

Fashion(s) from the Northwest Coast: Nuu-chah-nulth Design Iterations

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Abstract Carved and painted onto wood, stone, bone, animal skins, or metal, or woven and knitted into cloth, the material culture from Northwest Coast Native peoples has historically been a one-of-a-kind iteration and a declaration of familial rights and privileges. These items have adorned public and private spaces, including the body, and were traditionally produced by hand. In recent years, some designs have been serialized and mass produced through new technologies such as silk screen and digital printing, adorning everything from coffee mugs to t-shirts, sunglasses, jewelry, and other garments (Roth 2012; Roth 2015). This chapter explores the history of Nuu-chah-nulth First Nations specifically and analyzes their distinctive aesthetics and design practice through the lens of fashion theory. The chapter concludes with a discussion of contemporary Nuu-chah-nulth designers and the circulation of their work. I ask: how does fashion operate within Nuu-chah-nulth social organization and how has ongoing colonialism and hybridization of prestige and capitalist economies transformed Nuu-chah-nulth fashion systems and design ideas? The findings discussed in this chapter draw from ongoing ethnographic research (beginning in October 2009) and archival- and museum-based research at both major and minor institutional repositories in the United States, Canada, Germany, and England.

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1 Introduction

Aesthetics of Northwest Coast Native arts are distinctive: anthropologist Boas (1955) emphasized the role of stylized iconography within the complex social organization of the Northwest Coast. Later, Holm (1965) interpreted the formal elements of design, with emphasis on formline as a critical element in characterization of design from this large region of Aboriginal peoples. Development of design complexity within this region is often attributed to ecological factors, as the Pacific Northwest Coast is rich in sea, land, and sky resources. Indigenous peoples had the luxury of time and abundant natural resources, which enabled them to focus on artistic practice because agriculture and animal husbandry were not necessary on a large scale (Arima and Dewhirst 1990; Duff 1977). As a result, Northwest Coast ceremonial and material culture developed with great complexity and ornate detailing. The potlatch, a ritual occasion to mark important life events through the display and distribution of familial wealth, is one contemporary situation where Nuuchah-nulth design and fashion are displayed and deployed. In addition to the ceremonial realm, Nuuchah-nulth graphic artists, weavers, carvers, engravers, and fashion designers are finding commercial opportunities for their work, especially following the popularization of serialized design (e.g., silk screen prints) in the mid-1970s. New forms of cultural expression, including fashion, have burgeoned since the 1970s, supported by a growing art market, governmental initiatives, training programs, increased tourism, and revitalization of cultural practices, such as the potlatch, which had been banned in Canada from 1884 to 1952 (Glass 2008, p. 15).

During the pre-European contact period, before 1774,¹ Nuuchah-nulth peoples engaged in trade and potlatch celebrations with other Native communities, which fueled fashion change long before European contact. Northwest Coast peoples were very industrious and willing to develop their design practice with new technological knowledge and trade materials that came with trade (Jensen and Sargent 1987; Sproat 1868). By the late eighteenth century, clothing styles changed rapidly as new materials became available (Sproat 1868; Swan 1868). In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Canadian government regulated Native dress in numerous ways—from banning the potlatch in 1885 to outlawing Native dress entirely in 1914. It was not until the mid-twentieth century that potlatching was no longer illegal and the last residential schools on the Northwest Coast closed their doors as late as the early 1980s. Over the last 40 years, Northwest Coast Native artists have experienced a cultural revival of sorts. I argue that fashion has always been an integral part of Nuuchah-nulth ceremonial life, and focus on specific designers who are part of cultural and commercial design efforts.

¹Captain James Cook arrived and landed in 1778, but Juan Pérez anchored off shore in 1774.



Fig. 1 Map of Nuu-chah-nulth tribal territories along the West Coast of Vancouver Island, British Columbia, Canada. Map created by Chuuchkamalthnii; used with permission from the Belkin Art Gallery

Fashion has existed for the Nuu-chah-nulth as a social and aesthetic form since *Iikhmuut* (time immemorial). The Nuu-chah-nulth hail from the West Coast of Vancouver Island, and are a southern Northwest Coast group that speak a Wakashan language (Fig. 1). The author has spent the last 6 years conducting ethnographic research among Nuu-chah-nulth communities, specifically the Hupacasath and Tseshah First Nations, but has interviewed highly ranked chiefs and artisans from a number of other nations, including the Ahousah, Ditidaht, Heshquiaht, Huu-ay-aht, Kyuquot, Cheklesath, and Ucluelet. The author has also conducted research in museums and archives across the United States, Canada, and Europe.² This chapter draws upon qualitative ethnographic research, in combination with archival methods, to explore aesthetics, semiotics, material production practices, and circulation of Nuu-chah-nulth fashion design within their prestige economy as well as the emergent capitalist context. I begin by contextualizing the Nuu-chah-nulth historically, then move to interpret Nuu-chah-nulth dress practices through relevant theoretical approaches to fashion, and conclude with a discussion of contemporary Nuu-chah-nulth designers.

²Museum and archival collections include: American Philosophical Society, Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian, National Anthropological Archives, United States National Archives, Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia, Alberni Valley Museum, British Columbia Provincial Archives, Canadian Museum of History, Royal British Columbia Museum, Cornell Costume and Textile Collection, Karl May Museum, Ethnological Museum of Berlin, British Museum, Fenimore Art Museum, Peabody Harvard, Peabody Essex, Menil Collection, Denver Museum of Nature and Science, and the American Museum of Natural History.

2 Contextualizing Nuu-chah-nulth First Nations

In one of my first meetings with Nasquu-isaqs, a high-ranking and well-respected woman of the Hupacasath First Nation, one of the Nuu-chah-nulth Nations, she explained: “Our people have been here forever, that’s our understanding.” Days later, standing in front of Kakaw’in, a petroglyph site on *Aa-ukw Tl’ikuulth* (Sproat Lake), Nasquu-isaqs’ Uncle, Chuuchkamalthnii, elaborated: “We talk about a time called *Iikhmuut*. *Iikhmuut* is ‘The Time Before Time’. That’s clearly prehistoric.” Anthropologist, Drucker (1951), among others, has written that the Hupacasath have “made their home on the shores of Sproat Lake since time immemorial” (5).

Anthropologists have repeatedly made mention of this sensibility among Nuu-chah-nulth peoples—that is, deep temporal and spiritual connection to place. In a study of the Kyuquot in the late 1970s, Kenyon (1980) wrote “There is a sense of identification with the land, rooted in the belief that their people have lived there forever and it is a part of their being” (154). Identification with *haahuulthii* (chiefly territories) has both historical and aesthetic depth, in part because of the nature of the landscape. Drucker argued that because the West Coast of Vancouver Island was rugged it “played an important part in the sociopolitical divisions of people” (7). One way to signal sociopolitical divisions is through dress and adornment and early accounts document unique crest symbols, craftsmanship, and the importance of local trade routes (Beaglehole 1999; Boas 1890; Sapir n.d.; Sproat 1868).

Before European contact, Nuu-chah-nulth people lived as autonomous tribes in their particular winter and summer village sites. People migrated with the seasons, women moved to different nations through marriage,³ warfare affected ownership and occupation of territories, and a complex trade network connected Nuu-chah-nulth tribes as well as other Indigenous populations on Vancouver Island and along the Coast of what is now mainland British Columbia, Alaska, Washington, and perhaps even as far south as Oregon and California. Captain Cook, for example, collected objects that were clearly Aleutian and Tlingit from Nootka Sound, the Nuu-chah-nulth community, where he landed in March of 1778. Although different Northwest Coast tribes have unique approaches to design, Holm (1965) has pointed out many unifying features, such as an “even distribution of weight and movement” through use of formline, ovoids, eyelids, eyebrows, U-forms, horizontal symmetry, semi-angularity of curves, and eyebrows (75). The absence of other features, such as overlapping, results in a two-dimensional and rather flat form, but one that utilizes the entirety of the graphic space with a carefully weighted balance. Although groups share stylistic features, they have distinctive designs which connect to particular histories and rights. Colonial encounters, and later relationships with settlers and industrial economies, would also increase the speed of fashion change in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

³If the woman was of higher social rank than her future husband, the husband would move to the woman’s community. *Hiskmiiłth* is the term used for a man who moves to his wife’s nation.

Encounters between Nuuchah-nulth and *Maatmaltnii* (White people) on the Northwest Coast began as economic interaction. Trade vessels visited the Coast and later established posts. Russians met with Northern groups as early as 1741, meaning that trade goods made their way to the West Coast of Vancouver Island before European contact (and evidenced by the aforementioned Cook collections at the British Museum). Spaniard Juan Pérez anchored offshore of Nootka Sound in 1774, and Captain James Cook landed near Friendly Cove in March of 1778 and spent a month with Nuuchah-nulth peoples. By the 1790s, merchant ships from Europe and North America participated in a lucrative sea otter pelt trade. Following the widely-read publication of Cook's journals, a flurry of vessels made the "Golden Round" in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries: they traded for sea otter pelts on the West Coast, brought furs to Canton, China to trade for tea, and eventually returned home to three times the profit. During this period, many ships anchored, encountered, and made transactions with Nuuchah-nulth people (Gibson 1992).

Cook's journals, among other written accounts, fueled the European imagination of a rugged, wild, untouched landscape. Menzies and Butler (2008) have criticized the notion that the Northwest Coast was an unadulterated landscape that was "tamed" by capitalism and colonialism. These kinds of discourses—that the Coast was "untouched"—became rationale for dispossession. In other words, perpetuating the idea that Indigenous people were not using the land became a justification for taking the land and exploiting resources through extraction industries, agriculture, and eventually settlement. However, in reality, Indigenous peoples throughout the Northwest Coast were active in manipulating terrestrial and marine territories prior to European contact. Nuuchah-nulth people actively harvested the inner bark of the cedar tree in late spring to be used in weaving or treated and processed to make soft fabrics. Engagement with the landscape and its natural resources enabled and perpetuated the Nuuchah-nulth fashion system before contact. The earliest drawings of Nuuchah-nulth people, made by John Webber, the artist aboard Captain Cook's ship, confirm that people were wearing ornate cedar bark clothing, hats with designs made of sea grasses tightly twined (Fig. 2). Examples of elaborately woven and painted cedar bark cloaks, and woven hats with pictorial designs, were collected by Cook and are housed in the British Museum collections.

At the same time that Cook's stories of encounter and the potentiality of wealth made their way back to North America and Europe, sea otter populations began to dwindle and they ultimately disappeared from the West Coast by the mid-1820s. Between the 1830s and the 1860s, very few *Maatmaltnii* came to Vancouver Island for trade. Despite the dearth of outsiders, the *Maatmaltnii* left another kind of violent imprint on place: disease. Although many epidemics went unrecorded, conservative estimates project that by 1881, the Nuuchah-nulth population declined by two-thirds (Boyd 1990, p. 145). "They wanted us to vanish," Chuuchkamaltnii, a highly regarded contemporary Nuuchah-nulth designer, often told me during our ethnographic interviews.



Fig. 2 Woman of Nootka Sound, 1778. engraving by W. Sharp from drawing by John Webber, artist aboard the third expedition of Captain James Cook

Nuu-chah-nulth *haahuulthii* and social organization changed dramatically during this period, when sickness and disease dramatically reduced populations on the West Coast. Confederation efforts were emerging just prior to contact (Knight 1996, p. 26), but severely diminished populations sped up the process. The late

Fig. 3 Shawl covered in dentalia shells, likely used for a girl's coming-of-age potlatch. Collected by Captain Dorr F. Tozier in 1902. Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian, #069293. Photo by Denise Green



nineteenth century brought major transformations to the West Coast of Vancouver Island that would have a tremendous impact on dress practices and access to new materials (Green 2013a): prospecting resulted in mining, logging, and fishing operations that relied on Nuu-chah-nulth labor. Political and governmental changes were also underway: Vancouver Island merged with British Columbia in 1866 to become the Colony of British Columbia. Shortly thereafter British Columbia joined the confederation in 1871, making Native peoples wards of the federal government. Visitors to the West Coast no longer left on their ships, but stayed and began to make their lives there—sometimes intertwined with the Native peoples they met and often came to depend upon.

Lutz (2008) argues that the “moditional economy,” which was a hybridization of traditional prestige and emerging capitalist economies, expanded global capitalism through use of Aboriginal labor (279). The moditional economy began with early trade relationships, which fueled an accumulative capitalist system and transformed the landscape, particularly on the West Coast of Vancouver Island. In addition to the landscape, Nuu-chah-nulth fashion also changed dramatically with newfound access to trade goods. As discussed, Nuu-chah-nulth people were initially involved in trade routes because of their access to sea otter pelts. These furs were also highly prized among the Nuu-chah-nulth, and generally only those of chiefly status had the right to don sea otter fur. Display of wealth and status through dress practices persisted after the sea otter’s extinction, integrating both local and far-flung materials. Girl’s coming of age adornments are a good example: dentalia shells, brass buttons, thimbles, and glass “blue beads” might all be part of the jewelry and embellishments worn for her *Aaytstuulthaa* (Girl’s Coming of Age Potlatch). As new wealth came to Nuu-chah-nulth peoples in the form of wage labor, potlatching and visible displays of wealth on the body through fashion became popular (Fig. 3).

Nuu-chah-nulth people shaped capitalist expansion in various ways and they played a critical role in emerging industrial economies (Knight 1996). Lutz (2008) has suggested that Northwest Coast peoples “worked according to a logic that was based in their own economies,” with the understanding that they still had access to their own subsistence economies and could work seasonally (203). “Fishing, logging, whaling, hop picking, berry picking, and sealing generated income in the late spring, summer, and early fall months, and allowed Nuu-chah-nulth to accumulate

goods in preparation for winter redistribution through the potlatch system... What resulted was a period of wealth and a more upwardly mobile commoner class. Although the elite controlled trade networks, access to wage-labor was a relatively democratic process, resulting in a burgeoning *nouveau riche*" (Green 2013a, p. 171).

The potlatch system, in which families host elaborate gatherings to mark important life events, is a critical component of a prestige economy. The "business"⁴ of the potlatch is marked by redistribution of wealth. As a functioning part of a culture that depends upon oral history, potlatch attendees are compensated for their time and commitment of memory and remembering by accepting gifts from the host family. The more the host family gives away to mark their event, the greater their prestige and social status enhances. During the late nineteenth century, wage labor fueled an incredible number of potlatches and enabled many families to become socially mobile. Dress played an important role in shifting social status for Nuuchah-nulth people of this time.

However, Indigenous economic relations were also undermined through different legal and governmental devices to ensure a labor force for this emerging economy (Menzies and Butler 2008, p. 35). This follows Wolf's (1982) argument that the capitalist market "creates a fiction" of symmetrical relationships—in fact, there was ongoing struggle and negotiation between groups (354). In the latter half of the nineteenth century the government of Canada deployed a series of legal actions on Native peoples that resulted in dispossession of land and encouragement of the industrial economy, which was rapidly transforming the landscape through resource exploitation (e.g., timber, mining, fishing, etc.). Duff (1977) has argued that, unlike other provinces in Canada, British Columbia "evolved a policy that ignored or denied the existence of any native title," and perpetuated this denial through the 1876 Indian Act and other legal actions (67). By the 1880s, Aboriginal people accounted for roughly three-quarters of the population of the province, and it was at this same time that the Aboriginal people were legally denied the right to participate in elections (Lutz 2008). Their voices were silenced in the political realm, and later in the legal realm with the "Great Settlement of 1927," which prevented First Nations people in British Columbia from seeking legal counsel for land claims.

In 1876, the Joint Indian Reserve Commission was set to the task of answering the "land question." The answer was establishment of reserves under the ideological auspice that White settlement was good for Native peoples and would eventually help Natives to "learn how to use land properly" (Harris 2002, p. 108). Peter O'Reilly arrived in 1882 to allocate reserves on the West Coast of Vancouver Island. According to Harris (2002), Premier George Walkem was encouraged, "not to allocate reserves in Barkley Sound if whites had applied for the land, or

⁴"Business" is the English term used by Nuuchah-nulth people to refer to the planned proceedings of the potlatch. If it is a Thlaakt'uulthaa (End-of-grief potlatch), for example, the "business" would be to end and put away the family's grief for the death of a family member publicly. Giving names is also another form of "business" that often takes place at potlatches.

simply if Indians used a site for fishing. The premier was afraid that the best harbors would be lost” (207). Such large-scale legal, institutional, governmental, and economic encounters were part of “power geometries of space” which produced new relationships to landscapes and decreased access to natural resources used for the production of textiles, dress, and jewelry (Massey 1994, 2005).

Race-based education also fueled inequalities and impeded intergenerational knowledge transfer around weaving, design, and semiotics of dress. Indian Residential Schools (IRS) provided sub-par education that attempted to assimilate that of the Nuu-chah-nulth children. In my interviews with residential school survivors, many were quick to point out that uniforms and short haircuts were required. IRS regulated bodies and minds, and sought to modify the appearances of Native children and to prevent students from learning about their cultural practices. In 1920 an amendment to the Canadian Indian Act of 1876 made residential school attendance mandatory for Native children. Nuu-chah-nulth children were alienated from their homes, forced to speak English, and were not allowed to practice cultural traditions or wear clothing, jewelry, or hairstyles that appeared “Aboriginal,” as were other First Nations youth across the country. In Nuu-chah-nulth territories, The Alberni Indian Residential School operated until 1973 and the Christie (Kakawis) Indian Residential School did not close until 1983, making it the last residential school in operation in British Columbia.

Early encounters between Nuu-chah-nulth and visitors stimulated trade, but as visitors became settlers, *Maatmalthnii* sought to change Aboriginal cultural lives (Duff 1977). As a result, Duff (1977) has argued “Indian cultures ceased to function as effective integrated systems of living” (53). Anthropologists felt a need to document what they called “vanishing cultures.” Edward Sapir worked on behalf of the government of Canada to document the Nuu-chah-nulth of the Alberni Valley in 1910 and 1913–1914 (Sapir n.d.; Sapir and Swadesh 1939, 1955). His student, Morris Swadesh, continued his work in the late 1930s, and Susan Golla picked it up in 1976–1992 (Golla 1987). The Nuu-chah-nulth have also been well documented in museum collections around the world. From the British Museum (Captain Cook collections) to the Ethnological Museum of Berlin to the Smithsonian collections and the American Museum of Natural History, to name a few, Nuu-chah-nulth material culture has left Canada and has been dispersed across continents.

The Northwest Coast became a landscape where different kinds of relationships to the land and to aesthetic and cultural practices were in conflict. On the one hand, accumulative capitalism sought to extract as much from the land as possible, and employed mostly Aboriginal labor to do so (particularly between 1860 and 1920). These practices conflicted with the way Aboriginal relationships with the land have been described in ethnographic texts. Knight (1996) has argued that industrial resource extraction differed greatly from traditional hunting, gathering and processing methods (9). These beliefs about landscape, coupled with participation in the resource extraction industry, would produce a highly conflicted experience of landscape for Nuu-chah-nulth peoples. As a result, the resources used for dress and textiles began to shift and change as new materials became available and

Nuu-chah-nulth people had increasing access to capital and decreasing access to their territories. The adornment of the body began to change, as did the purposes of adornment.

Most recently, the colonial experience has come to a head in British Columbia with the modern treaty process. In 1997, *Delgamuukw v. British Columbia* ruled that Aboriginal title in most of British Columbia had not been extinguished (with the exception of the Douglas Treaties on Vancouver Island). The modern treaty process is a political means of “solving” the “land question.” Treaties, called “final agreements,” once ratified and implemented, extinguish most right and title to lands. In those treaties that have been implemented, on average, First Nations maintain title over 5–10 % of their traditional territories. Ultimately, the “land question” and relationships to particular places are produced and reified through bodily adornment; therefore, historical contextualization of the West Coast of Vancouver Island is critical to understanding how the fashion of Nuuchah-nulth people has not only changed but also reflected political, economic, and social adaptations that have come with the colonial encounter.

Fashion is a product of articulating economic, political, cultural, and aesthetic worlds and change with time and effects of increasing globalization. The contemporary ceremonial and commercial fashion practices on the West Coast of Vancouver Island have been produced by nearly 250 years of colonial encounter, exchange, tension, and resistance. I have prefaced the theoretical discussion with an explanation of Nuuchah-nulth social organization alongside historical shifts in economic systems, colonial regulations, and White settlement on the Pacific Northwest Coast. I now move to discuss theoretical approaches to fashion studies, and how Nuuchah-nulth articulations of dress as fashion intersect with the aforementioned histories.

3 Theorizing Indigenous Fashion: Phenomenology, Place, and Change

Fashion—that is, the changing stylization of the body over time—is a process that occurs in a variety of manifestations across all cultures. Kaiser et al. (1995) define fashion as “a dynamic phenomenon that inextricably links aesthetics, culture, economics, and everyday social life” (172). Although fashion is affected, in part, by economic systems, it is not exclusively “the product and domain of Western capitalism” (Lillethun et al. 2012, p. 75). Lillethun et al. argue that the Eurocentric definition of fashion, which has come into popular use colloquially and scholastically, was produced by the capitalist and Social Darwinist context of late nineteenth century: “For them fashion occurred in a capitalist production system of innovation, distribution, and consumption wherein the social structure enabled, even fostered, emulation of adjacent status groups” (75). I follow Lillethun et al.’s contention that fashion is not a uniquely Western phenomenon but one that transpires in cultures throughout the world, from Aboriginal to European, rural to

urban, and capitalist to communist. Fashion operates differently in each situation, depending on distinct cultural identities, historical contexts, politics, economics, and access to resources. For the Nuuchah-nulth, fashion pre-European contact unfolded through a prestige economy and in conversation with other Native communities connected through trade routes. With contact and European encounters, the prestige economy began to hybridize with wage labor capitalism, particularly in the late nineteenth century, and continues to this day to function in conversation with late Western capitalism and relationships with *haahuulthii* (chiefly territories and their resources).

Fashion is a powerful material, aesthetic, and bodily force that transforms identities, experiences, and inter/intra-cultural interactions. This is why anthropologist Tarlo (1996) has written that the study of clothing and dress is a critically important anthropological pursuit. On the Northwest Coast, and within Nuuchah-nulth communities specifically, the transformational power of regalia lies in its ability to connect spiritual and terrestrial worlds. Chuuchkamalthnii (then, Ki-ke-in/Ron Hamilton) has written about oral stories describing the transformational power of dance robes (Jensen and Sargent 1987, p. 64). Kwatyat, a mythical character, could adorn himself in robes and, in so doing, become a baleen whale. In another story, a group of young boys put on robes that transform them into dogs and once the robes are burned the boys quickly mature into expert whalers (Jensen and Sargent 1987, p. 64; Sapir and Swadesh 1939). The belief in the transformational role of clothing in Nuuchah-nulth culture is crucial—there is no more powerful force than that from the adornment of regalia in ceremonial settings. Even in the secular environment, the display of crests and images on everyday clothing items such as screen-printed t-shirts, sunglasses, socks, and hats, alludes to the power of graphic crests to transform and strengthen the wearer.

There are two critical forces in Nuuchah-nulth dress that emerged throughout my fieldwork research: (1) the ability of fashion to connect and make declarations about place and territory; (2) the important role of the body as an intimate site of cultural production and transformation. These findings have guided me toward theories of phenomenology, space and place, and cultural studies of fashion to interrogate the body as a site where identities and relationships to place are produced, and, at the same time, struggles and conflicts unfold in the ongoing colonial context.

Bodies come together to produce spaces and identities, and meanings are negotiated through interactions. For example, what might be called “fashions” are the resonance of multiple bodies referencing similar aesthetics, and when brought together in multiples, produce strong political, ideological, and/or identity-based claims. In developing a theoretical framework for interpreting Indigenous fashion, I begin with an overview of phenomenological perspectives on the body and spatial production that leads into a discussion of symbolic interactionist approaches to fashion theory. I discuss how Nuuchah-nulth fashioned bodies have been mobilized and regulated across different power struggles, and throughout draw on examples of textile production, bodily modification, appearance management, and fashion as social, aesthetic, and symbolic processes that produce spaces, identities, and new commercialized fashion products.

3.1 *Phenomenological Interpretations*

Phenomenological approaches to the study of space and place begin with perception. According to Merleau-Ponty (1962, p. 240), the body is where sensation occurs and perception begins. He argues that the body is not a thing in space, but rather, it is of space (171–173). In other words, the two are mutually constitutive—space cannot exist without bodies, and bodies cannot exist without space. This is why he suggests that “all senses are spatial” (252). Fashion, necessarily, comes from and produces spaces through an embodied subject. Casey (1996) has explained that the phenomenological turn from the body-as-object to the body-as-lived has opened up possibilities for a “corporeal subject who lives in a place through perception” (22). For Casey, perception is rooted in corporeality and the mind-body makes places through direct interaction in the immediacy of the present moment. If bodies actively make places, as phenomenologists suggest, the adornments and bodily modifications profoundly connect, and help to produce, senses of place. This body of theory is important to the interpretation of Indigenous fashion, which by being rooted is connected to places of origin—Indigenous peoples are First Nations peoples. The sensorial body is one means of articulating and negotiating ongoing and changing relationships to space.

Casey (1996) builds on the work of Merleau-Ponty, contending that place differs from space in that it is localized and particular to embodied experiences. For example, Nuu-chah-nulth *huulthin* (secular and ceremonial shawls) were historically made from beaten and processed cedar bark, harvested from the forests along the West Coast of Vancouver Island. As Nuu-chah-nulth relationships to these places shifted with industrialization and colonial exploitation of timber resources, so too did fashions change (Green 2011, 2013a). Nuu-chah-nulth people today have trouble accessing large stands of timber because clear cutting has destroyed most forests easily accessible by road (Green 2011). Casey (1996) argues that bodies come to reflect the places they occupy—and the absence of cedar bark clothing on Nuu-chah-nulth bodies reflects destruction of forests and a forced shift to capitalist economies. Particular knowledge about cedar processing, which enabled the production of a bark shawl softer than any wool, was destroyed by the residential school system (i.e., forced removal of children from networks of intergenerational knowledge exchange) and impeded by industrial logging operations. Nuu-chah-nulth have struggled, through the courts and through daily lives, with the government’s choices about logging tenure rights. Although some nations today operate logging operations, most logging tenure rights are awarded to large corporations. These political and economic decisions ultimately alienate Nuu-chah-nulth peoples from their traditional resources. As a result, dress practices have changed as people witness their natural resources being annihilated through logging. The phenomenological experience of gathering cedar bark, processing it, and wearing it against the body has been undermined by environmental destruction.

3.2 *Phenomenology and Symbolic Interaction*

Other scholars have integrated phenomenology and theories of space and place to consider the impact of individual bodies as social bodies. Richardson (1982) follows the phenomenological contention that we are not external to the world, but necessarily part of it. He diverges slightly in his analysis of space by following symbolic interaction, which posits that people act toward objects, places, and one another, based upon the meanings that those people, places, and/or things hold for them (422). His study of two distinct places in Costa Rica—the market and the plaza—found that people altered their behaviors and bodily dispositions upon entering the new space and engaging with the materials found there. This is not unlike the findings of Goffman (1959) over 20 years earlier, who argued that in Western society people are always moving between “front” and “back” stages—that is, between formal and informal spaces of interaction. People alter their behavior depending on which part of the stage they find themselves. He calls front stage performances *dramaturgical*, where people consciously embody dispositions, mannerisms, appearances, and behaviors that follow perceived social values and ideals and conceal those behaviors that are not in line with an idealized conception of self. Goffman argues that moments of transition are hugely informative because they reveal the putting on and taking off of airs. How people perceive social spaces affects how their bodies perform in those spaces. The potlatch ceremony is one of these spaces, where a literal front and back stage exists, delineated by a *thli-itsapilthim* (painted ceremonial cloth screen). Ceremonial regalia is adorned, and family members and close friends dance onto the floor together, unified as a family or dance group. The adornments enable transformation: the headdress, shawl, and sometimes mask or other implement held in the hands (i.e., feather, paddle, spear, etc. depending on the dance) change the wearer from an individual to a family member. Those in attendance as witnesses watch carefully and quietly, giving full attention to the *ha’wilthmis* (chiefly treasures) coming alive through dance and adornment.

The foundation of Symbolic Interaction theory posits that, in social interactions, people look to one another to try to understand the others’ actions. In Nuu-chah-nulth potlatch dances, the family communicates to the witnesses present through song, dance, speech making, and adornments. Dance shawls and ceremonial cloth screens become a medium for crest display. They declare what rights and privileges each family owns, making fashion objects an important form of familial patrimony. The potlatch, with all its pomp and circumstance, is a space for display and communication. Other families adorn their regalia and take the potlatch floor in song and dance to support the host family and whatever business they are conducting. Potlatches continue today as spaces for families to honor their ancestors and display connections via embodiment of dress through dance.

Although late modern capitalism yields fast fashion in the secular world, it yields a slow and dynamic fashion system in the ceremonial world. This does not mean that ceremonial fashion stagnates: on the contrary, people invest immense

amounts of time designing and constructing regalia and it changes with time and experience. The abundance of new materials, made possible by the capitalist system, also fosters new design. Each Nuu-chah-nulth family relies on some talented relative, and there are often many. Designers work in a variety of media—wood carving, graphic design, sewing, metal, and weaving—and are not afraid to embrace new technologies such as screen printing and new materials such as ultra suede, acrylic paints, polyester fabrics, synthetic dyes, etc.

Dance shawls typically worn by women are called *huulthin*. They are probably the most visible and declarative form of regalia. There are two classes of *huulthin*: individual and familial. Women typically own a personal shawl which they do not share with anyone else. This is a distinctive feature of Nuu-chah-nulth dress, as relative groups such as the Kwakwakw'akw have shawls that are shared. An individual shawl is typically constructed by the owner with crests that they or their family own. Some women may also own individual shawls that have been gifted to them. The second class of shawls, familial, are typically owned collectively by the family to be used for specific dances. For example, the sisters of Sayach'apis, *Tayii* (head chief) of the Nash'asat-h Tribe, made shawls with the *naani* (grizzly bear) crest after their brother's near death experience with a grizzly bear. During his *Yaxmalthit* (cleansing potlatch), his family ceremonially brushed *kahmis* (deathness) off of his body and then danced with the new crest, which was created by artist Ray Sim (Fig. 4). The men of the family wore vests screen printed with



Fig. 4 *Naanii* (grizzly bear) crest design for Sayach'apis (Walter Thomas), *Tayii* (chief) of the Tseshaht First Nation. Shawls were displayed for his *Yaxmalthit* (Cleansing Potlatch), held in February of 2010. Photo by Denise Green

the same design. The women wore appliqued shawls featuring the same design. As potlatch hosts, the family appeared unified and carried the message of their brother's survival through the grizzly crest. At the end of the potlatch, Sayach'apis was seated in his father's position, making him the head of an important Tseshah family and tribe.

From unconscious, and often repetitive expressions of the body, particular identities come into being. Bourdieu (1977) calls this outcome *habitus*, the combination of a performative body and cultivated "taste" or aesthetics. Potlatches are a mechanism for intergenerational transfer of knowledge. Typically, a family meets weekly before a potlatch to prepare for dances and songs. Women spend hours in sewing rooms constructing regalia. All of these preparatory meetings away from the potlatch are also opportunities for knowledge transfer within a family. The potlatch itself is an opportunity to share with a larger network of families with their own distinct cultural patrimony and practices. In his book *Distinction*, Bourdieu (1984) explores how a "class habitus" emerges through the body. He argues that "embodied cultural capital of the previous generation" is imparted on youth, generally within familial situations (70, 71). Children develop classificatory realms and the ability to make judgments between these realms—that is, the deployment of "taste" (170). Nuu-chah-nulth social organization is incredibly complex and hierarchical. Potlatches provide an opportunity to display wealth and become socially mobile. A family's prestige is elevated by giving away wealth at the end of the potlatch, and by displaying wealth (in the form of fashion, dances, songs, etc.). The preparations prior to a potlatch also enable children and other family members to learn and practice bodily movement (i.e., dance) and adornment (i.e., fashion).

3.3 *Fashion, Colonialism and Regulation of the Body*

Fashion change also occurs through regulation of the body and dress. Regulation of appearance and discipline of bodies has been crucial to the colonial project (Comaroff and Comaroff 1997). On the Northwest Coast of Canada, First Nations have been subjected to a body of law called the Canadian Indian Act. Butler (2006) builds upon the work of Foucault (1995) to argue that bodies are sites of discipline and regulation (183–185). Some bodies are more regulated than others, and this is especially evident with aggressive assimilationist policies in the United States and Canada. Because the body surface is relatively variable (i.e., changeable), it easily becomes a contested site of political regulation. Take, for example, the 1914 amendment to the Canadian Indian Act, which required First Nations to gain permission from government officials before appearing in public wearing any kind of ceremonial regalia. This amendment created a body of law that regulated how Aboriginal bodies in Canada could and could not look, and was a means of perpetuating an agenda of assimilation. These actions affected public appearances, and created an even greater difference between secular and ceremonial fashion.

3.4 *Dialectical Fashion and Symbolic Interaction*

The body is a highly contested and sought-after site—politically, morally, ideologically, economically—and therefore it is no wonder that understanding/performing one's identity through fashion is wrought with tension and anxiety (Kaiser 2001; Davis 1992). Tension may be destructive or productive, and Fred Davis argues that tensions between competing or conflicting identities are central to promulgating fashion change. Tensions have many forms for Indigenous peoples from the West Coast of Vancouver Island: tensions between past and present, traditional and new materials, ceremonial and secular aesthetics, and commercial markets and ceremonial outlets for fashion items. Cultural tensions are not post-contact phenomena. Certainly before contact, as evidenced in oral recounting at contemporary potlatches, families have historically (as well as today) disagreed about ownership, imagery, and histories. Potlatches themselves are essentially about tension between life phases, often marking an important moment of tension and resolution, such as a birth, coming-of-age, marriage, and death (end-of-grief).

The dialectical approach to fashion holds that change arises from tensions within a particular culture. People often seek resolution of tension through appearance and adornment. Turner (1980) found that with the Kayapo of the Amazon, the feeling of “being in fashion” gave greater security than religion (114). Symbolic interactionist Blumer (1969) has argued that the sense of “being in fashion” and of collectively selecting particular styles is a coping mechanism that allows people to adjust collectively to a rapidly changing world. Museum artifacts collected in the late nineteenth century show that Nuu-chah-nulth people were increasingly integrating new materials into ceremonial paraphernalia. From headdress paints derived from Reckitt's Laundry Blueing to shawls woven with strips of trade blankets, new materials were integrated into new designs. “The old costume of the natives was the same as at present, but the material was different” wrote Indian Reserve Commissioner Gilbert Malcolm Sproat in 1868. Evidence in museum collections suggests a rapid and consistent adoption of new materials in the late nineteenth century, integrated with historically used materials such as cedar bark and sea grasses.

The dialectical approach to fashion change also relies on the fact that “fashion susceptible instabilities,” particularly those related to identity, continuously find resolution and tension once more. People's adoption of similar fashions at one moment in time displays unity and synthesis, but latent and lurking tensions arise with everyday matters and world events, and the dialectic continues to unfold. Changes in appearance follow identity tensions and resolution (Davis 1992). The argument is that identity tensions and conflicts may be “read” through fashion changes over time. One such tension is that between youth and adulthood. With menarche, Nuu-chah-nulth women are isolated and later revealed to the family through an *Aaytstuulthaa* (Girl's Puberty Potlatch). Her dress has completely changed, she wears ear pendants and some representation of wealth (traditionally dentalia shells, which may still be used, but more typically, dollar bills are pinned to her dance shawl). The elaborate costuming, different from anything she has

worn publicly, signals the result of identity tension between youth and adulthood. The synthesis is an adult dress. She likely abandons her childhood dance shawl, takes a new name, and displays her new identity through dress.

One of the greatest tensions has been around the commercialization of Nuu-chah-nulth designs. As discussed, crests are familial patrimony and clearly owned, and have thus far only been described and interpreted within the ceremonial life of Nuu-chah-nulth people. The reality for Nuu-chah-nulth designers today is that they must grapple with family, tribal, and national politics, whilst the larger fashion industry continually appropriates from Native culture and design. The emergence of new technologies, such as silk screen printing, has enabled serialization of images and increased distribution. I conclude by discussing eight contemporary Nuu-chah-nulth designers who work in a variety of media which ultimately are used as adornment on bodies.

4 Nuu-chah-nulth Fashions in the Contemporary Context

The translation of Nuu-chah-nulth design into the commercial realm really began with curiosities and souvenirs for early trade vessels and late nineteenth century tourists and the liquidation of ceremonial paraphernalia by art dealers, anthropologists and government officials from the late nineteenth century (Cole 1985). Northwest Coast art and design was appreciated by traders, tourists, and later settlers, and, despite aggressive assimilation efforts by the Canadian government, Northwest Coast Native artists continued to work throughout the potlatch ban and residential school epoch. The contemporary Northwest Coast Art market began to thrive in the 1970s with the Northwest Coast Indian Artists Guild, apprenticeship programs such as Thunderbird Park at the Royal British Columbia Museum, and the continued devotion of anthropologists and art historians to the documentation and celebration of Northwest Coast arts in public institutions. The proliferation and celebration of Northwest Coast art has created an interesting space for commercialization of decorative arts and fashion. Jewelry, both metal and basketry, was an early form of fashion sold to outsiders. With basketry and weaving talents, hats were also a popular tourist item, and Fig. 5 is a great example of combining Nuu-chah-nulth wrapped twining techniques, local materials, with the fashion desires of a Western consumer in the late nineteenth century. Lastly, silk screen prints have become an important part of contemporary fashion design. There are many hundreds of Nuu-chah-nulth designers that work in both large and small scale.

4.1 *Lena Jumbo (Ahousaht)*

Lena Jumbo (Fig. 6) is one of the leading weavers on the West Coast of Vancouver Island and lives at Maaqtusiis, the Ahousaht village a short boat ride from Tofino. Lena was born in the 1930s and learned to weave from her grandmother at a



Fig. 5 Basketry grass boater hat produced in the late nineteenth century and collected by James G. Swan for the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History. (E23330) Department of Anthropology, Smithsonian Institution. Photo by Denise Green



Fig. 6 Photograph of Lena Jumbo holding a whaler's hat in 2010. Photograph by Denise Green

young age (her mother died when she was 3 years old and her grandmother looked after her). Today, Lena produces a range of work: small *pika-uu* (curio style baskets), traditional whaler's hats, shopping baskets, pendants, and various implements covered in basketry (e.g., bottles, cigarette lighters, glass buoys, etc.). Her best sellers, however, are miniature whaler's hats worn as earrings (Fig. 7). With the exception of synthetic dyes and commercially manufactured sterling silver fish hook earrings, Lena does not employ any other new technologies in her weaving. Everything is still produced by hand using materials gathered locally such as cedar bark and sea grasses. The designs "are all in my head," Lena has told me, "I don't use a pattern book."



Fig. 7 Miniature whaler's hat earrings made by Lena Jumbo in 2010 featuring a whale design. Photograph by Denise Green

4.2 *Chuuchkamalthnii (Ki-ke-in/Ron Hamilton—Hupacasath)*

Chuuchkamalthnii is one of the most prolific contemporary Nuu-chah-nulth designers, though today he designs exclusively for ceremonial events only (Fig. 8). He is adamant that his work is not “art.” “There’s a lot of literature out there that talks about the ‘Indian artist, Ron Hamilton.’ Well, I’m not an Indian and I’m not an artist. Never have been” (Green and Chuuchkamalthnii 2010). Chuuchkamalthnii resists labels of all kinds, the subtext being that these are English words and Western categories that do not do justice to the spiritual and cultural significance of his design work. Chuuchkamalthnii was born in 1948, and as a young person he engaged with the commercial market. He sold drawings, carvings, silver engravings, and silk screen prints (Fig. 9). From 1969 to 1973 he worked at Thunderbird Park at the Provincial Museum of British Columbia as a carver, restoring and replicating old totem poles and creating new original works. During this time he was apprenticed with the renowned Kwakwaka’wakw carver Henry Hunt. He later co-founded the Northwest Coast Indian Artists Guild in 1972, with the intention of supporting and teaching young Native designers interested in creating new work for both commercial and ceremonial settings. The British Museum, the Museum of Anthropology at UBC, Port Alberni’s Rollin Arts Centre, Public Archives of British Columbia, the Belkin Art Gallery, and the Alberni Valley Museum have all featured retrospectives of his printmaking,



Fig. 8 Photograph of Chuuchkamalthnii painting a dance shawl in 2012. Photograph by Denise Green



Fig. 9 Chuuchkamalthnii preparing a silk screen print in the late 1970s. Photo used with permission of Chuuchkamalthnii

poetry, photography, and drawing. Examples of his carving and other design work are found in the Canadian Museum of History, the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia, the Alberni Valley Museum, the Royal British Columbia Museum, and the British Museum, among others. Chuuchkamaltnii's resistance to the commercial market and capitalist exploitation of Northwest Coast design has left him devoted to the fashions of potlatching and ceremonial life. He regularly produces designs for dance shawls, ceremonial curtains, potlatch t-shirts, and recently completed carving a totem pole for the Ts'uubaa-asatx (Lake Cowichan First Nation). He occasionally carves bone pendants and engraves metal, but more typically focuses his efforts on shawls and graphic design. Chuuchkamaltnii is devoted to the meaning of these images, and is careful to follow his ancestors' teachings and stories in creating appropriate designs for particular families. He uses his immense knowledge of history and Nuu-chah-nulth social organization to ensure that the design work he completes for ceremonial purposes has been vetted and thoughtfully considered before it appears on the potlatch floor.

4.3 Joe David (Tla-o-qui-aht/Hupacasath)

Joe David's father was Tla-o-qui-aht and his mother was Hupacasath, but he was born in the Tla-o-qui-aht village of Opitsaht. He spent much of his youth and adult life in Seattle. David is a first cousin to Chuuchkamaltnii, and born just 2 years before him. Both were members of the Northwest Coast Indian Artists Guild, but whereas Chuuchkamaltnii has chosen to focus on ceremonial life and inter-community fashion, David has succeeded in the commercial market. His designs have been sold as one-of-a-kind art pieces, but more commonly as serigraphs. The serigraphs of the 1970s influenced the development of the Northwest Coast artware market, which has continued to grow since the 1980s (Roth 2015). Although David's work is more likely to be found in art galleries, his serigraph designs paved the way for Northwest Coast artware markets and the appearance of silk screen prints on garments such as t-shirts, sweaters, and hoodies.

4.4 Tim Paul (Hesquiaht)

Tim Paul, born in 1950, is a designer of the same era as David and Chuuchkamaltnii. As did Chuuchkamaltnii, he participated in the Thunderbird Park carving apprenticeship program and was ranked "First Carver" at the Royal British Columbia Museum until 1992. Although Tim Paul is known for his carving talents, he has also embraced clothing design and produced silk screen prints for garments sold in the commercial market (Fig. 10). The design shows a *hinkits* dancer wearing an elaborately designed robe and is fascinating because it depicts a ceremonial right that is often jealously guarded.

Fig. 10 Tim Paul's silk screen print design for a hoodie, circa 2012. Photograph by Denise Green



4.5 Julie Joseph (Ditidaht)

Julie Joseph is known for her fine basketry. Similar to Lena Jumbo, she uses her skilled hands to create pendants and earrings, transforming weaving practices typically used for millinery and baskets into the realm of jewelry design. Joseph grew up in a traditional Ditidaht village site with her immediate family. The rest of the community had moved to a new village site, Balaatsad, which had electricity, running water, and road accessibility. She remembered learning to weave by coal oil lamp, and has taught her children to weave. In her adult life she has lived in larger cities such as Nanaimo, where there is a market for her jewelry designs (Fig. 11). Joseph adheres to the designs owned by her family—that is, whales, canoes, and harpoons—because her ancestors were whalers (Green 2013b).

4.6 Paul Sam (Ahousaht)

Unlike the other designers discussed thus far, Paul Sam focuses primarily on metal engraving and produces jewelry for the commercial market (Figs. 12 and 13). As with



Fig. 11 Earrings designed by Julie Joseph. Photograph by Denise Green

Fig. 12 Silver cuff design featuring *hinkiist'am* (serpent headdresses), made in 2010 by Paul Sam. Photograph by Denise Green





Fig. 13 *Hinkiits'am* pin designed by Paul Sam circa 2008. Photograph by Denise Green

Tim Paul's hoodie design, Sam also uses ceremonial imagery such as *hinkiits'am* (serpent headaddresses). He carves deep grooves into silver and uses cross-hatching and dashing to create texture and value.

4.7 Yahmiss—Jolleen Dick (Hupacasath)

Born in 1991, Yahmiss is the youngest designer included in this discussion. She translates traditional Nuu-chah-nulth basketry designs into woven beadwork (Fig. 14), almost exclusively drawing from the basketry designs of her great grandmother, Rose Cootes (Ucluelet). It is important to Yahmiss that her designs reflect family patrimony and the rights that come to her through her maternal grandfather, who was the hereditary chief of the Hupacasath. Yahmiss majored in Aboriginal Tourism at Vancouver Island University, and currently serves on the council for the Hupacasath First Nation. During the summer months, she organizes a Wednesday night market at Victoria Quay in Port Alberni, thus providing artisans a space to sell their design work. She is interested in both the design and marketing aspects of fashion, and actively works to bring Aboriginal tourism and Nuu-chah-nulth fashion design together in the commercial market.



Fig. 14 Beaded bracelet, woven using peyote stitch and Thunderbird design by the late Rose Cootes, 2013. Photo by Denise Green

4.8 *Tl'aakwaa Huupalth—Carmen Thompson* (*Ditidaht/Kyuquot*)

Of all Nuu-chah-nulth designers, Carmen Thompson is probably the most directly involved with the fashion industry and also works as a costume designer in the film industry. Thompson is the daughter of Art Thompson, a renowned Ditidaht artist known for his carving, painting, and serigraphs, who passed away in 2003. Carmen Thompson was inspired by her father and had talked with him about her ideas to create a Nuu-chah-nulth fashion line. She received a scholarship and attended the Fashion Institute of Design and Merchandising in Los Angeles, and eventually began to work as a freelance costume designer in Hollywood. She is currently working for Arrow Productions on costumes for *1491: The Untold Story of the Americas Before Columbus*. Since 1997, Thompson has operated a design company called TlaKwa (meaning “copper,” suggesting wealth). In 2013 she produced 60 hoodies stenciled with her father’s design for the Indian Residential School Survivors Society (Fig. 15). Thompson uses new technologies such as Photoshop and the internet both to create and deploy her design work. Thompson is an up-and-coming Nuu-chah-nulth fashion designer and costumer and can certainly spearhead the future of Nuu-chah-nulth fashion design.



Fig. 15 Hand stenciled hoodie made by Carmen Thompson, using a design for the Indian Residential School Survivors Society produced by her father, Art Thompson. Created for the Indian Residential School Survivors Society 2013 Youth Conference. Photo by Carmen Thompson

5 Conclusion

Nuu-chah-nulth peoples participated in a dynamic and highly developed fashion system prior to European contact. Fashion was never stagnant or fixed, but changed with seasons, interactions with other communities (including trade/exchange), and internal social dynamics. Nuu-chah-nulth fashion change was therefore fueled by the prestige economy, highly developed ceremonial life, and hierarchical social organization. Easy access to an array of abundant natural resources and trade networks with other First Nations facilitated exchange of ideas, aesthetics, and materials. Materials used to produce fashion items were both locally sourced and exchanged: Nuu-chah-nulth people used cedar bark, animal skins, dentalia shells, and sea grasses to produce early garments, and traded for mountain goat hair, dog hair, and other trade items. These natural resources were completely biodegradable and left a very small impact on the environment. After European contact, the Nuu-chah-nulth fashion system changed rapidly with an emerging capitalist economy, wage labor, and governmental regulation of Native bodies. As trade networks became more expansive, new materials and resources fueled dramatic changes in style and made fashions much less sustainable. Governmental regulations required Nuu-chah-nulth people to adopt “Western” dress in 1914 and this meant purchasing fabrics and other materials from outside sources, making Nuu-chah-nulth design much less sustainable both socially and environmentally. As governmental regulations loosened in the late twentieth century, a revitalization of Native art and design emerged alongside new technologies such as serigraphs. Contemporary designers draw upon traditional skills, such as carving and weaving, to create new designs that appear in mass-produced fashion as well as one-of-a-kind originals in art galleries and museums. Although some designers have returned to using natural resources from the region, many continue to source fabrics, paints/printing inks/dyes, and other materials from outside sources.

Fashion theory has tended to favor Western design as “fashion” and non-Western, Indigenous design as “costume,” but these categories began to change with post-modern, post-colonial thinking in the 1980s and 1990s. This chapter illustrates how fashion theories derived from phenomenology, Symbolic Interaction, anthropology, and cultural studies, in combination with Indigenous thought and reflection through ethnographic practice, may be used to interpret and understand the complexities of Indigenous fashions past and present.

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