FEATHER ‘TIS NOBLER IN THE MIND:
A CASE STUDY IN FEATHERWORK, INDIGENEITY, AND THE WEST AT THE
NASHER ART MUSEUM

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ABSTRACT

ELIZABETH L. FOX: FEATHER ‘TIS NOBLER IN THE MIND: A CASE STUDY IN FEATHERWORK, INDIGENEITY, AND THE WEST AT THE NASHER ART MUSEUM

(Under the direction of Dr. Eduardo de J. Douglas)

This thesis attempts to identify a feathered coat offered to the Nasher Museum of Art for acquisition in January 2010. Each chapter explores a major method of identification: materials, taxonomy and construction techniques, and design elements. These methods will be used to place the Nasher coat in the contexts of Amazonian and Peruvian featherwork. Though this thesis ultimately will not be able to offer a firm identification of the coat, it will both critically engage Western concepts of indigeneity and suggest directions for further study.
To my family and friends, who learned far more about feathers than they ever intended; to my advisors, Dr. Eduardo de J. Douglas and Dr. Lyneise Williams; and especially to my cohort: Joanna Gohmann, Katherine Rice, Sarah Schultz, Shahrazad Shareef, Allison Smith, Ji You, and Mona Young. Thanks for lunch.
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Introduction: An Amerindian Coat Visits the Nasher Art Museum

Here is a familiar story: near the turn of the century, a doctor visited the Amazon rainforest and provided medical services to a group of indigenous people. Afterward, several members of the tribe went into the forest and unearthed a wooden box. They gave its contents, a coat covered in brilliant feathers, to the doctor in thanks or in payment. The doctor brought the coat back to his home in the United States, where some time later he gifted it to an acquaintance. When the second owner offered the coat to Duke University’s Nasher Art Museum, he was only able to explain that it was from the “upper Amazon.”1 Perhaps the doctor never revealed the name of the people he had helped. Maybe he never knew. While the donor was not able to explain the coat’s origin, this story contextualizes it in a set of Western stereotypes about the non-West: the adventure story, à la Indiana Jones. The coat fits neatly in the popular entertainment trope of the mysterious artifact, an object of unknown and perhaps unknowable provenance that ignites a series of events resulting in adventure and fortune for the (white Western) protagonists.

This school of Western fantasy is well known and often parodied. In Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gomez-Peña's infamous performance piece, Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit..., the artists attempted to satirize this long history of Western fascination with indigenous peoples through visual parody of Western expectations of

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1Curatorial files, Nasher Museum of Art.
indigeneity. They billed themselves as Guatinauis, a fictional tribe from the equally fictional island of Guatinau, who had volunteered to tour Europe and North America as ambassadors to the West. They displayed themselves in museums of art and natural science, caged and accompanied by explanatory texts and overbearing "zoo guides." The artists' dress and accessories in the cage were an amalgamation of cheap "Indian" Halloween costumes and commonly used Western items like sneakers and televisions. Gomez-Peña's boom box played rock en español, and for fifty cents, Fusco would dance to a rap song. These Western references could function on two levels: as contemporary analogues to the cultural production exhibited in nineteenth-century ethnographic displays, and more generally, as parodies of Western conceptions of how indigenous peoples should look and act.

Fusco and Gomez-Peña took for granted an audience capable of reading the work's visual signifiers of satire; their intended message was overshadowed by audiences that took the performance to be literal truth, reacting primarily to the presence of a caged Other, ripe for consumption. Fusco addressed this misreading in her essay, "The Other History of Intercultural Performance," as well as a video made in conjunction with Paula Heredia, "The Couple in the Cage." The film makes clear the satirical intent of Fusco and Gomez-Peña's actions by juxtaposing footage of the performance with clips from the ethnographic and popular films that it critiqued. Students viewing the film in 2010, seventeen years after the last performance, frequently claim that they would not mistake the performers for "real" indigenous people. They too misread the signifiers as satire, however: they often explain their skepticism by citing Fusco's Converse All Star sneakers

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or Gomez-Peña's fake-leopard skin wrestling mask as examples of inauthentic Western gear--not something "real" indigenous people would wear. This interpretation relies on Western conceptions of indigenous authenticity: essentially pure, unsullied by globalization and Western industrialization. Once again, Fusco and Gomez-Peña's critique of these very notions passes unnoticed.

In some shots, Gomez-Peña wears a feathered headdress with his wrestling mask. This is the one accessory not often critiqued as "inauthentic," perhaps because of the long history of Western fascination with Amerindian featherwork. The very first images of the Americas depicted feather-laden Indians engaging in gory cannibal feasts, and some of the earliest European allegorical figures of America wear feather headdresses not unlike Gomez-Peña's (Figure 1). Feathers are frequently used as visual shorthand for the Amerindian, and vice versa. In this context, the Nasher coat might perfectly fit Western conceptions of proper indigenous costume simply because it is covered in feathers from tropical birds.

The coat is visually arresting. The vibrant colors of the feathers starkly contrast the clinical white box and tissue paper in which the garment must be kept. In order to preserve the feathers, which the coat sheds at the slightest provocation, it is stored with the arms folded over the body. Figures 2 and 3 show the entire coat, both folded and unfolded. The sleeves, quite damaged, seem haphazardly or randomly feathered, with no apparent pattern--but when the arms lift, as they surely must when worn, they reveal

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crisp, neat horizontal stripes all along the bodice of the coat (Figure 4).⁴ A series of four feathered florets marches down the right edge of the opening, mimicking a lapel (Figure 5). Two large florets sit near the hips (Figure 6). On closer inspection, several small florets have all but fallen away from the shoulders and sleeves (Figure 7). Unfortunately, the neck does not offer a manufacturer's label. The coat stubbornly refuses to offer any identification at all. The Nasher placed it gingerly in storage, and began the difficult task of determining what, exactly, it is.

While both the donor and Western popular culture vouch for the " Authenticity" of the coat, scholars have their own set of criteria for indigeneity with accompanying assumptions and stereotypes. For scholars of South American featherwork, the coat's Westernized form is problematic. The coat resembles a blazer; it has two full-length sleeves and a central opening that ties at the front. There is no record of an indigenous South American group that created full-sleeved garments with central openings before contact with Europe. While the coat itself may be a unique product of indigenous South America, its form is a product of European colonialism. In addition, because of the way the coat was folded and photographed, the lack of pattern on the sleeves of the coat was taken to be constitutive of the entire garment. Pattern and color are major carriers of meaning in South American featherwork, and when they are perceived to be missing, the object is difficult or impossible to read. Thus, when the Nasher emailed specialists with digital images of the coat, they were unable to respond with an absolute identification. There were, however, two leads: Dr. Amy Buono of Southern Methodist University suggested that the construction and feather "florets" resembled eighteenth- and ⁴See glossary for terms.
nineteenth-century featherwork from the Brazilian Amazon, and Dr. Anne McMullen of the Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian compared the coat to a Quichua object. ⁵

These suggestions are sensible points of departure because the bodies of scholarship on indigenous featherwork from the Brazilian Amazon and Peru are the largest available on South American featherwork of any kind. ⁶ Throughout this paper, textiles from areas known today as Peru will be referred to as “Peruvian,” while textiles from the Brazilian Amazon will be referred to as Amazonian, as these fields generally identify themselves. These terms are scholarly constructs, shaped in part by the resources each modern state commands to make studies of their indigenous production possible.

Perhaps because of the larger size of Brazil and its history of greater financial stability, featherwork from the Brazilian regions of the Amazon is the best studied of the two, with over ten major publications in the past twenty years. ⁷ Broadly speaking, in Amazonian

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⁵Amy J. Buono, e-mail to author, January 7, 2010; Patricia L. Nietfeld, e-mail to the author, February 22, 2010.

⁶Though the Quichua are located in Ecuador, they are part of a larger group of Quechua speakers who live throughout Peru and Ecuador. As in most post-colonial states, modern boundaries have little to no relationship to the political organizations that pre-date them.

featherwork, diadems, bracelets, belts, and other small accessories are far more common than large torso garments. The only well-known examples of large-scale feather garments are the famous Tupinamba cloaks, of which a limited number exist (Figure 8).

While the Amazon does intrude into Peru, the most commonly studied Peruvian textiles are Precolumbian weavings, usually from the highlands of the Andes and the coast. Though both weaving and featherworking may appear in a single garment, weaving will not be considered here. Feathers are often used as decoration on woven garments, and small feather accessories are often worn as well.\textsuperscript{8} Texts that specifically address Peruvian featherwork are rare, however. The first and only comprehensive volume is James W. Reid's \textit{Magic Feathers: Textile Art from Ancient Peru}, published in 2005.\textsuperscript{9} As such, this paper is heavily indebted to his work. Though Reid's focus is Precolumbian work, mainly of Inca extraction, his examples are often given date ranges that reach into the Colonial Period.

These two bodies of featherwork also introduce a scholarly tendency to emphasize objects that appears to Western eyes as if it were created for ritual use within indigenous communities, though many objects in museum collections were created only for sale in European markets.\textsuperscript{10} Catalogues on Amazonian featherwork from both the US and Brazil describe these objects and explain their use in language that often suggests either a world

\textsuperscript{8}See Jaime Valentiñ Coquis, ed., \textit{Tejidos enigmáticos de la amazonía peruana: Asháninka, Matsiguenka, Yánesha, Yine} (Lima, Perú: Cotton Knit SAC, 2006).


of ritual untouched by the West, or one on the brink of destruction, from which these objects were rescued. *Arts of the Amazon*, a 1995 catalog from the Houston Museum of Natural Science, offers a typically contradictory example:

Inevitably, however, industrial development proceeds apace and the surviving Indians of the Amazon are becoming acculturated to white society. Yet they are not all about to disappear or become extinct, as is commonly supposed. Instead, two kinds of adaptation are taking place. Those Indian groups who abandon their cultural heritage and passively enter the nation state, adopting Western clothing styles, language and customs, invariably become absorbed into the white culture on the lowest level--as day laborers and servants. They also become dependent on showy new Western gadgets and locked into corporate culture that produces them, at the expense of ties to their kinspeople.\(^{11}\)

The catalog commendably states its intention to avoid stereotyping all indigenous peoples as tragic and passive. The next sentence, however, immediately dives into a digression about the tragedy of Westernization and passivity of the Indian participants. Occasionally objects with Western influence are included in catalogs; for example, a beaded Mehinaku belt decorated with repeating Brazilian flags is frequently reproduced in American publications (Figure 9).\(^{12}\) This object is rarely accompanied by in-depth analysis of the intersection of national and indigenous identities. Though the above quotation is well-intentioned, it reduces living people and the objects they create to categories of authentic and vital or inauthentic and ineffective, participating in the same essentializing project of Otherness that Fusco and Gomez-Peña critiqued.

Beyond obscuring the complexity of indigenous identity politics, writing that focuses only on objects that appear to be "authentic" by Western standards actively

\(^{11}\)Braun, *Arts of the Amazon*, 13-14.

\(^{12}\)See Fresno Art Museum, *Invisible People*; Braun, *Arts of the Amazon*. 
inhibits scholarship because a great many objects created by indigenous artists do not conform to these expectations; the Nasher coat is a prime example. Numerous scholars have suggested that because the coat does not conform to any of the established forms of Amazonian featherwork, it may have been intended for sale outside the community in which it was created. Like Fusco and Gomez-Peña's performance, the Nasher coat's visual signifiers are ambiguous to eyes trained in Western notions of indigeneity. The scholarly inability to read the Nasher coat can be resolved by suggesting that it had been made for an audience that did not care to or could not read these signifiers—while this assertion may not be incorrect, its currency lies in an assumption about what indigenous peoples should look and act like that may not be based on how indigenous peoples think about themselves.

What, then, can be assumed about a totally unknown object of possibly indigenous origin? How can Western scholars think and speak sensibly and sensitively about South American indigenous cultural production? This study will attempt to answer these questions by focusing on the only piece of empirical evidence available in the Nasher coat's case: the object itself. Though it is impossible for Western scholars to entirely divorce themselves from their own contexts and biases, it should be possible to acknowledge and problematize them through meticulous observation of visual evidence. Each chapter of this paper addresses a specific aspect of the Nasher coat's composition in order to contextualize it within both Amazonian and Peruvian featherwork: materials, taxonomy and construction techniques, and design elements. The conclusion suggests further avenues of analysis. Though ultimately there may be more questions than answers, this study is offered in the hope of contributing to a future in which we may
avoid misreading the Guatinaui once again.
Chapter 1: Materials

This chapter will explore the sources of the three main materials used to create the Nasher coat: feathers, thread, and fabric. In "The Other History of Intercultural Performance," Fusco notes the importance of material in her costume: "white Americans and Europeans have spent hours speculating ... about how we could possibly run a computer, own sunglasses and sneakers, and smoke cigarettes." Though Fusco and Gomez-Peña's costumes parodied the exhibition of indigenous peoples dressed in Westernized versions of their "traditional" clothing, the performers' costumes seemed "inauthentic" to viewers because they could too easily identify the influences of their own Western culture in the performance. Objects like Fusco's sunglasses are not the only indicator of Westernization. The materials from which they are made, like plastic and other industrially produced goods, also conflict with Western notions of how indigenous crafts should appear. This instinct is useful to some extent. Materials used to make an object can certainly communicate information about its provenance. In order to identify the Nasher coat, one may begin by interrogating the materials. What materials were used to make the coat, and how can material place its point of origin? How can materials speak to authenticity?

The most striking aspect of the coat, and the easiest to identify, is the feathers. Feathers themselves encode a great deal of information, primarily through shape, color,

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\(^{13}\text{Fusco, "The Other History," 162.}\)
and texture. Ornithologists can identify from which bird a feather came, and from where on its body, using these elements. Featherwork artists share this specialized knowledge. Because birds’ feathers perform different tasks depending on their placement on the body, a wide variety of colors, shapes, and textures can be found on a single specimen. Featherwork artists take advantage of this fact by selecting specific types of feathers to achieve special effects; for example, the Nasher coat's artist used down rather than wing coverts to form the center of each floret, giving them a fragile, floral appearance and easy movement in a breeze (Figure 5). Featherwork artists are also often deeply familiar with the habitat and habits of the birds from which they take their materials, and the placement of feathers on a garment may correspond to the height at which birds live in the forest. Identifying precisely which feathers are used, and where, on the Nasher coat could prove instructive.

The Nasher coat's feathers come from at least six birds. According to the Houston Museum of Natural Science's ornithologist Dan Brooks, "the majority of the feathers belong to wing and tail coverts of Scarlet macaw (Ara macao) and Blue-and-yellow macaw (Ara ararauna)," as well as "tail rectrices of a curassow (either Salvin's [Mitu salvini] or Razor-billed [Mitu tuberosum]), wing and tail coverts of the Amazon parrot (Amazona sp.), and some White egret (Casmerodius alba)." At first glance, this information validates the origin story of the coat: the feathers are from tropical birds,

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15Dan Brooks, e-mail to the author, January 21, 2010.
readily accessible in the Amazon.\textsuperscript{16} While Macaws and Amazonian parrots are found throughout the Amazon, egrets and currasows are slightly more restricted to the north and west, near Colombia and Peru. Unfortunately, feathers alone cannot provide an authoritative location of origin of the coat. Feathers are extensively traded throughout the Amazon, as well as between Amazonian and Peruvian groups.\textsuperscript{17} Macaw feathers are particularly widely used in both Amazonian and Peruvian featherwork.\textsuperscript{18}

While the feathers may be Amazonian, the textiles used in the coat were not woven in the Amazon. There are at least six fabrics used to construct the coat, all of which are patterned. The base fabric, a white and blue checked material, resembles gingham. There are five fabrics used to attach the feathers to the base fabric. The most frequently used and visible is navy blue with white pinstripes (Figure 10). The other four are used in much smaller quantities, and they are most visible in the damaged areas at the back of the neck and on the floret backings. These materials are all printed; they consist of a thick red and white stripe; a white with red squiggles; a cream with black flowers; and a cream with red and yellow flowers (Figure 11). The materials' luster, weight, and texture resemble cotton. In addition, because of their tight, even weaves, the materials are more likely commercial trade goods than hand-woven fabrics.\textsuperscript{19} While some

\textsuperscript{16}Dirk Van Tuerenhout, e-mail to the author, January 21, 2010.

\textsuperscript{17}Their value and meaning varies, but feathers are frequently important commodities. See Reid, \textit{Magic Feathers}, 166.

\textsuperscript{18}Amy J. Buono, e-mail to the author, dated April 6, 2010.

\textsuperscript{19}While this means that the fabrics are not easily identifiable in terms of place of origin, textile specialists can use prints to date fabrics.
specialists can use characteristics like weave and print to identify industrial fabrics, such
identification still will not secure a solid location of origin for the coat. These fabrics, as
well as the string employed to construct both the base garment and sew down the
feathers, could be used to date the garment. The use of industrially produced materials in
this garment can speaks volumes in itself about access to commercial goods and
Westernization; textile specialists have hazarded that the coat may have been made before
1930, or 1940 at the latest.20

Though the Nasher coat's base was made of industrially produced material, the
coat itself was constructed entirely by hand. This is particularly apparent along the collar,
where the uneven size and spacing of the stitches characteristic of the entire garment are
easily visible. There is no evidence of machine-stitching on any seam. All the thread
used on the coat is the same medium-weight white (Figure 10). The coat also shows
ample evidence of Western-style tailoring, but indigenous peoples may use these
techniques as well. Though the bodice seams were left unfinished, the collar seam has
been pressed inside the lining. The cuffs, the front edges, and the bottom edge of the coat
are simple hems. The bottom hem is tacked in place by large hand-stitches that also
attach the bottom-most decorations to the right side of the coat (Figure 3). The front edge
hems are difficult to see because the decorations from the right side of the coat are often
folded to the interior of the coat, obscuring them.

20Dirk Van Tuerenhout, e-mail to the author, January 21, 2010; Patricia L. Nietfeld, e-mail to the author,
The materials from which the coat was made introduce the first stage of debate as to what assumptions scholars can safely make about unknown objects. How do specialists know what they know, and how can they safely extrapolate from their knowledge? The Nasher coat's industrially produced materials and Westernized design beg to be interpreted—especially because, as Chapter 2 will discuss, sleeved coats with central openings are not created in Peruvian or Amazonian featherwork. The Westernized aspects of construction may be taken as proof of the maker's intention to use the garment for external sale.

This assumption is problematic, though not necessarily inaccurate—it is simply too dangerous to make without knowledge of the particular community in which this coat was made. For some groups, like the Asháninka people of Peru and Brazil, adhering to Precolumbian garment forms is an important method of displaying ethnic identity and pride in the face of the institutionalized racism of the state.21 Continuing to produce Precolumbian prototypes for a thriving modern market asserts Asháninka existence and agency.22 By contrast, machine-made materials and clothing are not necessarily inauthentic or unindigenous by the producer's understanding of his or her own indigeneity. Some Quechua weavers use industrially produced yarns in their work because they prefer synthetic colors, though they re-spin the yarn to produce the fine

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22 Ibid., 66.
weight they prefer.\textsuperscript{23}

Practicing an indigenous craft using Westernized factory equipment and selling the product abroad can also be understood as an indigenous activity. The Quechua sweater manufacturer Alfonso Chiza pursued loans for industrial knitting machines in order to maximize his sweater factory's production.\textsuperscript{24} Chiza conceptualizes his drive to produce as many sweaters as possible and his work ethic as indigenous values. Though there is a certain glow of authenticity surrounding the mental image of an indigenous weaver hard at work in a rural setting, Chiza characterizes rural Indians as "country, drunken, and poor." He does not understand his own urban capitalism as any less indigenous—just a more progressive, profitable, and positive way of being an Indian.\textsuperscript{25} Chiza's example should caution one against hasty assumptions about what materials and construction can say about how an object is used and understood by the maker, especially in the case of an unknown object divorced from its cultural context, like the Nasher coat.


\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 54.
Chapter 2: Construction

Alfonso Chiza's sweater factory introduces the question of construction method as well as material. Though Chiza took pride in his modern machinery, the West persistently identifies indigeneity with non-industrial, hand-made objects of "primitive" appearance. In Two Amerindians Visit..., Fusco and Gomez-Peña acted the part of "proper" primitives not only by exhibiting their unfamiliarity with the television in their cage but also through Fusco's sewing. Though the metal needle is a product of Western industry, her participation in handicraft recognizable to Westerners from their own pre-industrial past is an acceptable indigenous practice. Feathework scholarship also recognizes the importance of method in recognizing an object’s indigenous origins, and identifying the culture of its maker. The habitats of the Nasher coat’s feather sources suggest that the coat was created in the Peruvian or Columbian Amazon. This chapter will attempt to narrow this identification by examining specifics of the coat's construction in comparison with common construction techniques in Peruvian and Amazonian featherwork.26

The most logical starting point is to determine whether the form of the coat has a particular name and accompanying construction techniques and cultural associations.

26This scholarship is not always art historical; most of the material on Amazonian featherwork comes from anthropology, though Barbara Braun and Amy J. Buono are notable art-historical exceptions. There is a much longer history of study of Andean woven textiles. As such, more art-historical analyses are available. The field remains narrow enough to necessitate an interdisciplinary approach.
With regard to Amazonian featherwork, Brazilian scholar Berta Ribeiro authored the two most comprehensive guides to identifying unknown works: her 1988 book *Dicionario do artesanato indigena*, and her 1957 article, "Bases para uma classificação dos adornos plumários dos índios do Brasil."27 The *Dicionario do artesanato indigena* offers a meticulous, though not comprehensive, taxonomy of objects created by the indigenous groups of Brazil. The dictionary is organized by type of object, with clothing further sorted according to the area of the body it covers. Though obviously a scholarly construction, Ribeiro's book offers a common, specialized language in which to describe and catalog indigenous crafts.

Unfortunately, from the first glance the Nasher coat thwarts Ribeiro's taxonomy. In Ribeiro's dictionary, feathered clothing is divided into three major categories: those worn on the head, the torso, or the limbs. Torso garments are further defined according to where, precisely, they rest.28 The only garments listed that would cover a large part of the torso, like a coat, are feathered ponchos, capes, and petticoats. While capes may have central openings at the front of the garment, like the Nasher coat, Ribeiro's taxonomy does not include sleeved garments at all. This oversight does not pose a significant challenge to most scholars of Amazonian featherwork, however, as there is not a single

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28 “Def. Ornaments, of the category of feathework, worn on the torso subdivided in: 1) adornments for the chest: pectorals, dorsals; 2) worn diagonally across the chest; 3) adornments for the waist; 4) adornments for the abdomen or lower back.” (Ribeiro, *Dicionário*, 113). All translations are the author's unless otherwise noted.
example of a sleeved garment of any kind in the eleven major publications of Amazonian featherwork released in the past 25 years.29

On the Peruvian side, James W. Reid's *Magic Feathers: Textile Art from Ancient Peru* is the most recent and comprehensive resource on featherwork from the various Precolumbian ethnic groups of Peru. Though less rigorously organized, Reid delineates several major categories of featherwork objects: shirts with sleeves, tunics, and decorative half-tunics.30 The majority of tunics reproduced in the catalog are sleeveless tunics or tabards, the side seams of which have been removed in order to allow the garment to lie flat.31 Those with sleeves do not significantly resemble the Nasher coat, however; though the blue and yellow checked Chimú *cushma* has sleeves, they are quite short (Figure 12).32 *Cushmas* are frequently constructed by sewing two sheets of fabric together with several inches of the central seam left open to form a neck.33 Though there must be a seam, it is hidden by fabric and there is certainly no large, central opening as in the Nasher coat. The Nasher coat's form resembles neither Peruvian nor Amazonian examples.

The method of attaching feathers to the base of the Nasher coat may provide some clues. Both Ribeiro and Reid discuss in detail common methods of construction.

29 See footnote 6.


31 Ibid.

32 Ibid., 339.

Ribeiro's discussion of construction, or as she says, technology, begins with a basic observation that most featherwork is created by affixing feathers to a base.\(^{34}\) This observation holds true for Peruvian material as well.\(^{35}\) In this regard, the Nasher coat appears quite typical: its base, as discussed, is an industrial-cotton, Western-style blazer-shaped coat. The pattern of the coat is simple, consisting of a rectangular bodice with a slightly sloping opening at the front, and full-length sleeves extending from each shoulder.\(^{36}\) The two front edges of the coat overlap when folded, but tie by two ribbons sewn to each side of the openings. The coat has a slight v-neckline that would expose an undershirt or a bit of the chest when worn. There is a small (roughly 1 ½ in. tall) lined collar standing unfolded and vertical against the back of the neck. The garment has no lapels or other folded decoration along the front edges.

Ribeiro does not specifically describe fabric backings, but she does include fabric in a list of potential materials that an artist may need in order to begin work on a piece.\(^{37}\) In contrast, Reid's chapter on featherwork construction begins with a discussion of the various fibers spun to form the yarn used in weaving the fabric base. Reid specifically

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\(^{34}\)Ribeiro, "Bases," 64.

\(^{35}\)Reid, *Magic Feathers*, 182.

\(^{36}\)Because the seams have been left raw on the unlined interior of the bodice, one can clearly make out the individual pieces. There are three basic parts: two front pieces and one continuous back piece. The seams have frayed, however, making it difficult to determine what the original seam allowance may have been. This is significant because in US commercial pattern drafting, seam allowance sometimes differs by company—it could be used in conjunction with other details to identify the patternmaker, if the coat was not drafted by hand. In addition, there are no darts in the bodice that might accommodate breasts. This detail in itself cannot prove the gender of the wearer, as women can certainly wear tops without darts.

\(^{37}\)Reid, *Magic Feathers*, 64.
mentions that indigenous plainweave cotton, available in "white, tan, light brown, dark brown, and greyish mauve," is a common backing material for surviving pieces. Given the Quechua example cited above in regard to synthetic yarn, it may not be unreasonable to suppose that some indigenous Peruvian artists may now prefer working with industrial cotton like that of the Nasher coat due to increased color options or expediency.

Both Ribeiro and Reid agree about the method used to attach feathers to a base: they are either tied together, and the strings attached to a supporting surface of fabric or wood, or they are pasted directly to the supporting surface. Ribeiro identifies seven basic knotting techniques, some of which are favored by particular ethnic groups. The most relevant for torso coverings is the sixth, "fixing feathers to webs." This is the most common way of creating a feather garment in the Brazilian Amazon; feathers are individually tied into knots or between knots that make up large nets that can be draped over a body or affixed to a cloth backing. Ribeiro references the famous Tupinamba feather cloaks when explaining to this technique.

Unfortunately, Ribeiro's explanations do not resemble the Nasher coat's construction, in large part because she focuses on knotting, a technique not used on the Nasher coat. Ribeiro's diagrams in this section all show the same basic procedure: the

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38Reid, Magic Feathers, 160.

They are in full: "1) Fixing feathers in a horizontal line down a cord, oriented perpendicular to the cord, using plumes, medium feathers, and long feathers; 2) Fixing plumes and medium feathers inside cords, splints, or tubes, parallel to the cord; 3) Fixing feathers to each other; 4) Fixing feathers to seeds, animal bones, etc; 5) Fixing feathers to shafts or hollow tubes; 6) Fixing feathers to webs; 7) Fixing spinnerets of feathers to each other." Ribeiro, "Bases," 59-72.

40Ibid., 69.
calamus of the feather (the bottom-most part of the shaft, extending beyond the vane of a feather) is bent around one continuous cord that acts as the base support of the piece. Another long, continuous cord knots each folded calamus and extends to the next feather, both securing the calamus around the base cord and tying the feathers together (Figure 13). The type of knot differs by group. On the Nasher coat, the feathers are sewn directly to long strips of fabric in single-file, horizontal lines (Figures 10 and 14). The strips were created by horizontally folding an approximately two-inch wide piece of fabric twice. This folding hides the raw edges of each strip; the construction resembles single-fold bias tape. These long, feather-covered strips of fabric were affixed to the blue and white checked base in horizontal stripes. Rather than using several cords both to hold feathers together and affix them to a base, this technique uses strips of fabric to hold the feathers together, and only one cord to hold the feathers in place.

Although the Nasher coat’s feathers are not tied together, their stitching does bear some basic resemblance to Ribeiro’s technical drawings. Each feather is attached to the wrong side of the strip (the side of the fabric that is not printed) with three small stitches, between a fourth to an eighth of an inch long. Two stitches show on the right side of the strip. These stitches are placed around the rachis (the hollow central shaft) in the vane (the main body of the feather) or at the calamus. The feathers are stitched to the strips

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41 See glossary.

42 The strips vary in width, but are generally around 1 in. wide. The length varies.

43 The fabrics do not appear to be cut on the bias, however. On patterned strips, such as the blue and white pinstripe, the strips are cut and folded so that the pinstripes stretch unbroken horizontally along the length of the strip.
with long, continuous threads that are visible against the feather on the wrong side of the strip (Figures 10 and 14). Though the calamus of the feather is never bent or knotted, the stitches and the visible connecting thread do look something like Ribeiro's sixth technical drawing: feathers attached to each other, with visible thread wrapped around the feather at similar points (Figure 15). This superficial similarity is not adequate to identify the construction technique and thus the garment itself.

While Ribeiro entirely omits sewing as a method of conjoining feathers, Reid discusses it in some detail. Peruvian featherwork, like Amazonian, is often made up of a long series of knotted feathers that are then affixed to a surface.44 Reid notes three separate cords used in the process: a carrying cord that provides support for the feathers; a tying cord that holds the feathers to each other and to the carrying cord; and a sewing cord that fixes the whole opening to the fabric base (Figures 16 and 17).45 This method of construction is immediately and strikingly similar to the Nasher coat's fabric strips—it is not impossible that fabric strips could have been substituted for a carrying cord. Though Reid's technical drawings confirm that it was also common Peruvian practice to bend the calamus and knot around it, there are some examples of feathers tied or sewn in place mid-vane. In one Chimu feather panel, the large feathers at the bottom of the panel are tied both at the calamus and around the shaft in the middle of the vane—the thick white cord connecting the feathers is clearly visible against their brilliant blue, green, and yellow hues (Figure 18). Though this was not the sole method of holding these feathers

44Reid, Magic Feathers, 182.
in place, this example illustrates that tying or sewing mid-vane was not unheard of in Precolumbian Peruvian featherwork.

The Nasher coat’s construction most closely resembles the Precolumbian Peruvian featherwork in *Magic Feathers*. Following the example of the Quechua weavers who re-spin industrial yarn, it is entirely possible that an individual familiar with these ancient Peruvian techniques adapted them for use with modern materials. The artist or artists could have had any number of motivations. The Quechua weavers’ appropriation of industrially produced materials was based in aesthetic preference—though the patterned strips of cloth ideally remain invisible, perhaps they were preferable to cord for aesthetic reasons as well. Expediency may have been a major factor. Perhaps the cloth was simply readily available, in large cuts or in scraps from other projects. Alternatively, the feathers could also have been cut from an existing garment and sewn to a new base.⁴⁶ Perhaps a number of individuals worked on the coat, and divided the labor into several tasks. Like Reid’s example of Inca workshops storing long knotted cords of feathers for future use, these feathered strips could have been made independently of the base coat and used as needed.⁴⁷ There is room for endless speculation—while the Nasher coat does not exactly match either Amazonian or Peruvian precedent, it is not sufficiently different that it could not have been made in either region. Current scholarship is simply insufficient to provide a solid identification. In the face of this lack, refusing to rely on stereotype to create

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⁴⁶Suggestion of Eduardo de J. Douglas.

⁴⁷Reid, *Magic Feathers*, 175.
meaning challenges Western expectations of indigeneity. This allows for the greatest possible consideration of agency on the part of indigenous craftspeople.
Chapter 3: Design Elements

Fusco's Converse All Star sneakers, which she wears in every filmed performance in conjunction with a grass skirt and fake leopard-skin bikini top, are immediately recognizable to viewers from the United States. These shoes, known colloquially as chucks, are a popular brand; further, they have come to represent non-threatening counter-culture consumerism. The shoes are symbolic, but their particular color and state of wear also speak to the wearer's interests and politics. The appearance of these shoes on the feet of a supposedly indigenous woman is jarring because the associations and stereotypes chucks and indigeneity carry in the Western imagination are at odds.

Featherwork designs convey similar information to those schooled in the associations colors and patterns carry, and unexpected juxtapositions of associations may be jarring or unreadable. In the catalog *Exposição arte plumária do Brasil*, presented as part of the 17th São Paulo Bienal, Lux B. Vidal gives a poetic and moving description of the layers of meaning in Kayapó featherwork:

Some ornaments, like the grand diadem *krokrok it*, possess dense symbolic signification. Among the Kayapo-Xikrin of the Catete River, for example, it can represent an eye, the feathers being the eyelashes, or in another context it could represent the sun, the feathers coming to represent the rays. But it symbolizes above all the circular form of the village, where the blue central feathers represent the square, the ritual and magical place par excellence; the row of red feathers, the periphery, the houses and domestic world of women; and the white down tied to the tips, the forest; thus encapsulating the world of this small Xikrin group who adapted over millennia, who lived and reproduced in the heart of the Amazon rainforest,
creating their own forms of artistic expression, always the same, yet always renovated. 48

Both Amazonian and Peruvian featherwork are not simply aesthetically pleasing or ritually useful, they are ways of expressing one's cosmology and placing oneself within it. In the case of the Kayapó, as with many Peruvian groups, this is achieved by complex associations with individuals' feathers: not just color and shape, but also the type of feather and its function on the bird, the habitat from which the bird came. 49 Thus, use of pattern and color are hardly arbitrary. If one is able to locate comparanda that employ the same or similar use of pattern and color, one may be able to assert an identification.

Like many other artistic traditions, certain forms or visual strategies begin to develop in the featherwork of individual communities, which can be used to identify their origin. In some cases, broad tendencies can be associated with specific ethnic groups; for example, both the Kayapó and the Karajá are known for extensive use of bicolor and multicolor feathers. 50 Some designs are only made by certain members of society; for Quechua weavers in the Andean village of Chincheros, patterns are not only gendered, but each age group masters a different pattern. 51 In virtually every case, the design elements of featherwork—that is, the deliberate choices of color, type, and shape of feather, as well as the patterns the feathers create—carry meaning. Design is, as Ribeiro


49Braun, Arts of the Amazon, 60.

50Bilbao, Plumária Amazônica, 63.

emphasizes again and again, a "visual language" that can be easily read by the literate.\textsuperscript{52}

Thus, design elements are some of the more powerful methods of identifying featherwork.

The Nasher coat's use of color and pattern are careful and deliberate, though the initial impression may now be one of chaos. Each clean, orderly stripe marches across the bodice from front edge to front edge, stretching along the sides and across the back of the coat to form an uninterrupted wave of color.\textsuperscript{53} The striped effect is produced by the construction. Only one size and color of feather is used on any one strip, and each strip is attached to the base in an unbroken horizontal row, parallel to those above and below it.\textsuperscript{54}

The first decipherable stripe at the back of the neck is thin and black, composed of small feathers. The proceeding white stripe is thicker, as the feathers are slightly longer. These thin stripes are followed by two thick rows of yellow and red. A white stripe of similar size is separated by a thin line of dark green iridescent feathers above, and small, dark blue feathers below. The last two distinguishable stripes are thick, but differ from the preceding stripes because they are both bicolor: one stripe is yellow and red, and the

\textsuperscript{52}A phrase borrowed from Berta Ribeiro's \textit{Arte Indígena, Linguagem Visual}, which argues that indigenous arts of Brazil are in fact visual languages. See Berta Ribeiro, \textit{Arte Indígena, Linguagem Visual} (São Paulo: Editora da Universidade de São Paulo, 1989).

\textsuperscript{53}The stripes are best visible on the bodice of the coat because it is the least damaged area, due to the fact that the sides and back of the coat have been stored compressed (face down in the case of the back and pressed against the sleeves in the case of the fronts). This pressure preserved the feathers in a smooth, flat surface.

\textsuperscript{54}Some strips near the top of the sleeves carry three colors—yellow, white, and brown—in no apparent pattern. Some feathers are themselves multicolored, usually one base color with a different hue at the tip or near the shaft, for example, yellow with some green; blue with lighter blues and occasionally yellows and greens; and reds with spots of green and yellow. The rows of medium white, medium dark green, and small dark blue feathers are usually monochrome.
bottom-most, blue and white. The stripes dissolve into large, dark blue and brown feathers once they meet the top of the florets. This is likely an intended design choice, as these long feathers are as densely packed as the stripes, and there is no base fabric visible.

By contrast to the bodice, the sleeves appear to be more or less chaotic because their colors form no immediately apparent pattern. The feathers on the sleeve backs are compressed, like the bodice, but the tops of the sleeves are more tattered and stand up off the surface of the base. On careful inspection, the perceived chaos of the sleeves is due largely to extensive damage; clearly delineated stripes, like those on the bodice, are obvious on the sleeve bottoms, which feature two to three clearly delineated stripes of blue and yellow. This perceived chaos, however, was what led several specialists to tentatively identify the piece as a work of tourist art, intended for external sale rather than internal use.\footnote{Dirk Van Tuurenhout, email to the author, January 21, 2010; Barbara Watanabe, email to the author, April 19, 2010.} Because color and pattern often make objects meaningful and appropriate for use in ritual, a coat without a pattern would likely not be intended for use by an individual able to read "visible language." Deliberate, neat use of color and pattern alone may not signify that the Nasher coat was intended for internal use, but it does problematize its categorization as tourist art.

The Nasher coat’s patterns, like its construction, do not obviously resemble any known body of Amazonian featherwork. Stripes are common design elements. Both the Kayapó diadems and Kaapór bracelets use a common technique—layering short feathers over longer feathers in order to create two horizontal stripes of varying widths (Figure
29. Because featherwork associations are so precise, it is difficult to draw useful comparisons between works that may have a similar color palette, but do not reproduce any other aspects of the Nasher coat pattern.

The sharply defined stripes of the coat do bear some resemblance to Peruvian featherwork and weaving, however, in their shared interest in hard edges and geometry. The feather edges in the Nazca eight-pointed star panel form straight, smooth, crisp divisions between planes of color, much like the Nasher coat’s stripes (Figure 20). Both objects achieve this effect without resorting to trimming the feathers. The similarity ends here. Most Peruvian featherwork is more intricately patterned than the Nasher coat. The Nazca eight-pointed stars are an excellent example of how Peruvian featherwork often takes a simple geometric design and repeats it, reworking color and shape. Though the Nasher coat cannot be firmly identified as Peruvian, the similar use of color and shape is striking.

Like the stripes, the Nasher coat’s florets may be used to identify the garment. There are at least nine florets scattered on the body of the coat: the right edge of the front opening is lined with a series of four florets; three more are scattered on the sleeves, and the two largest florets rest on the sides of the coat, at the hips. Each floret is constructed the same way. Feathers are arranged in concentric, overlapping rings, and sewn directly to a circular patch of fabric (Figures 5 and 6).

56 There are florets on the upper right shoulder, lower on the left shoulder, and about three-quarters down the left sleeve.

57 Most often a cream floral similar to that used for the strips.
these florets are very small and run from large on the outer rings to small in the center ones. The ends of the feathers are frayed and spread out, rather than smooth and gathered like the feathers on the bodice. If the feathers extend all the way to the center of each floret, the longest must be approximately one and a half inches, though no more than five-eighths of an inch of any feather shows. Though the feathers are somewhat ragged on most of the florets, it does not appear that they have fallen away or disintegrated entirely, as on the sleeves. The florets are, on the whole, well-preserved and generally quite flat.

The major differences between florets are in size and color. The florets range in size from around three to six inches in diameter. The ones along the lapel are three inches in diameter, with the exception of that nearest the neck, which is approximately an inch larger. The sleeve florets also measure roughly three inches, though the size is difficult to gauge due to damage and feather loss (Figure 7). The hip florets are the largest and most dramatic. A massive six-inch floret sits over the side seam on the left hip, and a corresponding five-inch floret rests on the right side of the coat, though the right hip floret is closer to the lapel than to the side seam (Figure 6). Each floret seems to have a partner on the other side of the garment, but the placement is asymmetrical.

Because each layer is made of only one color of feather, the concentric circular arrangement creates target-like design. The first and third of the lapel florets, as well as the second and fourth, use the same color progression. The hip florets' color patterns do not match each other, nor that of the lapel florets. The same is true for the sleeve florets.
Though the precise order of colors differs, the types of feathers and available colors remain consistent in all nine florets. In addition, the innermost ring of each floret is made of white down. When not damaged, these feathers curve up off the flat surface of the floret to form a fragile cup in which the final yellow center rests. The center is often quite small and contributes to the overall floral impression. Though the florets are not identical due to the character of individual feathers and the wear on each, they are clearly intended to be similar.

Feathers arranged to mimic flowers are a common decoration in Amazonian featherwork, but most examples show three basic differences from the Nasher coat's florets: they follow Ribeiro's second knotted-construction technique; they often have ornamental centers; and they are frequently worn individually, rather than used as decorations on a larger piece. Ribeiro explains that these "flores de plumas" are often created by wrapping a cord around the calumus and vane of several feathers. A pair of Karajá earrings exemplify this technique (Figure 21). Here, circular pieces of ceramic tile have been affixed to the center of the feathers, adding to the floral impression. Similar florets also line a Karajá belt; though they lack centers and are not independent objects, their construction technique is the same as in the earrings (Figure 22). All the florets discussed are, at most, two colors, and they function as complete pieces in and of themselves. By contrast, the Nasher coat's florets are constructed by layering feathers on

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58 The right side may be missing the left's three-quarter floret due to damage. The hip florets do not seem to have been moved, and there is no sign of damage or removal of a floret anywhere along the bottom of the bodice.
top of one another on a flat surface, make more use of color, and are affixed to the coat.

Though woven Peruvian garments are can be worn with feather accessories, the floret does not seem to be a popular form in Peruvian textiles. Unlike the Nasher coat, ornaments are not usually added to the surface of Peruvian featherwork; the feathers themselves create designs. There are some examples of featherwork garments decorated with concentric rings of color—for example, a Nazca half-tunic (Figure 23). The "target" design is not entirely unlike the Nasher coat florets, but it is much larger, and its construction is quite different. The "targets" are constructed through multiple horizontal rows, like any other design, rather than by overlapping circles of feathers. Again, the correlation between the Nasher coat and Peruvian material does not appear strong enough to serve as the basis of an identification. Design elements ultimately return us to the end of Chapter 2: scholarship on featherwork designs is insufficient to identify the Nasher coat, and it should not be forced into the narrow categories currently available.
Conclusion: Tupi or not Tupi?

Throughout this paper there has been an underlying current of concern with the relationship between the authenticity of objects and the bodies that use them. Fusco and Gomez-Peña make this concern explicit: their costumes call into question the indigeneity of the bodies wearing them, while the movements of those bodies reasserts it. Bodies and the actions they perform can validate the authenticity of the garments they wear. Fusco's sewing contradicts her sneakers, but Gomez-Peña's feather diadem negates his weightlifting. The artists consciously play with the interchange of authenticity between action and object. Scholarly discourse on the Nasher coat exposes an anxiety about this play. The coat's Westernized form and unrecognizable patterning are interpreted as evidence that it could not have functioned in ritual, and thus may be a piece of tourist art.

The body inside the coat must have performed a particular action to make it “authentic;” specifically, an action that denies the reality of colonialism and its ongoing effects. “Ritual” usually refers to “pure” Precolumbian ritual, not the Catholic festivals enjoyed by those who “abandon their cultural heritage and passively enter the nation state, adopting Western clothing styles, language and customs.”\(^{59}\) This mindset denies indigenous agency because it traps communities in the ethnographic present, ignoring the fact that many indigenous people participate and find meaning in Christianity and other

\(^{59}\)Braun, *Arts of the Amazon*, 13-14.
Western traditions. Though individuals like Alfonso Chiza identify as Christian, and religious products of transculturation like Afro-Brazilian Candomblé are well studied across academic disciplines, the objects used in these contemporary rituals are not.

Objects meant for use in indigenous Catholic ritual frequently exhibit unique blends of Western and indigenous influences, much like the Nasher coat. Because of its Westernized form and similarity to Precolombian Peruvian featherwork, the Nasher coat may well be from a Quechua group for use in an indigenous Catholic festival. Specific to the Peruvian context, both featherwork and weaving are prevalent in Holy Week processions.60 Though Ecuadorian specialists such as Norman Whitten did not recognize the coat, forays into nineteenth-century travel accounts may uncover images of similar costumes.61 No such images surfaced in the course of examining twenty-five travel accounts available at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill’s Wilson Library, but there are undoubtedly many texts outside the collection that could yield clues.62

60Patricia L. Nietfeld, email to the author, Februrar y 22, 2010 ; suggestion of Eduardo de J. Douglas.

61Norman Whitten, email to the author, April 7, 2010.

Descriptions of Holy Week processions and costumes may also appear in ethnography. The catalog *Arte de la Real Audiencia de Quito, siglos XVII-XIX* reproduces several sketches of processions and costumes from Quito that could provide a point of departure to connect the Nasher coat to indigenous Catholic production.\(^63\)

Indigenous catholic ritual objects constitute one lacuna in art historical scholarship, but there are gaps even in within relatively well-studied areas like the Amazon. There Nasher coat could have been created by a group whose work is

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\(^{63}\) Alexandra Kennedy, ed., *Arte de la Real Audiencia de Quito, siglos XVII-XIX: patronos, corporaciones y comunidades* (Hondarribia: Nerea, 2002).
undocumented, for any number of reasons: they could live in an understudied area of the Amazon, like the Columbian or Ecuadorian Amazon, or they could live in an inaccessible area of the Brazilian Amazon. The Westernized form of the coat makes these options seem unlikely, but even relatively isolated indigenous groups may trade for Western goods. The coat may also be a unique piece, made on commission or a whim, purposely flouting convention. Perhaps the culture that created the coat stopped producing featherwork before it began to be well-documented in the 1980s.

Answers may lie with scholars not able to contribute to this study. South American institutions like the Museu Nacional in Rio de Janeiro have large collections of featherwork and highly trained staff who may recognize the Nasher coat. Objects similar to the coat could be prevalent in South American and German collections, but fieldwork is necessary to find them. The majority of specialists contacted were curators

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64 Suggestion of Adam Mekler through Dirk Van Tuerenhout, e-mail to the author, January 21, 2010.


66 Bilbao, *Plumária Amazónica*, 16.

67 The only contributor from a South American institution is Marlo Brito, of Ecuador’s Museo Mindalae. Marlo Brito concurred with Norman Whitten’s opinion that the object did not appear to be Ecuadorian. E-mail to the author, April 13, 2010.

68 Amy J. Buono mentioned similar florets used on objects in German ethnographic collections, but a survey of four recent publications was not fruitful. It is quite possible the objects have not been published. E-mail message to the author, January 22, 2010. See: Anita Hermannstadter, *Deutsche am Amazonas Forscher oder Abenteurer?: Expeditionen in Brasilien 1800 bis 1914* (Berlin: Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbau, 2002); Heinz Israel, *Indianer Brasiliens: Ausstellung des Staatlichen Museums für Volkerkunde Dresden zum 100. Geburtstag des Jenenser Indianerforschers Curt Unckel-Nimuendaju, 1983-84* (Dresden: Staatliches Museum für Volkerkunde Dresden Fo, 1983); Doris Kurella, *Amazonas Indianer: Lebensräume, Lebensrituale, Lebensrechte* (Berlin: B. Reimer, 2002); Andreas Lommel, *Indianer vom Amazonas* (Munchen: 1960); Marie-Louise Nabholz-Kartaschoff, *Golden Sprays &
of South American art, ethnography, or natural science. Soliciting the input of conservators may access the body of knowledge and resources necessary to identify materials such as industrially produced fabric. They may also be helpful in locating the moment in which the coat was manufactured from the style and tailoring. 69 Finally, representatives of South American indigenous groups may be able to identify the coat as well. Contrary to the stereotype of the passive and tragically extinct Indian, there are many indigenous groups still extant who take great interest in their history.

Critiquing Western conceptions of indigeneity is not merely a pedantic scholarly task. In his pointedly Choctaw-imperialist volume of Choctaw history, D. L. Birchfield clarifies that his goal is to illustrate "the role that propaganda plays in shaping public opinion about Indians, public opinion that has been derived from propaganda, which has masqueraded as 'history,' which in turn has shaped Indian law." 70 The nature of oppression is that those in power represent and define those without; images, textual and visual, can directly impact the material conditions of life for the oppressed. Scholarship on indigenous arts that does not attempt to recognize Western bias or indigenous agency is complicit in oppression because it propagates an image of indigeneity dependent on Western racism.

The Nasher coat and Fusco and Gomez-Peña's performance offer one last lesson:

69 Suggestion of Lyneise Williams.

decades of academic critiques of racism, as well as multicultural programming in schools and workplaces, clearly have not penetrated Western mass culture. Though the 1980s saw a massive increase in critiques of Western academia, Fusco wrote in 1994 that,

> As we assumed the stereotypical role of the domesticated savage, many audience members felt entitled to assume the role of the colonizer, only to then find themselves uncomfortable with the implications of the game. Unpleasant but important associations have emerged between the displays of old and the multicultural festivals and ethnographic dioramas of the present. The central position of the white spectator, the objective of these events as a confirmation of their position as global consumers of exotic cultures, and the stress on authenticity as an aesthetic value, all remain fundamental to the spectacle of Otherness many continue to enjoy. 

There is obviously a gulf of experience between academic and non-academic spaces, but what is to be done? Can scholarship be activism? Academic critique can certainly contribute to activist causes by helping individuals understand and begin to speak about the world in which they live. Unfortunately, this critical scholarship is nearly useless when written in what D. L. Birchfield terms "secret scholar code-talk" and not circulated outside universities, as is often the case.

Latino/a artists have long addressed these problems of power and representation by satirizing the West's tendency to equate all of South America with feathered, exotic Amerindians. The Brazilian modernist movement *Antropofagia* turned the pejorative image of Brazil as a nation of cannibal Indians into a strong articulation of national identity. In *Antropofagia*, the cannibal was a metaphor for being Brazilian. Cannibals

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71Fusco, "The Other History," 152.
could consume foreign influences, ingesting the inspiring and expelling the repellent, to become one hybrid but unified whole. Eighty years later, cannibalism and feathers remain potent symbols of Brazilian identity and resistance against neocolonialist powers. In Ligia Pape’s *Tupinamba Cloak*, a large hammock filled with blood-red feathered balls hangs from four columns (Figures 24 and 25). The spheres’ feathers and coloring are obvious references to the famous Tupinamba cloaks of the title. They resemble eggs or huddled fledglings, curled into tight balls from which they may spring at any strange noise. Though the work’s colors are as rich and luxurious as the Nasher coat, *Tupinamba Cloak* guards itself against the viewer’s consuming gaze: a bloodied white hand extends limply from the depths of one of the spheres, as if the body to which it belonged was recently swallowed and slowly digested. Along with Birchfield, Fusco, and Gomez-Pena, Pape disrupts Western preconceptions of indigeneity by confronting the viewer with an indigenous Other cognizant of colonialism and prepared to retaliate. The Nasher coat’s Westernized form coated in feathers performs a similar disruption, albeit more subtly— whoever made the coat and for whatever reason, it is a product of colonialism and a reminder of the ongoing scholarly reverberations.
Glossary

**afterfeather**: bottom-most part of the vane of a feather. Often softer, and less structured or stiff than the main vane.

**bias**: diagonal direction of fabric, the direction in which the fabric stretches.

**bias tape**: thin strip of fabric cut on the bias and folded on itself, often used as trim.

**bias cut**: cut in the same direction of the bias; often used in waistbands and other pieces that need stretch and flexibility.

**bodice**: also "body." The section of the garment that rests directly against the torso above the waist; i.e., the "body" of the coat, the area which is not the sleeves or lapels. This term is usually specific to the material above the waist on a woman's dress, but it is descriptive here and not intended to gender the garment.

**calamus**: bottom-most part of the shaft, extending beyond the vane of a feather.

**cuff**: the end of a sleeve.

**garment**: a piece of clothing.

**lapel**: a folded flap of cloth along the neckline of a jacket; here, refers to decoration placed where a lapel would be.

**lined**: indicates a double thickness of fabric; often added by creating a mirror image of the garment and sewing them together.

**medium weight**: describes thickness of thread or fabric.

**plainweave**: basic type of weaving in which warp and weft threads cross at regular 90 degree angles, creating a checkerboard-like effect.

**pressed**: ironed or literally pressed with the hand or other object to create a lasting fold;

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73 All definitions are the author's.
needs pressure and heat to work.

**rachis**: shaft of feather immediately above calamus, covered with afterfeather.

**raw edge**: edge of fabric which has not been trimmed or secured in some way to prevent the edges of the fabrics from fraying.

**right side**: exterior of the garment; the side intended to be seen.

**seam**: line of stitching holding two pieces of fabric together.

**seam allowance**: space between the raw edge of the fabric and the seam (for example, 5/8 in. is most common in American commercial patterns).

**shaft**: pointy, hard part of the feather that runs through the center of the vane.

**simple hem**: a single fold at the edge of a garment, secured at the top of the raw edge. Usually visible only on the wrong side.

**slip stitch**: a type of hand stitch often used for hems; one very carefully pierces only a small piece of fabric with the needle, perhaps only a few fibers, creating large, visible stitches on the wrong side and no visible stitching on the right side.

**single fold bias tape**: actually has two folds, one on top and one on bottom. The fabric is folded inward to meet in the middle, rather than overlap.

**tacking**: large, loose stitches spread out over a surface; not intended to be permanent, just to hold fabrics together temporarily.

**unfinished seam**: also called "raw seam." Seam made of two raw edges, unsecured to prevent fraying.

**vane**: feathery, colorful, "furry" part of the feather.

**wrong side**: interior of the garment, or a surface which is otherwise not meant to be seen when the garment is complete.
1. Guillermo Gomez-Peña's feather headdress in comparison with an early allegorical figure of the Americas. After Fusco, “The Other History,” 151, fig. 2; Moffitt and Sebastián, “Early Pictures,” 131, fig. 15.
3. Nasher coat opened. Note florets along right edge, as well as ribbons for tie closure.
Nasher Museum of Art.
4. Nasher coat, left arm lifted off front left bodice to reveal stripes and left hip floret. Author’s photo.
5. Nasher coat, florets along right front edge. Author’s photo.
6. Nasher coat, left hip floret detail. Author’s photo.
7. Nasher coat, left arm folded over left front bodice. Note ribbon tie, exposed construction on cuff, and floret on the right edge of the sleeve (shown in the upper right corner). Author’s photo.
10. Nasher coat, left arm cuff. Note blue and white checked base fabric, as well as blue and white pinstripe strips. Stitches along feather calamus and in vane also visible.

Author’s photo.
11. Nasher coat, interior. Note red and white striped fabric in upper right corner, large stitches on interior of coat. Author’s photo.
13. Technical drawings of Amazonian featherwork construction. Captions read, "Fig. 1--Line of feathers over a base cord. True knot," and "Fig. 2--Line of feathers over a base cord, false knots." After Ribeiro, "Bases," 64, figs. 1-2.
14. Nasher coat, right sleeve and cuff. Note blue and white checked base, blue and white pinstripe strips, and stitches. Author’s photo.

Fig. 6 — Amarração das penas à meia altura com fio-guia. (Apud Krause, 1911:398, fig. 258)
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