

Transforming Hybridities: Brendan Lee Satish Tang's *Manga Ormolu*
and Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas' *Haida Manga*

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A Thesis

in

The Department

of

Art History

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of Master of Arts (Art History) at

Concordia University

Montreal, Quebec, Canada

April 2012

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CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY

School of Graduate Studies

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ABSTRACT

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Wesley Benjamin Colclough IV

This essay discusses the works of artists Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas and Brendan Lee Satish Tang as they relate to manga and popular culture. Known as *Haida Manga* and *Manga Ormolu*, these hybrid works move through global circuits of exchange integral to a transcultural aesthetic where multiple signifiers have been folded and fused into one. Manga, like blue jeans and cell phones, unites viewers with universally recognizable themes in the art.

Yahgulanaas, a First Nations artist of mixed ancestry, introduced and developed “Haida Manga” by combining Japanese manga graphic novels with Haida narratives and formline, creating contemporary forms for old stories. In *Coppers from the Hood*, the traditional copper, an object of great respect and value in traditional potlatch ceremonies, is playfully replaced by car hoods sandblasted and painted copper with Haida Manga characters. Yahgulanaas' creative gesture demonstrates Haida is a living culture with an irrepressible power to innovate and transform.

Tang's *Manga Ormolu* ceramic sculptures subvert expectations of Chinese porcelain in Western culture through an uncanny amalgamation with war toys and techno-pop prosthetics. Japanese manga, found in fragments adjoining the Chinese vessel, points to the contemporary form of Orientalism where perceptions of Asia in Eurocentric nations are predetermined by cultural imports depicting transhuman dystopic futures of robot Armageddon. The distillation of ethnicity into one character-type is rendered ironically absurd. Strangely familiar, yet not quite the expected narrative of erotic and tranquil sublimity, these hybrid sculptures jar the Western viewer, and point to an oft forsaken subjectivity.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to extend my sincere and heartfelt thanks to the artists, Brendan Lee Satish Tang and Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas, whose work this essay focuses on. Thank you for your kindness and cooperation throughout this process. Your artwork will always be an inspiration and a light in this life's journey. I certainly could not have begun without your immense contribution. Dr. Alice Ming Wai Jim, as my advisor you have been an incredible guide and teacher, keeping me on the good path home when I would have otherwise explored every rabbit trail and deer track that caught my eye. To the Concordia University Department of Art History, I owe an extra special thanks to all of the amazing professors who taught me, and to all of the staff seen and unseen who maintain this space for us to share knowledge. This includes, but is not limited to, Dina Vescio, Drs. Loren Lerner, Cynthia Hammond, Elaine Paterson, Alice Jim and Johanne Sloan who also read my thesis and contributed essential feedback.

I never would have made it to the graduate level if not for the immeasurable help from Dr. Linda Morra in the Department of Literature at Bishop's University. Also, I also received much academic guidance which prepared me for this essay from Dr. Mary Ellen Donnan in the Department of Sociology. A strong background in art history was made possible by instruction from Drs. Laurie Milner, Claude Lacroix and Gwendolyn Trottein.

Aside from my academic instruction, I would like to thank my family and friends who have stood by me and supported me through thick and thin, so many, in fact, it would be impossible to name everyone here and now, but you are all in my hearts always. I must

make mention of my maternal grandmother who taught me what it means to have faith, compassion and love even when no one is paying attention, my paternal grandmother who still offers me guidance and hope when I am in doubt and in search of meaning. Much love to my parents who put a roof over my head and fed me even when they didn't fully understand me. A heartfelt thanks to my friends Rad, Leo, Erik, Marcin, and Scott, and to so many wonderful sisters, kindred spirits all. Finally, Je t'aime beaucoup Nyima! And Natasha Diana Stovall, words cannot describe how I feel...

Aho Mitakuye Oyasin

Thanks to All my Relations

Power To the Peaceful Now and Forever

May the Circle Be Unbroken

Allelujah!

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis chronicles the aesthetic transformations of two contemporary bodies of work, *Manga Ormolu*, produced by Brendan Lee Satish Tang between 2003 and 2012, and *Haida Manga*, produced by Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas between 2001 and 2012. Specifically, it focuses on the ways in which both artists borrow heavily from manga sources and integrate them into their overall style to yield unique works that nonetheless echo one another in strategy and influence. Although each artist approaches his practice very differently, this lateral reference of Japanese-inspired manga represents a very profound method of relating to other cultures without totally yielding to them.¹ Tang and Yahgulanaas contribute to this cultural phenomenon while they draw from it, playing on its meaning within their own art practices.

To address the meanings of *Manga Ormolu*, I examine the historical roots of Tang's practice, in terms of Chinese ceramic production, ormolu, and Chinoiserie as well as consider contemporary expressions in mecha/tech.² I set out to discuss the innovations of "Haida Manga" in relation to Haida narrative, material culture, and visual forms, especially formline. The forms, Tang and Yahgulanaas' art practices and their respective series of artworks, are analyzed in relation to commodification, authenticity, cannibal culture, syncretism, liminality, hybridity, technology, and globalization.

-
- 1 In other words, Tang and Yahgulanaas do not succumb to assimilation on foreign terms in their respective art practices, but actually effect change upon (trans)culture itself. Manga is interesting in the sense that it has a certain global purchase on popular culture. It is not Euro-American, and may be Asian in origin, but is internationally appreciated and participated in.
 - 2 What I mean by "mecha/tech" in this context is manga-inspired robot warriors and contemporary technology, such as cell phones, computers, and military equipment, as it is appropriated and assimilated into Brendan Tang's *Manga Ormolu* ceramic art production.

Exploring some of the strategies used by both artists, I follow the connections made between seemingly disparate and divergent sources transformed into new, hybrid constellations that span multiple cultures and points of reference. What interests me first and foremost about the works of art discussed in the thesis is the artists' ability to horizontally integrate heterogeneous material into a single hybrid work which shows respect to multiple cultures while expressing and expanding something representative of their own culture rather than compromising it. Tang and Yahgulanaas access and recombine meaning(s) which allow the viewer a way into their artworks and hence, their world. I argue that this is in large part due to the use of manga and pop aesthetics in their work. Adapting and innovating new ways of expressing living culture, Tang and Yahgulanaas fuse heterogeneous elements into a hybrid form of contemporary art. Recognizable objects and images begin a visual dialogue that the viewer is invited to take part in while at the same time the artworks' humour and semiotic sabotage threaten to undermine hegemonic systems of representation and exchange. The possibility of movement or passage is suggested by the intermediary figures of the trickster and the cyborg who embody contradiction, indeterminacy and ambivalence, which I discuss in relation to Yahgulanaas and Tang's work respectively.³

Born in Dublin, Ireland to Trinidadian parents of Chinese descent, Brendan Lee Satish Tang (b. 1976) began creating *Manga Ormolu* in 2003. He graduated with a Master of Fine Arts from Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville in 2006 and a

3 For further reading on the significance and symbolism of the trickster and the cyborg as figures in contemporary art and culture, see: J. Ryan Allan, *The Trickster Shift: Humour and Irony in Contemporary Native Art* (Vancouver: UBC Press; Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999); and Bruce Grenville, ed., *The Uncanny: Experiments in Cyborg Culture* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2002).

Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from the Nova Scotia School of Art and Design in 1998, and has been lecturing and making ceramic sculptures professionally since.⁴ Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas (b. 1954) of Haida and Scottish descent grew up in Haida Gwaii. He attended the Vancouver School of Art in the 1970s, but left when a professor told him: “traditional Haida artists don't use chainsaws and commercial paint.” Returning to Haida Gwaii, Yahgulanaas began work on a totem pole with master carver Robert Davidson.⁵ He studied Chinese brush technique and calligraphy in 1999 under Cai Ben Kwon from the Canton School of Art.⁶ In 2001, what Yahgulanaas would call “Haida Manga” was inaugurated with the publishing of *A Tale of Two Shamans*.⁷

Tang's *Manga Ormolu* sculptures look as if heavily armoured bionic warriors flew right off the pages of a manga comic and into a time warp, landing in the middle of a still-soft Ming Dynasty vessel half-way through the firing process. For example, in *Manga Ormolu ver. 5.0-g* (fig. 2), candy-coloured high-tech gadgetry protrudes from the vessels, vents, hoses, and access panels adorn metal plates that appear joined at seams necessary on any armoured vehicle or knight in shining armour. However, this time the past and the future have collided in some sort of freak accident, giving rise to the most “pathetic fallacy” of all, of things becoming human.⁸ Ceramic vessels seem to come alive, telling the story of multi-generational migrations across space and time, empire and

4 Brendan Tang, *Biography / CV*, http://brendantang.com/?page_id=2 (20 Jan. 2012).

5 Heather Ramsay, “Artists Portrait: Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas” (Galleries West Fall/Winter 2007) <http://www.rockingraven.com/2007-artist-portrait-michael-nicoll-yahgulanaas.html> (20 Jan. 2012).

6 “Artists: Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas,” Lattimer Gallery, <http://lattimergallery.com/artistbio.php?a=317> (13 March 2012).

7 Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas, “Curriculum Vitae”, <http://mny.ca/biography.html.es> (21 Jan. 2011).

8 According to Encyclopædia Britannica Online, a 'pathetic fallacy' is defined as the “poetic practice of attributing human emotion or responses to nature, inanimate objects, or animals.” *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, s. v. "pathetic fallacy," <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/446415/pathetic-fallacy> (13 April 2012).

colony, border and bridge. A con/fusion of radically-divergent objects are concatenated in an uncanny collusion of Chinese history and Japanese fantasy right in the middle of contemporary Canadiana. Resembling ancient pottery-cum-fighter jet, with racing stripes, wires, hoses, metal grommets, and transformer-like protrusions, Tang's hybrid vessels recall biker Tetsuo Shima's fate in the internationally-renowned manga and anime cult classic *Akira* (1983-1992) at the hands of a young boy who, exposed to a mysterious radioactive crater, gains incredible psychic powers before absorbing half of Neo-Tokyo into his own body, blurring the distinction between self and city entirely.⁹ In *Manga Ormolu*, seemingly disproportionate and ineffectual rocket thrusters, computer parts, and bionic wings protrude irrationally from elegant, innocent-looking Chinese dishes.

In "Haida Manga," Yahgulanaas has advanced Indigenous concepts beyond preconceived notions of Haida tradition, telling old stories with a new twist. Replacing the typical 'cell and gutter' layout found in American comics with formline and Haida Manga characters, Yahgulanaas invites the viewer into a world that is part Haida, part manga, and part settler. Similarly, in his installation work, Yahgulanaas combines semi-commodified substances with his Haida Manga designs, such as in the recently completed *Abundance Fenced* (October 2011), a steel public artwork ornamenting a concrete wall in Vancouver, which depicts orca whales to celebrate a record-setting salmon run. In *Meddling in the Museum*, a 2007 intervention at the University of British Columbia's Museum of Anthropology, the artist appropriates Incan myths and Toyota car parts alike. Using cunning humour and strategic irony, Yahgulanaas defies stereotypes that freeze Native culture in a timeless past. In an act of cultural sabotage and hybrid

9 Otomo Katsuhiro, *Akira* (Milwaukie, Oregon: Dark Horse Comics, 2001).

fusion, he takes the industrially-manufactured machine — a car — and weds it with Haida Manga characters, large-scale Haida formline narratives and traditional copper shields central to Haida potlatching culture.¹⁰ Interestingly, in Yahgulanaas' hybrid strategy, the material and the metaphorical work together to expand a living culture.

The works of these two artists tap into a multiplicity of media, craft traditions, and aesthetic strategies to express a heterogeneous whole in the context of transcultural networks. For example, static character-types and identities are re-fused and resisted while popular culture is used as a means of deflating the bubble of exclusivity surrounding high culture. Tang's Manga Ormolu re-signifies popular technologies such as computer parts, cameras, and cell phones to suggest the seemingly limitless global circulation of information and simultaneous presence of ominous surveillance technologies. In combining futuristic jet aircraft technology with ancient pottery, he questions our presumptions about inherent categorical divisions between high and low, past and future, and the separation of art aesthetics from technical craftsmanship. Yahgulanaas' Haida Manga re-purposes car parts as well as canoes. As part of *Meddling in the Museum*, he put a hand-carved Haida canoe on par with a factory-manufactured car to raise questions about authenticity, value, and class, as well as handcraft versus industrial production.¹¹ In doing so, these works reconfigure prejudiced notions of the popular as mindless propaganda or crass commercialism, offering multiple points of connectivity between low and high, rarefied and mass produced culture; complicating simple binaries along the way.

10 West Coast First Nations Copper shields are valued symbols of wealth, prestige, and privilege.

11 Carver and Firekeeper of Haida Gwaii, Guujaaw, and Bill Reid, the famous artist whose sculptures are featured on Canadian currency, collaborated with others in carving this canoe.

Manga

Significantly, as mentioned, the two bodies of work discussed in this thesis are connected by their reflection of an appreciation for the popular style of Asian graphic narrative known as *manga* and the animated version known simply as *anime*. As such, manga acts as a key cipher to reveal significant interpretations of *Manga Ormolu* and Haida Manga and at least a brief treatment of what has come to be known as manga is entailed before my in-depth analyses of the works per se.

The cultural roots of manga may go back to China, but the modern popular use of the term *manga* can be traced to the mid-seventeenth century to print artist Katsushika Hokusai's work *Hokusai Manga*.¹² Japan's modernization movement looked to adapt certain Western models during the Meiji period (1868-1912). Many Japanese comic artists travelled to the United States and Europe in the early twentieth century, learning from the foreign comic format, and adapting what was perceived as exotic for domestic readers. Since then, Manga exports exemplify and embody Japan's role as an economic and cultural superpower, demonstrating manga's 'soft power' to overcome and disrupt traditional boundaries, constantly contorting and transforming itself into something new in order to satisfy international market demands and lend itself to local assimilation.¹³

Much like historical Chinese ceramic vessels, manga acts as a cultural product readily-

12 Wendy Siuyi Wong, "Globalizing Manga: From Japan to Hong Kong and Beyond," *Manga: An Anthology of Global and Cultural Perspectives*, ed. Toni Johnson-Woods (New York: Continuum, 2010): 332. According to Wong, the written Chinese characters for *manhua* are the basis for the Japanese and Korean terms for comics. The visual and narrative form of sequential art which uses images and text to convey a message or feeling is found in many modern societies.

13 For explanation of "Soft Power," see: Susan J. Napier, "The World of Anime Fandom in America," *Mechademia 1*, ed. Frenchy Lunning (2006): 47-63. <http://0-muse.jhu.edu/mercury.concordia.ca/> (22 January 2011): 48, 49, 53, 63; also Douglas McGray, "Japan's Gross National Cool," *Foreign Policy* (May-June 2002): 48.

exported in commodity form, moving through global networks of transcultural circulation.¹⁴ Hence, manga rests uneasily at the juncture between locally-embedded culture and the universal global, between the homely and the uncanny, weaving worlds of virtual realism and fantasy where the reader might be able to find something familiar and comforting, and likewise, something disconcerting and incomprehensible as well.

¹⁴ Wong, 332.

SECTION ONE:

TRANSFORMATION AND TRANSCULTURALISM IN *MANGA ORMOLU*

This section explores issues of Asian Canadian subjectivity and globalization through Brendan Lee Satish Tang's ceramic sculptural series known as *Manga Ormolu* which he began in 2003 with *versions 2.0-d* and *2.0-e* (fig. 6). The series is still ongoing with *MO version 5.0-g* (2010) (fig. 2), and *MO version 5.0-k* (2011). Specifically, the section elaborates on *qinghua* (blue and white) porcelain, Chinoiserie and mecha (the last of which I argue is the ormolu in *Manga Ormolu*, that come together to constitute the series' key elements for cultural critique. Tang's aggregation of elements from Ming Dynasty China, eighteenth-century French aristocracy and contemporary Japanese pop culture into a hybrid object not only invites the questioning of human subjectivity in relation to technology, but also the notion of 'Asian' identity in regards to empire, trade, and global capitalism. The hybrid subject matter of *Manga Ormolu* acknowledges the traffic of Asian stereotypes such as the exotic and primitive, but visions of a futuristic dystopia also distort the lens by which images of the "East" are imagined as cold and mechanical. However, these racialized tropes are subverted using humour, hybridity, and hyperbole. Mixing and con/fusing, and ultimately undermining these cultural stereotypes, Tang's work exaggerates and expands certain expectations made on notions of Asian Canadian art to the point of ridiculousness at the same time it recognizes a very serious history of racism and discrimination in the Americas.

Works by Chinese Canadian artists such as Mary Sui Yee Wong and Karen Tam

(both based in Montreal) might be compared with Brendan Tang's *MO* series considering the way all three confront stereotypes of Chinese-Canadian culture and identity. At first glance, these artists offer stereotypical images of Chinese-Canadian identity reflected back unchanged in their artwork. However, a second, closer look reveals how these stereotypes are challenged, blurred, and undermined, subverting Eurocentric control over means of representation. For example, Tam sources Chinese tradition in her paper cut-outs, but goes a step further by updating them with contemporary themes. In the 2008 exhibition curated by Alice Ming Wai Jim, "Re-arranging Desires," coinciding with the 150th anniversary of Chinese immigration to Canada, Tam used gold paper and vinyl cut-outs to portray elements of news from the Beijing Summer Olympics, the SARS virus outbreak in China, and politics surrounding Tibet. Hence, on the surface, the wall-mounted paper silhouettes resemble traditional artistic design, yet upon greater scrutiny, the seeming archaic form belies the ironically-political content. Tam plays with societal expectations of 'Chinese-ness', subverting essential notions of the 'Asian Other'. In the same exhibition, Wong, created a line of clothing called *Yellow Apparel*, consisting of outfits covered in the motif of cutesy little 'brown-skinned' people¹⁵, as if multiculturalism were merely a matter of the 'coloured other' standing in for and representing all non-White people, confusing specificity and distinctiveness in culture and ethnicity, an issue also raised in Tang's *Manga Ormolu*.

Significantly, while Tang plays with these globally-circulated visual metaphors, he also reveals a deep appreciation for Chinese pottery and the transcendent possibilities of

15 The print consists of children dressed in stereotypical traditional Asian, Mexican, and "Eskimo" costumes.

clay. *Manga Ormolu* recalls the long history of ceramic production that began as early as 9,000 BC in China, and continues today in the present work, playing on a rich object history, and its relation to appropriation, imitation and propaganda.¹⁶ The following section describes two forms of transcultural exchange in relation to ceramics as it evolved in Asia and Europe. The first aspect concerns Chinese blue and white porcelain which is often considered representative of quintessential classic chinaware, although it actually came about as a result of a prolonged transglobal exchange of technology and aesthetic patterns.

The second aspect concerns Chinoiserie, which is an example of what happens when Europeans attempt to emulate Chinese artistic production. In the latter case, the effects of appropriation are layered and complex, occurring on a number of levels and in multiple directions. Not only is trade crucial to both forms of transcultural exchange, but power and empire as well. In fact, the title of Tang's ceramic series, "*Manga Ormolu*," refers to the practice of ormolu developed in Europe during the eighteenth century in order to embellish an object, and in a sense, to make it even more ornate. Ormolu was a key feature of the trade in porcelain between the Chinese Ming Dynasty and increasingly powerful European nation-states, where Chinese porcelain was consumed, appropriated and adapted to aristocratic European aesthetic tastes. It is a specific practice deriving from the French words *or* and *moulu*, meaning "ground gold," referring to the process of ornamentation through the application of a gold-mercury mixture which was then burned off in an extremely hazardous firing process, exemplified by the shortened lifespans of

¹⁶ Stacey Pierson, *Chinese Ceramics: A Design History* (London: V&A Publishing, 2009): 11.

ormolu guilders who rarely lived past the age of forty.¹⁷ Specifically, according to Tang's artist statement, *Manga Ormolu* “recalls eighteenth century French gilded ormolu, where Ming Dynasty China blue and white porcelain was transformed into curiosity pieces for aristocrats,” the height of which saw famous sculptor Jacques Caffieri design an ormolu toilet gilded in gold for King Louis XV's Versailles palace.¹⁸ However, as I argue later on, Tang's ormolu is actually mecha.

Chinese Ceramic Production: *Qinghua Ci* and Global Trade

The period between the beginning of the Ming (1368-1644) and end of the Qing (1644-1911) Dynasties in China saw the production of the renowned blue and white porcelain (*qinghua ci*) reach its height in production and distribution. Traditionally, this blue floral pattern (*qinghua*) was painted onto the white surface of porcelain vases, bowls and plates in China and other Asian countries such as Korea, Thailand and Vietnam.¹⁹

Sinologist Jung Su explains the transcultural qualities of blue and white porcelain in the following way: “the delicate branching-out and intertwining of blue stems and blossoms is meant here to embody Asia's subtle multiplicity, its complex heterogeneity over against the Western conception, criticized by Said, of Asia as unified Other.”²⁰ Like the floral patterns of ancient Chinese blue and white porcelain, the patterns of Tang's *Manga Ormolu* complicate clichéd stereotypes of Asian culture.

Su dates the origin of the practice of transfer-printing or stencilling a floral pattern

17 “Antique Instruments,” *Ormolu*, <http://antiqueinstruments.co.uk/ormolu> (5 Sept. 2011).

18 Ibid; Brendan Lee Satish Tang, *Gallery 1: Manga Ormolu — Statement*, http://brendantang.com/?page_id=4 (5 Sept. 2011).

19 Jung Su, “Thinking Otherwise: Asia Revisited ~ Othering Asia,” *Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies*, 34.2 (September 2008: 3-12): 3.

20 Ibid.

to the surface of porcelain using a blue pigment, usually cobalt oxide, in eighth-century West Asia (the European's "Middle East"), when the "arabesque abstraction of Arabic-language calligraphic designs" were popularized on the surface of pottery, and eventually circulated eastward where Chinese artisans adapted floral designs to the vessels using the same technique.²¹ While West Asian decorative techniques influenced China's highly developed ceramic art, Chinese pottery, with its delicate craftsmanship and proficient manufacturing techniques greatly influenced West Asian style and productivity.²² The "travelling aesthetic" of *qinghua ci* demonstrates the "complex and inwardly-intertwined" pattern of ceramic design which shifted and evolved through multiple transcultural exchanges of physical objects and aesthetic techniques.²³ The ability of the aesthetically-appreciated object to communicate and signify concepts of Asia as an artificially unified whole to "the West" are evident, but, as Su suggests, the "design [also] incorporates within itself the East's imagined or projected West."²⁴

Tang's personal family history entails a physical journey of successive generations extending from China to India, Trinidad to Ireland, and from Canada to the United States where he earned his Master's degree before returning to Canada, echoing the trans-global migrations of *qinghua* porcelain. Entire vessels as well as fragments of *qinghua* pottery have been found in places such as "Fustat in Egypt, along the Red Sea in Sudan, on the island of Bahrain in the Persian Gulf, and East African countries such as Somalia, Kenya, and Tanzania," and more recently discovered in Japan, Thailand, and the Philippines.²⁵ In

21 Ibid., 3-4.

22 Ibid., 4.

23 Ibid., 5.

24 Ibid.

25 Fang Lili, *Chinese Ceramics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011) 82.

China, the Yuan Dynasty (1276-1368) prospered from an increased demand for the high quality of Chinese *qinghua* even though domestic versions have been found in present-day Iran.²⁶ Through the global circulation and exchange of Chinese porcelain, its popularity and demand increased, becoming a symbol of “fashion and luxury... favoured by the aristocracy of the Ottoman Empire.”²⁷ The area known as Samarra, in present day Iraq, was a rich source of cobalt (blue).²⁸ Meaning has been shaped through the influence of myriad cultures along the circulatory path of these ceramic objects.²⁹ In this process, “shedding the markers of ethnic identity” and adopting new ones is a necessary survival tactic, according to Tang.³⁰ This transcultural journey, where successive phases of filtration and intermixture yield the hybrid contemporary moment, is precisely what is echoed in his work. In *Manga Ormolu*, hybridity is expressed through a profound infusion of transcultural motifs and signification. The object as carrier and container of information conveys meaning, endogenously and exogenously, in both form and content. Both structural form and outer layer contain meaning.

The contortions necessary to survive for a people under so many different cultural traditions is reflected in *Manga Ormolu*'s physical shape as it is bent, squeezed, and stretched to fit the apparatus of robotic technology. For example, in *MO versions 2.0-d* (2003) and *2.0-e* (2003), the visible marks of Asian-ness are doubled over. In these pieces

26 Ibid., 75.

27 Ibid., 77.

28 Ibid. According to Lili, West Asian merchants (Syrian, Persian et al.) would transport this “cobalt coloring” along the Silk Routes with “drawings of their desired products to Jingdezhen of China, and place their order directly.”

29 Jean McClure Mudge, *Chinese Export Porcelain in North America* (New York: Clarkson N. Potter Pub., Inc., 1986) 74. Islamic influence profoundly affected Chinese porcelain design. Evidence of hybrid transculturation was revealed when sixteenth century textiles from the Ottoman Empire and typical Arabic motifs were found on chinaware in Mexico and Florida.

30 Tang, *Statement*.

the ceramic vase appears intact, depicting a writhing but seemingly-smiling dragon with five-claws extended from each arm, and hair, horns and moustache adorning the open-mouthed head. In China, “Celestial Chinese Dragons are referred to as the divine mythical creature that brings with it ultimate abundance, prosperity and good fortune.”³¹ In this context, the Dragon also represents imperial power and the Chinese people themselves.³² However, with the attachment of techno-pop accoutrements, the updated traditional vase form takes on the appearance of Chinese ceramics clothed in futuristic Japanese Samurai armour. Not only are the vessels not disfigured here, but instead appear valiant, powerful and as omnipotent fighting machines. In this sense, it appears as an encoded three-dimensional family crest.

The *Manga Ormolu* works allude to the uncanny hybrid con/fusion between the fetishization of ethnic identity and capitalist commodities past and present. They speak to the paradox of globalization where postmodern militaries are mobilized to de-mobilize and quarantine human populations while forcibly expunging others in order to guarantee the free flow of commodities under the ideology of economic 'free trade'. Historically, at the onset of European maritime trade with Asia it was difficult for traders to find a market for their goods, but the Spanish conquest of the New World provided vast quantities of silver that was so popular it displaced paper money, practically exhausting mines in Mexico and Peru to meet Chinese demands for the metal.³³ Nonetheless, this did little to ameliorate the mounting trade deficit between China and Britain, relations exacerbated by

31 Crystal Dragon of Taiwan, *Dragon Articles: Celestial Chinese Dragon*, http://www.cdot.org/history/dragon_articles.htm. (20 Nov. 2011).

32 Ibid.

33 Anna Jackson and Amin Jaffer, eds., *Encounters: The Meeting of Asia and Europe 1500-1800* (V&A Publications, 2004): 4; and D. E. Mungello, *The Great Encounter of China and the West, 1500-1800* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009): 3-4.

the intentional flooding of China's markets with Indian opium by Britain.³⁴ China's ancient tribute system came to an abrupt end when Britain declared war on China and ravaged coastal towns after Chinese authorities attempted to confiscate opium and quarantine British activity during the period of the First Opium War (1839-1842). In a dramatic shift in Sino-British relations, Imperial China was reduced to a virtual colony of Britain who began dictating the terms of trade with China immediately, opening up new ports, and shifting priority from Hong Kong and the Canton region (Guangdong) to the city of Shanghai as the preferred site of exchange.³⁵

The relationship between global trade and human diaspora is evidenced most notably by the transatlantic slave trade which is also related to the history of Chinese porcelain. European and colonial American demand for goods accelerated the exchange of material and visual cultures. A cursory look at colonial porcelain used in the Americas reveals the appropriation of Chinese porcelain techniques for the fabrication of vessels which signified opulence; its use is often portrayed as part as the lavish lifestyles of White American plantation owners who have “tea parties” attended by Black slaves.³⁶ In fact, the drinking of tea (using chinaware), considered a very British tradition today, was appropriated from the Chinese, and quickly became highly sought after by European consumers when Dutch and Portuguese traders returned with it in the early seventeenth century.³⁷ China is implicated not only in the ornate 'china' porcelain tea sets used in tea parties, but also in the cultural practice of drinking tea that has been appropriated from

34 Ibid., 11.

35 Tim Barringer and Tom Flynn, eds., *Colonialism and the Object: Empire, Material Culture, and the Museum* (New York: Routledge, 1998) 29-30.

36 Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums, *Remembering Slavery*, <http://www.twmuseums.org.uk/slavery/online-exhibition/a-taste-for-the-exotic/>. (20 Nov. 2011).

37 Wissotzky Tea, *The History of Tea*, http://www.wtea.com/about-tea_history.aspx (13 March 2012).

Chinese society.

At the intersection of commodity consumption and human diaspora, *Manga Ormolu* thus upsets embedded layers of meaning attached to ceramic history. For instance, in Eurocentric appropriations of Chinese culture and technology, exploitative practices mingle with excessive opulence. In the strange commingling of cultural craft and aesthetics in *Manga Ormolu*, however, difference becomes difficult to decipher. An incomprehensible blending begins to blur edges. Categorical imperatives originality and authenticity give way to commodity and craft. Unique singularity collapses into the illusion of infinite replication and lack of origin.

Chinoiserie

Ceramic vessels made in China for export to specific nations transmitted fantastic images to domestic audiences in Britain and Europe, often depicting imaginary, exaggerated stereotypes of both Asian and European origin.³⁸ By the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, ideas of the Orient had really taken hold in European perceptions of the exotic other, where fantasies were projected onto the East.³⁹ Endeavouring to make their own versions of Asian imports in what is known as *Chinoiserie*, great liberal artistic license was taken in the representation of the Orient by Europeans, and for European tastes and consumer markets, mixing fact with fiction. Fragments of Indian and Chinese motifs, and remnants of Japanese and Indonesian designs, were appropriated and combined by European designers, and re-circulated as authentic representations of those cultures

38 Tim Barringer and Tom Flynn, eds., *Colonialism and the Object: Empire, Material Culture, and the Museum* (New York: Routledge, 1998): 33.

39 Jackson and Jaffer, 350.

without any regard for the origins or contexts from whence they came.⁴⁰

After Asia had been conquered militarily and no longer represented a threat to European hegemony, the imagined East became the subject of popular fiction, and served as an 'exotic backdrop' for wild tales of magic and enchantment.⁴¹ Figures tended to be depicted androgynous, languid, and melancholic, however high on hallucinogens or capitulating to some strange 'primitive' rituals.⁴² Imperial China became domesticated in casual, decorative scenes of the picturesque suitable for the bourgeois or aristocratic interior.⁴³ Chinoiserie thus was the imagined haven of leisure and luxury where Western fantasies could be played out and counterpoised. The Orient, as a dream-like realm tamed and domesticated, became the perfect source for Western Rococo design.⁴⁴ This psychological demilitarizing of the East informed eighteenth-century European notions of 'oriental exotica' whose decorative and literary potential were conjured up solely for the frivolous affections that would invoke laughter or a smile.⁴⁵

As a cultural trope, the East was depicted in an intentionally jumbled manner by Western designers, where sundry aspects of so-called Eastern motifs, whether Indian or Chinese in origin, was recombined in Rococo and Gothic wallpaper, or porcelain patterns rendered palatable enough for the typical Georgian home.⁴⁶ Hence, China, and the East in general, was reduced to a mere speculative fiction sourced for decorative 'exotica' and 'otherness' with little regard for cultural accuracy.⁴⁷

40 Jackson and Jaffer, 88.

41 Ibid, 352.

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid, 352-3.

46 Ibid, 355-56.

47 Ibid, 356.

Despite creative license taken by European designers, according to cultural theorist Jan Nederveen Pieterse:

Imperial frontiers are not only geographical frontiers, where the 'civilized' and the 'barbarians' confront and contact one another; they are also frontiers of status and ethnicity which run through imperialized societies... here colonizers and colonized are segregated and meet... where imperial posturing is at its most pompous and hatred is most intense, the imperial house of cards folds and paradox takes over.⁴⁸

Following this, I suggest that Chinoiserie also represents an effort to categorize and inoculate foreign matter, while hybridizing it. A blanket, uncritical application of the term hybridity might miss the issue of power in appropriation and categorization. In this regard, the critical difference is in who is hybridizing and for what end. While the Eurocentric consumption of 'other' cultures demonstrates a pathos of difference, disdain and distinction⁴⁹, it also shows a desire to make the other a part of the self, an underlying impetus to make the disturbing, incommensurable elements of difference in other cultures a part of one's own; a desire to retain wholeness out of the chaos of disrupted boundaries; and a sort of hybridized transgression of those boundaries. Nonetheless, in Chinoiserie, European and North American borrowers of stylized representations of exotically imagined eastern motifs ostensibly exercised and expressed a certain power over the subjects depicted, an objectification of the subject. In *Manga Ormolu*, however, the contradictory desire for the other through colonial relations is problematized and rendered ironic. Moreover, the issue of ongoing hegemony and power is not hidden but present in the physical scars and disfigurement of the *Manga Ormolu* vessel, suggesting

48 Jan Nederveen Pieterse, "Hybridity, So What? The Anti-Hybridity Backlash and the Riddles of Recognition," *Theory Culture Society* 18:2-3 (2001): 225-26.

49 Ibid., 225.

the pain and suffering involved in migration, assimilation, and contradictions within contemporary multicultural liberal societies.

Mecha/Tech as 21st Century Ormolu

Tracing the political philosophy of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, globalization theorist Kit Dobson explains that “wresting control of ‘the means of representation’ is an extension of wresting control over geographic space, and the contemporary imperialist project is connected to both processes.”⁵⁰ An April 2008 issue of *Fuse Magazine* published a four-page segment on Tang's work called “Kit Bash.” It makes a direct connection between Tang as a person and the artwork he creates. Over-the-top and tongue-in-cheek, this piece acts as a cipher for the entire *Manga Ormolu* series. At first glance, it appears to be part of a CIA file on a wanted suspect with multiple identities, a Power Ranger ad, and a toy model, all at the same time, complete with all the accessories necessary for constructing a plastic *Manga Ormolu* cyborg out of sprues of interchangeable parts, both mecha and humanoid. Tang uses hyperbole to satirize the cultural expectations made of contemporary art, and questions the ability of anthropomorphic representations to offer anything other than distorted fetishes of the real. The spectre of the cybernetic organism is raised as miniature human body parts are placed in positions which animate and anthropomorphize the *Manga Ormolu* sculpture.

The multiplicity evident in *Manga Ormolu* draws from many sources, and points in many directions. Ideas of transformation, assimilation, and adaptation are all present.

⁵⁰ Kit Dobson, *Transnational Canadas: Anglo-Canadian Literature and Globalization* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2007): 114.

In the following section, popular technology and mecha warriors are considered. How do fantastic juvenile war toys come into play? Is it armour, or is it camouflage? Perhaps it is the ability to transform, to adapt and become something else that is important. One thing is certain. The familiar and the unhomely collude in unexpected ways.

Binary tropes posing artificiality against the authentic are toyed with in *Manga Ormolu*. Circulating 'out of time and place' in virtual and physical reality, globalization is suggested through digital technology, mass production, and an international pop culture. Traces manifest in fragments of cell phones, computers, jet packs, export 'chinaware', and mecha cyberpunk shell fragments. It is difficult to locate the authentic when digital replication is seemingly instantaneous and universal. The postmodern decentered subject, the diasporic, the immigrant and the exile, the nomad and the electro-patchwork cyborg are echoed by the circuitous route of the commodity fetishized through space and time. The strange and grotesque agglomeration of heterogeneous matter congeals into sublime unhomeliness. The viewer is con-fused, much like the hybrid object itself.

For example, in *MO version 2.0-1* (fig.7), the object appears less like a sculpture and more like a digital transformer, turning ceramic into 0's and 1's, physical information into electronic. In this *Manga Ormolu* version, the Ming Dynasty vase is attached to the wall-cum-circuit-board hanging upside-down from its biomechanical sheath, harnessed by the mainframe, and ready to upload. In contrast, *Manga Ormolu versions 3.0-a* and *3.0-b* (figs. 3 and 4) concentrate less on protective armour, jets or proud, peacock-like displays of wings, and more on cybernetics. *Version 3.0-a* (fig. 3) seems to be out on a stroll, walking the dog. In this case the dog is a mouse — a computer mouse. The

sculpture is highly animated, appearing mobile and ‘in motion’. Wires extend from several places, including the virtual leash which guides the mouse. Or is it the other way around? Bio-mechanical spirit familiar guides the blind juggernaut? Or, perhaps the Chinese vessel is riding a chariot pulled by a ‘mouse’, recalling Gilles Deleuze’s notion of hybrid assemblage as a relationship between horse, rider and chariot, where each benefits, but is restricted at the same time.⁵¹

In *Version 3.0-b* (fig. 4), the blue and white vase has been levelled prone, and appears to be less in control, more restricted by the candy pink cyber-mecha apparatus which carries it. Moreover, a pod hovers ominously above the main body of the machine. It is unclear whether the Chinese vase benefits from this relationship at all, or is actually a victim kidnapped by a vampire-droid, to be siphoned of its life-energy and carried off to the master’s lair. It is important to consider this in terms of subjectivity, agency and power in the futuristic postcolony. The hovering pod may contain an aperture, suggesting exposure to an all-seeing panopticon and post-911 surveillance systems. Blurring the difference between self and other, domestic and public, empathy with the object leaves the uncanny impression of being a test subject in an experiment.

Manga Ormolu stands at the crossroads of the contradictions internal to subjectivity, place, and globalization in a world where structured power constantly impinges upon formations of identity and culture. The struggle for aspirations of egalitarian democracy, an imaginary utopic place of equal opportunity and access to power and wealth, is stretched and reconfigured from within the self-imagined West,

51 John Protevi, “Rhythm and Cadence, Frenzy and March: Music and the Geo-Bio-Techno-Affective Assemblages of Ancient Warfare,” *Theory & Event* 13:3 (2010).

while visual culture gives visibility to suppressed contradictions and historically racist imperialism embedded within this system. *Manga Ormolu* intervenes at this juncture as a visual signifier of the exoticized other in commodity form, a hyperfetishization of not one but two waves of consumption of (difference represented by) the Other — *Orientalism* and *Techno-Orientalism*.

As theorist Edward Said explained: “the Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other.”⁵² According to Said, “Orientalism constitutes the 'Orient' by making authoritative claims about its nature, using those claims as grounds for and means of its subjugation.”⁵³ This discourse informing notions of the 'Orient' serve to “constitute that Other... into a governable imaginary, and in doing so constitute the West as its opposite.”⁵⁴

According to media critic Toshiya Ueno, “The basis of Orientalism and xenophobia is the subordination of other cultures or areas of the world through a sort of 'mirror of cultural conceit',” at which time a host of stereotypes appear based on binary oppositions: culture and savage, modern and pre-modern, and “projected onto the geographic positions of Western and non-Western.”⁵⁵ Hence, according to Ueno, “The Orient exists in so far as the West needs it because it brings the project of the West into

52 Edward Said, 'Introduction', *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978) 1.

53 Kovskaya paraphrasing Said in: Maya Kovskaya, “Techno-Orientalism: Shattering the Mirror of Itself,” *Art Fairs International* (March 27, 2006), <http://www.artfairsinternational.com/?p=117> (29 Sept. 2011).

54 Ibid.

55 Toshiya Ueno, “Japanimation and Techno-Orientalism: Japan as the Sub-Empire of Signs,” *Japanimation and Techno-Orientalism*, <http://www.t0.or.at/ueno/japan.htm> (29 Sept. 2011).

focus.”⁵⁶ Recalling Donna Haraway's “cyborg politics,” he writes:

In so far as it can be said that humans and cyborgs each belong to different tribes and “races,” these problems are closely concerned with the micro-politics of identity, including the opposition and segmentation between classes, genders, ethnicities, and “races.”⁵⁷

The conflation of technology and ethnicity engenders a kind of techno-racializing and is the essential aspect of techno-orientalism itself, the assignment of mechanical and digital qualities to human beings based on their ethnicity or 'race'. In this case, it is the West's attempt to construct itself by relegating the repressed super-, or sub-human to the exoticized 'East'.

The relationship between power and culture discussed here might be understood through art historian Deborah Root's conceptualization of ‘cannibal culture’.⁵⁸ *Manga Ormolu* features tropes of Asian identity and material culture, specifically that which has been historically commodified and consumed by the West. According to Root,

The problem seems to occur when cultural difference is construed through particular systems of authority and is charged or energized for its own sake or, to put the issue somewhat differently, when this interest goes out of balance in such a way that the fact of difference itself is able to produce intense excitement and pleasure at the cost of negating the people or culture that is the source of interest.⁵⁹

The consumption of the Other as commodity fetish involves processes of digestion, translation, and domestication, a bringing of foreign (inexplicable and exotic) matter into the safety of the home (or national, tribal body), where it is displayed as a representation

56 Ibid.

57 Ibid.

58 Deborah Root, *Cannibal Culture: Art, Appropriation, & the Commodification of Difference* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1998) 30-31.

59 Ibid., 30.

of the conquered and reconfigured, as wildness tamed. In *Manga Ormolu*, images of catfish, Buddhist monks, idyllic landscapes, and regal figures act as tropes of the exotic Orient and sources of opulence and luxury, recalling the moment of consumption by European aristocracy and burgeoning bourgeoisie. But *Manga Ormolu 4.0-m* (2011), for instance, depicts a terrifying rupture in the seamless narrative of appropriation, as fragments of manga-inspired machinations squeeze and constrict the tranquil decorative scenes of floral patterns and stylized animals. This intense, ambivalent excitement produced by representations (fragments, tropes and fetishes) of the exoticized other stem, in part, from the West's malaise — its alienation from self and community. As Root puts it:

In the streams of exoticism that locate authenticity in other cultures, the image of authenticity and the potential for liberation attributed to cultural difference are based on the assumption that European culture is dead; because cultural transformation is no longer possible, Westerners must look elsewhere for meaning.⁶⁰

However, when these tropes of difference are hyper-fetishized, as in the hyperbolic and ridiculous depictions of 'Eastern objects of desire and fantasy', authenticity is waylaid and desires left unsatisfied. When excesses of sublimity, timelessness, and passivity found in the orientalized object generate a critical reaction, rather than satiate a desire, expectations are strategically subverted.

Manga Ormolu acts as both a material object and as a sign which symbolically subverts and reconfigures Orientalism. Ormolu references the imperialist European project which appropriated Chinese pottery in order to domesticate and neutralize the

60 Ibid., 31.

Asian threat to European capitalism, turning an export commodity into an ornate fetish of power and consumption. However, in Tang's updated act of ormolu, manga becomes the gilded ornamentation in the updated Orientalism. Hence, Japanimation, an international and transcultural Asian export, is reinserted into the equation. Yet, in a play on hybrid amalgamations, *Manga Ormolu* is transfigured at the crossroads of Orientalism, where the Eurocentric project of imagining 'the Orient' as part of the primitive, timeless past meets Techno-Orientalism, where fears and desires of technology and the other are played out in a fantastic place in the future Asia.

This is because the 'ormolu' in *Manga Ormolu* is not gold mercury-fired onto imported 'china'. It is a contemporary Japanese pop culture aesthetic called *mecha*. Mecha-anime, or mechanical animation, is a subgenre of science fiction within popular mediums of manga and anime, with narratives and visual style which references and depicts robots (such as in Osamu Tezuka's *Astro Boy*, 1952), cyborgs (such as in Masamune Shirow's *Ghost in the Shell*, 1989), and the mechanized mobile suits made popular in animated films and TV series such as *Patlabor 1* and *2* (1989 and 1993), *Gundamu* (1979-present), and *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1995-98).⁶¹

Manga Ormolu 4.0-c (2008)⁶² exhibits signs of violence and struggle, of domination and subjugation, as the techno-pop apparatus seems to be growing out of and subduing the *qinghua* style porcelain vessel. Quaint floral patterns are interrupted by biomechanical attachments whose utility remains equally incomprehensible. In this

61 *Mecha-anime*, or mechanical animation, is a subgenre of science fiction within popular mediums of manga and anime, with narratives and visual style which references and depicts robots (such as in Osamu Tezuka's *Astro Boy*, 1952), cyborgs (such as in Shirow Masmune's *Ghost in the Shell*, 1989), and the mechanized mobile suits made popular in animated films and tv series such as *Patlabor 1* and *2* (1989 and 1993), *Gundamu* (1979-), and *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1995-98).

62 Please refer directly to Tang's website for image: http://brendantang.com/?page_id=4.

juxtaposition, old tech and new tech seem to be engaged in some sort of sadomasochistic embrace. Similarly, *MO ver. 4.0-e* shows a chrysanthemum motif stretched and distorted as the mecha apparatus pinches and pulls around the Ming Dynasty vase, transforming this formerly ornate container into a war machine.

By combining Ming Dynasty porcelain with fragments of the cybernetic armour of robotic warriors, cell phones, and computers, as a form of decorative-design mech-ornamentation, Tang plays in the gap between an historical past and an imagined future, suggesting a science fictional narrative inherent in both. Spanning this gap is a transmission which connects the future to the past through the idea of technology, craft and artifice. Hence, the idea of Orientalism becomes a double entendre. The parodic humour that Tang uses in presenting the hybridized form of ancient vessels and futuristic robots causes Orientalist meaning affixed to the object to become unhinged and apparent as a meaning applied and invested in the object by the viewer. Tang's personal response to the question, "why manga?" is telling:

On some level I feel that Manga is a good reflection of what is hot right now. It has become a ubiquitous comic style (i.e. manga versions of Batman and Spider Man) and it is funny echo of an echo. After all, the origins of anime and manga come from a mash up of Western Disney and Japanese print sensibilities.

On another level one could view Manga as a modern day Orientalism.⁶³

Following the post/apocalyptic narratives of manga and anime such as *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, *Akira*, and *Ghost in the Shell*, *Manga Ormolu* lends itself to the questioning and reconfiguration of subjectivity, hence reality. Anime and manga critic

63 Brendan Tang, interview with author, email, 18 February 2011.

Susan J. Napier states: “Japanese ambivalence towards technology goes beyond a simple binary split between technology and its Other(s) to encompass a problematic contemporary vision of human identity vis-à-vis not only technology but also the nature of reality itself.”⁶⁴ The uncanny sense of the unhomely and loss associated with prewar Japan, epitomized in subsequent anime themes, lent itself to the spirit of play found in Japanese science-fiction and fantasy, where the material world became unhinged from reality, and a spectral splay of phantasmagoria the norm.⁶⁵

In “0/1 v. Zion: Techno-Orientalism in *The Matrix*,” Asian American Studies professor Gail Derecho gives examples of “high-tech racial stereotyping” expressed in popular science fiction films and novels, and specifically the three live-action films featured in the Wachowski Brothers *Matrix* series.⁶⁶ But Derecho illustrates how the animated film *The Animatrix* features a short known as ‘The Second Renaissance’ (TSR), based on a story by the Wachowski Brothers but written and directed by Mahiro Maeda, that subverts the dominance of Orientalist tropes within the other three.⁶⁷ Derecho explains how TSR “relates the beginnings of the machine-human struggle, which is the core antagonism of the entire Matrix narrative,” the Maeda-Wachowski backstory “turns the usual techno-orientalist tropes on their heads, and portrays the machines as the one-time wage-slaves of humans, the excluded model minorities, and the targets of racist, xenophobic violence,” drawing an allegorical correlation between *The Matrix* narrative’s

64 Susan J. Napier, “When the Machines Stop: Fantasy, Reality, and Terminal Identity in *Neon Genesis Evangelion* and *Serial Experiments Lain*,” *Science Fiction Studies*, Volume 29 (2002): 421:

“Increasingly in Japan reality has become something to be played with, questioned, and ultimately mistrusted.”

65 Ibid., 422.

66 Gail Derecho, “0/1 v. Zion: Techno-Orientalism in *The Matrix*,” livejournal/gailderecho: Essay, <http://gailderecho.livejournal.com/1824.html> (8 Oct. 2011).

67 Ibid.

machine-human war, and “Asian-Western conflicts, both past and current, which have been predicated upon questions of technology and bodies.”⁶⁸ Folded back into the interpretation of *Manga Ormolu*, it becomes possible to read technology itself as a mask or symbol for the rejected, denigrated Other within global society in general, and technology as a 'travelling' signifier of excluded identities. Considering the above reading of Techno-Orientalism, negative attributes such as primitive or mechanical associated with marked identities, specifically the feminized non-European, are revealed as products of systemic imbalances of power and agency. In this way, *Manga Ormolu*'s technological element might be read as a reflection of a racialized mechanization of certain aspects of society.

At the crossroads of Japanese manga and Techno-Orientalism, the stereotype of the Asian subject as somehow outside of the Eurocentric and patriarchal modern conception of being human. The constellation of meanings relating anime and manga narratives with the hybrid art object elicit questions concerning power, the subject, and reality. Ming Dynasty blue and white porcelain delivers a message applied to the surface of the vessel, tranquil and timeless narrative scenes ruptured by the quasi-violent/parasitic techno-pop prosthetics, while the 'body' or material form of *Manga Ormolu* elicits a message as well, one of hybridity, slippage, and perpetual transformation, tending towards a transcendence of form even while bound to it.

Manga Ormolu ver. 5.0-k (2011)⁶⁹ shows a gigantic light green appendage coming out from underneath the porcelain 'skirt'. The appendage is highlighted by a sea green

68 Ibid.

69 Please refer directly to Tang's website for image: http://brendantang.com/?page_id=4.

trim along the jet engine edges and fins as well as what appears to be a compartment panel. White stripes add a feeling of space-age technology. Various electronic lights, ports and circuits embellish the apparatus. The mecha protrudes from the porcelain Ming Dynasty jar nonsensically. Yet, ironically the two makes sense out of each other by their strange juxtaposition. The porcelain appears more like an old sweater pulled over the techno-pop machine, but it is hard to imagine a purpose for the machine other than an appendage of the 'fine china'. This aesthetic beckons a juvenile accessibility. Appearing like an oversized toy while alluding to an uncanny con/fusion between Orientalisms, the popular in this sculpture brings the ormolu down to a level any one can reach. Not only is it candy-coloured and fun-looking, the sculpture elides opulent refinement despite flashy ornamentation. Most of all, it refuses to be taken too seriously.

As globalization theorist Nikos Papastergiadis states, “We now need a discourse that can address this state of cultural ambivalence and help people find a new sense of place in the world and thereby short-circuit the appeal of both the neo-nationalists and corporate globalism.”⁷⁰ Tang expresses the impact and struggle of these two conflicting, interminably unmediatable forces in the form of the contemporary art object as if it were a *hyperfetish* standing in for the very human experience of multiple worlds of globalized East-West migrations, Chinese diaspora and the questions of identity in a superficially homogenized settler society culture. In other words, *Manga Ormolu* playfully pretends to ‘contain’ the uncontainable and unabashedly expresses the incorrigible, irresolvable inner and outer struggle of the transformational growing pains in the throes of coming-into-

70 Nikos Papastergiadis, “Hybridity and Ambivalence: Places and Flows in Contemporary Art and Culture,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 22:4 (2005) 53.

being of a new being invested with all the pain and suffering, joy and catharsis that this entails; all the hopes of an impending doomsday that must yield life and resolution.

In conclusion, Tang's own life reflects an aspect of transcultural globalization in which he inherited a history of migration that extends from parents who descend from China by way of Trinidad, and ultimately Ireland, where he was born, before emigrating to Canada. This story of migration is not new but reflects a globalized population increasingly in-flux. Tang's sculptures present the viewer with the process of mixing and hybridity prevalent in a culture whose origins are always in multiple worlds. Like the cyborg, *Manga Ormolu* defies classification and transgresses categorical imperatives. This blurring of boundaries causes us to question limits of the static object referent, of the museological practices of collection and display, and finally of the human subject. Tang demonstrates to the viewer, how culture, as a living aspect of humanity, exhibits seeming inexhaustible flexibility, as throughout the *Manga Ormolu* series each object expresses the very human quality of transformation, refusing to be boxed in and fixed by static categories. *Manga Ormolu's* ability to grow and evolve, despite the pressure to separate and compartmentalize, distinguishes the work beyond a sum of its parts.

SECTION TWO:

HAIDA MANGA AND THE SPACE IN-BETWEEN

The career of Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas is rooted in aesthetic diversity and a conscientious political practice. After leaving Vancouver Art School (now Emily Carr University of Art and Design), and apprenticing under Haida carver Robert Davidson, Yahgulanaas became involved in local struggles to protect Haida Gwaii from unsustainable logging practices and other aggressive business ventures.⁷¹ Chief Councillor of the Old Masset Village Council for many years, as well as a councilman for the Haida Nation, Yahgulanaas was no stranger to local political duty.⁷² Drawing on a history of sovereign First Nations working to protect Haida Gwaii's forests from corporate exploitation, his artistic skills were also honed from many years of illustrating a serial comic known as *Red Stump* (1998-2002 - *Spruceroots Magazine*: editorial cartoons) and a two-volume graphic tale known as *Tales of Raven: No Tankers Thanks* and *Mutants of the Pit* (1977 and 1985).⁷³ After twenty-plus years of environmental activism during the eighties and nineties, Yahgulanaas “turned his attention to pushing the boundaries of traditional Haida art,” expanding the possibilities of formline.⁷⁴ It was when a group of Japanese students mentioned the

71 Haida Gwaii was re-named Queen Charlotte Islands by British colonists after a ship named after King Henry III's wife, but officially recognized by British Columbia Premier Gordon Campbell in December, 2009 as Haida Gwaii. The name “Haida Gwaii” means islands of the people in the Haida language. See “Queen Charlotte Islands renamed Haida Gwaii in Historic Deal,” CBC News (9 December 2009), <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/story/2009/12/11/bc-queen-charlotte-islands-renamed-haida-gwaii.html> (20 Jan. 2012).

72 Marcus Youseff, Cultural Worker: Art, *This Magazine* (February 2003), http://web.archive.org/web/20040618173242/http://www.thismagazine.ca/36_4/cw.html (20 Jan. 2012).

73 Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas, on-line *CV & biography*, <http://mny.ca/biography.html> (20 Jan. 2012).

74 Mark Medley, “Pacific Notion: The Convergence of B.C. 's Haida with Japan's Manga,” *National Post*

word manga in relation to his work that Yahgulanaas was introduced to the term, and with that, “Haida Manga” was born, blending the “precision and rigour of Haida art with the whimsical nature of manga.”⁷⁵ Yahgulanaas' 2002 Haida Manga, *The Last Voyage of the Black Ship*, exemplifies this hybrid nexus between environmental activism and graphic storytelling where the tragic story of deforestation is told in comic form.

In the introductory remarks to a short 2004 Haida Manga graphic narrative called *A Lousy Tale*, Yahgulanaas explains how “a typical comic represents time and space as an empty white gutter. Haida Manga, assisted by Raven, reveals that time/space is an active, twisting and expanding vitality.”⁷⁶ This helps locate the position of Haida Manga as an example of a living culture inhabiting a hybrid, in-between space. This also points to the hybrid form of the Haida Manga narrative that fuses the u-shapes and ovoids of the Haida formline with Asian manga graphics in order to re-tell old stories in a popular contemporary idiom.

Yahgulanaas' work accesses and recombines signs from the natural world, giving a shape and voice to natural metaphor. His perspective on Haida formline is described by writer Marcus Youseff as such: “the geometric animal shapes, like the hybridized iconography of his own pictures, are part of a visual language that understands everything in the world is a metaphor.”⁷⁷ Put another way, signs in nature reveal themselves metaphorically. Yahgulanaas mixes media in unorthodox ways, even for

(October 17, 2009) <http://www.rockingraven.com/2009-10-17-pacific-notion.html> (20 Jan. 2012).

75 Ibid.

76 See *gutter theory* in Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1993).

77 Youseff.

Haida, combining Japanese manga traditions with Haida formline and myth. The tendency to label Yahgulanaas' work as hybrid, like Tang's, is predicated upon a prior assumption of difference and of boundaries—'sacred' categories—that are punctured, crossed, or blended.⁷⁸ However, the hybridized works Yahgulanaas creates are not so much an anomaly as part of a Haida tradition of making symbolic connections with people and places reflected in one's environment, poignantly demonstrating the potential for pushing the limits of the known into the unknown.

For example, in *Red: A Haida Manga*, an elder stands on the shore with a young boy named Red. Pointing towards the ocean he says, “out there is where we are conceived... Here on the beach is where we are born... and in there [pointing inland towards the forest], that is where we become adults.”⁷⁹ Haida communities in Yahgulanaas' epic story rely on water for travel, sustenance and exchange. In looking westward, towards the ocean, West-Coast Indigenous communities also looked east towards Japan, a place Yahgulanaas remembers hearing stories about as a child, where Haida fishermen would make port of calls after following northern fur seals for months across the Pacific Ocean. Here, he says, “they could go to the restaurant, could use public restrooms, they could shop and move freely and live freely as regular humans,” whereas in British Columbia, in Canada, “where even if you're allowed in the movie theatre you had to sit on the Indian side.”⁸⁰ Being of both Scottish and Haida descent, Yahgulanaas defends both cultures depending on the circumstances, but especially when it comes to

78 Jan Nederveen Pieterse explains that “hybridity as a point of view is meaningless without prior assumption of difference, purity, [and] fixed boundaries;” adding that: “Without reference to a prior cult of purity and boundaries, a pathos of hierarchy and gradient of difference, the point of hybridity would be moot.” Pieterse, “Hybridity, So What?,” 226.

79 Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas, *Red: A Haida Manga* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2009) 5.

80 Medley.

the rights of Haida where land, culture and political sovereignty are at issue.

In this section, I consider how Yahgulanaas' Haida Manga as developed in his comics and installations operates within a liminal, in-between space that strategically crosses borders, shifts categories and brings new meaning to subjectivity, especially in regards to indigeneity but not exclusive to it. Yahgulanaas mixes traditions from multiple sources, whether cultural, aesthetic or technological. In these works, Industrial, digital, commercial, and graphic forms come together in surprising ways. A multiplicity in style and form takes shape in three-dimensional sculpture and two-dimensional graphic novels and watercolours. Haida, European settler, Incan, Japanese and Chinese cultures, all influence and coalesce in his work. Blurring the boundaries between seeming discreet entities, Yahgulanaas moves his artform in the globalized medium of pop art and contemporary Haida Manga graphic novels and sculptures. However, Yahgulanaas is not alone in this regard, following a well-trod path as much as he forges new ones for the next generation. Locating this phenomenon, Lucy Lippard states:

In the late 1980s and 1990s, postmodernism's iconoclastic spirit coincided with a global wave of postcolonial theory that carried a number of artists from hitherto unconsidered cultures onto the shores (margins) of the art worlds... The concepts of hybridity, cross-culturalism, strategic essentialism, and other new ways of getting around the classic Eurocentricity of the modernist art world opened up new common ground.⁸¹

Certainly, First Nations have been making innovative art all along, but were nonetheless shut out of institutions dominated by modern Euro-Canadian artists. Ojibwe artist Carl Beam (1943-2005) is one Indigenous artist who used a strategy that stood at the

81 Lucy Lippard, "Moving Days," *Migrations: New Directions in Native American Art*, ed. Marjorie Devon (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006) 11.

crossroads of popular mainstream culture and his own personal expression of indigeneity. Other contemporary Indigenous artists who fuse pop iconography with their own might include Sonny Assu, James Luna, Shelley Niro, Jim Logan, David P. Bradley, Gail Tremblay, Brian Jungen and Tom Jones. Various, images of canonical European 'fine art', corporate logos, and industrially manufactured commodities are appropriated by these artists as expressions of contemporary indigeneity. Ironically, however, in doing so, they in part disrupt and overturn the dominant narrative of Indigenous as irreconcilably stuck in the primitive past.

In her discussion of the problems some contemporary Native artists contend with, Lippard describes “liminality” as from the Latin word for 'threshold' or “the initial stage of a process.”⁸² She states:

One of the strategies that has become globally popular is to emphasize syncretism, the bringing together of different influences from different cultures within one's own... This has the effect not of watering down specific cultures, but of demonstrating their complexity, serving to befuddle those who had memorized the 'fictions of authenticity'.⁸³

Hence, Haida Manga works to expand the meaning of Haida while it complicates and blurs the boundaries between self (communal or personal) and other, refusing to rest in a static position where subjectivity becomes objectified and fetishized. In this way, Haida Manga refuses to be quarantined in a space that would regulate Haida-ness as a cultural commodity endowed with authenticity and originality as a product of the timeless past in order to reinvigorate a tired modernity. Instead, it reflects a water's fluidity and mutability — its ability to transform and take on multiple shapes without being grasped so easily.

82 Ibid.

83 Ibid., 11-12.

Yahgulanaas offers his own interpretation and explanation of formline as a West Coast Indigenous form of communicating stories, social status, and mythic origins which explains ownership and responsibility as well as cultural and physical relationships.

Formline, like Chinese characters or Mayan hieroglyphs, is an alphabet according to

Yahgulanaas, capable of sharing very special meanings about Haida reality and culture:

The study of formline is like the study of water because the basic theme is compression and expansion... I looked straight down into the deep water that arched through the passage, swelling in the middle like a muscle, tense with anxiety to get through to the other side. It was so compressed. I could have cut it. I see that same tension in Haida design where it is either obviously filled, or seemingly empty, compression seeking expansion. Someone, perhaps, Bill Reid, quoted an inherited wisdom, saying the line has to look like it would spring apart if you touched it with a knife."⁸⁴

Contemporary artist Larry McNeil (member Tlingit and Nisga'a Nations)

states, "I see my work as a bridge between cultures that is satirical about both."⁸⁵ In a

December 2010 CBC interview with Sherman Alexie (by Eleanor Wachtel), Alexie

describes the predicament of being Indigenous in North America, explaining "we are

Indigenous to the land, and immigrant to the [mainstream, dominant] culture...

That's what happens to artists of a colonized culture... you're in the in-between...

every artist works in the in-between... you have to see the whole world."⁸⁶

Postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha explains, "these 'in-between' spaces provide the

terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood - singular or communal - that initiate

84 Daina Augaitis and Vancouver Art Gallery, *Raven Travelling: Two Centuries of Haida Art* (Vancouver : Vancouver Art Gallery; Seattle: Douglas & McIntyre; University of Washington Press, 2006): 156.

85 Marjorie Devon, *Migrations: New Directions in Native American Art* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006) 87.

86 Sherman Alexie, CBC interview with Eleanor Wachtel, Sunday October 11, 2009, accessed Nov. 17, 2011, <http://www.cbc.ca/writersandcompany/episode/2009/10/11/sunday-11-october-2009-and-wednesday-14-october-2009-sherman-alexie/>.

new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself.”⁸⁷ Reflecting the premise behind 'Haida Manga and The Space In-Between' in Bhabha's *The Location of Culture*, “it is in the emergence of the interstices - the overlap and displacement of domains of difference - that the intersubjective and collective experiences of *nationness*, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated.”⁸⁸ Ironically, in the very act of pressing towards the limits of Haida culture, Yahgulanaas generates an intensification of the expression of culture itself. By pressing against the boundaries of Haida, Japanese, Canadian or Incan culture, the meaning of being human becomes more evident in the nascent, if momentary and equivocal, experience of sharing.⁸⁹

According to Yahgulanaas, famous Haida artist Charles Edenshaw (1839-1920) was of pivotal importance in terms of relations between Haida and Canadians. He was the nephew and apprentice to the canoe and copper shield maker Albert Edward Edenshaw (1810-1894), and the great grandfather of Yahgulanaas as well as other contemporary artists. As an argillite carver, Edenshaw was a fundamental part of the expansion of Haida culture through the innovation of tradition. Argillite carvings served as a repository for humour, myth, and even social commentary, providing a popular form of communication formerly occupied by totem poles, formline house paintings and storytelling.

Like Edenshaw, Yahgulanaas goes beyond the limits of Haida, expanding into indefinite territory, and bringing back new ways of doing things. This is also the

87 Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London; New York: Routledge, 1994) 5.

88 Ibid.

89 Yahgulanaas published an inspiring book in 2008 called *Flight of the Hummingbird* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre; Canada, Australia) which is based on an Incan myth about a hummingbird who tries to put out a forest fire one drop at a time despite the incredulity of other animals.

quintessence of coyote and other hero-trickster figures throughout myriad Indigenous cultures. In an act of compression, Haida culture is reconfigured into something more than what it was. It breathes like a person, or the cosmos — expanding and contracting...

For generations the Haida Nation was in a period of compression. In the 1970's when I went to apprentice with Robert [Davidson] on a project in Old Massett, I experienced an expansion. It was a new adventure---poles were being raised, Massett was building a longhouse, and dancing it and singing it. We were laughing. That night I retold an old story of the feast hall, new words came in, "fast rainbow trout canoe," had become "speedboat." People didn't mind the playfulness. We were all accelerating and expanding...

~Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas⁹⁰

In *The War of the Blink* (figs. 17 and 18), a small fly averts a tribal war. This Haida oral narrative presented in graphic form demonstrates Yahgulanaas' gift for dialogue, and in this story a humble fisherman sees an unusual forest fly many miles out to sea, but is laughed at by his people when he tries to convince them this is a sign that danger is imminent. Interestingly, the graphic narrative carries the story forward along a linear trajectory, but is folded back into the larger picture, the vocabulary of the logographic formline. Yahgulanaas states that he works with "graphic publications, so that the work is as accessible as it once was, when everyone in the Indigenous world was literate and could read design... Graphics, comics, manga—they are now the truly accessible language for all, regardless of class or culture."⁹¹

Comics as a medium for communicating is unprecedented in its ability to appeal to a wide-ranging audience: the visual narrates as much as words, and action and emotion are depicted graphically. This form, already a synthesis of text and image, makes an ideal

90 Augaitis, 157.

91 Ibid, 168.

medium for popular expression as Indigenous activist Gord Hill (Kwakwaka'wakw) illustrates in his *The 500 Years of Resistance Comic Book*.⁹² Hill's book depicts the various movements of resistance to colonization by First Nations throughout the Americas in an accessible, popular form.

Yahgulanaas also recognizes the strength in comics as a tool of popular communication. His *Red: A Haida Manga* (2009) (figs. 14-16) is the story of a young warrior orphan, Red, who is driven by vengeance after a neighbouring tribe kidnaps his sister. Red begins amassing weapons from 'The Traders', and after rescuing Carpenter, a man who has a gift for making deadly weapons, the two set out to build a massive killer whale submarine. Finally, Red avenges his sister's kidnapping by killing and beheading her husband and father of his nephew. Upon realizing his actions, Red averts an all-out tribal war by shooting an arrow into the sky at such a high arc that it comes back down upon him. However tragic, this story teaches a lesson. Perhaps it is didactic, but it is worth considering Kobena Mercer's text in *Pop Art and Vernacular Cultures*, when he states: "Exploring the vernacular as an entangled space in which 'popular' and 'official' world-views are constantly antagonised in shifting patterns of authority and subversion, these critical perspectives demonstrate how pop art strategies 'gave permission' to dissonant viewpoints that came into visibility as a result of the de-centring and fragmentation of monocultural consensus in the 1960's..."⁹³ Thus *Red's* plot could be seen as presenting an ambiguity that goes against Western traditions of absolute heroism and

92 Gord Hill, *The 500 Years of Resistance Comic Book* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2010); see also Michael A. Sheyahshe, *Native Americans in Comic Books: A Critical Study* (Jefferson, N. C.: McFarland & Co., 2008).

93 Kobena Mercer, *Pop Art and Vernacular Cultures* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press ; London : Iniva, Institute of International Visual Arts, 2007) 10.

binary polar opposites of good and evil. The story might even be read as a critique of Haida-European Settler colonial relationships, but the complex narrative remains open, allowing for multiple interpretations.

The graphic formline is especially important in *Red* as it shapes the entire experience of the work, articulating the story through a Haida logographic form (figs. 14-16). Each page depicts a different scene in the story as it unfolds in a linear sequence of events. However, there are no singular rectangular panels separated by empty gutters, as in conventional comic formats, but scenes that unfold within the ovoids and u-shapes of a macrocosmic pattern representing the same story through a traditional formline motif, presenting an iconic graphic whole and a narrative story simultaneously. The inside cover invites the reader/viewer to cut up the entire book, removing each page and re-assembling it into a four metre long formline. This multivalent narrative is indicative of Yahgulanaas' strategy as a whole, as in trickster-like fashion, he invites us to take part in the process of destruction and re-creation in order to realize the bridging of the story from one cultural paradigm to another, one popular style and medium to another, and in this process of exchange, a globalizing of the Haida epic narrative and an indigenizing of the manga comic format occurs simultaneously.

According to Yahgulanaas, "I am attracted to the idea that manga (pictures without limitations) might signal that an evolution of Haida design into another contemporary technique (as metal jewelry or silk screen once was) but need not be seen as contained within a Euro-centric world ("comics")."⁹⁴ He compares his own hybrid strategy (using a cultural form which combines Haida with another cultural innovation),

94 Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas, interview with author, email, 8 December 2010.

to that of previous Haida artists who in fact did basically the same thing.⁹⁵

I self-identify as a hybrid and appreciate how I am able to flow back and forth through the spaces between and beyond the binary world of indigene and settler. I feel not only competent in two cultural political worlds, not only a dual citizen but also responsible to talk about the other. From time to time I will defend that which is different and other. For example I enjoy reading Robert Bringhurst and understand that his apparently clumsily Haida springs from his deep affections for his now departed friend Bill Reid. Some Haida individuals were upset and suggested his work was tainted. I speak in support of his work amongst these people. In another example amongst Canadians I will defend the free constitution of the Haida Nation and its rights to be its broadest aspirations of governance. I will argue that should Canada so deeply desire to own us as citizens and our archipelago as property this is best done with love and not with assumed and by the force of legislation that is inconsistent with its own Constitution.

How is it even possible to be an artist removed from ones identity?

~Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas, 2010⁹⁶

Installation Work

Two parallel forms of Haida Manga make up Yahgulanaas' oeuvre: two-dimensional Haida Manga graphic novels, and a series of sculptural installations initially introduced as part of the 2007 *Meddling in the Museum* intervention at the University of British Columbia's Museum of Anthropology (MOA). With a trickster-like guile, Yahgulanaas playfully changes meanings long-accepted as canonical, upsetting Eurocentric configurations of 'Natural History'. Contemporary art historian Jean Fisher states: "When the Native artist speaks as the author rather than bearer of (an other's) meaning, she or he precipitates an epistemological crisis, which exposes the fundamental instability of those knowledges that circumscribe the social and political place of colonized peoples."⁹⁷ As

95 Such as Bill Reid, Robert Davidson, Charlers Edenshaw, or any number of Haida Innovators.

96 Yahgulanaas, *Interview*, Dec. 8, 2010.

97 Jean Fisher, "In Search of the "Inauthentic": Disturbing Signs in Contemporary Native American Art, (Art Journal, Fall 1992), 44.

Yahgulanaas explains, "that strangely contorted term 'traditional' does not reflect my understanding of the potency and expansiveness of my Haida heritage."⁹⁸ Likewise, Haida Manga's hybridity is also a form of innovation and survival.

Haida Manga is both Japanese and Haida, both Asian and Indigenous, both global and local, yet neither one nor the other at the same time. This might shed light on the political import of *Pedal to the Meddle* (2007) (fig. 13). Here, a Pontiac Firefly has been 'Indigenized' with a Haida Manga 'firefly' painted on the hood along with a new paint job of autobody paint, copper leaf and argillite dust. Pontiac, an Indigenous leader, is re-appropriated by Yahgulanaas in this shrewd act.⁹⁹ Yahgulanaas has taken the traditionally-carved authentic canoe made by elder artists Bill Reid and Guujaaw in 1985, and strapped it to the roof, gesturally making a quick get-away with tire tread skid-marks left behind. Painting the Firefly with copper leaf and argillite dust is especially significant, for the copper shield figured as the most valuable and symbolically potent component of Haida culture while argillite carvings themselves, beginning early in the nineteenth century, became the newest, yet most prolifically traded form of Haida art. Typically, copper shields were given names like Sea Lion and Beaver Face, but at the height of West Coast potlatching, some famous coppers were called All-The-Other-Coppers-Are-Ashamed-To-Look-At-It, Making-The-Home-Empty-Of-Blankets, and About-Whose-Possession-All-Are-Quarrelling, demonstrating Native humour at the centre of intensified

98 Michael N. Yahgulanaas, *Aboriginal Times* (2007), review of *Haida Manga*. Rocking Raven, accessed Oct. 14, 2009, <http://www.rockingraven.com/2007-haida-manga.html>.

99 "Pontiac was a war chief of the Ottawa. Born around 1720 near Lake Erie, he was a gifted speaker, strategist, and military commander." Beginning in 1763, Pontiac, allied with war chiefs from neighboring tribes, led a successful campaign against British forts throughout the Great Lakes region, capturing eight of twelve forts, and driving out many settlers. This led to the British-issued *1763 Royal Proclamation* which set a boundary line for settlers and recognized Native title to land. Hill, *The 500 Years of Resistance Comic Book*, 44-45.

social relations. But in 1885, after Canada and the U. S. had banned potlatching, Haida turned much of their artistic output towards argillite carving.¹⁰⁰ Argillite carvings were originally inspired by whaler's scrimshaw and fur trader's tobacco pipes according to some theories, but the hardened clay-like substance comes from Slatechuck Mountain at Haida Gwaii as exclusively a Haida innovation.¹⁰¹

In the 2007 work *Bone Box* (fig. 12), Yahgulanaas re-purposed the anthropologist's artifact tray, and made it into a versatile, interactive piece that works when a participant turns the copper crank. This action moves each of the twelve panels into a position where the bentwood boxes behind can be seen along with “the ancient cedar poles taken from Indigenous lands” just outside the window.¹⁰² The allusion to James Luna's performance art 1985-87 *Artifact Piece* is evident, particularly given the images on Yahgulanaas' personal website (www.mny.ca), where he lays prone on the floor in front of the work. In the first one, the individual panels spin revealing the distinctive formline designs on the West Coast bentwood boxes just behind it, cedar poles in the centre, and the sea and coastline beyond. The spinning panels blur all three together, as the body of Yahgulanaas confronts us with the colonial past, reminding the viewer of the history anthropological research which often prioritized the collecting, sorting, and categorization of Indigenous people's remains over the well-being of the people themselves. The second image depicts a whole formline motif out of twelve individual panels. According to Yahgulanaas, each tray represents a different word of the

100 Carol Sheehan, *Pipes That Won't Smoke, Coal That Won't Burn: Haida Sculpture in Argillite* (Calgary Alberta: Glenbow Museum, 1981):19-21.

101 Ibid, 18-21; Carol Sheehan, *Breathing stone: Contemporary Haida Argillite Sculpture* (Calgary: Frontenac House, 2008): 18.

102 Ramsay.

sentence: “Stack of plywood trays built to contain the remains of our culture. The word 'our' is inclusive in so far as we all — Indigenous and settler — are defined in part by the act of collecting.”¹⁰³

One Bone Box, an acrylic wash painting on board (archaeology storage tray) was originally intended as a replacement for one of the twelve panels in *Bone Box*, damaged from *Meddling with the Museum*. However, another replacement was made that matched the original better so this one remained a separate piece that nonetheless referred back to, drew from, and even informed the interpretation of the original *Bone Box*. This work uses a character that Yahgulanaas' four-year-old daughter named 'Kookamanda'. Depicted with a black hood in a white robe, the figure represents the “notion of the Indian as an uncivilized evolutionary creature, recalling the high school biology text book images showing the rise of the singular cell to fish, crawling to landscape, becoming monkey and then man.”¹⁰⁴ This character points to racist ideologies and Western pseudo-sciences that portrayed the Native as evolutionarily inferior to the European, arrested in development and child-like.

Another character in *One Bone Box* relates to Christian iconography. It is multifarious, and connects to other figures. God-like, it is made completely out of Haida formline ovoid and u-shapes, and floats above a green mountain in a blue sky. Its foot transforms into a figure with a cruciform hat which makes out the top of another figure pressed into another, all along the left side of the panel until it reaches the Kookamanda character who looks off towards something outside of the picture frame. These figures are

¹⁰³ The Path Gallery, “One Bone Box — Northwest Coast Native Art,” The Path Gallery, <http://www.pathgallery.com/itoolkit.asp?pg=products&specific=jpmsdmr0> (26 November 2010).

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

connected to the spiritual world. The blue God-like figure wears a wristwatch and pinches and pulls the red ovoid shape which contains the material world and anchors the spiritual. On the bottom edge of the work “contain” is written. *One Bone Box* corresponds to the word 'contain' in the phrase: “Stack of plywood trays built to contain the remains of our culture.” Containing a very profound metaphor, the work negotiates identity and exchange in a liminal space in-between cultures, peoples and worlds.

I am one of many going through a fence, building a gate, creating a narrow passageway so that we can experience the other side without fear or hyperbole.

~Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas¹⁰⁵

At the gates of the Museum of Anthropology in 2007, visitors were greeted by an ancient tradition of innovation. Where coppers were historically collected and displayed by Haida as symbols of social status and wealth, Yahgulanaas displays two copper shields made from recycled car parts known collectively as *Coppers from the Hood* (figs. 8- 11). Installed next to “cast-concrete dedications by the federal and provincial governments that have been on the museum's exterior pillar since its opening in 1976 — dedications Yahgulanaas sees as “'land-claim statements' in need of redress;” these shields welcome visitors and a new signification for the museum.¹⁰⁶ Through the humorous title taken from police lingo, one of the coppers, *Stolen But Recovered* (fig. 9), also alludes to the colonial legacies of the Potlatch Ban (1884- 1951), when important ceremonial gatherings were suppressed, First Nations leaders imprisoned, and highly valued items such as the copper

105 Augaitis, 157.

106 Robin Laurence, “Re-collecting the Coast,” *The Georgia Straight*, 5 July 2007, <http://www.rockingraven.com/2007-07-05-re-collecting-the-coast.html> (26 Nov. 2010).

shield confiscated by the Canadian government.¹⁰⁷ The material parts themselves are made from the hoods of a Plymouth and a Pontiac, sandblasted and painted with a copper leaf. The Plymouth hood connotes the land that was taken by pilgrims beginning with a colony supposedly established near Plymouth Rock, Massachusetts in 1620, while the Pontiac hood refers to how the Indigenous leader Yahgulanaas 'recovers' for the purpose of a contemporary revision of historical appropriations. *Two Sisters*, on the other hand, is made from the hoods of a Chevy/Geo Metro and a Dodge Dynasty.¹⁰⁸ The American line of Geo Metro was produced as the Pontiac Firefly in Canada as a result of the hybrid relationship between Chevrolet and Suzuki. The formline design on the updated copper refers to the story of the Two Sisters in which a historic peace accord was reached between the Haida and the Salish.

Yahgulanaas' Haida Manga body of work emphasizes a strategy which re-shapes and re-informs the meaning of both Indigenous contemporary art and what human culture is, what it means to move beyond boundaries, and what it means to confront colonial history head-on, albeit with playful irony and strategic humour. Standing at the crossroads of hybrid exchange, Yahgulanaas boldly expands Haida culture and humanity's capacity to recognize itself at the same time.

Once we begin to take ourselves less seriously we might find we actually love ourselves.

~Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas, 2011¹⁰⁹

107 Ronald William Hawker, *Tales of Ghosts: First Nations Art in British Columbia, 1922-61*, Vancouver: UBC Press, 2003.

108 Please see the following website for images of *Two Sisters* (2007):

http://www.houseofthespiritbear.com/Michael%20Nicoll/michael_nicoll_yahgulanaas.htm (15 April 2012).

109 Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas, interview with author, email exchange, 20 May 2011.

CONCLUSION

Peoples throughout history have bought, adopted or pillaged technologies from one another, often through the mechanisms of war, trade and espionage. ‘Nations’ and ‘cultures’ are not discrete entities, but are rather continually evolving expressions of social history, economic imperialism and geo-politics.

Viewed in this way, globalization is a historic trend, but one that is accelerating. The rate and extent of globalization has increased exponentially through increasingly complex technological revolutions – agricultural, industrial, and now, digital. Yet, simultaneous to this technological convergence, the cleavages between populations defined by race, religion and nation are being redrawn, redefined and reinforced. Clearly, “we” (patriots, developed, democratic) are not like “them” (insurgents, underdeveloped, oppressed). Globalization, as translated through capitalism and nationalism, has not yielded cultural uniformity.¹¹⁰

At the crossroads of transculturalism and hybridity, unforeseen possibilities open up and reveal themselves, upsetting static boundaries. Since Fernando Ortiz's concept of transculturation, culture is recognized more and more as constantly changing in order to meet the needs of a living people. As Ortiz wrote:

Transculturation is a set of ongoing transmutations; it is full of creativity and never ceases; it is irreversible. It is always a process in which we give something in exchange for what we receive: the two parts of the equation end up being modified. From this process springs out a new reality, which is not a patchwork of features, but a new phenomenon, original and independent.¹¹¹

Considering this, both *Haida Manga* and *Manga Ormolu* challenge reified notions of nationality, ethnicity and culture, and undermine notions of culture as fixed and immobile. Comparing the works of *Manga Ormolu* and *Haida Manga* has exposed profound intersecting strategies at various junctures that engage with manga. Using strategies of hybridity and humour, both Tang and Yahgulanaas borrow from various

110 Tang, *Statement*, http://brendantang.com/?page_id=4.

111 *GIRA: Interdisciplinary Research Group on the Americas*, “Transculturation and Cultural Hybridity: The First Encounter, Fundamental Component of Transculturation Processes,” <http://www.gira.info/en/about-us/research-questions-and-key-notions/transculturation-and-cultural-hybridity> (30 Nov. 2011).

cultures while bringing new meaning to their own.

One might envision hybridity as something which threatens to disrupt essentialist thinking maintained through borders and compartmentalizations.¹¹² Bhabha has proposed that the Third Space offers a position of agency for the oppressed or marginalized, at the same time it comes from various degrees of ambiguity and indeterminacy: “this interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy.”¹¹³

However, Nederveen Pieterse argues resistance to hybridity as a concept is in part due to what he calls “boundary fetishism,” and the reification of “ethnicity” and the “local.”¹¹⁴ Tang and Yaghulanaas’ works whose subject matter reflect mixture and plurality within a heterogeneous and sometimes contradictory whole to a large extent reflect precisely the tensions and ambivalences that surface in processes of globalization and hybridity.

In the above epithet, Tang describes globalization as a process related to both trade and war, hence commodity exchange and imperialism, conquest and coercion, evolution and sharing. This description locates the precise contradiction in history in which myriad complex technologies and knowledges are both shared through mutually beneficial exchange and also plundered through vicious acts of war. In many ways, this is the story of colonial empire, and the start of the modern era which so shapes the contemporary moment. Accordingly, hybridity is directly related to this period of intensified exchange and collision of cultures commonly referred to as globalization.

Although approaching the subject matter of authenticity, identity, hybridity and

112 Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *Globalization and Culture: Global Mélange* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004), 113.

113 Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London; New York: Routledge, 1994): 5.

114 Pieterse, *Globalization and Culture*, 91-2.

globalization from slightly different angles, the works of Tang and Yahgulanaas nonetheless seem to meet in the middle. Ultimately both works point to the right to ethno-cultural survival, and make hybridity and transformation an imperative. They both demonstrate the process of living culture and the indomitable spirit to create innovative works that address stereotypes only to transgress them, and to mix aspects of the artists' worlds that society might separate. The transcultural movement in both *Manga Ormolu* and *Haida Manga* illustrates the process of a living culture that gains and loses attributes while constantly interacting and altering its shape, tone, and trajectory. To control it, to put one's finger on it, to pin it down and say, "there it is, that's it," would be a gross injustice, for at that moment, it has changed and shifted. Like the myriad versions of Tang's *Manga Ormolu* series that constantly change and transfigure, or Yahgulanaas' *Bone Box* which spins about, opening and revealing more when it is in motion, these hybrid works express a constant fluidity and a movement that suggests migration and a transformational adaptability.

Ultimately this essay attempted to show how Tang and Yahgulanaas employ tactics that foster thought and experimentation in ways that suggest the power of creativity in usurping imposed boundaries and unjust societal expectations. *Manga Ormolu* and *Haida Manga* highlight the space in between this and that, you and me, self and other, and dare to transverse that space, recalling humanity's innate ability to join and unify even the most diverse and contradictory elements of reality. In many ways, these works call for a redress of political history so that we might simply share the present.

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FIGURES



Figure 1: Brendan Lee Satish Tang, *Manga Ormolu ver. 5.0-c*, 2009. ceramic, 16" X 11",
Brendan Lee Satish Tang - Gallery 1: Manga Ormolu, online gallery.
http://brendantang.com/?page_id=4 (1 January 2012).



Figure 2: Brendan Lee Satish Tang, *Manga Ormolu ver. 5.0-g*, 2010. ceramic, 16" X 30",
Brendan Lee Satish Tang - Gallery 1: Manga Ormolu, online gallery.
http://brendantang.com/?page_id=4 (1 January 2012).



Figure 3: Brendan Lee Satish Tang, *Manga Ormolu ver. 3.0-a*, 2007. ceramic, 13" X 25",
Brendan Lee Satish Tang - Gallery 1: Manga Ormolu, online gallery.
http://brendantang.com/?page_id=4 (1 January 2012).



Figure 4: Brendan Lee Satish Tang, *Manga Ormolu ver. 3.0-b*, 2007. ceramic, 17" X 14",
Brendan Lee Satish Tang - Gallery 1: Manga Ormolu, online gallery.
http://brendantang.com/?page_id=4 (1 January 2012).



Figure 5: Brendan Lee Satish Tang, *Manga Ormolu ver. 4.0-k*, 2010. ceramic, 19.5" X 18", Brendan Lee Satish Tang - Gallery 1: Manga Ormolu, online gallery. http://brendantang.com/?page_id=4 (1 January 2012).



Figure 6: Brendan Lee Satish Tang, *Manga Ormolu ver. 2.0-e*, 2003. ceramic, 11.5" X 9", Brendan Lee Satish Tang - Gallery 1: Manga Ormolu, online gallery. http://brendantang.com/?page_id=4 (1 January 2012).

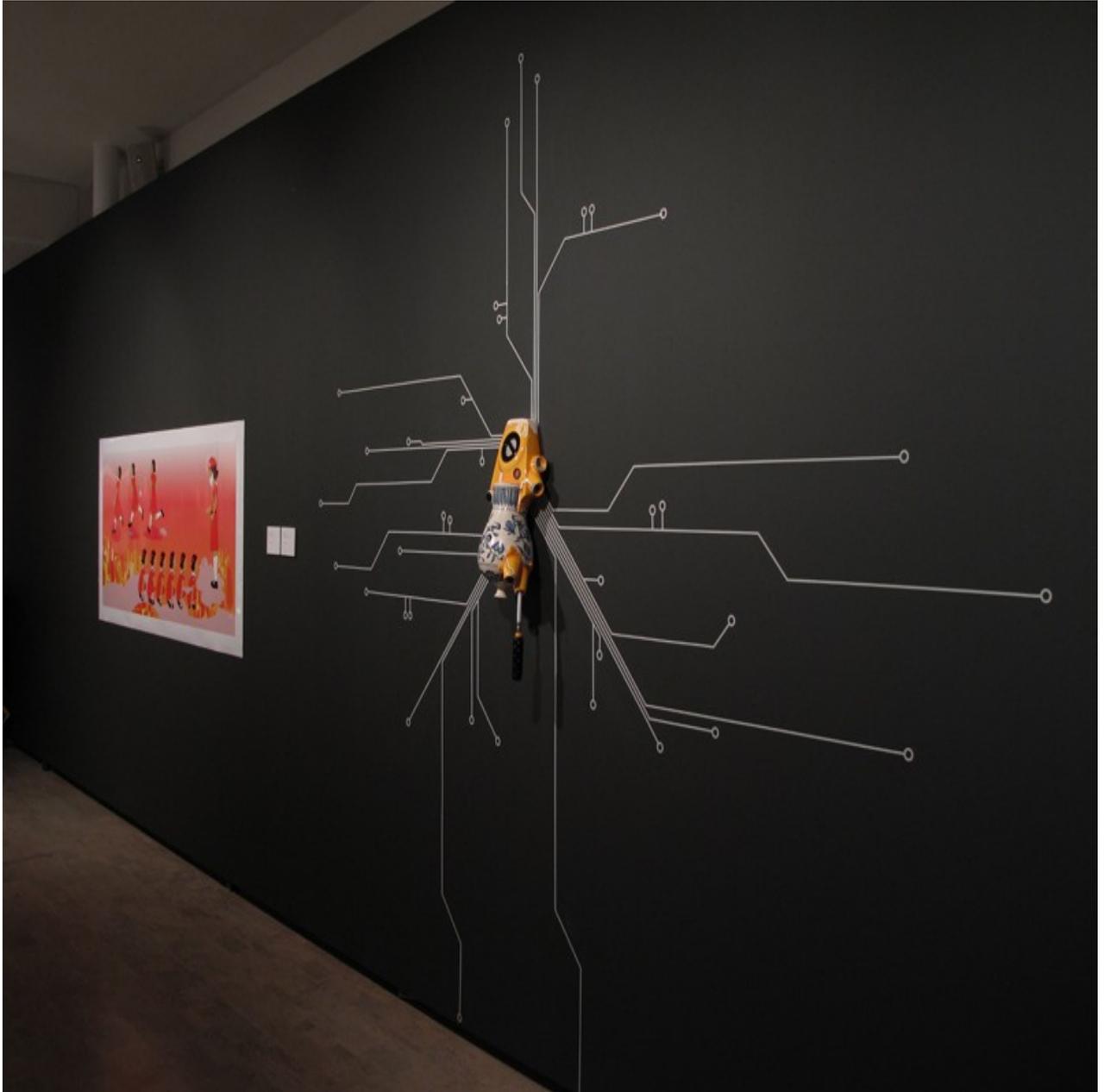


Figure 7: Brendan Lee Satish Tang, *Manga Ormolu ver. 2.0-1*, 2009. ceramic, 28" X 10",
Brendan Lee Satish Tang – online blog. <http://brendantang.com/?p=269> (1 January 2012).



Figure 8: Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas, *Untitled*, *Coppers from the Hood* series, 2011. copper, steel, acrylics. Commissioned by British Museum. <http://mny.ca/coppers-from-the-hood.html> (1 March 2012).

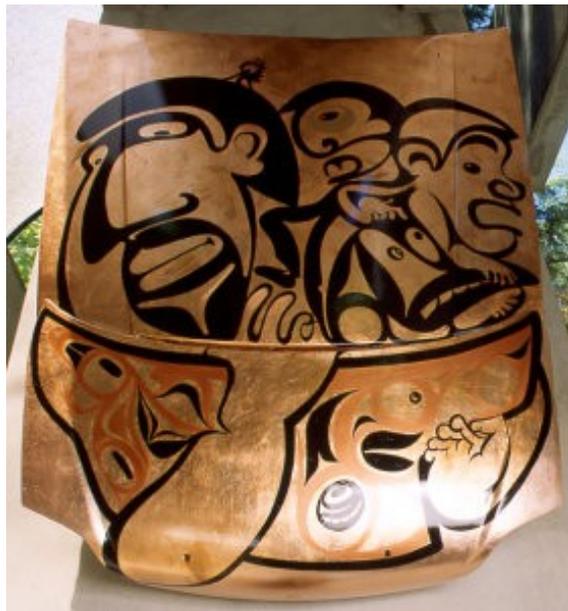


Figure 9: Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas, *Stolen But Recovered*, *Coppers from the Hood* series, 2007. Plymouth and Pontiac car hoods, copper leaf, paint, 185 x 140 cm. Collection of the Glenbow Museum, Calgary, Alberta. <http://mny.ca/coppers-from-the-hood.html> (1 March 2012).



Figure 10: Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas, *Terse Cell*, *Coppers from the Hood* series, 2010. 1995 Tercel car hood, copper leaf, paint, exhibited Douglas Udell Gallery, Vancouver.



Figure 11: Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas, *Untitled*, *Coppers from the Hood* series, 2010. copper, steel, acrylics. One of five commissioned by the Listel Hotel, Whistler, BC, Canada. <http://mny.ca/coppers-from-the-hood.html> (1 March 2012).



Figure 12: Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas, *Bone Box*, *Meddling in the Museum* intervention, July 2007. Acrylics, plywood, copper and steel, 1.8 x 2.4 m. Collection of the Museum of Anthropology, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, British Columbia. <http://mny.ca/bone-box.html> (1 March 2012).



Figure 13: Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas, *Pedal To The Meddle, Meddling in the Museum* intervention, July 2007. Pontiac Firefly, autobody paint, argillite dust, copper leaf. Collection of the Glenbow Museum, Calgary, Alberta. Notes: Exhibited with 7.5 meter cedar canoe by Bill Reid, assisted by Guujaaw and others, 1985. <http://mny.ca/pedal-to-the-meddle.html> (1 March 2012).

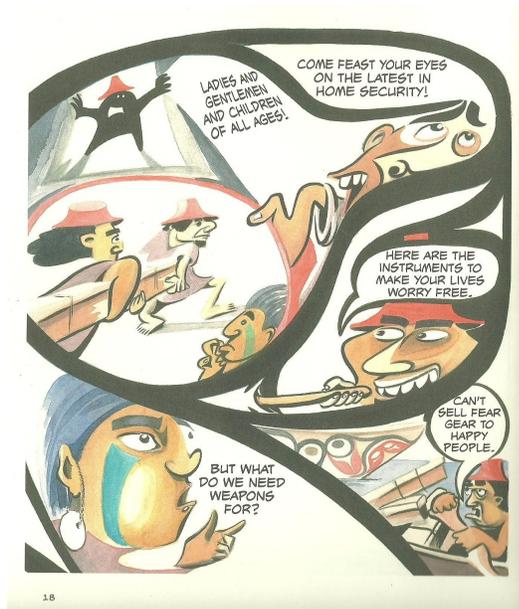


Figure 14: Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas, *Red: A Haida Manga*. (excerpt, page 18) Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2009.

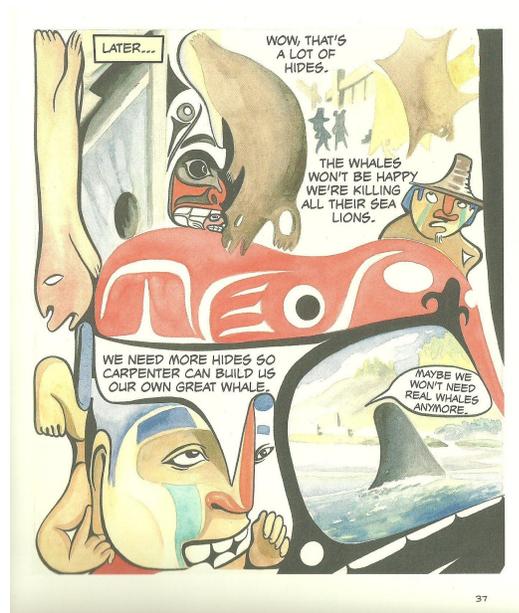


Figure 15: Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas, *Red: A Haida Manga*. (excerpt, page 37) Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2009.



Figure 16: Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas, *Red: A Haida Manga*. (excerpt, page 89) Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2009.



Figure 17: Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas, *The War Of The Blink* was displayed at the Vancouver Art Gallery from June 10th to September 17th, 2006, for the exhibition *Raven Travelling: Two Centuries of Haida Art*. Private collection - West Vancouver, BC. As exhibited: Glenbow Museum - Calgary, Alberta, Canada. <http://mny.ca/the-war-of-the-blink.html> (1 March 2012).

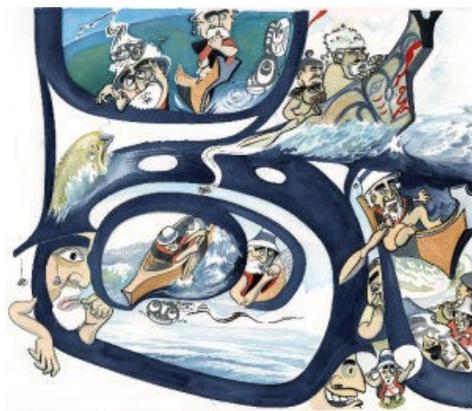
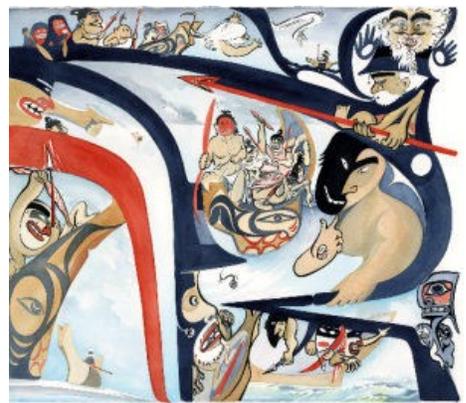
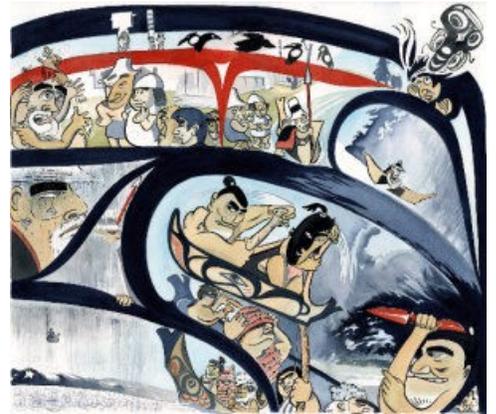


Figure 18: Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas, *The War Of The Blink*, detail.