

Review Essay: Making Mannequins Mean: Native American Representations, Postcolonial Politics, and the Limits of Semiotic Analysis^{*}

***Taxidermic Signs: Reconstructing Aboriginality.* Pauline Wakeham. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008. 255 pp.**

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In 1984, Donna Haraway published her seminal article “Teddy Bear Patriarchy: Taxidermy in the Garden of Eden,” which critiqued habitat dioramas as semiotic pawns in the exploitative, racist, and nostalgic game of westward expansion under Manifest Destiny. While Claude Lévi-Strauss taught us that animals are “good to think,” Haraway suggested that stuffed animals are too. Her analytical construct of “taxidermy” was quickly taken up by scholars hoping to show how diverse cultural forms—texts, exhibits, films—traffic in a (typically capitalist) desire for suspended animation under various ideological (usually colonial or imperial) rubrics. Now, a quarter century later, Pauline Wakeham’s *Taxidermic Signs* attempts to extend Haraway’s analysis to a logical conclusion by identifying a coherent system of “taxidermic semiosis” underlying a wide variety of both historic and current cultural representations of Aboriginal people in North America.

Starting with literal mounted animal hides, Wakeham extrapolates a series of diagnostic criteria for recognizing this signifying system. Surface “skins” (or hidden corporeal indices such as flesh, skeleton, blood, or DNA) are taken as synecdoche for the entire—and subsequently “racialized”—Native body. Forms of temporal manipulation and ultra-realistic mediation “freeze-frame” the resulting depictions in order to preserve the Native American in an idealized, presumably authentic past. Recontextualization frames the body as a “specimen” for anthropological or scientific consumption, and thus for continued colonial domination. Having laid out the covert semiotic logic of this system, Wakeham works through four case studies in order to reveal its operation in a natural history museum, two early (but recently restored) ethnographic films, and the disposition of ancestral human remains, all within the region of Northwestern North America in both Canada and the United States. Wakeham adopts an overtly politicized stance toward her material—she desires to “interrogate,” “deconstruct,” and “defamiliarize” (pp. 5-6) these cultural texts in order to expose the colonial power relations that continue to shape both representations and realities of contemporary indigenous peoples. While this is certainly a laudable aim, the book’s theoretical and political intervention is undermined by analytical and methodological blindspots. It ends up an impassioned but somewhat overwrought—and frankly quite familiar—critique of “salvage” discourses and technologies of preservation, of anthropologists as colonial handmaidens, and of natural history museums as racist-cum-racist venues for representing indigenous people. While discussing the book in some detail, I would like to suggest that its approach is characteristic of a wider range of purportedly “critical” works on Native American topics that share two major limiting qualities

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(see for instance Lyman 1982; Hulme 1986; Rony 1996; Bracken 1997): a disconnect between the politicized goal of theorizing and the particular textual/interpretive methodology adopted; and a real disengagement with the idea of Native agency, if not with First Nations themselves as historical and contemporary actors in the contested fields of representation. My goal in scrutinizing this particular text is to open a larger discussion on how best to bring academic analysis into closer articulation with actual practices of cultural production as well as ideals of indigenous sovereignty.

Wakeham begins by laying out her theoretical orientation in encouraging terms by pledging to build—and improve—upon previous studies in a number of important ways. She claims to go beyond the metaphor of taxidermy by revealing its *systemic* and *productive* logic. She hopes to focus on various representational *media* in a single analysis, and to pay close attention to the specific *materialities* of each; this entails going beyond the visual to account for other *embodied*, *sensory*, and *affective* modes of response. Rather than looking solely at historical texts, she takes a *diachronic* approach, tracing their lasting impact, especially as they are self-consciously re-packaged in the present. Wakeham also rightly acknowledges that neither colonialism nor counter-hegemonic efforts are unified structures, discourses, and practices, but rather are *heterogeneous* and internally contradictory projects. Finally, to avoid the common semiotic traps of unmoored signifiers and universalized theoretical postulates, she asserts her intention to socially, historically, and politically *specify* and *contextualize* her case studies. I appreciated the promise of such attention, but aside from the sporadic nod toward these perspectives and the important diachronic purview, I found most of these promises largely unfulfilled; the cumulative weight of the textual interpretation strategy overwhelms and distracts from the important and potentially mitigating factors.

With these introductory hedges, Wakeham (who works in an English department) seems to acknowledge long-standing critiques of some North American cultural studies (e.g. Nelson 1991; Schudson 1997), but anthropologists are likely to identify many of the telltale limitations in her book, including a relatively shallow reading of texts, marked decontextualization, reliance on casually invoked jargon, argument by synecdochic conversion, and posturing toward the political while remaining safely disengaged from actual social movers or movements. Theoretically, the book arrives a bit late to the party—at times it reads like Haraway reworked via catch-phrases borrowed from Frantz Fanon and Homi Bhabha (“racial epidermal schemas”), Johannes Fabian (“allochronism” and the “denial of coevalness”), Paul Gilroy (“nanopolitics”), Michel Foucault (“biopower,” and “discursive formations”) and Jacques Derrida (“hauntings,” “dissimulations,” “remainders,” and the “always already”). All of this is certainly PCC (Postcolonially Correct), but despite the liberal and casual deployment of such terminology there is no compelling, underlying theory of racialization, colonialism, ideology, mediation, or even semiotics itself. Rather, thin veils of historical evidence are offered to connect what must remain textual interpretations, while specifying contexts and conditions are dispatched with quickly so as not to undermine the resulting hermeneutic equivalencies postulated between the “object matter” of the case studies (Wakeham prefers this formulation over “subject matter,” as it is meant to underscore and defamiliarize the process of objectification itself [pp. 3, 211]). In an attempt to avoid reducing this to a simple disciplinary critique (many anthropologists wield the same tools, blunt or otherwise), I will try to focus on the larger theoretical ramifications of the approach adopted by this book, which has interdisciplinary ambitions in the scope of its case studies.

The first chapter deals directly with the display of taxidermied animals and Native artifacts at the Banff Park Museum in Alberta, both in its historic incarnation as a means of promoting regional tourism and conservation, and in its current meta-status as a reflexive “museum-of-a-museum.” Here, Haraway’s familiar argument—about the use of preserved animals in the context of “ecological colonialism” and its discourses of imminent vanishing (see also Wonders 1993)—is transposed to the Canadian context and applied specifically to representations of Aboriginal people. While the historic museum casually juxtaposed Native objects with stuffed animals in a classic conflation of the “natural” with the “Aboriginal,” the current museum frames its small First Nations collection in a deliberately anachronistic “cabinet of curiosity” display. Despite the self-conscious curatorial efforts to critique this archaic classification scheme by historicizing it, Wakeham accuses the museum of “dissimulating” its current complicity in the maintenance of racist attitudes toward Native people (pp. 64-66). While wanting to extend her diagnosis of taxidermic semiosis in this museum onto mannequins of Natives, Wakeham’s critique is undermined by the fact that the only mannequins around today are in the nearby and *tribally-run* Buffalo Nations Luxton Museum. Her presumption is twofold: that the Luxton Museum simply and unreflectively appropriates the past (colonial, racial) methods of Native objectification; and that visitors today will fail to appreciate the two different museological contexts, instead simply conflating the exhibits of animals in the one place with those of Indians in the other. Although momentarily conceding the possibility of Native (or general visitor) agency (p. 68), she never truly grapples with what it means for indigenous people to adopt mannequins as a mode of *self-representation*—whether to articulate a specific connection to animals or “nature” (perhaps as a cultural expression of alterity or as a strategic accommodation to visitor expectation), or to maintain their own “salvage”-like efforts to preserve objects or record cultural knowledge.¹ Instead, museological proximity of stuffed animals to human mannequins or artifacts is, in Wakeham’s terms, a recapitulation of evolutionary discourse and racist domination—period.

The rest of the book extends the “logic” of taxidermy from actual animal skins (or their posited semiotic equivalents in human mannequins) to representations in other media. Chapter 2 takes on Edward Curtis and his “stasis-effects” in both photography and film, arguing—with no great originality—that Curtis was complicit in constructing the “vanishing races” that he claimed to be preserving for the artistic or scientific record (read: for imperialist nostalgia). The core of the argument is borrowed from Christopher Lyman’s (1982) grossly overstated but oft-cited critique of Curtis’s heavy-handed photographic manipulations, and Fatimah Tobing Rony’s (1996) invocation of taxidermy to critique Curtis’s 1914 film *In the Land of the Head Hunters*.² The most significant discussion here is of the 1974 re-edited version of the film, *In the Land of the War Canoes*, and its attempt to re-frame the melodramatic original as a documentary (c.f. Evans 1998) in order to recuperate it for an anthropological science that, Wakeham suggests, continues to fetishize the lost, authentic, indigenous past (not to mention the film itself). Working along the opposite semiotic trajectory, Chapter 3 treats Marius Barbeau’s 1927 film *Nass River Indians*, which was made in a self-consciously “salvage” mode, as well as its 2001 restoration, which specifically and critically re-framed it as a colonialist document. Despite an interesting discussion about the relationship of phonography to film as technologies of cultural and sensory preservation (pp.134-137), this chapter reiterates Wakeham’s earlier dismissals of current scholarly efforts to wrestle with these historic texts in an intellectually and politically engaged manner; instead, she sees any such attempts as blatant mystifications of (neo)colonial power relations.

In other words, Wakeham suggests that by framing the original films (or museums) as past “mistakes,” the re-issues risk perpetuating the presumption that the colonial project itself is similarly over and behind us (p. 155). This is an important point. However, Native players in the film projects are subjected to similar dismissal. Although she mentions it briefly in passing, Wakeham fails to really engage with the participation of First Nations in either the original film productions or in their more recent reincarnations, nor does she pause to ask how *Native audiences* might read the filmic (or textual or phonographic) records in any manner other than one over-determined by supposedly intrinsic, colonial, “taxidermic” significations. For example, what about current First Nations efforts to revive cultural practices—using archival resources as only one among many—that really may have been lost without prior preservation?³ Anyone who has experienced these films or Curtis’s photographs in a room filled with Native descendants of their casts or models is forced to reckon with the texts as complex documents of colonial encounter and intercultural agency, not simply as products of representational violence *a lá* Edward Said, Foucault, or Bhabha (c.f. Clifford 1997:127, 199, 361).⁴ While Curtis and Barbeau certainly trafficked in salvage discourses (as Rosalind Morris [1994] and others have already clearly demonstrated), and while we should definitely acknowledge the political dangers of perpetuating this logic through uncritical recirculation of their work, the textual critique offered here is rather one-dimensional and socio-culturally decontextualized.

The semiotic correspondences are finally stretched to their limit in the final chapter in order to facilitate a critique of genetic research in the context of repatriation debates surrounding Kennewick Man and Kwādāy Dān Ts’ínchi. Here, the collection of DNA samples from ancient preserved bodies and current populations, as well as the visualization techniques for analyzing them (such as craniofacial reconstruction), are posited as somehow “taxidermic” in Wakeham’s attempt to demonstrate their maintenance of her schematic logic. Wakeham is right to caution Canadian scholars against over-celebrating the successful cooperation that resulted in initial research on—and then subsequent Native return and reburial of—Kwādāy Dān Ts’ínchi; indeed, repatriation discourses can sometimes seem triumphant and exonerating, thus “dissimulating” the maintenance of official (government, scientific, or academic) power. And this chapter does contain the book’s most satisfying discussion of contemporary legal and political negotiations, which helps to situate the struggle over the two bodies in question. However, explicit First Nations endorsement of such arrangements, as well as overt (if also self-serving) claims by such agencies as the Human Genome Diversity Project to be strategically *anti-racist*, are largely dismissed by Wakeham as being smokescreens for ongoing racial essentialism and the fetishization of authentic Aboriginality. Again, though she mentions it in passing (p. 193), she never wrestles with the complicated and locally contested discourses of blood quantum emerging *from* Native communities, only those being imposed by scientists presumably—but not demonstrably—obsessed with “racial purity,” as if that was the *sine-qua-non* of all genetic testing.⁵ Mostly, she ends up warning about the potential, but not evident, legal ramifications for genetic mapping and visualization in the important political context of land claims, and her characterization of biological data as “taxidermic” *per se* (bodies “reincarnated” as chemical DNA codes for racist “preservation”) remains an unconvincing semantic exercise. Indeed, except in Chapter 1, taxidermy enters rather late in each case study and feels a bit tacked-on as a means of uniting otherwise disparate textual critiques.

The analytical and methodological over-reliance on semiotics is all the more disappointing given the potential strengths of the book. The comparative U.S./Canadian case studies provide a helpful perspective, especially when Wakeham takes the time to situate her cultural texts in terms of shifting Indian assimilation and management policies in both countries. I especially appreciate the impulse to track texts across time as their contexts of reception change, or as they are self-consciously reframed or resisted (c.f. Trachtenberg 2004; Elliott 2007). Most importantly, I share the author's caution about accepting, at face value, self-serving declarations of the "post"colonial; real and deep engagement with Aboriginal social justice demands that we closely monitor such claims, even from well-intentioned allies, in the context of lasting inequity and power imbalance. Moreover, most scholars dealing with issues of Native American representation are likely to agree that static dioramas, (pseudo)documentary films from earlier eras, and essentialist racial/genetic discourses are likely to "freeze" the Indian as a stereotype.

Unfortunately, none of these valuable standpoints are particularly well served by the specific interpretive formulations regarding taxidermic semiosis. To the contrary, I found that the thin hermeneutic efforts undermine rather than buttress the underlying and important political critique. Some of the problem is terminological. Beyond the heavy use of other scholar's catch phrases, Wakeham tends toward her own baroque redundancies, such as "preconstituted ontologies," "interimbrication," and "intimate contiguity" (pp. 4-5), which mask straightforward claims in obfuscating language. Certain key—and loaded—terms are used too loosely and without explicit justification.⁶ To give a sense of this from a single page (p. 204), words such as "recovery," "reconstruction," "reincarnation," "restoration," "resurrection," and "resuscitation" are used more or less interchangeably, so that restoring an archival film is equated with facial reconstruction and salvage-oriented recovery projects, all of which are collapsed as evidence for a single, purported, and misplaced fetishization for "preservation"—*of Natives by whites*—at all costs (see pp. 90-117 for a more extended series of such analogic and synecdochic substitutions regarding Curtis).

While I have nothing against semiotic hermeneutics *per se*, much less "theory" more broadly, what is missing here—especially for an anthropological audience—is a real sense of the sociology and political economy in which the signs are embedded and invested with significance by specific players. Wakeham's periodic attention to the larger political contexts in which her texts circulate—natural resource expropriation, unresolved treaties or land and repatriation claims, popular misrepresentation of Indians—is most welcome, but it takes a back seat to, and is fatally distracted by, the taxidermic interpretations applied to the texts themselves. And while I appreciated the frequent statements regarding the "material" effects of representation on Native struggles for social and environmental justice, the specific case studies seem a bit obscure and well removed from on-the-ground political concerns (with the exception of Chapter 4). Finally, perhaps it is my own disciplinary propensities, but the unique materialities of the media involved, not to mention their particular modes of social circulation, override the potential for their collapse under the umbrella term of "taxidermy."⁷ For example, taken just at the most grossly material level, only literal taxidermy *necessarily* results in the physical death of the "specimen;" thus, the extensions can *only be metaphoric* (or perhaps analogical) expressions, even if ideologically loaded ones. Notably, many of the authors that Wakeham actually cites, including Haraway herself (1997:247) as well as Griffiths (2002:36), have explicitly cautioned against the semiotic over-application of taxidermy to other representational modes and media.

The great danger, of course, is to see taxidermy everywhere until it loses analytical purchase.⁸ In fact, Wakeham discursively and performatively produces semiotic equivalency across text/media largely by describing various phenomena—mannequins, photographs, films, wax cylinders, human remains, and DNA—in the same interpretive terms that she describes stuffed animal hides. Superficial resemblance and discursive co-treatment are taken to indicate deeper semantic correspondence. This is structurally parallel to her argument that, under colonial discourse, Native people are falsely equated with animals solely based on their spatial proximity and similar visual treatment in natural history museums. Her primary evidence for this widespread “taxidermic semiosis” is her ability to interpret various texts according to its singular, a priori, internal logic (a standard critique of classic structuralism, never mind the “post” variety). Nowhere does she fully consider how *actual people* (specific museum visitors, film or photograph viewers, scientists) in *particular* contexts (school visits vs. film festivals vs. academic conferences) might read these texts, and whether practices of reception and “decoding” can in fact subvert intended messages (c.f. Hall, ed. 1997). What’s worse, the hypothetical viewer/reader is almost always (is “always already”?) presumed to be white; Wakeham fails to account for Native visitors to (or managers of) museums, Native viewers (or co-producers/restorers) of archival film, Native proponents (as well as critics) of genetic testing.

Wakeham acknowledges some of these absences, framing them as the result of conscious interpretive strategies of her own (pp. 38, 68). Although she reflexively locates herself (p. 37), and concedes that she chose to focus on dominant discourses and representations rather than indigenous ones, I found the repeated neglect of First Nations participation in, and reception of, the texts in question to be disturbing, both intellectually and politically. As I mentioned above, and as Wakeham would certainly admit, academic theories and practices are themselves performative and constitutive—they create interpretive possibilities in addition to revealing them. By interpreting texts as solely indicative of racist domination while ignoring alternative readings, such analyses risk simplifying the mechanics of colonialism and occluding other histories or perspectives, including ones that might be empowering to First Nations. Ed White (2005) has leveled a similar critique of “new historicist” readings of colonial literature that attribute a very high degree of structural coherence to hegemonic discursive formations while allowing little space for the recognition of indigenous agency in the colonial encounter, even though such readings criticize those hegemonic formations for occluding Native voices in the first place. Wakeham’s turn to poststructuralism for her theoretical scaffolding is highly partial and curious in this respect; she relies on it to deconstruct hegemonic/colonial representations without encouraging the same theories to open up holes (slippages) in those representations themselves, which could otherwise encourage counter-hegemonic appropriations and resignifications (in the realm of film, see Russell 1999; Ginsburg 2002; Raheja 2007). The very tools of discursive dis-integration are here deployed in order to erect a structurally coherent semiotic framework for colonial depiction at the expense of competing visions and voices.

Herein lies, from my perspective, the greatest analytical limitation and rhetorical danger of the semiotic method represented by this approach. Despite the impassioned—and obviously earnest—discourse of colonial critique, one has to wonder what real political service is offered to indigenous people by the maintenance of a view in which First Nations are only imagined to be targets of historical and representational violence, never willful contributors to these texts nor audiences for them. While numerous scholars in diverse disciplines are engaged in the task of

recognizing Native Americans and First Nations as active—if at times ambivalent—historical participants in colonial modernity and its various media (e.g. Phillips 1998, 2001; Cairns 2000; Ginsburg 2002; Deloria 2004; Townsend-Gault 2004; White 2005; Anthes 2006; Smith 2009), Wakeham seems to have a real problem with Native agency—both locating it methodologically and reconciling it with colonial domination without resorting to romanticizing “resistance.”

To her credit, Wakeham occasionally acknowledges the *possibility* of agency, but due to its posited absence from the archival record (pp. 37, 117), she chooses to focus her analytical attention on dominant discourses and colonial representational practices. This is a peculiar argument for many reasons, most obviously because it perpetuates the same bracketing of oral histories that she critiques in the courtroom context when it comes to adjudicating land or repatriation claims (p. 168). Moreover, her methodological identification of taxidermic semiosis—and the positing of colonial intentionality behind it—does not rely on “archival” evidence in the first place, but rather with interpretive analysis of available public exhibits, films, and scientific controversies. It is equally possible to *interpret* mannequins made from Native body casts, or filmic and phonographic records, or even genetic projects, as encoding strategic indigenous decisions, political postures, and identity formations; this is essentially a question of perspective and rhetoric, not evidentiary argument. Instead, Wakeham relentlessly posits a frankly untenable degree of Native disempowerment, for instance by regurgitating the claim that Curtis “dressed up” his models according to “[his] idea of traditional” Native life (p. 100). The reality is that the frontier photo-shoot was much more likely to be a collaborative endeavor between photographer and model, even given conditions of gross inequality (see Horse Capture 1993; Coleman 1998; Haukaas 2001; Rushing 2003; Zamir 2007; Glass 2009). More generally, where is the vast literature on the “middle ground” of colonial experience—the shifting North American frontier (and beyond) as a contact zone in which both colonizer and colonized negotiated the uneven terms of encounter (see Fisher 1977; White 1991; Jehlen 1993; Feest 1999; Kupperman 2000; Flint 2008). At the outset, Wakeham critiqued taxidermic representations for denying “historical agency” to Native people (p. 18), yet her mode of analysis ultimately reiterates the erasure.

By refusing to engage in an interpretive practice that might reveal and highlight indigenous agency—even, or especially, in the face of colonial power—Wakeham is in effect once again silencing “the Indian” as a historical and contemporary actor in exchange for a presumably political critique of colonial domination. By further evacuating real Native players from a textual account of these representations of Nativeness, the book is (ironically and perhaps unintentionally) maintaining indigenous invisibility, all the while dissimulating its own complicity in the process. Actual Aboriginals “haunt” Wakeham’s *Taxidermic Signs*, just as she claims they do her taxidermic texts.⁹

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Notes

1. As readers of this journal know, the literature on indigenous museums and cultural centers is replete with examples of Native people engaging in their own heritage-recording projects while balancing indigenous and non-Native philosophies, technologies, and institutions of “preservation” and social reproduction (e.g. Simpson 1996; Kreps 2003; Hendry 2005). Moreover, a large number of Native museums employ state-of-the-art mannequins in their exhibits, in some cases cast from living community members and identified as such. Even at the federal level, the National Museum of the American Indian recently launched a new searchable, internet-based database in order to facilitate the recording of stories related to their collections (<http://www.nmai.si.edu/searchcollections/home.aspx>, accessed December 8, 2009). The language used to promote this effort is quite reminiscent of “salvage ethnography,” with its prediction of imminent loss and a race against time. Rather than assuming this to be a simple appropriation of dominant (perhaps racist) paradigms, I believe we need to recognize the unique discursive contours of this framing, especially given its indigenous as well as government context.

2. For the past 25 years, many critics of Curtis have reiterated Lyman’s general claims as well as three of his specific examples of photographic manipulation (all reproduced by Wakeham): the pictorialist distortions in focus and lighting of “The Vanishing Race—Navaho” (1904); the darkroom removal of a modern clock in “In a Piegan Lodge” (1910); and the re-use of certain items of clothing across different individuals or even tribal groups. However, given that Curtis produced thousands of images, these few are statistical anomalies. Moreover, much of this critique ignores the fact that Curtis was hardly unique in such photographic practice at the time, and it grants total artistic intentionality to Curtis while occluding the active participation of his models/subjects. See Holm (1983) for an early critique of Lyman’s overstatements, and citations below for a discussion of Native agency in Curtis photographs.

3. My own experience with the Kwakwaka’wakw—reinforced by colleagues working with other First Nations—is that archival material is eagerly sought out, even if it is then critically evaluated locally. Ethnographic records are frequently put to use in land claims, treaty negotiations, and repatriation requests. Family-owned songs, legendary narratives, visual art forms, and ceremonial protocols have all been re-activated based on consulting archival materials as well as community elders. In an explicitly “material” example (in both physical and economic senses), Kurin (1997:70) mentions the rebuilding of contemporary Mandan and Hidatsa buffalo herds from the genetic stock of animals once kept by the Smithsonian on the National Mall as a turn-of-the-20th century ecological preservation project. Though none of these examples negate Wakeham’s critique of the lasting semiotic dangers of a “salvage” mentality, they do complicate our understanding of the material, social and political efficacy—for *Native people*—of the projects themselves.

4. As further context for my statements, I should say that for the past three years I have been involved in a collaborative project to “restore” or “reconstruct” the 1914 version of Curtis’s film and to present it with Kwakwaka’wakw descendants of the original cast and crew. Watching the film with the Kwakwaka’wakw privileges audiences to alternative modes of interpretation, which emphasize Native participation in its creation as well as Native perspectives on its legacy.

This neither neutralizes the disturbing or anachronistic aspects of the film's content nor shields Curtis from potential critique, but it does demand a more nuanced and multiply contextualized approach (see <http://www.curtisfilm.rutgers.edu>, accessed December 8, 2009).

5. As with her suggestion that the First Nations running the Luxton Museum have simply absorbed colonial structures of domination, which they now revitalize in their own exhibition practice, Wakeham's brief discussion of tribal interest in using blood quantum or genetic testing to regulate their own membership eligibility makes the same assumption (p. 193). Native American scholars such as Kimberly TallBear (2003), who Wakeham briefly cites, present the issue from a far more complex perspective that takes indigenous strategies—on both sides of the debate—into account. For instance, Joanne Barker, who shares Wakeham's distrust of genetic testing, nonetheless argues that “agency demands a better analysis than merely concluding that indigenous peoples are doomed to repeat ideologically-laden, overly predetermined meanings or fated to mimic their socioeconomic positions whenever claiming rights to sovereignty” (2004:572).

6. For instance, transformation is repeatedly rendered as “transmogrification” and fantasy as “phantasmatic;” travel through North American space is routinely and casually glossed as “imperial” or “colonial” (pp. 10, 41, 53); Native “exploitation” is assumed, not demonstrated (p. 63); museum collection is presumed to be “plunder” (p. 131); all classification is described as “taxonomic” (p. 188), and so on.

7. See Faris (2003) for just one example of a similarly Foucauldian critique of representations of Native Americans that brings the unique and specific materiality of photography to bear on the analysis of how such “representations” (as objectifications) work on both Native and non-Native producers and consumers.

8. In fact, by the end of *Taxidermic Signs*, I began to see the book itself as conspicuously taxidermic in character. Wakeham's method of selectively decontextualizing, dissecting, and hollowing out her texts—spreading their surface features over a predetermined theoretical scaffold—starts to look a whole lot like the process she decries. More to the point, she reproduces earlier “mistakes” in her own (explicit or implied) postmodern quotation marks to focus on them *as errors*. For example, she maintains the use of “Kwakiutl” to call attention to the term as a colonial construct (pp. 111, 226), and she casually calls Curtis's original film a “documentary” even after she critiques the description of it as such (p. 109). Her deliberate recirculation of these misnomers, even in the guise of her own self-conscious critique, is precisely what she criticizes the Banff Park Museum and *Nass River Indians* for attempting in their current, reflexive recuperations.

9. Almost twenty years ago, in the first “age of deconstruction,” museum anthropologist Michael Ames warned of just this analytical trap: “Once scholars begin to debate their own social constructions of other peoples' lives, as they are prone to do, the people themselves are gradually dropped from sight. They become the ‘disappeared’ of the scholarly world” (1992:155).

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