As Jacknis notes however, the message
seems not to have been communicated successfully, as we do not see this type of display again until 1967, with *Arts of the Raven* at the Vancouver Art Gallery.

In 1954, one Daxdaxaulamł owl mask (VII-E-457) from the CMC was displayed in an exhibit called *Exhibition of Masks* from October 28th to December 31st at the New Brunswick Museum, St. Johns. This owl mask was made by Willie Seaweed and was owned by Chief Hiüamas, Ned Alvin Innis before it was surrendered (U’mista Cultural Centre records). The exhibit had 32 artefacts in total, which included masks from Africa, Alaska, Arctic Canada, British Columbia, Ontario, Ceylon, Indonesia, Japan, Easter Island, and New Brunswick. In the catalogue records, it only mentions the loan of one owl mask (VII-E-457) to the New Brunswick museum. In the New Brunswick archives, however, there is an additional mask apart from the owl from the National Museum of Canada that could possibly be part of the potlatch collection. It is described as a Kwakíutl Bird Mask from Alert Bay, acquired in 1922 (New Brunswick Museum Art Department fonds F126). Unfortunately, there are no accession numbers attached to these descriptions but the second Kwakíutl Bird Mask, acquired in 1922 could refer to one of many bird masks in the confiscated collection. While there is no discussion of this exhibit available, it is probable that the Daxdaxaulamł owl mask’s role in this exhibit is to demonstrate the unique ways in which the Kwakʼwakawakw constructed and designed masks, situated in a global context of masks as a type of ceremonial, religious and cultural expression.

In December of that same year, ten or possibly eleven objects from the CMC’s portion of the potlatch collection were displayed in the Christmas exhibition entitled *Masks of the Indians of the West Coast* from December 19th to 29th at the Winnipeg Art Gallery. These masks included:

- Unknown mask (VII-E-441) previously owned by J. Dick
- Unknown mask (VII-E-448) previously owned by Jim Bell
- Animal mask (VII-E-528) previously owned by Tom Wallace
- Unknown mask (VII-E-551) previously owned by Homiksinis

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11 Abiding by the accession numbers provided on the item list from the exhibit at the Winnipeg Art Gallery, eleven objects were included in the show with accession numbers in the potlatch collection range. However, one of the objects listed VII-E-611 whose accession number signifies it is part of the potlatch collection, is listed as collected by Harlan Smith in 1929. It is for this reason I have stated that only ten masks were definitively loaned, possibly eleven.
• Bird mask (VII-E-562) previously owned by Dan Quatell
• Kulus mask or Supernatural White Down Covered Bird mask (VII-E-566; UCC-80.01.154) previously owned by He’wasa
• Xwixwi mask (VII-E-570; UCC-80.01.120) previously owned by Tom Alfred
• Unknown mask (VII-E-581) previously owned by Harry Mountain
• Dzunukwa mask (VII-E-582; UCC-80.01.027) previously owned by Harry Mountain
• Unknown mask (VII-E-611)
• Duck (?) mask (VII-E-619)

They formed a part of a larger group of 53 masks loaned from the CMC for this very short exhibition. In the item list for the exhibition, they are listed as collected by D.C. Scott in 1922 (Winnipeg Art Gallery Archives CA101.55). There is no mention of the potlatch prohibition or the confiscation of the regalia. Without prior knowledge a reader would assume that these masks were collected by Scott in a conventional manner rather than by a forced surrender. This exhibition is also mentioned in the Winnipeg Art Gallery newsletter which states that the “Christmas exhibition will show a valuable collection of masks of the Indians of the West Coast, showing the skill and yet fantastic ideas expressed in the art of this race of people” (Winnipeg Art Gallery Association. Newsletters. December 1954). This description does not relegate First Nation’s cultures to the past as we have seen in other exhibition catalogues, however neither does it explicitly discuss the continuity of Northwest Coast cultural expression. This is especially relevant given the exhibition occurred only three years after the potlatch ban was dropped, one year after Mungo Martin hosted the first legal potlatch on the west coast in Victoria, and at the beginning of the resurgence of Northwest Coast art spanning the next two decades.

One year later in December of 1955 the Art Gallery and Museum, London, Ontario (now Museum London) hosted an exhibition called The Canadian Indian in which the same Daxdałałamł owl mask (VII-E-457) made by Willie Seaweed and a bird rattle (VII-E-460; UCC-80.01.140) previously owned by Amos Dawson were exhibited. The exhibition presented the usual variety of costumes, masks, house posts, beadwork, headdresses, model canoes etc. from “three major groups of Canadian Indians – the West Coast tribes, the Plains Indians, and the

12 The newsletter also incorrectly states the masks were loaned from the Hudson’s Bay Company, however the accession numbers indicate they were loaned from the National Museum.
Eastern Woodlands people...loaned by the National Gallery of Canada” (*The Canadian Indian*, The Art Gallery and Museum, London, Dec. 1955-Jan.1956). These materials were exhibited alongside a large selection of Paul Kane paintings and sketches loaned from the Royal Ontario Museum. In the exhibition notes from the Museum London archive, Paul Kane’s career and work is given a large amount of attention, detailing his position as a pioneering painter documenting the lives of Canadian Indians across the country (*The Canadian Indian, The Art Gallery and Museum, London, Dec. 1955 – Jan.1956*). Masks, as general type divorced from their specific cultural affiliations, are discussed in the note as follows:

They were of a religious nature, and were generally worn in secret societies, membership in which gave great prestige. Masks were not a matter of amusement as our Halloween masks are, but represented the supernaturals of the spirit world. In the collection in the main hall case, there are masks representing the Moon Spirit and the Owl Spirit from the West Coast. Masks of this type were used in the moving picture The Loon’s Necklace. (*Museum London Archives. The Canadian Indian, Dec. 1955-Jan.1956*)

This reference to the “owl spirit” may in fact refer to the Daxdaxaulamł owl mask (VII-E-457) made by Willie Seaweed. The purpose of this exhibition is not explicitly stated in these notes but it appears to have explored the material culture of Canadian First Nations peoples and to have used Paul Kane’s work as a type of documentary source of “Canadian Indian” life.

In 1959, the Royal Ontario Museum held an exhibition from February 11th to April 5th entitled *Masks: The Many Faces of Man*. The exhibit brought together masks from collections all over North America which were divided into six sections: The New World I (Canada and Northern USA); The New World II (Southern USA, Mexico and South America); Oceania; Africa; The Far East; and The Near East: Europe and Modern. From the ROM’s portion of the potlatch collection, two wolf headdresses (923.26.3; 923.26.8), a supernatural bird mask (HN 548, 923.26.6), and an eagle headdress (HN 522, 923.26.52, UCC-88-06-011) were displayed in the exhibit.¹³ The catalogue states that the purpose of the exhibit was to bring together masks from across the world and examine common meanings and uses of masks, for example as a

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¹³ In the exhibition catalogue the eagle headdress (catalogue number A50) HN 522, 923.26.52 is incorrectly named and numbered a Hawk Mask, 924.36.2. This mistake was discovered by Susan Loetitia Clark Wilson in her Master’s degree thesis, which consisted of a catalogue of the Northwest Coast masks and headdresses in the Royal Ontario Museum’s collection.
transformer of personality, as a protective device, as decoration or as part of a ritual (Royal Ontario Museum, 1963).

From June to September 1960, six objects from the CMC’s collection were displayed in an exhibition called West Coast Indian Exhibit at the Stratford Festival, an annual theatrical festival started in 1952 dedicated to the works of William Shakespeare. The seven objects included in this exhibit were

- Imas, Ancestral Spirit mask (VII-E-446; UCC-80.01.017) previously owned by Hilamas (Ned Alvin Innis)
- Sisutl belt (VII-E-466; UCC-80.01.155) previously owned by Bond Sound
- Xwixwi rattle (VII-E-483; UCC 02.05.011 OR UCC 02.05.014) previously owned by Tom Alfred
- Carved box (VII-E-532) previously owned by Sam Charlie
- Unknown mask (VII-E-565) previously owned by J. Kalokwami
- Sisutl belt (VII-E-571) previously owned by J. Dick

The exhibition was arranged by Alvin Hamilton, the Minister of Northern Affairs and National Resources, and the National Museum of Canada. According to the accompanying exhibition pamphlet, the pieces from the potlatch collection were displayed alongside totem poles, chilkat robes, daggers, carved spoons, silver jewelry, argillite, and coppers from the Haida and Tlingit. It is unclear if any of the southern groups were included in this exhibition. The pamphlet explains each category of objects in detail, discussing the material used to make them and the function of the objects in west coast society overall. What is distinct about this exhibit pamphlet is that it discussed the potlatch and the prohibition of the potlatch by the Canadian government:

Toward the end of the 19th century, the Indian interest in craftsmanship declined. The society of the West Coast tribes was infiltrated by European culture and gradually the traditional customs were abandoned. The potlatches were declared illegal by the Dominion Government and the Indians began to leave their villages to find new occupations with the fishing fleets and canneries. (West Coast Exhibit, From the Collection of the Stratford Festival Archives)

While the “decline of interest in craftsmanship” and “abandoning” of traditional customs had more to do with assimilationist actions taken by government officials, missionaries and the effects of disease rather than a voluntary move away from craftsmanship and customs as this passage alludes to, it is still the only exhibition pamphlet in this exhibition history which
mentions the potlatch ban. It does not however, discuss the removal of the potlatch ban from the Indian Act in 1951. Another significant aspect of this exhibit which is reflected in the pamphlet is the recognition of contemporary artists and the continuing of cultural traditions:

During the exhibition Ellen Neel, a direct descendant of a celebrated Kwakiutl chief named Klakwagila, and granddaughter of Charlie James, will carve a twenty-two-foot totem pole. Mrs. Neel, one of the country’s best-known practitioners of this ancient art, will be assisted in the task of carving the pole into its intricate pattern by her husband Ted Neel...Although only a few of the older people continue the artistic traditions of the coast tribes, a revival of the Indian arts and crafts is now in progress. The National Museum of Canada, the University of British Columbia, and the British Columbia Provincial Museum are encouraging carving, the making of jewelry and painting in an effort to preserve these unique expressions of the rich folklore and mythology of the West Coast Indians. (West Coast Exhibit Stratford Festival 1960, From the Collection of the Stratford Festival Archives)

This is the first exhibition of the potlatch collection that included a contemporary practising artist. That the artist was Kwakwaka’wakw carver Ellen Neel, the first female totem pole carver, is even more significant to this case. Neel was taught to carve when she was only ten by her grandfather, Charlie James, who had surrendered regalia during the potlatch confiscation. To date, I have found no documentation indicating whether Neel was aware there was confiscated material in the collection, or what she thought of the exhibited objects generally. When Neel moved to Vancouver with her husband and six children, she turned to carving and painting both full sized and miniature totem poles to sell to curios shops, dealers, and department stores. Throughout the forties, fifties and sixties Neel remained a prominent figure in the modern aboriginal art scene, carving for important commissions nationally and internationally and advocating for the value of contemporary aboriginal art as a living culture rather than focussing on preserving the traditional (Nuytten 1982). While the Stratford Festival exhibit pamphlet is correct in mentioning that large museums were instrumental supporters of aboriginal art in the sixties it is important to remember that artists such as Neel and her contemporaries (Doug Cranmer, George Clutsei, Mungo Martin, Mathias Joe, and Bill Reid among others) were developing their own cultural and artistic resurgence by opening workshops, galleries and completing commissions.

In 1961, the Royal Ontario Museum loaned ten objects to the Art Gallery of Hamilton on a long-term loan. One of these objects was a wolf headdress (HN 496, 923.26.3) previously
owned by Harry Hanuse before it was surrendered in 1922. In 1967, the loan was extended until 1969 when the Art Gallery of Hamilton staff asked to acquire the objects into their permanent collection. Director T.R. MacDonald stated that “Objects such as the Indian masks which are so scarce now are very difficult for us to acquire. We have a few already, but I despair of enlarging the collection” (ROM Ethnology Loan Files. Ethnology Department). The ROM refused and the loan was returned that same year (ROM Ethnology Loan Files. Ethnology Department).

In October 1961, the Heard Museum in Phoenix, Arizona, opened an exhibition called *Indians of Canada* in which the following regalia from the potlatch collection were exhibited:

- Unknown mask (VII-E-441)
- Gangananamis mask (VII-E-444; UCC-80.01.034) previously owned by Hilamas.
- Sisutl belt (VII-E-466; UCC-80.01.155) previously owned by Bond Sound
- Imas, Ancestral Spirit mask (VII-E-480; UCC-80.01.146) previously owned by Abraham, attributed to Mungo Martin
- Nulamal Fool mask (VII-E-514; UCC-80.01.018) previously owned by Harry Mountain
- Bird mask (VII-E-562)
- Xwixwi mask (VII-E-570; UCC-80.01.120) previously owned by Tom Alfred
- Unknown mask (VII-E-583)
- Nulamal Fool mask (VII-E-584; UCC-80.01.148) previously owned by Bond Sound
- Sea Eagle (?) mask (VII-E-595)
- Hamsiwe’ Supernatural Man-Eating Bird Mask (VII-E-616; UCC80.01.020)
- Duck (?) mask (VII-E-619)

The exhibition included a large amount of artefacts from the National Museum of Canada, as well as collections from the British Columbia Provincial Museum (now RBCM) and the Robert H. Lowie Museum of Anthropology, University of California, Berkeley. The exhibit included objects from the “Eskimo,” the Plains, the Woodlands, and the Pacific Coast (Heard Museum of Anthropology and Primitive Arts. 1961).

From March to November 1962, four objects from the CMC’s collection were exhibited at the World’s Fair Seattle in an exhibit called *Northwest Coast Indian Art* organized by Dr. Erna Gunther. These included:

- human face mask (VII-E-448) previously owned by Jim Bell
- hamatsa raven mask (VII-E-508) previously owned by Henry Jumbo Bell
- wolf mask (VII-E-592) previously owned by Tom Wallace
- Hi’namix headdress (VII-E-560; UCC-80.01.024) previously owned by Tom Alfred.

The Hi’namix headdress is distinctly Nuu-chah-nulth in style and is incorrectly labelled as a “wolf mask” in the Seattle World’s fair catalogue (Gunther 1962, 78). According to the U’mista Cultural Centre’s records, this headdress probably came into the ownership of Tom Alfred’s family through a marriage with the Nuu-chah-nulth.\(^{14}\) Also exhibited at the Seattle World’s Fair was an Atlak’amł (Dance of the Forest Spirits) Mask (HN 471, 923.26.133; UCC-88.06.003) from the Royal Ontario Museum’s collection. This mask is pictured in the catalogue on page 37 and described on page 88 as follows: “A mask with less carving than painting shows a human face with very thick lips. The hair is made of raffia which may be an indication that it was part of the ceremonial regalia made for Edward S. Curtis when he photographed the Kwak’iutl” (Gunther 1962, 88). This connection to Edward Curtis remains unconfirmed. When I asked Juanita Johnston, Collections Manager and Assistant Director at U’mista Cultural Centre, about this possible history she stated that raffia was not a material that was traditionally used but that artists would often use what is readily available to them. She also shared that the owner Harry Mountain never showed this mask and its accompanying masks because it was such a high-ranking dance and he wanted to save it for his son (Juanita Johnston, pers. comm. May 14th, 2013). Therefore, the probability of this mask being made for Edward Curtis is low.

The exhibit was one of five main exhibits at the Fine Arts Exhibition of the Seattle World’s Fair. Objects displayed in the exhibit were loaned from museums all over North America and Europe, bringing together some of the most significant collections of Northwest Coast material in the world. Most importantly, this exhibition reunited objects from the potlatch collection that had previously been separated between the Royal Ontario Museum and the National Museum Canada. These meeting points are significant because they represent

\(^{14}\) This error in description was determined by myself by cross-referencing the accession numbers of the headdress in the Seattle World’s Fair catalogue and the U’Mista Cultural Centre’s collection on the Reciprocal Research Network (RRN) and the U’Mista Cultural Centre’s website. The description of the headdress held at the U’Mista Cultural Centre confirmed that the headdress is a Nuu-chah-nulth Hi’n’namix headdress acquired by Tom Alfred’s through marriage with a Nuu-chah-nulth family not a wolf mask.
moments of object action but also moments of reunion. These objects have come back into contact with each other, however there is no indication that their shared history was told to the World’s Fair audience. The exhibition catalogue is written by Dr. Erna Gunther, a distinguished Northwest Coast scholar. Her discussion of the exhibit explores the climate, landscape and language group organization of the Northwest Coast as a geo-cultural region. She discusses the objects included in the exhibition as art objects essential to the expression of various groups’ religious, ceremonial and functional needs while also placing them on a hierarchy of development, stating that the northernmost groups are more complex and developed than the southern groups in social structures and artistic style (Gunther, 1962). She discusses various ceremonies and secret societies of the Kwakiutl but does not describe the potlatch in detail or address potlatch prohibition at all. As Jacknis notes,

Gunther espoused a cultural approach to the art. The introductory sections ‘The Anatomy of the Art,’ outlined the basic materials and motifs...Needless to say, Gunther was a pioneer in advocating a temporal perspective on these tribal arts. The bulk of the exhibit was arranged by functional complexes: ritual and dance drama, potlatch and feast, household crafts, and shamanism. (Jacknis 2002, 187)

In contrast however, in the exhibition catalogue she admits that “many pieces, large and small, are displayed as sculpture and thus are removed from their original purpose, but perhaps are adjusted better to our aesthetic enjoyment” (Gunther 1962, 101). It seems the purpose of the exhibition was to explore the materials from an artistic perspective grounding them in “traditional” cultural meanings while not acknowledging the contemporary issues or continuity of Northwest Coast art production.

In May 1963, Campbell River and District Historical Society, located within Kwakw̱aḵa’wakw territory, only about 200 kilometres from Alert Bay and only across the channel from Cape Mudge, borrowed a selection of Kwakw̱aḵa’wakw artefacts from the National Museum of Canada to add to their permanent exhibition. From the National Museum of Canada’s collection, eleven objects were loaned including:

- Copper, called Nunkamala (VII-E-422)
- Bird rattle (VII-E-460) previously owned by Amos Dawson
- mallard headdress (VII-E-463; UCC-80.01.021) previously owned by Joseph Speck, attributed to Ned Harris
- Wolf headdress (VII-E-479) previously owned by Joseph Speck
- Possible Imas mask (VII-E-480) previously owned by Abraham, carved by Mungo Martin
- Xwixwi rattle (VII-E-483; UCC 02.05.011 OR UCC 02.05.014) previously owned by Tom Alfred
- Chief’s rattle (VII-E-488, UCC-80.01.138) previously owned by Abraham
- Sun mask (VII-E-512) previously owned by Robert Brown and carved by Charlie James
- Nulamala Fool mask (VII-E-514) previously owned by Harry Mountain
- Sea Eagle (?) mask (VII-E-595)
- Duck (?) mask (VII-E-619)

The nature of the exhibition is unclear, but the objects from the potlatch collection accompanied nine other pieces from the National Museum’s collection whose origin was determined to be from the Campbell River area and Kwakw̱a’wakw more generally. The loan was intended to be for two years only but the Campbell River District Historical Society applied for a renewal twice until 1967 when the National Museum’s staff decided to recall the loan due to political upheaval in the Campbell River area. In a memorandum written by Chief Ethnologist A.D. DeBlois to the National Museum’s Director, Dr. Glover, in which he lists a number of reasons to recall the loan from Campbell River, he references a letter from Campbell River’s curator Mr. Meade written in 1963: “As you mentioned, the Comox Indians [sic] rose in arms, but our own Lekwiltok [Ligwilda’xw] of Cape Mudge are very pleased to see some of their old material again” (emphasis in original, CMC Archives E2005.26 B899).15 DeBlois continues by quoting a letter written by a Mr. John E. Kyte to Mr. Archie F. Key:

…but I believe that the Comox Indian Band has for some time been agitating for the return of confiscated articles to their area. (By the same token, we know that the Cape Mudge Band feel very strongly about the return of their material and feel certain that they would be more than happy to cooperate with us to ensure that the material be placed here. Some of the Cape Mudge people hold membership in the Campbell River Historical Society. (Emphasis in original, CMC Archives E2005.26 B899)

Assessing this correspondence, it is unclear whether the material they were referring to was the confiscated collection that had been sent to Campbell River on a loan, or whether they were referring to Lekwiltok (Ligwilda’xw) material in general. The above two passages seems to

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15 Wełka’yi, or We Wai Kai, refers to the Kwakwaka’wakw band which lives at Cape Mudge on Quadra Island. Ligwilda’xw, Laich-kwil-tach, or Lekwiltok has been used in previous publications to refer to this band, but the term Ligwilda’xw, Laich-kwil-tach, or Lekwiltok is a collective term that is used to refer to the bands which reside in Cape Mudge, Campbell River, and the Discovery islands area.
suggest that the Ligwilda’xw were aware that the confiscated material was in Campbell River and they were requesting its permanent return. It is possible, however, that these two events were occurring simultaneously: that the confiscated potlatch regalia was in Campbell River unbeknownst to the Kwakwaka’wakw, while they were advocating for the return of the confiscated collection from Ottawa.

As a result of the events discussed in these letters, DeBlois recommended the immediate recall of the loan which he felt

will encounter a great deal of vociferous opposition if we do so...from local newspapers and Mr. Thomas S. Barnett, M.P. ... It seems quite clear that many people feel that Kwakiutl specimens really do belong in Campbell River. In this instance, the unfortunate

Figure 4. Ed Meade, Curator of the Campbell River and District Historical Society, holding a Sea Eagle mask now in the collection of the Nuyumbalees Cultural Centre. Image 9100 courtesy of the Museum at Campbell River.
thing is that the specimens are now in Campbell River, even though they are acknowledged as belonging to the National Museum of Canada (Emphasis in original) (CMC Archives E2005.26 B899).

The return of these eleven pieces of the regalia to Campbell River, a town so close to their homeland, occurred around the same time that Chief James Sewid and others were pushing to bring the potlatch regalia home. The agency of these objects is distinctly apparent at this moment; their return to Campbell River placed them in a political spotlight, instigating a renewed sense of the necessity of righting the injustice of confiscation. I will return to these early requests for repatriation in Chapter four.

From March 26th to October 17th, 1965 the Robert H. Lowe Museum of Anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley presented an exhibition called *Arts of the Northwest Coast*. The exhibition included rattles, masks, basketry, weaving, blankets, totem poles, argillite, carved bowls and daggers representing groups from all areas of the Northwest Coast. From the potlatch collection, the National Museum loaned three pieces:

- Sisutl carving (VII-E-527)\(^{16}\)
- Dzunukwa Mask (VII-E-579; UCC-80.01.149) previously owned by He’wasa
- BaKwas Mask (VII-E-588; UCC-80.01.013) previously owned by Harry Mountain and carved by Bob Harris

The introduction to the catalogue provides a detailed overview of the Northwest Coast as a geo-cultural area, recognizing the diversity of the area and how this diversity is represented visually through the production of material culture. It describes the roles of women and men in material production as well as the important role of artists in the maintenance of family histories, inheritances, and power through the need to visually represent these aspects in daily living, ritual, and potlatches (Harner and Elsasser 1965). Throughout the introduction, there is attention paid to potlatching as a central part of Northwest Coast societal organization although the potlatch ban and assimilationist pressures are only briefly mentioned in passing in the last paragraph:

\(^{16}\) This Sisutl carving was part of the National Museum’s collection, but the carving was missing its “head” which was later found in the National Museum of the American Indian’s collection. The Sisutl carving, without its “head” was photographed in the catalogue for this exhibition.
From the 1880’s onward there was a rapid decline in the arts under the impact of Christian missionization, anti-potlatch laws and other acculturative influences. Today limited revivals and reinterpretations of the arts have begun to occur with the encouragement of museums and commercial interests, particularly in Victoria and Vancouver. However, it is clear that the outstanding achievements in the traditional arts of the Northwest Coast belong to the past, as do the cultures of which they were an integral part. (Harner and Elsasser 1965, 16)

Throughout the catalogue, the emphasis is placed on celebrating the cultural production of the Northwest Coast while placing it securely in the past, as an example of a lost culture as so aptly demonstrated by the above comment. Meanwhile, there was indeed a vibrant cultural revival movement burgeoning not only in Victoria and Vancouver but in First Nations communities as well.

In 1965, the ROM loaned one wooden whistle (HN 561, 923.26.67) from the potlatch collection to the Department of Trade and Commerce who was responsible for the Canadian Government Exhibition Commission. The Exhibition Commission was a government faction responsible for installing exhibitions about Canada in foreign countries at events such as world fairs and international expositions to ensure they communicated the best possible impression of Canada as a whole (Library and Archives Canada, Canadian Government Expositions Centre, 2012). As a part of Expo ’67 the Exhibition Commission organized the Confederation Train which was essentially a “museum on wheels.” The Confederation Train travelled from Victoria, BC, to Sydney, Nova Scotia, showcasing Canada’s history in six specially designed train cars. During eleven months, it stopped at eighty-two locations throughout nine provinces and was visited by 2,757,945 visitors (ROM, Ethnology Loan Files. Ethnology Department). In addition to the Kwakwaka’wakw whistle were other smaller items such as rattles, boxes, spoons and one wolf mask not related to the potlatch collection (ROM, Ethnology Loan Files, Ethnology Department). I have not been able to find a detailed description of the role the whistle played in the Confederation Train, however an overview of the six cars provides a general impression of the layout:

Visitors entered the rear of the train and walked forward, following the tour. The Centennial Commission distributed a flyer listing the displays in each of the six exhibition cars. ‘What is Canada?’ asked the flyer, describing with life-size models, sound effects, lighting, artefacts, and photography to tell the story of the history of Canada. The first car celebrated the end of the ice ages and the early history of
humanity, jumping to Canada’s aboriginal culture as its people crossed the Bering Strait. The display showed models of Indian villages intended to transport visitors’ minds ‘between past and present for comparisons of today with yesterday.’ (Graham and New 2007, 19)

While the Confederation Train placed Aboriginal content at the beginning of Canadian history, recognizing First Nations as the original inhabitants of Canada, the description does not indicate whether Aboriginal people were also included in any of the following cars or in a contemporary framework. Exhibit labels are no longer extant so the curatorial interpretation of the whistle is unavailable.

The Vancouver Art Gallery held a large exhibition called Arts of the Raven: Masterworks by the Northwest Coast Indian from June 15th to September 24th 1967. The CMC loaned three objects from their portion of the potlatch collection to this exhibition which included a Baḵwas, wild-man of the woods mask (VII-E-588; UCC-80.01.013) previously owned by Harry Mountain and carved by Bob Harris, a Hamsiwe’, Supernatural Man-Eating Bird headdress (VII-E-617; UCC-80.01.001) previously owned by Abraham, and a cedar bark costume (VII-E-489). The exhibit, which was held in honour of the one hundredth anniversary of Canadian Confederation, displayed objects from the Haida, Tsimshian, Tlingit, and Kwakwaka’wakw from both public and private collections in North America. The exhibition was organized by Doris Shadbolt with the help of three curatorial consultants - Wilson Duff, Bill Holm, and Bill Reid - with the express intentions of displaying Northwest Coast sculpture as art:

...this is an exhibition of art, high art, not ethnology. It proposes to bring together many of the masterworks of this art, to show the wide range and aesthetic excellence of its forms, and to explicate and establish its claim to greatness (Shadbolt 1967).

The exhibition itself was divided into eight galleries: Faces; Small Sculptures in wood; Interpretation; Slate, Ivory, Horn, Bone, Silver; Flat Design; Charles Edenshaw: Master Artist; Masterpieces of Northwest Coast Indian Art; Arts of the Kwakiutl; Arts of Today. The two masks and one costume from the potlatch collection were displayed in the “Arts of Kwakiutl” gallery. This exhibit was ground-breaking because it displayed Northwest Coast objects, which were typically thought of objects of ethnography and anthropology, in an art gallery, shifting the perception of them into the realm of high art. It was also one of the first exhibits to include contemporary Northwest Coast artists’ work en masse emphasizing the continuity of Northwest
coast art, design, and culture. Kwakwa’wakw artists Doug Cranmer, Henry Hunt, Tony Hunt, and adopted Kwakwa’wakw Lelooska (Don Smith) were included in the “Art of Today” gallery along with Haida artists Robert Davidson and Bill Reid, as well as Bill Holm (Shadbolt 1967). It is unclear if Doug Cranmer, Henry Hunt, or Tony Hunt were aware that pieces of the confiscated regalia were exhibited in the same exhibition as their artworks. Two factors may have contributed to this lack of knowledge. First, the catalogue information provided by the CMC did not draw attention to the collection history of the two masks and the costume; it states the name of the object, the subject matter or creature it represents, the materials, the loaning institution and the accession number. Second, the nature of the exhibit itself was to re-contextualise Northwest Coast art as high art, which placed a larger emphasis on the aesthetic properties of the pieces rather than their cultural contexts or histories as confiscated objects. The combination of these factors may have led to the absence of the objects’ histories as confiscated objects being presented in the exhibition or the catalogue. The only way these pieces could have been identified was by visual identification by someone who was very familiar with the collection. Doug Cranmer, Henry Hunt and Tony Hunt were all born after the regalia was confiscated and are a generation removed from the confiscation. They would not have seen the regalia before it was surrendered, however it is more than likely they were aware of the history of the confiscation.

A Dzunukwa mask (HN 478, 923.26.11) was loaned by the ROM as a part of a larger collection of Canadian Aboriginal material to the Musee de l’Homme in 1969 (ROM, Ethnology Loan Files, Ethnology Department). The exhibit, called Masterpieces of Indian and Eskimo Art from Canada, ran from April to September 1969 and then was exhibited at the National Gallery of Canada from November 21st 1969 to January 11th 1970. An exhibition catalogue was published by the Musée de l’Homme that provided information on all of the objects included in the exhibit as well as articles written by some directors of the loaning institutions, including Dr. William Taylor, then Director of the National Museum of Man. Out of 186 objects, 104 were from the Northwest Coast (TIME, April 4, 1969). The Dzunukwa mask is not illustrated in the catalogue but it is described as an “Anthropomorphic Mask from Alert Bay, Vancouver Island
made by the Kwakiutl Indian in the late 19th century” (Société des amis du Musée de l'Homme, 1969). The Dzunukwa’s provenance is not mentioned.

The National Museum of Man also loaned two masks from their portion of the potlatch collection to the Musée de l'Homme; a Baḵwas, wild-man of the woods, mask (VII-E-588; UCC-80.01.013) previously owned by Harry Mountain, and a Dzunukwa mask (VII-E-579; UCC-80.01.149) previously owned by He'wasa. The Baḵwas mask was carved by Bob Harris. After confiscation this Baḵwas mask was one of the objects Duncan Campbell Scott chose for his personal collection displayed in his office (Deimel, Holland and von Bloh 2011,72). In the exhibition catalogue, the Baḵwas mask is described incorrectly as a Hawk Spirit Mask, but it is photographed and accompanied by a short description of its meaning in Kwakwa’kaws ceremonies.

In the larger context of the exhibit, which also includes sections on “the Eskimos, the Indians of the Northwest Coast, the Indians of the Plains and the Indians of the Eastern Region,” the objects from the potlatch collection are just three of hundreds which are meant to “resist against mass media stereotypes by presenting authentic works of art, which better than any treatise, would provide the basis of a proper appreciation” (Evrard 1969). The objects included in this exhibit were chosen on the “basis of aesthetic criteria so as to reveal their plastic and decorative qualities” (Evrard 1969). While Evrard may be using “authentic” works of art to argue against offensive media stereotypes, his comments are paradoxical (though also reflective of his time) in that he is assuming he can derive a true representation of a complex culture simply from viewing objects of material culture. There was a definite emphasis on Northwest Coast art, as the organizers felt that as a geo-cultural area, Northwest Coast material culture was the strongest materially to challenge the traditional emphasis on classic antiquity (Evrard 1969). This emphasis on the artistic merits of the masks from the potlatch collection is one that has been seen in other exhibits mentioned in this chapter.

The Royal Ontario Museum released a publication in 1969 called Forgotten Peoples: A Reference. Written by Dr. E.S. Rogers, Curator in the Department of Ethnology, the publication

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17 The location in this description is incorrect; Alert Bay is located on Cormorant Island, not Vancouver Island.
18 The Dzunukwa mask is listed as a ‘Tsonoqua’ mask, which is an older spelling for Dzunukwa
highlights material from the ROM's collections from “Africa, Southeast Asia, Australia, Oceania and both North and South America ranging from the profane to the sacred” (Rogers 1969, iv). From the potlatch collection a large hamatsa raven mask (923.26.6) was included in the section of the book dedicated to North American Religions, in which Rogers discusses “Eskimo” Shamanism, the Hamatsa Society, the Sun Dance, the Midewiwin Society and False Face Society, the Game Ruler Concept and the Kachina Cult (Rogers 1969, 84-93). The Hamatsa Society and Hamatsa dance is discussed in detail and Rogers emphasized how important these ceremonies were for maintaining societal organization through winter ceremonials. The potlatch ban or confiscation of potlatch regalia is not mentioned in the catalogue.

In 1970 the ROM loaned a Dzunukwa mask (HN 478, 923.26.11) to the McMichael Canadian Collection in Kleinburg, Ontario on long term loan. The Dzunukwa mask, described as a “man with mouth open in the act of blowing. Alert Bay, Kwakiutl” was part of a group of six Northwest Coast masks lent to the McMichael for inclusion in their permanent gallery. The loan was renewed every two years until the masks returned to the ROM in 1983.

As previously mentioned, there are instances in which the exhibition or loan of parts of the potlatch collection were probably not recorded. Most likely, this would have occurred when the National Museum or the Royal Ontario Museum produced internal exhibitions. While there was little to no remaining documents about exhibition production, fortunately, in 1976 the ROM published a small pamphlet about their permanent Northwest Coast Gallery. Exhibited in this gallery and pictured in the pamphlet were three pieces of the potlatch collection: a raven mask (HN 548; 923.26.6), and a pair of wings and leggings (HN 482, HN602). The regalia are displayed on a mannequin and below the photograph is a description entitled “Raven Dancer (composite).” This description states that the figure wearing this headpiece is enacting part of the “Yehl,” the supernatural Raven who first appeared after the flood (Royal Ontario Museum, 1976). The description continues to discuss the role raven plays for the Haida and the Bella Coola but neglects to discuss the raven’s significance to the Kwakwaka’wakw. In fact, the Kwakwaka’wakw, the potlatch, and the potlatch ban are not mentioned at all on this page. In addition, the identification of this regalia as a “raven dancer” is also incorrect; it is indeed a
raven mask but the wings and leggings are associated with the Sea Eagle. These exclusions of information related to both the ceremonial practices of the Kwakwaka’wakw and the confiscation of the regalia under the potlatch ban further demonstrates the disassociation of the collection from its social, cultural, and historical context. Exhibition labels are not extant for this gallery, but due to standard museum practice, we can presume that the exhibition labels contained more information about the regalia than contained in this pamphlet. It is important to note, however, that the pamphlet was probably sold or given to visitors and remains the primary source of information about the exhibit once it closed.

In 1979, an eagle headdress (HN 522, 923.26.52; UCC-88.06.011) was loaned from the Royal Ontario Museum for an exhibit called Thunderbird and Killer Whale; Indian Art of the North American Northwest Coast from May 3\textsuperscript{rd} to October 31\textsuperscript{st} to celebrate the centenary of the Museum Fur Volkerkunde in Hamburg. Along with argillite candlesticks, masks and shields from other Northwest Coast groups, two Paul Kane paintings were also loaned to the exhibition. In an article entitled “Germany correcting Europe’s false view of Canada’s Indians” in the Globe and Mail, Josh Moskau states that this exhibit was the largest exhibit of West Coast Indian art outside of North America to date. The exhibit included objects such as material from Captain Cook’s 1778 voyage into Nootka Sound as well as woodworking tools dating to 500 B.C. According to Moskau, Wolfgang Haberland, the exhibit’s curator, wanted to emphasize that Northwest Coast cultures are living cultures, not frozen in the past. Haberland also chose to focus on Northwest coast groups, rather than say Plains, because he was “concerned with getting rid of the many false clichés that have built up over the years on North American Indians” (Moskau 1979). In an effort to suppress these clichés, the Canadian embassy brought over Kwakwaka’wakw dancers and carver Calvin Hunt. As with Neel’s participation in the 1960 Stratford Festival exhibit discussed earlier, I found no evidence indicating Hunt’s knowledge of the presence of confiscated potlatch materials.

From September 1\textsuperscript{st} to November 4\textsuperscript{th} of 1979, the Art Gallery of Windsor held an exhibit in their children’s gallery called To Top it Off which displayed historic and contemporary hats and headdresses from around the world. The Royal Ontario Museum loaned ten pieces to the

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19 Personal communication, Nuyumbales Cultural Centre Meeting, May 15, 2013.
Art Gallery of Windsor, the majority of which were headdresses. One piece from the potlatch collection was loaned: a bird headdress or forehead mask, possibly representing the Northern Shoveler duck (HN 495, 923.26.28, U’mista number UCC-94.09.019). The artist that carved the headdress could possibly have been Da’naxda’xw Artist and Chief Xi’xaniyus, Bob Harris. It was owned by Harry Hanuse before it was surrendered in 1922. It is unknown whether this headdress was part of the T’seka Red Cedar Bark ceremonies or, due to its lack of cedar bark trimming, a part of the Tla’sala Peace Dances (U’mista Cultural Centre, The U’mista Collections, 2013). At the Art Gallery of Windsor, the headdress was exhibited alongside a buffalo hide headdress formerly belonging to Stoney Chief Walking Buffalo, feather headdresses from Paraguay and Venezuela as well as women’s 1920s hats, firefighters’ and policemen’s hats (Burkhart, 1979). Similar to the Exhibition of Masks at the New Brunswick Museum mentioned earlier, the bird headdress is displayed amongst headdresses and hats in a global context. Its role here is to act as an example of Kwakwaka’wakw headdress production in comparison to headdresses made by cultures all around the world.

Despite museum correspondence indicating the potlatch collection remained unused during its time at the museums (see CMC Archives E2010.14 B13 F3), and the repetition of the phrase “it was stored in the basement” by various Kwakwaka’wakw individuals involved in the repatriation negotiations (See Sewid in CMC Archives VII-E-35M B465 F-11; Saunders 1995, 41), the exhibition history of the potlatch collection between the years of 1922 and 1979 is extensive with pieces of the collection travelling as far as France, Germany and Mexico. Individual pieces in the collection have travelled thousands of kilometres around the world to be displayed in exhibitions focusing on the artistic and cultural expression of First Nations in Canada. As discussed above, some of these exhibitions tend to focus on the aesthetic properties of the masks and in some instances place them on a hierarchy in terms of sophistication compared to other First Nations groups from the Northwest Coast. This emphasis on aesthetics reflects the position of First Nations material culture in museums during this period. African, Polynesian, and Aboriginal material culture and more specifically masks, had been inspirational to modern artists such as Picasso, Braque, Breton and Matisse. Kwakwaka’wakw masks, often categorized as “primitive art,” were beginning to be appreciated as art objects in their own right, and later as high art (see Wyatt 1994).
In some of the exhibitions discussed, the pieces from the potlatch collection came to represent Northwest Coast design as a geo-cultural region, or were displayed in exhibits emphasizing a cross-cultural comparative analysis of masks or headdresses as a category of material culture. In the few catalogues that are available for the exhibitions discussed, the pieces of regalia were often incorrectly named and had relatively little information in terms of associated stories, dances, or ceremonies while information such as accession numbers, materials, and collection locations were present. This lack of contextual information is not unique to the potlatch collection; it is a fact of many early collections. The potlatch collection however, may have had slightly less associated information because it was collected by an Indian Agent and an RCMP Sergeant rather than an anthropologist or museum collector, who generally had a deeper interest in the socio-cultural contexts of the objects they were collecting. Nevertheless, the potlatch collection is unique because the names of the original owners were recorded by Halliday when the regalia was surrendered and often were written in pencil directly on the objects. It is very uncommon for the names of the owners or makers of First Nations material culture to be recorded for museum collections, and these names were not included in catalogue records or exhibition descriptions. These attributions became very important for the potlatch collection when it was repatriated. In exhibition catalogues and exhibition descriptions commonly found in newsletters and correspondence, the history of the potlatch ban and the objects’ history as part of the confiscated collection is not discussed. This is a great neglect in terms of recognizing the importance of these objects as historical documents of the suppression of First Nations social, cultural and economic organization. This part of their biography was essentially erased during this period when they were relatively indistinguishable from other Kwakwaka’wakw objects in museum collections that were collected under the auspices of academic research or museum collecting.

A closer examination of associated information provided in the exhibition catalogues demonstrates the long-term effects of the suppression of this specific history. Through a process of recording, translation, reproduction, and standardization in museums’ registers and various exhibition catalogues the potlatch regalia became disassociated from their owners, their familial lines, and their status as confiscated material under the potlatch law. For example, in the exhibition catalogue for *Masterpieces of Indian and Eskimo Art from Canada* exhibited at
the Musée de l’homme in 1969 and the National Gallery of Canada in 1970, the catalogue entry for a Baḵwas mask from the National Museum collection states:

HAWK MASK  
Wood. H 30cm  
Alert Bay, British Columbia.  
Kwakiutl Indian, Collected by D.C. Scott, 1922

Mask has a hawk nose, brass washers for iris of eyes, holes for pupils. It is painted blue, green, red, black, brown and white. Along the hair line are fucia [sic] dyed chicken feathers encompassing brown human hair, bark, twigs, eagle feathers and red cotton.

National Museum of Man, Ottawa. No. VII-E-588

U’mista Cultural Centre’s catalogue records tell us that this is in fact a Baḵwas mask carved by Bob Harris and owned by Harry Mountain. His name translates to “man-of-the-ground embodiment” and he lives in the country of ghosts. Other names for Baḵwas include “The Cockle Hunter,” “Chief of the Ghosts,” or “Hunter of the Night.” Baḵwas can appear in both the T’seka ceremonies and the Tüa’sala ceremonies. They also mention that this was one of the masks kept in Duncan Campbell Scott’s office until 1932 (Deimel, Holland and von Bloh 2011, 72).

The Masterpieces of Indian and Eskimo Art from Canada catalogue entry for a Dzunukwa mask from the ROM’s collection states:

ANTHROPOMORPHIC MASK  
Wood. H 32cm, W 29cm.  
Alert Bay, Vancouver Island, British Columbia.  
Kwakiutl Indian, late 19th century.

Carved wooden mask of human face. Human hair on crown: lips eyes and ear are outlined in red, Used in secret society winter ceremonial

Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto. No. 923.26.11

Again to reference U’mista Cultural Centre’s records, this mask is in fact a Dzunukwa mask which was owned by He’wasa. The Dzunukwa is also referred to as the “Woman of the Woods” and is one of a large family of giants that live in the forests. She carries a large basket on her
back in which she puts children she captures. Dzunukwa appears in both the T’seka Red Cedar Bark ceremonies and the Tla’ala Peace dances (Deimel, Holland, and von Bloh 2011, 73).

For those exhibitions included in this history that have accompanying catalogues, the entries for the confiscated material are very similar. As was common for the time, the information reproduced in the catalogues includes the type of object, the date collected, the cultural region of origin, and occasionally the collector. In the instances in which D.C. Scott’s name is included, he is listed as a collector, which in no way infers that the collection was involuntarily surrendered to Scott’s department. In the Dzunukwa example from the ROM there is absolutely no indication this mask has any association with the confiscated material. Short descriptions of the pieces privilege information related to the aesthetic qualities, the construction, or the “traditional” use of the object, which was in some cases incorrect. The history of the potlatch ban and the regalia surrendered to Halliday is not mentioned in these catalogues, except for the brief mention of the potlatch ban in the Stratford Festival exhibition pamphlet. Whether this history was mentioned in the exhibit labels and interpretation remains unknown; I have not been able to locate any surviving text panels or object labels to date.

As time passed, the 1922 confiscation in Alert Bay was disassociated with the collection until the pieces of regalia became “types,” indistinguishable from other Kwakwaka’wakw regalia displayed alongside them. Referring back to Kopytoff’s concept of singularization, which I used to discuss the diversion of objects from their path into the realm of the museum, it is evident here that the potlatch regalia was not singularized to its highest potential, but rather became subsumed into a collection of representative types, or in a way, de-singularized to an extent. While they had been removed from the sphere of commodification and preserved for purposes such as research and exhibition representing a limited form of Kwakwaka’wakw culture, they were not singularized as individual objects with particular histories and meanings. If the link to their specific history had been maintained then the collection would have gained a higher level of prestige and they would have been deemed even more un-exchangeable. Before

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20 It is important to note that not all catalogue entries in this volume were this lacking in information, for example the catalogue entries for objects loaned from the British Columbia Provincial Museum (now RBCM) were much more developed in cultural context. This may simply reflect the nature of the museum, the geographical area which they represent and the Northwest Coast scholars who were employed during this time.
they entered into the museums, they were singular objects, owned by individuals or families with specific histories and associations with family histories, origin stories, crest figures and supernatural beings. During their stay in museums, they lost a substantial degree of this individualism; they became a group of objects valued for their capacity to represent the material culture of the Kwakw̓ak̓a’wakw in general.

To relate this concept of de-singularization to the collection’s condition of objecthood and subjecthood, it is useful to refer to Maureen Matthews who, working from Marilyn Strathern (1999), argues that artefacts as ‘dividuals’ exhibit maximal personhood and have the greatest capacity to act in the world when their multiple relationships are expressed and acknowledged. Their personhood is augmented by the breadth and vibrancy of their relationships and objects with numerous active relationships with source communities, research communities, and visitor communities, are objects with maximal personhood, least constrained by colonial processes. (Matthews 2013, 4)

The period of time in which the collection was stored in the museum and loaned for exhibits is the period where the collection demonstrated a greater degree of objecthood. During this period, the objects in the collection simultaneously held dual social contexts; as a museum object and as a Kwakw̓ak̓a’wakw object. These social contexts however, did not hold equal weight. Seen through a functional lens, the collection’s role as museum objects overshadowed the existence of the collection as Kwakw̓ak̓a’wakw objects, in that its interactions are limited to those with exhibition visitors and researchers (of which there is no record) rather than source communities. During this period the community-related subjecthood of the collection decreased, while its museum-related subjecthood increased. The collection accumulated meaning and significance throughout the exhibition history, but it is important to understand the value and the limits of this significance; the series of exhibitions described here display relatively similar themes and interpretations. As Aaron Glass argues, “For most of the past century...major Northwest Coast collections have been used to tell rather conservative anthropological and art historical stories about the social and material coherence or national aesthetic styles of the cultures on the coast” (Glass 2011, 6). The gradual erasure of the potlatch collection’s unique history through the translation and reproduction of “type” information minimizes the breadth and vibrancy of its potential relationships. This erasure can
be conceived of as a process of institutional forgetting. The history and significance of the potlatch collection was buried in the museum register and only existed in traces of the museum staff’s memories. As staff left the institutions or passed away, these traces ceased to exist within the institutional memory. This process of institutional forgetting could explain the inconsistencies evident in the National Museum staff correspondence discussed in chapter four.

The pieces exhibited during this period held multiple meanings to various groups of people. To the Kwakwaka’wakw they were family treasures which told the history of Kwakwaka’wakw involvement in the potlatch and its ban, held hostage by the museums; to the museums they represented significant portions of their Kwakwaka’wakw material; and to the millions of visitors who saw the objects displayed across the world we can only imagine the array of perspectives – curiosities, works of primitive art, works of high art, traces of the past, traces of the “other,” entertainment and so forth. Consider the potential impact the regalia may have had on those who viewed it on exhibition during this period: nearly three million people possibly viewed the whistle displayed on the Expo ’67 Confederation Train. Millions of people walked through the halls of the National Gallery of Canada, the Seattle World’s Fair, the Musee du l’Homme, and the Vancouver Art Gallery and potentially viewed the regalia. The objects themselves have accumulated values and meanings associated with these travels and exhibitions. They have moved through both space and time and have been recontextualized in every exhibit they are displayed in to align with the exhibit’s theme. As Jacknis writes, upon entering a museum

objects take their meaning more from the other objects and setting around them than from their place in their original culture. It is common to speak of a museum taking the object out of context. While this may be true from the standpoint of the originating culture, all museum displays create some kind of context, some kind of surrounding, for the object. In an anthropology museum, the curators are using this context to say something about generic human culture or a specific culture. (Jacknis 2002, 106)

The potlatch collection has been connected physically, in the exhibition space, and symbolically, in thematic comparisons within the exhibits, with other indigenous objects and cultures from Canada and around the world. This museum-related subjecthood should be recognized as important but also reconciled with the fact that it adds to a greater and more complex biography of the collection.
This portion of the collection’s biography has never been discussed or published before. Perhaps this is because when scholarly contributions on this case were published, this portion of the history was not considered important in relation to the history of confiscation or the politics of the repatriation. It may also reflect a belief that when objects enter into a museum they undergo a process of decontextualization and become static objects. Re-evaluating the collection’s activity and agency during its time in the museums’ collections reveals a new layer in the life history of this collection specifically, and is instrumental to our understanding of the lives of museum objects generally. Museum objects are now resituated as active, rather than passive objects, through exhibition, research, loans, and handling. The regalia once in the museum may have been lacking in important cultural context, but it did not remain static and immobile. Rather, it accumulated additional meanings and significances that became yet another part of an already complex biography.

I began this chapter by discussing the transition of the regalia from individually owned regalia to a collection of museum objects as a diversion. Diversions, as Appadurai states, are signs of creativity or crisis (1988, 26), indeed the confiscation of the regalia from its owners was a crisis. The transition of the collection from individually owned regalia into museum objects, was relatively immediate. Within a period of 18 months the collection underwent a process of valuation, numbering, documentation, and storage to become available for exhibition. The first public exhibition of the potlatch regalia that I am aware of was in 1927, but after World War Two, the exhibition activity of the collection became much more frequent and varied, with pieces of the collection being sent to significant exhibitions representing Northwest Coast art and Canadian heritage. The diversion to museum objects, then, became so predictable over the next five decades that it became the potlatch collection’s path. To the non-Kwakwaka’wakw constituencies involved, the regalia had transitioned into museum objects and become part of the museum’s collections to be displayed in exhibitions both nationally and internationally. To the Kwakwaka’wakw however, it remained a reminder of an old injustice that needed to be healed.

Chapter Four: Recognition, Negotiation, Repatriation and the National Museum of Canada

This chapter begins with an acknowledgement of an overlap in time. The previous chapter discussed the exhibition history of the CMC and ROM’S portion of the potlatch collection from 1927 to 1979. This chapter however, jumps back to 1957 when the records indicate that the Kwakwâ’wakw renewed the pressure to have their treasures returned home. This period of time, namely the negotiation and eventual repatriation of the collection, is one of the most frequently written about parts of this repatriation case. Webster (1991; 1992; 1995), Bell et al. (2008), Cole and Chaikin (1990), Jacknis (2000; 2002), Saunders (1995; 1997), Mauze (2003) and Clifford (1991) have all discussed the main events of the repatriation negotiations in varying levels of detail from Kwakwâ’wakw, museological, and anthropological perspectives. My contribution focuses on those moments found in the archive that may not have been previously discussed and which reveal the often-opposing meanings the collection held for the parties involved, and to trace how those meanings changed across more than two decades of negotiations.

The Kwakwâ’wakw had never forgotten about the removal of the potlatch regalia in 1922, some of the people who were present at the time of the confiscation have documented their memories of the event (see Olin and U’mista Cultural Society 1983; Webster 1988, 1995; Assu and Inglis 1989). Many attempts were made directly after it was confiscated to have the regalia returned and the potlatch law dropped (Cole and Chaikin 1990, 133-137; Webster in Potlatch: A Strict Law Bids us Dance 1975). The first recorded attempt at having the regalia returned home occurred in 1957 when Chief Andy Frank from Comox approached Dr. Rousseau and Mr. Cote, two staff members at the National Museum of Canada, who refused to return the regalia because they believed it had been used for illegal purposes and because they felt it had been fairly purchased. Indian Affairs became involved at this point, asserting their ownership and their desire to return the collection to the Kwakwâ’wakw (CMC Archives VII-E-35M B466 F1-4). The next effort to bring the regalia home was made by Chief James Sewid, a hereditary chief of the Mamalilikala band. Chief James Sewid was born in 1913 in Alert Bay, and he remembered the potlatch regalia confiscation and subsequent trial in the town’s schoolhouse. The vivid detail he provides makes it worth recounting from his autobiography Guests Never Leave Hungry, at length:
...when I was eight years old, George Luther told the kids that there wasn’t going to be any school for a few days because they were going to use that room for a courthouse. The law against the potlatch had been passed and the mounted police were beginning to enforce it. The government had sent out the word that if the people would give up all their masks and coppers and their regalia and everything that they owned in connection with the potlatch they wouldn’t be put in jail. There were only people from three villages who did what they were ordered, Cape Mudge, Village Island, and Alert Bay. They gave all their masks and regalia and everything they owned from the Indian way and they put it in a big building behind the Indian office. That was just full of all the masks and things from these three tribes and they took them away. And the people who refused to give up their things were brought to Alert Bay and put on trial and they used that schoolroom for a courthouse. And some of them from Fort Rupert, Kingcome, New Vancouver, Turnour Island and from all over the Kwakiutl nation were brought there. After some people had been tried on a certain day the ones who had been sentenced were just kept in the schoolroom and had to sleep on the floor. The mounted police would lock that place up and guard it at night. After they were sentenced they were sent down south to jail for about two to six months.

I heard that some of my relatives had been sentenced and were going to be sent to jail, so I crept around in back of that schoolroom and looked through the window. All the people were just sleeping there on the floor. I didn’t realize everything that was going on at the time. Old man Whannock and old lady Whannock were in there and Herbert Martin who was a close relation of mine was in there. I felt very badly about it because they told me that they were all going to be in jail. Of course the mounted police were watching all the time and they used to chase me away from there. That was the time that we lost a lot of our masks and regalia and coppers and other wealth. (Sewid and Spradley 1969, 54-55)

The confiscation of the potlatch regalia played an important part in Chief James Sewid’s life history. His family surrendered regalia to the Indian agent in 1922 and some relatives, like Whannock, went to jail for not surrendering their regalia. It is not surprising then, that Chief James Sewid was later an influential figure in ensuring his community remembered the old ways and for advocating for the return of the potlatch regalia as he and his family had been directly affected by its confiscation. In 1964, he visited Ottawa on business in his role of vice-president of the Native Brotherhood. While he was there, he visited the CMC and asked to see the regalia that had been taken from them. In a meeting held many years later in 1978, he spoke about his 1964 National Museum visit in the presence of CMC staff, representatives of the Nuyumbalees Cultural Society, the U’mista Cultural Society, and most importantly five old people who had witnessed the confiscation of the regalia. He began by proclaiming the
confiscation of the regalia as illegal and explaining that ownership of the regalia cannot be held by the museum or the government:

The artefacts that you got in your hands in Ottawa you cannot buy, it doesn’t matter if you’re a millionaire. You cannot buy it from the other chiefs of the Kwakiutl nations. The only way you can acquire it is through marriage. That’s the only way. You can ask all these old people here. That’s why these descendants of the great chiefs that you are talking about now, that’s the reason why they have the ownership of these artefacts that we are talking about. (CMC Archives VII-E-35M B465 F11)

He continues by informing the listeners about his efforts to try to retrieve those treasures lost in 1922. In 1964, he visited the National Museum and asked to see the regalia that was stolen from his people, he was told that it was in seventeen cases in the basement. He returned to Ottawa in 1967 with his uncle and mother-in-law to raise a totem pole for the Centennial year. Assisted by Barrie Reynolds, a staff member at the National Museum, Chief James Sewid went again to view the collection. Then he was told that some of the collection had been given to the ROM and the Museum of the American Indian and that the museum did own the collection because they paid $1456.00 for it in 1922. Chief James Sewid offered to pay the museum the $1456.00 but they refused. He argued that the “white people” were violating their own law because they were in possession of stolen goods (CMC Archives VII-E-35M B465 F-11).

It is important to begin this section of the collection’s biography with this recollection from Chief James Sewid, who was both a hereditary chief and the first elected chief in Kwakwaka’wakw territory. Still, his opinions and actions do not necessarily reflect the opinions and histories of all the Kwakwaka’wakw involved. There were strong divisions and disagreements between the ‘Namgis, Mamalilikula, and We’ka’yí throughout the repatriation process in regards to the location of the cultural centres, the division of the regalia and the ownership of the regalia. Nevertheless, it is important to understand an individual Kwakwaka’wakw perspective. Based on other individual Kwakwaka’wakw accounts,²² there is agreement with Sewid’s perspective that the surrender of the regalia by the original owners was done under duress and that the ownership of the regalia remained with the original

²² See, for example, the accounts of Gloria Cranmer Webster (Potlatch: A Strict Law Bids us Dance 1975); Agnes Alfred (Alfred, Reid, and Sewid Smith 2004); Harry Assu (Assu and Inglis 1989); Robert Joseph and Gloria Cranmer Webster (Olin and U’Mista Cultural Centre 1983); Sewid Smith (1979); and Robert Joseph (Joseph 1998).
owners. The next two decades in the collection’s biography reflect political, social, and cultural upheaval between the Kwakw̱ak̓a’wakw and the museums involved. The negotiations which occurred had a significant impact on both the Kwakw̱ak̓a’wakw and the museum staff.

The Department of Indian Affairs approached the National Museum in 1966 claiming that ownership of the collection rested with their department and they asked the CMC to return the collection to the Kwakw̱ak̓a’wakw. For the Department of Indian Affairs, the potlatch regalia held at the museum represented a significant hurdle in terms of overcoming bad relations between the Department of Indian Affairs and the Kwakw̱ak̓a’wakw. The Department of Indian Affairs was pressing for the return of the collection as a way to help heal the wounds of the potlatch ban and the assimilating actions of the department in the past (CMC Archives E2010.14 B13 F3-4). The National Museum staff’s response over time reflects some significant shifts in the collection’s meaning to the museum staff. Correspondence in the archives reveals inconsistencies in communication between staff members. It seems the museum was being pressured by the Department of Indian Affairs who in turn was responding to the demands of Chief Andy Frank. Resisting these claims, Dr. Glover, the Director at the time, referred to earlier correspondence from 1957 to support his claim that no material was seized from Comox, and only from the Mamalilikala, the Nimpkish (’Namgis) and the Cape Mudge band. Glover further argued that the material should not be returned because it was purchased for nearly $1500 (CMC Archives VII-E-35M B466 F1-4). He also stated that “Mr. Laing [Minister of Indian Affairs] is not really acting in the public interest when he tries to take National Treasure from the museum to send it to an Indian reservation in his own province” (CMC Archives VII-E-35M B466 F1-4). Later correspondence between D. Damas, Chief Ethnologist, and Dr. Glover states that the National Museum did not hold confiscated material from Cape Mudge, Comox, or Alert Bay at all and that the ROM had material confiscated from a raid (CMC Archives E2010.14 B13 F3-4). Once it was recognized that the regalia did in fact exist in the collection, every effort was made to determine if the National Museum held title to the collection so they could decide the best course of action.

The ethnological and museological value of the collection to the National Museum is an argument that is strongly defended throughout the archived correspondence and reappears frequently. In many instances, the collection is discussed as a part of the “national treasure”
that the museum had a duty to preserve for perpetuity. Its role in forming a complete collection at the National Museum reserved for research purposes is especially emphasized. For example, in a letter to Mr. G.G.E. Steele, Under Secretary of State, from Dr. Glover on April 4th, 1966 he states: “If the claim of the Indian Affairs is upheld, certain unpleasant consequences follow, of which the least is that we lose some valuable ethnological material. The worst is that a precedent may be created for other departments to raid the National Museum for their own advantage” (Emphasis added, CMC Archives VII-E-35M B466 F1-4). In a second letter from Dr. Glover to Mr. Steele on November 15th, 1966, Glover writes that “the function of this museum was to preserve the National Treasure of all the people of Canada, and not store particular pieces of property belonging to other government departments; and, second, that our collections were made valuable by their completeness” (Emphasis added, CMC Archives, VII-E-35M B466 F1-4). He continues:

I remain very concerned about this threatened whittling away of our study collections in Ethnology. The question is not one of whether we are or are not exhibiting such and such an item at a particular time. It is a question of whether a visiting scholar of international standing...can or cannot find in our collections the material which he needs to study and which ought to be there...On broad general principles it is undesirable to break up a national museum’s collections for the local benefit of any member of parliament’s constituents. (Emphasis added, CMC Archives VII-E-35M B466 F1-4)

Perhaps most opposed to the return of the regalia was A.D. DeBlois, Chief Ethnologist at the National Museum until 1967. In 1967, the newly appointed Director, William E. Taylor, asked A.D. DeBlois to inventory the collection. In a lengthy memorandum to William E. Taylor on May 16, 1967, A.D. DeBlois outlines his reasons for the retention of the collection at the National Museum. He recognized the “gross injustice perpetrated upon the Indians at Alert Bay some 45 years ago” but then feels it is his sincere belief that the interests of the Kwakiutl descendants of the Alert Bay Indians, and of the present and future generations of the people of Canada as a whole, will best be served if the collection of artefacts confiscated in 1922...remain in the custody of the National Museum of Canada. For only thus can this invaluable, irreplaceable part of Canada’s national treasure, this national resource, be assured of proper and adequate preservation and safe-keeping, in accordance with the most modern museum techniques available. (Emphasis added, CMC Archives E2010.14 B13 F3-4)
He continues by detailing the many projects the National Museum was involved in to “preserve this irreplaceable remnant of their (and Canada’s) heritage” including purchasing contemporary Kwakwaka’wakw artists’ work, reinstalling the North West Coast art exhibits and developing a replica program (CMC Archives E2010.14 B13 F3-4). He concludes by listing several other points why the collection should remain in the National Museum: the potlatch regalia comprised roughly one-third of the National Museum’s collection and their loss would “leave a gaping hole...It no longer would be useful for research purposes;” the artefacts were paid for; the artefacts were used for illegal purposes; and the original owners of the regalia could not be determined (CMC Archives E2010.14 B13 F3-4).

DeBlois’s memorandum underscores several key aspects of early responses to the possibility of repatriation of the regalia. It demonstrates DeBlois’s real fear of the repercussions on the institution’s reputation as a research resource as well as its ability to provide exhibits. His vociferous proclamations of the collection as an irreplaceable part of the national treasure testifies to the importance of the potlatch regalia to the National Museum and to the fact that it was considered part of the National Museum’s permanent collection and not a distinct entity held in keeping. DeBlois’s comments also demonstrate a certain misunderstanding and paternalism in assuming he knew what was best for the descendants and future generations of the Kwakwaka’wakw. The language used in DeBlois’s and others’ correspondence at this time reflects an almost exclusive concern with a museological perspective, rather than a cultural, community-based one; when he does consider the well-being of future Kwakwaka’wakw generations, he identifies the National Museum as the body best able to care for and instruct them about their material heritage.

As discussed in the previous chapter, through a process of recording, translation, and standardization, the unique and particular historical and social history associated with the potlatch collection became suppressed and essentially buried in the museum register. The narrow understanding of this collection as represented in exhibition catalogues is all the more striking when we understand that pieces from the collection were being exhibited in British Columbia at the same time Museum Staff were advocating for the retention of the collection. The exhibition at Campbell River and District Historical Society (now Campbell River Museum) from May 1963 to April 1967 was significant because parts of the collection were displayed just
across the bay from Cape Mudge and less than 200 km from Alert Bay at the same time that early repatriation attempts were occurring in Ottawa. The extent of the connection between these two seemingly connected events is unclear in the records. There is however, an interesting intersection of people and events during this time. Ed Meade, Curator at Campbell River and District Historical Society first approached the National Museum inquiring about returning the confiscated regalia to the Historical Society or the community in 1959. He was inquiring on behalf of the Campbell River Spit band and the Cape Mudge band (Campbell River & District Museum & Archives Society, Museum Administration Files). They received a response from L.S. Russell, the Acting Director of the National Museum in 1959 who stated they had no authority to return this material, either to the Tribes concerned or to the Campbell River Museum. Any action that we took in this connection would be at the direction of the Department of Justice, and any representation for their return should be made to that Department. On the other hand, the National Museum of Canada would be happy to assemble a collection of material illustrating the ethnology of the Campbell River area. (Campbell River & District Museum & Archives Society, Museum Administration Files)

If we compare this early response from the National Museum to the 1964-1967 responses mentioned earlier, it further supports my claim that there has been a process of institutional forgetting, perhaps associated with the movement of staff in and out of the museum. The 1959 correspondence between L.S. Russell and Ed Meade indicates that the museum was aware of the existence of the regalia in the collection, that it had been confiscated by the government, but that it was not under their jurisdiction. The 1964-1967 correspondence between Dr. Glover, A.D. DeBlois and Mr. G.G.E. Steele indicates the staff were not as familiar with the collection and its confiscation history. This further demonstrates how museum registers are not complete and objective documents, but rather subject to the people who interact, or do not interact with them.

After this initial correspondence, the National Museum agreed to a loan with the Campbell River and District Historical Society and eleven pieces from the potlatch collection along with other Kwakwaka'wakw material were sent to Campbell River in 1963. They remained there for four years. During this same period, National Museum staff were responding to requests for repatriation of the collection with inconsistent levels of information and strong
oppositions to the possibility of losing the collection. As at the same time that A.D. DeBlois was recalling the loan from Campbell River, he was also arguing against the return of the collection to the Kwakwaka’wakw. Whether DeBlois was aware that part of the collection was already in Kwakwaka’wakw territory is unclear due to the museum staff’s general unfamiliarity with the collection.

Around 1967, National Museum staff were asked to prepare possible proposals for a solution to the potlatch collection problem. Proposals from museum staff and E.A. Cote, Deputy Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, suggested many alternatives to repatriation such as sending replicas of the collection to newly established museums in Kwakwaka’wakw territory, sending collections on long-term loan to the British Columbia Provincial Museum (now RBCM), or sending exhibitions to the West Coast (CMC Archives VII-E-35M B466 F1-4). DeBlois continued to argue that

...the enforced return of the potlatch regalia would be a grave mistake, and would satisfy no one. Canada would lose an *irreplaceable segment of her national treasures*. The National Museum of Canada would lose an *invaluable research resource*. The specimens involved would receive extensive, in many cases irreparable, damage in shipment and through exposure to rapid fluctuations of temperature and humidity. (Emphasis added, CMC Archives VII-E-35M B466 F1-4)

DeBlois’ personal opinions were not necessarily representative of the other staff members at the National Museum or an institutional voice. In the late sixties, there was a turnover in staff at the National Museum bringing in several key figures who played a prominent role in the next decade of negotiations, namely the new director William E. Taylor and the Chief Ethnologist, Barrie Reynolds. The records indicate that around this time there was a shift in the understanding of the Kwakwaka’wakw’s request for the return of the regalia. One contribution to this shift stemmed from Plains Ethnologist, Ted Brasser, who attended the National Conference on Native Culture in Kamloops, British Columbia in 1971, on which he reported to Taylor and Reynolds upon his return. He states:

Dignified and without even an undertone of hate, Mrs. Mabel Stanley described in detail what she personally saw and experienced when the R.C.M.P entered into her village and confiscated the greater part of the ceremonial paraphernalia. The whole atmosphere of

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23 It is important to note that the ROM and the NMAI had similar initial reactions that will be discussed later.
this account reminded me strongly of the all-pervading terror during a German razzia, in which my father and many other men were arrested and sent off to a concentration camp. As far as the Kwakiutl-delegates were aware, the R.C.M.P had the legal ‘right’ under the anti-potlatch law to break up an Indian ceremonial meeting. However, there appears to have been no justification whatsoever to confiscate the ceremonial paraphernalia. Therefore the Kwakiutl delegates could not but regard this affair as outright robbery.  

He continues:

*Disregarding the sentiments of the Indian owners is dishonourable to all of us and certainly will jeopardize the image of the museum and our relations with the Indians throughout Canada. It is a mistaken idea that the Indians will forget this affair; particularly along the west coast where the detailed transmission of oral traditions still is unbelievably strong. The collection under concern is of but very limited use to us: we cannot exhibit it nor publish pictures or related information under these circumstances.*  

(Emphasis added, CMC Archives VII-E-35M B466 F1-4)

While Brasser did not advocate the immediate return of the collection, his words seem to indicate a greater, more complex understanding of Kwakwaka‘wakw perspectives, and perhaps a greater understanding of the impact that the confiscation of the regalia had had upon its removal from the community. Meeting with members of the Kwakwaka‘wakw community directly involved seems to have had a direct personal effect on Brasser, which he communicated with his colleagues and effectively began the process of reintroducing the multiple relationships associated with the collection. Combined with the continued pressure from the Kwakwaka‘wakw and the arrival of new staff members at the National Museum, the sentiments expressed at the National Conference of Native Culture led to an institutional shift in understanding of the significance of the regalia. This shift is reflected in a letter written from Dr. Reynolds to W.E. Taylor in response to Brasser’s report on May 14th, 1971. He states:

*I have not examined our own files in detail but am sure that there is no question of our legal right to the collection. At the same time I am very much aware that we can neither exhibit nor loan nor publicize the collection for fear of repercussions. Except for study purposes the collection is of little direct usefulness to us at the present time. On the debit side it does, as Dr. Brasser indicates, provide the Museum with continual bad publicity and is indeed perhaps the largest skeleton in our ethnological closet. For these reasons I am in favour of giving positive consideration to the return of the collection, under suitable safeguards to the Kwakiutl people.*  

(Emphasis added, CMC Archives VII-E-35M B465 F-3)
W.E. Taylor’s response to Dr. Reynolds on June 17, 1971 reaffirms this shift both within the National Museum and perhaps the museum field:

I am very pleased that the Division agrees that a large collection of the confiscated potlatch material should be returned to a proper museum at Alert Bay…I do think it correct that we pay more attention to justice and less attention to the legalities of the history of the case…Lastly, I have tried here to indicate the intensity of feeling I have with this material and I think I should record that the general impression documented by Ted Brasser has been communicated to me by three other ethnologists working in Canada. (CMC Archives VII-E-35M B465 F-3)

In January 1970, the last items of potlatch regalia out on loan from the National Museum returned and no further loans were made of this material to other cultural institutions. The National Museum’s entire portion of the potlatch regalia was returned to Ottawa.

W.E. Taylor began making arrangements for the collection to be returned as early as July 1971. Taylor and other staff at the museum were concerned for the preservation of the material and had agreed that it would be returned to the Kwakwaka’wakw as a whole and placed in a museum rather than returned to individuals (CMC Archives VII-E-35M B466 F1-4). Despite various recommendations from people external to the museum to return the collection to the Royal British Columbia Museum or the new Museum of Anthropology in Vancouver, Taylor stated: “It seems to me we should go further – that we should go to Alert Bay and think not so much of the present, but of the time 50 years ago and of what things will be there 50 years from now” (CMC Archives VII-E-35M B466 F1-4). It was of great concern to the National Museum staff that the Kwakwaka’wakw themselves decided the location of the museum to receive the returned material, and this debate continued for almost seven years. In a memorandum from Chief Ethnologist Barrie Reynolds to W.E. Taylor on December 20, 1971, he acknowledged the importance of this decision while also still perceiving the collection to be of national importance. He states that by returning the collection to a Kwakwaka’wakw museum the objective would be

...to establish a focal museum for the Kwakwaka’wakw themselves, a focus for the development of their interest and pride in their own culture and history, a focus for the development of local cultural activities and a museum which will conceivably build on the basis of this nuclear collection by means of gifts and deposits made by local Kwakiutl. At the same time we could reasonably expect that the data appropriate to the Potlatch Collection itself would be considerably increased from the memories and
reminiscences of older Kwakiutl residents. The collection would thereby become of greater value to anthropologists and historians working among the Kwakiutl. (CMC Archives VII-E-35M B465 F-3)

This excerpt seems to indicate an understanding of the potential impact that the repatriation of the collection would have on the Kwakw’akw community while simultaneously assuming the scholarly community will benefit from the repatriation and continue to have research relationships with the collection.

At the National Museum, consultations, negotiations and internal debates about the logistics of the repatriation continued until January 24th 1973 when Taylor gained approval from the Board of Trustees to repatriate the potlatch regalia (CMC Archives VII-E-35M B465 F13).

Once the repatriation had been approved, the meaning of the potlatch collection to the National Museum became rather liminal. It had formed an important part of the National Museum’s collection for the last 49 years in which it was accessioned, catalogued, exhibited, and loaned. Parts of the confiscated regalia were displayed alongside other museum’s collections in national and international exhibitions as representative types of Kwakw’akw material culture, though devoid of its specific political and historical implications. Staff at the National Museum demonstrated a great deal of hesitation and fear at the prospect of relinquishing the collection, pointing to the high museological and ethnological value of the material. Since the requests for the return of the collection began however, the collection assumed yet another meaning. The potlatch collection had become symbolic of the Department of Indian Affairs cultural repression of Kwakw’akw culture, and more broadly First Nations cultures. This marks another significant diversion; the collection, which was previously indistinguishable from other Kwakw’akw material culture in its role as museum objects, suddenly became re-injected with its specific political and cultural history. It was distinguished as a collection whose past was especially important to the Kwakw’akw and held especially sensitive implications for the National Museum, and later the Royal Ontario Museum. The collection was separated from the rest of the National Museum’s collection by this recognition of its specificity and it illuminated the complex relationship between museums and the Canadian government’s efforts to acculturate First Nations people.24 This diversion resulted in a

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24 The collection holds multiple meanings and expresses multiple contexts. The collection has come to represent an intercultural context (cf. Glass 2011), in which it both represents Kwakw’akw potlatch material culture and
shift in the collection’s subjecthood. The repatriation requests restored the collection’s capacity to act through multiple relationships. Referencing Bruno Latour, Matthews discusses the intricate relationships between an object’s personhood/subjecthood and repatriation claims:

A person/object, as a partible entity, may have conflicting ownership and rights relationships, may be sold, stolen or given away and yet be bound by ancient, inalienable personal relationships. These relational conflicts and contradictions assert themselves when a repatriation claim is activated. This is one of those moments Bruno Latour anticipates; when previously silent objects push their way into the accounts of events, they speak up as it were, recalcitrant artefacts dig in their heels and the obligations deriving from the multiple personal relationships of artefacts become imperatives (Latour 2005: 79-82). (Matthews 2013, 7)

The objects from the potlatch collection similarly pushed themselves forward through this repatriation request, making themselves visible and in doing so revealing relational conflicts and contradictions. As previously mentioned when in the museum’s collections, the potlatch regalia held unequal dual social contexts as museum objects and as Kwakwaka’wakw objects, with greater weight placed on its capacity as museum objects. The repatriation requests mark a movement towards a greater emphasis on the collection’s role as Kwakwaka’wakw objects and simultaneously a greater degree of subjecthood. Through the repatriation request, the collection was reconnected with its Kwakwaka’wakw communities, if only symbolically at this moment. After a period where the collection’s specificity and uniqueness had slowly decreased, the repatriation request instigated a process of re-singularization, as its singularity as evidence of the potlatch ban and confiscation had been restored, while it also took on a new identity as a focus for reconciliation and social justice.

**Division of the Collection and the Establishment of Two Cultural Centres**

The next fifteen years in the collection’s biography reflect a period of time where the collection oscillates between objecthood and subjecthood throughout negotiations between museum staff and Kwakwaka’wakw representatives. The collection’s subjecthood was augmented by the repatriation request and approval by its symbolic reunion with its Kwakwaka’wakw
communities. However, as Matthews states: “artefacts are at their most vulnerable object-like mode when they are subject to taxonomic ordering, cultural delimitating and property claims” (Matthews 2013, 4). She refers to Marilyn Strathern’s (1999, 14) work when she states that “cultural rights claims like repatriation are ownership claims made by persons (who have choices) in respect of objects (who do not), and ownership claims force unexpected and sometimes conflicting relationships into the open” (Matthews 2013, 6). This uneasy tension between the collection’s objecthood and subjecthood is played out over the next fifteen years, as the collection is simultaneously perceived as physical, material objects whilst also negotiating delicate relationships between the museums and the Kwakwā’wakw, and re-activating old disagreements between the ’Namgis, Mamalilikala and Weka’yi bands.25

Once the repatriation of the potlatch regalia was approved in 1973 under the stipulations that it was returned to the community as a whole and placed in a museum, negotiations began between the National Museum and the Kwakwā’wakw regarding the location of the proposed museum. In 1972, the Kwakiutl District Council had agreed to build a cultural centre in Cape Mudge to house the collection, however dissension soon rose from the ’Namgis who felt it should be built in Alert Bay (Jacknis 2002, 350). In 1973 Clarence Alfred Jr., ’Namgis band manager wrote to W.E. Taylor stating his reasons for opposing the Cape Mudge location and his justifications for building the cultural centre in Alert Bay. He stated that “Alert Bay has long been and remains the spiritual centre for the Kwakw’lth Nation and the place where the way of life of our people has been kept alive and developed” (CMC Archives VII-E-35M B465 F-4). He continues by stating that Alert Bay is not only the cultural centre of the Kwakwā’wakw and an established tourist area, but also that the majority of objects in the confiscated collection were taken from Alert Bay families (CMC Archives VII-E-35M B465 F-4).

The National Museum took the position that it would not return the collection to Kwakwā’wakw territory before the Kwakwā’wakw themselves had provided an agreed upon location which was supported by the community (CMC Archives VII-E-35M B465 F-5). The U’mista Cultural Society and the Nuyumbalees Cultural Society were founded by the ’Namgis and the Cape Mudge bands in 1974 and 1975 respectively to continue negotiations over the

25 A closer examination of the sensitive conflict that arose during this time between the ’Namgis and Weka’yi bands would be better addressed by a Kwakwaka’wakw scholar.
collection’s return. It was also in 1975 when the agreement to build two cultural centres was passed. Negotiations then ensued over the division of the objects between the two cultural centres. The decision on the method of division took another three years of negotiations between the ‘Namgis, Weka’yi and National Museum staff, and for very justified reasons.

The stipulation that the collection would not be returned to the descendants of the original owners but only to the community as a whole was problematic in itself. The regalia was individually owned and was taken from individuals at the time of confiscation, so some Kwakwaka’wakw felt it should be returned to the individuals or to their descendants (CMC Archives B465 F-11). The National Museum’s reason for this stipulation was a fear that if the objects were returned to individuals that they might be sold to collectors outside of Canada (see Sewid-Smith 1979, 3). Even though the National Museum had agreed to return the collection, this stipulation suggests they still perceived of it as a part of Canadian national heritage and wanted to maintain control over how it was managed in Kwakwaka’wakw territory. The acceptance of this stipulation by the Kwakwaka’wakw was in large part a compromise; the Kwakwaka’wakw had their material returned while the National Museum ensured it was kept in a museum-like environment (Jacknis 2002, 353). The division of the regalia between the two cultural centres in Alert Bay and Cape Mudge was also a complicated process. The National Museum did not want to make this decision for the Kwakwaka’wakw and asked the representatives of the Nuyumbalees Cultural Society and the U’mista Cultural Society to come to an agreement over the method of division.

In a meeting on 19th of May 1978, representatives of the National Museum, the Nuyumbalees Cultural Society, the U’mista Cultural Society, several Kwakwaka’wakw old people who were present at the confiscation, and other Kwakwaka’wakw community members met to discuss the division of the collection between the two cultural centres. Dividing the collection in half arbitrarily would not satisfy any of the families involved. Simultaneously, Gloria Cranmer Webster pointed to the fact that because of the length of time since the regalia was taken, some people had difficulty identifying objects as belonging to any one specific person (CMC Archives VII-E-35M B465 F-11). It was suggested that the division of the regalia be based on Halliday’s 1923 list made at the time of confiscation. The list itemized the regalia and recorded the owners, however it had come to light that this list was not completely accurate. It was
decided that families from the Alert Bay area and the Cape Mudge area would decide for themselves which cultural centre they wanted to house their family’s regalia and that they would use Halliday’s list as a provisional guideline. The remainder of the collection that was taken from Mamalilikula families, was to be placed in whichever cultural centre those families deemed best (CMC Archives VII-E-35M B465 F-11). The long and complex task of deciding on the division of the collection points to its nature as a rather unique collection compared to other, conventionally collected material commonly found in museums. As previously mentioned, the potlatch collection carried with it connections to specific histories, and specific named individuals, whether they were owners or carvers of the regalia. Halliday’s list of the regalia by owner (however inaccurate it may have been) and the writing of the owner’s names directly on the objects with pencil created a direct link to individuals. It was not common practice for museums to identify individual people with ethnographic objects, rather such objects were perceived as the products of a culture as a whole. Ethnographic objects themselves were not necessarily devoid of these connections, for example a specific carver or artist’s style was still evident, however this information was not prioritized by the field of ethnography at the time. For the potlatch collection, the connections to individual owners and histories was not valued by museum staff or the field of ethnography during the collection’s time in museum exhibitions. Nevertheless, it became immensely important in terms of helping to identifying regalia and re-situating the collection in current perspectives.

The negotiations regarding the location of the cultural centre, and then the division of the collection between the two cultural centres illuminates the collection’s degree of objecthood during this period. The discussions between National Museum staff and members of the U’mista and Nuyumbalees Cultural Society addressed the physicality and materiality of the regalia as “things” which can be moved around and acted upon by the subjects involved. It is through these discussions and negotiations that Matthews’ (2013) statement that objects reflect their most object-like mode when they are subject to property claims, is demonstrated. The regalia was discussed in terms of rightful ownership, physical location, and logistics. At the same time, the regalia’s subjecthood is also evident by the familial links that are re-activated by these ownership discussions. Determining the familial and band association of the regalia both marks it as “things” which belong to individuals, and at the same time establishes historical and
social connections. The regalia, if only symbolically at this point, was re-united with the families it was confiscated from in 1922, and re-activated certain relationships and tensions between bands. The reactivation of these relationships points to the collection’s capacity to create change and affect people’s lives. The collection’s subjecthood is augmented by the renewal of old relationships to individuals, families, and band histories at the same time that the collection is discussed purely at a physical and logistical level. This oscillation is further supported by the terminology used to discuss the collection and by whom these terms are used. For example, in the May 19th, 1978 meeting, representatives from both the National Museum and the two cultural societies use the words treasures, artefacts, possessions, articles, objects, collection, stuff, and masks interchangeably to discuss the potlatch regalia. This selection of words, ranging from the specific to the broad, from the Kwakw̱a’wakw context to museum context, continue to be used throughout correspondence over the next decade suggesting the collection maintained a liminal, flexible meaning. These conditions of objecthood and subjecthood expressed at this time are not distinct entities, rather they are intricately interconnected with each other, and one cannot be discussed without the other.

The National Museum’s portion of the collection was shipped to Victoria and temporarily stored at the Royal British Columbia Museum while the final designations were being decided between the two cultural societies. The Kwagu̱lth Museum (now Nuyumbalees Cultural Centre) opened in Cape Mudge in June 1979 and the U’mista Cultural Centre opened in Alert Bay on November 1st 1980. The National Museum marked the occasion by transferring on permanent loan the Whonnock totem pole to the U’mista Cultural Centre and a dentsiq collected by Franz Boas in 1898 to the Kwagiulth Museum (now Nuyumbalees Cultural Centre). The return of the National Museum’s portion of the collection did not end the relationship between the National Museum and the Kwakw̱a’wakw. The National Museum’s relationship with the Kwakw̱a’wakw over the past six decades was complex in that it had to negotiate a sensitive history in which former staff members seemed complicit with actions that

26 A dentsiq, or power board, is shown during winter dances, especially by the society initiating youth into the ritual of Winalagilis, the warrior spirit. The power board portrays the Sisutl rising up among the people gathered in the big house. It rose slowly out of the earth floor swaying and glittering in the firelight to the great awe of the assembly (Courtesy of the Kwagiulth Museum (now Nuyumbalees Cultural Centre), Cape Mudge, reproduced in Assu and Inglis 1989, 154).
had removed and withheld collections from the rightful Kwakwaka’wakw owners. Twenty years of repatriation negotiations further complicated the matter, sometimes producing politically and emotionally charged moments of conflict among and between both parties. The National Museum, however, continued to dedicate themselves to assisting in the return of the remainder of the potlatch collection from the ROM and the MAI (now NMAI). This continued involvement was insisted upon by the Kwakwaka’wakw as they felt the National Museum, the Department of Indian Affairs, and the Canadian government were responsible for the removal of the regalia from the community and therefore accountable for its return. It was also equally supported by National Museum staff who, addressing their institution’s involvement in colonial actions, felt an obligation to see things through. After attending the opening of the U’mista Cultural Centre on November 1st, 1980, Andrea Laforet, Pacific Coast Ethnologist communicated her thoughts to Annette Macfayden Clark, Chief of the Canadian Ethnology Service in a letter dated December 22, 1980:

In a way this potlatch [at the opening of the U’mista Cultural Centre] brought the story of the confiscation of the potlatch regalia full circle. The events leading to the confiscation were triggered by Dan Cranmer’s potlatch; the return of the confiscated material was marked by a potlatch given by his children. It has not really ended, though, and the consequences for the National Museum have not really ended, either. Although Edward Sapir had gone on record, saying that the potlatch was not an institution that should be prohibited by law, he and the Anthropology Division of his time were ultimately compromised by Halliday’s actions and by the decision of the Department of Indian Affairs to ratify those actions. Halliday is dead, Sapir is dead, but in the minds of the Kwakwaka’wakw people the National Museum is irrevocably linked with those actions. No single action on the part of the Museum can change this, although the transfer of the dentsiq can certainly help. Probably nothing can help to remedy it as much as a relationship of consistent good will and plain dealing over a period of time. (CMC Archives VII-E-35M B 465 F-12)

The potlatch collection continued to be part of the National Museum’s concern, and museum staff were well aware of the impact that the repatriation had had on their institutional identity as well as the potential impact it could have on other museums with First Nations collections. In a letter to Yorke Edwards, Director of the British Columbia Provincial Museum (now RBCM) on June 19th, 1978, W.E. Taylor notes:

some museum people will see this repatriation with the traditional curatorial possessiveness. Personally, I think that an abject perception. Certainly, this is a precedent and one to be taken with great care and one that should concern museum
curators. At the same time, regardless of the legality by which the material came to the Museum, the morality of the event makes this a unique case – and the nature of the case calls for the proposed return of the collection. (CMC Archives VII-E-35M B465 F8)

Again, in a speech to representatives of the Nuyumabalees Cultural Society on February 17th, 1979 at the final meeting in Victoria to decide the division of the collection, W.E. Taylor states:

...there have, I suppose, been bureaucrats and other museum people who question either my sanity or sense of duty in this undertaking. But there are many kinds of duty, diverse responsibilities and significant museological questions in pursuing this undertaking. It is a precedent that will worry many museum people, a few anthropologists and one that will, undoubtedly, provoke some harsh criticisms of what we, in the National Museum of Man, and I, personally have done...It seems so clearly the correct and proper thing to do – and yet, doing it will surely damage my career and repute. (CMC Archives VII-E-35M B465 F13)

These excerpts provide an insight into what I believe, is a certain degree of self-awareness and a shift in understanding of the National Museum’s obligation to the Kwakw’ak’wakw. Keeping in mind that the repatriation was indeed a compromise, one acknowledged by all involved parties, it only follows that the repatriation process has been situated in differing narratives for both the National Museum and the Kwakw’ak’wakw.

Kwakw’ak’wakw: The Righting of a Wrong

The impact of the repatriation of the National Museum’s portion of the potlatch regalia in 1979 and 1980 for the ‘Namgis, We’ka’yi, and the Mamaliliḵala cannot be fully expressed by myself, as a non-Kwakw’ak’wakw person. I will however, refer to published accounts of the return of the collection to the communities. In 1983, the U’mista Cultural Centre produced a documentary in collaboration with Documentary Education Resources called Box of Treasures, which discusses the opening of the U’mista Cultural Centre and the significance of having the collection returned home. In the documentary, Gloria Cranmer Webster describes the establishment of the cultural centre:

U’mista means the return of something important. In earlier days, people were sometimes taken as slaves by other groups. When those people were returned to their homes, either through payment of ransom or through a retaliatory raid, they were said to have U’mista. When we were looking for a name for this place, we talked to the old people and a couple of them said, it will be as if those masks and other treasures are U’mista. They’re coming home to us...The objects in the potlatch collection have been arranged in this big house space more or less in the order that they would appear in a
potlatch. And they're not in cases. The feeling some of us had when the pieces were returned was that they'd been locked up for so long in a strange place that it seemed wrong to lock them up again. (in Olin and U’mista Cultural Society 1983)

The centre seemed to become a physical manifestation of an already bourgeoning cultural revival movement, no doubt spurred along by the successful repatriation efforts of the potlatch regalia. The collection became the centrepiece around which the U’mista Cultural Centre and the Kwagiulth Museum (now Nuyumbalees Cultural Centre) developed. The Cranmer family hosted a potlatch to celebrate the opening of U’mista Cultural Centre, which served to emphasize the continuity and vitality of the potlatch, art production, dancing, language and singing in Alert Bay. Gloria Cranmer Webster spoke about the opening of U’mista Cultural Centre:

Opening day, although there was just this enormous joy and happiness, I think for some of us there, there was also some sadness. I thought as the chiefs spoke today, that I wish there had been some way that those people, my father included, could have been here, to see what we have accomplished. Then I realized that there was no reason to be sad, that somehow they were here with us. If we had forgotten all of them, I don't think we would've worked as hard as we did for the return of this collection. We came very close to losing our culture, our language, for a lot of people even interest in knowing about those things. We're lucky; we're very fortunate that we've something to build on. That we've old people who care, that we've younger people who are beginning to realize the importance of knowing these things. And we're lucky that we've this center in which to try and build some of this store of knowledge that all of us need to know who we are. (in Olin and U’mista Cultural Society 1983)

At the opening of U’mista Cultural Centre, Robert Joseph (Hereditary Chief of the Gwawaenuk First Nation, and resident of Cape Mudge) spoke of the impact of acculturation efforts on his people: “You heard some of my other chiefs' talk about losing their language; you heard some of our people talk about losing our dances and our songs, our legends. It's not an easy thing for a man to do that. It's like stripping away your soul, and there's nothing worse than that” (Olin and U’mista Cultural Society 1983). He also emphasized the importance of preserving their culture and the knowledge that seniors and Elders in the community held at that time through U’mista: “The old people are the links to our history. So that the past does not die with them, their memories and stories are being recorded at the center” (Olin and U’mista Cultural Society 1983) The U’mista Cultural Centre and the Kwagiulth Museum (now Nuyumbalees Cultural Centre) were established to house the potlatch collection, but both centres became much more
than a building to store objects in. In addition, they became centres that focussed on preserving intangible parts of Kwakw̓a’wakw culture through language classes, dance programs, oral history recording projects, film projects and temporary exhibitions. “We’ve won some victories, the people in this area. The masks have come home. The old people are teaching the children what they know. We’re rebuilding and we’re growing stronger in all sorts of ways. We use this center as a focus of that rebuilding” (Webster, quoted in Olin and U’mista Cultural Society 1983). Gloria Cranmer Webster’s words as well as many other’s included in the documentary including Agnes Alfred, Robert Joseph and Chief Bill Cranmer emphasize the importance of this repatriation as a victory for the ’Namgis, Weka’yí, Mamalilikala, and the Kwakw̓a’wakw as a whole.

Chapter Five: The Royal Ontario Museum and the National Museum of the American Indian

The Royal Ontario Museum

The National Museum’s ongoing relationship and sense of obligation to the return of the potlatch collection led to the National Museum assisting in the return of the remainder of the collection held in public institutions, namely the Royal Ontario Museum and the Museum of the American Indian. W.E. Taylor, Director at the National Museum began reaching out to the Royal Ontario Museum and the Museum of the American Indian to enquire about the possible return of their portions of the collection as early as 1971. The initial response from the ROM was similar to the National Museum’s initial reactions discussed earlier; there was investigation into the existence of the regalia in the collections and hesitation to return the regalia in case it opened the museum to other repatriation claims. On October 26th, 1971 Dr. E.S. Rogers, Curator of Ethnology at the Royal Ontario Museum wrote to Taylor to express his concerns with the proposed return of the collection to the proposed Kwakw̓a’wakw museum:

We do not feel that one can establish a museum at Alert Bay and merely forget the matter. One must be concerned with all the Indians of Canada and whether or not they also are entitled to similar consideration, not because of the Potlatch Law, now void, but as Canada’s first citizens. It is an exceedingly fine line that has been drawn here between Alert Bay and elsewhere within Canada...Provisions must be made that these [the regalia] are preserved in perpetuity. I am personally convinced that on reflection, the Indians would concur that they, and we, have an obligation to the future generation. (CMC Archives E2010.14 B13 F3-4)
This passage from Rogers is interesting because, apart from a note of paternalism, it is similar to earlier correspondence by National Museum staff in the sixties. There is a hesitancy here that was evident in earlier correspondence from the National Museum, and reappears in later negotiations with the ROM. It also aptly demonstrates a distinct difference in perspectives towards what the museums value preserving and what First Nations value preserving. Rogers’ comments, and those of earlier staff members at the National Museum, reflect a museum viewpoint in the seventies that privileged the physical preservation of the objects as a way to preserve Kwakwaka’wakw culture for future generations. An underlying tension found in a majority of the correspondence between museum staff and Kwakwaka’wakw members of the cultural societies is the misalignment of value systems. This is most obvious when the notion of preservation is discussed. Miriam Clavir’s book *Preserving What is Valued: Museums, First Nations and Conservation* discusses at length the fundamental differences between a museum’s notion of preservation versus a First Nations notion of preservation. While this may seem like a constructed binary, it is important to note that Clavir discusses several overlaps in both parties’ concepts of preservation and does not presume to define a singular First Nations or museological perspective of preservation. Generally, she posits that a museum perspective of preservation has, in the past, privileged the material and aesthetic qualities of an object while restricting use and access to avoid further deterioration (Clavir 2002, 134). It was the belief that meaning is inherently derived from the material object itself, and this is reflected in Rogers’ and DeBlois’ earlier comments. The First Nations people Clavir interviewed in her book generally agreed that the preservation of the material object was important, but that the cultural preservation of an object, its history, associated stories and songs, were of even greater importance (Clavir 2002). They valued the preservation of the tangible as a vehicle to preserve the intangible.

27 Many museums across North America have come to respect First Nation’s beliefs about the cultural preservation of intangible heritage intricately tied to objects they may have in their collections. These museums, such as the Canadian Museum of Civilization, the Museum of Anthropology and many others have adopted respectful storage conditions and welcome ritual caretakers into the store rooms to care for their objects. At the CMC sacred objects are stored in ways which are deemed respectful by the communities they are associated with. This may mean that they are covered, stored with tobacco, sage and cedar, or stored in a particular orientation. The sacred materials are stored separately from other collections, and CMC staff welcome community members to perform ceremonies with the sacred materials. (Canadian Museum of Civilization Staff members, Personal Communication January 17th, 2013).
In 1981, the National Museum, in partnership with representatives of the U’mist Cultural Society and Nuyumbalees Cultural Society, renewed its focus on the ROM and the MAI’s portions of the potlatch collection. Compared to the National Museum, the status of the collection at the ROM was much more complicated. The archival records consulted contain a significant portion of correspondence between National Museum staff and legal advisors that discuss the status of the collection held at the ROM in terms of legal ownership between the Department of Indian Affairs, the National Museum and the ROM. The conditions of the transfer of the regalia to the ROM in 1923 were unclear and it was never stated in any correspondence whether the transfer of the potlatch collection was a gift or a loan. The terms “transfer” and “exchange” used in correspondence and catalogue records from 1923, are themselves ambiguous and they do not imply whether ownership was transferred with the physical movement of the objects. While the National Museum used this information to argue ownership remained with the Department of Indian Affairs, the official response from the ROM was that the ambiguity pointed to their ownership of the collection. In a letter from ROM Associate Director Barbara Stephen to W.E. Taylor on November 11, 1982, she states that:

The only reference we have been able to find in our records relating to the acquisition of the material is that the ‘material from Alert Bay was received in exchange from D.C. Scott, Department of Indian Affairs, Ottawa March 1923.’ Unfortunately, our records do not disclose what was exchanged for the material but it does appear from our records that consideration in the form of exchanged material was given to the Department of Indian Affairs at the time the potlatch collection was acquired by the ROM. (CMC Archives VII-E-35M B465 F1-3)

For these reasons, the ROM staff felt they had a justified claim to the ownership of the collection. After substantial research and legal advice, it was determined by the National Museum, working on behalf of the Department of Indian Affairs, that legal ownership still rested with the Crown. They referred to an original letter sent from Duncan Campbell Scott to Edward Sapir on October 9th, 1922 that stated:

I am advised by Agent Halliday that he has shipped to you 17 boxes of Indian curios. I trust that these will reach you safely in due course. It is understood, of course, that these curios are to remain the property of the Department of Indian Affairs although housed in the Victoria Memorial Museum. It may also be our wish to dispose of some of them to other institutions. (Emphasis added) (CMC Archives E2010.14 B13 F3-4)
In 1984 George F. MacDonald, the new Director of the National Museum, made an official request to Dr. James Cruise the new Director of the ROM, to return the potlatch collection to the National Museum so it could be repatriated to the Kwagiulth Museum and U’mista Cultural Centre (ROM Archives, The Potlatch Collection Files, Director’s Office). The reaction at the ROM was initially quite positive; Cruise wrote a memorandum to Dr. David Barr, Curator of Collections at the ROM, stating that

...the time has come at last for the ROM to return the Potlatch materials which have been at the centre of a controversy during the past 62 years...It is my understanding that the artefacts in question are not particularly displayable, and that their return will in no way diminish the attractiveness or significance of our new public galleries. (Emphasis added, ROM Archives, The Potlatch Collection Files, Director’s Office)

His last sentence points to an understanding of the collection’s limitations in terms of exhibition value, but it is unclear whether this refers to the physical condition of the collection or its status as a politically sensitive collection. Cruise wrote again to MacDonald stating that he would move forward with arrangements to return the collection but approval had to come from the Collections Committee on the Board of Trustees, to which MacDonald questioned the necessity of this Board approval if the collection was simply on loan from the National Museum (ROM Archives, The Potlatch Collection Files, Director’s Office).

Further negotiations between the ROM and representatives of the U’mista Cultural Society and the Nuyumbalees Cultural Society were not so amicable. On November 14th 1985, a meeting was held in Toronto with representatives of the Nuyumbalees Cultural Society, the U’mista Cultural Society and the Royal Ontario Museum. Gloria Cranmer Webster’s meeting notes record the conversation in which David Barr, Curator of Collections at the ROM expressed that the “ROM has curated, conserved, etc. the collection for 61 years, and although it is sympathetic to the importance of the collection to the Kwagul people, ROM has to get something in return” (CMC Archives VII-E-35M B465 F1-3). Meetings with the Board of Directors Collections Committee had resulted in a general agreement that the collection should be returned but that there would be conditions on the return. ROM representatives at the meeting stated that they did not believe their actions should be contingent on the precedent.

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28 This may not be a direct quote from David Barr, but is taken directly from Gloria Cranmer Webster’s meeting notes.
set by the National Museum, which returned the collection free of compensation stipulations. David Barr suggested the option of carved replicas of the collection, a travelling exhibition of the potlatch regalia or a potlatch held at the ROM (CMC Archives VII-E-35M B465 F1-3). Gloria Cranmer Webster, representing the U’mista Cultural Society, and Don Assu, Rod Naknakim, and Bob Joseph, representatives of the Nuyumbalees Cultural Society rejected these stipulations, insisting that the ROM acknowledge that ownership of the regalia belonged to the ’Namagedis, Mamalilikala, and the Weka’yi. “For us to become involved in travelling exhibits or other issues implies that we are in some way obligated to ROM and clearly we are not. There can be no conditions” (Webster in November 14th 1985 meeting, CMC Archives VII-E-35M B465 F1-3). Later correspondence between Brian V. Arthur, Assistant Director at the CMC, and George MacDonald, Director of the CMC as of December 1986 demonstrates that the ROM was still advocating for a “fair exchange agreement” in the form of

a gift or loan of similar material from the CMC or DINA [Department of Indian and Northern Affairs] to fill the gap in the ROM collection; arrangements made with native carvers to carve new pieces perhaps funded by DINA; or purchase of other collections by DINA or CMC and given to the ROM in an exchange for them returning the Potlatch material to the rightful owners. (CMC VII-E-35M B465 F1-3)

Arthur responded by stating that “contrary to his statement that the ROM should have some form of recompense for looking after the collection for sixty years, the other view could be stated that they had had the use of the collection for sixty years” (CMC Archives VII-E-35M B465 F1-3). After several more months of pressure applied on the ROM and the Department of Indian Affairs by the U’mista Cultural Society and the Nuyumbalees Cultural Society, the ROM agreed to repatriate the regalia to the U’mista Cultural Centre and the Kwagiulth Museum free of stipulations (now Nuyumbalees Cultural Centre). The idea of a travelling exhibition was cancelled due to lack of funding from the Department of Indian Affairs. The ROM’s portion of the potlatch collection was shipped to the British Columbia Provincial Museum (now RBCM) for the representatives of the two cultural societies and respective families to make the necessary divisions, and returned to the cultural centres in 1988. The ROM’s portion of the collection was deaccessioned from the National Museum via their Board of Trustees (CMC Archives VII-E-35M B465 F1-3).
Approximately ten years separates the National Museum repatriation from the ROM repatriation of the potlatch collection, and yet we can see various similarities and differences in the ways in which the repatriation and the collection was dealt with. Both the National Museum and the ROM were large cultural institutions with significant First Nations collections. Both institutions viewed the potlatch regalia as an integral part of their collection and expressed hesitation at the prospect of returning the collection. Regardless of James Cruise’s thoughts relayed to David Barr in 1984 which stated that the collection was of little exhibition value, it is obvious from other correspondence presented above that the ROM staff did not conceive of the return of the collection in quite the same way the National Museum staff came to understand it. The request for compensation in the form of replicas, a travelling exhibition, and a potlatch held at the ROM suggests some ROM staff and Board members did not see the return of the collection as a moral issue involving the return of an illegally confiscated collection. Archival records suggest that even though they were sympathetic to the situation of the Kwakwaka’wakw, they still perceived the potlatch regalia as so valuable to the ROM that they would require something in return for such a loss. The political and museological environment at the time surrounding the Spirit Sings controversy may have had an impact on the ROM’s agreement to return the collection free of compensation related stipulations (see Harrison 1988; Harrison et.al 1988; Phillips 2011).

Another factor to consider in understanding the ROM’s position in regards to the repatriation is that they did not have a relationship with the Kwakwaka’wakw representatives that was as prolonged and involved as the relationship that developed between the CMC and the Kwakwaka’wakw. As previously demonstrated, over a period of two decades the staff at the CMC had frequent interactions with various Kwakwaka’wakw representatives beginning with...
Chief Andy Frank in 1957 and increasing to periods of constant interaction with Gloria Cranmer Webster, Don Assu, William Cranmer and a multitude of others. There was a person-to-person relationship established with invested individuals at the CMC and in Alert Bay and Cape Mudge. While staff came and left at the CMC there was always an acknowledgement of the situation as present in the consciousness of the institution, but it was these individual relationships between people that established the institutional relationship lacking between the ROM and the Kwakwaka’wakw representatives. This may have been because there was not a long enough period of contact between the two parties to create this relationship, but also it seems there was a misalignment of expectations between the two parties. The CMC’s actions had set a precedent that, as shown in the correspondence, the ROM staff did not feel they had to replicate, while the Kwakwaka’wakw representatives did. The repatriations from the CMC and the ROM share many similarities in the staff’s initial reactions, but they also hold a lot of differences. Comparing the two institutions is not necessarily a valuable exercise. As I have demonstrated, the outcomes of repatriation negotiations, and indeed many important events in museums, are not necessarily a result of the institutional operations or framework, but the work of individual people who share a common goal and understanding of the situation.

Similar to the period of negotiation with the National Museum, the ROM’s portion of the potlatch collection was oscillating between conditions of objecthood and subjecthood. The situation at the ROM centred much more on the legal sense of ownership of the collection, demonstrating its objecthood as material objects that can be owned, as property and were believed to be owned by the ROM. At the same time, the ROM’s catalogue cards stated that the regalia had been received in “exchange from D.C. Scott, 1923” which disassociated the collection from its specific history as the confiscated collection of potlatch regalia under the potlatch prohibition. This disconnect represented in the museum register contributed to the ROM’s assumption of ownership and belief that some kind of reciprocity was due in exchange for the return of the collection. The disassociation of the collection from its specific life history further restricted its subjecthood and its capacity to act through various relationships to its origin communities. The repatriation of the potlatch regalia from the National Museum had shed light on the ROM’s position as a holder of a large portion of regalia which resulted in a gradual increase in the collection’s subjecthood and singularization along with its identification
and acknowledgement as wrongfully acquired material. The collection was recognized as a politically sensitive topic as evidenced by the correspondence and this too worked to distinguish the collection from the ROM's other material. The actual repatriation requests from the U’mista Cultural Society, the Nuyumbalees Cultural Society, the National Museum, and the Department of Indian Affairs reunited this specific history with the collection, reviving band and familial relationships between the collection and the 'Namgis, Mamalillikala and the We'ka'yi. The collection’s return home from the ROM to Alert Bay and Cape Mudge in 1988 completed this reunion.

**National Museum of the American Indian**

The first evidence of correspondence with the Museum of the American Indian occurs on January 28th 1972. Frederick J. Dockstader wrote a letter to Judy Thompson at the National Museum in response to a request for information about the potlatch collection. As mentioned earlier, the portion of the collection in the MAI was purchased by George Heye, the founder of the museum, directly from William Halliday in Alert Bay. Heye continued to collect other Northwest Coast material on this trip and according to Dockstader, did not keep detailed records of his purchases. In addition, when the material was returned to New York it was all catalogued as one large acquisition instead of several smaller ones, making identifying the confiscated potlatch regalia extremely difficult. Thompson had sent Halliday’s list of confiscated regalia to Dockstader to cross-reference with the MAI’s records, but Halliday’s list was so vague it could have referred to other Kwakwaka’wakw material in the MAI’s collection. He concludes by stating that of those pieces that he could identify as potentially the confiscated potlatch regalia, a portion of those had been exchanged or sold to other museums and private collectors (CMC Archives VII-E-35M B465 F4). Through extensive research, another collection of the potlatch regalia was discovered in the MAI’s collection in addition to the 35 pieces Heye purchased from Halliday. It was received from B.E. Angermann, the widow of Sergeant Donald Angermann in 1926.

In 1988 Gloria Cranmer Webster wrote an article about the return of the ROM’s portion of the potlatch collection and the obstacles they had encountered in negotiating the repatriation. In this article she mentions that the initial response from the MAI in 1984 was very
similar to the ROM’s and she continued to call on the MAI to be accountable for their historical involvement in the removal of First Nations material culture from communities:

How often have we heard museum directors and curators say, ‘We are not responsible today for what was done in the past’ or ‘If we hadn’t taken care of these artefacts all these years, they would have disappeared’? Such statements do not justify the holding by major museums of materials acquired in a dubious manner. My question to museums out there is, ‘Why would you want to keep objects that you know, or even suspect, may have been stolen or otherwise illegally acquired.’ If you can’t answer that honestly don’t talk to me about your ethics. (Webster 1988, 44)

The repatriation of the potlatch regalia from the MAI was yet another battle the Kwakwaka’wakw had to fight. The Museum of the American Indian, founded by George Heye, an avid collector of indigenous material culture from both North and South America, opened to the public in 1922. In 1989, the Museum of the American Indian became part of the Smithsonian Institution and was renamed the National Museum of the American Indian (Ganteaume 2010, 284). The ethos of the museum changed significantly to address the needs of indigenous people across the continent. The enabling legislation which created the NMAI included a repatriation policy which related to Native American and Native Hawaiian human remains, funerary objects, communally-owned Native American property, ceremonial and religious objects and objects acquired illegally (National Museum of the American Indian Act, 1989). The NMAI’s repatriation policy does not apply to Canadian First Nations but requests are considered on a case-by-case basis. The repatriation request came at a time of great restructuring for the NMAI and in a letter dated July 14th 1992 to U’mista Cultural Centre and Kwagiulth Museum W. Richard West Jr., the first Director of the NMAI, stated that “Since our repatriation policy is so new and relatively untested we consider essential our moving with care in our deliberations. We are firmly committed, however, to resolving your request, which has been so long delayed” (U’mista Cultural Centre Archives, file #U96-032-30-12). He reiterated his commitment to returning the nine identified objects to U’mista Cultural Centre and Kwagiulth Museum, but also expressed some concern about competing ownership claims from individuals. Chief William Cranmer replied by stating that “The descendants of the original owners met on two prior occasions and all agreed that this collection goes beyond individual ownership rights and requires proper care and storage” (U’mista Cultural Centre, file #U96-032-30-12). This suggests that the descendants recognized the importance of the repatriation to the
community as a whole and continued to feel that the cultural centres were the best depository for their regalia. The NMAI returned the nine pieces they could definitively identify as part of the confiscated regalia in 1992.

Peter Macnair was contracted by U’mista Cultural Centre in 1998 to undertake research into the NMAI’s collection to try to determine which pieces in the collection were part of the remaining confiscated regalia. A part of this research involved a substantial amount of provenance research into the NMAI’s collection, a comparison of George Heye’s collecting notebooks with William Halliday’s correspondence, and a close examination of the photographs that Halliday and Lord took of the confiscated regalia in the Parish Hall in 1922. An additional outcome of his research was a list of pieces that were missing from the collection, exchanged to other parties. The continued use of these photographs throughout the overall repatriation history has been instrumental in identifying missing pieces. Macnair identified a further seventeen pieces of the confiscated regalia still in the NMAI’s collection but they did not return to U’mista Cultural Centre and the Kwagiulth Museum for another ten years. With the passing of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) in 1990, the request for the remainder of the material was put on hold by the museum while the NMAI dealt with human remains repatriation requirements (U’mista Cultural Centre Archives, file #U96-032-30-12).

Reminiscent of the erasure of the history of surrender in exhibition catalogues and the National Museum’s register, the potlatch regalia’s specificity as a confiscated collection was even further neglected and buried in the MAI’s register to the point that the parts of the collection could not be identified at all without intensive research and the use of Halliday’s photographs. Dockstader’s statement that many of the objects had been exchanged or sold is also evidence that the museum was not aware of, or did not consider, the politically sensitive implications of the ways in which the material had left the community. Through the way in which the history of the collection was recorded, or in this case not recorded in the museum’s register.

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30 The NMAI is not covered under NAGPRA because of their own repatriation policy included in the NMAI Act of 1989, however NAGPRA would have made communities more aware of their rights to request for repatriation so its reasonable to assume that the NMAI would have received an increase in repatriation requests.
register, the confiscated regalia was subsumed into the MAI’s collection, completely indistinguishable from other Kwakwaka’wakw material.

In addition to the large repatriations from the Royal Ontario Museum, the Canadian Museum of Civilization, and the National Museum of the American Indian, there have been a series of smaller repatriations of individual pieces that had journeyed away from the Museum of the American Indian in the form of exchanges and sales to other museums or private collectors. Examining these individual objects and their journeys allows us to explore moments in which pieces of the regalia have become completely separated from the collection, both physically and in terms of their shared specific history. These objects have perhaps an even more complex biography as they have been sold, exchanged, displayed and returned as individuals, however this complexity informs the biography of the collection as a whole. Peter Macnair’s research was instrumental in identifying and tracing the movements of these pieces of regalia. The next chapter will address these individual or small groups of objects that were separated from the collection, and briefly discuss their journey home.

Chapter Six: Repatriations from Institutions and Individuals

Yaxwiwe’ Headdress in the Breton Estate

In 2003, a yaxwiwe’ (peace dance headdress) was repatriated from the family of the surrealist artist Andre Breton. The life history of this headdress is multifaceted as the headdress has travelled across the world and exchanged hands multiple times. In the summer 2003 issue of the U’mista Cultural Centre’s Newsletter, Andrea Sanborn recounts its history. The yaxwiwe’ was one of thirteen pieces that RCMP Sergeant Donald Angermann had retained for his own personal use after the collection was confiscated from the ‘Namgis, the Mamalilikula, and the We’ka’yí in 1922. Angermann’s collection was purchased by George Heye of the Museum of the American Indian in 1926. Then in 1957 the yaxwiwe’ was sold by the Museum of the American Indian to a man named Edward Primus. From there it was sold to a French sculptor Isabelle Waldberg living in New York. She then sold the headdress to Jacques Kerchache who took the yaxwiwe’ to Paris and exhibited it in his private studio in 1965. Before his death, Andre Breton, the father of surrealism, purchased the yaxwiwe’ and put it on display in his study, where it
remained for almost forty years before he died. In 1998, Marie Mauzé, an anthropologist who has done research on the potlatch collection in the past, was asked by Mr. Kerchache, who was then an Acquisition Committee member for the Musée de Louvre, to examine the headdress for possible acquisition by the Louvre. Mauzé identified the piece as part of the confiscated potlatch regalia and immediately wrote to Mr. Kerchache to inform him of the yaxwiwe’s history. The Louvre decided not to purchase the headdress, and when informed of the yaxwiwe’s history, Andre Breton’s family stated that they would be “very proud to give back the mask [headdress] to the people to whom it had been stolen from” (U’mista Cultural Centre, Summer 2003). The headdress was delivered to U’mista Cultural Centre in 2003 by the Breton family themselves, they also donated a sum of money to the centre to care for the yaxwiwe’ in the future (Sarah Holland, pers. comm. May 13th, 2013).

**University of British Columbia, Museum of Anthropology**

In 2004, three hamsaml bird masks were identified by Peter Macnair in the University of British Columbia, Museum of Anthropology’s (MOA) collection in Vancouver as a result of his research. The masks had been purchased by the museum from a private collector in the 1950’s.31 MOA and U’mista Cultural Centre have developed a close relationship over the years. Under the guidance of Director Anthony Shelton, MOA returned the masks on long-term loan in 2004. The ’Namgis celebrated the return of the masks by hosting an open house at U’mista Cultural Centre followed by a feast, ceremony, songs and dances at the Gukwdzi (Big House). Recalling the event in U’mista’s newsletter, Director Andrea Sanborn remarked, “This was an exciting day filled with spirituality and power and we thank all those who made it possible and to those who came to share it with us. I am sure that most of us thought about our ancestors who were around during the confiscation of the ceremonial objects when the three hamsaml were being carried in by the Chiefs and then unveiled for all to see” (U’mista Cultural Centre, winter 2004). The three masks now take their place amongst the potlatch collection in U’mista Cultural Centre.

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31 The full provenance of these masks is unknown, they were not from the Museum of the American Indian, or sent to the Victoria Memorial Museum in 1922. They were displayed in Halliday’s photographs from the parish hall and this is how they were identified (Juanita Johnston, pers.comm. May 14th).
The British Museum

In 2005, a sun transformation mask was returned to the U’mista Cultural Centre on long-term loan from the British Museum. Andrea Sanborn acted as primary negotiator with the British Museum and recounts the journey of the sun transformation mask in an article written in 2005 called *The Reunification of the Kwakw̱aka’wakw Mask with its Cultural Soul*. The sun transformation mask was originally part of the Heye collection at the Museum of the American Indian (now NMAI). In 1937 it formed part of an exchange with Harry Beasley of the Cranmore Ethnological Museum in Chislehurst, Kent, England. After his death, Harry Beasley’s widow donated the mask to the British Museum in 1944. The mask was first spotted in an exhibition catalogue in the seventies (Juanita Johnston, pers. comm., May 14th, 2013). Andrea Sanborn and William Cranmer, Chair of the Board and Chief of the ‘Namgis Nation, travelled to the British Museum in 1997 to begin talks about the possible return of the mask (Sanborn 2009, 85). Initially the British Museum refused to repatriate the mask citing the British Museum Act of 1963, which prohibits the British Museum from deaccessioning any object from the collection (Knox 2002, A23). Many people wrote letters of support for the repatriation of the mask, to which the British Museum replied stating its position as restricted by the British Museum Act and defending itself as a universal museum. In a letter from the Director Neil MacGregor, to one of these individuals he states:

    Universal museum collections make two important points: that great works of art are the patrimony of the whole of humankind, and that their full significance is best able to be grasped when they are experienced within the rich comparative context provided by these collections. Now more than ever, it seems to me, the world needs universal museums, to reveal the unity and connectedness of human history. (British Museum, Africa Oceania and Americas Department, Keepers File, U’mista Loan)

MacGregor also included in this letter that the British Museum had been negotiating with the U’mista Cultural Centre regarding the possibility of a long-term loan or a replica carved by a Kwakw̱aka’wakw carver (British Museum, Africa Oceania and Americas Department, Keepers File, U’mista Loan). Finally, after eight years of negotiations, the British Museum returned the mask on a long-term loan, renewable every three years. Reflecting on the process Sanborn stated:
Over time I came to believe that changes were taking place in the negotiating process. I could see that attitudes were softening, my own included, and many were sympathetic to our cause. The process showed that, given sufficient information, it becomes easier for people to understand our deep desire to have our masks and regalia returned to us. (Sanborn 2009, 85)

Other significant factors that point to changing attitudes, both from a museum perspective and a Kwakwaka'wakw perspective, are several important events that occurred when the mask was returned to Alert Bay. First, the British Museum worked in coordination with U’mista staff to have the mask returned so it could be unveiled on November 1st, 2005, the 25th anniversary of the U’mista Cultural Centre. It was couriered to Alert Bay personally by Jonathan King, then Keeper of the Department of Africa, Oceania and the Americas, who then stayed for five days in the village. King arrived with the mask several days before the anniversary so local carvers could have a chance to examine the mask before it was put into its exhibit case (a stipulation of the loan). At the celebration of the centre’s 25th anniversary and the mask’s return, a drum, with the image of the sun transformation mask painted by William Wasden was presented to the British Museum after it had been used in the singing and dancing. King also took the time to visit Village Island with Chief Cranmer and the original site of ‘Namgis Village on the Nimpkish River. Finally, he visited the local school where he donated 20 British Museum books and visited three classes to talk about the British Museum and the mask (British Museum, Africa Oceania and Americas Department, Keepers File, U’mista Loan). King’s interest and investment in visiting Alert Bay and engaging in reciprocal learning opportunities demonstrates a greater degree of engagement associated with interactions between museums and origin communities such as long-term loans. Legally the British Museum was within their rights to refuse to return the mask and to decline a long-term loan. Regardless of the eight-year process, individuals involved with this return managed to come to a positive agreement.

As with the earlier repatriations, the return of the sun transformation mask represented a continuing process of homecoming and justice. The British Museum is restricted by its legislation, however through the work of Jonathan King and staff at the U’mista Cultural Centre, they worked around this legislation to return the mask on a long-term loan. As Sanborn points out above, given sufficient information, and I would add, an understanding of what the return of the sun transformation mask would mean to the community, an agreement was reached and
the mask returned home. MacGregor’s sentiment in defending the universal museum is one which has been repeated multiple times elsewhere (see Curtis 2006 for an alternative perspective on the place of repatriation within universal museums) but it fails to hold significance when compared to the powerful impact of returning the regalia to Alert Bay and Cape Mudge. In her article, Sanborn articulates this importance beautifully I quote her here at length in order to demonstrate the continued importance of returning the collection back to Kwakwaka’wakw territory:

We ask that our language, cultural ceremonial masks and regalia be returned to us as part of our spirit. Only then can our culture be whole again, and only then can the spirits of our ancestors rest...Without reunification and repatriation we cannot be whole. World histories cannot make sense if they remain in pieces, spread around the world in fragments. We need to tell our own stories and build our own histories. After all, they are ours, and we will share them in friendship, living together in this world with peace and understanding. Let the spirits of our ancestors be at rest now. (Sanborn 2009, 82)

She continues:

Repatriating our treasures means honouring the work of our ancestors. We must maintain the cultural and historical information of our ancestors for the generations of children to come. Everyone has the right to know where they belong, what cultural privileges they hold and what songs, dances and legends they can celebrate...Our children are our future, our artists are integral to our ceremonies and our lives, our ancestors are integral to our history and culture, and honouring our memories of them is mandatory; all these factors are central to our arguments for repatriation. (Sanborn 2009, 86)

**The Horniman Museum**

The next diversion in the potlatch collection’s repatriation history is the return of a Dzunukwa mask from the Horniman Museum in London, England. In 2012 Sarah Holland, Director of the U’mista Cultural Centre, wrote a letter to the Horniman Museum which spoke about the Dzunukwa mask, the history of the potlatch collection and the significance that repatriated pieces have to the people in Alert Bay (Sarah Holland, pers. comm., May 13th, 2013). Around that time, U’mista staff along with carvers, artists, singers and dancers were travelling to Leiden to celebrate the opening of *The Story of the Totem Pole* at the Museum Volkenkunde and they were able to schedule a meeting with Janet Vitmayer, Chief Executive; Robert Storrie, Keeper of Anthropology; and Finbarr Whooley, Director Curatorial and Public Engagement. When I spoke
with both Sarah Holland and Juanita Johnston about the Horniman return, they expressed their happiness with the results of the meeting:

We were expecting to discuss the possibility of repatriating the mask and the experience couldn’t have been more positive in the sense that we met with Robert Storrie, Finbarr Whooley and Janet Vitmayer of the Horniman Museum. They were very welcoming to us and they had asked that the mask be sent over to the main museum from the collections store, which is a distance from the main museum. We were able to actually see the piece and we were talking about it, very excited, photographing it. I got Juanita to play a traditional song that she had on her phone because I just felt like I wanted the mask to know we were ‘messengers from her people!’ It was a really beautiful feeling to be in that room and to also see how moved my colleague was to see the mask again. (Sarah Holland, pers. comm. May 13th 2013)

Right away it was for sure a long-term loan, they needed to talk to their trustees, so they still need to do all of that but they are very hopeful that it will be smooth. The big push was education and [Horniman staff figured] ‘why not use this piece to tell the history of it and educate people.’ So it’s pretty exciting compared to other repatriations I have been involved in, even ones from here. (Juanita Johnston, pers. comm. May 14th 2013).

The staff present at the meeting agreed to return the mask on long-term loan to U’mista Cultural Centre pending the approval of the Board of Trustees, and eventually the legal transfer of ownership will follow in the future. This repatriation, while not yet complete, is in stark contrast to what U’mista staff have experienced in the past. The Horniman return is an example of how repatriation can be conceived of as a positive opportunity for education and the sharing of stories. The repatriation has been the formation of a collaborative relationship between the Horniman and U’mista Cultural Centre, which will have a positive outcome for both parties.

What we have done with the Horniman is decided to make it into a very positive education project on both sides of the partnership. We’ll be sending over singers, dancers, and artists to lead workshops and offer performances of traditional dance and take the opportunity to tell again our story over in England in a big way when the mask was there. When it comes home, there will be a big celebration in the big house. (Sarah Holland, pers. comm. May 13th, 2013)

Before the Dzunukwa mask returns home it is participating in a project called First Time Out, sponsored by the Wellcome Trust. Ten museums in England display an object from their collection that has never been exhibited for a period of approximately one month. Each museum involved in the project is partnered with another, and after the one-month period of display, they switch objects. The Dzunukwa mask was on display at the Horniman from June 6th
2013 to July 4th 2013, and then on July 5th it will be on display at the Royal Shakespeare Company in Stratford-upon-Avon. When the Dzunukwa mask moves to its new location it is given new interpretational material to reflect the mission of the Royal Shakespeare Company (Horniman Museum 2013). One might ask how this exhibition and tour of the Dzunukwa differs from the exhibition and tour that the ROM proposed as a stipulation prior to their repatriation of the regalia. The ROM repatriation was seen as a necessary process of justice and healing at that time and according to the archives their hesitation to repatriate created a rather adversarial relationship. Almost three decades later, the situation both at U’mista and in museums more generally has changed. The process of healing has had more time to develop while museums recognize the benefits of working in collaboration with First Nations communities. While the return of the Dzunukwa is equally important, U’mista staff members saw this exhibition and tour as a positive opportunity to share their story on an international scale, which directly benefits the Kwakw'ka'wakw. The Horniman agreement demonstrates how museums recognize the importance of their collections to communities, and how repatriation can be the starting point of a meaningful relationship.

The Dzunukwa mask’s role throughout this repatriation becomes very complex. Like previous repatriations, the identification of the Dzunukwa mask in the Horniman Museum re-established the connections and relationships between the mask and its family, history and community therefore increasing its subjecehood. Prior to this reconnection, the mask had not been exhibited by the Horniman and existed in storage for the better part of a century, displaying its greatest degree of objecthood. While in storage it had not had the ability to establish relationships with other people, places, or objects in the collection. The agreement to return the Dzunukwa mask on long-term loan established a positive relationship between the U’mista staff and the Horniman staff where they both recognized the mutual benefits to the return. The Dzunukwa mask is now demonstrating its greatest degree of subjecthood. The Dzunukwa’s identity as a part of the confiscated potlatch regalia, its connections with family histories, origin stories and community histories are revealed throughout this repatriation process, while simultaneously developing connections with other audiences in England. It has become an ambassador for Kwakw'ka'wakw culture on an international scale. Through the Dzunukwa mask, the ’Namgis have an opportunity to share their story, their history and their
culture with a new audience. The history of the confiscated collection, which had been buried in the museum register and rarely spoken about in exhibition interpretation throughout the twentieth century, is now revealed. The Dzunukwa along with its interpretative material and educational programming will be telling the complete story of the importance of potlatching to Kwakwaka’wakw cultural identity as well as the long history of repatriation efforts associated with the collection.

Another aspect of the Horniman repatriation which is unique is that the two institutions have agreed to develop a prolonged relationship past the return of the Dzunukwa mask to Alert Bay. U’mista has agreed to loan contemporary pieces from U’mista’s collection to the Horniman which will be displayed in the gallery for the next several years (Sarah Holland pers. comm. May 13th 2013). The presence of these masks in the Horniman’s galleries will ensure that the story of the Dzunukwa mask, the Kwakwaka’wakw potlatch, resistance to prohibition, and the repatriation will continue to exist in the consciousness of the Horniman and be communicated to their audience. This prolonged relationship differs from previous repatriations in that it demonstrates the Horniman’s dedication to continuing to tell this story in their galleries through the loaned contemporary pieces. Following the repatriation from the CMC and their continued involvement in facilitating the ROM’s repatriation, a relationship of collaboration did develop between the Kwakwaka’wakw and the CMC staff, such as Director George MacDonald and Dr. Andrea Laforet. These collaborations included consultations such as Gloria Cranmer Webster’s involvement in the Grand Hall, as well as the commissioning of artists to replicate or restore Kwakwaka’wakw material such as the replica Wakas house front and restored Wakas pole now in the Grand Hall. The CMC also actively collects contemporary Kwakwaka’wakw art. The repatriation itself is not actively discussed in public representations of the CMC’s history. When I asked staff members for the reason behind this exclusion, they explained that repatriation and working in collaboration with First Nations has become such an ingrained part of their identity and purpose since the 1960s that it was not seen as necessary to celebrate this part of their operations as something new and unique. Instead, staff at the CMC are working proactively with First Nations to provide opportunities for repatriation, meaningful access to their collections, and resources for communities who wish to apply for repatriation of their
materials or develop their own community cultural centres (Canadian Museum of Civilization staff members, pers. comm. January 17th 2013).

A comparison of the repatriations throughout the potlatch collection’s history is not the focus of this research, and yet it tends to be an inevitable outcome in this history. What is evident across cases is the importance of invested individuals throughout the repatriation negotiations. As previously demonstrated, through individuals such as W. E. Taylor at the National Museum (now CMC), Jonathan King at The British Museum, and now Robert Storrie, Janet Vitmayer and Finbarr Whooley at the Horniman Museum, negotiations have been made and the collection returned home. The difference in each repatriation in terms of the nature and length of negotiations points both to changing perceptions of repatriation over time and to the individual ethos of each museum:

...there is quite a range in terms of the response of individuals in organizations to the Kwakwaka’wakw when they are approached regarding repatriating. The Horniman repatriation, in the most nuts and bolts sense, required one letter and one meeting before we were both able to recognize the benefit to all our communities we serve in returning the mask to its home. (Sarah Holland, pers. comm. May 13th 2013)

The continued return of the remaining pieces of the potlatch collection holds just as much significance today as it did thirty-five years ago. When asked about the kinds of events that occur when a mask is returned, U’mista Cultural Centre’s Collections and Education assistant Trevor Isaac recounted:

My experience from partaking in the audience, [is that] we have a big celebration, a communal celebration at the Big House and they often have a feast and unveiling of the masks. People who are involved in the repatriation, if they are from off the island, they will often come to the island and be here to celebrate in the joyous occasion. I remember three pieces coming back [the MOA return] and it was at the Big House and they had seafood and traditional food for everybody to enjoy and that type of thing. It’s a pretty exciting time for everybody young and old, and it brings people back to U’mista. (Trevor Isaac, pers. comm. June 14th 2013)

These celebrations are important because they also provide an opportunity to reiterate and share anew the history of the confiscation of the potlatch regalia with the community. The history of the confiscation of the regalia and the work done by community members to bring it home is restated and emphasized so it holds a strong and significant place in Kwakwaka’wakw cultural identity. Much like the passing down of family origin stories, songs and dances, the
homecoming celebrations act as a way of remembering and passing down the history of the collection’s confiscation and return.

These stories and histories are kept vibrant by their retelling in the Big House at potlatches, by being retold to younger family members, by being recorded, and by being added to as new events occur. These stories are a living connection to the ancestors and to the future of the Kwakwaka’wakw. The events surrounding the banning of the potlatch and the aftermath of the Village Island potlatch have been incorporated into family histories so that the Kwakwaka’wakw do not forget the lessons learned in those dark and trying times. (Bell et al 2009, 56)

These celebrations held to honour the continued return of the potlatch collection point to the ongoing significance of the collection in the community and the importance of finding the remaining pieces of the collection. In this context then, the potlatch collection can also be conceived of as a mnemonic device, as physical evidence of the potlatch prohibition, confiscation and cultural survival during a period of oppression. While the majority of the collection has been returned to Alert Bay and Cape Mudge over the last thirty-five years, these individual repatriations of lost pieces are still immensely important to the community. When discussing with Sarah Holland the significance of a mask being repatriated to Alert Bay she states that “when it comes home, it’s a returned hero, it’s a spirit that uplifts everyone. I really feel that U’mista is a powerful example of what it means for people to have their own collections that they can access in ways that they need to and ways that are similar to the life that those objects had before they were museum objects” (Sarah Holland, pers. comm. May 13th, 2013). The continued repatriation of parts of the potlatch regalia also forms a significant part of a process of healing. In Bell, Raven, McCuaig and Sanborn’s research, they endeavored to explore the significance of the preservation and repatriation of cultural heritage for the Kwakwaka’wakw. In their study they explain that,

Many participants spoke about the experiences of their relatives and of how the repatriation of their regalia is one way to acknowledge that suffering and to help the family and community heal. As Emma Tamlin explains ‘[i]t’s just part of healing, ‘cause we all need to be healed because of what happened in 1922 it affected all of us.’ Basil Ambers emphasizes that it is also important to acknowledge ‘old-timers’ as ‘heroes’ and to respect those who are still in the community and who suffered, or whose immediate family members suffered. (Bell et al 71, 2009)
There are still three masks from the potlatch collection which have not been returned, one of which is a large transformation mask in Claude Duthuit’s estate in Paris.\textsuperscript{32} Negotiations for the return of this mask have been unsuccessful so far. The location of the other two masks is unknown and it is highly likely that they too are in a private collection. Unless someone with a familiarity with the collection has the good fortune to see them, there they will remain. The staff at U’mista remain positive and are determined to find the remaining pieces and bring them home. “I don’t know how long it will take, until they are all home. We won’t give up on them. It’s part of our mandate and it just feels right to bring them home” (Juanita Johnston, pers. comm. May 14\textsuperscript{th} 2013).

**Chapter Seven: The Collection Today**

The potlatch collection began its journey home almost thirty-five years ago when the regalia from the CMC arrived in Cape Mudge in 1979 and Alert Bay in 1980. Since then more and more parts of the collection have found their way home from Toronto, New York, Vancouver, London and Paris, continuing a long journey. The potlatch collection tells a rich and multifaceted story of Kwakwa’k̓a̓wakw myths, origin stories, and family histories. It also tells the story of potlatch prohibition, the Kwakwa’k̓a̓wakw resistance to this law, and the ultimate price they paid for proudly defending their culture by continuing to potlatch. The return of the collection from the CMC, ROM and NMAI was the righting of a wrong, a small piece of justice for what the communities had experienced. The potlatch collection repatriation efforts have played a role in the lives of the ’Namgis, the Weka’yì and the Ma’maliliḵala for over seventy years, and it will continue until the last pieces are returned and beyond. Forming an important part of the history of the three groups involved, this process has become intergenerational, continuing on in the lives of younger generations. There was always an emphasis on using the potlatch collection in cultural revitalization efforts to teach younger generations in the community. In 1983, speaking about the importance of maintaining cultural continuity through generations, Gloria Cranmer Webster said: “When the old people are gone, then there’ll be people like me. All we can do right now is try to learn as much from our present generation of old people so

\footnote{\textsuperscript{32} Claude Duthuit, recently deceased, was Fauvist painter Henri Matisse’s grandson.}
that we have that kind of thing to teach the younger generation” (Webster in Olin and U’mista Cultural Society 1983). Using the collection to help educate the young people has always, and continues to be, a priority for the Kwakw̓a’wakw. Trevor Isaac, Collections and Education Assistant at U’mista Cultural Centre, remarked:

It’s a rich history and people gravitate to it. That’s why we are open. People from all over the world come here to learn about it, but I find it more important to be able to teach the descendants of the people who went to prison, or the people who had given up the masks, and their families. So they know the history of the ancestors and what they had gone through and given up and what they had undergone because of their strong beliefs in their cultural system. (Trevor Isaac, pers. comm. June 14th 2013)

Juanita Johnston, Collections Manager and Assistant Director at U’mista Cultural Centre, added to these thoughts when she stated “We are trying really hard to get more kids in here because they are the future and we want them to feel comfortable. They are going to have to take over someday so we want them to feel a sense of ownership too” (Juanita Johnston, pers. comm. May 14th 2013). This chapter outlines the contemporary roles of the potlatch collection today.

As I have demonstrated, the collection has experienced moments in which its objecthood and subjecthood both surface and recede throughout its life history. Events such as the confiscation, exhibition, and repatriation act as diversions, turning points in which the collection’s biography shifts and accumulates or loses significances. The multiple social contexts of the collection adjust throughout its history, where some contexts may be valued over others and some may not be visible at all times. The contemporary placement of the collection demonstrates a time in which the collection is fulfilling its highest potential in terms of subjecthood and a multiplicity of social contexts emerge simultaneously. It is at once a collection of mnemonic devices, of Kwakw̓a’wakw objects, museum objects, family objects, ceremonial objects, educational objects, and artistic objects.

During my research, I was able to visit Alert Bay and Cape Mudge to view the collection in U’mista Cultural Centre and Nuyumbalees Cultural Centre. Due to a more established and prolonged relationship with the staff at U’mista Cultural Centre I spent five days in Alert Bay visiting the collection and talking with staff members. I was only able to visit Nuyumbalees Cultural Centre briefly on my way back to Victoria. Nuyumbalees Cultural Centre is responsible for caring, displaying and interpreting the half of the collection that originated from families
who lived in the Cape Mudge area. Due to restructuring, Nuyumbalees Cultural Centre was closed for a period of six years (2001-2007) while they renovated their cultural centre. When I was there, I was able to meet with Joy Inglis, two board members, three community members, and the newly-hired Executive Director, Jodi Simkin, to share my research as well as view the collection on display. The Board members and the Executive Director are enthusiastically taking steps to further develop Nuyumbalees Cultural Centre’s services to their community and visiting audience. As a result of my limited time at Nuyumbalees Cultural Centre, the majority of my observations and interview material stems from my visit to Alert Bay rather than Cape Mudge. Understanding the continuing role of the collection in the community of Cape Mudge would be a valuable area for future research.

While in Alert Bay I tried to gain an understanding of the contemporary role of the potlatch collection at the U’mista Cultural Centre and the community in general. I spent my days at U’mista Cultural Centre studying the collection, talking to staff, helping with basic collections tasks and participating in events. The collection is displayed in the portion of the cultural centre that was built in 1979-1980 to resemble the inside of a big house. The regalia is displayed around the outside of the room in the order that they would have appeared in a potlatch. They are not in cases but are mounted on stands on open display. In the centre of the room are museum-grade exhibit cases that house the remainder of the collection that was previously in the collection storage room. On the wall above the collection, a film called *Kwakwaka’wakw Potlatch: To Give* made by ‘Namgis filmmaker Barb Cranmer shows footage of contemporary potlatches while making references to Kwakwaka’wakw legends and contemporary life in Alert Bay. There is a real sense of power and greatness that emanates from the collection. My familiarity with the collection’s history no doubt informs this feeling, however it is the display and interpretation of the regalia combined with rich contemporary cultural expression found in Barb Cranmer’s film that creates this atmosphere. The open display of the majority of the collection also adds to this feeling. Preciousness or singularization is not communicated through plinths or other types of physical barriers, but rather through the

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33 Joy Inglis is a specialist in west coast First Nations, she worked with the We’ka-yi at Cape Mudge for 25 years, is a long time Quadra Island resident and Nuyumbaless Board member),

34 The museum-grade cases were left behind by Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden in 2011(see p.116).
careful arrangement of the collection in the potlatch order and the connections made to families through interpretation. The collection is singularized here through its link to its specific history which was lacking in earlier museum exhibitions. U’mista’s staff are cognisant of the environmental damage that can accompany open display. They mitigate these concerns by adhering to strict preventive conservation standards in terms of monitoring and gallery behavior, however they respect the initial decision to have an open display because they recognize the significance of not locking them in cases:

It’s a whole different feeling to have them on open display, I think it was the right decision. Sure it’s hard on the collection but I think the old people made the right decision...this stuff was locked up for so long that the old people felt it was wrong to lock it up again, and they didn’t want it behind glass and you would lose that feeling if it was all behind plexi. (Juanita Johnston, pers. comm. May 14th 2013)

U’mista staff continuing to respect the decision of the old people to keep the collection on open display is an indication of the complex role that the collection now inhabits. It is simultaneously a collection of museum objects and an important historical collection of Kwakwaka’wakw regalia, which in turn represents an invaluable part of Kwakwaka’wakw identity. The collection constantly navigates between these two areas of definition throughout its contemporary existence, a point I return to shortly. It is not just a ceremonial or repatriation history that is represented here, but the expansive object biography spanning over a hundred years which makes this exhibit a powerful experience for the visitor. The collection’s interpretation situates individual pieces within Kwakwaka’wakw myths and origin stories, family histories, individual and family ownership designations, ritual and ceremonial placements, potlatch prohibition history and contemporary potlatch practice.

Apart from housing and displaying the potlatch collection, U’mista Cultural Centre is active in a multitude of other cultural activities. The display is only one facet of U’mista’s role as a cultural centre. U’mista’s mandate is to ensure the survival of all aspects of the cultural heritage of the Kwakwaka’wakw. In addition to the potlatch collection gallery, U’mista has two large galleries and several smaller cases dedicated to temporary exhibits. These can range from internally produced exhibits by U’mista staff, interns or volunteers, to exhibits produced in collaboration with larger institutions. When I was visiting, I was present at the opening of Kesu: The Art and Life of Doug Cranmer produced in collaboration with the University of British
Columbia’s Museum of Anthropology (MOA). The opening was attended by well over a hundred people from diverse audiences including villagers from Alert Bay and Cape Mudge, carvers, collectors, and museum professionals. Many attendees spoke at the opening, whether it was about the process of creating the exhibition or their personal relationship with Doug Cranmer. Many people felt the need to vocalize their feelings and relationship to Doug Cranmer in this public setting. This suggests that not only was Doug Cranmer a much-loved figure in the community but also that U’mista Cultural Centre provides a space where community members can conduct family and community business.

In an effort to fulfill their ambitious mandate, U’mista runs a wide variety of programs for their community. For example, events for children include the Kwak’wala Summer Camp as well free events including fishing, berry-picking, petroglyph-inspired chalk drawing, cedar bark weaving, canoeing, and warrior games (U’mista Cultural Centre Annual Report, September 2012). The Kwak’wala Public Speaking Group, a group of children aged from eight to twelve who are learning and using Kwak’wala, recently had the opportunity to choose an object from the storage room, put it on display and describe their selection in Kwak’wala. These objects were displayed in one of the gallery’s display cases for temporary exhibitions along with the children’s drawings and explanations of their choices.

U’mista invites Elders and culture bearers to share their knowledge with the community through events such as *Tea with Beau*, a story-telling session with Beau Dick, an incredibly gifted master carver and storyteller (U’mista Cultural Centre Annual Report, September 2012). Throughout the summer of 2012, every Saturday afternoon was dedicated to storytelling and cultural sharing with different community members who spoke about topics such as living on Village Island, button-blanket making, traditional medicines, and songs as oral histories (U’mista Cultural Centre Annual Report, September 2012). The gift shop at U’mista also features artwork from ’Namgis artists in the community, therefore providing a level of exposure and financial support for these artists. These are just a few of many initiatives that U’mista participates in to engage with their community and to fulfill their mandate of ensuring the survival of all aspects of the cultural heritage of the Kwakwà’wakw. U’mista Cultural Centre is a central, cultural hub in Alert Bay that engages with its community in meaningful, long-lasting ways. Initially built to house the potlatch collection and to engage the community with their cultural history,
U’mista has evolved into an interactive, multi-use centre, which is a source of pride for the local community while simultaneously representing the ‘Namgis and the Kwakwaka’wakw on an international scale.

U’mista participates in many outward-looking partnerships with museums and cultural institutions nationally and internationally. One of the most significant partnerships was the recent exhibition exchange in 2011, *The Power of Giving: Gifts in the Kwakwaka’wakw Big House from the Canadian Northwest Coast and at the Saxon Ruler’s Court in Dresden*. This exhibit exchange was the result of an innovative collaborative partnership with the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden (hereafter SKD) and the U’mista Cultural Centre’s former Director, Andrea Sanborn, that continued after her passing in 2010. The basic premise behind the exhibition was to use the act of gift-giving as a fundamental social institution to draw similarities and differences between the two cultures. This collaboration was ground-breaking in that it was the first time a First Nations cultural centre and a large European museum have embarked on such an endeavour. U’mista Cultural Centre sent sixty pieces of the potlatch collection to be exhibited at the SKD for the summer of 2011 in exchange for a collection of Saxon court treasures that were sent to U’mista Cultural Centre. The design and interpretation of the potlatch collection in Dresden was conducted solely by Kwakwaka’wakw people. The overall design of the exhibition was coordinated by Corrine Hunt, a Komoyue Kwagiul artist, and the film which was shown in the exhibition was directed and produced by Barb Cranmer, a ‘Namgis filmmaker. An important design element that was taken into consideration in Dresden was whether to display the regalia in cases or not. It was decided that the regalia was to remain on open display and by replicating the design elements of the potlatch collection gallery in Dresden, they sought to replicate the powerful feeling and connection one has when viewing the collection in U’mista (Juanita Johnston, pers. comm. May 14th 2013). This deliberate choice to keep the masks on open display in a location so far from home suggests that the collection continues to maintain the same historical and cultural value that it did almost thirty-five years ago when it was returned to Alert Bay and put on display in U’mista.

Initially, the concept of sending part of the regalia to be exhibited in a European museum suggests that it has indeed transitioned into a collection of museum objects whose role is to be exhibited in a public forum for the aesthetic and educational pleasure of its visitors. However,
for U’mista staff, the potlatch collection is not seen as a museum collection available for loan on any occasion; it represents much more than a set of museum objects. For the Kwakwaka’wakw and U’mista Cultural Centre, taking the collection to Germany was an opportunity to share their story and their culture with another audience (Sarah Holland, pers. comm. May 13th, 2013). This sharing took place not just through the collection, but also through a variety of programming opportunities. Alongside the exhibition, ‘Namgis traditional singers, dancers, and artists travelled to Dresden to “engage German visitors and create a platform for the Kwakwaka’wakw to represent themselves without an outside or academic intermediary” (U’mista Cultural Society Annual Report 2011). Artists Barb Cranmer, Meghann O’Brien and Sean Whonnock practiced their art in the gallery space, gave tours and led learning sessions with school groups (U’mista Cultural Society Annual Report 2011). Trevor Isaac, U’mista’s Collections and Education Assistant as well as a singer, dancer and accomplished two-dimensional artist, stayed in Dresden for a month with a touchable collection that he used in workshops with children. Children were encouraged to physically engage with the objects as a way to inspire them to learn about First Nations cultures (Juanita Johnston, pers. comm. May 14th, 2013). Viewed from this perspective, the collection can be seen as an ambassador for Kwakwaka’wakw cultural heritage on an international scale, however, it still maintains an equal, if not greater significance to the community. Sarah Holland, Director of the U’mista Cultural Centre demonstrates this significance when she recounts:

When the masks were over there [in Dresden] that was the first time I was contacted by the Museum Volkerkunde [in Leiden], who the following year we did a substantial totem pole project with. They first contacted me saying they had heard of, or perhaps their curator had visited the exhibition in Dresden, and asked if they could borrow the collection to show for 6 months. I just knew that that was not going to go down and when I asked Bill [Chief Bill Cranmer] about it he just totally laughed! Like it’s a truly ridiculous idea and no, we knew those masks needed to come home now and no they weren’t ‘on the road’ and no, absolutely not. As much as what I said earlier in believing in telling the stories and taking opportunities, yes, but also it stops here because we can’t be away from our sacred regalia for so long. (Sarah Holland, pers. comm. May 13th, 2013)

*Power of Giving* marked a significant event in the collection’s biography where the regalia was being utilized as museum objects but in an inspired and meaningful way that included the incorporation of other areas of Kwakwaka’wakw culture represented by the ‘Namgis themselves. While *Power of Giving* was certainly important, Sarah’s comment above points to
the continued value and meaning the collection holds to the community as more than museum objects. The collection’s social contexts become evident here, it is a collection of museum objects but perhaps more importantly, it is a group of Kwakwaka'wakw community objects that have a strong, deep connection to the people in Alert Bay. This is further evidenced by the preparations, both culturally and museologically, that were made to ensure the safety of the regalia on its travels. When asked if there was any concern in the community about the potlatch regalia leaving Alert Bay again, Sarah Holland responded by saying:

Absolutely there was hesitation and concern and also confusion. We sent 60 pieces to Dresden so even though there have been loans where pieces have left the centre, it’s only been one or two pieces at a time so this was a really big deal. There were some people who didn’t understand how come or why, but I know my Board of Directors was pretty unilateral around seeing it as an opportunity to share their stories with a different audience and that that’s the reason for being for the collection and one level is to tell the story...Some of the ways that this concern was mitigated was by paying for the best in terms of art handlers and the art shipping company that took care of the objects as it was transported and helped us with all the preparation and packing. Another thing, on a different level, as a way of protecting the collection on its journey was through ceremony. We had a goodbye blessing ceremony with Bill [Cranmer] our Chief, some board members and community members when the masks were all crated up and Bill sang a blessing to them. He said ‘by sending you to Germany we are sending our ancestors to Germany to tell our stories’ and I found that to be a really beautiful insight into his perspective as to why they would take, in some ways, an enormous risk. I was really impressed with their trust and courage and their determination to tell their stories to whoever will listen anywhere in the world . . . Everyone was very concerned and we kept people posted . . . once we heard the objects had safely arrived in Dresden. We let people know and all along the way it was Juanita and myself who handled the masks in the installation. That was important too that it wasn’t people who didn’t know anything about the masks who were handling them. That was a way we took special care . . . When the collection came home again we let everyone know and once again we had a blessing ceremony led by Bill [Cranmer]. That was again, a really, really lovely way in which two worlds, which sometimes clash, can also fit together and we were taking care of business in a museum perspective with all of the different ways we handled the collection etc., but then we were also taking care of business in a ceremonial perspective. (Sarah Holland, pers. comm. May 13th, 2013)

The potlatch collection at once comprised of museum objects and Kwakwaka'wakw cultural objects that tell a multitude of stories and hold a multitude of meanings. The collection’s subjecthood, in its present position, is expanded to its greatest degree in that it is maintaining community relationships while forming multiple new relationships with a wide variety of people, places, and things. The vibrancy and value of these new relationships is demonstrated
by the overall success of *Power of Giving* in Dresden alongside the important and active role the collection continues to play for the Kwakwaka’wakw. The display of the collection in a conventional museum exhibition means that the collection’s objecthood as material, physical property comes into play here, but interestingly, they act as a tool to express the multitude of relationships now carried by the potlatch collection. Their potential to tell multiple stories, express complex historical and contemporary meanings, and communicate the cultural continuity of the Kwakwaka’wakw potlatch through its interconnections with the contemporary potlatch, suggests that the collection’s objecthood is secondary to the rich and diverse intangible heritage which is evident through its subjecthood.

The social contexts of the potlatch collection as both a museum object and as a Kwakwaka’wakw object are revealed at several instances during the *Power of Giving* exhibit. There are also multiple instances in which this balance between museum object and Kwakwaka’wakw object is evident when the collection is at home in Alert Bay. I have already discussed the ways in which U’mista staff negotiate physically preserving the collection, which is ostensibly tied to museum values of conservation, while respecting the old people’s decision to keep the collection on open display. The display of the collection in itself is an aspect of the potlatch collection that points to the museum-context of the collection. As mentioned in chapter two, potlatch regalia would not be seen unless at a potlatch, so the exhibit of the collection in the parish hall and the photography of the regalia in 1922 was seen to be disrespectful. The establishment of the cultural centre to house the collection was a stipulation of the initial repatriation which was outside of a Kwakwaka’wakw cultural framework. The collection put on display has now become an educational tool which tells the story of Kwakwaka’wakw culture and ‘Namgis family histories. U’mista has re-appropriated the concept of the museum and adapted it to the Kwakwaka’wakw’s needs. Display of the collection, however, is only one aspect of the cultural centre, and it is secondary to the intangible cultural heritage which is embedded within it. The shift of the role of the collection to educational tools and culture-carriers is recognized by Juanita Johnston when she said that “. . . some people didn’t agree with us having to build a cultural centre, they said ‘it’s ours’ and I mean the families should be able to burn it if they want to, ‘who are you to say what we should do with them,’ but in the end they did decide that the two societies would house the collection”
(Juanita Johnston, pers. comm. May 14\textsuperscript{th}, 2013). Staff at U’mista are aware that the display of the masks is not in line with traditional beliefs:

\ldots they are pretty sacred and would always be wrapped and stored properly and that’s why people have a strong belief about that, being displayed. There is also a thing about whistles, we are not allowed to display whistles because they are sacred but at the same time, every artifact that is on display now is just as sacred. So how can we display a hamsamł and not a whistle, when the hamsamł is just as, if not more, sacred spiritually? (Trevor Isaac, pers. comm. June 14\textsuperscript{th}, 2013)

Some ways in which they have acknowledged these cultural misalignments is by appropriating museum practice and making it distinctly Kwakwaka’wakw by incorporating cultural collections management protocols into their storage and display practices. For example, all of the hamsamł man-eating bird masks have their beaks tied shut because it is believed that you should never hear the \textit{hap-hap} noise of the beaks snapping outside of a potlatch, and if you do then Baxwbakwalanuxsiwe’, the man-eating spirit of the north end of the world, would come to earth and attack you (Juanita Johnston, pers. comm. May 14\textsuperscript{th}, 2013). Another significant aspect of U’mista’s operations in balancing these two social contexts of the collection is a recent project in which staff have been working to add supplemental cultural and historical information to the accession records. Trevor Isaac, Collections and Education Assistant spoke about the project:

Accession records are pretty basic, like materials used and that type of thing, but for our people that kind of information is pretty irrelevant. What we are working towards is adding to those files associated songs that the family owned that are specific to the artefacts, or legends that the dance may have derived from. That type of thing is important to us, so it’s a bit of a specialized field I guess. \ldots So with the potlatch collection we do our best, we try to keep it relevant to the family’s history and the owners at the time the mask was taken. The right to use the mask or the dance itself still belongs with the family. Many times new masks would be carved for the dance, so it wasn’t the object itself, it was the meaning to our people of the dances. The meaning behind that mask and the story, not the mask itself. (Trevor Isaac, pers. comm. June 14\textsuperscript{th}, 2013)

It is this intangible heritage which is so highly valued at U’mista and representative in the potlatch collection. The collection, as physical objects are beautifully carved pieces

\footnote{35 The whistles from the potlatch collection are no on display in the gallery but are kept in storage.}
demonstrating the aesthetic and material decisions of turn-of-the-century artists, but it is the intangible heritage such as songs, origin stories, family histories, and dances that are carried within these objects’ biographies that is significant. In terms of the social contexts of the collection as museum object and as Kwakw'aka’wakw cultural object, more weight and value is placed on the collection’s capacity as a Kwakw'aka’wakw cultural object, with all the subsequent social contexts that may include, rather than as its capacity as a museum object. Speaking about the collection’s role as culture-carriers, Trevor Isaac remarked:

A mask is history in object form. It’s the history behind the mask itself, that the mask represents, which is important to us . . . For example, if there is a thunderbird mask or headdress, the object itself represents much more than a bird. It represents a family’s history and the origin story and goes right back to the first ancestor. A simple carving of a bird tells so much about the people and the families and it’s a lot greater than just a beautiful carving . . . It is like looking at a totem pole, if you know the legends and the history of the different tribes and clans and even the families within the clans, and you look at a totem pole you can pick out all the stories that are being represented because you know where they come from and their history. So the totem pole itself tells so much of a person because of the crest figures used, so it’s much greater and deeper than a beautiful carving itself. (Trevor Isaac, pers. comm. June 14th, 2013)

Philip J. Deloria eloquently speaks about the ability of objects to act as culture-carriers when he says that “unlike historical accounts or collective memory, objects carry the material past palpably forward. In the object, the past is literally present. What was there, in the past, is now here, in our own time” (Deloria 2010, 15). This may be true to an extent, but the forms of intangible heritage that Trevor speaks about are not inherent to the collection, they are represented in the material form but the ability to understand and interpret them is dependent on the collection’s relationships with those who have this specialized knowledge. As I demonstrated in chapter three, the restriction of these relationships results in limiting the collection’s capacity to act and communicate these stories. The collection’s role then, as history in object form, or as culture-carriers, or as a learning resource translates into the unique ways the collection is used by the community. The regalia is still active and in a sense alive within Alert Bay, not just by being present in U’mista but by the continued role that parts of the collection play in potlatches. As Trevor mentioned earlier, the rights to display and dance the masks in the potlatch collection still reside with the descendants of the original owners at the
time of confiscation. U’mista respects this ownership by loaning out regalia to families to present at their potlatches.

Depending on the artifact itself, sometimes objects can be loaned to the families who are connected to the pieces. For example, some of the coppers have been borrowed and displayed during the potlatch recently, or a bentwood box has been loaned to a family who carried the name of the Chief who it was confiscated from. So there is that type of thing if the object is strong enough, sometimes they may be able to borrow it for the ceremony. I know it’s a pretty special thing that U’mista does, I know that MOA does some of that as well, but I don’t think many museums loan their collections out [for ceremonies] (Trevor Isaac, pers. comm. June 14\textsuperscript{th}, 2013).

Many of the masks are too fragile to be worn or actually danced in a potlatch but they are presented at the potlatch and sometimes held and carried by family members. In this way, they are used almost in the same manner they were made for. In instances such as these, the collection has come full circle and been returned to the potlatch. The use and display of a piece of regalia in its family’s potlatch demonstrates the strength and vibrancy of these familial relationships between the confiscated potlatch regalia and the family’s history. The presence of a confiscated piece of regalia at a potlatch not only honours what their ancestor had to endure during potlatch prohibition, but also serves to cement that experience in their family history. In this way, the potlatch collection also serves as a mnemonic device in that it is evidence of a period of cultural upheaval. When asked how important this type of use is to the staff at U’mista, Juanita Johnston replied, “. . . the pieces belong to those families, we are just caretaking them really, the rights and privileges belong to those individual families and they are still practicing those rights. I think it’s important for them to see the original pieces even if they are not danced and it strengthens the ties to U’mista as well (Juanita Johnston, pers. comm. May 14\textsuperscript{th}, 2013). Trevor Isaac added to these comments by saying “. . . I think it’s important to do that because that’s what it’s made for, that’s the whole purpose behind the piece. What we are here for is to educate. The mandate is to ensure the survival of all aspects of Kwakwaka’wakw culture and loaning out the collection, if we are able to, for ceremonial purposes basically falls right into that mandate” (Trevor Isaac pers. comm. June 14\textsuperscript{th}, 2013).

Another way in which the collection is actively used is through the creation of replicas in situations where a family wants to dance a mask, or when artists use a mask in the potlatch collection as artistic inspiration. Sarah Holland recounted one such instance:
One really neat story is about the Smith family who held a potlatch, and it was a really special potlatch and monumental in their family because they hadn’t hosted a potlatch in 60 years. A lot of the time there is a little flurry of research activity that happens because community members want to come in and check out records, particularly our genealogical records to double check names, or spellings of names or the availability of names. So with the Smith family when they were doing that type of research they found out that we held a Raven transformation mask that they held the right to dance in their family. This particular transformation mask hadn’t been on display, I don’t know if ever, that might be the case. We had just been able to put the mask on display in mid-September and the Smith family potlatch was in early November 2011. The carvers were very excited when they realized that the family had the right to this and not only that they had the right to this but also that it was on display in such a way that they could walk all the way around it . . . so again there was a flurry of activity in the carving studio before a potlatch when pieces are being made, so the carvers replicated this Raven transformation mask and it was danced in the Smith family potlatch. It was incredibly moving to be a part of that, to be a part of helping that family make those deep connections to their ancestor and to their past and to their identity. For me again, I’ve worked in other types of museums but I’ve never been a part of something quite like that, where within two months of putting a very complex and beautiful ceremonial piece on display it’s been replicated and used ceremonially (Sarah Holland, pers. comm. May 13th, 2013).

Replication then, forms a unique and interesting continued use of the collection. As Sarah Holland states, replication of a mask involves a certain level of engagement with a piece both in understanding the associated history, ceremonial songs and dances, but also a level of engagement which includes a process of intense looking and making. The replicated piece ensures that this mask, and the rich object biography it contains as a culture-carrier lives on in another material form. An interesting illustration of this point occurred when I was speaking with Juanita Johnston in the potlatch collection gallery at U’mista. We were discussing the masks while Barb Cranmer’s film was playing in the background when Juanita aptly demonstrated the potlatch collection’s long and continued cultural and ceremonial significance:

[Footage of a contemporary potlatch is playing on the screen in which a dancer wears a Deaf Man mask]

It’s interesting in this video because they show this mask here [points to the Deaf Man mask from the potlatch collection UCC.95.03.010], well the new generation of this mask, in that video, so it comes from this mask. The dance is descended from this mask, because Sam Charlie was the owner and his sister married Harry Hanuse, so Dan Hanuse holds this dance to this day and he still does (Juanita Johnston, pers. comm. May 14th, 2013).
In one short anecdote, Juanita drew together family histories and inheritance lines while simultaneously demonstrating the potlatch collection’s enduring significance in the contemporary potlatch. Juanita offered another example when she said that Wayne [Alfred] has done a few replicas for different shows, or he has adapted from them. I think he might have replicated our Dzunukwa mask and he based his killer whale mask with the raven fins on that mask [points to killer whale mask UCC.80.01.001] with the green eyes. It’s really [carved] in that shape but Wayne’s has a raven dorsal and pectoral fins...oh there it is in the video [points to Barb Cranmer’s film where Wayne’s killer whale mask is being danced] (Juanita Johnston pers. comm. May 14th, 2013).

Situating oneself in the presence of this regalia, which carries with it such dense intangible heritage, and witnessing the contemporary iterations of the regalia in Barb Cranmer’s film, is a powerful testament to the vitality of the collection in its ability to sustain a web of relationships reaching through time. These connections that stem from the potlatch collection are representative of the strong and meaningful relationships that have been renewed after the repatriation and through the various ways in which the collection has been, and still is, actively used. The collection is now demonstrating its highest degree of subjecthood throughout its life history. The Kwakwaka’wakw social context here is both independent of, and transforms its role as a museum object.

Referring back to Matthew’s framing of personhood, or in this case subjecthood, she states that an object’s subjecthood is augmented by the breadth and vibrancy of its relationships and that objects with numerous active relationships with source communities, research communities, and visitor communities are objects with maximal personhood, least constrained by colonial processes (Matthews 2013, 4). The potlatch collection in its present state has established a web of meaningful, active relationships within the ‘Namgis, Alert Bay, the Kwakwaka’wakw and Kwakwaka’wakw territory. These relationships also span outside of Kwakwaka’wakw territory and the collection has connections to people and places all over the world. This not only stems from the confiscation history, exhibition history, or repatriation, but also the ongoing interest that museums and academics have in the collection and U’mista. Pieces from the collection continue to be loaned to museums for exhibits such as Down from the Shimmering Sky (1998) at the Vancouver Art Gallery, Chiefly Feasts: The Enduring Kwakiutl Potlatch (1991, see Jonaitis 1991) at the American Museum of Natural History, Killer Whales
(1997-1998) at Royal British Columbia Museum, and *The Colour of my Dreams: The Surrealist Revolution in Art* (2011) at the Vancouver Art Gallery. The collection is still operating as a museum object in that it is included in museum exhibitions and used as an educational tool both at U’mista and in other museums. Parts of the collection’s social contexts may be emphasized to suit the theme of the exhibition. For example, the headdress that was sent to the Surrealist exhibition at the Vancouver Art Gallery was the headdress that Andre Breton once owned and had in his library. The headdress’s inclusion in the exhibition told the story of how First Nations and Indigenous art forms were inspirational to the Surrealism genre.

The collection’s role as a museum object within Kwakwaka’wakw territory is much different to its role as a museum object when it was held by the ROM and the CMC. The collection now tells much more meaningful and diverse stories as current exhibits restore its specific history, original owners, and community of origin. This restoration resulted in the reunion of the collection with many intangible forms of Kwakwaka’wakw heritage, increasing the collection’s capacity to tell a more nuanced, contextualized, and engaged story. The collection continues to have an impact worldwide because of its specific history and because of the unique nature of the centre. This wide-reaching impact was most evident when I was talking to Trevor Isaac about his experiences with sharing his culture overseas at the opening of exhibits, conferences, or instances in which he has been invited to speak or teach:

> It’s very uplifting I suppose, how eager people are to learn about U’mista. Also in the museum world, U’mista is a very small organization and up to two years ago there was only two employees. For a museum of that scale to be known worldwide is pretty powerful and I think it says a lot about our culture but also the hard work of the people who held on to their memories or their masks, the potlatch collection, and those who made it their mission to get these artefacts returned. It’s pretty powerful to know people in big organizations like SKD and have them know about U’mista and have them tell me things that I didn’t know because of their research and their interest in U’mista. It’s really great to hear people’s interest (Trevor Isaac, pers. comm. June 14th, 2013).

This international impact is further understood by the amount of international visitors U’mista Cultural Centre receives each year. The collection lives in people’s consciousness as an important piece of First Nations and Canadian history, so much so that people travel from as far as Australia or Germany to see the collection (Trevor Isaac, pers. comm. June 14th, 2013).
Indeed, U’mista Cultural Centre’s community-focused and outward looking ethos, which in turn plays into the potlatch collection’s identity, represents a hybridized cultural institution which appropriates concepts of western museology and adapts them for their own purposes. In Patricia Pearce Erikson’s exploration of the Makah Cultural and Research Centre in Washington State, she refers to Aboriginal cultural centres as autoethnographic texts (Erikson 2002, 28). She uses Mary Louise Pratt’s concept of autoethnography to describe the idiosyncratic nature of aboriginal cultural centres. According to Pratt, autoethnography refers to

Instances in which colonized subjects undertake to represent themselves in ways that engage with the colonizer’s own terms. If ethnographic texts are a means by which Europeans represent to themselves their (usually subjugated) others, autoethnographic texts are those the others construct in response to or in dialogue with those metropolitan representations (Pratt 1992, 7).

To follow Erikson’s thinking, if Aboriginal cultural centres are considered autoethnographic, informed by aboriginal perspectives as well as those of non-aboriginal community members, archaeologists, anthropologists, museums professionals, and so forth, then the assertion that they are hybridized institutions is validated. U’mista is autoethnographic in that it was founded as an institution outside of a Kwakwā’wakw cultural framework, which the staff and community adapted and re-appropriated to serve their own needs through self-representation and self-determination. It is a hybrid in the sense that it combines aspects of museology such as exhibition, collections management, and conservation, and makes them distinctly Kwakwā’wakw whilst combining them with integral aspects of intangible heritage preservation.

Chapter Eight: Conclusions

Throughout this research, I have used object biography as a tool to understand the rich and multi-faceted life history of what is known as the potlatch collection. Object biography allows us to explore the trajectory of an object, or in this case a group of objects, as they journey across space and time. By using concepts such as paths and divergences, I have explored moments of crisis and creativity which have resulted in shifts in the collections objecthood and subjecthood. The initial confiscation was a major disruption in the regalia’s life history, the moment a disparate group of objects became known as a collection, forever altering the
trajectory of the collection and the lives of the people who surrendered them. Their time spent in museums’ collections was a period in which their historical specificity was gradually erased in the museum register through a process of institutional forgetting. The period of repatriation was a phase in which the collection oscillated between moments of objecthood and subjection; where it’s materiality as objects that can be acted upon by subjects was blatantly visible while at the same time reuniting the collection with its historical specificity, it’s familial, and ceremonial contexts. Finally, object biography facilitated an understanding of the contemporary social contexts that the collection occupies concurrently. In its present state the collection has the greatest capacity to maintain, fulfill and develop relationships with a wide variety of people, places and things through both museological and community-based forms of use. These social contexts may differ in intensity at any one time, but the collection has the capacity to fulfill the roles of museum object, historical document, educational resource, family object, mnemonic device, and ceremonial object as well as acting as a source of artistic inspiration.

Taking a step back from the collection, we can see that it has developed a web of connections across time and space. It has been carved, painted, danced, inherited, confiscated, displayed, loaned, interpreted, stored, repatriated, displayed again, danced again, replicated, and more. Throughout its life, it has been an individual’s potlatch regalia, a part of the “national treasure” of Canada, and a subject of one of the largest repatriations of its time. It has represented Kwakw̱aka’wakw culture and people as far away as Paris, Seattle, and on two separate and very different occasions, Germany. Understanding the density of social, historical and cultural significance embedded in the objects within this collection helps us to understand how First Nations material culture is much more complex than its physical attributes. An object that seems at first glance to be a Kwakw̱aka’wakw mask, whose museological emphasis has been on its historical, intended use within the community, may indeed hold its own long history of movement, adaptation, encounter, and continual recontextualization.

Revealing this web of connections does not always mean that all areas of the potlatch collection’s life history will be valued equally by all invested parties. For example, the discovery of the collection’s exhibition history is probably not as relevant or valuable to a ’Namgis reader living in Alert Bay whose interest might lie instead with the family associations that are tied to
the collection. The impact of this research for the Kwakwaka’wakw is relatively low in terms of contributing to historical or cultural information lost during the period of highest cultural oppression. A museum professional, whether Kwakwaka’wakw or non-Kwakwaka’wakw, however, might find this interpretation of the collection’s history especially interesting in terms of further understanding the capacity for objects in their museums to expand their web of relationships and significances. I encourage using object biography as a tool for discovering these complexities which may otherwise remain hidden. Scholars have previously demonstrated how object biography has been instrumental in tracking a single object before it comes into a museum collection, but by using it to comprehend the pre-museum life, museum life, and post-museum life of single objects or a collection of objects, we are able to better understand how past phases inform subsequent phases of the biography. This kind of research is important for the museum field in broadening the kinds of interpretations generally valued in museum work; understanding the museum as a recontextualization rather than a decontextualization can result in a more nuanced comprehension of the role of objects in our lives. This research is also an indication that objects’ are not static, even when they are in museums, and their meanings continue to evolve over time in relation to larger socio-cultural events.

The findings presented here also expand the knowledge of the history of the collection. Part of my research addressed a large gap in the collection’s history and developed an exhibition history for the collection that will add to our understanding of how objects are recontextualized through exhibitionary practices. The erasure of this collection’s history over time is a reminder of the importance of comprehensive and detailed museum records for tracing the movements and identities of a collection. However, perhaps more important here is the recognition that we need to think critically about what kinds of information we privilege in museum records and databases. There are still gaps in this collection’s life history, some of which may never be filled, however a next step would be to explore the exhibition history of the portion of the collection that was in the Museum of the American Indian in New York. This exhibition history may prove to be especially interesting taking into consideration the diversity of the Heye collection and the reputation of the MAI throughout the twentieth century. Object
biography, and the archival method I specifically engaged with, can also be utilized to assist in searching for the two masks that have not yet been found.

This research builds on previous contributions that have explored the repatriation of the collection as a sense of justice and healing. Part of my discussion has looked at the ways in which the collection’s specific history and repatriation is reiterated through celebrations, ceremony, and replication. The replicas raise an interesting question in terms of situating these pieces in relation to the collection: are they perceived as separate to the potlatch collection or a contemporary expansion of the collection? This would be an interesting area of future research. My reframing of the concepts of objecthood and subjecthood throughout this collection’s life history demonstrate the potential of objects and collections to develop and maintain multiple relationships through different types of use. My discussion of the collection fulfilling the role of both museum objects and community-ceremonial objects through these unique types of use demonstrates the continued significance of the collection to the community and suggests the value of encouraging these kinds of partnerships within other museums. Partnerships such as these, in which collections are used by First Nations communities in more meaningful ways, in turn help to develop stronger relationships between communities and museums. They open up spaces for dialogue, learning and collaboration which benefit both the community and the museum.
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Appendix A: Exhibitions of pieces of the potlatch collection yet to be researched.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>CMC Accession Number</th>
<th>ROM Accession Number</th>
<th>U’mista Accession Number</th>
<th>Nuyumbalees Accession Number</th>
<th>Name of regalia</th>
<th>Loaning Institution</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>VII-E-460</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>UCC-80.01.140</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Bird rattle</td>
<td>Crawley Films, Ottawa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 1959 to April 1960</td>
<td>VII-E-584</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>UCC-80.01.148</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Nulamał fool mask</td>
<td>Unknown, New York and Chicago, Canadian Government Exhibition Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 1961</td>
<td>VII-E-583</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>? mask</td>
<td>CBC Ottawa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 1962</td>
<td>VII-E-457</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>UCC-80.01.028</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Daxdaxaulamł owl mask</td>
<td>Musee Classes, Bordeaux, France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 1962</td>
<td>VII-E-483</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>UCC-02.05.011 or UCC-02.05.14</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Xwigwi rattle</td>
<td>National Museum Canada, Childrens Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964-1990 (?)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>923.26.120</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>? mask</td>
<td>Museo de Nacional Antropologia Mexico, Mexico City</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>HN546, 923.26.5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Huxwhukw mask</td>
<td>Canadian National Exhibition, Toronto</td>
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