This thesis has been submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for a postgraduate degree (e.g. PhD, MPhil, DClinPsychol) at the University of Edinburgh. Please note the following terms and conditions of use:

- This work is protected by copyright and other intellectual property rights, which are retained by the thesis author, unless otherwise stated.
- A copy can be downloaded for personal non-commercial research or study, without prior permission or charge.
- This thesis cannot be reproduced or quoted extensively from without first obtaining permission in writing from the author.
- The content must not be changed in any way or sold commercially in any format or medium without the formal permission of the author.
- When referring to this work, full bibliographic details including the author, title, awarding institution and date of the thesis must be given.
From Archaeology to Unceded Territories. Urban Indigenous Art and the Politics of Place in Vancouver.

By

Anna Stewart-Zyw

(B.A. Art and Cultural Studies, Simon Fraser University, 1999)

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

In

Cultural Studies
Edinburgh College of Art

University of Edinburgh
Scotland

May 2023
Abstract

The project sets out to engage Indigenous connections to land and culture in the settler colonial city of Vancouver Canada and examine the ways urban Native art expresses these relationships in forms that trouble, resist and complicate western aesthetics, definitions of land and property, and understandings of Indigenous identity and community as bounded, bordered and reservation based. It considers how ancient, contact era, and contemporary practices and conditions for Indigenous communities in the Lower Mainland area converge to create a particular context for Indigenous public art in the city, with the works engaged in the project, functioning on a number of levels that simultaneously draw on, and subvert the western gaze and history of connoisseurship on the Northwest Coast. By working to re-inscribe/reveal Aboriginal presences in various ways in the city, they contribute to and reflect on, the entanglements of Indigenous /settler relations and place making in Vancouver and can be read as particular manifestations of Indigenous sovereignty in settler colonial public space.
Contents

Introduction ........................................................................................................................................... 1

Introduction to the Research. Public Art on Ancestral and Unceded Coast Salish Territory 5
Contemporary Native Art in Vancouver. Focusing on the Last 25 years. ................................. 7
Core Theoretical Concepts ...................................................................................................................... 8
Transmotion and Native Sovereignty ....................................................................................................... 8
Survivance ............................................................................................................................................. 10
Fugitivity ............................................................................................................................................... 11
Ethnographic (and Everyday) Refusal .................................................................................................... 12
The Settler Colonial Present .................................................................................................................. 15
Decoloniality/Modernity, or the Hubris of the Zero Point ................................................................. 18
Northwest Coast as Category Shifting the Terrain of Indigenous Art in Vancouver. From 1996 to the Present ........................................................................................................................................ 20

Methodologies ........................................................................................................................................ 1

Relational Reckonings ............................................................................................................................ 2
Choosing Cultural Studies ...................................................................................................................... 4
Voice as Political Intervention. Speaking Back ..................................................................................... 6
The Power of Native Oratory .................................................................................................................. 7
Field Work ............................................................................................................................................. 8
Relational Epistemologies ...................................................................................................................... 13

Chapter 1 Still Here/Speaking Back to Emily Carr. Transmotion and the Indian Modernist painting of Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun ......................................................... 1

From Aesthetic Past to Native Present .................................................................................................. 8
Transmotion ........................................................................................................................................... 11
Unceded Territories ............................................................................................................................... 22
An Indigenous Elsewhere ..................................................................................................................... 29
..Native and Modern ................................................................................................................................ 37
A Manifesto of Ovoidism ....................................................................................................................... 41
Canadian Modern .................................................................................................................................. 45
Making Emily Carr Accountable .......................................................................................................... 47

Chapter 2 An Indigenous Elsewhere Totem Poles, Welcomes & Susan Point’s People Amongst the People .............................................................................................................. 1

Coast Salish Welcomes ........................................................................................................................... 8
Totem Poles as Absence .......................................................................................................................... 13
On Traditional Lands, a Salish Footprint .............................................................................................. 18
Productivity and Its Constraints ............................................................................................................. 26
Coast Salish Design Revival ................................................................................................................... 32
Spectacle as Negotiation ........................................................................................................................ 35
Calling to Witness ................................................................................................................................... 37

Chapter 3 Through the Eye of the Raven Native Cosmopolitanism, Fugitive Public Art & Living the City as Indigenous Territory .............................................................................. 1

Data Mining, Extractionism and Violence against Indigenous Women .............................................. 10
Frontier .................................................................................................................................................. 18
Grounded Normativity ........................................................................................................ 21
Being in This Colonial World but Not of It ........................................................................... 30
Indigenous Cosmopolitanism .............................................................................................. 35
Fugitivility ............................................................................................................................. 39

Chapter 4 Restorying The Storyteller Refusing, Re-imagining and Embodying

Chapter 4 Restorying The Storyteller Refusing, Re-imagining and Embodying

Sovereignty in Public Space ................................................................................................. 1
Manifest Manners .................................................................................................................. 14
The Implicated Gaze. Positioning Jeff Wall ......................................................................... 17
Out of Place..? ......................................................................................................................... 20
Routes, Roots and Meeting Places ....................................................................................... 24
Relational Epistemologies ..................................................................................................... 27
The Settler Colonial Uncanny ................................................................................................ 32
Refusal and Irreconcilable Spaces of Indigeneity ................................................................. 35

Reflections ................................................................................................................................ 1

Reflections ................................................................................................................................ 1

Feeling Citizenships ................................................................................................................. 2
Decolonization .......................................................................................................................... 4
Native Transmotion .................................................................................................................... 6

Bibliography ........................................................................................................................... 1

Glossary of Terms .................................................................................................................... 22

Sample of Artist Interviews .................................................................................................. 24

Sample of Artist Interviews .................................................................................................. 24

Duane Linklater Interview, 2015.......................................................................................... 24
Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun, Interview 2014 ....................................................................... 38
Tania Willard, Interview, 2016 ............................................................................................... 59

List of Illustrations

List of Illustrations

Figure 1-1. Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun, Opening of Unceded Territories .................. 4
Figure 1-2. The Impending Nisga’a Deal Last Stand Chump Change ............................. 10
Figure 1-3. Fundamental elements of Coast Salish design ............................................. 14
Figure 1-4. 1913 Nuxalk grave marker from Bentick Arm ............................................ 19
Figure 1-5. Ovoid Box. Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun ...................................................... 42
Figure 1-6. Transformation of Bill Wilson. Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun ..................... 49
Figure 2-1. Spindle Whorl manhole cover ...................................................................... 4
Figure 2-2. Stanley Park tourist map .................................................................................. 11
Figure 2-3. Eighteenth-century Coast Salish mountain goat horn bracelets ............... 22
Figure 2-4. Male and Female Welcome Figures, Welcome Post Gateways ............... 26
Figure 2-5. Chowitsut house post at Lummi ................................................................. 27
Figure 2-6. Quw’utsun’ Coast Salish Spindle whorl (pre-1912) ................................... 39
Figure 3-1. Through the Eye of the Raven mural ............................................................. 4
Figure 3-2. Valentines March for the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women .... 18
Figure 3-3. Downtown Eastside garden .......................................................................... 25
Figure 3-4. East Van sign .................................................................................................... 27
Figure 3-5. Musqueam Indian band member Brad Charles at the Sunrise Market .... 35
Figure 3-6. Mural from alley ............................................................................................ 43
Figure 4-1. “Re-storying The Storyteller,” event conducted during the Indigenous Acts conference ................................................................. 4
Figure 4-2. The Storyteller, Jeff Wall, 1986 ............................................................... 9
Figure 4-3. Cecily Nelson and Cheryl L’Hirondelle, “Re-storying The Storyteller,” ... 13
Figure 4-4. Peter Morin, Salmon Honouring Circle .............................................. 17
Figure 4-5. Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe, Eduard Manet, 1863 ................................. 18
Figure 4-6. Hastings Sawmill from Powell Street and Jackson Avenue, ca. 1890 ... 28
Figure 4-7. Group photograph with Dylan Robinson, Raven Chacon, Karen Racolette, Duane Linklater, Joar Nango, Candace Hopkins, and Tanya Willard ...... 31
Figure 4-8. Transmotion in Florence ................................................................. 4
Acknowledgements

This project is, in so many ways a collaborative effort that would not have been possible without the following people for sharing their work, thoughts, time and patience so graciously.

Very sincere thanks and appreciation to my Supervisors, Dr John Harries in the School of Social and Political Science, for his support and interest in the project from the beginning (despite always maintaining it wasn’t anthropology).
To Dr Sole Garcia Ferrari in the School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture, for her calm patience, encouragement and support, the project would simply not have been possible without you both.

Dr Phillip Pass for his precious friendship, generous feedback and invaluable editing skills. Dr Kaitlin McKormick and Dr Kelsey Wrightson from The Centre for Canadian Studies at the University of Edinburgh, for their friendship and encouragement in the beginning stages and over the years.

Huy’ch’qa siem
to Brad and Mary Charles and the Charles Family at Musqueam for their generosity and welcome, and for so graciously hosting my boy and I on their beautiful territory.

Dr Heather McLean and Professor Dusky Purples (aka Darren Patrick) for showing me what was possible in academia.

To Dr Paul Carter for our generative correspondence and exchange over the years, and for his book *Dark Writing, Rewriting the Language of Colonialism*, which remains invaluable to me, and many other Indigenous scholars.

Dr Roy Carlson at Simon Fraser University for his patient replies to my pestering questions and for pointing me towards the invaluable work on the pre-contact history of the Northwest Coast which would shape this project.

To Dr Dylan Robinson at Queens University and Candace Hopkins, for organizing the incredible ‘Indigenous Acts’ gathering in Vancouver, Unceded Coast Salish Territory in 2014. Hands up to them and all the powerful Indigenous artists, activists and scholars who were there that week.
(I’m sure world peace could have been attained if we’d had a few more days).

Real gratitude for the everyday correspondence and friendship of many scholars, artists, Elders, activists and community members over the years who so generously shared their thoughts, ideas, critiques and encouragement, as we navigate together the importance and Decolonial possibilities of Indigenous art. Dr Marcia Crosby, David Garneau, Tanya Lukin Linklater, Audrey Huntley, Sonny Assu, Elwood Jimmy, Dr Michele Raheja, Alvin Mack, Banchi Hanuse, Peter Siwallace, Jordana Luggi, Michelle Nahani, Dr Coll Thrush, Dr Gloria Bell, and Musqueam Elder Larry Grant.

To the many artists who shared their work and voices with me: Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun, Peter Morin, Elle Maija Tailfeathers, Jerry Whitehead, Duane Linklater, Lorna Brown, Miquel D’Angeli, Kwiaahwah Jones and Tania Willard

My Elders group and all the Women at the Downtown Eastside Woman’s Centre
Stella, Louisa, Ronnie, Tia, Mable, Marge, Teresa, Carol, Harsha.
Hands Up to you all.

Deepest gratitude for all my Friends and Relations in East Van, Italy, Scotland
and Bella Coola for their invaluable support over the years—for your conversation, spare beds, warm meals, and sometimes shoulders to cry on,
I am forever indebted.
Manijeh Ghaffari and Leonor Wellwood and their Families (who are like my own),
Dan Harbord, Brian Bailey, Ocean Dionne, Igor Santizo, Diana Calthrop, Cahal Morgan, Patty and Shane Harsch, Sif Peterson, Bridgit Lanham, Dad and Pegge, Edith Foster, Karthikeyan Damodaran Darcey Leith, Katie Hastie and Javita Narang.
And of course my amazing Mother, who never waivers in her love and belief in me.
This work is dedicated to my son Ira, and my Secwepmc/St’át’imc Granny, Caroline Smith
who carried her Nativeness with her wherever she went, and who moved between the urban and the rural and would not be defined by either.

All My Relations
This is for you.
Map of Coast Salish Territories

---

### Timeline of Northwest Coast Art in public space

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1927</td>
<td>National Gallery of Canada exhibits Northwest Coast art.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>Vancouver Art Gallery exhibition of Northwest Coast art.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>Museum of Anthropology exhibition of Northwest Coast art.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>Vancouver Art Gallery exhibition of Northwest Coast art.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>Vancouver Art Gallery exhibition of Northwest Coast art.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>Vancouver Art Gallery exhibition of Northwest Coast art.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>Vancouver Art Gallery exhibition of Northwest Coast art.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Vancouver Art Gallery exhibition of Northwest Coast art.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Vancouver Art Gallery exhibition of Northwest Coast art.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Vancouver Art Gallery exhibition of Northwest Coast art.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Vancouver Art Gallery exhibition of Northwest Coast art.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Vancouver Art Gallery exhibition of Northwest Coast art.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Vancouver Art Gallery exhibition of Northwest Coast art.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction
Chloé Leriche’s film Before the Streets tells the story of a young Native man named Shawnouk, played by Atikamekw Cree actor Rykko Bellemare, who, getting caught up in a crime in the city, ultimately has to escape the urban environment and return to his rural homelands to connect with his Indigenous culture and find redemption. Though the 2015 film is rare in that it tells a story about Native people entirely in a Native language (Atikamekw), using non-professional Cree actors, the story it tells, is not. Elegant and spare, full of striking imagery of the natural world shot in and around the village of Manawan in rural Quebec, it essentially represents Indigenous cultures as timeless, one with nature and the wilderness, and ostensibly ‘other’ to a western, civilized urbanity. In doing so, it reinforces a common trope in narratives about Native people in settler colonial societies, that upholds cities as the ultimate projects of western modernity, where Indigenous people, debased and out of place, must return to a remote home land if they are to connect to their true culture. The story is resolved with the Native slipping from the picture, while the city remains the ultimate symbol of western conquest, progress and civilization.

My research project attempts to trouble this narrative and look at some of the factors that contribute to the conceptual divide in settler colonial states between urban Indigenous and rural Native cultures. By examining urban Indigenous art in public space in Vancouver, it attends to social and political issues that have contributed to this thinking, and is concerned with ways, in North America more broadly, and in British Columbia in particular, cities often were and continue to be Indigenous places.
Long before contact, and continuing to the present day, Native People have lived in cities. Though often obscured in the modern city, relegated to particular areas through formal and informal forms of segregation, and/or constructed as inauthentic and defined by displacement, Native people have inhabited, and contributed to urban places and spaces in ways both constrained by and resistant to, colonialism. The thesis examines ways in which Indigenous presence and histories in Vancouver are reflected in four urban Native art works that form the study, and how they work to trouble these assumptions. Scholar Nathalie Balloy refers to this process as a revenant Indigeneity, coming in and out of view, understood by non-Indigenous people through both what is obscured and what is displayed, in what she calls “spectacular” and “spectral” ways.

In her curatorial introduction to the important Vancouver exhibition *Nations in Urban Landscapes*, Tsimshian, Haida art historian Marcia Crosby, stresses the political importance of recognizing urban Indigenous cultures and critiquing assumptions about ‘authenticity’ in acknowledging Indigenous histories and connections to cities:

> The purpose of locating nations in urban landscapes is twofold, firstly it acknowledges the empirical reality of aboriginal peoples who have been historically displaced from traditional lands, and recognizes the importance and legitimacy of the hybrid histories that have arisen out of their displacement. Secondly, it metaphorically situates all Aboriginal or Indigenous peoples—Native, Indian, Inuit and Metis, as nations in an urban landscape.

---

This is a strategy that explodes the officially sanctioned context for Aboriginal authority and expertise; that is, living in one’s Aboriginal territory, speaking one’s own Aboriginal language, following “traditional” cultural practices, having the ability to trace a seamless lineage to one’s geographic, social and historic origins, and so on.8

The project takes as its focus the changing politics of Indigenous representation in the city of Vancouver Canada as reflected in four key Indigenous art works from the 1990s to the present. Engaging them in ways which reveal a shift in discourse, from one that sought to replace the Indigenous histories of the Lower Mainland area with the art of more northerly nations, to an acknowledgement of the unceded Indigenous territory on which Vancouver sits, it attends to questions around ways Native People live the city Indigenously.

The presupposition that “authentic” Indigeneity is rural- and reserve-based, or defined by a homeland outside of cities, has its origins in the conceptual and material removal of Indigenous communities from urban spaces, dating from early colonial settlement. With over half the Indigenous populations of Canada living in urban areas,9 these assumptions can act as a present-day form of assimilation, denying recognition and rights to urban and off-reserve Native people, and continuing to impact urban Indigenous communities who face systemic inequality and lack of equal access to services and housing, in relation to non-Indigenous urban dwellers, “including lower levels of education and life expectancy.”10

---


Vancouver is the unceded and traditional homelands of the x̱məθkwəy̓əm (Musqueam), the Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and the Səl̓ílwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh) Central Coast Salish Peoples of the Lower Mainland area, who have had continuous presence on those territories from time immemorial. Their languages part of the Salish linguistic family that extends from “the northern limit of the Gulf of Georgia on the inside of Vancouver Island and covering most of southern Vancouver Island, all of the Lower Mainland and most of Puget Sound and the Olympic Peninsula.”

This project looks at the ways these urban Native art works in Vancouver counter the colonial effacement of Coast Salish places and spaces throughout the city. Examining aspects of municipal settler colonialism that dispossessed several Coast Salish settlements including those in Stanley Park, which were replaced with Totem poles in the 1920s, and other art of more northerly nations (namely, the Haida on Haida Gwaii, and the Kwak'waka'wakw of Vancouver Island). Suggesting the Indigeneity of the city as being elsewhere from Vancouver, which worked to overwrite the Central Coast Salish art and culture of the area and justify the settlement of their lands.

Introduction to the Research. Public Art on Ancestral and Unceded Coast Salish Territory

The project sets out to engage Indigenous connections to land and culture in the settler colonial city and examine the ways in which urban Native art expresses these relationships in forms that trouble, resist and complicate western aesthetics,

---

definitions of land and property, and understandings of Indigenous identity and community as bounded, bordered and reservation based.

Considering Vancouver as a site of various intersecting Indigenous presences and cultures, from the traditional territory holders the x̄məθkw̓y̓əm (Musqueam), the Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and the Səl̓ílwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh),¹⁴ who have continuously occupied the lands on which the city sits from time immemorial, to its large and varied intertribal communities. This project considers the land, art and culture of the Coast Salish of the Lower Mainland area, and the city of Vancouver as a particularly complex site of meeting for differing Indigenous and settler communities.

Owing to a number of factors, Coast Salish art is distinguished from the art of the northern Northwest Coast cultures in important ways that have informed how it has been practiced, displayed, viewed and interpreted in the city. Resulting in it being ‘hidden in plain sight’ in public spaces in the city until the 1990s, despite the entire Lower Mainland’s situation on Ancestral and unceded Coast Salish territory. Due to early and ongoing municipal colonialism, particular cultural and religious constraints around the kinds of imagery that could be depicted in Salish art,¹⁵ and ways of understanding land which emphasized borderless kin and community

¹⁴ There are eleven Coast Salish languages (named due to their proximity to the Salish Sea or Strait of Georgia) in the Salishan language family (totaling 23 languages). The Salish linguistic area extends from the interior and south coast of British Columbia, into northern Oregon and Washington state, as well as the Idaho panhandle and Northwestern Montana. With the exception of the Nuxalk in the Bella Coola valley, located on the central coast of British Columbia, the languages share a geographically integrated area that dates back to 9000 BCE. A Stó:lō-Coast Salish Historical Atlas, ed. Keith Thor Carlson (Vancouver, BC: Douglas & McIntyre, 2001), 6–18.
networks, Coast Salish art and culture was largely obscured from public space in Vancouver until well into the latter half of the twentieth century.

It considers how ancient, contact era, and contemporary practices and conditions, informed by major political events for First Nations in the province of British Colombia, converge to create a particular context for Indigenous public art in Vancouver. With the works engaged by the project functioning on a number of levels that simultaneously draw on and subvert the western gaze and history of connoisseurship on the Northwest Coast. By working to re-inscribe/reveal Aboriginal presences in various ways in the city, they contribute to and reflect on, the entanglements of Indigenous settler relations and place-making in Vancouver and can be read as particular manifestations of Indigenous sovereignty in settler colonial public space.

**Contemporary Native Art in Vancouver. Focusing on the Last 25 years.**

*Modernism was like walking into a restaurant and they ask, do you have a reservation? And you say no, and they say, we're not going to serve you because you don't have one. I'm going “I do have a reservation, you **!!ers can't keep me out. I'm off the reservation.”*

Each of the four chapters that make up the body of the thesis, engages a work of Indigenous art in public space in Vancouver. In light of significant political events for First Nations in the province, together with particular theoretical concepts, namely the Anishnaabe poet and scholar Gerald Vizenor’s concepts of *transmotion*, (sovereignty of motion), *survivance*, and *fugitivity*, together with Mohawk scholar

---


17 Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun (artist). Interview with the author. Summer 2015.
Audra Simpson’s refusal, as a conceptual or poetic framework that thread through the chapters, I argue the works reflect a major shift in discourse around Native presence, resistance and representation within the context of the settler colonial city. The themes of transmotion, survivance, fugitivity and refusal embody a sense of movement that defies enclosure, capture and containment, expressing what Vizenor refers to as the ‘Native potentiality’ intrinsic to Indigenous sovereignty.

Core Theoretical Concepts

Transmotion and Native Sovereignty

Sovereignty as ‘transmotion’ is not the same as the notions of Indigenous treaty sovereignty; transmotion can be scorned and denied, but motion is never granted by a government. Motion is a natural human right not bound by borders. Sovereignty as transmotion is tacit, inherent, and not the common provisions of treaties with other governments.

The Anishnaabeg poet and scholar Gerald Vizenor refers to transmotion as the basic, intrinsic right of movement which Native people have to the land, and being travelers on it, that form the basis of Indigenous life ways, the “originary” form of Indigenous sovereignty. The fundamentally relational elements of freedom of movement, of negotiation, of trade, of enacting Nation to Nation protocol with other groups and nations, that were curtailed by the imposition of the reservation system, are inherent ways in which Indigenous peoples exercise forms of sovereignty that

---


19 Or “the closure of meaning by cultural representation however thick.” Gerald Vizenor. Literary Chance: Essays on Native American Survivance (València: Universitat de València, 2007), 78.


21 Vizenor, Fugitive Poses, 188.

22 Ibid.


24 Audra Simpson cites “the wild Indian who knew no enclosure.” Mohawk Interruptus, 101.
transcend colonially imposed systems of governance. Maintaining this freedom, then, is “not a power that can be granted. The sovereignty that is Indigenous presence, motion and survivance—transmotion—inheres in Native Peoples and not in the settler state.”

Physically and conceptually imposed structures of dominance and containment were imperative to the western colonial project. The need to confine Indigenous peoples to reservations and other government-delegated tribal areas, was also realized in representations of Indigenous cultures in images that conveyed a pre-emptive closure of Native life, something Vizenor argues, worked to orphan them from their context, showing instead, fixed and fetishized facsimiles that circulated in the colonial imaginary as ‘authentic’ images of Indians. What he terms the closure of ‘ironic interimage simulations,’ seen and categorizable, in photographs and paintings, but decontextualized and fixed. Discussing the ways these images differ from those of early homesteaders as pioneers in the context of their new environments, ‘indians’ were consistently conveyed in a dislocated manner. “The manifest camera created interimage fragments of fugitive poses that separated Natives from their communities and ancestral land; the simulations of the other as the Indian, turned the real into the unreal with no obvious presence in time or nature.”

---

26 “Colonial governments across the globe managed their Native populations through violence, segregation and the appropriation of land, as well as by way of assimilationist policies. From violent dispossession and genocide in the Americas, to forced evictions from cities to black townships in South Africa, colonial rule was backed by racial violence, terror, and coercion.” Renisa Mawani. “Genealogies of the Land: Aboriginality, Law, and Territory in Vancouver’s Stanley Park,” Social & Legal Studies, 14, no. 3 (2005): 319.
27 “The interimage portraiture, photographic and iconic enactments of the other, are seen with no sense of Native presence or referent.” Vizenor, Fugitive Poses. 146, 160.
28 Ibid., 158.
His concept of *transmotion* actively resists this physical and representational capture, it is something inherently mobile, not something that can be granted by governing states or regulated by force. As scholar Deborah Madsen writes in the *Transmotion* journal:

*The right to physical spatial movement is a key aspect of Indigenous sovereignty, as is the Native spiritual, philosophical and subjective engagement with material space, without which sovereignty can be rendered precarious and vulnerable to domination by settler colonial interests. A fully realized sovereign politics addresses not only the right to land, but also the right to express a specifically Native centered relationship to land through physical and conceptual mobility.*

**Survivance**

Vizenor is perhaps best-known for his use of the term *survivance*—alternately interpreted by Indigenous scholars and artists as survival+resistance or survival+endurance, (and sometimes as neither, or both), and understood to mean Native presence and story as enduring, active and embodied forces—he links directly with *transmotion*. For Vizenor, *Survivance* and Indigenous futurity are impossible without the sovereignty of motion inherent in *transmotion*.

*The presence of natives on this continent is obvious, a natural right of motion, or transmotion, and continuous sovereignty; in other words, natives are neither exiles nor separatists from other nations or territories. The presence of natives on this continent is an obvious narrative on sovereignty—that is-natural reason and the sovenance of motion and survivance. And later in a constitutional democracy, the legal entitlements of native sovereignty.*

*Survivance* is active presence—and can be found in creation stories, dances, songs, paintings, that resist dominance, closure and static representation. He gives as an example the *anishinaabe midewiwin* scrolls, incised on birch bark or cedar meant to “assist the memory” and convey a type of record, that show wavy or straight lines

---

31 Vizenor, *Fugitive Poses*, 181–82.
coming from humans or animals, often indicating spirit power. ‘If the lines proceed from the mouth, they indicate song or speech, if from the ear, they indicate sounds which are heard. The virtual cartography of the anishinaabe, includes messages, casual records, and representations of action, “days, directions and duplications of numbers.” He argues that Native virtual cartography is about presence and process, more than mere directions showing a trajectory from one place to the next, which he contrasts with western maps as documents which are possessory and fixed.

Native transmotion is an instance of natural reason, and an aesthetic creation, to be sure, but not a literal simile of nature as a resistance to civilization; transmotion is motion and native memories, and not mere comparatives or performative acts. The sovereignty of motion is survivance, shared power, and performative transmotion is an ethical presence of nature, native stories and natural reason.

Fugitivity

Manifest destiny and colonial expansion relied on the ongoing dispossession of Indigenous communities from their land, while consistently subjecting them to various forms of genocidal violence, carceral reservation systems, assimilationist projects and other ongoing forms of oppression, resulting in marginalization and dislocation from and often in their own homelands. Sioux scholar Nick Estes argues that unlike other groups who are targeted for their cultural or religious differences, Native people are not targeted so much for who they are, but “where they are.” “By default, Indigeneity is a condition of fugitivity.” Essentially rendering Native people outlaws, geographically within, but outside, the modern colonial state.

32 Ibid., 172.
33 Ibid., 183.
Despite the carceral thinking that imposes the status of other on Indigenous people, a state of fugitivity can also be seen as a liminal place and one of possibility. Picking up from Vizenor’s Natives as the “fugitives of manifest manners,” Ritskes and Martineau argue for fugitivity as a state that transcends boundaries and resists closure, instead becoming radical in its alterity.

*fugitive proposes an insurgent force of dissident visibility; it is the hidden that reveals itself in motion. The fugitive aesthetic is thus an overflowing of borders and bordered-thinking, a liminal praxis whose generative effects activate art in a transversal re-presencing of indigeneity throughout Indigenous lands, languages and territories.*

As Vizenor states, “Natives were the others, outside of monotheistic civilization and the national debates over state and federal sovereignty despite the manifest of dominance.”

**Ethnographic (and Everyday) Refusal**

*I am interested in the way that cultural analysis may look when difference is not the unit of analysis, when culture is disaggregated into narratives rather than wholes, when proximity to the territory that one is engaging in is as immediate as the self, and what this then does to questions of “voice. I will argue that in such a context of anthropological accounting, “voice” is coupled with sovereignty that is evident at the level of interlocution, at the level of method and at the level of textualisation.*

Mohawk anthropologist Audra Simpson, in her important book; Mohawk interruptus: Political life across the borders of settler states, writes about the different ways Indigenous sovereignty continues to be practiced in her home community of Kahnawá:ke in what is now southwestern Quebec. Echoing Vizenor’s concept of transmotion as survivance and sovereignty, Simpson affirms that “like Indigenous bodies, Indigenous sovereignties and Indigenous political orders prevail within and

---

36 Vizenor, *Fugitive Poses*, 192.
apart from settler governance.” Her book began as an ethnographic research project, looking at how the Kahnawa’kehró:non have exercised their political rights and sovereignty in ways both restrained by, and resistant to, settler colonialism.

As a people within the Haudenosaunee or Iroquois Confederacy, many continue to acknowledge their own Indigenous forms of governance and citizenship, refusing to recognize the Canadian or American settler colonial states. Simpson considers this form of refusal to seek recognition from the colonial state, a generative concept—a means by which the Mohawks of Kahnawá:ke, maintain their Indigenous Nationhood within and apart from colonial governance.

Coining the term ethnographic refusal, she considers the concept through the prism of her own relationship to ethnography as an Indigenous Woman scholar and community member. “The interrupted and interruptive ways,” it is used to practice powerful forms of resistance to the settler state and its assumption of Indigenous disappearance and a means of resisting intrusive and often violating forms of research which she critiques in her own field of anthropology, as seeking to reify Indigeneity into something fixed, classifiable, and past.

She critiques the project of anthropology in the first part of the twentieth century as being aligned with the imperatives of empire, emphasizing a timelessness and tranquillity that focuses on the contained and classifiable, while disregarding the sometimes contradictory, ongoing resistance, struggle and

sovereignty of motion inherent in Indigenous culture. As Marcia Crosby writes, “Complex signs of Aboriginal traditions and cultures are continually being re-negotiated and, in turn, reinvested with power and meaning at personal, public and political levels.”

Historian Douglas Cole, in the introduction to his book Stolen Heritage: The Scramble for Artifacts on the Northwest Coast, discusses this anthropological drive to categorize, collect and display Native Northwest Coast art works over the past century, as being fundamentally allied with empire and conquest. An expression of “power relations,” imperative in the making of a western self in relation to an Indigenous “other.” Or as Vizenor claims in its reverse, “The indian sustains the other.”

Simpson critiques this historical relationship between anthropology and the colonial subject, articulating how deeply it conditions representations of Indigeneity.

To speak of Indigeneity is to speak of colonialism and anthropology, as these are means through which Indigenous people have been known and sometimes are still known. In different moments, anthropology has imagined itself to be a voice, and in some disciplinary iterations, the voice of the colonised. This modern interlocutionary role was not self-ascribed by anthropologists, nor was it without a serious material and ideational context; it accorded with the imperatives of Empire and in this, specific technologies of rule that sought to obtain space and resources, to define and know the difference that it constructed in those spaces and to then govern those within.

---

42 Simpson, Mohawk Interruptus, 34–33.
45 “In other words, institutionalized practices and relations of power shape the production, circulation and consumption of anthropological knowledge as well as the production of subject positions and subjectivities. These micro-practices of the academy define not only a specific grid of enunciability, authority and authorization, but also the conditions of existence of anthropology as an academic discipline.”
46 Vizenor, Fugitive Poses, 151.
This anthropological tendency to define Indigenous cultures as culturally and physically fixed, continues to inform perceptions of colonization and settlement as past and somehow resolved, when as Simpson and others have argued, settler colonialism remains a fundamentally unfinished project.

In addition to what Anishnaabeg scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson calls “intervention,”48 in her introduction to Theorizing Refusal, McGranahan writes about refusal as active response: “Refusal is often a part of political action for movements of decolonization and self-determination, for rights and recognitions and for rejecting certain structures and systems.”49

The Settler Colonial Present

Settler colonial theory forms the basis for engaging the art in this study. Locating the works in relation to the way it is practiced in Canada, it is used as a reference throughout and as a framework for thinking from and through. And this project draws heavily on the work of Australian settler colonial scholars Patrick Wolfe, and Lorenzo Veracini, Mohawk anthropologist Audra Simpson, and Unangax scholar Eve Tuck for her work in Indigenous methodologies and land-based education.

Settler colonialism, as it is practiced in the Americas, Australia and New Zealand, refers to a particular kind of colonialism whereby the colonizers who came to these places remained, not only claiming the land, resources, and people as being under their dominion, but permanently settled there, creating a new nation state.50 In his important work, Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native, Patrick Wolfe describes this founding of a new country as an “invasion (without end),” one

---

50 Differentiating it from “exogenous” colonialism as in India for example, which was colonized by the British to extract resources but without the intention of founding a new country. Tuck and Yang, “R-Words,” 224.
that comprises an ongoing “structure not an event.”\textsuperscript{51} As Lorenzo Veracini describes, it is therefore a “normalizing structure constantly engaged in superseding itself.”\textsuperscript{52} This is built into the structure of the nation and is predicated on the ongoing dispossession of Indigenous peoples from their land, which is considered a valuable resource to the state. Tuck and Yang identify the originary tripartite nature of settler colonialism that includes the white settler, the disappearing Native, and chattel slaves who were taken from their (mainly African) homelands to work the land stolen from the Indigenous people; an approach which thus fueled world economies and other nations built on empire, informing the “formation of whiteness in settler colonial nation states.”\textsuperscript{53} Despite the end of Chattel slavery as it was practiced in the United States in 1865,\textsuperscript{54} communities whose predecessors were slaves, have remained largely racialized and economically marginalized.

Within settler colonialism, Indigenous people are not only continuously being dispossessed of their land bases to make way for settler groups and economies, but are further subjected to cultural and epistemological, as well as material elimination. This constitutes a process that Wolfe terms “structural genocide,”\textsuperscript{55} whose organizing principles can include:

\begin{quote}
Officially encouraged miscegenation, the breaking-down of native title into alienable individual freeholds, native citizenship, child abduction, religious conversion, resocialization in total institutions such as missions or boarding schools, and a whole range of cognate biocultural assimilations. All these strategies, including frontier homicide, are characteristic of settler colonialism.\textsuperscript{56}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{53} Tuck and Yang, 224.
\textsuperscript{55} In Canada this is known as assimilation.
\textsuperscript{56} Wolfe, “Elimination of the Native,” 389.
These assimilation projects manifested in Canada with the Indian Act legislation of 1876, the consequent enforcement of Residential schooling (with some schools still in operation until the 1970s), and the Potlatch Ban on any and all Native dances, festivals and religious practices in British Columbia, from 1884-1951.\(^57\), \(^58\), \(^59\) In addition to these attempts at elimination, the process of effacing Native place names and consequent stories, histories and Indigenous presences, overwriting them with western or non-local place names, were a further effort to construct the Canadian landscape as \textit{terra nullius}, both geographically and culturally. With both exclusion and inclusion in the settler state working to erase Indigenous presence.\(^60\)

Though a powerful theoretical concept used to identify the constitutive and structural aspects of colonialism built into the ways the state is run, by placing an emphasis on systems and structures, there can be a tendency not to “account for Indigenous lives – the assertion that it could do so is itself allied to the settler colonial impulse to erase Indigenous life and assert settler control of this discursive space.”\(^61\)

As a language or way to describe the ongoing everyday violence of colonialism, and to help make visible the normative processes of colonialism, settler colonial theory is tremendously useful. Yet, at the same time, Native people have


\(^{59}\) “Potlatch ceremonies, depending upon the culture, could for example be held to celebrate the passing of names, titles and responsibilities of one chief to the eldest heir, distribute wealth, establish rank; to mark the passing of a chief or the head of a house; to celebrate weddings and births. Recognized as integral to the culture of coastal First Nations, the potlatch was targeted with particular force. The government and missionaries viewed potlatch ceremonies as excessive, wasteful and barriers to assimilation.” Bob Joseph. “Potlatch Ban: Abolishment of First Nations Ceremonies,” in Working Effectively with Indigenous Peoples Blog, posted October 16, 2021, accessed May 2016, http://www.ictinc.ca/the-potlatch-ban-abolishment-of-first-nations-ceremonies.

\(^{60}\) Examples of this in the settler city would be “art washing” where murals and other public arts are commissioned by urban developers working to gentrify marginalized neighborhoods.

\(^{61}\) Macoun and Strakosch, “The Ethical Demands of Settler Colonial Theory,” 14, 19.
been articulating this in a variety of ways since contact.\textsuperscript{62} Indigenous experiences of settler colonialism did not start with, and is not defined by this theory, which can over emphasize a sense of inevitability\textsuperscript{63} and discount Indigenous agency and sovereignty.

As Audra Simpson states, settler colonialism remains a deeply unfinished and unsettled project. The importance then, of \textit{imagining otherwise}\textsuperscript{64} in this project comprises an attempt to locate the works engaged and the contexts from which they emerge—the places of refusal to comply with colonial systems, as well as the ways in which they are restrained by them, presently AND historically—as sites of struggle and resistance to settler colonial erasure.

\textbf{Decoloniality/Modernity, or the Hubris of the Zero Point}\textsuperscript{65}

\textit{Once upon a time scholars assumed that the knowing subject in the disciplines is transparent, disincorporated from the known and untouched by the geo-political configuration of the world in which people are racially ranked and regions are racially configured. From a detached and neutral point of observation (that Colombian philosopher Santiago Castro-Gómez describes as the hubris of the zero point), the knowing subject maps the world and its problems, classifies people and projects into what is good for them.}\textsuperscript{66}

Colonialism is predicated on the ongoing physical dispossession of Indigenous peoples, as well as the devaluing and “otherizing” of Indigenous and subaltern knowledges which are not commensurate with white colonial ways of knowing and being. Theorizing and understanding Decoloniality is thus central to engaging with Indigenous art in the settler colonial city and comprises an essential

\textsuperscript{62} Here I would name the Secwépemc author and activist Art Manuel and the Stó:lō poet and author Lee Miracal, as only a few names among many Indigenous scholars working on settler coloniality in Canada.

\textsuperscript{63} Macoun and Strakosch, “The Ethical Demands of Settler Colonial Theory,” 435.


practice in this work which is greatly indebted to the

Modernity/Coloniality/Decoloniality Project thinkers.

The largely Latin American Modernity/Coloniality/Decoloniality project or (MCD), involves the collective work of scholars as diverse as Argentinean

semiotician Walter Mignolo, Puerto Rican sociologist Ramon Grosfoguel, Colombian

anthropologist Arturo Escobar and Chicana poet and Feminist theorist Gloria

Anzaldúa, among others. The use of the term ‘project’ is designed not to connote a

singular piece of research work, but rather to provide a disciplinary description and

method of articulating the collective and ongoing effort to delink (as Mignolo writes)

and rethink, the concept of a universal neutral production of knowledge that purports
to speak for all in its universality. Instead they term this open ended work "a project

of epistemic disobedience"67 that critiques the enlightenment philosophy espoused

by Rene Descartes which proposes “I think therefore I am.” (as a body unconditioned

by social situation or the outside world).68 Their work claims, then, that the western

academic privileging of this universalizing thinking, constitutes an epistemic violence

that upholds certain structures and knowledge productions at the expense of

others.69 In turn, they further critique the concept of western modernity and progress

(and its Capitalist, heteropatriarchal, white supremacist, Christian centrum),70 as the

lens through which world history has been measured—an epistemological framework
intrinsically correlated to European coloniality.71

---


69 Grosfoguel calls this epistemic violence an “epistemicide,” 66–67.

70 Grosfoguel, 87.

As part of the project of Decolonization is a reclaiming or speaking back to what Grosfoguel has termed the *epistemicide* inherent in colonization, a major intention of this project is to centre and privilege Native voices over a mediated version learned through the academy or archives, a positioning of the Native voice as the voice of authority.

Audra Simpson discusses intervening in anthropological and academic discourse that proposes to speak *for* and *about* the Native experience as acts of sovereignty. “Within Indigenous contexts when the people we speak of, speak for themselves, their sovereignty interrupts anthropological portraits of timelessness, procedure and function that dominate representations of their past, and sometimes, their present.”

Northwest Coast as Category
Shifting the Terrain of Indigenous Art in Vancouver. From 1996 to the Present

As this project considers urban Indigenous art in the Coast Salish Lower Mainland area, charting the ways in which it has come in and out of visibility in the settler colonial city, it necessarily critically engages with Northwest Coast as a *category*. Using it not only to describe the art of the area, but also the discourses that have been privileged in the use of the term—those cultures overwritten or largely left out, and the ways in which this continues to shape the identity and practice of Indigenous artists and artmaking in Vancouver.

The term *Northwest Coast* was first used by European explorers to describe the area in the latter half of the 18th century and is now used to characterise both the geography and cultures of a region “extending some 2600 km from Prince William

---

Sound in the Gulf of Alaska, along the coast of British Columbia, to the California-Oregon border.” Home to over 200,000 people, it was among the “most densely settled regions in the Americas north of Mexico” and, as one of the most linguistically (and culturally) diverse in the Americas—with over 40 languages (and cultures) stemming from 12 language families spoken in the area at the time of European contact\(^73\)—it has long been famed for its elaborate and distinctive artistic and cultural traditions; making it a source of great fascination to ethnographers, anthropologists, and art connoisseurs the world over.

Though fundamental to this project, and a term used throughout to describe the cultural and geographic context that informs the art and cultural practices of the Indigenous communities it considers in Vancouver, this project sets out to privilege the Native voice, and is thus concerned with speaking back to the colonial voice as authority on what constitutes *Northwest Coast* art. And the term has remained contested for various reasons and in various ways since contact. The attempt to describe the vast range of distinctive Indigenous cultures, practices and styles that fall within Northwest Coast as a *category*, limit its usefulness as a descriptor except in the broadest of terms. And, as Charlotte Townsend-Gault describes in *Native Art of the Northwest Coast: A History of Changing Ideas*, “This essentializing identification is always in tension with the transcultural exchanges and entanglements that have been going on since the first exchanges with newcomers.”\(^74\)


In interviews with Haida curator and artist Kwiaahwah Jones, and Tsimshian scholar and dancer, choreographer Miquel D’Angeli, both critiqued the use of a single category to describe the complexities of so many varied and diverse traditions and practices.

As an Indigenous art historian who started dancing at the age of four in her home community of Metlakatla Alaska, D’angeli’s work troubles the borders of western art history and of what qualifies as art within the category of Northwest Coast. D’angeli questions the object-based paradigm that has traditionally excluded dance and performative traditions fundamental to the arts of the Coastal peoples within its scope. “I don’t have a distance from the topic, it’s been a life-long embodied practice and understanding deeply rooted in my own experiences. I wanted in my work to disrupt the notion of the tangible above all else, it’s such a narrow canon. This is not found in mainstream accounts, our practices are about showing that we are living cultures, not museum cultures.”

Kwiaahwah Jones is a Haida, Nishgaa artist who worked at the Bill Reid Gallery for Northwest Coast art (an urban gallery space in Vancouver which hosts a wide variety of classical and contemporary exhibitions), as exhibition programmer from 2010 to 2016. She was guest curator at the Museum of Vancouver in 2018, where she organized Haida Now, a comprehensive exhibition of Haida cultural belongings in the museum’s collections, and is currently working on an extensive repatriation project between several major art institutions and coastal Indigenous communities. Part of her mission at the Bill Reid Gallery was to challenge people’s understandings of what Indigenous art of the Northwest Coast can be. And her time at the gallery included curating Rez Erect a show of Native Erotica in 2013, and The

---

75 Miguel D’Angeli (artist). Interview with the author. 2015.
Box of Treasures: Gifts from the Supernatural featuring Kwakwaka'wakw Potlatch masks and regalia by hereditary Chief Beau Dick, amongst others. She challenges the problematic notion of a Northwest Coast art, which overwrites the wide diversity of First Nations cultures from the area, lumping them together into one monolithic classification (an approach which contrasts with ways European art is appreciated for its distinctive strands and threads from different periods, cultures and movements). As a Vancouver-based curator on Coast Salish land, Jones resists the concept, which she says not only obscures differences and fails to recognize major movements and nuances in a history that for millennia has been about change and adaptation, but which also creates a ‘divide and conquer mentality’ in the Native arts community: “Why is it we’re vying for funding and competing for funding with one another when there is so much richness to offer? There needs to be more, not less funding for our art and culture out there.”

Their respective work contributes to a growing body of Indigenous scholarship that troubles the concept of Northwest Coast in important ways that has helped to shift the focus from an aesthetic past toward a Native present.

---

76 Kwiaahwah Jones (artist). Interview with the author. 2017
Methodologies

We have set up a bunch of binaries as if they represent most people’s experience. The choices, as I understood them, were urban or rural, fullblood or not really Indian, traditional or sell out. My own existence never fit into the categories, and so, I thought, I never qualified.¹

I think I set out with this project to trouble something I was troubled by—the contrast which I experienced and witnessed as a mixed Indigenous and settler, urban-located woman between the reality of urban Indigenous life,²—lived manifestations of sovereignty, diverse forms of rootedness and identity, kinship, cultural affiliations and the arts, and what was being represented in conventional media and culture. As Audra Simpson writes: “I was stimulated to frame my project on Mohawk nationhood and citizenship by the complete disjuncture between what was written about my own people and the things that mattered the most to us.”³

Official narratives of Vancouver relegated Indigenous people to certain circumscribed spaces within, or to places elsewhere from, the city.⁴ Native art in museums and galleries was presented in ways that suggested Indigenous culture was either traditional and timeless, or defined by oppression, objectified in ways that seemed to suggest no life outside of the gallery space, (or the non-Indigenous gaze). Echoing concerns raised in the exhibition Nations in Urban Landscapes, I was interested in questioning the dearth of Indigenous art that reflects urban realities and experiences. As curator Marcia Crosby asks; “Is historical displacement only about

² Simpson, LB, As We Have Always Done, 195.
⁴ The writing of history contains all this, even as it is supposed to narrate it.” Audra Simpson. Mohawk Interruptus. 75.
loss? Can we make political art about urban Aboriginal communities as a positive and significant force in our lives?\textsuperscript{5}

**Relational Reckonings**

This project grew out of my personal relationship to the urban Native community of Vancouver, both as a mixed Indigenous Woman living in the city for 20 years, and through my work with Indigenous Women in various anti-violence organizations in East Vancouver throughout the 1990s. This included front line support and advocacy with Women survivors of violence, and as a participatory action researcher with the *Aboriginal Women’s Action Network* (AWAN), an Indigenous Woman’s research collective on a project looking at violence against Aboriginal Women and children and Restorative Justice reforms. And I entered into this Graduate school project informed by my experience of working from a participatory action research (PAR) model. For AWAN’s *Journey for Justice*\textsuperscript{6} project, methodologies included regular collective meetings, focus groups for and led by Indigenous Women, follow-up trips to communities, and the presentation of a final draft of our paper at a conference for all the participants to feedback before submitting it for publication. But the reality of being an individual researcher doing a PhD from a European university, with a finite amount of resources and time to be back in Vancouver, made doing the same kind of collaborative, in-community work as with AWAN, less viable. Being Europe-based and doing field work trips over three summers proved to be very different than actually living full-time in Vancouver as I had before. As a result, the focus became more about working in ways informed by

\textsuperscript{5} Crosby, “Bordering Complexity,” *Nations in Urban Landscapes*, 12.

PAR principles, rather than re-enacting the same methodological steps. And this, for me, meant working collaboratively wherever possible, recognizing that any project of this scope involves the unpaid labour, time, sharing and contributions of many people—from family members and scholar friends to community Elders—to all of whom I remain deeply indebted.

My ethical commitment and scholarly approach have always been informed by my experience with participatory grassroots research and Decolonial, anti-violence activism, grounded in the belief that research with Indigenous peoples should have a practical community based and informed focus, and ultimately an emancipatory effect on the lives of the subjects involved. I was influenced by Ristock and Pennell’s *Community Research as Empowerment*, and by Linda Tuhiwei Smith’s *Decolonizing Methodologies*, in that they both politicized the context of social science research, emphasizing a with and from, rather than for and about approach: the former by positioning research within a grassroots context, emphasizing the importance of research accountability to subject communities, and the latter with respect to its critique of the western academy and the damaging effects of colonial research on Indigenous communities. Though the project underwent many changes as it went along, these remained the principal concerns underpinning my own methodology, along with the importance of collaboration wherever possible.

Choosing Cultural Studies

A conjuncture was both a moment of danger and one of opportunity; it was something to intervene in, a configuration whose components were to be rearranged through practice. It was a call to action—intellectual, social, cultural, political.9

My reasons for choosing cultural studies were informed by a commitment to Decolonial critique and conforming to one particular discipline did not make sense as a strategy or approach. I was critical of the tendency for academia to confine projects concerning Indigenous culture to the field of anthropology, furthering the tendency to other Indigeneity from a Western centre.

As the project considers urban Native art and how it reflects a shifting cultural landscape in Vancouver—involving various intersections between living Indigenous communities, politics at macro and micro levels, social justice, and the ways in which ancient claims to land are interpreted and lived in the present era,10 like refusal—it engages what Jamaican-born British scholar Stuart Hall termed the ‘present conjuncture’. Rather than an historical survey or formal art historical analysis (which I was concerned could risk memorializing and reifying the Native art and culture I was looking at), it felt necessary to adopt a multi-disciplinary approach, and the work is heavily influenced by Conjunctural analysis.11 More a practice or project than a discipline, taken up by Hall at the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies, conjunctural analysis set out to ‘take in and weave together strands of philosophical

---


and ideological thought, social dynamics and economic developments and think them together with the political terrain of the present.

Conjunctural analysis as a methodological position critiques assumptions that research can (or should) be impartial, professional or neutral. As it was never my intention to compare with a white western episteme, but to imagine otherwise and centre Indigenous knowledge systems and ways of being in the world, a conjunctural analysis resonated with me. I didn’t want to write about but rather with and from the Indigenous work my project engages. I therefore approached the work from a place of reciprocity and dialogue, without assuming that knowledge should or would be shared with me as an outsider. I wanted to ensure that I remained in dialogue to the best of my ability with the interlocutors around the data, and how much of it they felt was acceptable for me to use.

It also emphasizes a collaborative approach, which is at the core of Indigenous ways of being in the world. Presenting an idea, and having that conception engaged with or refined and shifted through feedback from others, creates a certain democratizing of knowledge which ensures that insights are not kept to a select few, but instead sees knowledge as relational and communally generated. Something Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate scholar Kim Tall Bear refers to as, the importance of “learning in conversation.” Together with Decolonial analysis, which requires, as Mignolo urges, a “strategic delinking” from colonial structures,

---

13 Kim Tall Bear. “Decolonizing Sex,” All My Relations Podcast, episode 5, https://open.spotify.com/episode/1aDLCo2XHvhU6Cf1g2yedv?si=IVteuqQSTpen4som3bXe_w&utm_344, (quote appears 7 minutes into the episode).
systems and epistemologies, conjunctural analysis requires a *relinking*, based on an intersectional thinking which threads together past, present and future.\(^\text{15}\)

**Voice as Political Intervention. Speaking Back**

I initially started gathering recorded conversations without really knowing what I would do with them. I knew I wanted my project to be about voice, in several ways, as so much of Native public art is about speaking back to the silencing processes of colonialism. Interviews and recorded conversations, then in the artist’s own voice and words, felt important and powerful as the basis for the study. I wasn’t interested in analysing the art from afar, but rather learning from interactions and exchange with those who agreed to talk to me about their own particular art practices and relationship with Vancouver as a city on unceded Coast Salish territory.

I intended to centre the power of Native oratory and to foreground Native voices–their work and art–on their own terms as closely as possible. Doing so was a deliberate methodological act, intended as a critical intervention into the western academic tradition of the anthropological gaze and its interpretation. Several times, academics assumed my project was anthropology as it was about Indigenous culture and art. I was more interested in questioning this assumption and what felt to me like the automatic positioning of Indigenous cultures as *other*, outside of art history, or the contemporary realm of the social and political. Rather than having Indigenous culture defined, I was interested in how Indigenous people (myself included) talk about *ourselves/themselves*, whether or not this meant that my project was able to fit

\(^{15}\)“But it requires us to revisit broader questions of identity and nation; democracy and the media; power, domination and liberty - and in a context where we must look backwards to what has gone before as well as forwards to the world we want to see.” Deborah Grayson and Ben Little. “Conjunctural Analysis and the Crisis of Ideas,” Soundings 65, no. 65 (2017): 67
neatly within a given category. Instead, I focused on asking questions concerned more with every day lived and embodied realities.

The Power of Native Oratory

*An Indigenous way of telling a story may take a month or more to tell properly.*

I was also interested in the performative power of Native oratory, and the inflections and rhythms Native speakers use in communicating: from the poetry of everyday conversation to political speeches and introductions, to teaching and storytelling. This was also intended as a response politically and epistemologically to the dominance of the written word over other forms of knowledge production in Western academia, honoring the richness and importance of Indigenous performative traditions. This influenced my decision to draw heavily from the recorded conversations, italicizing all the quotes from the artists themselves in their own words, and to write them as they sounded in the transcriptions.

Leanne Betasamosake Simpson talks about *repetition* (and cadence) and how this is deeply embedded in Indigenous art and traditions of thought and oratory:

*rhythmic repetition is at the base of Nishnaabeg intelligence. We hear variations of the same creation story for our entire lives, and we are expected to find meaning in it at every stage of life, whether that meaning is literal (when we are kids), metaphorical, conceptual, or within the constellation of our collective oral traditions or that meaning comes from lived experience.*

As Vizenor argues, with *transmotion, survivance* and *fugitivity*, the sense of repetition and expansion of space and time is integral to Native story and is something which resists the containment of conventional western narrative structure. Refusing what African American poet and scholar Fred Moten terms “a call to order.”

---

16 Peter Morin (Artist), Interview with the author. August 2013.
17 Simpson, LB, *As We Have Always Done*.
Indigenous storytelling, the African American playwright August Wilson, acclaimed for The Century Cycle, his ten-generation spanning plays about Black life in the United States from the turn of the century, was known for the unconventional length of his works and the rich Black vernacular tradition he drew on. As with transmotion, the sprawling length of the plays defy the order of the western narrative and refuse any neat closure. Attendant instead, to creating the space for the story to be told on its own terms and on its own time.19 In a conversation about Wilson’s work in contemporary theatre, Brantley and Morris reflect on the performative oratory power of language in his plays:

There’s a sort of Shakespearean heightening of vernacular going on, isn’t there? But just like with Shakespeare, a good August Wilson actor will pull you all the way through the language so that it sounds utterly natural. You’re listening for two things with Wilson, as well as with lots of lyrical playwrights. First, there’s the handsomeness of the language itself, the way he insists that black vernacular is its own grammar. Then, you’re listening to hear what characters are saying to each other.20

Field Work

I chose to focus on four Indigenous art works in Vancouver for their particular significance in relation to political events for first Nations in the Province of British Columbia, that together marked an important shift in the cultural landscape of the city around Indigenous visibility, art and art making.

A small exhibition in 1996 at the Vancouver Art Gallery of the works of Coast Salish painter Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun with Canadian modernist Emily Carr grappled with unease over the impending Nisgaa land claims agreement that marked the first major treaty since the turn of the century in the province. Musqueam artist

19 “Our stories have always talked about the future and the past at the same time. they’ve always coinhabited the spiritual realm; the birthright of the storyteller has always been to make the stories that come through them relevant to the current generation.” Simpson, LB, As We Have Always Done, 200.
Susan Point’s *Welcome Post Gateways* were the first traditional Coast Salish public art works to be included at the Stanley Park Totem Pole Site in 2008. Reflecting Vancouver’s winning bid to host the 2010 Olympics and striking of a Four Host First Nations Committee that created more commissions and visibility for local Indigenous groups and artists from the Lower Mainland area.

The *Through the Eye of the Raven Mural* that went up in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside (DTES) in 2010. The infamous Pickton trial drew attention around the world to the area’s violence and rates of addiction, becoming most associated with Missing and Murdered Indigenous Woman. Four local Indigenous artists were commissioned to create the mural, and together in collaboration with the DTES community, shifted the gaze to showcase a vibrant Native arts community, and distinctive Indigenous cosmopolitanism in the area that predates the city by millennia.

The fourth chapter focuses on an Indigenous restaging of an iconic work by the Vancouver based artist Jeff Wall, depicting Native people sitting around and under the Georgia Street Viaduct in the city. Conceived by the Cree artist Duane Linklater for an Indigenous arts conference in Vancouver in 2014, when Vancouver’s City Hall declared the city to sit on unceded Coast Salish territory—part of Vancouver’s official year of Reconciliation stemming from the city’s first Truth and Reconciliation hearings on Indian Residential schools. All the Indigenous conference participants were invited to gather for a picnic on the same grassy slope where the original was set, to share food, hold ceremony and document each other in the process, as a kind of intervention in the colonial tradition of western landscape painting.
Each work in different ways, has worked to provoke and challenge dominant definitions of what qualifies as Northwest Coast art in Vancouver, and poses questions around Indigenous culture and connections to land in urban spaces, asserting Native presence in a city that has been home to several Native nations for millennia, and which has never been formally ceded.

After deciding on the art works and informed by experience working with Native communities in participatory action research methodologies, I knew I wanted to base my primary source of data on the unstructured interviews, or in this case ‘recorded conversations’ I had begun gathering. I went in with a few open-ended questions around the relationship between Indigenous culture and art and art making, the role it played in people’s lives, and their relationship to the city. I’d found some of the most meaningful exchanges with Indigenous community personally, and as a researcher, came out of what has been termed a visiting methodology, something that happens naturally in relation, around people’s kitchen tables, walking together, sitting with folks, and other everyday activities where people share with each other. I set out to interview or speak with as many people related to the art works as possible, including, but not confined to artists or those working in the arts, people living near/or who worked on the art-community members, Elders and knowledge keepers, youth… These included the Nuxalk film maker Banchi Hanuse, and Master Carver Alvin Mack, film maker Sami, Blackfoot director and artist Elle Maya Tailfeathers, Tsimshian, Haida art historian Marcia Crosby, all of who’s kind sharing about Indigenous art informed the project in ways less directly related to the works themselves.

I transcribed everything and distilled down from the body of interviews, what felt the most relevant to the project, trying to stay as close to the original transcripts as they sounded as possible, with only the slightest alterations if needed for the sake of clarity.

Chapter one draws heavily on interviews with Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun who was very generous in his sharing with me on several occasions over coffee and blueberries, and Tania Willard, the Secwep’emc artist from my Granny’s territory, who curated Yuxweluptun’s exhibition *Unceded Territories* in 2016 at Vancouver’s Museum of Anthropology.

For chapter two, my close friendship with Brad Charles who is a mask dancer from an important family at Musqueam, and who has been incredibly generous with me around Coast Salish, life, art and culture, has aided me immensely, and I’m deeply indebted to him for the years of good conversation and welcome. As he and Susan Point are relations, he helped me to get in contact with her on a few occasions, but she politely and firmly declined, being too busy with her work and family as a grandmother. I had to draw heavily from secondary sources in place of talking with Susan herself about her work, and went over the many interviews she did with her Uncle, Professor Michael Kew and the writing of scholar Wayne Suttles, in addition to spending a great deal of time with her art works in situ in Vancouver, at Musqueam, on man hole covers throughout the city, Stanley Park, the Vancouver airport, Christ Church Cathedral and the Museum of Anthropology.

For chapter three, I interviewed the artist Gerry Whitehead, who worked on the mural, Dave Eddy, director of the Urban Native Housing Society who funded the work, and community members living in the area, including Elders I worked with at the Downtown Eastside Women’s Centre.
For the fourth chapter, I wrote to Jeff Wall, explaining what I was writing about, and that I hoped he would be open to talking with me, but my email was not returned.

I interviewed the artist Duane Linklater and had a very rich conversation with him around his work, and our relationship to conceptual art and Jeff Wall, and with Peter Morin the Tahltan artist and educator who has been a generous interlocutor from the first stages of the project, both via zoom.

I went on to talk to several other folks who participated in the re-staging, including curators Lorna Brown, and Kwiawaa Jones from the Bill Reid Gallery, scholar and dancer Miquel D’angeli, Dylan Robinson, Canada Research Chair in Indigenous Arts, and conference organizer, and the Metis artist and writer David Garneau.

I began the first part of the field work in Summer 2013, where I attended a Pacific Arts conference at Musqueam, and conducted in person interviews with Jerry Whitehead, Peter Morin (pt 1), Dave Eddy and Elle Maja Tailfeathers.

In Summer 2014, was invited to lead a graduate school workshop with my airfare provided to Vancouver for the Indigenous Acts conference at UBC, where I interviewed Lawrence Paul Yuxwelutun (pt. 1), Jordana Luggi, and Banchi Hanuse in person, Lorna Brown via email and Miquel D’Angeli, Peter Morin (pt. 2), and Duane Linklater via Zoom the following September.

In Summer 2015, I presented on the Intimacies of Indigenous public art with Dylan Robinson for the Emotional Geographies conference at the University of Edinburgh, where I interviewed Dylan Robinson.

In Summer 2017, I did a second interview with Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun and Kwi Jones in person and Tania Willard via zoom.
Relational Epistemologies

I’ve been able to be surrounded and influenced by these radical and brilliant Indigenous artists that don’t ask permission, that by nature refuse colonial recognition, and generate through their practice, their performance and the creation of their work this alternative.22

My methodology is rooted in a sense of relationality—a way of working informed by a sense of relation to those I am working with.23 Similar to the relational epistemologies that describe Coast Salish kinship systems based on affiliation and relationships, not boundaries or borders, it correlates to my own positionality as a transnational Indigenous cosmopolitan; being part of a community, similar to Audra Simpson’s notion of feeling citizenship, “as something felt and lived, grounded in affect and narrated history.”24 And as such, was never a removed academic interest, but rather something embodied.25

As someone situated between outside/inside,26 having lived and worked in East Vancouver for many years (and having lived in Europe for as long), what stories, contributions could this perspective contribute? How might it trouble, engage or obscure the issues I was looking at in other ways than if I had continued to live in the city?

---

24 Simpson, Mohawk interruptus, 173.
25 Simpson, LB. As We Have Always Done, 193.
26 Here I think of Decolonial scholar Gloria Anzaldúa’s concept of Border thinking. In her book ‘Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza’ which has subsequently been developed by decolonial thinkers, most prominently Walter Mignolo. It is based on the idea that the theoretical and the epistemic must have a lived dimension to them, and that theories already exist which sit at the very borders (if not outside of) of the colonial matrix of power.” Lucy Mayblin. “Border Thinking,” Global Social Theory website, organized by Gurminder K Bhambra, accessed winter 2019, globalsocialtheory.org/concepts/border-thinking.
Rather than seeing my distance from East Vancouver as an impediment, the focus shifted more to consider my own positionality or relationality (as a mixed Indigenous/settler, trans-national, Woman scholar from Bella Coola), as affording me an opportunity. Growing up with an interior Salish Mother, on Coastal Nuxalk territory, I began to appreciate how that experience, and history of Feminist activist/anti-violence work with Women in the DTES, with Two Spirit and Indigenous groups, and last summer with the Downtown Eastside Woman’s Centre, as a cultural programmer working with Indigenous Elders, might offer insights into the very kind of Indigenous mobility and cosmopolitanism I was writing about. And how would my own position as a mixed-Indigenous cosmopolitan from a long line of mobile Indigenous people that passed back and forth between the urban and the rural, inform, enhance or impede the kinds of networking, relationships, and affiliations that would arise in the course of my research?

Networking thus extended out from real-world meetings and acquaintances with Indigenous scholars, artists and community members (some whom I had met when I lived in East Vancouver, or from my return field trips, from conferences and so on), to maintaining those connections by means that expanded to skype, email correspondences and social media, and even to meeting in Europe.

Reflecting back, I think I somewhat naively supposed that my concerns around positioning oneself in relation would be commonsensical in any approach to research with subalternized and vulnerable communities—in particular with projects like mine which focused on Indigenous communities in the context of settler colonialism. As I navigated the project through an academic system that often seemed incommensurate with my approach—hierarchies that emphasize the individual over the collective and collaborative, in particular, and which were at odds
with the research relationships that I formed with my participants, and the deepening sense of responsibility to hold what they shared with me, about art, identity and relationships to urban space—it became apparent that a collaborative methodology, attentive to the systems of privilege and power that underpin coloniality, was crucial to the work. Where I had previously been immersed in a context of grassroots political work with others who shared my experience and commitment to community, I found myself in a different environment in graduate school, with various approaches to the social sciences, many not rooted in shared cultural or political affiliations with subject communities. That forms of knowledge-making could somehow be neutral and impartial, or which failed to comprehend how such research could impact certain communities or groups more than others was common. Many of these alternate approaches seemed to hold the curious assumption that academic researchers had a divine right to access knowledge.\textsuperscript{27} It became necessary to ask (or in my case re ask); as Tuck and Yang outline in their article, \textit{R Words-Refusing Research} (responding to Spivak’s \textit{Can the Subaltern Speak}), ‘\textit{What Does the Academy Do? What Does Social Science Research Do?}’\textsuperscript{28} and perhaps more importantly, \textit{Whom Is It For?}

I felt I was being entrusted with knowledge that was shared with me, and I had an ethical responsibility to think about the ways that it was used, the implications for that using, and about the necessity of holding certain aspects back if necessary. Particularly with regards to the vulnerability of extremely marginalized communities to exploitation and voyeurism.

\textsuperscript{27} Tuck and Yang address this tendency in the context of places that have experienced colonial conquest and/or ongoing settler colonialism. “Settler colonial knowledge is premised on frontiers; conquest, then, is an exercise of the felt entitlement to transgress these limits.” “R-words,” 225, 231.

\textsuperscript{28} Tuck, and Yang, “R-words,” 225.
Terming it “enquiry as invasion,” Tuck and Yang, in their article *Pedagogies of Refusal in Qualitative Research*, reflect on the entanglements between social science research and a western academe deeply implicated in settler colonial ideology. They critique the normative and often unquestioned structures of western academia that underlie the drive to know as a form of “academic colonialism,” where research occupies a hallowed position in a hierarchy of knowledge; a means by which one can point to the ways that this approach can be weaponized to reify existing colonial structures and excuse intrusive and unethical methods bent on ‘knowing’ in the name of liberal academic freedom.29

And the emphasis in social science research on what they term “pain and damage-centered research”30 can be read as an extension of the impetus behind this collecting and cataloguing of Native “artifacts” and other forms of Indigenous cultural belongings in the first part of the twentieth century. What Vizenor calls the “dominance”31 inherent in the construction of the Western self in relation to the Indian. They refer to “the ways in which the researcher’s voice is constituted by, legitimated by, animated by the voices on the margins. The researcher-self is made anew by telling back the story of the marginalized/subaltern subject.”32

The wounded Indigenous subject is contained within a narrative of disability, of failure and brokenness, that not only sets them outside the logics of western time, progress and place, but implies an irreparability rather than interruption. In its place,

29 Ibid, 243.
30 Ibid, 231.
31 “The converse histories of dominance rather than native survivance have been secured in museums and at universities by several generations of academic masters. The natives were studied and established as abstruse cultures and then embodied in motion pictures as the simulated burdens of civilization.” Gerald Vizenor. “Transethnic Anthropologism: Comparative Ethnic Studies at Berkeley.” *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 7, no. 4 (1995): 3–8.
32 Tuck and Yang, “R-words,” 228.
Tuck proposes instead a “desire centered” research,\textsuperscript{33} which, while not denying experiences of trauma and pain resulting from colonialism, does not focus on a static state of tragedy, but rather understands them as intimately bound with wisdom and knowing. This transformation of approach thereby shifts the narrative from one of “tragic victimery,”\textsuperscript{34} to one of possibility and survivance.

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid, 231.

\textsuperscript{34} Gerald Robert Vizenor. \textit{Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance} (Lincoln: U of Nebraska Press, 1999), 155.
Chapter 1 Still Here/Speaking Back to Emily Carr. Transmotion and the Indian Modernist painting of Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun
Native transmotion is directly related to the ordinary practices of survivance, a visionary resistance and sense of natural motion over separatism, literary denouement, and cultural victimry. Survivance and transmotion are original critical philosophies and ethical convictions derived from personal experiences of ceremonies, critical examination of sacred objects in museums, and relative observations of natural motion and totemic associations in native art, stories, and literature.¹

The most characteristic single design unit in the art is the formline ‘ovoid’ used as eyes, joints and various space fillers. It has been variously termed a rounded rectangle, an angular oval, a bean shaped figure, and other more or less descriptive names. Although the term ovoid is no more accurate than these others, it is short and handy and will be used herein to signify this design unit.²

--Bill Holm, Northwest Coast Indian Art, An Analysis of Form

I created this ‘Manifesto of ovoidism’ which is existential thinking, free thinking. I created the concept too, so I could emancipate my own mind, free will and thinking as a human being. That wasn’t going to be ‘written’ in the rules by the likes of Bill Holm and Bill Reid because they were having a conversation about it, and talked about what the rules of Northwest Coast art are. I’m an Indian, I’ll make the rules! I’ve broken about every Northwest Coast rule that ever existed..(laughter..)³

--Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun

³ Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun (artist), Interview with the author, August 2014.
Figure 1-1. Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun, Opening of Unceded Territories, Museum of Anthropology, Vancouver, May 2016. Photograph by Paul Wong.
Still Here/Speaking Back to Emily Carr. Transmotion and the Indian Modernist painting of Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun

The Grizzly Bear has never signed away his land, why on earth should I? Or a fish, or a bird?

The Nisga’a land claims settlement of 1998 was the first significant treaty to be made with British Columbia First Nations, with the majority of the province remaining unceded since the Douglas Treaties on Vancouver Island in 1854, and Treaty 8 in the North Eastern part of the Province in 1899. Seen as victories by some, they also saw the dispossession of many Indigenous tribes in and around Southern Vancouver Island, including the Songhees who were relocated from their villages in what is now greater Victoria, British Columbia’s capitol city.

Chapter one takes as its focus a small show held at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1996. Radical for its location, curation and content, it exhibited for the first time, the work of contemporary Coast Salish/Okanagan painter and self-described Indian modernist Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun, alongside the paintings of celebrated Canadian post-Impressionist Emily Carr. As a protest against colonial land claims processes, Yuxweluptun’s imposing and acidic; The Impending Nisga’a Deal: Last Stand, Chump Change, painted in 1996 (the same year as the show), set the tone for the exhibition. Organised on a small scale as an intervention in the gallery space by assistant curator Andrew Hunter, who worked with Yuxweluptun to create an exhibition that intended to reclaim, not only the Emily Carr gallery space (the only permanent gallery at the VAG), but also challenge the dominant narrative of romantic

---

lonely landscapes and dying Native cultures underpinning the Canadian modernist narrative.\(^7\) His large scale acrylic paintings interspersed with Carr’s, confronting, not only the viewer, but Emily Carr’s works themselves, forcefully reminding, that for Native people, the bucolic landscapes Carr depicts, remain, metaphorically and literally, contested territories.

This chapter engages the Anishnaabe poet and scholar Gerald Vizenor’s concept of *transmotion*\(^8\) to consider how Yuxweluptun’s presence in the contemporary art gallery, and use of northern Northwest Coast design forms, work to re-inscribe Native, (and specifically Coast Salish) presence in Vancouver, assert Indigenous right of movement over the land, and counter colonial narratives of an unchanging and static Indigeneity “elsewhere” from the city.


\(^8\) Vizenor, *Fugitive poses*, 188.
Still Here/Speaking Back to Emily Carr.  
Transmotion and the Indian Modernist Painting of Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun

I am engaged in recording myself and the noble savage in the modernalities of this time and history. Fundamentally, it is about colonial deconstruction and Aboriginal reconstruction.⁹

For anyone who has ever talked with the Coast Salish painter Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun, they would acknowledge this response to established academic discourse around what constitutes the formal rules of Northwest Coast art, as characteristically irreverent. As a self-proclaimed ‘Indian Modernist’ he takes a certain pride in thumbing his nose at an art establishment that has, since the early part of the twentieth century in British Columbia, been the hallowed ground of connoisseurs and aesthetic experts on the art of the Native Nations of the Coastal region of the province. A geographic and cultural area, extending up from northern California through Washington and Oregon states, encompassing all of the British Colombia coast including Vancouver Island and the Lower Mainland, north into what is now Alaska.

The city of Vancouver and entire Lower Mainland sit on the territory of the central Coast Salish. Though numerous groups are included within this linguistic and cultural category, there are three main territory holders of the area, the Sḵwx̱wú7mesh (Squamish) Nation, the Tsleil-Waututh Nation (with territories in what are now Kitsilano and North Vancouver respectively), and the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam) Indian Band, who have lived at the mouth of the Fraser River, which runs through the Lower Mainland area, from time immemorial.¹⁰

---


¹⁰ Continuously occupying the area for 9,000+ years, https://www.musqueam.bc.ca.
Yuxweluptun’s father was Salish from Quw’utsun’ (Cowichan) and
Yuxweluptun’s work is known for its particular blend of the classic iconography and
design principles of the First Nations of the Northwest Coast of Canada, and elements of western modern art, namely Surrealism and the Pop art of the 1960s.

From Aesthetic Past to Native Present..

I first experienced, or better encountered his work in 1996 at the Vancouver Art
Gallery. I remember wandering into their Emily Carr gallery on a rainy Vancouver
afternoon and being surprised to find every other Emily Carr piece replaced with
striking paintings, that though clearly Northwest Coast in style and form, were
rendered in shocking acid yellows and lurid neon pinks, oranges, and blues. Rather
than the emphasis on the elegance and timeless form of Northwest Coast carving or
print making, one had come to expect with Native art at the Gallery, the viewer was
squarely confronted with themes of urban Indigenous life, environmental destruction,
and ongoing colonialism in Canada. The jarring colors juxtaposed with elegant
Northwest Coast lines, crescents and ovoids, create a style of painting both
recognizable (to those acquainted in any way with the iconic Native art of the area),
and intensely discomfiting. The work conveys a sense of the natural world and the
things associated with it—trees, mountains, bodies of water, with the sickly and
surreal. The tainted landscapes are at once compelling and off putting in a way post-

---

11 Northwest Coast art is generally referred to as the art of the coastal First Nations cultures encompassing the entire coast of the province of British Columbia stretching from as far North as the Tlingit in the state of Alaska, to the Coast Salish territories in the Northern part of Oregon. Native American Culture Map and Language Groups-North West Coast website, created November 2001, www.snowwow.com/maps/mapnorthwest.html. Until relatively recently, many maps depicting the areas of artistic significance of the Northwest Coast ended with the Kwakwaka’wakw on Northern Vancouver Island, as in Art historian Bill Holm’s Northwest Coast Indian Art, An Analysis of Form (Madeira Park, BC: Douglas & McIntyre, 1965), 2. Credited with coining the term ovoid, Holm’s text is considered the “bible” of Northwest Coast art.
colonial scholars Gelder and Jacobs term uncanny,\(^{12}\) simultaneously familiar and strange, and deeply unsettling.

My initial surprised reaction changed to recognition of what the work was about, and what it meant to use a language of Modernism, (or the things I’d always associated with the modern-neon colours, the wilted distorted figures, the political nature of the works), to convey what many urban Indigenous people felt and knew, but never experienced reflected back in an art gallery or museum setting. He was shifting the focus from Native past fixed in textbooks and museums to an Indigenous present.

That somehow, he was poking through Carr and Canada’s narrative that Native cultures were no longer really present, and that representation in the art world meant the classical beauty of objects made, or done in, a timeless northern Northwest Coast style. I was doing my undergrad at Simon Fraser University at the time, and courses on Native art were to be found in archaeology or anthropology classes, never classes in art or art history. He was saying we are here, we have always been here, and we are not going away.

---

That European Surrealism appropriated from what were considered the “primitive”\textsuperscript{13} Indigenous cultures of the world including the Northwest Coast, incorporating certain designs and what they understood to be aspects of spirituality closer to nature and more attuned to the subconscious,\textsuperscript{14} is something

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{13} In his “The Manifesto of Ovoidism” defines the word Modernalities as “a neologism that references the art historical juncture of modernism and primitivism as politically contested and historically unfinished,” in \textit{Colour Zone}, exhibition catalogue, ed. Petra Watson (Winnipeg: Plug In Editions, 2003), 2.

\textsuperscript{14} Inspired by the Northwest Coast Collections in the Museum of Natural History and the Museum of the American Indian in New York City, many Surrealists throughout the years of the Second World War, including prominent artists Max Ernst, Barnett Newman and influential French Anthropologist Claude Levi Strauss, collected and exhibited Northwest Coast cultural objects. The first were two artists, Kurt Seligmann and Wolfgang Palen travelling to British Columbia and Alaska to study and collect Native art in the late 1930s. Marie Mauze. “Surrealists and the New York Avante Garde, 1920–60,” in \textit{Native art of the Northwest Coast: A history of changing ideas}, eds. Charlotte Townsend-Gault, Jennifer Kramer, and Ki-çe-in (Ron Hamilton) (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2013), 272.
\end{flushleft}
Yuxweluptun’s work both reclams and engages. Enabling him to express what he has termed the ‘modernalities’ of a ‘surreal reality’ as a Native person. And to challenge traditionalist ideas around Native art and culture as static, primitive and ultimately uncontemporary. It also, and perhaps more importantly, acts as a bridge between the Native world and the western, as a kind of meeting place.

*Europeans came over before they wrote a manifesto for surrealism, they looked at primitivism and at what they encountered on the Northwest Coast, did the ‘research’ and took it back with them. The Northwest Coast has always been surreal at creating its form. I just released it in another format. I didn’t bother with traditionalism, I took a photosynthesis of my mind into a color composition and translated it out to the world. So it has two dualities, when a Native person reads it, he understands it and feels it and knows it’s from a Native person and they can see their culture transformed into a different form.*15

**Transmotion**

Native memories, stories of totemic creation, shamanic visions, burial markers, medicine pictures, the hunt, love, war and songs, are the transmotion of virtual cartography. Tricky creation stories, totemic pictures, and mental mappery are the embodiment of Native transmotion. Native mappers are storiers and visionaries.16

Anishnaabe poet and scholar Gerald Vizenor’s term survivance,17 means, not simply survival, (as the ‘tragic victim’ of near genocide and colonial dominance), but also to resist and to thrive. It refers to realized Indigenous knowledges and presences that are continuously in motion, constantly shaped by Indigenous people and interpreted into the present and futurity. Yuxweluptun’s work can be understood as an embodiment of survivance, and his way of expressing an Indigenous relationship to land, as transmotion.

Sovereignty is transmotion and used here in most senses of the word motion; likewise, the ideas and conditions of motion have a deferred meaning that reach, naturally, to other contexts of action, resistance, dissent, and political controversy. The sovereignty of motion means the ability and the vision to

---

16 Vizenor, Fugitive Poses, 170.
17 Something he refers to as natural reason. Vizenor, Manifest Manners.
move in imagination and the substantive rights of motion in Native communities.\textsuperscript{18}

*Transmotion* describes the inalienable right of movement Native people have to land and traveling on it, that was restricted by colonial governance and the implementation of a reservation system that disrupted and constrained Indigenous life ways—movement, access to traditional modes of sustenance, trade and meeting with other groups, that form the basis of Indigenous sovereignty.\textsuperscript{19} Resulting in different tribes that had complex diplomatic systems of negotiation, exchange, accountability and responsibility to each other, confined within discreet reserves or government designated tribal areas. Implying, not only a stasis materially, but culturally and linguistically, when historically Indigenous people have always been in movement. For Vizenor, Indigenous sovereignty is impossible without the liberty of movement inherent in *transmotion*. He refers to Dorothy Jones’ *License for Empire: Colonialism by Treaty in Early America* and treaty making processes (legally recognized Native claims to land in North America), as inherently antithetical to this, as they were “not based on a diplomatic system of accountability but on the assumption of counterveiling force.”\textsuperscript{20}

*Clearly, the notions of Native sovereignty must embrace more than mere reservation territory. Sovereignty as ‘transmotion’ is tacit and visionary; these notions and other theories of sovereignty are critical in the consideration of native rights, and the recognition of those rights outside of reservations and in urban area.*\textsuperscript{21}

Rather than a break with tradition, as one might suppose, Yuxweluptun’s work, as radical as it seems, can be read as part of a long tradition of innovation on the Northwest Coast. He considers himself grounded in tradition, his use of modernism is a deliberate way to express the sovereignty of motion of Vizenor’s *transmotion*,

\textsuperscript{18} Vizenor, *Fugitive Poses*, 182.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 167-199.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 181.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 190.
that resists the neat containment of anthropological classification and the closure of what he terms; the *interimage Indian* and instead challenges western assumptions about what traditional Native art can (or should) be. Deliberately drawing on, and re-appropriating aspects of European modernism in his work, not only reflects an ancient history of adaptation, but also creates a space for him to express the contemporary political experience of First Nations in Canada.

If you want to play the white man’s game you’ve got to challenge ‘modern art’ on its own terms. I feel my job is to record history, to leave traditionalism to record the issues Native people are constantly facing. I am sovereignty. I am First Nations. I am from this land. That’s what my painting is about!

Though he references Coast Salish cultural traditions and cosmology in his work, he also draws on what is commonly associated with northern Northwest Coast forms, namely the *ovoid*. His reasons for doing so are political, personal and deliberate. His mother was Okanagan (Syilx) and his father Cowichan (Hul’q’umi’num Coast Salish) from Vancouver Island. The use of the *ovoid* in his work has caused controversy with purist Northwest Coast art experts who associate the form with the more northerly Native nations and who have dismissed his painting as a “hybrid” mix of upper Northwest Coast and Coast Salish, and for promoting a “pan Indian” style true to neither. And to some Vancouver-based Haida

---

22 Something Vizenor calls the “‘pictorial turn’ of cultural surveillance.” Ibid., 152.
23 Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun (artist). Interview with the author. August 2015.
24 The most well-known Northwest Coast art, which utilizes the form line tradition, refers to work from the most Northerly located of the Northwest Coastal Native groups, in what is now the province of British Columbia into the state of Alaska. The most prominent groups include the Tlingit around the Stikine River, the Haida mainly located on the Islands of Haida Gwaii, the Nisga around the Nass River, and the Tsimshian based along the Skeena River watershed. But these groups also include the Heiltsuk and the Nuxalk on the Central Coast of British Columbia and the Kwakwaka’wakw and Nuu cha nulth of Northern Vancouver Island. First Nations Peoples of British Columbia Map, https://indigenouspeoplesresources.com/products/canada-first-nations-peoples-of-british-columbia-map?_pos=2&_sid=41bf9c530&ss=r.
artists who consider the ovoid to be the specific patrimony of their territories.  

The Coast Salish are not amongst the groups that traditionally used either form lines or the ovoid shape in the formal sense described by Holm, but negative and positive relief patterns utilizing circular, crescent, and trigon shapes sometimes called “Salish eyes.”

Figure 1-3. Fundamental elements of Coast Salish design. (From Alcheringa-gallery.com, accessed November 2016.)

Archaeological evidence of the area suggests that the earliest examples of what we’ve come to know as Northwest Coast art, actually originated in Coast Salish territories, in what is now the southern part of the province of British Columbia around the mouth of the Fraser River, about 3,500 BCE. Aspects of the style spreading north and south before being impacted by changes in salmon runs that

25 From a social media debate with Haida artist and Vancouver based professor at the Emily Carr School of Art and Design, Raymond Boisjolly in 2016.
scattered village sites, and with population decline due to contact era smallpox epidemic in the late 1700s. This is thought to have resulted in Coast Salish areas, in a shift away from depicting religious or sacred forms towards cleansing rituals connected to secretive sXwayXwey ceremonial practices that rose to prominence at the time. The sXwayXwey Society or dance is a highly respected, often secret Salish spiritual practice, that can be performed only by the initiated of certain families who have hereditary rights to do so. It is danced or performed using a characteristic peg eyed mask that is generally not to be displayed in public or worn by the uninitiated. If a sXwayXwey mask is displayed in a museum setting it should be a copy or screen object commissioned for that purpose only, and not one that has or can be, used in ceremony. In 1980, a group of dancers and other knowledge keepers from the Musqueam Indian Band, protested against the inclusion of spirit dance costumes and other culturally sensitive materials in the “Visions of Power, Visions of Wealth” exhibition held at the Museum of Anthropology. Though groundbreaking in that it was the first exhibition of its kind on Coast Salish art to be held in Vancouver, the protest around the inclusion of the spirit dance material resulted in the pieces being removed and the development of culturally sensitive


29 Though I’ve found many variations of the spelling, this is the anglicized spelling of the aňq̓aminiʔam Down river dialect of the Coast Salish Musqueam people, on whose ancestral and unceded territory the city of Vancouver sits. Sharon Michelle Fortney. “Forging New Partnerships: Coast Salish Communities and Museums.” (PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 2009), 102.


31 Though protocol for its representation differs amongst the various Coast Salish groups, UBC Historian Susan Roy who specializes in Musqueam history and assisted with the časnaʔam, the city before the city exhibitions in Vancouver in 2015, discusses the sXwayXwey mask dance, as one that has “moved in and out of public view during the twentieth century, (but) it is rarely performed within non-Aboriginal contexts.” Susan Roy. Performing Musqueam Culture and History at British Columbia’s 1966 Centennial Celebrations,” BC Studies 135 (2002): 59.
protocol in handling such materials at the Museum for future exhibitions.32 Due to its sacred nature, it is considered inauspicious to display or depict the mask or the visions and powers associated with it- unlike many masks and cultural belongings33 used in ceremony in the Northern Northwest Coast, Salish material culture would not have circulated in the same ways, which contributed to what remained its overlooked status by Anthropologists and the general public alike, into well into the latter half of the twentieth century.

Though the Coast Salish territories cover a vast area from lower Vancouver Island, what is now the Lower Mainland, into Washington and Oregon states and part of Montana, with strong linguistic, kinship and cultural relations to one another with freedom of movement up and down the Southern coast, they were also amongst the first groups exposed to and impacted by, sustained colonial contact. This also effected the way that Salish art was circulated, rather than the more monumental pieces found in the North which would have been suppressed by missionaries and municipal colonialism, many Salish designs were found on more utilitarian objects or those used in the home, such as spoons, combs and spindle whorls for spinning wool.34 Important indicators of status and wealth in Salish society were measured in “incorporeal property,”35 possession of songs, dances, important names and

33 Rather than the terms ‘artifacts’ or ‘objects,’ which reflect a western monetary system, I use the term ‘cultural belongings’ to convey the fuller meaning that they “are innately tied to heritage and ancestral significance, and do not exist as goods to be exchanged for monetary value.” Abi Moore. “Cultural belongings in the lens of Indigenous materials,” interactive online presentation, accessed April 2019, https://prezi.com/2lgl6yvyqasow/cultural-belongings/.
35 Finely woven wool blankets were prized possessions and important gifts for potlatches and other ceremonies in Coast Salish culture. Wayne Suttles. “Private Knowledge, Morality, and Social Classes among the Coast Salish.” American Anthropologist 60, no. 3 (1958): 501.
knowledge, and use of the best fishing sites which were connected to a person’s guardian spirit, and considered deeply unlucky to depict in any express way. Clandestine ceremonial practices and some of the more quotidian nature of their designs were factors that contributed to Salish art not receiving the same level of recognition as other arts of the Northwest Coast.

Yuxwelupton was raised with Coast Salish traditions, traveling with his parents who were actively involved in Aboriginal politics, his Father was the founder of The Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, and his mother the Director of The BC Indian Homemakers Association, taking part in Salish spiritual ceremonies including Salish Black Face dances in the long house:

*I have come from a position of tradition, I haven’t left it, it’s always there. I’ve not left tradition, I’m just working in modernism. The Neosavage recording this culture and this world to translate back and forth. These paintings go simultaneously from one culture to the other back and forth.*

His deliberate use of the ovoid, and drawing on certain design elements associated with the Northern form line cultures, comes from a place deeply grounded in culture, and he rejects these territorial demarcations between high and low Northwest Coast as colonially imposed. Understanding the boundaries between them instead as fluid, and his use of iconography that is for many considered something used by groups from the northern parts of the province, as a way of exercising his sovereign rights as a Coastal Native person from a tradition thousands of years old, of mobility, traveling on sea and land exchanging ideas with neighbouring territories and of back-and-forth influence. Anthropological and archaeological maps showing Northwest Coast cultures that utilized the form line and the ovoid ending with the Kwawaka’wakw of Northern Vancouver Island. Not only was there exchange, (trade and potlatching) within Coast Salish networks and neighbouring groups, but

---

influences may well have travelled back and forth as far up as Haida and Tlingit territories in the North,\textsuperscript{37} with slaves held by most coastal groups, extensively raided for up and down the coast.\textsuperscript{38,39} Though the Nuxalk people of the Bella Coola valley on the central coast are included amongst the northern cultures of the Northwest Coast, they are considered linguistically Coast Salish, with certain pieces from the 1800s showing design elements that resemble \textit{Salish eyes}.  

\textsuperscript{37} Though there is little evidence of Haida raids as far south as the lower Fraser River, Wakishan-speaking people from Vancouver Island are known to have raided these areas in the early 1800s. Roy L. Carlson. Email correspondence with author. Winter 2017; and Wayne Suttles. “The Ethnographic Significance of the Fort Langley Journals,” \textit{The Fort Langley Journals}, 30 (1827): 174–75. 


\textsuperscript{39} Leland Donald. \textit{Aboriginal Slavery on the Northwest Coast of North America} (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 1997).
Figure 1-4. 1913 Nuxalk grave marker from Bentick Arm. (SFU Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology.)

The Bill Reid Centre at SFU wrote that this grave marker was donated by “Tallio” (the last name of a prominent Nuxalk family) in 1913. On loan from the Royal British Columbia Museum in Victoria, the paws which resemble Salish eye patterns before and after repainting were likely repaired there by Kwakwaka’wakw artists in the modern era. Bryan Myles Bryan. Email correspondence with the author. Winter 2019.
My Dad was Salish from the Island, so he’s Salish and my Mmother’s Okanagan, but I grew up in the city. This is Coast Salish territory, the problem with colonialism is that it indoctrinates. Some would say I’m an Island Salish person and a separate Salish person on the mainland, but I’m Salish. I’m living on my traditional territory! I don’t belong to Musqueam, I don’t belong to Squamish, I’m not a band member. Before contact we were just Salish, now Squamish etc a ‘nation’, they all claim this colonial paradigm as validation of their identities. Strange in a way they would claim it but aren’t recognized as share holders to that land and still aren’t benefitting from it. As Salish we use our identities under the Indian act? Salish are an example of groups divided by colonialism, 500 years ago if a person went over from the mainland to the Island-to Duncan or Tsawwassen, to Tsarlip to the longhouse for ceremonies, they would take their canoe and go there and they were Salish. We were all one group, together in this territory! This is why we held this territory, because we were such numbers, high density numbers. We didn’t have a problem with other Natives raiding because it was all one Nation and territory. Natives tend to take the colonial road because of government chiefs and validation. I’m still going to claim I’m in my traditional territory and I don’t need Musqueam’s permission, I don’t need Twassan’s permission, or Squamish’s permission to tell me I’m Salish. I don’t need a government status card to tell me I’m a Salish person. I live my Coast Salish territory and I exercise my traditional ways.41

Yuxweluptun’s work and use of more Northerly iconography also emerge from a context where up until the late 1980s, Coast Salish art had languished to the point of obscurity. Though Salish artists and weavers, (often credited for their work in reviving Coast Salish forms) were creating work, the style as such, remained little known in the Lower Mainland area until the early 1990s. The Musqueam People whose traditional territories stretched throughout what is now greater Vancouver, have a rich weaving tradition using decorated circular spindle whorls to spin mountain goat wool and dog hair (from a now extinct Salish wool dog) prior contact (and sheep wool predominantly today), into yarn for blankets and shawls. The symbol’s revival is attributed to Musqueam artist Susan Point, with the elegant circular motif containing plant, animal and marine life within the form, are commonly featured in the Coast Salish art of the Lower Mainland area. Coast Salish had house

41 Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun (artist). Interview with the author. August 2014.
posts made of carved or painted wooden support beams often depicting family connections to mythical beings and ancestors.\textsuperscript{42} Now the Coast Salish house posts and spindle whorls\textsuperscript{43} that one is greeted with at the Vancouver airport, or see adorning manhole covers\textsuperscript{44} and other spaces in the city, were until relatively recently in the Lower Mainland, largely unrecognizable to most Vancouverites, as the art of the local Indigenous people. Native art in the city, was to be found in the Stanley Park totem poles, at the Museum of Anthropology on the grounds of the University of British Colombia, and in acclaimed Haida artist Bill Reid’s monumental public sculptures. His bronze cast sculpture \textit{The Spirit of Haida Gwaii, the Black Canoe}, depicting various figures from Haida mythology and finished in black to represent Haida argillite,\textsuperscript{45} stands outside the Canadian embassy in Washington DC, with a second version \textit{The Spirit of Haida Gwaii, the Jade Canoe}, originally shown at the Canadian Museum of History, and moved to the Vancouver International Airport in 1996. Vancouver became a city widely associated with striking Indigenous art, albeit little of it actually representative of the Coast Salish of the area.


\textsuperscript{44} Musqueam artist Susan Point, along with her Daughter Kelly Cannell, designed an award-winning Spindle whorl design for the city of Vancouver’s manhole covers in 2004. http://www.ironcladart.ca/competition/examples.php (accessed July 2016).

\textsuperscript{45} Argillite is a grey/black carbonaceous shale particular to Graham Island in Haida Gwai. Carved by Haida artists for hundreds of years, it gained in prominence with pieces made for trade with Europeans after the decline in the sea otter trade in the first part of the 19th century. Robin K. Wright. “Nineteenth Century Haida Argillite Carvings: Documents of Cultural Encounter,” \textit{Art and the Native America: Perceptions, Reality and Influences} ed. Mary Louise Krumrine and Susan Clare Scott, (University Park, PA: Penn State Press, 2001), 224–45.
Differing from other provinces of Canada, the majority of the province of British Columbia was never formally treated, with much of the province, (including the Lower Mainland area) never legally surrendered or sold by its Indigenous inhabitants and therefor considered *unceded* Native land. Vancouver’s City Hall made a unanimous decision to acknowledge the fact that the city sits on unceded Aboriginal territory in June of 2014. Natalie Baloy in her work on spectacular and spectral Indigeneity in Vancouver, discusses the anxiety such an admission causes for non-Indigenous inhabitants of the Lower Mainland area, and what it might mean for the future right to reside on the what has been officially acknowledged as the ancestral territory of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and the Tsleil-Waututh First Nations. ‘The lack of historical treaties has produced modern-day ‘uncertainty’ about First Nations peoples’ rights to territory and resources in the province, as well as the terms of relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people settling on unceded lands.” Though this unease is characteristic of most settler colonial societies premised on the dispossession of its Indigenous populations from the land, and is widespread throughout Canada, it is

---

particularly unsettling for a city that has never really been aware of its local Native culture.

What scholar Patrick Wolfe refers to as “structural genocide” in settler societies was enacted on Indigenous People of Canada with the Indian Act legislation of 1876, the subsequent Potlatch ban on any and all Native dances, festivals and religious practices in British Columbia from 1884–1951, and the enforcement of Residential schooling, the last of which were operational until the mid-1970s. In addition to these material attempts at disappearance in what has been declared by the UN a “cultural genocide” the process of effacing Native place names (and consequent stories, histories and Indigenous presence), overwriting them with western or non-local place names, were a further effort to construct the Canadian landscape as *terra nullius*, both geographically and culturally.

Though the topical features of settler colonialism play out differently according to particular location, the establishing of a new nation (culturally as well as geographically), and a distinctive national identity, relies on appropriating selective aspects of Indigenous cultures of the land, that then get taken up to distinguish the new country from its European forbears. Examples of this would be the Starbucks Corporation’s Salish spindle whorl, or various sports team logos such as the Washington Redskins. Wolfe refers to this as a “recuperation of Indigeneity.” This conflation of the true Indigeneity of a place with a national narrative that works to

---

54 “For nationalist purposes, it is hard to see an alternative to this contradictory reappropriation of a foundationally disavowed Aboriginality.” Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism,” 389.
obscure its settler roots and histories of migration, resulting in *origin amnesia*. Establishing a general feeling amongst the population that Indigenous groups have been safely assimilated into the body politic of the nation, with settlers having become *native to the nation*. In the case of Vancouver and Victoria, the two most prominent and sizeable urban centres in British Columbia (both located on Coast Salish territory), the Indigenous culture taken up to establish the distinctive characters of the province’s most important cities drew from northern Northwest Coast traditions. Suggesting a Native *flavour* but an Indigenous *elsewhere*. {56}

In May of 2016, Vancouver’s Museum of Anthropology (MOA), famous for its spectacular park-like setting, modernist architecture, and great hall filled with awe inspiring Northern Totem Poles, house fronts and other monumental Northwest Coast pieces, hosted a retrospective of Yuxweluptun’s work entitled *Unceded Territories*. Spanning thirty years, it was curated by Karen Duffek, curator of contemporary visual arts at the MOA, and the Secwep emc independent curator and artist Tania Willard, who curated the groundbreaking *Beat Nation, Art, Hip Hop and Indigenous Culture* exhibition at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 2012. {57} Though the MOA has begun to incorporate more contemporary exhibitions, and programming that addresses political and social issues, they are better known for their extensive ethnographic collections of Northwest Coast works, and Haida artist Bill Reid pieces, including *Raven and the First Man*, a monumental sculpture depicting a Haida creation myth, commissioned specifically for the museum in the late 1970s. {58} Yuxweluptun’s show, and first solo exhibition of a Coast Salish artist ever to be held

---

at the Museum of Anthropology, can be read as a radical breakthrough for Indigenous art in Vancouver for a number of reasons.

As a young Native artist from the Interior living and working in East Van at the time, Tania Willard describes a similar sense of *encounter* she felt first experiencing Yuxweluptun’s work at the *Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun and Emily Carr* show at the VAG in 1996. She shared about what it meant to witness as a younger generation of urban Indigenous artist in Vancouver, and how that informed her experience curating his show at the MOA twenty years later.

*His work was really influential to me, I first became familiar with it around the time of that show. I can’t remember the title or anything, but I remember seeing that work and the juxtaposition with the Emily Carr works, and specifically chose “The Transformation of Bill Wilson” piece (great piece), because of seeing that show. The impression it made on me as a young artist coming from a small town, and my relationship to the reserve and art school, and then all of a sudden this work showed me how, what was possible. And the work juxtaposed with E Carr really opened up these deep conversations. Definitely the influence of that body of work made me jump at the chance to have some kind of voice and thoughts about his work and curating it. And at such an interesting and complicated venue as a museum of anthropology.*

As co-curator of Yuxweluptun’s exhibition at Vancouver’s MOA, Karen Duffek refers to the title of the show as both a political statement, and metaphor for his use of modernist imagery, and his solo exhibition at the Museum, an “intervention in the space.”

“For Yuxweluptun, the term ‘unceded territories’ refers to land and governance as much as to his right to paint how and what he sees. He calls himself a *history painter, a monumentalist, a modernist.*” Holding a comprehensive survey of a contemporary Coast Salish, Okanagan artist on such a scale in an anthropology museum (places Yuxweluptun has always called “morgues” for Indigenous cultural

---

61 Ibid., 115.
became then a strategic and timely choice that raises a number of issues at the core of Indigenous and modern art and representation in Vancouver.

Reflecting back on shifts in public thinking about contemporary Native art in the Lower Mainland, and the relative lack of exhibition space, critical attention and institutional support for any work outside of classic northern Northwest Coast style carving and print making, when Yuxweluptun and others were starting out, is something that Willard was very aware of taking on the work for the 2016 show.

_It was not in the institutions really, rarely. The exceptions were those landmark exhibitions like ‘Land, Spirit, Power’ in the early 90s, but largely that was happening in the artist run center movements. In working so closely with him and the museum and with the exhibition material, it was really interesting to know how much of an impact or how much of an impression, it made on him growing up in Kamloops. That there was a lot of cross over with the interior and the politics out of the interior and the coast Indigenous rights focused, land rights focused politics from the late 1800s to the time when Lawrence was a young man. It was interesting to see that embodied in his work and layered references, not just on the surface, though sometimes they are. They’re really layered into his kind of conceptual approach to his work and interesting again to see his relationship to that place and my own._

Not only did the show of Yuxwelutun’s painting push against the prevalence of the salvage paradigm in Northwest Coast art by centring contemporary Indigenous narratives over exhibiting of a more timeless and classical northern work—often displayed without connection to land and place, but perhaps more radically, as an Interior, Coast Salish painter, it positions him within his traditional territories of the Lower Mainland. Willard discussed the significance of this intervention into western connoisseurship and ethnography that have shaped the ways Indigenous art in

---

63 Here Willard also cites the work of Indigenous artists Rebecca Belmore and Dana Claxton, whom she says ‘changed the face of contemporary art in Canada’. Tania Willard (curator, artist). Skype interview with the author. October 2016.
64 Ibid.
Vancouver has been displayed and consumed for the better part of the last century, and how these worked to obscure local and Interior Salish cultures in doing so.

*It’s very fraught some of the reasons that NWC art practice has such a tension was anthropological and ethnographic work that heavily documented those cultures and dispersed them internationally and of course beautiful aesthetic form, but there is a ‘shaping’ going on throughout all of the arts of BC. A kind of shaping by museums, by connoisseurs, by the market. What materials were ‘the ones’ to use etc. And what LPY’s work does is kind of punch through all of that. He only made one silk screen print and coming out of art school the height of NWC art of print making, serigraph, silkscreen, and he chooses to be on his path as a painter and a modernist and to do that at that time, it takes all kinds of negotiation and inner strength to hold to your own vision and give yourself the cultural agency to do that, both within your own community and in the contemporary art world.*

Yuxweluptun became interested in art in high school and, as a young man in the 60s and 70s, an era commonly called the Northwest Coast Renaissance. A term considered problematic, as comparison with a western term for a period in European history that emphasized a great cultural break from the past. Sec wep emc author and activist George Manual critiqued its use: “the renaissance of today is the fruit of the accumulated labors of our grandfathers. The appearance that we are only now coming alive is an illusion created by the press and public institutions, who have for so long warped, distorted and falsified the story of our resistance.” Public appreciation and an expanding market for the Indigenous arts of the NWC was re-emerging, thanks in part to the lifting of the potlatch ban in the 1950s, and the medium of printmaking which had become important for the dissemination of Northwest Coast design in a more accessible way to a broader public. Along with a re-emergence of northern style traditional carving techniques with a focus on masks for the tourist market. This revival in the art of carving, together with print making was considered *the* direction for Native artists wanting to practice their culture and

---

make a living with their work. It espoused a limited repertoire of northern NWC designs and masks with an emphasis on a “simplification and standardization of form”⁶⁹ that would render them more recognizable to the non-Indigenous customer. And Yuxweluptun recounts being strongly encouraged to become a carver in the style taught at the Kitanmax School of Northwest Coast Art near Hazelton, in Gitxsan territory in northern BC,⁷⁰ to learn from northern (mostly Haida) masters, something he resisted as a Coast Salish artist.

*Like why would I want to carve in the Haida style when I’m a Coast Salish? I’m not Haida, I don’t need Robert Davidson to tell me how to make art. I’m more interested in painting and Surrealism or these other kinds of forms.*⁷¹

Drawing on the techniques of modernism offered a freedom to step out of a circumscribed idea of what Northwest Coast Native art (and identity), was at the time. Willard contextualizes the importance of this decision for Yuxweluptun’s own artistic trajectory, as well as for generations of Vancouver based Native artists to follow.

*That was important politically, to say “yeah I’m not a carver, I’m a painter, and I can still be doing this and talking about this, and to kind of open that space.” Something that that older generation of artists did, feel lucky as younger generation in that way, it’s not easy to open space and you don’t know what’s going to come through when you open that space. I guess it was a moment when that space was so firmly opened that you can never shut that door again.*⁷²

---

⁶⁹ Townsend-Gault, Kramer, and Ki-ke-in, 476.
⁷⁰ Often called K’san after the historical village it is located in, near the Skeena River in the Northwestern part of the province. It was the first school to offer formal instruction in Northwest Coast Indian art. Kitanmax School of the Northwest Coast Art information webpage, accessed May 2019, https://www.strongnations.com/gs/show.php?gs=3&gsd=1971.
⁷¹ Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun (artist). Interview with the author. 2013.
An Indigenous Elsewhere

In her article *Erasing Indigenous Indigeneity in Vancouver*, historian Jean Barman looks at the way in which the city’s cherished tourist attraction, the *Stanley Park Totem Poles*, worked to overwrite local Coast Salish presences in the city, replacing them with a northern cultural tradition that would define for years to come what Indigenous and Coastal culture was, not only in Vancouver but in the province and country more broadly. Though the Native villages of Xway Xway (now Lumberman’s Arch) and Chaythoos (now known as Brockton Point) in the city’s Stanley Park, were uprooted and their inhabitants dispossessed, the park erected four Kwakwaka’wakw totem poles from Northern Vancouver Island to celebrate its “Kawgwhelth Indians” in 1923.73 Public support for the evictions was aided in that the remaining families were of mixed Native and white ancestry and therefore not ‘really’ Aboriginal in a way that fit comfortably within the settler imaginary, and their dwellings not picturesque enough to remain.74 Echoing a theme that continues to inform the way urban Indigeneity is understood in the broader culture, as *adulterated* and inauthentic. The totem poles which would become synonymous with Indian culture throughout Canada, despite being a tradition specific only to the northern Nations of the Northwest Coast and not practiced by the Coast Salish of the area,75 remains one of British Columbia’s most visited tourist attractions.76 With their serene park location, removed from the city, and severed from their cultural context, they appeared salvaged, if impressive reminders of a bygone era. That were, as Barman

74 Barman points out that though this fueled the argument for eviction, it was not enough to prevent the children from being seen as ‘Indian enough’ to be sent to residential school. Jean Barman. *Stanley Park’s Secret, The Forgotten Families of Whoi Whoi, Kanaka Ranch and Brockton Point* (Madeira Park, BC: Harbour Pub., 2005): 110–22.
says, “making the province’s indigenous heritage fashionable in sanitized forms that did not affect the realities of newcomers’ everyday lives.”\footnote{Barman, “Erasing Indigenous,” 27.} Allowing locals and tourists to dabble briefly in the “exotic” Indian cultures of British Columbia without having to leave the Lower Mainland, or for that matter consider the Indigenous territory on which they were standing.

Similarly, with the elegant and impressive Museum of Anthropology, located on the northwestern tip of the University of British Columbia endowment lands, the trope of Native people at one with an unspoiled nature and the city with western progress and development is repeated. Commanding striking views of Burrard Inlet and surrounded by majestic old growth forest, the space feels designed to give museum goers the sense they are stepping back in time and accessing authentic Indigenous culture in its original setting, far removed from the urban landscape. Designed by celebrated Vancouver modernist architect Arthur Erikson, and finished in 1976, visitors descend gracefully through a glass fronted structure, based on the style of a northern Northwest Coast longhouse, to a spacious great hall looking out over a reconstructed Haida village, with totem poles directing one’s gaze over shell midden, past wildflowers and grasses toward the sea. The Northern village site that sits prominently beside the museum was constructed under the direction of the acclaimed Haida artist Bill Reid, and it included both newly constructed Haida totem poles carved with Kwakwaka’wakw artist Doug Cranmer, along with some remaining poles that had been removed by Reid and a group of anthropologists from Haida Gwaii on a rescue expedition in the late 1950s. It was feared the poles would decay
if left in situ in Haida Gwaii and that they should be salvaged for posterity, the subject of which was made into a short documentary film for CBC television in 1959.\textsuperscript{78}

The awe-inspiring space, monumental structures and view of the ocean combine to suggest one is immersed in nature, albeit an elegant, modernized version. The museum, which houses the university’s extensive ethnographic collections, incorporates the remainder of a second world war gun placement at the site, as a mount for Bill Reid’s massive yellow cedar sculpture *Raven and the First Man*. Called “the beating heart of the museum,”\textsuperscript{79} the circular room with its large skylight was designed around the piece, which takes pride of place next to the museum’s great hall. Reid was the star of the Museum and of the Northwest Coast Anthropological discourse of the time. This emphasis on Haida and northern Northwest Coast culture continued to dominate until the extensive renovation project, *A Partnership of the Peoples*, was initiated in 2009 to include a new Centre for Cultural Research, larger spaces for temporary exhibitions, and other additions to the original museum that shifted the emphasis to “reciprocal research” and a commitment to working with the Musqueam Indian Band and other local Coast Salish groups.\textsuperscript{80}

In a sense, Reid’s mission to rescue the poles from their original setting, which served specific ideological and political purposes crucial to understanding their meaning (commemorating ancient connections to land and place, moiety and kinship, and important events) within Haida community, can be seen as a metaphor for a broader paradigm in thinking about Native art, and in particular Reid’s position within


\textsuperscript{80} Office of the Vice President Research and International, The University of British Columbia. “A Partnership of the Peoples,” statement issued November 1, 2009; and Sharon Michelle Fortney. “Forging new partnerships: Coast Salish communities and museums” (PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 2009), 137.
it, that would inform Northwest Coast discourse for much of the century. That Reid and the anthropologists sought to salvage the works as aesthetic objects for study, by severing them from their cultural context, preserving them for the world as an example of classic antiquity, enabled the public to think of Indigenous cultures as no longer really present. The poles became remnants of the past, preserved in museums, rather than extensions of living cultures and communities. Arguably Canada’s most revered Indigenous artist, he is considered the most influential figure in the Native Arts revival of the 1960s, or the Native Renaissance. Scholar Aaron Glass critiques the use of the term ‘Renaissance’ to describe Northwest Coast art at this time, as not a ‘rebirth,’ as is commonly associated with the phrase, but as something “completely new,” shaped by western academics, art markets and political forces.\(^\text{81}\) which saw a shift in thinking about Native material culture (and carving in particular) from craft to artform in its own right. Reid emphasized being the inheritor of a timeless and classical tradition, believing Haida art to be the most akin to European classical art, and that pieces should be produced in ways as authentic to the originals as possible. In a letter to the president of the University of British Columbia regarding an idea for re-creating a Haida village on the university’s grounds in the mid-1950s, Reid argued he, rather than Kwakwaka’wakw carver Mungo Martin, who as a professional carver had proposed the idea, was the only artist capable of the project. He wrote: “To expect a modern Indian, uneducated, either in the patterns of his ancestors, or those of today to recreate what are

\(^{81}\) In addition to the term homogenizing complex and unique Native groups with diverse experiences of colonial contact, as with the Haida and the Coast Salish, the term also problematically implies a ‘dying out’ and rebirth of Native culture at a time when many Indigenous communities, as George Manuel states earlier in the chapter, actively resisted assimilation and continued to practice culture in ways both overt and clandestine, risking imprisonment to do so. See Tina Loo. “Dan Cranmer’s Potlatch: Law as Coercion, Symbol, and Rhetoric in British Columbia, 1884–1951.” Canadian Historical Review 73, no. 2 (1992): 125–165; and Aaron Glass. “History and Critique of the ‘Renaissance’ Discourse,” in Native Art of the Northwest Coast: A History of Changing Ideas, eds. Charlotte Townsend-Gault, Jennifer Kramer, and Ki-łe-in (Ron Hamilton) (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2013), 492.
essentially great artistic achievements, is an empty hope,” believing Northwest Coast (including Haida) culture to be a thing of the past. Reid was not unique in this assumption about Indigenous culture, which was widely held by the majority, Native and non-Native alike. Major waves of smallpox devastated the Indigenous populations up and down the coast from early European contact, the first in the late 1700s that decimated populations, (many in advance of actual contact with Europeans) desolating what was one of the most densely populated (and linguistically and culturally diverse,) areas in north America. And the second in 1862 with the docking of a boat in Victoria Harbour carrying an infected passenger, striking the large Native population encamped for trade near the Fort. Despite having access to a vaccine, the non-Indigenous inhabitants of Fort Victoria fearing the spreading disease, forced the sick and infected local First Nations groups away from the area. This then extended to all infected Native groups on the southeastern part of Vancouver Island, and as many returned to their communities, the disease spread up the coast, wiping out entire villages and spreading inland, nearly every Native community in the province was effected. Along with the Indian Act, the Potlatch ban and residential schooling, part of Canada's forced assimilation policies throughout the twentieth century, it was easy to believe that Indigenous cultures would disappear.

---

82 Maria Tippett. Bill Reid, 99.
83 The Northwest Coast was one of the most populous places in North America at the time of contact, with some areas such as Haida Gwaii, and what is now Vancouver Island, having much higher populations than they do at present. https://www.ictinc.ca/blog/the-impact-of-smallpox-on-first-nations-on-the-west-coast (Accessed Spring 2019).
84 “From oral history and ongoing research, it is clear that the European diseases that ravaged the Central and South American populations spread in advance of actual contact to First Nations in BC. Therefore early explorers and traders who considered the populations quite low were witnessing Nations who had already experienced drastic decreases.” https://www.ictinc.ca/blog/the-impact-of-smallpox-on-first-nations-on-the-west-coast (Accessed Spring 2019).
Western scholars, chiefly anthropologists, (as part of a burgeoning field at the beginning of the twentieth century), played an enormous part in defining Indigenous culture in Canada from its beginning and shaped perceptions of Indigeneity and Indigenous art on the Northwest Coast in powerful ways that continue to resonate today. One of the first anthropologists to be hired at what is now the National Museum of Canada in 1911, ethnographer and folklorist Marius Barbeau, considered a founding father of Canadian anthropology, played such a role. Known for his work on Quebecois folk music, Huron-Wyandot culture and his interest in totem poles of the Northwest Coast, in particular those of the Tsimshian of northern British Columbia. Working from a salvage understanding of Indigenous cultures, he refused to reconcile Indigenous adaptation to changing conditions with “authentic” Native culture, and has been widely criticized for his conclusions that Native people no longer retained enough of their culture to be considered anything other than assimilated. In 1924, he along with notorious Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Duncan Campbell Scott, (famous for being a fervent proponent of Indian Residential schools) and the Canadian Parks Service, formed a Totem pole preservation committee intended to preserve and restore northern Northwest Coast totem poles for posterity and to “oversee the restoration of old poles that would encourage tourist travel to the region for 30 poles along the Canadian National Railway’s Skeena River


66 His work on totem poles as a relatively recent art form stemming from contact, and theories that the Tsimshianic-speaking Haida and Tlingit people came with the most recent migration to the Northwest Coast from Siberia, have been widely discredited by linguistic and DNA evidence. Jean-Nicolas de Surmont. “Genèse de l’enquête Ethnomusicologique Collective au Canada Français,” in Around and About Marius Barbeau: Modelling Twentieth-century Culture, ed. Gordon E. Smith, Lynda Jessup, and Andrew Nurse, (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press / Museum of Civilization, 2008), 207–8.

Route”, with many poles repainted and some even relocated to be seen more clearly from the train, the project was met with great controversy by local Native groups.\textsuperscript{88} An influential figure in the worlds of art and anthropology, in 1927 he oversaw the first exhibition in the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa to include Aboriginal art, \textit{West Coast Art, Native and Modern}.\textsuperscript{89}

From German born anthropologist Franz Boaz’s \textit{Primitive Art}, published in 1927, with its meticulous classifications, descriptions and categorization of Northwest Coast art forms many believed lost or disappearing, the Western gaze and cultural interpretation, had a tremendous influence in shaping understandings around Indigenous art and connoisseurship for generations. French Structuralists such as Claude Lévi-Strauss showed enormous interest in the art of the Haida and other Northwest Coast groups, and his book \textit{The Way of the Masks} published in 1982,\textsuperscript{90} which attempted to reconcile the myth and material culture of the Northwest Coast with European structural analysis,\textsuperscript{91} has been appreciated for its positioning of these arts as equal to any European tradition. But by furthering associations between Northwest Coast forms and an elegant classicism, it contributed to a widespread appreciation for a Native art that was commensurate with western aesthetics,\textsuperscript{92}


\textsuperscript{91} The stress in Structuralism on theory as “a necessary element in any true discipline and for “any systematic study of the arts,”, fails to address in any substantial way, important critiques of its emphasis on universalizing grand narratives that attempt to reconcile incommensurate aspects of culture with a European center. As well as the deeply problematic assumption of voice and authority to speak about and for Indigenous people.


\textsuperscript{92} The tendency to appreciate Indigenous art based on western/European recognition, continues to inform public opinion. In a \textit{Globe and Mail} newspaper article about Bill Reid, Rod Micleburgh wrote: “This was
informing a wide appreciation with the European public (and art market).

Scandinavian American scholar Bill Holm, whose book, *Northwest Coast Indian Art: An Analysis of Form*, initially published as a study for the University of Washington in 1965, is still widely regarded as the definitive analysis of Northwest Coast art. Not only has it gone on to define what constitutes the art of the Northwest Coast, but the standards which it should meet to be considered a part of the category. The book has never gone out of print, and remains hugely influential on generations of Native carvers and artists, many of whom would have been forcibly taken from their families and communities as small children due to residential schooling and other forms of assimilation.\(^9\) Though it remains useful for artists and scholars today, in what is now criticized as neo colonial fashion, it established Holm as non-Native expert on Native culture, who knew more and better than the actual artists themselves, privileging aesthetics and discounting the myriad ways culture (stories and myths, ceremony, place names, heredity etc.) is shared within families and communities. As UBC anthropology professor Wilson Duff said; “(he) makes better Haida art than any living Haida, he makes better Kwakiutl masks, sings better Kwakiutl songs, and dances better Kwakiutl dances than any Kwakiutl.”\(^9\) Anything but neutral in its consequences, the history of anthropology on the North West Coast could be argued as less an engagement of epistemologies, and more an imposition of Western ways of knowing and being onto Indigenous cultures incommensurate with European belief systems.\(^9\)

---


\(^{9\text{b}}\) Tippett, *Bill Reid*, 129.

\(^{9\text{c}}\) Ibid., 128.

\(^{9\text{d}}\) Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus*, 75.
As Audra Simpson on the canon of anthropological literature states; it is more “a desire, for order, for purity, for fixity, and for cultural perfection that at once imagined an imminent disappearance immediately after, or just within land dispossession.”⁹⁶ And in the case of the Northwest Coast, with an aesthetic focus almost exclusively on the forms and material culture of the Northern part of the Coast, it furthered assumptions that little art (or for that matter culture and ties to territory) of value, existed in Southern or interior parts of the province, overwriting the wide diversity of Northwest Coast cultures and arts with those of the northern nations.⁹⁷

..Native and Modern

The Arts of the Raven: Masterworks by the Northwest Coast Indian exhibition (on which Reid and the Northwest Coast’s most prominent anthropologists, Wilson Duff and Bill Holm were consultants) was held at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1967. The exhibition that coincided with the 100th anniversary of the birth of Canada, though groundbreaking in that it exhibited work of living Native artists along with old pieces, was intended to showcase Native art not as curio or artifact, but as fine art in its own right⁹⁸ focused predominantly on Northern Northwest Coast work. The “Art Today” section, in addition to several works by Reid, included five commissioned pieces by Haida artist Robert Davidson, five works by Kwakw’akw artist Doug Cranmer, a further three by Tony and Henry Hunt (also Kwakw’akw), Don Lelooska Smith (a Cherokee artist working in the Northwest Coast style), and works by non-Native makers.⁹⁹ With Salish⁹⁰ and many others left out, the exhibition helped to further

⁹⁶ Ibid, 70.
⁹⁷ Glass, “Selling the Master (Piece by Piece).”
⁹⁹ Tippett, Bill Reid, 146, 148.
¹⁰⁰ Reid referred to Coast Salish art as being “childlike creations.” Ibid., 108.
understandings that to be Native art, it should be materially tangible (and commodifiable), untainted by “outside” hybridized elements, northern Northwest Coast in style, and “authentic” to older works of classical pedigree. This new appreciation of Native art as fine art object, without connection to living communities (and a growing politics around land claims), may have established a worldwide audience and appreciation for the arts of the northern Northwest Coast, in particular the Haida, but doing so fixed them in a pre-contact era equated with a pristine and untainted “authenticity,” held up as a standard by which all Native arts were compared, obscuring that Indigenous art and culture are traditions of adaptation, innovation and exchange. And further reinforced assumptions that a fixed, pure Indigenous art existed prior to colonialism, with that coming after, degraded and lesser forms.

Art Historian Scott Watson in his piece on Yuxweluptun’s use of modernism, which was included in an exhibition catalogue for his 1995 show Born to Live and Die on Your Colonial Reservations at UBC’s Morris and Helen Belkin Gallery, traces the evolution of Northwest Coast work in the western art market from its appropriation by the Canadian Art & Crafts movement in the 1920s to its widespread acceptance as fine art in the 1960s. He argues part of what allowed Haida art to become so widely recognized, was that, unlike earlier Native artists whose work was rarely if ever considered “art” (and therefor “modern”) in the Western sense, Reid and many of those that worked under him, emphasized a style that conveyed values and meanings that were “universal.” Art historian Marcia Crosby explores Modernity from an Indigenous perspective in her work on Indigenous art in Vancouver in the 1960s, contrasts this in her writing about Nu Cha Nulth artist George Clutesi, as a

Modernist, locating his work within a circle of mid-century Native artists drawing from particular aspects of modernism to tell stories about Indigenous land and culture. The association could be interpreted as a kind of resistance, in that she argues, it enabled a certain recognition for Indigenous work in Europe and elsewhere, as “art” from a living tradition, at a time when it was predominantly associated with museums and archives in Canada.103 Where Reid’s ‘universalism’ in promoting Haida art,104 could be seen as art for art’s sake, without having to engage issues like Native rights and claims to land, which were beginning to gain momentum at the time. In his introduction to the Art of the B.C. Indian section in the Vancouver Art Galleries’ 100 Years of B.C. Art exhibition, held to celebrate the centennial year in 1958, Reid writes, “They are not arranged according to their place of origin, or the different groups who produced them but in attempt to show them to the best advantage possible as the beautiful sculptural objects they are. Actually, to know the technical facts about these people and their arts adds little to the appreciation of it.”105

Watson further links the ascendancy of the recognition of Haida art over other forms, with its resonance with European Art Deco, and the minimal, elegant aesthetics characteristic of modernism. A further element that helped to establish Northern forms as more refined and classical was that they came from a place far away and removed from urban life (something Reid himself called the difference between the “public’s romantic view of the Indian and the distressing ordinariness of

the people”), and enabled museum and gallery goers to “think of Haida art in mythic, rather than social and historic terms.” Ostensibly resulting in the general public associating “Native art” with work from Haida Gwaii and far Northern parts of the province, and not with Coast Salish or other Indigenous cultures, which, though everywhere in Vancouver, were rarely really seen

Reid was a complex figure, and his legacy is not unproblematic. He introduced Northwest Coast art to the world at a time when Indigenous culture on the West coast was widely considered to be dying, but as Tsimshian, Haida art historian Marcia Crosby, and others have pointed out, doing so helped to reinforce a salvage paradigm that in many ways still persists. His position brought him a great deal of fame as an individual artist, in a way that fits more with the Renaissance paradigm of the modern artist as singular ‘genius’ and conduit for divine inspiration, than as a member of a cultural group working in an ancient tradition marked by innovation and adaptation, which would have further influenced the way Haida art was circulated and consumed by a western art market, interpreting it as more European. And yet he can also be read as an Indigenous person straddling two very different and seemingly irreconcilable worlds, at a time when assimilation was widely enforced as social policy in Canada. His work embodying the tensions and entanglements of Indigeneity in a colonial modern world. Raised mainly in Victoria, British Columbia to a Haida Mother (and residential school survivor), and a white Father, he was not raised to think of himself as Native, as his Mother had married a

---

106 Tippett, Bill Reid, 94.
non-Native man and would have lost her status under Indian Act policy of the time.\textsuperscript{109} Despite her maintaining relations with her Haida family, he was only briefly acquainted with his Mother’s home community of Skidegate on Haida Gwaii from the occasional trip as a child, and was not brought up within Haida culture.\textsuperscript{110} Through careful study, networking and self-promotion, he contributed to reviving Native arts (albeit as aesthetic objects and designs often disconnected from cultural context), at a time when they were widely believed to be a thing of the past, and combatted colonial assumptions of Indigenous disappearance in important, if complicated ways.

**A Manifesto of Ovoidism**

*This new body of work develops and creates a new visual language of conceptual art. The principal pinnacle concept is the ovoid. I have spent years looking at different ovoids, hundreds of them, thinking about them and visualizing different ovoids to create art. The rule of ovoidism is to maintain some part of, or all of, the shape of the ovoid. At the same time, the ovoid serves as a philosophy to think about such things as land claims, Aboriginal rights, self-determination and self-government, social conditions and environmentalism, Native reason and Native philosophy – all of these things have to be synthesized together. I am simplifying a way to discuss my mind and how I feel. This body of work is a new way for me to express Native “modernalities” and to intellectualize place, space and Native reason.*\textsuperscript{111}


\textsuperscript{110} Tippett, Bill Reid, 32, 44.

The ovoid then, as a form widely associated with the Northern nations, becomes a deeply contested symbol that can be interpreted as a sign of demarcation between the established “quality” and elegance of northern Northwest Coast art and that of its neighbours to the South. Yuxweluptun meditates on the motif, using it to challenge this understanding and invert an Anthropologically imposed claim on a form that can be seen to symbolize the privileging of Northern art over the art and ultimately the culture of the Salish and Interior cultures. (In and of
itself advancing a “pan-Indian” [in this case Northern Northwest Coast] style that would come to be associated with the whole of the Lower Mainland and the province.) But it can also be seen, like any site of contestation, as one of possibility, and in this case way to exercise Native sovereignty, through transmigration, and the questioning of colonially imposed boundaries between groups that have long and complex traditions of trade and exchange between them.

The Manifesto of Ovoidism is also a way to reclaim the form’s depoliticized abstraction from a universalizing modernism, which equated the quality and ‘authenticity’ of Indigenous art in the western imaginary, with the pristine and classical forms of the more northern nations.

THE RULES TO OVOIDISM

Ovoids can come in all shapes and sizes.  
Only ovoids can be used.  
Ovoids can be any colour.  
Ovoids can be made into sculptures and all other forms of art as long as you retain the principles and guidelines that are deemed absolute.  
Ovoid painting can be used as a metaphorical terminology of thinking, for instance, “all my relations.” 2 Therefore I will gain wisdom. Ha, Ha!  
Political statements and joyous statements can be made.  
All modern equipment and materials are allowed to create an ovoid.

You should at least be an Indian to create an ovoid.  
Ha! 112

Yuxweluptun’s Manifesto echoes the playfulness and absurdity of the French writer Andre Breton’s Manifesto of Surrealism from 1924,113 but here uses the concept of a manifesto or declaration to engage and critique questions of cultural appropriation and mock western understandings of the “primitive” and the “classical” through his own appropriation of the ovoid form. Reading the Manifesto of Ovoidism, one notes that it is premised with the piece illustrating what is intended with the Manifesto, with

112 Yuxwelupton, “Manifesto,” 2.  
the Rules coming after. The reader is aware of a kind of resistance in the piece, first to a western art history that has relegated the work of certain cultures to the periphery of what actually qualifies as art, and then to Northwest Coast purists who would dismiss his use of the ovoid as “inauthentic.” For a Cowichan/Okanagan artist to adopt aspects of design elements traditionally used by Northern artists to tell stories about Coast Salish life, colonial violence to land and culture, and what it is to be an urban Indian, is for many, particularly in the city of Vancouver where he lives and works, deeply unsettling.

To consider urban Natives as anything other than separated from a “real” Indigenous elsewhere, or reminder of those unable to adjust to western progress and modernity, means coming to terms with a much more complicated reality that challenges disappearance and demands an engagement with what Indigeneity and Indigenous land really means in colonized nations.

Art historian and curator Marcia Crosby engages the nuances and complexities of urban Indigenous experience and the importance of hearing and telling these stories if one is to make sense of what it is to be Native in the world today, and to challenge the binary thinking that has upheld certain kinds of Nativeness as more ‘authentic’ (and therefor more valid) than others. In doing so, she also touches on the invisibilising of the many histories that don’t fit neatly into a colonial binary.

Isn’t pretending that any of our pasts survived untouched by colonialism itself a dangerous thing? Oral history projects that focus on the oldest people and their oldest memories, and the continual retrieval of histories that refer to land use and lineage has supplanted the equal importance of recording the hybrid

---

114 Tsimshian, Tlingit scholar and dancer Mique’l Dangeli has pointed out the use of the terms traditional and contemporary to describe methods in indigenous art practice have often been used in oppressive ways to “keep Native people out” of certain discourses and conversations. Interview with the author, September 2014. See also Sean Mallon. “Opinion: Why We Should Avoid the Word ‘Traditional,’” blog entry, National Museum of New Zealand, posted December 202, 2016, http://blog.tepapa.govt.nz/2016/12/20/opinion-why-we-should-beware-of-the-word-traditional/.
histories of displacement, which emerged out of gaps, both on and off the reserve. Because we know so little about urban Aboriginal communities, the complexity, the ambiguity, the contradictions and thus, the richness of our Aboriginal past and present is erased.\textsuperscript{115}

Canadian Modern

Considered among Canada’s most important landscape painters, Emily Carr is one of British Columbia’s most celebrated artists. Born in Victoria in the 1870s and raised in an English household in the city of Victoria on Vancouver Island, Carr studied in San Francisco and Paris, and painted in a Modernist style heavily influenced by the European Impressionism of the time. Her work is most celebrated for its iconic melding of Northwest Coast Indian imagery, which she studied on trips made up and down the coast of Vancouver Island and into Northern British Columbia, rendered in a brooding and melancholy Impressionist style. Her unique subject matter as much as her dramatic style, brought her to the attention of the Group of Seven painters in Eastern Canada\textsuperscript{116} in 1927, when her work was included in the National Gallery of Canada’s \textit{Canadian West Coast Art: Native and Modern} exhibition.\textsuperscript{117} The show was curated by anthropologist Marious Barbeau at what is now the National Museum of Civilization, who was considered an authority on totem poles, and other aspects of Northern Northwest Coast culture at the time. A great champion of the work of the Group of Seven painters, whom he felt, in drawing inspiration from a fading Indian culture (which he believed was not the patrimony of Native people themselves, but the national patrimony of Canada),\textsuperscript{118} created an

\textsuperscript{116} Arguably Canada’s most revered modernist painters, based in Toronto in the 1920s, they painted in a European influenced Impressionist style inspired by the natural beauty of the Canadian wilderness. Thomas W.J. Mitchell, \textit{Landscape and Power}. University of Chicago Press, 2002.
\textsuperscript{117} Monique Kaufman Westra, review of \textit{Emily Carr: A Biography} by Maria Tippett, \textit{RACAR} VI, no. 2 (1979): 130–33.
\textsuperscript{118} Barbeau emphasized Native heritage as the heritage of Canada in a series of lectures delivered at UBC in 1926 on Northwest Coast art and culture. He cautioned that Canada’s Indian artefacts (in particular totem
important new art that was uniquely Canadian. The exhibition included twenty-six of Carr’s paintings, mostly depicting lonely Native villages and totem poles in the moody light of the coastal rain forest, as well as hook rugs and pottery also displaying Northwest Coast motifs, which were shown alongside paintings by other Canadian artists, many of whom connected with the Group of Seven, also depicting Native subject matter. These were shown with Indian carvings, masks and other artifacts used as inspiration for the Canadian modernists featured in the show.

Signifying Canada as a forward-looking modern nation inspired by its rugged landscape and Native past. Though it met with mixed reviews at the time it opened, it would go on to bring Carr a widespread acclaim.

This appropriation of Indigenous imagery and subject matter, considered novel at the time, were fundamental to Canada’s development of a particular national style and aesthetic that would distinguish it, from its American neighbors and European forbears (as Wolfe points out with the settler colonial use of a *recuperating Indigeneity*). This would continue to echo with the Native Arts and Crafts revival in the late 1940s that sought to combine Native designs with “modern objects” for everyday use, the discourse may have shifted subtly to include an emphasis on living Native producers,119 but was still predominantly concerned with the salvageable aspects of Indigenous cultures that had become at that point, targets of wholesale state assimilation.120

---

120 Watson discusses designs for this purpose being ‘taught’ in Indian Residential schools where children were held captive, with the intent to revive certain aspects of Native heritage, but where they were “discouraged from imagining their own communities.” Ibid., 64.
Though Carr has been extensively critiqued for her appropriation of Indigenous imagery and for her problematic portrayals of vanishing Native life, she remains an iconic and influential figure in the Canadian art world. And with the prestigious *Emily Carr School of Art & Design* (founded in 1925) named after her, she continues to be regarded as an important figure in the development of a Canadian modernist style, and the imaginary it continues to inspire.

**Making Emily Carr Accountable**

*That show was about the gaze and the lived reality. Carr was looking out from her colonial perspective, her tower. Taking. Embracing her control from a colonial culture, expropriating to record this dying thing. Mine was about the lived experience, and the Indians who do dance and have their culture and ‘continue’ to create. It, par for par, dealt with everything she had to say.*

Though *Thou Shalt Not Steal: Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun and Emily Carr* (held at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1996) was not the first exhibition to showcase Yuxweluptun’s work in Vancouver, it was his most significant within the context of Indigenous contemporary art in Vancouver. A solo show dedicated to his painting at UBC’s Morris and Helen Belkin Gallery was held in 1995. As a noncommercial art gallery, rather than a museum, the Belkin space provided an elegant, if unchallenging setting for Yuxweluptun’s particular modernism. The provocatively titled exhibition *Born to Live and Die on Your Colonial Reservations* was accompanied by an extensive catalogue containing scholarly essays, including those by Charlotte Townsend-Gault and Filmmaker Loretta Todd, and included a timeline of colonialism, documenting significant political events for Indigenous people since the confederation of Canada, provided a didactic contextualization for his work. Though it was, “Even in 1995, one of the first noncommercial, solo exhibitions of a

121 Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun. Interview with the author. August 2014.
Native artist’s work anywhere in North America,” as a small university gallery specializing in contemporary art, it risked assimilating Yuxweluptun’s work as a novelty style into an anything goes pastiche of modernism. The development of which in Vancouver, may have drawn attention to particular kinds of Indigenous art, as Townsend-Gault states “by taking it seriously as art, but on whose terms?”

Yuxweluptun’s modernism is an anticolonial (re)appropriation, which effectively works to trouble European modernism’s core assumptions (the nature/culture split, privileging of the rational and logical, the drive toward western progress and development), by utilizing certain aspects of the modern to express an Indigenous world view, and the many entanglements and contradictions inherent in the relationship between the two. And the gallery’s remote location on the grounds of UBC, known for its conceptual programming (including exhibitions of Vancouver school artists Jeff Wall and Roy Arden), lacked the radical quality Yuxweluptun’s work would have for a much broader and less versed public at the VAG the following year. On curating Unceded Territories, Karen Duffek, reflects on his complicated relationship to both worlds:

Yuxweluptun complicates the terms of inclusion and exclusion that prevail for Native art and artists, whether at the site of the carving shed or the longhouse, the market or the museum, when he refuses their con- straints by claiming his own position as a modernist, not a traditionalist. At the same time, fully aware of modernism’s search for the non-referential subject and for the rupture from tradition, he points to his responsibility as a caretaker of his ancestors and the spirits of the land, and describes even his abstract Ovoidism paintings as a

---

123 Ibid., 873.
124 What the Modernity/Coloniality project describe as “a regime of capitalist nature that subalternized all other articulations of biology and history, of nature and society, particularly those that enact through their local models and practices of the natural a culturally established continuity (as opposed to a separation) between the natural, human, and supernatural worlds.” Arturo Escobar. “Worlds and Knowledges Otherwise 1: The Latin American Modernity/Coloniality Research Program.” Cultural Studies 21, no. 2/3 (2007): 197.
way of asking, “In what part of the Indian Act can you not define and regulate me?”

Figure 1-6. Transformation of Bill Wilson. *Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun*. 1991. (Vancouver Art Gallery.)

---

The show at the Vancouver Art Gallery, with its prominent position on the busy intersection of Robson and Georgia streets in downtown Vancouver, was organized by associate curator, Andrew Hunter.\textsuperscript{126} It combined many of the gallery’s extensive collection of Emily Carr paintings (regularly displayed in the only permanent gallery in the building, and the only one devoted entirely to her work,) with the paintings of Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun. The Vancouver Art Gallery had previously held some exhibitions of Indigenous art: two solo shows devoted to Haida artists Bill Reid in 1974, and to Robert Davidson in 1993,\textsuperscript{127} and a group show entitled Beyond History in 1989, that attempted to engage the category “Indian art” and ‘examine the shift from tribal modes of expression to more individual and political points of view’. Neither of the solo shows, however, nor the group show which focused on the work of ten Indigenous artists, included any Coast Salish art from the lower Mainland area.\textsuperscript{128}

Though little was written about Thou Shalt Not Steal, either before or after, one imagines it was a contemporary take on the National Gallery of Canada’s Canadian West Coast Art: Native and Modern from 1927. The exhibition was improvised with works from the VAG’s permanent collections (with some of Yuxweluptun’s on loan) and had little or no advertising or accompanying material. Hunter recalls the evolution of the conversations with Yuxweluptun leading up to the show. What began for him as, “an initial desire to question some of the assumptions around the work of Carr, through a juxtaposition of Yuxweluptun’s and Carr’s

\textsuperscript{126} At the Vancouver Art Gallery library in 2015, I found that Andrew Hunter was responsible for curating the exhibition, and that Yuxweluptun names him in an interview regarding the show. However, VAG could provide no further information at the time. Hunter went on to hold the Fredrik S. Eaton Curator of Canadian Art position at the Art Gallery of Ontario. He has also worked with various Indigenous artists and artists of color on exhibitions that grapple with issues of Canadian identity.

\textsuperscript{127} Vancouver Art Gallery Library archives, accessed Summer 2015.

paintings,” it became evident that “it was essential to Yuxweluptun that his paintings be considered directly, not filtered through Carr, and further, that a situation be created where the viewer is forced to view Carr through Yuxweluptun. A true dialogue flows both ways!”

The thrown together, “guerilla” style quality of the show and little textual accompaniment or publicity-created the sense of encounter one might experience with street art, for galley goers. A certain shocking quality that everyday visitors, tourists on holiday or Emily Carr fans, would never expect at the Vancouver Art Gallery. Mohawk scholar Audra Simpson, calls settler colonialism the “love that dare not speak its name,” meaning that it everywhere conditions the reality of Indigenous (and non-Indigenous people) in North America, and yet is rarely acknowledged.

Here, contrary to what one would expect at an important art institution, the cherished and acclaimed Emily Carr representing the Canadian canon, and Coast Salish Indian modernist, Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun, side by side, articulated this in a way that was impossible to ignore, acting as a powerful intervention into the dominant narrative of Vancouver (and Canadian) modernism. The works were arranged simply, on the same level, with one of Carr’s, next to one of Yuxweluptun’s around the room. Though Bruce Braun in his piece on the exhibition, has critiqued this as reductionist, in that it implies a Native/white binary and danger of “recapitulating an old nostalgia for a place of pure difference,” Yuxweluptun and Hunter wanted to “par for par” address Carr’s images in a way that was deliberately confrontational.


Painted the same year as the show, *The Impending Nisga’a Deal: Last Stand Chump Change* forces the viewer to reconsider Carr’s bucolic landscapes. Reflecting on Yuxweluptun’s paintings, Vancouver art historian Scott Watson describes them as a means to “confront the viewer with the social and historical characteristics of a contested territory. They bring something new to the problem of landscape by replacing the theme of ‘wilderness’ with the issues of land claims.”133 The work expressing Yuxweluptun’s deep concern with a process which he sees as naïve belief that they will be honoured within a colonial system that has worked to systematically dismantle and undermine Indigenous forms of governance and sovereignty.

Instead of resting one’s gaze on the serene Coastal village and brooding skies of works like *Blunden Harbour* from 1930, it is immediately drawn to its garish-colored counterpart with toxic mountains and poisoned landscapes plundered to exhaustion. In *Red Man Watching White Man Trying to Fix Hole in Sky* from 1990, a forlorn figure made of eye and U forms, to the left of a Dalie-esque landscape, watches while small white figures in lab coats balance atop one another, trying to fit a bandage like piece of sky, back into place. Carr’s swirling and mysterious *Cedar* from 1942 is disrupted by Yuxweluptun’s *Transformation of Bill Wison*. Named after a prominent Native political leader, the work riffs on the European triptych format with a painting of a stylized Northwest Coast face in bright orange on the outside of a cupboard topped with black hair and feather pieces suggesting a Kwakwaka’wakw transformation mask134 that when opened spells out “Self Government Now.”

---

134 The Kwakwaka’wakw are known for their elaborate Transformation masks. Used for dancing in potlatches and other ceremonies, they are wooden, deeply carved, and elaborately painted to resemble bird heads with long beaks, worn over the head. A piece pulled on the inside opens the long beak or outer piece to reveal another face within. Jonaitis. *Art of the Northwest Coast*. 
Reflecting on 20 years between the quiet radicality of the 1996 show at the Vancouver Art Gallery, and the outsider/inside support for *Unceded Territories* at the Museum of Anthropology, Tania Willard locates Yuxweluptun’s particular interpretation of modernism as firmly within the innovative and adaptive Northwest Coast tradition.

_I think it was also a significant moment. The amount of work, the folks wanting to see that, and that it was the MOA. There was this pressure on him his entire career that he wasn’t a carver, and he wasn’t doing Native art in the way everyone expected to consume Native art, and the moment of the opening it seemed like there was a coming together. With work that had had to position itself so differently could now be understood as part of that lineage as opposed to so differentiated, (part of that art historical frame, it was an interesting moment to see. And in the Great Hall with thousands of people around and Lawrence at the podium, and the drum group and that cultural connection, and all his daughters and everything, and to have that reflected and feel that it was a kind of taking back of the great hall. Really amazing!_

Yuxweluptun’s paintings will not sit comfortably aside, they challenge the viewer, they dance around, they mime and mimic and make fun. Refusing to conform to what Vizenor terms the “interimage simulation” of the *indian*, they make Native presence felt in palpable ways. Embodying *transmotion*, despite the violation they depict, with paintings like *Scorched Earth, Clear-cut Logging on Native Sovereign Lands, Shaman Coming to Fix* from 1991, their connection to the living natural world, plant, animal and human together, is enduring.
Chapter 2 *An Indigenous Elsewhere*
Totem Poles, Welcomes & Susan Point’s
People Amongst the People
The practices of survivance, however, are obvious and unmistakable in native stories. The nature of survivance creates a sense of narrative resistance to absence, literary tragedy, nihility, and victimry. Native survivance is an active sense of presence over historical absence, the dominance of cultural simulations, and manifest manners. Native survivance is a continuance of stories.¹

¹ Vizenor, Native Liberty, 1.
Although the exhibition includes the more or less distinctive styles of several tribes, the main distinction made is between the austere and intellectual elegance of the Haida, Tlingit and Tsimshian, and the flamboyant histrionic style of the Kwakiutl. For stylistic reasons, neither the Nootka nor Coast Salish are represented, nor is prehistoric stone art included.

Doris Shadbolt, Forward for Arts of the Raven: Masterworks by the Northwest Coast Indian

“I, a Coast Salish artist, devoted a great deal of time to researching, trying to revive the art form, attempting to educate the public and my children to the fact that there is another form of native art unique to British Columbia.”

Susan Point

---

Figure 2-1. Spindle Whorl manhole cover, Susan Point and Kelly Canal, Vancouver 2013. Photograph by author.
Chapter 2-5

An Indigenous Elsewhere
Totem Poles, Welcomes & Susan Point’s People Amongst the People

The task of my generation is to remember all that was taught, and pass that knowledge and wisdom on to our children.³

Vancouver’s winning bid to host the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver in 2003, and the striking of a Four Host First Nations Committee, resulted in an increase in commissions for Indigenous public art in the Lower Mainland,⁴ helping to initiate a turn towards a recognition of the local First Nations of the area. The positioning of the Coast Salish as the traditional territory holders hosting the Olympics, effected the ways both Indigenous art and presences in the public space of the city, and in museum and gallery discourse, were understood.⁵

Chapter two looks at xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), artist Susan Point’s People Amongst the People, Welcome Post Gateways, which were the first traditional Coast Salish art works to be included in Vancouver’s Totem Pole site in Stanley Park in 2008, marking a major shift in the cultural landscape of the city from the association of the Lower Mainland area with the totem pole tradition of the northern part of the Northwest Coast. This chapter considers how the commissioning of Point’s work for the Stanley Park site is a particularly important contribution to Indigenous public art in the city, and to the Central Coast Salish People in the Vancouver area. The site was the territory of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), the Sḵwx̱wú7mesh (Squamish), and the Səl̓ílwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh), who had important burial sites, villages and ties to the area, which the city not only failed to recognise from when the park was

³ Susan Point, quoted in Susan Point: Coast Salish Artist, ed. Gary Wyatt (Madiera Park, BC: Douglas & McIntyre, 2000), 76.
⁴ Spindle Whorl, an exhibition of Point’s work at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 2017, was the first solo show of a Coast Salish artist to be held at the gallery. “Susan Point: Spindle Whorl” exhibition webpage, accessed January 2019, www.vanartgallery.bc.ca/the_exhibitions/exhibit_point.html.
created in 1888, but which they actively worked to overwrite. Villages in the area were razed and shell middens and burials upset to make way for (and in some cases were used as fill to create) roads and paths for the park. The erasure of Salish presences from the park culminated with the eviction of the last remaining Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) inhabitant Rose Cole Yelton, in the 1920s. With the erecting of four Kwakwaka'wakw Totem Poles from northern Vancouver Island in the area where her house had been, coming to symbolize Indigeneity in Vancouver.

Chapter two engages the significance of Point’s Salish style house posts or Gateways, in Vancouver’s iconic totem pole site, in light of Vizenor’s concept of survivance, considering the ways they function as expressions of Salish presence often hidden in plain sight in the area for millennia. The chapter considers how Point’s public art at the site, works to re-inscribe Coast Salish stories and connections to land and intervene in the prevailing narrative, that for the better part of the century, would mask the true Indigeneity of the city with art imported from northern parts of the province.

---

6 “In fact, Xw’ay Xw’ay (also known as Whoi Whoi), which has since been (re)named Lumberman’s Arch, was recorded by anthropologists as one of the oldest Indian villages in Burrard Inlet.” Renisa Mawani. “Genealogies of the Land: Aboriginality, Law and Territory in Vancouver’s Stanley Park, Social & Legal Studies, 14, no. 3 (2005): 323.
7 Rose Cole Yelton’s memorial pole can be viewed at www.fp-artsmap.ca/art/rose-cole-yelton-memorial-totem-pole (Accessed April 2019).
There is a freedom to Salish art and design that is unique to them...it is everywhere within the range of Coast Salish arts, in the very old and the very modern.  

“We are finally being acknowledged as the Coast Salish People of the area.”

When Musqueam Elder Larry Grant honoured the territory on a rainy June afternoon in 2008 addressing the group assembled at the inauguration ceremony for Susan Point’s Welcome Post Gateways in Vancouver’s Stanley Park, not only did it to mark the occasion of the first traditional Coast Salish art works to be erected at the site amongst the predominantly Northern Kwakwaka’wakw and Haida Totem Poles that have sat in the park since the 1920s, but was also an honouring of Coast Salish history, settlement and presence in the park predating the city of Vancouver by millennia.  

In an interview with the author, Larry Grant, Elder in Residence at the First Nations House of Learning at UBC, shared his thoughts about the inclusion of Point’s works at the totem pole site:

*After 150 years of occupation the settlers finally actually include the presence of Central Coast Salish people within their own lands and (do) not promote that the Salish Peoples built totem poles which they did not traditionally do.*

It was deeply significant to the Coast Salish People on whose ancestral and unceded lands the entire Lower Mainland sits, but whose histories had for so many years,

---


11 A simple definition would describe the term as a formal declaration or prayer, acknowledging the Indigenous territory on which a group is standing. It is customarily performed by an Elder or other well-respected person from the territory. In a discussion of the importance of this practice, Linc Kesler, professor in First Nations and Indigenous Studies and director of the University of British Columbia’s First Nations House of Learning, explains an acknowledgement in the full sense of the term; “When we make this acknowledgement, we’re acknowledging the past history, but we are also acknowledging our present relationship with Musqueam, other Indigenous communities in Canada and worldwide.” It is a greeting that affirms and recognizes the past history and First Nations of the land beneath one’s feet and also acknowledges an ongoing relationship in the present and future tense. This implies not simply a formality moved on from, but an ongoing obligation to the territory entered into. Linc Kesler, personal blog, accessed August 2016. https://safeharbourblog.wordpress.com; and “Musqueam & UBC,” Indigenous Portal, The University of British Columbia, accessed September 2016, https://indigenous.ubc.ca/indigenous-engagement/musqueam-and-ubc/.
best been represented by an absence of representation in urban space throughout the city.\textsuperscript{12}

**Coast Salish Welcomes**

It was a welcome to territory that invited those gathered in the driving rain to both admire the striking art works, and to think beyond (or beneath) the Indian monuments the park is famous for, to the specific and local Indigenous culture beneath their feet. Grant is Musqueam (ʷməθkʷəy̓əm), the hən̓q̓əmin̓əm̓ (down river dialect of the Central Coast Salish Hulʼqumi’num) speaking people, whose name itself means *People of the River Grass*, and who have resided at the mouth of the Fraser River from time immemorial.\textsuperscript{13} Though there are three acknowledged traditional territory holders of the Lower Mainland; the ʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), sḵwx̱wú7mesh (Squamish), and sel̓íl̓witulh (Tsleil-Waututh) First Nations,\textsuperscript{14} the Musqueam had important villages throughout what is now the greater Vancouver area.

The word *welcome* in Coast Salish culture is a complex one with a rich and multilayered meaning.\textsuperscript{15} The term “My hands are up to you in welcome and respect” is a common formal greeting amongst those in Halkomelem speaking Coast Salish territory, that brings together the words for welcome m̓i ce:p (kw̓etx̱w̓ilam), with

\textsuperscript{12} Larry Grant. Interview with the author. September 2016.
\textsuperscript{13} www.musqueam.bc.ca (Accessed September 2016).
\textsuperscript{14} https://blogs.ubc.ca/sparkece/land-acknowledgement/.
\textsuperscript{15} I have observed in meetings and other gatherings in the Native communities in Vancouver that it is a common sign of deference and respect to hold one’s “hands up” to someone in thanks and appreciation. As I do not speak hən̓q̓əmin̓əm̓, I am only superficially acquainted with a few words, and I wish to thank Brad Charles and Elder Larry Grant of Musqueam for their insights regarding the word. In order to appreciate the complexity of the term in hən̓q̓əmin̓əm, it is important to witness it spoken by a native speaker. See Larry Grant’s “Welcome to Territory” statement, accessed September 2016, https://aboriginal.ubc.ca/community-youth/musqueam-and-ubc.
thanks (o siem), which is also used to describe “High Born” or respected people, when it is used, it is accompanied with the gesture and phrase “hands up” with both hands raised in front of ones chest with the palms turned in. It has been used in Coast Salish territory for millennia. It encompasses gratitude, agreement, honouring of territory, and respectful listening, and along with mî ce:p, can also be read as a kind of relationship or contract offered those welcomed, which implies certain obligations and responsibilities to the host territory.

The People Amongst the People, Welcome Post Gateways as they are formally titled, were made by the acclaimed Musqueam artist Susan Point and are comprised of three monumental carved red cedar structures, two rectangular plank pieces, carved on both sides, connected by a thinner crossbeam at the top. They reference traditional longhouse frames which were used throughout the territory prior to colonial contact, framing a central cluster of totem poles framed by trees to the north of the site. That the Gateways are carved of Western Red Cedar, which is considered the “tree of life” by Indigenous groups on the West Coast of North America and has been used extensively throughout the region for thousands of years, is a significant choice of material. Making up an important part of the region’s old growth rainforest, cedars flourish in the Northwest Coast’s shady, wet

17 Describing four carved antler figures pre-dating contact found in the Pacific Northwest in Washington state, Astrida Blukis Onat writes; “They all show arms that are upraised in a traditional gesture of thanking and acknowledgement, which is still commonly used today by Salish peoples. Guests who attend community events to support the work being done may repeatedly raise their arms in gestures of support, similar to what is seen on the figures, “Astrida Blukis Onat.” “Remembrance,” in S’abadeb = The gifts: Pacific Coast Salish art and Artists ed. Barbara Brotheron (Seattle: Seattle Art Museum and University of Washington Press, 2008), 76.
20 Pollen samples of Pacific or Western Cedar trees taken from the lower Fraser valley date back over 6,600 years. Hilary Stewart. Cedar: Tree of Life to the Northwest Coast Indians. (Madeira Park, BC: Douglas & McIntyre, 2009: 26.
climate. Its fragrant, relatively light weight, and versatile wood was used for canoes, housing, clothing, basketry, masks and many other household and ceremonial items, and figured prominently in the everyday and spiritual life of the Northwest Coast cultures.\textsuperscript{21} A natural fungicide in mature trees allows for the bark and light planks to be removed without having to kill the tree, and evidence of First Nations harvesting from Cedars, known as Culturally Modified Trees\textsuperscript{22} (CMTs) attest to millennia of Native presence throughout the Northwest Coast rainforest. Highly valued, the wood, which was used as material for ceremonial pieces, had ceremonies accompanying the harvesting from the tree and is the subject of a Coast Salish creation legend as a precious gift from the Great Spirit.\textsuperscript{23}

The site known simply to Vancouverites and tourists alike as the “Stanley Park Totem Poles,” was erected in Vancouver’s Stanley Park, nearly a thousand acres of spectacular, thickly forested urban park surrounded by water on all but its Southern side, in the 1920s. Ironically, the first stage of a plan to erect a “model Native village” complete with Native residents who would live a “traditional” way of life on the place where the former village of Xway Xway,\textsuperscript{24} once stood. After objections from the Squamish Indian Council, (whose former villages were cleared from the park and about whose culture the proposed tourist attraction bore little resemblance), the project was abandoned, but the totem poles remained. Additional poles were added to celebrate the 1936 Golden Jubilee, and all were moved from

\textsuperscript{21} Several types of cedar basketry weaving styles developed at Musqueam, and early wood working tools and masks show the tree’s use from between 4,500–3,000 years BP. Ibid., 27.
\textsuperscript{23} Each weaver before harvesting the bark from the tree will have a prayer asking for its generosity. Stewart., Cedar, 27; and subiyay Miller and Chixapkaid Pavel. “Traditional Teachings about Coast Salish Art,” 49.
\textsuperscript{24} Archeological studies of remaining shell middens and burial sites (many of which were used as fill when roads were put through the park in the early part of the century) show the village sites to be over 3,000 years old. Randy Shore. “Before Stanley Park: First Nations Sites Lie Scattered Throughout the Area,” The Vancouver Sun, March 17, 2007, and Jean Barman. “Erasing indigenous indigeneity in Vancouver,” BC Studies 155 (2007): 24.
the original location renamed Lumberman’s Arch, to its current more accessible location near the eastern tip of the park by Brockton Point in the 1960s.

![Figure 2-2. Stanley Park tourist map, Vancouver, 2017 (City of Vancouver).](image)

One of Vancouver’s most iconic places, long associated with the city’s Indigenous past, the predominantly northern Northwest Coast totem poles (from Haida Gwaii, the Skeena River and Vancouver Island), are among the provinces most visited (and photographed) tourist destinations.25 The only concessions to their situation on Salish land prior to Point’s Gateways, was the Thunderbird Dynasty Pole carved in the northern style by Squamish chief Mathias Joe and commissioned in 1936 for the Golden Jubilee,26 and the Rose Cole Yelton Memorial Pole, the ninth and most recent totem pole which was raised in 2009, which is named after the last


surviving resident of the nearby village of Chaythoos. Raised to commemorate her life and those who lived in the village before its violent removal by the parks board, it was created by the Squamish Nation to the north of Vancouver, who did not historically carve totem poles.

Historically, Northwest Coast totem poles were monumental, free-standing carved poles generally found at the entrance to houses or villages, usually hewn from a single red cedar tree. Historically carved by men,27 they function as documents meant to be read from the bottom to the top,28 that tell stories about families and their relationship to land by depicting human, spirit and animal figures which certain family lineages are connected to, and have a right to depict, (or are in some tribes, believed to have descended from). Though totemism in Anthropological terms generally refers to a kin group or clan descending from a particular animal,29 Northwest Coast scholar Aldona Jonaitis refers to this definition of “totemism” in reference to the poles, as something of a misnomer in that this is not the case with the majority of totem poles, which more often narrate legendary deeds and events, it remains in use to describe this specific tradition amongst the northern tribes. With the Coast Salish (who believe they descended not from animals, but from first humans,) and other Interior groups not traditionally associated with the practice in this sense.30

Special pole raising ceremonies are held when a pole is erected, and they are important events in the life of the community. Accompanied with a feast or potlatch

whereby invited guests are called to witness events which include the performative re-telling of the story depicted and display of hereditary privileges of certain families to tell the story. Poles will be raised to commemorate significant events in familial or community history, such as the death of an esteemed chief or a significant feast, and portray important ancestral legends and connection to place and land.31

**Totem Poles as Absence.**

Though a form specific to the tribes of the Northern parts of the Northwest Coast, spreading from the Haida and Tsimshian, north to southern Tlingit territory in the early nineteenth century and later at the end of century adopted by the Kwakwaka’wakw and Nuu-chah-nulth on Northern Vancouver Island, that totem poles have come to be widely associated with all the Indigenous tribes of the Northwest Coast, is in large part due to their extensive appropriation to promote tourism in Southern Alaska and the British Columbia coast beginning in the 1890s.32 Though northern totem poles did exist prior to colonial contact, the Haida from Haida Gwaii in the northern part of the province, have oral histories that testify to ancient pole carving traditions,33 their proliferation due to an increase in wealth and potlatching in high status families generated by the early fur trade, and an increase in metal tools that aided in speed and concision of carving, led some anthropologists like Marius Barbeau to suppose they developed from contact. Featuring in accounts of French fur traders in Haida Gwaii in the 1790s, the dramatic forms appeared so marvelous to the first Europeans an early fur trader is documented as describing

---

31 Totem Poles webpage, accessed August 30, 2016, indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/home/culture/totem-poles.
33 Wright, “Totem Poles: Heraldic Columns of the Northwest Coast,”
them to be as if “a stranger might imagine an ex-voto suspended to the door-case of the niche of the Madonna.”

Their monumental scale and spectacular designs: skilfully rendered animals, human figures, sea serpents and other creatures would have been the first (if seen from ships,) and most striking symbols of Native presence encountered by early traders in the early contact era, and their resonance with ideas about the primitive “other” in the European imaginary continue to dominate associations with Indigenous art in Canada.

Later this would be taken up as part of a wider pattern of growing fascination with all things “exotic and ethnic” that culminated in the 1920s. A growing interest in the disciplines of archaeology and anthropology and the display of Indigenous artefacts from around the world in museum displays, world fairs and even department stores such as Wanamakers in the United States, whose founder, a self-styled American Indian scholar, funded three photographic Expeditions into Plains Indian communities between 1908 and 1913. The purpose of which was to capture images of a “vanishing race” in their natural environment and the last vestiges of unsullied Indian culture which it was believed would fast succumb to a necessary, if less exotic modernity. Joseph Dixon led the store’s expeditions and shot thousands of highly romanticized photographs purporting to document Indian tribes in their natural state. Dixon was a contemporary of the photographer Edward C. Curtis, who is famous for the now iconic The North American Indian, a book financed by American Industrialist J.P. Morgan in 1906. The North American Indian was intended to be a comprehensive documentation, with text and photography, of the

North American Indian people at the beginning of the century, before their culture and way of life vanished. Dixon and Curtis shared an interest in portraying their subjects in states untouched by colonialism, intended to edify the general public, as well as to uplift the “noble race” of Natives. Dixon, describing his own photographs, stated that they were “of Indian life, every effort was exhausted to eliminate any hint of the white man’s foot.”

The prevailing assumption equating the ‘authentic’ with an idealized rural, pre-contact era, continues to legitimate certain types of Indigeneity over others and influence attitudes and policies regarding urban Native communities. As historian of Musqueam history Susan Roy writes; “The dichotomy between tradition and modernity justified policies that denied Aboriginal people access to specific pieces of land and disassociated them from their larger territories,” and which work to reify settler colonial assumptions of Indigenous disappearance.

Raibmon discusses the concept of “authenticity” on the Northwest Coast in the early part of the century, an idea which came to prominence in a cultural climate that refused to acknowledge Indigenous cultures as contemporaneous, focusing instead on what could be “salvaged” of pre-contact Native life. Combined with the rise of mass commodification and circulation of Native curios (often made by Native people themselves as a source of income adapting to changed circumstances), the term resonated and eventually became entrenched through the “so called great divide between high (authentic) culture and mass (inauthentic) culture. With “emergent anthropology aligning itself with the former, and tourism with the latter.”

---

The mass commodification of art pieces and souvenirs associated with mysterious tribal people and exotic settings fuelled a growing craze for curios that could be bought into North American homes without ever having to travel. Textiles, carpets, pottery, jewellery and small carvings referencing Egyptian pyramids, Chinese floral design motifs and Northwest Coast totem poles could be found throughout fashionable homes in North America, with some even having “Indian Corners” for their display.\(^{39}\) Combined with a scarcity in material production from the early part of the twentieth century onwards in northern Indigenous communities that had been decimated by disease and subjected to widespread assimilation, and with their complex meanings and connections to territory obscured, the totem pole as a symbol, became particularly vulnerable to cultural appropriation.

Sociologist Renisa Mawani points out this process of commodification and growing museum mania\(^{40}\) resulted in the government’s recognition of totem poles and other Indigenous artefacts as a potentially lucrative and important “Canadian” cultural resource, and consequent government sponsored efforts to ensure them for posterity were established. This included *The Totem Pole Preservation Society*, struck in 1924 to “preserve” and “protect” the diminishing number of totem poles in the province. Initially the project aimed to preserve and restore a number of Tsimshian poles along the Skeena River rail route in northern British Columbia, with some even removed from their original settings and relocated nearer to the train’s path for easier tourist viewing.\(^{41}\) The respected ethnologist Marious Barbeau, who erroneously theorized in his many writings that totem poles were a recent art of the northern Tsimshianic speaking Tlingit and Haida peoples who had come via Siberia

---

as recently as a few centuries previous, the Canadian Parks Service, and the infamous Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Duncan Campbell Scott, were among the committee members. Not surprisingly the project, which was investing resources into the preservation of poles at the same time that cultural practices like the potlatch were banned and residential schooling of Indian children made mandatory, was met with criticism on the part of the Tsimshian and other local Native groups.

With poles becoming less and less plentiful, fears they would be lost by being exported to the US and elsewhere, resulted in the passing of an amendment to the Indian Act in 1927 that made it illegal “to purchase, acquire, deface, or destroy any Indian grave house, carved grave pole, totem pole, carved house post, or rock embellished with paintings or carvings without the written consent of the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs.”

Though the act was meant as a conservation effort to protect Canadian Indigenous artifacts, Mawani argues that it allowed the settler government to exercise a further control over Native life and lands by allowing for the removal and relocation of poles, (which were obvious signs of Native presence and connections to land), and other cultural objects in the interest of “protection.” It was through this mandate that poles could be removed and erected in urban settings such as parks

---

43 Superintendent of Indian Affairs from 1913 to 1932, Campbell Scott was a committed proponent of the Residential school system for Native children in Canada and instrumental in the amendment to the Indian Act in 1927 that required all Native children to attend the schools. His quote on Indian assimilation in Canada, typified the argument for the schools and other cultural prohibitions of the era. “Our objective is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic and there is no Indian question, and no Indian Department, that is the whole object of this Bill.” The Historical Development of the Indian Act, second ed. (Ottawa: Treaties and Historical Research Centre, P.R.E. Group, Indian and Northern Affairs, 1978), 115.
44 Mawani, “From Colonialism to Multiculturalism?,” 42.
45 Ibid., 39.
and museums, with their Indigenous owners having little say over their own cultural property.

*While the totem poles display could be read as a presence—a symbol of Aboriginality—the poles could also and perhaps more accurately be seen as an absence; one which tells us nothing about the local Coast Salish, their histories, culture, and most importantly, their struggles against the state’s colonial legal practices of displacement and dispossession.*

Removal from their original setting and relocation in urban areas where the supposed Indigenous past of the country could be viewed in a safe (and contained) way.

Indigenous people as one with nature and western people associated with technology, advancement and modernity is a familiar trope. Separated from the city by water on nearly all sides, the location of the poles, similar to the University of British Columbia’s Museum of Anthropology in Vancouver, suggest one is experiencing Indigenous culture in its natural setting, geographically and temporally separated from the modern (and urban) world. As place markers, totem poles are a potent symbol of connection to land and territory, but their relocation, taken from the complex system of ancestral and kinship affiliations, removed from their original context, and appropriated by a settler government, they become misplaced. Signs that came to represent not the Indigenous people of the territory but the overwriting of one place with another.

**On Traditional Lands, a Salish Footprint.**

*At one time, they would raise a totem pole wherever and whenever they wanted*

---

46 Ibid., 38.

47 Tahltan performance artist and curator Peter Morin discusses this cultural misplacement in Vancouver.” So some people put up Totem Poles in the city to raise awareness and all that stuff, born out of the idea of the city WITH the Indigenous population right?! The city Totem pole, but at the same time it’s about a kind of agenda by the city that says we have to meet this population’s needs in a way, and raising the poles can be a kind of silencing too because not everyone has a Totem Pole, but nobody wants to talk about that, the contentiousness of these acts, because we want to talk about them like they’re an enabling act.” Peter Morin. Interview with the author. February 2015.
without consulting the Salish people’s in the area. Totem poles are not a part of our tradition. Salish do houseposts. By my doing public art commissions, it has opened up a lot of people eyes to Salish culture and art.\textsuperscript{48}

The three (for the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh territory holders of what is now the park land)\textsuperscript{49} gateways, form a kind of archway positioned over paths leading to a central clearing oriented towards a staggered line of totem poles dotted along a rise, with West Vancouver and the North Shore mountains just visible through the trees behind them. The structures’ design elegantly echo Coast Salish house posts or frames which were used for support and decorative purposes in traditional post and beam long houses used extensively throughout the area prior to contact.\textsuperscript{50} Differing from Haida-style longhouses, the horizontally arranged plank walls and posts supported a pitched shed roof often facing the water, with plain, simple fronts. Coast Salish dwellings, unlike northern Northwest Coast houses, were not concerned with displaying wealth or rank on their exteriors with family crests and status depicted on carved painted posts often found within the house, or in a families’ space located in relation to the chief’s room at the centre of the structure.\textsuperscript{51}

Susan Point describes the political significance of using Salish designs in public places and the important function they perform in reclaiming Salish territories: “Setting the Salish footprint onto our traditional lands has made non-Aboriginal people more aware of Salish art. Whether I do traditional or contemporary Salish art,

\begin{footnotes}
\end{footnotes}
on a large scale in Washington State or in the Vancouver area, they will realize that it is Salish territory."

Formally titled *People Amongst the People* and referred to as “*Welcome*” Post Gateways rather than totem poles, Point’s pieces at the site are powerful and eloquent symbols of Salish relationship to land and place. Like most Indigenous art in public spaces and the places they create in settler colonial contexts, the Gateways inclusion at the site creates a kind of *contact zone* as an intersectionary space where people “historically and geographically separated from each other come into contact and establish ongoing relations”. Though in this particular case the gateways are more about quiet contemplation than a dramatic encounter with the “other” one might associate with the concept. More a dawning realization that something is being revealed rather than intervened upon. Though the site is not residential and the majority of people I observed on the various occasions I was there, appeared non-Indigenous and new to or visiting the city (making it a different kind of place than the ones made by communities on a day-to-day basis), these sites can be seen as *places* nonetheless. Places whose narratives shape perceptions and understanding about Indigenous culture and land in powerful ways.

Their title, *People Amongst the People*, which some have read as ironic, given the “hidden in plain sight” history of the Coast Salish in Vancouver, can be read

---

52 Hare, “Pushing the Boundaries,” 173.
53 Mary Louise Pratt discusses these “contact zone” spaces as ones of dialogue and engagement within colonial contexts, that despite being based on radical imbalances of power, describe the everyday dynamics of influence and exchange with room for volition and self-determination in more complex ways than concepts like assimilation. “While subordinate peoples do not usually control what emanates from the dominant culture, they do determine to varying extents what gets absorbed into their own and what it gets used for.” Mary Louise Pratt. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge, 2007) and ““Arts of the contact zone.”,” in *Ways of Reading*, 5th edition, ed. David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrofsky (New York: Bedford/St. Martins, 1999): 36.
54 Townsend-Gault, “Art Claims in the Age of Delgamuukw,” 879.
more as a reference to *survivance* and to the enduring and adaptable Salish communities that not only inhabited the land prior to contact, but have continued to live out their Indigeneity in the city to the present day. That they are called “Welcome” Post Gateways is significant, not only in the meaning of “Welcome” in Halkomelem which implies it is the territory holders extending the *welcome* to guests on their land, along with the particular rights and obligations inherent in the gesture. The *Amongst* speaks less to being like any other resident of Vancouver, and more to the quotidian nature of every day Indigenous presences in cities that make a sense of place, but which so often go unnoticed. Similarly with the restrained gateway forms, and elegant subdued palette of brick, ochre, charcoal, moss green and ivory, one passes under and through them without necessarily noticing their presence. Though commanding and impressive in scale, they radiate a quiet expressiveness rather than the more forceful drama associated with the totem poles. One can sit with, as well as move through and around them, which is another aspect to their design that lends itself to resting or lingering that the totem poles arranged as though on a stage along the rise, do not have. The Salish design forms that thread through all her work embody a fluid quality that expresses the artists concern with the

---

55 “*Survivance in the sense of Native survivance, is more than survival, more than endurance or mere response; the stories of survivance are an active presence. The Native stories of survivance are successive and natural estates; is an active repudiation of dominance, tragedy and victimry*”. Vizenor, Ibid. p., *Manifest Manners*, 15.

56 In his writing on Indigenous histories in cities, Historian Coll Thrush uses the word imbricated to describe the complex series of actions and interactions between Native and non-Native people that form layers of history in urban environments. Using as an example a portrait of the city of Seattle painted in the late 1800s that includes a grouping of Native dugout canoes moored in the harbour, he suggests that “Rather than symbols of a vanished past, here they are matter of fact parts of the urban landscape, neither elided nor elevated.” Coll-Peter Thrush. “The Crossing-over Place: Urban and Indian Histories in Seattle. (PhD diss., University of Washington, 2002), 128.

57 In their article on Indigenous place making practices in the Australian city of Melbourne, and Potter refer to the non-western concepts of place they explored in their project as being about sites where people *gather*, which can imply both fluidity and repose. Citing the word for “place” used by the Aboriginal people of Gunna and Kumai of Eastern Victoria, as *tandeera*, which translates as “place of rest.” Janet McGaw, Anoma Pieris, and Emily Potter. “Indigenous Place-making in the City: Dispossessions, Occupations and Implications for Cultural Architecture,” *Architectural Theory Review* 16, no. 3 (2011): 296–311.
interconnectedness of humanity and the natural world.\textsuperscript{58} Being there for a time, one becomes aware of a sense of motion in the forms that moves through the space, connecting the posts with each other in a kind of whole united by the movement in the figures with each gateway informing the next. And with the distinctive oval, trigon and crescent shapes found in Coast Salish design,\textsuperscript{59} informing each other, which repeat up, down, and through the carving, that gives it a dynamic flow.

\textit{Figure 2-3. Eighteenth-century Coast Salish mountain goat horn bracelets. (Reproduced from Brotherton, \textit{S’abadeb = The Gifts}, 89.)}

\textsuperscript{58} Watt, \textit{The Public Art of Susan Point}, 8.
\textsuperscript{59} Washington State University professor and tradition bearer of Southern Puget Salish culture, D. Michael ChiXapkaid Pavel, outlines the “four” primary design elements in Coast Salish art that his uncle shared with him as: “the circle, crescent, and the trigon, including the outline element that delimits the boundary of the design field” which constitutes an often overlooked fourth element. “Traditional Teachings about Coast Salish Art,” 27.
When I do contemporary images, I use crescents, the wedges, and the other elements of Salish art. I will always incorporate these elements into my designs to keep them unique in the sense of being truly Salish ... although they may be very non-traditional with respect to subject, format, and medium.  

The works take as a starting point traditional Coast Salish design, drawing on many of its elements, at the same time innovating on the forms and reinventing them. Though they refer to Coast Salish legends, stories and traditions, which thread through all the pieces, they do so in a way both distinctive, and respectful of the “constraints” of Salish design forms.

In their essay on some of the cultural and spiritual significance of traditional Coast Salish design, Gerald Bruce Subiyay Miller and D. Michael Chixapkaid Pavel discuss the three most prominent central elements as manifesting “the interconnectedness of all things”: the circle, the crescent and the trigon shape, as well as the lesser known “fourth element” or “inner point of the trigon.” The circle representing “unity and centrality,” the crescent as “phases, of life and the moon,” and the trigon and fourth element as “reflecting light and as a ritual number representing the four directions, the four seasons, and the four stages of life.”

The first welcome posts, Male and Female Welcome Figures occupies the prominent and most important spot to the East of the site, under which pedestrians pass to connect to the rest of the works from a small parking lot. Although the poles and remaining two gateways are either set back into the trees or less prominent places, the Male and Female Welcome Figures gateway stands directly opposite the downtown skyline of Vancouver which is clearly visible through its arch from the site looking across Coal Harbour. This position is an important one in that it breaks with the common motif of “natural” or unspoiled settings for Native art, suggesting

---

60 Hare, “Pushing the Boundaries,” 167.
61 subiyay Miller and Chixapkaid Pavel, “Traditional Teachings about Coast Salish Art,” 43–47.
Indigenous and urban cannot co-exist. The gateways are flanked on either side by a male and female figure with their arms raised in a “traditional gesture of welcome,” which directly references male and female house post entrances. And the blankets they wear, the rich and important weaving tradition practiced by the Coast Salish cultures who considered them important sources of wealth. The Grandparents and Grandchildren Honoured gateway features intertwined faces on the interior sides, one with three female faces and the other six of different sizes that signifies the importance of family and Elders, with a carved design of interconnected herrings facing both direction on its outside which reflects in Point’s words; “the living culture of the area as it has been transformed through history.” The striking Salish Dancer and Killer Whale gateway references a spirit dancer, with stylized peg eyes reminiscent of the sxwaxwex mask, holding a sea serpent rattle under the head of a Thunderbird, all powerful symbols in Coast Salish culture, but which are not intended to depict in any explicit way any particular image or vision, but rather are meant to express the idea of Coast Salish ceremony. In the book People Among the People, the Public Art of Susan Point, Dr Michael Kew discusses these ineffable

62 Australian Aboriginal scholar Larissa Behrendt describes the lack of recognition of urban Aboriginal communities, based on the assumption that Indigenous people have no meaningful place in cities. “This invisibility of the real in the face of the powerfully imagined creates a kind of psychological terra nullius, where, even though Aboriginal people are physically present, they seem to be invisible, not registering in the national consciousness.” Larissa Behrendt. “Home, the importance of place to the dispossessed,” South Atlantic Quarterly 108, no. 1 (2009): 77, 78.


64 Carved antler Welcome figures with upraised hands with palms turned in or out, that predate contact have been found throughout Salish territory and the gesture can be found on house posts, spindle whorls and other Coast Salish items. Astrida Blukis Onat. “Remembrance,” in S’abadeb = The gifts: Pacific Coast Salish art and Artists ed. Barbara Brotherton (Seattle: Seattle Art Museum and University of Washington Press, 2008), 174.

65 Brotherton, S’abadeb = The gifts, 230.

66 Point, People Amongst the People artist statement.

67 Rattles are highly sacred as they are associated with cleansing rituals and Winter dances. They are “made from steamed mountain sheep horn, are carried by families who have the right to use them in healing rituals.” subiyay Miller and Chikapkaid Pavel. “Traditional Teachings about Coast Salish Art,” 42.

68 “The term Musqueam has been used to define both a people and a place. Musqueam Elders tell the story of a two-headed serpent - a dangerous and feared creature that wound and twisted its way from its home in the Camoson Bog to the Fraser River, its droppings destroying vegetation and terrain along the way. The serpent’s trail became Musqueam Creek and upon its banks grew a river grass called (m-uh-th-kwi).” Roy, “cesna: m,” 5.
aspects of Salish spirituality in art, arguing against the tendency to assume that depictions refer to events or stories in the material or spiritual world, as to do so is considered “improper, unhealthy, even dangerous to share or talk about a dancer’s dream experience.”

Her image references the enduring and private aspects of Coast Salish ceremony while depicting only certain elements of them for a broader non-Native audience. The sculptural elements on these posts, differing from the others, face outward, and unlike the other two, are meant to be viewed from the outside, again referencing the private nature of Coast Salish ceremonial life. Opposite the back of the dancer, are tree root patterns, suggesting connections deep into the earth and the opposing post shows Killer whales referring to the Salish belief that “when great chiefs die, they become Killer whales.”

---


70 “Susan has taken every care to ensure her representation does not trespass on the rights of any living dancer, nor refer to any particular mask, rather it gestures to the generic idea of Salish mask dancing. This then is her idea of what a mask might look like, but never did.” Watt, Robert, ed. People Amongst the People, The Public Art of Susan Point, (Vancouver: Museum of Anthropology. 2019): 75.

71 Point, People Amongst the People Artists Statement.
Productivity and Its Constraints

Coast Salish groups of the area did not historically have a free-standing totem pole tradition, but decorated house posts that were used to support roof beams. And unlike the northern tribes where chiefly rank and status were prominently and clearly displayed outside the house, were often intended to be viewed from the house interior, with all rendered in a style (including those that were seen from the inside or intended as grave markers linking the deceased with important animal or spirit helpers or deeds), more esoteric and illusive than those of their northern neighbours. The posts might show ancestral feats and spirit or animal powers connected to certain families or allude to the head of the house’s spirit helper or guardian, which

72 Roy, “Performing Musqueam,” 72.
would have made it a closely kept knowledge considered deeply unlucky to depict explicitly or display overtly.\textsuperscript{73}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image}
\caption{Chowitsut house post at Lummi, depicting the chief’s spirit powers, “the sun carrying two valises of expensive things.” (Image and quote from Barbara Brotherton, ed., S’abadeb = The Gifts: Pacific Coast Salish Art and Artists, Seattle Art Museum, 2008, 55).}
\end{figure}

Adolescents, male and female, went on a quest for a vision, an encounter with some creature in the non-human world (some known to western science, some not). The vision was believed to be the source of success in life and the songs sung in the Winter dance. The most powerful visions enabled the men and women who got them to become Shamans. Once experienced the details of the vision had to be carefully guarded. If you told about the experience you would “spoil it”. Or someone could harm you with the knowledge. Thus,

\textsuperscript{73} Suttles and Lane, “South Coast Salish”, 486.
representation of the visions were symbolic, only hinting at the identity of the one being encountered.\textsuperscript{74}

Anthropologist and linguist Wayne Suttles, specialising in Coast Salish culture and languages from the 1940s, is considered one of its most significant scholars. His important essay *Productivity and Its Constraints: A Coast Salish Case* was one of the first in anthropological circles to refute the prevailing understanding at the time supported first by Boas, and taken up by other scholars that assumed Northwest Coast art to have spread from the more inventive areas in the north, where it was taken up in an ‘imitative’ way by the Coast Salish.\textsuperscript{75} Further fuelling urban settler bias that the northern tribes were inherently more refined and advanced (also conveniently located in places far and removed from coveted land and resources in the Lower Mainland) and that Salish art and culture were merely derivative of it.\textsuperscript{76} Instead he outlined the social and religious aspects informing Coast Salish representation, arguing that cultural and social ‘constraints’ in Coast Salish society around depicting what he identified as “the four sources of power and prestige-the vision, the ritual world, the ancestors and wealth,”\textsuperscript{77} influenced the ways in which their art was produced, circulated and interpreted by outsiders.

*These constraints are such that they may have varied in intensity through time and so may account for variations through time and kind of artistic input. We need not therefore interpret qualitative or quantitative changes in prehistoric art as evidence of cataclysmic culture change or population replacement. They may be the result of shifts in importance, back and forth, between the power


\textsuperscript{76} This ostensibly racist privileging of one Native group over another, served ideological purposes by helping to justify settler expansion and dispossession of local Indigenous groups from the Lower Mainland and was echoed on the local level in Vancouver’s newspapers, and in Northwest Coast representation in other parts of the country from the 1920s, shaping perceptions at home and abroad. Barman, “Erasing Indigenous Indigeneity in Vancouver,” 24.

\textsuperscript{77} Suttles, “Productivity and its Constraints,” 104.
of the vision and the power of the ritual world or shifts in the concentration of wealth and authority.\textsuperscript{78}

The importance the Musqueam placed on clandestine and Winter ceremonies,\textsuperscript{79} dances such as the Black face and sXwayXwey (with its accompanying regalia that would have been taboo to display to outsiders), affected both the kinds of material culture produced and constrained ways in which it would have circulated, differing from that found in most northern parts of the province. Having less Coast Salish monumental sculpture than in northern areas, which was most prized amongst Northwest Coast connoisseurs and held to be the most important to collectors and anthropologists, resulted in a dearth of representation in museums and other cultural institutions. Though the Musqueam did have house posts and prominent posts as grave markers, they were under intense pressure to sell them to collectors who mistakenly assumed “that detailed myths and legends were linked to the most ‘impressive’ and monumental physical objects.” The Musqueam resisted by asking for impossible prices when asked if they would sell pieces or by donating them themselves, to museums for educational purposes,\textsuperscript{80} thereby assuming some control over their own cultural property and avoiding coercive collecting practices that may have seen them removed regardless. Though they were not held by the Musqueam to be as significant as totem poles, they were nevertheless as Roy states “forceful visual reminders of social status and common history,”\textsuperscript{81} and as importantly, markers of claims to land that predated the city of Vancouver.

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., 132.
\textsuperscript{79} “We had to move them inside the Smokehouse so we could continue to dance because settlers called it “the work of the devil.” Brad Charles, recorded conversation at Musqueam, Summer 2015.
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., 94–95, 99.
\end{flushleft}
Despite ever-encroaching municipal colonialism, the Musqueam have continuously occupied their ancestral and unceded lands in what is now the greater Vancouver area for millennia, and they are the only urban Indian band in the city that continue to reside on their traditional (if much reduced) homelands. With their cultural and spiritual emphasis put on more private religious ceremonies rather than material culture production, combined with territories located in areas whose land was much sought after by settlers and rapidly urbanizing, there was a mistaken belief that the Musqueam and other Salish groups in the Lower Mainland areas had been assimilated.

The Stanley Park totem pole display which suggested an Indigenous elsewhere, was reflective of a broader way of thinking in the province that sought to legitimize settler dispossession of lands in the Lower Mainland by suggesting the local Indigenous cultures were not only less advanced artistically and culturally than the northern Northwest Coast groups, but that they had actually replaced a more civilized and peaceful “race” of Natives who had been taken over by the present Coast Salish culture. In 1927 the Art, Historical, and Scientific Association (a precursor to the Vancouver Museum), whose mandate was to build a museum of natural history that would showcase relics of Indian life and culture in British Columbia and America, undertook an extensive excavation of the Marpole Midden or Great Fraser Midden, an ancient Musqueam site and burial ground located in what is now South Vancouver. A project lead by local Vancouver ethnologist Charles Hill-

---

82 Ibid., 81.
83 This caused scholars and others in the 1930s to conclude that “at present the old culture is practically dead.” Little realizing that these more private practices which lie at the heart of Salish society, allowed them to elude missionary and settler suppression, and enabled their continuous practice in ways that the more northerly Indigenous communities would not have to the same degree. Suttles, “The Recognition of Coast Salish Art,” 67.
84 Roy. “Performing Musqueam,” 74.
85 Ibid., 167.
Tout, the site which was a village known to the Musqueam as C’əsnaʔəm, had been previously excavated by the American Museum of Natural History for Northwest Coast cultural objects and human remains for their collections. The 1927 excavation project employed Herman Leisk, who had no formal training in archaeology, to retrieve, regardless of means, any artifacts from the site, including human bones. According to Leisk’s own records, over one thousand human skeletons were found, with some even discarded in the trash due to lack of museum space. In 1933 the site was declared a Canadian National Historic Site. Despite being called “the site of one of the largest prehistoric middens on the Pacific Coast of Canada,” the city of Vancouver issued development permits on the land without consulting the Musqueam band, although further burials were unearthed. Only after much protest and lobbying by the Musqueam and their allies for several months, including the rerouting of traffic and blocking of bridge traffic in 2012, was the development halted, and the Ancestral remains restored to their “original condition.”

In 1933, despite increasing studies that disproved theories of phrenology including that of Franz Boas, conducted in the earlier part of the century, Dr. George Kidd (a former anatomy professor) and Hill-Tout surmised from the study of two of several skulls examined from the Marpole site that they had found evidence that two distinct “races” emerged from the area. A “long-headed” skull held to represent a more advanced group found deeper in the strata, and a more recent “broad-headed”

---

86 https://moa.ubc.ca/portfolio_page/citybeforecity.
87 Roy, “Performing Musqueam,” 164.
88 Roy, “Performing Musqueam,” 166; Bradley Charles. Interview with author at Musqueam, August 2015; and www.musqueam.bc.ca.
89 This theory has been disproven by anthropologists (like Suttles) and archeologists who have stressed a continuous occupation over millennia, with nothing to suggest that one group was replaced by another. Roy L. Carlson and Philip M. Hobler. “The Pender Canal Excavations and the Development of Coast Salish Culture.” BC Studies 99 (1993): 48.
group associated with skulls found closer to the surface, thereby ‘proving’ that the current Indigenous peoples of the area had likely violently over taken a more peaceful race of Natives thought to have come from the far north. Though the erroneous theory was never fully embraced within the scholarly community, it resonated widely with the general public who could refer to it as vindication for increasing colonial settlement in the Lower Mainland.

Coast Salish Design Revival

*When I first started doing jewelry I adopted the Northern art styles for a while. Most Salish artists were doing the same thing too. I guess it was because of the prominence in the market place as well as the media at that time.*

Though Susan Point and Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun are both Coast Salish artists of the same generation, the kind of work they create, and their responses to the political and social circumstances that condition that work, varies greatly. Yuxweluptun identifying as a Coast Salish artist and “urban Indian” has roots in both the interior and coastal Salish cultures, while Point is from Musqueam specifically, a group with a long and time-honoured tradition of diplomacy and negotiation with colonial forces that occupy their home lands. Despite the various differences, they share beginning their careers as artists during what has been referred to as the *Native Renaissance*, both struggling to find meaningful examples of Coast Salish art and culture in a 1970s art market driven by the success of northern Northwest Coast

---

90 Roy, “Performing Musqueam,” 168.
91 Hare, “Pushing the Boundaries,” 164–65.
92 “My Uncle Andrew (Charles), who was a well respected man down here, always corrected people when they said the Musqueam “Nation”. We’re not a nation, we’re called the Musqueam Indian Band because we have always been here in this place and no where else.” Bradley Charles. Interview with author. Musqueam, August 2015.
93 In her article on the political implications of constructing Musqueam public identity through cultural performances, in this case those arranged for British Columbia’s 1966 Centennial Celebrations, Susan Roy writes; “that the production and performance of a public identity was shaped both by internal cultural protocol and by an interest in creating a public image amenable to pursuing a resolution to Aboriginal land claims.” Roy, “Performing Musqueam,” 64.
design. As with Yuxweluptun,\(^4\) Point was directed toward the study of northern form line carving when she first began as an artist. Initially in jewellery making, her process of discovering and reconnecting to Coast Salish design led to print making and eventually to the works in wood, as well as glass, and other less traditional mediums for which she is most famous. Unlike Yuxweluptun, she was a Woman wanting to work in the medium of carving, a tradition that with few exceptions\(^5\) was practiced by men, Matt creasers, spindle whorls, swords for beating wool, and posts for weaving looms were thought to be carved and decorated by men, where mats, baskets, and highly prized and intricately woven blankets were made by Women.\(^6\) Widely credited with reviving traditional Coast Salish design when it was little known even in Salish circles, as a Musqueam Woman carver, her path to recognition has been challenging.

*I researched. I tried to find documentation and imagery from the Salish peoples. It was very difficult to find images because a lot of it wasn’t documented. With European contact and the arrival of the missionaries, a lot of things were destroyed or sent off to museums. So, it was really difficult doing research ... trying to find slides, photos, written documentation or anything on Salish art. With the little collection of images I accumulated over time, I would study the pieces to try and understand the placement of the elements and how they were being used in certain images.\(^7\)*

\(^4\) As a young artist in the late 60s and 70s, Yuxwelupton was steered toward the study of carving under a Haida master carver if he wanted to make Native art, which he refused to do as a Coast Salish painter. Making him one of a very few Native artists who resisted the widely accepted discourse that held the northern form line tradition to be the form of Northwest Coast art at the time. Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun (artist). Interview with the author. Vancouver, 2014.

\(^5\) Exceptions to this include the Kwagiulth artist Ellen Neel who is considered to be the first woman carver on the Northwest Coast, (http://thecanadasite.com/art/art43_neel.html) and Freida Deising, of Haida descent, who was a Master Carver in the traditional Haida formline style and is considered to be an important and influential figure in the Northwest Art revival of the 1960s. “Freda Diesing bio,” School of Northwest Coast Art, accessed September 2016, https://www.nwcc.bc.ca/programs-courses/nwcc-schools/freda-diesing-school-northwest-coast-art/freda-diesing.


\(^7\) Hare, “Pushing the Boundaries,” 166.
Eventually through careful study, and intense discussion with Elders and family members about Salish art and cultural practices (including anthropologist Michael Kew at UBC, who was married to Point’s Aunt), and inspired by circular Salish spindle whorl forms, she began to make the work she is known for today. Though her art is recognizably Salish, drawing on the four-principal design elements of Salish art, she has argued there is a freedom in the forms that allows for a broad range of expression and for her signature to be read in all of the work she produces.

When I began, very little information or documentation could be found on the art style of the Coast Salish people, due to early and extensive European contact in our territory. Many of our traditional artifacts, such as houseposts and other utilitarian pieces created by my ancestors, were taken by eastern Canadian and European museums, or destroyed because of their ceremonial significance in an attempt to assimilate our First nations Peoples. It was almost a lost art form.

Starting out with little frame of reference for Salish material culture, these conversations and careful study of early Musqueam and Coast Salish work in Museums and libraries, meant that she was starting her artistic path from a kind of “ground zero.” In certain ways, this allowed a particular freedom of expression, to draw from her research into the material and spiritual aspects of Coast Salish design forms, using them as a place from which to explore her unique artistic vision.

At the same time, because I found so little information on our Salish People’s art and culture, at first I did not yet truly understand the unique significance of our art. I went beyond the traditions of my people to develop my own style. I re-designed and re-created traditional imagery in my own original way, and developed a unique contemporary art style that created a movement.

This style has established her as among the most groundbreaking and important

---

101 Ibid., 7.
artists in Canadian art today.

**Spectacle as Negotiation**

Natalie Balloy, in her work on settler non-Indigenous perceptions of the Indigenous other in the settler colonial city, argues that complex systems both visible and invisible condition relations and constitute meaning in colonial contexts. Her study focuses on Vancouver as a settler colonial city with a complex mixture of Native communities and cultures, made up of traditional Coast Salish territory holders and a large intertribal community located mainly in East Vancouver, both of whom have come in and out of visibility in various ways throughout the city’s history, a process she describes as a revenant Indigeneity. She articulates the principal elements that inform these constitutive relations as the spectral: a “critical frame to investigate how non-Aboriginal (people) affectively relate to the spatio-temporalities of Indigenous visibility/erasure, presence/absence, and marginality/reinscription.” And the spectacular, which refers not to a passive form of entertainment in the more colloquial western sense of the term, or as the one sided “gaze,” but drawing on Debord’s definition, to mean “not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images.”

Balloy (and Debord’s) description of spectacle resonates with aspects inherent in Coast Salish *welcome* and to performative practices that relate to *honouring the territory*, touched on earlier in the chapter. The Musqueam have

---

105 Australian scholar Paul Carter discusses Aboriginal coroborees or ceremonies in Australia at the time of contact that were “site and audience specific” performances intended as living documents that connected people to land and place. And which by their performativity “created a meeting place that could never be ceded but (would) remain always in play like the two and fro of a conversation broken off only to be resumed.”
a long tradition of negotiation with colonial powers from first contact and have used
spectacle and performance to enact complex political negotiations that have
asserted their sovereignty and connections to their homelands. Roy discusses
these forms of complicated negotiation in Musqueam’s involvement in the British
Columbia Centennial celebrations in the 1960s, which though appearing to be acting
out dramatic re-enactments for the tourist and non-Indigenous gaze, were actually
complex performances that drew on Coast Salish customs, laws and claims to
territory.

Since contact with European societies the Musqueam and other First Nations
in British Columbia have been reminding non-Aboriginals that they have lived
here “from time immemorial.” Musqueam’s theatrical performance at British
Columbia’s centennial celebrations in 1966 was, in its simplest form, one of
those “reminders.”

It also draws on an important concept in Northwest Coast cultures that formed the
basis of any potlatch or give away (important economic and spiritual ceremonies
held to commemorate births, deaths, adoptions and other momentous occasions),
which was the practice of “bearing witness.” Potlatch ceremonies were held up and
down the coast from the northern territories to the Coast Salish in the south. A
necessary element required to affirm laws-connection to lands, status in society, and
to assert hereditary rights and privileges that defined wealth and rank in Northwest
Coast society, an audience was required to “bear witness” to the proceedings to
make it so.


Roy. “Performing Musqueam.”

Ibid., 64.


Musqueam Elder Larry Grant talks about the importance of bearing witness to Coast Salish people.


The common word potlatch comes from the Chinook jargon which means to “give away” or “gift.” Keith Carlson, Keith Thor Carlson, ed. You Are Asked to Witness: The Sto:lo in Canada’s Pacific Coast History (Chilliwack, BC: Sto:lo Heritage Trust, 1997).
Calling to Witness

Considering the concept of *bearing witness* in various forms of Aboriginal performance within the broader spectacle of the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympics, Baloy notes, that though the official Olympics narrative was meant to convey Canada as a settled post colonial nation state, Indigenous presences and claims to land were performed within it in complicated ways that both obscured conditions for Native people in the country and acted as powerful forms of political resistance.

Many Indigenous artists and performers in fact embedded anti-colonial messages in their Olympic-sanctioned art and performance, offering powerful examples of refusals and the productive tensions that can emerge through efforts toward “inclusion.” Positioning these refusals within and against the Olympics.¹¹¹

Baloy recalls the complexity of spectacular Coast Salish performative and oratory traditions in the Olympics opening ceremony, which drew on elements of *welcome* and *bearing witness*, where Tewanee Joseph, chief executive officer of the *Four Host First Nations Society* and member of the Squamish Nation, called Vancouver’s Olympic Games the “world’s biggest potlatch.”¹¹² Similar to Point’s *Welcome Post Gateways*, the performing of the opening welcome for those gathered for the Olympics, asserts the Central Coast Salish as territory holders as they are performing the *welcoming*, and affirms connections to land and territory by calling viewers to bear witness to that.

Though various powerful anti-colonial and anti-gentrification protests against hosting the Olympics took place in Vancouver, including *No Olympics on Stolen* 

---


Land, Baloy argues that after Vancouver had won the Olympic bid in 2003, the striking of the Four Host First Nations Committee, made up of the territory holders on whose lands the games were held (xʷməθkʷəy̓əm [Musqueam] Sḵwx̱wú7mesh [Squamish], Tsleil-Waututh, and Lil’Wat), actually created a space for political leverage for the First Nations hosting the Olympics on their land. Including more substantial and meaningful participation in the cultural programming for the games, and increased commissions for Indigenous art and culture throughout the city. Effectively working to shift public awareness for Vancouver visitors and residents alike, to consider to a much greater degree than in previous years, the Coast Salish territories who were doing the hosting.

---

Figure 2-6. Quw'utsun’ Coast Salish Spindle whorl (pre-1912). Royal British Columbia Museum, Victoria, BC. RBCM 2454.
Barbara Brotherton in her essay for *S’abadeb: The Gifts Pacific Coast Salish Art and Artists*, refers to the words Aszalus *S’abadeb*, as words that illustrate a Coast Salish philosophy of art. Meaning “something beautiful to give,” which are at the heart of artistic endeavours in Coast Salish culture. *Iyai* is the spiritual gift bestowed upon artists, and their work must be shared. *Cabaceb* are their gifts; the further meaning of the gift is “gifts which are not intended to be kept.”[^114] The sense of interconnectedness and exchange, inherent in Coast Salish design forms themselves, like Coast Salish “Welcome” which happens between the witness to the work, and the work of art itself, invokes a back and forth motion and flow, that embodies *survivance* constantly adapting and reinventing itself threading simultaneously to the past, present and future.

[^114]: Brotherton, 70.
Chapter 3 *Through the Eye of the Raven*
Native Cosmopolitanism, Fugitive Public Art & Living the City as Indigenous Territory
..if democracy has been weaponized by colonialism to contain, erase, marginalize, and domesticate radical alternatives, the fugitive aesthetic of anticolonial Indigenous art not only disrupts this instrumentalizing stasis, which reduces Indigenous art to expressly political or identity-based significations, it also refuses the finality of enclosure (capture/captivity) by remaining in motion: moving, seeking, and building toward the ‘tangible unknown’ of decolonization.¹

Comprising 18,500 residents, the Downtown Eastside has always been rough around the edges. As far back as the 1950s, Skid Road, as it was known, was already notorious for its high concentration of beer parlours, mayhem and murder.  

Tristan Hopper, National Post

*art informed by decolonial aesthetics* abandons the local imaginary for narratives that reach across those disrupted borders and connects to other locations from which testimonies are being made; *art is recognized by the ways it affects the story being told, because,*

place is an axis of power in its own right. As a basis for the construction of difference, hierarchy, and identity, and as the basis of ideologies that rationalize economic inequalities and structure people’s material well-being and life chances, place is a vehicle of power.

- Jacqueline Nassy Brown

luam kidane, *contentious art: disruption and decolonial aesthetics*

---


Figure 3-1. Through the Eye of the Raven mural, Vancouver, 2013. Photo by author.
Through the Eye of the Raven
Native Cosmopolitanism, Fugitive Public Art & Living the City as Indigenous Territory

There’s a whole wide range of artists from different backgrounds, and our own ideas coming together, there’s different ages, there’s a different perspective from each person right? This is how it is on the East Side.4

In December of 2007, the BC Supreme Court, in a trial that garnered widespread media attention around the globe, convicted known sex offender robert pickton of the murder of six Women from Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside community: Sereena Abotsway, Mona Wilson, Brenda Wolfe, Marnie Frey, Georgina Papin and Andrea Joesbury. The subsequent trial, conviction and links through DNA evidence to well over 30 more missing Women,5 many of them Indigenous, horrified the Nation and beyond, and focused attention on an issue long swept under Vancouver’s carpet.6 The trial focused a spotlight on the inordinately high numbers of missing and murdered Indigenous Women from the Downtown Eastside (DTES), and throughout Canada, and on the social structures that led to widespread indifference and police and legal negligence, including documented charges of homophobia and overt discrimination against Indigenous Women and sex trade workers.7 Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women in Canada shifted from being a “community issue” to one that become known around the world.8 Family members and Indigenous and Women’s rights groups continuously called for a national

5 "The serial killer has been linked by DNA to the deaths of 33 women and has boasted to an undercover police officer that he killed at least 16 more.” Suzanne Fournier. “Vancouver Police Task Force Referred to Missing and Murdered Women as ‘Whores,’ Inquiry Hears,” National Post, November 30, 2011.
7 Fournier, “Vancouver Police Task Force.”
enquiry into the matter which was ultimately launched in 2016. The final report published by the CBC in May of 2019 concluded the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls constituted a “Canadian Genocide.”

Chapter three focuses on the *Through the Eye of the Raven* mural, which when it was painted on the side of a residential hotel on East Hastings Street in 2010, was the first large-scale Indigenous led public art project to go up in the Downtown Eastside and the largest public mural in Western Canada. Commissioned by the Vancouver Native Housing Society and painted by four local Indigenous artists, it reversed the gaze on a deeply marginalized community, simultaneously invisibilised and particularly vulnerable to lurid media scrutiny and research exploitation.

In light of the mural’s situation within this newly politicized context, this chapter considers the concepts of Indigeneity as radical alterity and Indigenous art through the lens of Indigenous fugitivity to engage the ways the mural’s position on East Hastings Street and its combination of Coast Salish creation story, with northern Northwest Coast, Plains and other intertribal imagery, re-inscribes Indigenous presences in the Downtown Eastside, and functions in fugitive ways that trouble and resist the containment of state sanctioned and commissioned public art projects in Vancouver. Also marking a particular Indigenous cosmopolitanism in the area, which for hundreds of years prior to contact, was a series of intersecting

---

10 Dave Eddy (Director, Vancouver Native Housing Society). Interview with the author. Vancouver, 2013.
11 some communities—particularly Indigenous, ghettoized, and orientalized communities—are over-coded, that is, simultaneously hyper-surveilled and invisibilised/made invisible by the state, by police, and by social science research.” Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang. “Unbecoming Claims: Pedagogies of Refusal in Qualitative Research.” *Qualitative Inquiry* 20, no. 6 (2014): 811.
pathways, connecting inland Coast Salish villages to the sea. With its shared territory negotiated between the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), the Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and the Səl̓ílwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh), it has always been as an important meeting place for people, goods and trade, which I argue, continues to influence the culture of East Van to the present day.

---

14 Including what became known to settlers as the False Creek Trail, which was based on a pre-contact route from the False Creek area to what is now New Westminster. https://www.citystudiovancouver.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/HistoryBoards2.pdf
The way we do those projects, we go around doing workshops in the area, or with certain groups within the area where the work’s going to be done. It’s almost like their wall right, we can’t just go in and do our own work or what we want.\textsuperscript{15}

Jerry Whitehead, a Plains Cree painter from Saskatchewan, and Artist in Residence at the Vancouver School Board, came out to Vancouver in the Winter of 1990, and, living with his son and grandson, has made his life and work in East Vancouver and the Downtown Eastside ever since. Working mainly out of the Raven’s Eye Studio,\textsuperscript{16} a collective studio space on East Hastings Street, which is also on the ground floor of a residential hotel on whose west side, the 7500-square-foot mural Through the Eye of the Raven is painted. Jerry is one of four Vancouver-based Native artists who worked on the piece,\textsuperscript{17} with the main funding from the Vancouver Native Housing Society and close collaboration with the local community, the mural went up in 2010:

\begin{quote}
For such a big project, we had about six workshops, Native Health, a Woman’s Group, the Chinese Centre, most were done in the studio beneath the mural. We told people to jot down what they thought of, anything they wanted to see up there, and then collaged all these different ideas into one big piece.\textsuperscript{18}
\end{quote}

What began as a website called Looking Forward, Looking Back in 2008, which gathered stories from artists about their work and experiences of living in the Downtown Eastside (DTES), as Jerry describes “how they’ve survived down there with their art, just experiences,”\textsuperscript{19} and which went on to become the largest public mural in Western Canada,\textsuperscript{20} marks a significant representational shift for a community more used to being portrayed by others, than of depicting themselves.

\textsuperscript{15} Jerry Whitehead (artist). Interview with the author. 2013.
\textsuperscript{16} A collective Studio space, Raven’s Eye Studio offers a variety of community services, ranging from providing an exhibition space and holding concerts, to free mentorship programs for self-identified Aboriginal artists.
\textsuperscript{17} The artists are Jerry Whitehead, Ojibiway artist Sharifah Marsden, Haisla Collins of Tsimshian and Celtic ancestry, and Richard Shorty who is Yukon. Together with funding from VNHA, and the Great Beginnings Program which was developed in 2008 with the goal of revitalizing four historic Vancouver neighborhoods to coincide with the province of British Columbia’s 150th anniversary celebrations. Jerry Whitehead. Interview with the author. August 2013. See also http://vancouver.ca/people-programs/great-beginnings-old-streets-new-pride.aspx.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{19} Jerry Whitehead (artist). Interview with the author. 2013.
\textsuperscript{20} Dave Eddy (director Vancouver Native Housing Society). Interview with the author. August 2013.
I was “home” (in East Van) the Summer of 2013, after being away for over three years, when I first saw the piece. Walking up Hastings Street with a Musqueam friend, I was first struck by the mural’s sheer size and height, taking up the entire side of a residential hotel on East Hastings. And then surprised by the combination of colours and imagery, which seemed so unlike other Indigenous public art I’d experienced in Vancouver. Rather than the subdued northern style, symmetrical form lines and palette of blacks and reds, one is used to seeing throughout the city, the drab brick wall came alive with warm golds, yellows, greens and shades of blue, that seemed to draw the viewer into and out of, the frame. And the various animated figures partially framed by the bright red sweet grass braid and sea blue of the serpents on either side, depicting a mix of Coast Salish, Plains, and northern Northwest Coast imagery looking out over the street and the Downtown Eastside, invited passersby to stop and engage with them. Each figure tells a part of the story, with sea, open landscapes and buildings blending against the backdrop of the Raven’s button blanket robe. Rather than (a) unified piece meant to showcase a timeless Northwest Coast art, the mural tells many stories that contribute to a collective memory and narrate Indigenous life and relationships to land in the city.

Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside, known as one of North America’s poorest postal codes, is a place whose reputation precedes it. An urban corridor that stretches east from the city’s touristy Gastown area, along East Hastings Street towards Commercial Drive, it’s an area that has long been identified with poverty and alarming rates of substance abuse and violence, in particular violence against Native

---

21 This situation has changed since 2013. The annual Vancouver mural festival, which began in 2016 and is held every August, features Indigenous and non-Indigenous themed murals throughout the East Vancouver area, with suggested tours and talks and events related to the art works, https://www.vanmuralfest.ca/map-and-tours.

Women. One of the Vancouver’s oldest neighbourhoods, it was until the Depression of the 1930s, the financial, political and commercial heart of the city.\textsuperscript{23} An influx of unemployed workers drawn to the area’s inexpensive housing and drinking establishments, saw its gradual abandonment as a commercial hub, and a growing population of urban poor, becoming its main demographic. The largest facility for the mentally ill in British Columbia, Riverview Hospital, reduced its patient population from 4,630 in the 1950s to 1,000 by the 1990s, as part of a movement to deinstitutionalize custodial patients. Intended as a measure meant to integrate patients into community and cut government costs, the move has been criticized for failing to allocate adequate resources for follow-up care. Drawn to the Downtown Eastside for its concentration of mental health facilities, many ex-patients of Riverview who have few other options reside in the area.\textsuperscript{24} Over the years the area has shifted to accommodate de-institutionalized mental health survivors the homeless, people living with addiction and consequent high numbers of people involved in the survival sex trade.\textsuperscript{25} Though census taking is difficult in an area with a large homeless and transient population, Indigenous people are estimated to make up about forty percent\textsuperscript{26} of the community.

\textit{Data Mining, Extractionism and Violence against Indigenous Women}

It is also a place that holds a great fascination in the popular imaginary, as one of lurid crime stories and dramatic social issues, and has long been a subject of interest

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{23} Hopper, “Vancouver’s ‘Gulag,’” \textit{National Post}.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Read Alison. “Psychiatric Deinstitutionalization in BC: Negative Consequences and Possible Solutions,” \textit{UBCMJ} 1, no.1 (2009): 25.
\item \textsuperscript{25} The survival sex trade unlike sex trafficking generally refers to sex in exchange for basic subsistence, (drugs, food, shelter), rather than monetary gain. See also Sherene H. Razack. “Gendered Racial Violence and Spatialized Justice: The Murder of Pamela George.” \textit{Race, Space, and the Law: Unmapping a White Settler Society} (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2002: 131).
\item \textsuperscript{26} Dara Culhane. “Stories and Plays: Ethnography, Performance and Ethical Engagements,” \textit{Anthropologica} (2011): 259.
\end{itemize}
for popular media, local politicians and academic researchers alike. In 1997, the Downtown Eastside was reported to have the highest rate of HIV infection amongst intravenous drug users in the developed world, and declared by the city a public health emergency zone, consequently becoming an “internationally renowned centre for medical and pharmaceutical research on HIV/AIDS and addiction.”

Ethnographer and anthropologist Dara Culhane, known for her collaborative approach to research in the area, is an outspoken critic of what she calls data mining with regards to many of the research projects conducted in the DTES. In her article Stories and Plays: Ethnography, Performance and Ethical Engagements, she notes that many view the area as only a “source of data” for their own ends, rather than as engagement with community that has tangible effects on people’s lives.

Everything from my time with the Aboriginal Women’s Action Network (AWAN), an Indigenous research collective made up of Native Women scholars, activists and front-line workers, in and around the East Vancouver area, resonated with this criticism. Of the Woman we talked with in our focus groups, (as part of a project on Restorative Justice reforms and violence against Indigenous Women and children, that began in 1999), the majority complained of “being researched to death and nothing ever coming from it.”

AWAN’s formation was intended as a deliberate intervention into a long history of objectifying colonial research done on Indigenous people from the anthropological to the pharmaceutical, by taking research into our

27 Ibid., 274–75.
28 Ibid., 259–60.
29 “Many Downtown Eastsiders are astute political analysts who clearly articulate their understanding of themselves as ‘raw material for the extraction of surplus value’ in the research and poverty industries.” Ibid., 259.
own hands as Indigenous Women, with a mission to speak with and from rather than for and about the community.

Despite grassroots efforts of groups like AWAN, *No More Silence*, the Valentine’s Day *Women’s Memorial March* to commemorate Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, and other Indigenous led activist and community-based interventions into a long and problematic history of researcher/researched in the Downtown Eastside, an enormous amount of dehumanizing research done on and not with the community there still prevails. In addition to lucrative, what have been called, research, poverty (and now harm reduction) “industries,” the area is also becoming known for walking tours and other forms of *dark tourism* where people can pay to take guided excursions through the areas most troubled streets. The conflation of lurid sexualized violence with race, class, mental health and addiction, and the medical and anthropological gaze in the popular imaginary, make disentangling a pathologized spectacle from the humanity deeply complicated. And with the large number of Indigenous people in the Downtown Eastside, the overwhelming picture portrayed is one of displacement and failure to adjust to a modernized, urban world.

The concepts of *extraction, mining* and other exploitive forms to describe modes of social science research with marginalized groups has disturbing

---


34 Adam Gaudry calls this *extraction methodology*, which along with Culhane’s term *data mining*, critiques not only the colonial mentality that sees social phenomena with Indigenous and vulnerable groups as a mine to be exploited in the Downtown Eastside, but also implicates the pervasiveness of this thinking in approaches to
resonances for Indigenous groups, with extractionist practices like logging, mining
and fracking that continue to encroach on Native lives and lands, as the anti-pipeline
movement have been calling attention to, in their mobilization against potentially
dangerous oil pipelines through sovereign Indigenous lands that threaten major
water sources:35

I think I realized I needed to create an art that was politicized when our Chief
and Council sold the rights to nearly half our land in Alberta to oil companies
for fracking oil extraction. They inject millions of gallons of water with
chemicals that oil companies patent, so they don’t have to release what is in
the chemical cocktail, but we know they contain many carcinogenic
substances. They say they can get it out again, but it’s been proven it leaches
into the ground water. After the deal, they handed out cheques to all members
of the tribe (half of which live off reserve) ten days before Christmas, for 800$. What
single Mom on social assistance would be able to say no? It was a
strategic move. I was in my last year at UBC at the time and I learned to use a
camera and editing software and all that and I used my cheque to fund a
film.36

The resulting short film, Bloodlands, Elle Maija Tailfeathers, a Blackfoot and
Sami film maker based in Vancouver, made available in its entirety to the general
public when the Idle No More movement was gaining momentum in 2012. It is an
excruciating and powerful work, in which a young Native Woman in her regalia is
strapped to a table while several hydraulic drills pierce her body and her blood runs
to the floor.37 It is a powerful metaphor for violation, and the environmental
exploitation and violence that colonialism has wrought against Indigenous bodies
and land, and for the rape and abuse of Aboriginal Women.

Coast Salish scholar Rachel Flowers describes the connection between
colonial extractionism and violence against Native Women.

36 Elle Maija Tailfeather (artist). Interview with the author. 2013.

Chapter 3-13
There is a clear connection between land and the bodies of Indigenous women. Often, Indigenous women’s bodies are explained in symbolic terms, as a microcosm of Indigenous lands; her body is where our sovereignty begins. Indigenous women represent our political orders, our political will, our cultural teachings, our laws, and the power to reproduce Indigenous life.\(^{38}\)

The conflation of Indigenous people, and in particular Indigenous Women, in the western imaginary with nature and land, to be exploited and “brought under control,” has been integral to the colonial projects around the world. And the racism and misogyny,\(^{39}\) inherent in this association that renders Native Women particularly vulnerable to sexualized violence, is no more clearly evidenced than in frontier cities.\(^{40}\) Records kept on the pass system, introduced in the late 1800s which ran until the 1940s,\(^{41}\) requiring Natives to obtain a pass from government officials in order to leave reserves and enter towns, show government officials withholding rations to reserves unless Native Women were made available to them, Mounted Police having easy access to Indigenous Women when families were without food, and sometimes fatal violence against Women often ignored by authorities.\(^{42}\) The history of violence against Indigenous Woman is a long and deep seeded one, so ubiquitous in settler colonial cities, that, as one activist put it, “it is as common as the Canadian landscape itself.”

Violence against Native Women in Canada has been identified by Women’s groups, NGOs and UN reports as having reached epidemic proportions.\(^{43}\) According


\(^{43}\) “Growing public concern over missing and murdered indigenous women and girls has led to numerous calls from provincial leaders, opposition political parties, civil society, and in 2015, two United Nations committees, for a national inquiry into the violence. Canada had committed a “grave violation” of the rights of indigenous women by failing to promptly and thoroughly investigate the high levels of violence they suffer. The
to an RCMP report, 1,181 Indigenous Women and girls were murdered or have gone missing between 1980–2014, with many advocacy groups like the Native Women’s Association of Canada, who have compiled a database on missing and murdered Indigenous Women in the country, believing the numbers to be much higher\textsuperscript{44} with statistics showing them to be 6 times more likely to be murdered than non-Indigenous Women.\textsuperscript{45} The Vancouver-based activist group Valentines Memorial March Committee, which has commemorated the missing and murdered Women every year in the DTES for 27 years, argue despite the issue’s rising profile nationwide, little has changed to address the systemic inequality faced by Native Women, which leaves them particularly vulnerable to violence. “Increasing deaths of many vulnerable women from the Downtown Eastside still leaves family, friends, loved ones, and community members with an overwhelming sense of grief and loss. Indigenous women disproportionately continue to go missing or be murdered with minimal action to address these tragedies or the systemic nature of gendered violence, poverty, racism, or colonialism.”\textsuperscript{46}

For several years in the DTES, high numbers of Women, particularly those in the survival sex trade (many of whom are Indigenous), were disappearing from the community. Many Women’s and Native advocacy groups located in the DTES were receiving information from the local community that it was the work of serial killers targeting vulnerable Woman for the snuff film industry. As the Women were not

\textsuperscript{44} Native Women’s Association of Canada. Fact Sheet: Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women and Girls, https://www.nwac.ca/resource/fact-sheet-missing-and-murdered-aboriginal-women-and-girls/


\textsuperscript{46} https://womensmemorialmarch.wordpress.com.
considered “high priority” victims, the Vancouver police disregarded any pattern, and it was only in 2001 despite numerous tips and complaints from the public, that a joint task force was struck with the RCMP. By that time the numbers had climbed into the hundreds. Charged with the murders of 26 Women who went missing from the Downtown Eastside between 1978–2001, notorious serial killer Robert Pickton was known to sex workers and other members of the community as a danger for several years. Despite this, with one Woman actually escaping his attempt to abduct her which resulted in a stabbing reported to the police, as she was not considered a “credible witness,” he was not arrested until 2002.

Despite often lurid handling in the media of the investigation and conviction, and a tendency to focus on a lone, crazed killer, rather than the structures that enable the violence, it also shed light on an issue that had long been an embarrassment to the city of Vancouver, but was little-known outside of Canada. With the systemic factors that contribute to violence against poor, Indigenous and racialized Women coming into public view in an unprecedented way.

Tailfeather’s second film A Red Girls Reasoning, also deals with the subject of violence against Indigenous Women but is set in an urban context inspired by the Downtown Eastside. Named after a short story by the Mohawk-English writer and

---

47 Though ultimately convicted of only six of the murders with which he was connected, he confided to an undercover officer in prison that he had “killed 49 Women, but had been hoping to make it an even 50.” Edward Butts. “Robert Pickton Case,” in The Canadian Encyclopedia, Historia Canada, accessed January 2018, https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/robert-pickton-case.


50 “All Indigenous women face systemic violence; the stealing of land and the denial of land, the Indian Act, loss of status, the splitting up of families. Because of these systemic violations and the constant, ongoing structure of settler colonialism, Indigenous women and girls are over represented as survivors and victims of violence, sexual abuse and are vastly over represented in murder cases.” Lucy Anna Gray. “‘She was Decapitated a Block from a Police Station’: Indigenous Women are Going Missing and No One Listens,” The Independent, March 12, 2019, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/long-reads/mmiw-native-american-women-canada-inquiry-savannas-act-missing-murdered.
poet, E. Pauline Johnson, it tells the story of a Native Woman superhero who avenges the misogynist violence against her and other Indigenous Women. The film gives voice to the anger and frustration felt by many Indigenous communities and Women’s rights groups over the lack of priority given to the issue by the mainstream Canadian media, and by the law enforcement and the criminal justice system’s repeated mishandling. Flowers critiques the way the issue has been framed in general public discourse to place responsibility on Women themselves to prevent violence, rather than consider the systemic sexism, racism and entrenched colonial attitudes toward Indigenous people that underlie the problem.

This public discourse reinforces the idea that Indigenous women and girls simply need to stop engaging in risky behavior rather than address the structural and ideological conditions that allow and depoliticize violence against Indigenous women. While there is an increasing awareness around the disappearance and murder of Indigenous women and girls, there continues to be a failure to name white male violence as a root cause.51

By subverting the male-centered action movie, the film raises awareness around the issue of racialized sexual violence in a way that is smart and engaging:

A film like A Red Girl’s Reasoning, was made for a wider audience. The subject of violence against Women is huge and needs a lot more coverage than it gets, so I thought if I made an action film it would reach a wider audience, non-Native males for example, maybe they’ll start thinking about the issue.52

---

52 Elle Maija Tailfeather (artist). Interview with the author. 2013.
Figure 3-2. Valentines March for the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women. Photograph by author.

**Frontier**

Historian Coll Thrush, in his work on the Indigenous history of Seattle, writes about the colonial assumptions that underscore (or in this case undergrid)\(^5\) the common understanding that Native people and cities are paradoxical. “In America’s symbolic landscapes—if not its real ones—the urban and the Indigenous cannot coexist. The regional mythology of the West is no different, in fact it was the powerful idea of frontier encounters between savagery and civilization that fueled the larger American

---

\(^5\) In their work on decolonizing place and environmental education research, Tuck et al. use the word to locate the Enlightenment epistemic discourse that underwrites western geography and understandings of place. Eve Tuck, Marcia McKenzie, and Kate McCoy. “Land Education: Indigenous, Post-Colonial, and Decolonizing Perspectives on Place and Environmental Education Research.” *Environmental Education Research* 20, no. 1 (2014): 4.
The modern ordering of space, Vancouver based geographer Nick Blomley traces to the European Enlightenment and cartographic revolution of the 16th century, and the rational framing of landscape in survey mapping, with the use of perspective that sought to render it legible and containable. To “present the world as set before and logically prior to a disembodied viewer. The effect is to ‘enframe’ an a priori world of objects,” materially and philosophically vital to projects of colonial conquest. Stemming from the European Enlightenment, modernity and common understandings of what constitutes the modern (and often by association, urban) are deeply conditioned by, and dependent on systems of coloniality, and a “logic of development—the belief in perpetual betterment and overcoming as crucial to the philosophical foundations of the modern order.” The settler colonial city then, can be read as the culmination of colonial modernity based on “the cultural project of ordering the world according to rational principles from the perspective of a male Eurocentric consciousness, in other words, building an allegedly ordered, rational, and predictable world.” Together with the concept of frontier, the rational framing presupposes an irrational outside of the frame, with Indigenous inhabitants then positioned as wild, uncivilized, others to the modern city.

55 “Thus, the Indian Revenue Surveys established a British model of absolute proprietary rights in place of the Mughal system, while the “Virginia method” facilitated the establishment in the U.S. of large plantations based on slave labor. Similarly, the relations between state violence, the survey, and the foundation of a property regime received particular local inflections in British Columbia.” Nicholas Blomley, “Law, Property, and the Geography of Violence: The Frontier, the Survey, and the Grid.” Annals of the Association of American Geographers 93, no. 1 (2003): 127–28.
57 Ibid., 183.
The geography of the frontier was cast and created as a container of all these accumulated meanings; the sharpness of the geographical frontier was an excellent conveyance for the social differences between “us” and “them,” the historical difference between past and future, the economic difference between existing market and profitable opportunity. 58

Geographer Neil Smith’s work on gentrification and the inner city, expounds on the concept of frontier within the urban context, linking it to the American West, as both discursive space and physical marker. Delineating desirable, orderly neighbourhoods from those that through inevitable processes, 59 fuelled by a perceived failure to adhere to the social order, become savage, lawless and/or, in need of restoring, 60 making them particularly vulnerable to processes of gentrification. Drawing on both the social history and history of the built environment that inform and reflect the concept of frontier, Smith employs the concept as a way to describe the boundaries that physically and metaphorically separate certain parts of cities from others. This mentality that upheld the idea of cities as bastions of progress and civility, the culmination of the western modernist project, holding the chaos of nature at bay, saw a reversal in the post war era. With those that could afford to, migrating to the suburbs and outlying parts of the city, and downtown cores becoming increasingly racialized and neglected, 61 it became not so much a matter of keeping the perceived savagery out, as keeping it in. If not through physical barriers, through formal often legal (though invisibilised). Canadian scholar Sherene Razack identifies these often invisibilised forms of segregation in settler colonial cities, which function

59 Smith argues that rather than “inevitable” or natural processes, gentrification is the result of a deliberate system of real estate speculation-rational decisions on the parts of property owners, developers and investors, in what he calls disinvestment or reinvestment in areas, which largely determines inner city liveability. Ibid., 189.
60 Smith further outlines how this perceived failure to uphold the social order (drugs, the conflation of poverty with crime etc.) contributes to inner city vulnerability to gentrification and its residents to further dispossession, in that it is justified in helping to ‘restore order’, and at the same time drawn on to market certain areas as “edgy”, “bohemian” and ripe for co-option and development. Ibid., 195.
to contain urban areas with large Indigenous populations. “Such spatial practices, often achieved through law (nuisance laws, zoning laws, and so on), mark off the spaces of the settler and the native both conceptually and materially. The inner city is racialized space, the zone in which all that is not respectable is contained. Canada’s colonial geographies exhibit this same pattern of violent expulsions and the spatial containment of Aboriginal peoples to marginalized areas of the city, processes consolidated over three hundred years of colonization. Reserves remain land administered by the Indian Act while city slums remain regulated by a variety of municipal laws.”

There are the media reports, the statistical findings, the medical proclamations, the states of emergency, the top-down proposals for improving the Downtown Eastside, but to what extent do they really engage with or address the lives of those who live there? Who is doing the speaking and who is being spoken for? Living in Vancouver for 15 years, one heard troubling reports on local news about the area nearly every night. For many Vancouverites unless one had a reason to be there, it could be avoided altogether, and the DTES and its community otherized to such an extent, that it seemed more another world, than another neighbourhood in the same city. The border that exists between it and other parts of the thriving, multicultural and modern metropolis of Vancouver, much less about geographical distance than imagined divide.

**Grounded Normativity**

But places are always about more than what can be seen from the outside. To begin to understand any place, one has to have a sense for the ground on which one is located. As artist and design scholar Paul Carter, writes on the Malee region of

---

62 Razack, Gendered Racial Violence, 129.
northwestern Australia and its particular poetic convergence of history, story, song lines and biodiversity that create a sense of place; “what I have done, is to deepen the stories – not to generalise them, as if the idea were to extend the Mallee’s territory – to groove and regroove them deeper, showing how they spring from an impressionable ground. The ground is not passive, it is the generative matrix of an understanding that exists solely at that spot – situated, timely and often rubbed out.”

_This word urban, it’s pretty recent. Indigenous people have been gathering on the land for a very, very, long time and meeting in locations for centuries. I consider myself to be one of those travelers on the land._

The understanding that Indigenous people are naturally _displaced, or out of place_, in cities, belies that many urban centres in North America have been founded on sites historically used and often settled by Indigenous people prior to European contact. This thinking owes more to the frontier mentality that equated Indigenous culture with wilderness, reinforced by the dispossession of Native people from urban spaces through colonial efforts to free the land for settler development, than to actual histories of Indigenous presences on the land. The assumption that urban Natives are necessarily displaced or exiled from “homelands,” when Indigenous

---

64 Morin, Peter (artist). Interview with the author. 2013.
65 The Songhees people, an anglicization of Lekwungen, (the collective name for a group of Coast Salish villages whose traditional territory encompasses what is now the province of British Columbia’s capitol city Victoria on Southern Vancouver Island), unlike the Musqueam in Vancouver who continue to live on their traditional, (if much reduced) territory at the mouth of the Fraser river, were relocated entirely from the city limits in 1911. After “decades of pressure from municipal, provincial and federal governments they were removed from their land.” The first of the Northwest Coast groups to be impacted by urbanization, they have been called the “least known” but “most observed” due to their reserve’s visibility from the city and provincial legislative buildings, which considered unsightly made them particularly vulnerable to re-location from the city limits. John Lutz, review of *Songhee Pictorial: A History of the Songhees People as Seen by Outsiders, 1790–1912?* by Grant Keddie, _BC Studies_ 146 (2005): 108–10.
66 “The creation of Indigenous “homelands” outside of cities is, in itself a colonial invention. Moreover, for many Indigenous peoples, ancestral home-lands are not contained by the small parcels of land found in reserves, reservations, and rural Māori and rural Australian Aboriginal settlements; rather, they are the larger territories that include contemporary urban settlements.” Peters and Andersen, *Indigenous in the City*, 9.
cultures have ties to community, resource gathering and ceremonial and sacred spaces within what are now settler city boundaries sometimes for millennia, is premised on colonial fantasies of terra nullius that suppose the history of places in colonized nations began with settler history. Dene political scientist Glen Colthard, writing about the origins of the reserve system, which were rarely ever about traditional Native lands, and often deliberately chosen for their safe distance from urban centres “by the turn of the nineteenth century the reserve system, originally implemented to isolate and marginalize Native people for the purpose of social engineering (assimilation), was increasingly being seen as a failure because of the geographical distance of reserves from the civilizational influence of urban centers. Here you have the economic imperatives of capitalist accumulation through the dispossession of Indigenous peoples’ land come into sharp conflict with the white supremacist impulses of Canada’s assimilation policy and the desire of settler society to claim the city for themselves—and only themselves.” And As Mohawk scholar Audra Simpson, and others have pointed out, the factors that inform this thinking have gone hand in hand with particular agendas of dispossession. “There are politics and sensibilities that shapes these demands: settler populations that now sit on these territories without any sense of their historicity, without any sense of prior ownership, of forced relocation; the conditions of reservationization.”

In his book Red Skin White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition, Colthard calls for the reclamation of urban land as Indigenous land. Citing the need to disrupt the separation between the two as part of the colonial project of disappearance which echoes “the racist legal fiction of terra nullius,” in what he terms “urbs nullius.” His urge to rethink and reimagine what qualifies as

68 Simpson, Mohawk Interruptus, 75.
Indigenous land and reclaim Native spaces in cities is twofold. As imperative in a broader project of Decolonization that seeks to make visible the processes of capitalist settler colonialism predicated on Indigenous dispossession. But also to identify, as Carter touches on above, the need to consider the deeper relationships to territories carried and practiced by Native People that understands land in a fuller sense, not as commodity, but as an interrelated network of rights and responsibilities to each other—plant, animal and human relations together. This understanding Coulthard refers to as grounded normativity, a concept that describes a way of thinking about cities Indigenously. This echoes Vizenor’s concept of transmotion, as implicit in the interconnectedness of Native sovereignty and relationships to land. “Transmotion then is an expression of native ontology, located in narratives that bring together the physical land with an expression of Native cultural presence. This Native presence is, as Niigonwedom James Sinclair describes in his essay “A Sovereignty of Transmotion,” a vision of “both the physical and psychological realms of the universe [as] made up of interconnectivities and relationships”71

In a collaborative article with the Anishnaabe scholar and poet Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, where they explore the concept as it relates to honouring the territory as a form of solidarity with other Indigenous nations hosting on their lands.

---

69 Colthard’s term urbs nullius describes the attempt at erasure of Indigenous people from the urban environment as seeking to, “render Indigenous life and land void in urban contexts for the purpose of settler expansion and gentrification, Indigenous displacement, and the continued confinement of Indigenous bodies to reservations, prisons, and other carceral venues such as museums and history texts.” Coulthard, Red Skin, White Masks, 175


71 Madsen, “The Sovereignty of Transmotion,” 27.
Grounded normativity houses and reproduces the practices and procedures, based on deep reciprocity, that are inherently informed by an intimate relationship to place. Grounded normativity teaches us how to live our lives in relation to other people and nonhuman life forms in a profoundly nonauthoritarian, nondominating, nonexploitive manner. Grounded normativity teaches us how to be in respectful diplomatic relationships with other Indigenous and non-Indigenous nations with whom we might share territorial responsibilities or common political or economic interests.\textsuperscript{72}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image}
\caption{Downtown Eastside garden, Vancouver 2013. Photograph by author.}
\end{figure}

Prior to the real estate boom in Vancouver which began gaining momentum in the 2000s\textsuperscript{73} and which saw housing prices rise exponentially, fast encroaching gentrification that displaced longtime residents and the introduction of a new middle class demographic, East Vancouver, encompassing the Downtown Eastside to

\textsuperscript{72} Glen Coulthard and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson. “Grounded Normativity/Place-Based Solidarity.” \\
\textit{American Quarterly} 68, no. 2 (2016): 254.

Burard Inlet, and ending with the city of Burnaby to the east, and the Fraser River to the south, has traditionally been associated with large working class, Queer, immigrant, and Native communities. Despite changing economic conditions and massive gentrification causing a housing crisis in the city, rendering East Vancouver neighbourhoods much less accessible to low-income residents, there remains a strong sense of place and pride in East Van identity. And due to the majority of Vancouver’s Native housing located in the area, it is home to a large and diverse population of Indigenous people. East Vancouver was pre-contact, an intersection of routes connecting Coast Salish villages inland to the coast, with two seasonal villages, Q’umq’umal’ay and Lek’lek’l both located in the area. Usage rights for hunting and fishing were shared between the xʷməθkwəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and Səl̓ílwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh) First Nations, despite occasional warfare, political issues were primarily negotiated through intermarriage, and potlatching ceremonies with diplomatic distribution of wealth and gifts.

75 The Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre looking for a new location in early 80s, chose their present site at 1607 East Hastings Street for its proximity to the Native community. The majority of Vancouver’s estimated 40,000 Native residents at the time resided “between Cambie and Nanaimo Streets from 41st Avenue to the Burrard Waterfront”. William G. Lindsay. “A History of the Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre in an Age of Aboriginal Migration and Urbanization” (PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 2009): 32.
76 “Vancouver Before It Was,” The Story of Vancouver website, Vancouver Historical Society, https://www.vancouver-historical-society.ca/blog/introduction/i-vancouver-before-it-was/.
Though the traditional territory holders of the Lower Mainland have been a continuous presence in the area for millennia before the city was founded in 1886, migrations of Indigenous people from other parts of the country happened mostly in

---

the post-war era, with an increase in the Aboriginal population of Vancouver going from 239 in 1951 to 40,310 in 2006. This increase can be linked to several issues in addition to widespread dispossession including; poverty on reserve, more opportunity for employment and access to social services in the city, Women, children and other vulnerable community members escaping violence, and changing patterns of self-identification for urban located Indigenous people. The belief that identifying with one’s Indigenous heritage was a major barrier in “adjusting” to city life was common into the 1970s and 80s. As well as the prevalence in thinking, and literature at the time that saw moving to the city as a form of assimilation. And though Native people were migrating to cities for a wide variety of reasons, bringing their own cultural traditions and practices with them and creating strong new ones, assumptions that Native people who go to the city leave their Native-ness behind, continues to inform thinking about urban Indigenous culture as less ‘authentic’ than that of rural and reserve based Indigenous communities. As Peters and Anderson point out:

A focus on (non-urban) tribal homelands as the source of urban Indigenous identities also ignores the ways many urban Indigenous people have created organizations and communities across cultural and tribal groupings. Clearly, participation in urban organizations that represent Indigenous interests across tribal origins and participation in the life of nonurban tribal communities are not mutually exclusive.

The Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre, the largest of its kind in North America when it opened at its current premises on East Hastings Street, has been

---

79 Ibid., 36.
80 “I think the colonial mindset can affect urban Native people, they can be ostracized from their lives and communities, deemed “inauthentic” and they start believing it themselves because they’re raised in the city.” Elle Maija Tailfeather (artist). Interview with the author. 2013.
81 Peters and Anderson, Indigenous in the City, 9.
82 Lindsay, “A history of the Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre,” 32.
a cultural cornerstone for urban Indigenous people since its beginnings and is an example of the strength of urban Indigenous networking, cultural practices and survivance in city settings. Though the Friendship Centre Society was officially incorporated in Vancouver in 1963, it evolved out of a grassroots network called the Coqualeetza Fellowship group, that had been providing services to urban Native community since the 1950s.\(^3\) Originally established as a response to growing numbers of Aboriginal people migrating to cities in the post war era, with a mandate to ‘[provide] the Indian with a place where he is accepted socially and where he can find advice and direction with understanding,’\(^4\) it evolved from a focus on assisting to ‘adjust’ Native people to non-Native city life, to providing a place for intertribal Indigenous community to gather and practice their various cultures, collectively and specifically. In this way more reflective of Coulthard’s concept of grounded normativity, than a mould attempted to fit into. This is reflected in a description of various events held at the centre:

_Crossing the city limits does not transform Aboriginal people into non-Aboriginal people; they go on being the particular kind of person they have always been – Cree, Dene, Mohawk, Haida. The intention of Aboriginal people to go on expressing their Aboriginal identity and to pass it on to their children was a consistent theme in presentations by urban Aboriginal people at the round table and in hearings across the country._\(^5\)

The Friendship Centre’s expanding mandate reflects the realities of urban Native cultural resurgence in a post assimilation era which understands the city as a generative confluence of networks where Aboriginal people practice, express and celebrate specific, pan Indigenous and local Northwest Coast culture.

\(^3\) Ibid., 13.
\(^5\) Ibid., 31.
Being in This Colonial World but Not of It

That Coast Salish groups have a long history of cultural networking with extensive linguistic, cultural and kinship ties with one another covering a vast territory, supports an understanding of place as confluence and one of meeting and negotiation, as much as dwelling. Since 1993, over half of the 54 Coast Salish Indian bands have entered into formal land claims talks with Canadian Federal and Provincial governments. With the exception of the controversial pre-confederation Douglas Treaties (1850–1852) in the southern part of Vancouver Island, their lands were never formally ceded. Scholar Brian Thom presenting at the WIPO North American Workshop on Intellectual Property and Traditional Knowledge discusses the ontological and political challenges faced by Coast Salish groups around land claims in the establishing of territorial boundaries recognized by colonial governments commensurate with a “Cartesian vision of contiguous, bounded areas held by a village, band, tribe or language group”, when in reality the Coast Salish have vast networks of affiliations and connections to sites based on kinship ties, hereditary rights and privileges, and ancestral and spirit connections. Scholar Brian Thom outlines three categories of intangible property and their accompanying rights and responsibilities for Coast Salish communities within British Columbia. “Snew in the Hul’qumi’num language, which roughly translates as ‘private advice-/knowledge’. This is inherited private knowledge that includes some rituals, spells, and a vast array of traditional knowledge. ts’exwtén in the Hul’qumi’num language. This term does not translate well but is roughly ‘inherited ritual/ceremonial property’.

Salish culture has a large a complex set of rituals, songs, stories, masks and masked dances, rattles, powerful dolls, stuffed animal rituals, supernatural fish, designs, symbolic representations, and certain funeral rituals which are inheritable and for which there are very well-defined, well-respected criteria for the use, display and performance of. And ‘intangible House property’, which include hereditary names, songs and legends. A ‘House’ xwnets’álewem, which is formed by certain families descended from some illustrious ancestor, own pools of names, hereditary songs and legends." Again, reflecting the concepts of transmotion and natural rights of movement based on negotiation and grounded normativity that understands land and place as a complex web of relationships.

Furthermore, an emphasis on intangible property, clandestine religious ceremonies (including Winter dances held indoors; seyewen), and less spiritual emphasis placed on material culture, in combination with ongoing municipal colonialism, caused anthropologists to assume they had all but assimilated. This situation contributed to Coast Salish groups in the Lower Mainland continuing to practice culture in ways that may have eluded the Potlatch ban, and other administrative suppression of Indigenous culture, to a greater extent than Native groups in other parts of the coast. The spiritual and performative aspects of culture and ceremony, the emphasis on inherited knowledge and rights, names, songs and dances, and restraints around certain depictions resulting in a more esoteric art style, enabled an embodied connection to culture and identity that has resisted assimilation despite their location in a heavily populated metropolitan area.

---

90 Ibid., 1, 5.
91 Suttles comments on ethnographic research done around the Georgia Straight in the 1930s that erroneously assumed less material culture meant that Coast Salish culture in the area was disappearing, contrasting it with
Linguistic and cultural ties to other Salish groups in the Interior and to Wakishan\(^{92}\) groups to the north and west, made for strong social networks based on ‘interrmarriage and the flow of goods, practices and ideas.’\(^{93}\) In addition, Coast Salish art and architecture lends itself less readily to objectification and western attainability, which would also contribute to an underrepresentation in museums, galleries and Northwest Coast collections in the first part of the century. Though museums in the early part of the last century began to house extensive collections from Northern Northwest Coast areas that placed more emphasis on material culture production, they were seldom understood for their numinous quality, as part of a broader ceremonial or performative context. And the magnificent masks, boxes, rattles and other pieces on display, often removed from their cultural context, remain widely sought after as objects or “artefacts” one can purchase and consume. Though many museums have made important inroads in the understanding that holding Indigenous works in their collections requires ongoing relationship with their communities of origin over time, it remains fraught terrain. In January of 2014, for the American Superbowl, the Seattle Art Museum announced they would wager a sacred Nuxalk dance mask from their Northwest Coast collections, which was believed to have been taken from the community at the time of the smallpox epidemics. If the Seattle Seahawks lost to the Denver Broncos they would loan the piece, (a “Man-eating Raven” as it was erroneously called in the press) to the Denver Art Museum. Nuxalk Chiefs and Elders took great offense and considered the museum’s lack of consultation with the community to be extremely disrespectful. Although the piece is

---

\(^{92}\) A family of seven languages spoken by Northwest Coast First Nations from around and on Vancouver Island, including the Kwakwaka’wakw, Heiltsuk on the central coast, and groups to the Northwestern tip of the state of Washington. See, http://depts.washington.edu/wll2/languages.html#languagenames.

\(^{93}\) Suttles, “The Recognition of Coast Salish Art,” 63.
part of a permanent museum collection, it is a sacred dance mask and considered by
the Nuxalk, regardless of where it is held, their cultural and spiritual property. To
treat the mask, in particular, one used in sacred ceremonies, as simply an art object,
separate from the cultural context in which it was produced, is a grave misreading of
the piece and its importance in the community. Despite a dearth of information and
or misinformation around Coast Salish culture, including theories that they had
migrated from the interior with an art style that was “crude” and “imitative” of those
from other coastal areas, the more enigmatic nature of their ceremonial and
material culture enabled a certain privacy to practice culture that has resisted
containment or as Vizenor would term closure. The xʷməθkwəy̓əm (Musqueam),
Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and Səl̓ílwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh) have a long history of
negotiation and diplomacy with one another, and with the colonial powers that be,
while simultaneously resisting settler colonial assimilation and keeping a strong
connection to their traditional cultural practices and tribal identity.

Though developed to describe the unique conditions of hybridity of Indigenous,
African slave cultures and European settlers in the southern US and Caribbean
Coast, Martinican scholar Édouard Glissant’s term Creolization is useful in thinking
through urban Indigeneity, in its recognition of influences and exchange that shape
and inform Native cultures within colonial contexts. Rather than a comparison
between incommensurate “cultures” or ways of being, that understands cities as the
ultimate goal of western modernity and progress by which all progress is measured,

94 “Superbowl Wager of a Native Mask Upsets B.C. First Nation,” CBC News, January 28, 2014,
For the impact of smallpox on the circulation of Northwest Coast material culture and museum collections, see
95 Suttles, “Productivity and Its Constraints,” 56.
96 Grosfoguel, “The Structure of Knowledge in Westernized Universities.”
and a fixed, un-modern Indigeneity as its counterpoint, it critiques notions of culture as monolithic, recognizing instead its diffuse, elusive, complex and fugitive pathways.  

Not as a kind of dissipation or dilution of the original (or illusive “pure culture”)-culture: the modernist discourse that continues to inform thinking and public policy around urban Native cultural “authenticity”) but as a generative enriching that allows for true sharing. 

Can we not imagine a new dimension of identity, open to the truth, or simply the presence of the Other? An identity that would not be the projection of a unique and sectarian root, but of what we call a rhizome, a root with a multiplicity of extensions, in all directions? Not killing what is around it, as a unique root would, but establishing communication and relation? 

This being anchored to traditional cultural practice despite settler encroachment on traditional territory throughout the entire Lower Mainland area, successive waves of immigration from other parts of the world including China and the Pacific Rim, the post war influx of Indigenous groups from other parts of the Country and province, as well as ongoing waves of gentrification, has made for a resilience and a groundedness in central Coast Salish culture particularly amenable to a rich kind of Indigenous cosmopolitanism, perhaps most evidenced in the East Vancouver area.

---

97 Escobar suggests the locality of ‘place’ as an antidote to this universalizing modernism. “Place, after all, is the site of the subaltern par excellence, the excluded dimension of modernity’s concern with space, universality, movement, and the like. Escobar, “Worlds and Knowledges,” 199.


99 Raibmon, Authentic Indians.


101 Larry Grant, Musqueam Elder in Residence at UBC, talks about the history of Chinese market gardens on Musqueam lands from the turn of the century, when both distinctive communities experienced great discrimination. Grant is Musqueam on his mother’s side and Chinese on his father’s, despite the Indian act of the day that prevented non-Indigenous men from Interacting with Indigenous Women. “Farmers from Guangdong, China, including Grant’s father, cultivated farms on the flatlands along the Fraser River on Musqueam land from the turn of the 20th century into the 1960s, supplying much of the Lower Mainland’s produce, http://www.vancourier.com/community/vancouver-special/musqueam/musqueam-chinese-garden-on-musqueam-land-brought-cultures-together.” See also, Sarah Ling, All Our Fathers Relations film. http://www.vancourier.com/news/documentary-connects-histories-of-chinese-immigrants-and-musqueam.
Indigenous Cosmopolitanism

Attending to questions around how Aboriginal culture and identity is lived, shifted and transformed when it is no longer defined by material rootedness either to a cultural location or (as in the case with many Native communities who have been dispossessed), any longer possible, the book *Indigenous Cosmopolitans*, applies the concept of the cosmopolitan to globalized Indigenous cultures. Concerned with what Escobar points out as the changing globalized realities for place based cultures; “Locality and community cease to be obvious, and certainly not inhabited by rooted
or natural identities but very much produced by complex relations of culture and power that go well beyond local bounds,”\textsuperscript{102} it marks a shift from an either/or application of a term that saw cosmopolitanism as a phrase most associated with liberal humanism used mainly to describe global elites\textsuperscript{103} with the means to travel, or taken up to consider experiences of refugees, immigrants and people displaced from countries of origin. The concept seemingly antithetical to Indigenous cultures so often defined by place and not the other way around\textsuperscript{104} (unlike most refugees, immigrants, and diasporic groups, Native people largely remain in their lands under colonial occupation), owes more to Anzaldua’s concept of \textit{border thinking}\textsuperscript{105} and the idea of the interstitial space as liminal in between zone, from which to think and act from, than to liberal humanist understandings of the rootless traveller. \textit{Indigenous cosmopolitanism} shifts the focus from centre/outside to being located within but on the periphery,\textsuperscript{106} “a cosmopolitanism that emerges not from the privileged centres of world power, but in spite of them, from the margins.”\textsuperscript{107}

Given the invisibilising processes of settler colonialism that historically rendered urban Indigeneity ‘hidden in plain sight’, it holds a radical potential to consider ways in which Indigenous cultures shape and are shaped by, other cultures, and to their often overlooked contributions to place.\textsuperscript{108} It critiques Liberal humanist

\textsuperscript{103} Ibid., 147.
\textsuperscript{104} place based, although, again, not place-bound.” Escobar, “Worlds and knowledges,” 199.
\textsuperscript{105} Anzaldúa. \textit{Borderlands: la frontera}, (San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 1987).
\textsuperscript{106} Escobar describes the concept of \textit{place} as “a vast set of disarticulated ‘places’ households, social communities, ecosystems, workplaces, organizations, bodies, public arenas, urban spaces, diasporas, regions, occupations related analogically rather than organically and connected through webs of signification.” Escobar, “Worlds and knowledges,” 199.
\textsuperscript{108} Kent McKenzie’s remarkable film \textit{The Exiles} follows a day in the life of a group of Native people in the city of Los Angeles in the early 1960s. Though the film was loosely scripted and is only partly documentary, McKenzie’s employment of Native non-actors and ‘fly on the wall’ cinematography is a powerful testament to
discourse that takes as its basis the idea of being a citizen of the world\textsuperscript{109} with an emphasis on belonging anywhere over being from somewhere, privileging an Enlightenment universality that obscures and deracinates origins. The Decolonial scholar Walter Mignolo critiques this concept of cosmopolitanism as one that is based on a western hegemonic version of “modernity” that assumes the concept originates in ancient Greece and not with the 16th century Spanish “founding” of the new world, thus obscuring coloniality and “its production of differences on a planetary scale.” Indigenous cosmopolitanism shifts the epistemological focus to assert that “silenced and marginalized voices are bringing themselves into the conversation of cosmopolitan projects, rather than waiting to be included.”\textsuperscript{110} This rethinking of the in place(s) Indigenous cosmopolitan challenges these assumptions in that it “attempts to bring back a contextualized and situated notion of human practice in contrast to the desituated and detached view of people and things fostered by Cartesianism and modern science.”\textsuperscript{111}

The idea of Indigenous cosmopolitanism resonates with Vizenor’s concept of transmotion and what Tahltan artist Peter Morin refers to as “being a Native traveller on the land,”\textsuperscript{112} of a making/re/making which challenges circumscribed (and colonial understandings) of Indigeneity as fixed and discrete. On Vizenor’s application of transmotion in his work on the drafting of The White Earth Constitution, Bauerkemper asserts the seemingly antithetical concepts of “cosmopolitanism” and


\textsuperscript{110}Forte Indigenous Cosmopolitans, 8, 12.

\textsuperscript{111}Escobar, “Worlds and knowledges,” 167.

\textsuperscript{112}Morin, Peter (artist). Interview with the author. 2013.
“nationalism” have actually mutually informed Native cultural and political traditions in
generative ways for centuries in what he refers to as “cosmopolitan nationhood”:

*While the cosmopolitan critics emphasize the ways in which Native literatures and intellectual histories resist the legacies of colonialism through the foregrounding of cultural fluidity, adaptation, subversive resistance, and cross-cultural engagement, nationalist critics insist that Native writing remain accountable to specific tribal histories, epistemologies, and sovereignties while also aggressively confronting land dispossession and other colonial injustices.* \(^{113}\)

Arguing that they narrate in important ways, “the conceptions of polity remembered, imagined, and articulated in Native writing.” \(^{114}\)

Echoing Vizenor’s concept of *transmotion* in her description of the vigorous, complicated and often fractious processes involved in Native sovereignty, (and *survivance* despite settler assumptions of disappearance), Audra Simpson writes, “it is in robustly acknowledging these complicated histories of agency, imposition, push back, acquiescence, aspiration, and sovereignty” \(^{115}\) that demonstrate not only are processes of culture and nation making dynamic, resisting reified, static notions of an Indigeneity, unchanging over time, but that they are fundamentally cosmopolitan in their relationality.” Asserting that people can be en route but remain threaded to and responsible to specific places, while constantly narrating, adapting and re/making their Indigeneity, engaging the concept of cosmopolitanism as “rooted,” “routed,” \(^{116}\) and deeply relational. \(^{117}\)

In her chapter on the remarkable Kwakwaka’wakw photojournalist, painter and carver David Neel, Carolyn Butler Palmer, discusses his varied work and multiple positionalities from Northwest Coast Kwakwaka’wakw, to Thai Buddhism in


\(^{114}\) Ibid., 105.

\(^{115}\) Simpson., Ibid. 113.

\(^{116}\) Forte, ed., Ibid., 3.

\(^{117}\) Simpson, Ibid., 15.
relation to this concept. She argues that Neel’s life and work express an Indigenous cosmopolitanism that “manifests as an ethic of cross cultural engagement,” which “includes three necessary components: mobility, morality and multiplicity.” Neel is not someone who dabbles in different cultures as a pleasure, but shows a deep concern for and responsibility towards the world in which he moves. The negotiation of various affiliations from his place of origin as a First Nations person to the broader world in which he makes his home is shown in his work, from the his candid photo documentary works of poor neighbourhoods in Dallas Texas to his carved masks that combine broader Northwest Coast and Kwagiulth carving styles with non-traditional elements, such as the *Injustice system* mask, whose white lacquered surface, underlined with red, and grimacing mouth utilizes elements of Japanese Kabuki, the *Overpopluation mask*, which shows a pained Kwakwaka’wakw style face with the negative spaces depicting other small faces and figures climbing over and around it, and paintings like *The Young Chief-Waxwaxam*, which references Thai Buddhism, various elements from Kwagiulth cosmology and colours introduced into the Kwakwakawakw canon by his grandmother, the carver Ellen Neel, and her Grandfather Charlie James, Neel’s life and work embody a kind of *Native transmotion* which lives both Kwakwaka’wakw culture and the life of a transnational simultaneously.

**Fugitivity..**

---

118 Neel has said, “Tradition is a foundation to build upon, not a set of rules to restrain creativity.”
121 Neel’s Grandmother Ellen Neel was the first Woman carver on the Northwest Coast. Butler-Palmer, in Forte., “David Neel’s,” 5
The fugitive aesthetic is not an abdication of contention and struggle; it is a reorientation toward freedom in movement, against the limits of colonial knowing and sensing. It seeks to limn the margins of land, culture and consciousness for potential exits, for creative spaces of departure and renewal.\textsuperscript{123}

These notions, of a rooted and routed transmotion, an escape from or despite colonial systems, and a grounded normativity that recognizes "land" as a relationship constantly shifting, making and remaking itself, implicit in ideas of the Indigenous cosmopolitan, resonate with concepts of the (inside) outsider or ‘Indigeneity as radical alterity’\textsuperscript{124} that can be read as forms of fugitivity.\textsuperscript{125}

The concept of thinking from the periphery and eluding what African American scholar Fred Moten terms “a call to order,”\textsuperscript{126} not as a reaction to colonial systems, but as something transcending systems altogether. Echoing this, what Martineau and Ritskes refer to as a place “that finds similar freedom in movement not simply away from colonialism, but away from any standpoint where colonialism makes sense.”\textsuperscript{127}

Simultaneously expressing particular aspects of culture, and at the same time eluding, subverting and or reorienting dominant readings, are qualities inherent in Indigenous public art that disrupts the normative order of colonialism and the colonial gaze. And regardless of its location (whether in the street, a park, an institution, a gallery or a collection, there remains inherent in the work, a “fugitivity, (that) finds its

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{124} Ibid., V.
\item \textsuperscript{125} “Fugitivity, then, is a desire for and a spirit of escape and transgression of the proper and proposed. It’s a desire for the outside, for a playing in or being outside, an outlaw edge proper to the now, always already improper.” David S. Wallace. “Fred Morten’s Radical Critique of the Present,” \textit{The New Yorker}, April 30, 2018, accessed January 2018, https://www.newyorker.com/culture/persons-of-interest/fred-motens-radical-critique-of-the-present.
\item \textsuperscript{127} Martineau and Ritskes, “Fugitive Indigeneity,” IV.
\end{itemize}
energetic potency in remaining illegible to power, incommensurable with colonialism, and opaque to appropriation, commodification and cultural theft.”

Salish Sea serpents oriented towards each other at the top, frame an imposing Raven figure with the sun in its beak. The Raven extends a human arm holding a Spindle whorl moon, containing two Northwest Coast eagles (also seen as Ancestors in many Native teachings) arranged diametrically, merging northern Northwest Coast design elements with Coast Salish, while its eye, depicted as a moon mask, shines a beam of light down on the cityscape below. An elaborately carved post (again drawing on both house post and totem pole traditions), depicting animal and human figures and a braid representing Plains sweet grass borders the Hastings Street side. The raven’s button blanket robe decorated with Salish crescents and trigon shapes drops in panels down to become a backdrop depicting various scenes. Button blankets are an item of Northern Northwest Coast regalia that re-emerged with the lifting of the Potlatch ban in the mid-1950s. Button blankets are made of wool felt bordered with red or black, patterned with cut-out appliqués of animal and spirit crests, and trimmed with shell buttons. They are designed by their makers to be danced, with the body of the wearer in mind, forming a relationship between the dancer and the land under their feet. Tahltan artist Peter Morin refers to them as “a historical document, a written document that illustrates a deep connection

---

128 Ibid., V.
129 The Raven figures prominently in Northwest coast mythology as the consummate trickster and “light bringer or stealer.” Bill Reid and Robert Bringhurst. The Raven Steals the Light: Native American Tales (Toronto: Random House, 1996).
130 Moon masks figure prominently in the Northwest Coast tradition. The moon symbolizes power, prestige and transformation with the ability to control the tides. Squamish Lil’wat Centre, https://shop.slcc.ca/legends-symbology/.
131 Called a Smudge, sweet grass from the Prairies is burned for Indigenous ceremonies and prayers throughout Canada.
to the land when worn, you are performing and enacting your connection to the land.\textsuperscript{132}

A cityscape showing residential hotels and high-rise buildings, a group of Native people in various regalia with a Plains teepee behind them hold drums, and a Native Woman to the right with a British flag behind her and with a child that is being taken from her hands, while a hummingbird (a sign of hope, beauty and integrity in many Northwest Coast mythologies)\textsuperscript{133} rises to the sky above them. The striking composition and bright blues, yellows, and ochre, contrasting with the northern Northwest Coast graphic palette of black, white and red, to the left side of the work and top half, are most prominent to the traffic and passersby on Hasting Street. The right side with the robe forming the landscape on which various aspects, both of oppression and resilience, of Native life in the city are shown, is only really appreciated in detail from the alley below.\textsuperscript{134} One is required to be in that place, to actively seek out and engage from that position to see both sides of the mural in its entirety. Despite being a fixed piece on the side of a wall, it resists Indigenous closure, and its rich symbolism and considered placement are both an engagement with and transcendence of place.

\textsuperscript{132} “The World’s Largest Button Blanket, an Interview with Peter Morin” All Points West, CBC radio show, first aired February 24, 2014.
\textsuperscript{133} http://www.native-languages.org/legends-hummingbird.htm (Accessed January 2019)
\textsuperscript{134} When I was photographing the mural from the alley side, I noticed a small plaque at the bottom of a power pole, which marked one of the stopping places of the Valentines March to Remember the Missing and Murdered Women. The annual march stops at every site in the Downtown Eastside area where a Woman’s body has been found, prayers are said, and the spot is smudged with sage or sweetgrass and cleansed and reclaimed for its residents.
Though the *Through the Eye of Raven* mural was commissioned in part by civic bodies such as the City of Vancouver Council, as well as the *Vancouver Native Housing Society*, it is a fugitive work. Both in the act of its existence—of (re)presencing urban space with Indigenous narratives, the stories it tells and cultures it represents, constitute a radical act (one that defies settler colonial erasure)—and in its polyphonic subject matter that registers for different viewers according to one’s relation to the various symbols and imagery. This concept of thinking/acting from the margin with Indigenous art resists the carceral and is “thus an overflowing of borders and bordered-thinking, a liminal praxis whose generative effects activate art in a transversal re-presencing of indigeneity throughout Indigenous lands, languages and territories.”135 It’s symbolism functions as more than aesthetic, drawing from ancient traditions of meaning and representation that

---

135 Martineau and Ritskes, “Fugitive indigeneity,” V.
defy a sense of colonial framing and commodification. It draws on multiple themes, most prominently Northwest Coast and Coast Salish symbolism, as well as Plains and Intertribal Indigenous culture which specifically references Downtown Eastside life and place, and historical and present struggles with the ongoing violence of settler colonialism. And unlike other works commissioned by the city intended to promote particular aspects of urban diversity which has become increasingly weaponized against Indigenous communities by appearing to represent them, while at the same time failing to consult with territory holders, hire Native artists (or Native artists from that territory), or effect any meaningful legislative change. This “art washing” essentially functions as assimilation in a gentler guise, positioning First Nations as another culture absorbed into a reconciled Canadian multicultural mosaic.136 The mural has a multi-layered, multivalent and fugitive quality that despite its prominent position in the core of a settler city, evades dominant readings.137

Differing from the Stanley Park totem poles, and prevalence of northern Northwest Coast forms over those of the land on which Vancouver is located, which had less to do with Aboriginal culture than with rendering the Indigenous ‘other’ contained and legible to a settler population, the mural simultaneously commemorates Indigenous community, (from there and elsewhere) and creates a meeting place, that despite its radical inclusion of various aspects of Native life from all directions, and its refusal to sacrifice stories of Native struggle for an aesthetic palatable to the settler gaze, is less about rupture and change, and more a commemorative re-linking with stories and presences that have been there all along.

Though the Through the Eye of Raven mural was commissioned in part by civic bodies such as the City of Vancouver Council, as well as the Vancouver Native

---

136 Mawani, “From colonialism to multiculturalism?”.
137 “Natives were the others, outside of monotheistic civilization and national debates over state and federal sovereignty; despite the manifest of dominance.” Vizenor, Fugitive Poses, 192.
Housing Society, it is a fugitive work. Both in the act of its existence-of (re)presencing urban space with Indigenous narratives, the stories it tells and cultures it represents, constitute a radical act, (one that defies settler colonial erasure), and in its polyphonic subject matter, that registers for different viewers according to one’s relation to the various symbols and imagery. This concept of thinking/acting from the margin with Indigenous art resists the carceral and is ‘thus an overflowing of borders and bordered-thinking, a liminal praxis whose generative effects activate art in a transversal re-presencing of indigeneity throughout Indigenous lands, languages and territories.’

It’s symbolism functions as more than aesthetic, drawing from ancient traditions of meaning and representation that defy a sense of colonial framing and commodification. It draws on multiple themes, most prominently Northwest Coast and Coast Salish symbolism, as well as Plains and Intertribal Indigenous culture which specifically references Downtown Eastside life and place, and historical and present struggles with the ongoing violence of settler colonialism. And unlike other works commissioned by the city intended to promote particular aspects of urban diversity which has become increasingly weaponized against Indigenous communities by appearing to represent them, while at the same time failing to consult with territory holders, hire Native artists (or Native artists from that territory), or effect any meaningful legislative change. This, what has been termed, art washing essentially functions as assimilation in a gentler guise, positioning First Nations as one of many cultures to be absorbed into a reconciled Canadian multicultural mosaic.

Despite its prominent position in the core of a settler city, the mural instead is the fugitive other, evading, circumventing and transcending the interimage closure of the settler narrative.

138 Martineau and Ritskes, "Fugitive indigeneity": V
139 Mawani, "From colonialism to multiculturalism?"
Chapter 4 *Restorying The Storyteller*
Refusing, Re-imagining and Embodying Sovereignty in Public Space
Indigenous art evokes a fugitive aesthetic that, in its decolonial ruptural forms, refuses the struggle for better or more inclusion and recognition (Coulthard, 2007) and, instead, chooses refusal and flight as modes of freedom.¹

The Storyteller" (1986). Striking for its sheer size -- it is over 14 feet wide -- this panorama is set on a grassy patch adjoining a freeway, where a Native American woman, seemingly displaced from her home, sits by a small fire and talks animatedly to a handful of others, all similarly homeless. What does it mean? Eventually, it dawns: Wall is the storyteller here. It is he who has lured us, by his amazing artifice, into his imaginary movie.²


Natives have practiced medicine, composed music, published histories, novels and poetry, won national elections, and travelled around the world before the turn of the century, but their experiences were obscured by the interimage simulations of the Indian, the antithesis of civilization in photographs and motion pictures.³


³ Vizenor, Fugitive Poses, 165.
Figure 4-1. “Re-storying The Storyteller,” event conducted during the Indigenous Acts conference, Georgia Street Viaduct, Vancouver, August 2014. Photograph by author.
Re-storying *The Storyteller*
Refusing, Re-imagining, and Embodying Sovereignty in Public Space

Then my request of people there becomes really interesting too, and almost becomes more powerful because we’re in such a contentious space, our bodies making the choice to be in that circle in a different way, on that land in a different way. Not filling a role but being yourself, it’s a different energy.  

The fourth chapter focuses on an Indigenous restaging of well-known Vancouver artist Jeff Wall’s photographic work *The Storyteller*, as part of the conference *Indigenous Acts*, which was held at the University of British Colombia in Vancouver in 2014. Omaskeko Cree artist Duane Linklater’s idea, to collectively restage the iconic image depicting Indigenous people gathered under an overpass in East Vancouver, was held the last day of the symposium I attended on Indigenous art and public place, which brought together a diverse group of Indigenous artists, scholars and activists working on the subject, who were invited to participate in the event as the final part of the week-long gathering. The conference was held at a particularly significant time for the city which, two months previously, had been formally declared to sit on unceded Aboriginal territory. The declaration marked the final month of the city’s official *Year of Reconciliation* June 2013–June 2014, as part of Canada’s *Truth and Reconciliation Commission Hearings on Indian Residential Schools*.  

Drawing on Mohawk scholar Audra Simpson’s concept of *refusal*, Decolonial scholar Walter Mignolo’s concept of *de-linking* from colonial structures, and Metis

---

4 Peter Morrin. Skype Interview with the author, Winter 2015.
7 “If we [artists, theoreticians, curators, etc.] succeed, it is because we *delinked*, not because we have been recognized and “accepted” in a house we are not interested in inhabiting.” Walter Mignolo quoted in Rubén
artist and writer David Garneau’s work on *Irreconcilable spaces of Indigeneity*, to consider how the restaging can be read through the lens of *visual sovereignty*. The final chapter considers how the re-storying symbolizes through a public art intervention, a significant turn *away from* or *refusal* of the recognition discourse that supposes Indigenous people should “struggle for more and better inclusion” in the colonial state.

And drawing on Vizenor’s, concept of the *fugitive pose*, the chapter further explores the ways that settler colonial conceptual and material removal of Indigenous people from cities, has shaped understandings of urban Indigenous culture and how it is circulated and consumed in the colonial imaginary.

.. I guess I’m always thinking about histories of cities and places in North America. It’s always on my mind when I go to a different place, thinking about those places is a lot of the work that I do. I somehow want to articulate not only my own presence (which is not as important to me), but to indicate or suggest the presence of Indigenous People who were, or are, there for some time. For me that is important.

We had gathered in the stifling midsummer heat on the sidewalk in the shade of the overpass. Chatting in pairs and small groups with whomever we’d driven there with. Some broke off and crossed the street, examining the steep slopes running down from the viaduct at different angles, to find the same spot as the one in the photograph. We decided on the southwest side, from the light and the angle of the pines. We had come together—artists, scholars, activists, students—on the closing day of *Indigenous Acts*, a weeklong Indigenous arts conference held at the

---


9 Martineau and Ritskes, “Fugitive Indigeneity.”

10 Vizenor. “Fugitive Poses.”

11 Duane Linklater (artist). Skype Interview with the author. 2015.

Direct quotes from artists in their own words are shown throughout in italics.

12 www.contemporaryartgallery.ca/2014/08/indigenous-acts-art-and-activism-gathering/
University of British Columbia organised by Stohlo musicologist Dylan Robinson and Carcross, Tagish curator Candace Hopkins. Gathering to share a picnic and document our time together on this unremarkable grassy strip, yellowed and dry from the August heat, beside a concrete flyby in East Vancouver. Our lunch was part of a plan to do an Indigenous restaging of the iconic photographic work *The Storyteller*, by well-known Vancouver-based artist Jeff Wall. The idea was conceived by Duane Linklater, an Omaskêko Ininiwak artist from Moose Cree First Nation in Northern Ontario.\(^\text{13}\) Acclaimed for his subtle, poetic work that covers a range of mediums including photography, sculpture, film and installations, that meditate on Indigenous presences in public memory, urban spaces, landscapes and institutions. His work considers the quiet, hidden histories of places often overlooked, and invites the viewer to think about (and listen) to, the stories that reside there.

Linklater’s idea to do an Indigenous staging of *The Storyteller*, on the last day of the conference, by returning to the same location as that in the original for a picnic on the grass, (and for all the participants to take pictures of each other and the event while doing so) was a means of engaging Wall’s depiction of Indigenous marginalization in the city, and a way into thinking about the ways in which it is represented and circulated in the popular imaginary. Using it as a method to collectively explore the complex relationship between Indigenous People, urban environments, and the politics of representation. In an interview with Linklater via skype, he described the complicated and often fraught aspects of Indigenous representation by non-Indigenous authors and the importance of addressing and treating this as a Native artist.

\(^{13}\text{www.duanelinklater.com (Accessed January 2018).}\)
On the one hand, I’m very tired of being someone else’s content. I’m tired of Indigenous people being content for somebody else. There’s a sense of feeling really fatigued about it in many ways, because it’s so disgusting. But then the appropriating or taking of some of these, results in things that are not, (there are also) important things there. When you have non-Indigenous people directing, there is a door there. A door Indigenous people need to engage. Sometimes that engagement’s been welcomed and sometimes it’s been dismissed.\textsuperscript{14}

The original gives the impression of a museum diorama-at once verite and stiffly mannered, but unlike Natives in dioramas, the subjects wear contemporary clothing and appear in an urban setting. Stranded in a dislocated space between the natural world, to the left of the frame, and the built environment to the right, shown as its near symmetrical opposite. Forlorn, seemingly homeless groups of Aboriginal people huddle on the steep slope beside and under the viaduct. In the foreground, a Woman gestures animatedly around a cold fire pit, while others listen with resigned expressions. In the background higher up, two listless figures lay and sit, looking down at the Woman talking, while a solitary figure to the right of the frame perches under the overpass staring down into the street. It is a familiar portrait of marginalization, literal and figural, of Native people in the city, seemingly disconnected from their environment and each other.

\textsuperscript{14} Duane Linklater (artist), Interview with the author, 2015.
We set out for the picnic from the conference hall at UBC, where rides were organized for all the participants. As I’d taken public transportation, I rode with the Navajo composer Raven Chacon, his partner the curator Candace Hopkins, and the Metis artist and singer Cheryl L'Hirondelle. We shared our thoughts about taking part in the happening on the way. Hopkins and I were acquainted with the original piece both having lived in Vancouver, while Chacon and L'Hirondelle were unfamiliar with the work until the idea had been announced at the conference. For those who have been involved in the arts in Vancouver in any way, Wall and the Vancouver School of photo conceptualist artists epitomize contemporary art in the city, and his work is a staple part of every university/art school curriculum on modernism. Tahltan performance artist and educator Peter Morin, who led a Salmon Honouring Circle as part of the restaging, and who attended Emily Carr School of Art and Design in Vancouver, talked about his connection to the original work, “I mean I’d seen it. If
you go to art school in Vancouver everybody’s going to show you Jeff Wall’s work. I know I’ve seen the image but maybe haven’t really looked at it.”¹⁵

Arguably Vancouver’s most revered and influential contemporary artist, Wall’s work has been exhibited in major art galleries and institutions in cities across the world, from the White Cube in London to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York,¹⁶ and the collections of most important public art institutions would not be complete without one of his pieces. Known for his large-scale Cibachrome aluminium light boxes and what he describes as “near documentary style,”¹⁷ that gives an impression of looking at documentary photography but are deliberately constructed photomontage utilizing elaborate sets and nonprofessional actors. Though his work often appears to be conveying a moment, like a scene from cinema verité, each work is a painstakingly controlled composition that takes several months to create. For Vancouver-based artist and curator Lorna Brown, taking part in the restaging, raised painful memories around being unseen and unheard as an Indigenous Woman attending Wall’s university classes in the 80s. The way the original represented for her the privileging of certain voices to tell the stories of others, coloured her experience of the restaging.

_In seminar contexts, I would witness Women speak up with comments and critiques on readings only to be ignored. When male colleagues would repeat the same comment or critique, he would engage with them in respectful and quite brilliant dialogue. So the Women students organized parallel curricula, reading groups, especially feminist approaches to the social history of art and Frankfurt School theorists Wall favored. These activities were a way of trying to understand both the cognitive dissonance of our male faculty in general, and Wall’s unquestioning and uncurious use of privilege in particular._¹⁸

When we joined the others at the site, the many threads of conversation for those who knew the work, revealed strong feelings of ambiguity toward the original,

---

¹⁵ Peter Morin (artist). Interview with the author. 2015.
¹⁷ Ibid.
¹⁸ Lorna Brown (curator, Morris and Helen Belkin Gallery, UBC.) Email exchange with the author. 2015.
the idea of restaging the piece, and to gathering in that particular place. In conversation with Linklater about *The Storyteller*, we’d agreed we both found it a rich (if problematic) image, not only in what it was depicting, its history and links to that specific location, but who was doing the depicting.

*When non-Indigenous people are directing and controlling the content there are problems. There are problems with that relationship. “The Storyteller” reflects this I think, for me. I wanted to choose and identify that as something I wanted to work with.*

I remembered from a university class that Wall had based the composition on Manet’s *Le Dejeuner sur l’erb* with its figures reclining over a meal on the grass, and that it had been made when much of the Downtown Eastside area around False Creek was undergoing massive gentrification for Expo 86. Linklater described it as an image he was “both drawn to, and critical of,” and that he was intrigued when he heard the acclaimed Anishinaabekwe artist Rebecca Belmore had been one of the actors. When Linklater proposed a re-staging, responses amongst the participants was divided. Many were interested in engaging the piece from a Native perspective, but others had more complicated relationships to the original work. For some, Jeff Wall as a non-Native artist using Indigenous people as content, and his hallowed position in the Vancouver art scene, reminded former art students of past experiences, as Brown described:

*For my part the experience of occupying the Georgia Viaduct space became quite overwhelming. I was fairly embarrassed at how emotional I became the following day. I’ll try and unbundle my profound ambivalence. I routinely dreamed about being trapped in the freight elevator with him-because within that space and time he would be forced to listen to me.*

---

19 Duane Linklater (artist). Interview with the author. 2015.
20 Speaking with conference organizer Dylan Robinson, he said he’d asked Belmore about it after one of her performances, and she was not actually involved in the making of the work.
21 Brown, Lorna. (artist, curator), Email exchange with the author. 2015
Tahltan artist and educator Peter Morin touched on the complexities of a white artist depicting Native people in ways that both troubles and draws on tropes about urban Indigeneity.

*It’s also interesting because that piece is difficult, so Duane’s asking us to be inside of art history in a different way, asking us to enable a different way of being on the land. And he’s also saying the land here is a construction, the city is a construction, so why are we consistently playing out the same content?*

Along with conversations around the many diverse Indigenous backgrounds and reasons for being at the conference, some visiting from diverse places out of province—Europe, Eastern Canada, the Prairies, California, Michigan, some Coast Salish from the area, others from other territories but living in Vancouver, we discussed the work in light of our own sometimes complex relationship to Vancouver as a city.

*The nuances of that connection to Vancouver were addressed in that we were there for just over an hour, for some those relationships were different, people from there, that on reflection, were drawn out by the idea of that place. For me it was a really simple thing, maybe not simple but it seemed a really economic idea or something, like “let’s go have lunch there.” About eating and being together but also a really economical thing to do.*

Linklater’s idea engages these multiple positionalities and vantage points, and set out to blur the line between authorship and ‘content’ in the work, troubling its static tableaux like quality:

---

22 Peter Morin (artist). Interview with the author. 2015.
23 Duane Linklater (artist), interview with the author, 2015.
I was interested in (the photograph) as an entrance into the work, because Jeff Wall is so representative of and connected to Vancouver, and that photo conceptualism, that success he’s had because of Vancouver. There was something about the specific authorship of the photograph. It was for me an open space, to eat and be together for an hour and a half. To have multiple authors and vantage points, the perspectives of these new photos became really important, where we were taking pictures from our own perspective of each other, eating, laughing, really mundane things. For me the very, very, human need to eat and be together, might offer, at least temporarily, to loosen that controlled nature of the Jeff Wall photo. Suggesting to people to use their smart phones and put it on their Instagram, opened up the authorship of the original, so obviously authored by one white man. It went to having multiple authors.

Manifest Manners

I was thinking too, this Jeff Wall piece reminds me of Kriehoff, those guys who painted Indians. How would I be inside those paintings?24

That Indigenous people are represented in relation to founding myths around terra nullius, manifest destiny, and the noble savage, is widely evidenced throughout the history of art in the Americas. Something Vizenor has termed manifest manners, colonial domination through attempts to annihilate Native story:

*The simulation of the other is the absence of the Native; the Indian is an imprintur of a theistic civilization. Native resistance was abstracted as a fugitive pose in national histories; at the same time, the Indian was a cultural concoction of bourgeois nostalgia and social sciences evidence. Cultural pageantry, dioramas and museum presentations pictured the fugitive indian in the archives of dominance.*25

Historian Douglas Cole in his book, *Stolen Heritage: The Scramble for Artifacts on the Northwest Coast*, discusses the politics of collection and display of Native Northwest Coast works over the past century as being fundamentally about “power relations,” which can be read as Eurocentric displays of dominion over colonized people. That the context of Indigenous representation “within an expanding framework of western capitalism, technology and modernism,” was about not only the construction of the colonized other, but a modern/progressive Western identity (op)positioned in relation to it.26

Vizenor expounds on the ways in which images of the Indigenous Other, or in this case *Indian*,27 come into being, and the way they are reproduced, circulated and consumed within coloniality. That the image of the *Indian* by its very existence is

---

25 Vizenor, *Fugitive Poses*, 145.
27 Vizenor differentiates between *Native* and *indian*, with the first connoting the active presence of Indigenous cultures and the latter, the simulated image of the colonial imaginary. “Those natives captured as indians in the ethnographic photographs, the stoical poses of the other, are the cultural fugitives of desire and dominance.” Vizenor, *Fugitive Poses*, 157.
contingent on the erasure of the *Native* in a colonial context so deeply conditioned by systems of dispossession and domination. That Native *transmotion* and right, of what he refers to as *continental liberty*, will always elude containment and can never be accurately reproduced in a western pictorial tradition with its tendency to capture or enclose. Images of the Native can be translated or simulated accordingly but can never be truly conveyed. Vizenor calls these colonial attempts to detail or record “authentic” Indigenous culture *ethnographic interimages*, “the narrative closures of the seen over the heard, the simulation of icons over chance, emblems over totemic names, manners over native tease, and the desire of the scriptural over the performance of oral narratives.”

Linklater’s idea to *re-animate* *The Storyteller* with multiple Indigenous participants (and authors) speaks back to the desire for narrative closure of Vizenor’s *interimage Indian*. And when Peter Morin initiated a Salmon Honouring circle as part of the gathering on the viaduct, passing a Tahltan rattle around the circle and singing a song for the salmon, his response to the Mount Polly Mine spill the day before, he was evoking and embodying a performative tradition that refuses the

---


29 “Closure” is another name for the nescent representation of the other, and in this sense, the extreme closure of the interimage indian in photographs.” Vizenor, *Fugitive Poses*, 158

30 Ibid., 148

31 Salmon remains fundamental to Indigenous life ways-culture, spirituality, and economies in British Columbia, though stocks have dwindled due to environmental mismanagement and overfishing. Salmon ceremonies were held in Coast Salish territories to welcome the first salmon of the season, where songs were sung in celebration and the fish ceremoniously returned to the water so it could share of its “reverential treatment” with its relatives, which was done as a way of paying respect and ensuring their returns. The ceremonies languished with challenges to subsistence fishing and colonial suppression but have undergone a revival. Brotherton, *S’abadeb = The Gifts*, 31

32 Called one of Canada’s biggest environmental disasters, the Mount Polly Mine in the interior of British Columbia, had a breach in their tailing pond, spilling several years worth of mining waste into Mount Polly Lake on August 4, 2014. Overflowing nearby creeks and entering Quesnel Lake, British Columbia’s deepest body of fresh water, devastating the watershed and rendering it too toxic for human consumption. Imperial Metals who operated the mine, “had a history of operating the pond beyond capacity since at least 2011,” and are headed by billionaire N. Murray Edwards, who donated millions to Canada’s Liberal Party including a campaign to reelect BC’s pro mining Premier, Christie Clark. Jesse Allen and Adam Voiland. “Dam breach at Mount Polley mine in British Columbia,” *NASA (Visible Earth)*. 2014-08-15.
fixity and closure of *manifest manners*, and was instead performing his sovereignty of motion:33

*I don’t know if it’s a way of telling a truth, the embodiment. Old time Elders they kind of do that, they’re very present in the moment. When I think about the salmon circle, or salmon honoring circle, I was very in the moment, I felt very strongly in the moment, so when I do my performance work and I’m working with Ayumi and Leah, I’m never giving up that way of being. Like “I’m going to talk to the Indigenous people and they’re going to be standing right beside me. And at the same time, I’ve been thinking about the complications of, the performances were like “can we do (this) at some level talking to Indigenous history and white settler history, can we meet? What are the places we can meet?”34


34 Peter Morin (artist). Interview with the author.
The Implicated Gaze. Positioning Jeff Wall

Wall has lined himself up, as the rightful heir of the tradition of Western culture. (His reference to) Manet becomes an alibi for ‘depicting’ the bodies of others—he never admits that he ‘represents’ anything. The Indians are part of the pastoral, debased through industrialization. Seen but not heard.35

Lorna Brown is an Indigenous artist and curator at the Morris and Helen Belkin Gallery for Contemporary Art in Vancouver; here she interrogates Wall’s authoritative invisibility and seemingly impartial gaze, intervening as an Indigenous Woman in colonial art history and traditions of landscape and pastoral representation that assumes a neutral position, dislocated from embodied experience or political and social context. Locating it within a politics of representation inculcated in Cartesian

philosophy that positions the west as a “universal” centre around which other cultures and world views are peripheralized.\textsuperscript{36}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure4-5.jpg}
\caption{Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe, Eduard Monet, 1863. Musée d’Orsay.}
\end{figure}

In his article \textit{The Structure of Knowledge in Western Universities}, Decolonial scholar Ramon Grosfoguel, engaging the work of Argentinian theologian Enrique Dussel, outlines the basic ontological and epistemological tenets inherent in the Cartesian phrase \textit{I think, therefore I am}. That the concept of the universal is based on first “Ontological dualism,” which asserts a separation between the body and the mind, assuming the mind to be “undetermined, unconditioned by the body,” and therefore capable of producing knowledge equivalent to a “God’s-eye view,” free from any bodily “condition or existence.” And that knowledge is reached in the mind through solipsism or an internal dialogue with the self, rather than something

generated dialogically in relation to others. He further outlines the ways in which Cartesian philosophy came to be considered the main (or “universal”) system by which knowledge continues to be measured, that was spread through systems of western religious and colonial expansion. Providing a historical outline for reasons the subject/object split, and concepts of neutrality and objectivity (an unbiased knowledge unconditioned by its body or space location) remain fundamental foundations of Western science and culture, and are products of historical and cultural shifts that began in the 15th century.

Originating in the conquest of Al-Andalus, and the genocide and (what Grosfoguel terms) “epistemicide” of Muslims and Jews in the first part of the 15th century, the “purity of blood” discourse, adopted by Columbus and spread through the conquest of the new world in 1492, evolved from an argument around religion in the Christendom of the time, to whether people did or did not possess a “soul.” This was then taken up to support racial hierarchies that deemed certain peoples “less than human” and others “Godless,” fuelling the African slave trade and constructions of “Indian” savages without a religion who must be converted to Christianity. Echoing Vizenor’s manifest manners, he points out that the “category of ‘Indian’ constituted a new modern/colonial identity invention that homogenized the heterogeneous identities that existed in the Americas before the arrival of the Europeans.” The early American pictorial tradition emerged in tandem with imperatives of empire, and a cartography of expansion influenced by this Enlightenment philosophy, which “reduced the world to European universality.” And the assumption that anything

37 Ibid., 76.
38 Ibid., 79–80.
39 Epistemicide links cultural genocide with epistemological racism and sexism. “What links the “I conquer, therefore I am” (ego conquiro) with the idolatrict, God-like “I think, therefore I am” (ego cogito) is the epistemic racism/sexism produced from the “I exterminate, therefore I am” (ego extermino).” Ibid., 7.
40 Ibid., 79–82.
outside it could “only be absolutely different to it”\textsuperscript{41} is deeply imbedded in, and informed by, specific political and social processes, that were anything but neutral.

*The Storyteller* is entangled in these histories. Despite Wall’s postmodern twist on the depiction of Indigenous people in the landscape (the positioning in an industrial rather than pastoral setting), the piece can be read as a further iteration of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century Western landscape tradition that conflated Indigenous people with a romanticized nature, portraying them as remnants of a sublime past in the inevitable march toward a settled and civilized modernity.\textsuperscript{42}

The Indigenous subjects are positioned within this colonial pictorial tradition as part of an *a priori* world in which Wall, ironically through the guise of neutrality, implicates himself.\textsuperscript{43} Though in the case of *The Storyteller*, Wall frames the Native subjects, not as a noble “dying race,” or a culture that is in the past, but as out of step and debased by modernity, its irreconcilable other. They are portrayed as inexplicable in the urban landscape, *displaced* from the life of the city.

**Out of Place..?**

*We talked earlier about the special considerations of being urban located and we use a lot of words like temporality and temporary community, and stuff like that. I really want to fully embody the idea that Indigenous People have been traveling for a very long time on the land and meeting in locations.*\textsuperscript{44}


\textsuperscript{42}Gareth E. John “Cultural Nationalism, Westward Expansion and the Production of Imperial Landscape: George Catlin’s Native American West,” *Ecumene* 8, no. 2 (2001): 175–203.

\textsuperscript{43}Examples would be the nineteenth-century pastoral painting group, the Hudson River School, the first native school of painting in the US, known for their vast, awe-inspiring landscapes. Painter George Catlin (1796–1872) was known for his exacting ethnographic portraits of Native Americans, which Vizenor points out, had attached “certificates of authenticity” signed by Indian agents, army officers and other state agents. These “sanctions of indian portraiture” he likens to captivity narratives, which fixed the indian in an ‘authentic’ past and which has continued resonance for what qualifies as genuine Native art. Vizenor, *Fugitive Poses*, 161. See also “Hudson River School: American Art Movement,” in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed November 2018, https://www.britannica.com/art/Hudson-River-school.

\textsuperscript{44}Peter Morin. Interview with the artist. 2013.
Modern Western associations of Indigeneity with the rural, wilderness, and the natural world, is informed by a long colonial history of conceptual and material removal of Native people from city spaces. And in North American cities, this is often associated with concepts of “progress” and European civility, linked to colonial nation-building agendas and manifest destiny. Echoing Neil Smith’s work on the urban frontier in Chapter 3, Vancouver-based geographer Nicholas Blomley notes, “Perhaps in part because of this, settler cities have long been imagined as spaces of civilization, set against a world of savagery. Representing order and good government the colonial town was imagined as an outpost within the wilderness.”

Ongoing illegal dispossession (as in Vancouver, which has never been legally ceded), relocation (forcible or otherwise) to reserves outside of city limits, and the pass system, were all employed to actively control Native right of movement through, around and in urban places that were often either seasonally or permanently inhabited by Indigenous people.

In reference to the Indigenous people of the Lower Mainland area who have been in the same place for millennia, he argues, “dispossession is complete, displacement is not. Physically, symbolically and politically, the city is still a Native place.” In his book *Unsettling the City: The Politics of Property in Vancouver*, Blomley identifies the important distinctions between the terms *displacement* (which is often used to describe Indigenous communities in cities) and *dispossession*; though often conflated, they are fundamentally different. Blomley outlines the

---

45 Blomley, *Unsettling the City*, 119.
46 ‘Yet while Native dispossession is complete, land in British Columbia remains profoundly unsettled.’ Ibid., 107.
48 On the pass system and violence against Indigenous Women see; Razack, “Gendered Racial Violence.”
49 *cəsnaʔəm the City before the City* exhibition. Vancouver Museum, Summer 2018.
distinction between “dispossession and displacement, such that the former refers to the specific processes through which settlers came to acquire land historically held by Native people. Displacement, while related, refers to the conceptual removal of Aboriginal people from the city, and the concomitant ‘emplacement’ of white settlers.”50 In other words, the dispossession of land through various colonial means has occurred, but this is not the same as displacement, which assumes settlers have (re)placed the Indigenous cultures of an area, thus rendering Native cultures obsolete, “out of place,” or outside of the city.

Further critiquing that urban Natives are necessarily displaced from places of origin, Peters and Anderson challenge the distinction between urban space and “traditional” homelands, writing, many scholars still “fail to recognize that most cities are located on sites traditionally used by Indigenous peoples, including settlements equivalent in size and complexity of social organization to that of European cities of the time.”51

Not only have North American cities often been founded on Indigenous villages and significant sites for settlement, meeting and trade between Indigenous nations, but many continue to be inhabited by their traditional territory holders who are very much in place. Archeological evidence locates the Coast Salish Peoples as continuously inhabiting the Lower Mainland area from time immemorial. With Musqueam people, at the mouth of the Fraser River (what is now South Vancouver) for 9,000+ years.52

50 Blomley, Unsettling the City, 109.
51 They also critique the notion that Indigenous identity need be defined by a “homeland.” Noting that it “creates particular challenges for urban Indigenous communities and identities. It also impedes the development of a scholarship that highlights the ways in which urban Indigenous people are reformulating Western institutions and practices to support Indigenous cultures and identities so that Indigenous people can continue to survive as distinct people(s) in contemporary societies.” Peters and Andersen, eds. Indigenous in the City, 4, 8.
52 c̓əsnaʔəm the City before the City exhibition. Vancouver Museum, Summer 2018.
But the normative processes of settler colonialism in cities is rendered all but invisible, and, as Tuck and McKenzie outline in their editorial piece on Indigenous relationships to land in land-based education, urban settlers “do not consider the fact that they live on land that has been stolen, or ceded through broken treaties, or to which Indigenous peoples claim a pre-existing ontological and cosmological relationship. They do not consider themselves to be implicated in the continued settlement and occupation of unceded Indigenous land.”

Indigeneity in colonized places is positioned as a foil to the civilized settled urban and continues to inform ways in which Aboriginal art and culture is understood and constructed in the built environment of cities, both conceptually and physically, from museums, gallery spaces and display settings, to places for housing and social services. Indigenous art and cultural "artifacts" housed in Museums of Natural History, displayed in bucolic and pastoral settings, such as the Totem Poles in Stanley Park, shown in primitive museum dioramas depicting original inhabitants in remote settings, still persists, giving an overwhelming impression that Aboriginal people in cities are both (un)contemporaneous and displaced, rendered ghostly.

Emphasizing Indigenous displacement while downplaying processes of dispossession (dwindling land bases and ensuing poverty that often force migration to cities), ignores histories of Aboriginal people being from, traveling on, and meeting in, what are now city spaces. The idea of the “urban frontier” (economically, politically and symbolically) is reified through systems of municipal colonialism and urban expansion that foreground the one and obscure the other. “Both dispossession and displacement, though fundamental to processes of place making in settler societies, Blomley argues, remain unfinished projects with displacement "open to contestation and remaking.”

54 Dispossession and displacement, though fundamental to processes of place making in settler societies, Blomley argues, remain unfinished projects with displacement "open to contestation and remaking.” Unsettling the City, 109.
and displacement were, and still are, vital to the making of the settler city. Place making and the enactments of claims to land are social and political projects, they are both immensely powerful, but also, to the extent that they are enacted, are partial and incomplete."

**Routes, Roots and Meeting Places**

Linklater’s work responds to the way the majority of images of the urban Indian tend to reiterate colonial delineations between rural and urban and displacement over dispossession, which fails to address the complexities of Indigenous culture, adaptation and mobility on the land.

> Ok, so he’s done this really interesting photo of Indigenous people in the urban landscape but, like you were saying, this is not the only way Native people function in that landscape. For me I’ve always lived in the city, left the city, returned to the city. I lived in the country for the past five years and have recently moved back to the city or town this year. So again, there’s a nuance there the picture does not address. I thought maybe we could address this in a way, what it means for me to be in Vancouver anyway, temporarily, and for other folks who were from there literally, like Cesnam and all of that.\(^5^6\)

Both Linklater and Morin share an interest in engaging conceptions of urban and rural that portray Indigenous culture and cities as mutually incongruous, when as Morin says, the construction is a recent one in places where Native people have been gathering on the land and meeting in places for millennia. And the gathering on that particular space with its multilayered, or as Thrush says “imbricated,” history is significant for a number of reasons.

The overpass is situated in East Van, which was, prior to the founding of Vancouver, “a hub of trade routes between the Coastal and Interior nations,” as well as a place for meeting and trade between the x̱̓̓̓̓w̱məθkəy̓əm (Musqueam),

\(^5^5\) Blomley, *Unsettling the City*, 143, 109.

\(^5^6\) Linklater (artist). Interview with the author. 2015.
Sḵwx̱wú7mesh (Squamish), and Səl̓ílwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh), all of whom have overlapping claims to the territory and who negotiated its use amongst themselves.57

All these fulcrums, all these points, of intersections and layers of history all meeting in that little space. I said to Dylan afterwards, “that was the perfect place to do that”. It wouldn’t have been, in a nice ideal longhouse setting. It would have been something completely different.58

This history of the area attests to it always having been a meeting place. And though it made for a particularly fertile ground for the cosmopolitan nature of East Vancouver, the stories of Indigenous and racialized immigrant presences in the city have often been obscured. The historical near erasure of two prominent Coast Salish villages in what is now the Downtown Eastside, K’emk’emlay’ (Q’umq’umal’ay) which sat where Dunlevy Street meets Burrard Inlet and where Hastings Mill was located, and Luq’luq’I (Lek’lek’I), the site where the tourist area Gastown now sits, and where its namesake set up his first Saloon,59 along with much of the history of the Japanese (along Powell Street, a neighborhood known as Japan town), and Chinese (around East Pender and Keefer Streets) communities. This part of East Vancouver and the Downtown Eastside, places and populations particularly vulnerable to material and cultural displacement in the guise of development, were subject to racism and segregation which have been eclipsed by more palatable narratives of early pioneers who founded the city. The history of the Japanese community around Powell Street and their relocation to internment camps in the interior of the province

58 Peter Morin (artist). Interview with the author. 2015.
as “enemy aliens” with the declaration of war with Japan in 1941 remained a little-known part of Vancouver history until recent years.\(^\text{60}\)

The piece of steep, grassy land bordering the viaduct that channels traffic from Georgia Street and Vancouver’s downtown core, past the BC Place sport stadium to East Main Street, is a part of this fraught and deeply contested history, where race and class intersect with urban revitalization, as an area historically occupied by working class immigrants making the communities there particularly vulnerable to processes of displacement.

The place is a particularly significant setting for *The Storyteller*, considering the forces that have shaped the area since the city’s beginnings. Made in 1986, the year of Vancouver’s Expo 86 World’s Fair when gentrification of Vancouver’s False Creek and Downtown Eastside areas was gaining momentum in preparation for tourists expected for the Expo, with many long-time low-income residents of the area turned out of residential hotels and displaced to outlaying parts of the city.\(^\text{61}\)

Where one of the largest Chinatowns in North America (consistently resisting waves of gentrification)\(^\text{62}\) converges with East Van and the Downtown Eastside. Once known as Hogan’s Alley, the city’s only sizeable Black neighbourhood, which was largely razed in the early 1970s as the first part of an urban renewal project which proposed an interurban freeway in the area in an attempt to revitalize the downtown core.\(^\text{63}\) Though local resident and business associations joined together to

\(^{60}\) The Japanese presence can still be felt in the neighbourhood with Asian architectural features at the top of some of the buildings, a busy Japanese Language school, and the Powell Street Festival, which is held every year in Oppenheimer Park to celebrate Japanese culture and the Japanese Canadian community who lived there.


halt its construction (the Sun Yat Sen Classical Gardens in Chinatown came out of this protest), many living in the nearby Hogan’s Alley neighbourhood were pushed to other parts of the city and much of the Black community was displaced. Though recent efforts by groups like the Hogan’s Alley Society, who do a number of community based events-talks, tours and performances, are raising awareness around the effects of urban renewal on racialized communities. As well as educating on Black history, community and cultural life in Vancouver.

In conversation about the importance of the intervention in that particular area, Peter Morin recounted the impact of urban renewal and activism that shaped the neighbourhood’s history:

*It felt really important to be there on that side of the highway. I don’t know if you know, but the original road planned for that place which became the viaduct, was put into place after the Sun Yat Sen Garden was built. The original road there was meant to go through the DTES, they were going to put a highway there through Chinatown. It’s a contentious area. At Emily Carr (art college) they had a man who designed the gardens talk about the history of its making, and part of the design was also political protest, they put millions of pounds of concrete under the garden so it could never be destroyed, and they could never put in the freeway. So, there’s that piece and the African Canadian community was right across the street from the viaduct as well.*

### Relational Epistemologies

Going North from the viaduct along Main Street to the harbour, it borders with a part of the Downtown Eastside that was known as the Hastings Mill area, located on the waterfront. Where the pre contact Coast Salish village of K’emk’emley’ was located, which, along with other lumber mills along the water, were worked by large numbers of Native men. Though predominantly Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh, who founded

---

67 Peter Morin. Skype interview with the author. November 2015.
the first labour union on the Vancouver waterfront in 1907, the waterfront workforce, which had shifted toward longshoring, included Musqueam, some Aboriginal people from other parts of the province, as well as Indigenous Hawai‘in workers called Kanakas. Increasing interactions amongst local groups and intermarriage between non-Native men and Native Women of the area, formed new networks and alliances in adjusting to increasing dispossession and wage economies. The resulting of the early settlements of Kanaka Ranch, on the Southern shore of Coal Harbour and the village of Xwáýxway (anglicized to Whoi Whoi), in what is now Stanley Park, are examples of the mobility and complexity of Native-identified groups within city boundaries.

Figure 4-6. Hastings Sawmill from Powell Street and Jackson Avenue, ca. 1890. (City of Vancouver Archives, Mi P29).

---

69 Barman, Stanley Park’s Secret.
70 The village near what is now Lumberman’s Arch was razed in the 1920s for the proposed replica “Kwagwelth” Indian Village and eventually the northern totem poles.
71 Barman “Erasing indigenous,” 9, 17.
Indigenous relationships to land in the city are further complicated by understandings of boundaries as borders that delineate one area from the other, these western notions of property are directly informed by Cartesian philosophy as Grosfoguel outlines, and, as scholar of Coast Salish culture Brian Thom argues, not universal but “linguistically and culturally constructed.”

Maps are subjective, stories about how cultures dwell in and move through places, which can function in numerous ways. The Coast Salish relationship to land is one based on a totality of connections conditioned by “interlocking kin ties, where knowledge, use, control and even ownership of land is based on complex relationships with ancestors and spirits,” and with negotiation and reciprocity with other Salish groups as was the case with what is now East Vancouver. Thom refers to this relational epistemology, a way of knowing the world through relationships. “Traditional ethnographic mapping of territories largely fails to account for the moral ethic of sharing of resources that is a central feature of Coast Salish economic life. In kin-ordered societies like the Coast Salish, these kin-group associations and moral ethics are essential to understanding how boundaries are understood within indigenous territories.”

Related to Vizenor’s concept of relational sovereignty, where the concept of nationhood is other than colonial iterations of settled bordered property, and is instead, a cosmopolitan and deeply relational endeavour, contingent on negotiation, reciprocity and movement. As Bauerkemper writes on Vizenor’s contribution to the drafting of his tribe’s White Earth Constitution in Minnesota, “It is instead an acknowledgement that sovereignty is always relational, that it is necessarily and unavoidably rooted in culture, and that it is most operative at the interfaces where

72 “the seeming paradox in the notion of representing cartographic boundaries for an indigenous community whose core social relationships are embedded in a moral ethos of borderless kin networks.” Thom, “The Paradox of Boundaries,” 179.
recognition and reciprocity reside.” This approach maintains that Native people have continuously exercised their sovereignty in this way, through kinship networks, trade, and other natural rights of movement throughout North America.

The original photographic image on which the re-staging was based belongs to the MMK Museum für Moderne Kunst in Frankfurt Germany and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. The Met, in their description of the piece, refer to the subjects in The Storyteller as “Various groupings of modern urban castaways, (ironically descendants of the Native Americans who occupied the land before Europeans came).” But in the case of Vancouver, where Indigenous presences still “occupy” what has technically become an occupied land, Linklater’s idea was not to offer any fixed response to what has been described, as one of Wall’s most “iconic” pieces, but more in the spirit of transmotion, as something fluid and shifting, to enter into dialogue with the image, re/animating it from a multiplicity of Indigenous perspectives.

---

77 I presented a conference paper on the restaging that was partly written in response to this description, and what it means to be positioned as “descendant of” a supposed Indigenous past, when Native people still occupy what has become an occupied land.
78 The Tate Gallery writes, “In this, one of his most iconic works, Wall poses a group of people in a place that is normally overlooked. The composition evokes Manet’s Déjeuner sur l’herbe 1863, in which Manet depicts a group of Parisians picnicking in a leafy glade, an image that, with its portrayal of a naked woman sitting with two fully clothed men in modern dress, was at the time deeply shocking. Like Manet, Wall takes on the role of the observer of modern life with a radical reinterpretation of the classical pastoral scene.” http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/jeff-wall/room-guide/jeff-wall-room-4.
Linklater discussed making art as an Indigenous artist in a western art world, and the tendency for critics and audiences to attempt to place the work in a fixed category as polemic or overtly didactical when it can be, sometimes, and not at all or both. Vizenor would refer to Linklater’s work as a practice rooted in the everyday *survivance of transmotion* that naturally resists the containment of fixed readings that position Indigenous artwork in opposition to the idea of the western modern, through the “manifest manners of colonial domination.” Linklater’s work is uncanny

---

79 “Transmotion is the freedom to move across physical and conceptual boundaries; between what, in Interior Landscapes, Vizenor calls ‘communal tribal cultures and those material and urban pretensions that counter conservative traditions.’” Madsen. “The Sovereignty of Transmotion,” 23.

80 Vizenor. *Manifest Manners.*
and unsettling, troubling the edges of circumscribed understandings of what Indigenous art can or should be.

People have difficulty in terms of placing or naming (my work) or trying to figure out how it functions. In a way that’s good, because it’s telling me that the work, that art work, reflects the/my, complex relationship to the photograph, and to Jeff Wall and to Vancouver. Because it’s a multiple thing, it’s not one thing brought on by the photo. It became so much more than just the photograph, it became about the experience rather than the photo itself. It’s difficult for people to think about or critique or figure out what it was that we were doing because I wasn’t even sure—an homage, a critique, it could be all these things at the same time.\(^8^1\)

The Settler Colonial Uncanny

Linklater’s work is concerned with how we emplace places, how we presence absence, how we commemorate, and how we remember. The rusting frame of his family jeep on plinths in a gallery garden, Decommission from 2013, features the massive sculpture Grand Jeep Cherokee, which plays on the problematic appropriation of Indigenous names for commodity branding\(^8^2\) by using a family vehicle that transported thousands of kilometres, referencing the ephemeral nature of passage and trace, and the overwriting of certain presences with others. As Tanya Lukin Linklater writes in her curatorial essay on the work; the vehicle undergoes a transformation “from the utilitarian to the non useful; the quotidian to the non everyday.”\(^8^3\)

It is the mixing of these elements, the familiar with the sublime, the commonplace with the ghostly, that gives the work an unsettling and uncanny quality. In their essay A Postcolonial Ghost Story, Gelder and Jacobs use the term uncanny, taken from Freud’s heimlich, translating it as homely or familiar, and un-Heimlich as

---

\(^{8^1}\) Duane Linklater (artist). Interview with the author. 2015.

\(^{8^2}\) Cheyenne Turions and Tanya Lukin-Linklater. Duane Linklater: Decommission, Barrie, ON: MacLaran Art Centre, 2013. Published in conjunction with an exhibition of the same title, organized by and presented at the MacLaran Art Centre, December 5, 2013–March 9, 2014.

\(^{8^3}\) Ibid.
unhomely or home like,\textsuperscript{84} as a term to describe the uneasy tension between western modernity and its Indigenous others. Applying it to the settler colonial context where Indigenous claims to land, in cities (understood to epitomize western progress-order over chaos, civilization over nature), cause a rupture in the modernist narrative. In his book on gentrification and property politics in Vancouver, geographer Nick Blomley examines the role of the urban centre and private property in the settler modernist project; "settler cities have also long been imagined as spaces of civilization, set against a world of savagery. Representing order and good government, the colonial town was imagined as an outpost within the wilderness. The town was seen as a center that would radiate “knowledge, enterprise and civilization.”\textsuperscript{85} Gelder and Jacobs argue the uncanny results when one experiences one’s home as (un)familiar, “of being in and “out of place simultaneously.” Arguing this occurs “precisely at the moment when one is made aware one has unfinished business with the past, at the moment when the past returns as an ‘elemental’ force to haunt the present day.”\textsuperscript{86} Linklater’s work evokes this sense, the anxiety of something unfinished, half remembered, of hauntedness. Indigenous people in cities, as Jacobs and Gelder write, are uncanny, obvious markers of difference and testament to the incompleteness of colonial modernity.\textsuperscript{87}

His work \textit{Beothuk Building} quietly insists that one consider what is included, and more importantly what is left out of, official descriptions of places. His numerous attempts to edit a Wikipedia entry about Cape Spear, repeatedly taken down as vandalism,\textsuperscript{88} muses not only on the point as geographic location, but as a place, whose territory would have been held by the Beothuk People of what is now

\textsuperscript{84} Gelder and Jacobs, “The postcolonial ghost story,” 180.
\textsuperscript{85} Blomley Nicholas, Unsettling the City, 119.
\textsuperscript{86} Gelder and Jacobs, “The postcolonial ghost story,” 180.
\textsuperscript{87} Gelder and Jacobs. Uncanny Australia, 112.
\textsuperscript{88} See “Persistent article vandalism” in https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk%3ACape_Spear.
Newfoundland and Labrador, who are widely believed to have dwindled to extinction after contact.\textsuperscript{89} Attempting to record his own presence there, from their perspective, looking out to sea, perhaps seeing the first ships of new comers approaching, he touches on broader questions of what counts as relevant knowledge, history, memory, and the processes by which they come into being.

This tension between modernity, and its assumption of control—the grid, the straight line, the frontier, the built environment, and the cars, trains and other modes of transport that traverse these from point to point, with the unruly, the overflowing, the sacred, the unnamed and unclassifiable (similar to Balloy’s concept of \textit{revenant} Indigeneity\textsuperscript{90}), that reside in the moments of slippage between memory and forgetting, presence Linklater’s work in various ways. The unfinished project of Western modernity and its effects are embodied in works like the rusting \textit{Grand Jeep Cherokee}, similarly the uncanny reveals itself in works like \textit{A Modest Livelihood}, a luminous 50-minute silent film, made in collaboration with Dene artist Brian Jungen, which follows the two hunting in Northern BC in Autumn with an Elder from Jungen’s territory. The references to Scandinavian cinema, the Bergmanesque light and slow deliberate pace, visual references/clues: hunting rifles, propane tanks, tents, Taiga brand outdoor wear that feel familiar to the viewer, but that invoke a sense of disquiet and dislocation when combined with no human made structures as reference, walking with an Elder through a wild unnamed landscape and the silence, one has the impression that one is being invited to watch and experience something immersive (seeing the film at the Edinburgh Arts Centre, the screen took up an entire wall in a completely dark room that one had to pass through a curtain to access).

\textsuperscript{89} The use of the term \textit{extinction} in this context is problematic, in that it discounts Indigenous resistance by assuming processes of settler colonialism (predicated on Indigenous disappearance) to be fixed and inevitable. Donald H. Holly, Jr. “The Beothuk on the Eve of Their Extinction.” \textit{Arctic Anthropology} 37, no. 1 (2000): 79–95.

and at the same time asked to wait outside it somehow. That all is not being revealed to the viewer, that there is more there than what can be grasped, and regardless of how many times it is viewed, it will never be fully knowable.

Linklater discussed the political and artistic reasoning behind the choice to make the work a silent film:

“We were interested in that idea and some documentary conventions, but at the same time, because of certain tropes of specifically Indian men on camera, that we had to contend with, there has to be a kind of strategy to negotiate those tropes, and taking the sound out was a very careful and thoughtful choice. A big part of that position for us was that the film was done on our own terms.”

In this sense, the silence can be read as a form of resistance to and refusal of, the colonial gaze. In conversation with Linklater about the collaborative film work with Brian Jungen, A Modest Livelihood, where the entire fifty-minute piece is without sound, he agreed with my impression of the silence as a deliberate intervention into the colonial documentary style.

“We wanted to use silence as a certain kind of position, a certain measure of sovereignty. Thinking of previous art works done by Indigenous artists, and silence is a kind of unusual position to take, when it’s been used so violently against us. Thinking about that, it became quite unusual and unnerving and unexpected that we took that position. For us, it had to do with what you’re saying, about the gaze and in particular documentary filmmaking, about who the document is for; “I give you information clearly, concisely and objectively.”

Refusal and Irreconcilable Spaces of Indigeneity

If we think about the photo and using this kind of industrial space, the support for the overpass, (as) a stage. Thinking about that being what a photograph is too. It’s interesting because it begins to sort of unpack how it’s a staged photograph. It is a staged setting. A highly controlled environment. For me that’s kind of a problem, especially when Indigenous people are the content. (It’s) a way to address that, the idea of the stage and the control. Also the anthropological display or documentary “impartial” photo, museum display etc.

---

91 Duane Linklater (artist). interview with the author. 2015. 92 Ibid.
and how this shapes understandings about the Indigenous other.\textsuperscript{93}

Audra Simpson’s concept of ethnographic refusal, is useful here, coined in partial response to the discourse of recognition in Canada, where Indigenous people refuse the politics of inclusion in the social and legal jurisdiction of the Canadian nation state under the guise of multiculturalism. Recognition presented as a means of redressing and righting the wrongs of colonialism, is something Simpson (and many others) critiques, and the tacit assumption underpinning the concept, that supposes Indigenous legal and cultural systems ultimately need to be made commensurate with and legible to, western ways of being and knowing. Though her concept of refusal specifically critiques the foundation on which early forms of anthropology which: “had a serious material and ideational context it accorded with the imperatives of Empire”\textsuperscript{94} were premised, and recognition as a kind of present-day extension of its project presented as emancipatory discourse, it also resonates with Linklater’s work as a contemporary Native artist, and offers radical possibilities for Indigenous narrative in colonized places. As Paul Carter in a talk on Placemaking and Storytelling at the Edinburgh International Cultural Summit said, “public spaces in colonized countries often means for Indigenous people, the spaces (and stories) of the colonizer.”\textsuperscript{95} To hold certain elements back and refuse to give them to the viewer, is a deliberate act of resistance which belies the colonial assumption that all culture is know-able.

Referring to those elements of the untranslatable and culturally incommensurate in Indigenous culture, Metis scholar and artist David Garneau’s

\textsuperscript{93} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{94} Simpson discusses intervening in anthropological discourse that proposes to speak for and about, as acts of sovereignty. “Within Indigenous contexts when the people we speak of speak for themselves, their sovereignty interrupts anthropological portraits of timelessness, procedure and function that dominate representations of their past, and sometimes, their present.” “On Ethnographic Refusal,” 97.
term *irreconcilable spaces of Aboriginality,*

refusal and responds to the *Reconciliation* discourse arising from the Canadian *Truth and Reconciliation Commission on Indian Residential Schools,* which he argues disingenuously assumes a once-harmonious relationship in need of repair. The term critiques the (TRC) discourse, which gives a non-Indigenous public, a sense that the relationship between Indigenous and settler in Canada can be simply resolved and moved *on from,* without the difficult work of critically engaging the ongoing *structural* nature of settler colonial dispossession on which the country was founded.

As Simpson writes on the problematic desire of anthropology for discernibility,

“We must account for this reasoning in relation to settlement, an ongoing structure of dispossession that targets Indigenous peoples for elimination. (As) a structure that shapes discernibility and the desire for discernibility.”

*Irreconcilable Spaces of Indigeneity* describes the private, sacred spaces—intellectually, spiritually, and materially—at the heart of Indigenous life that cannot be explained, known, made legible to, or brought into line with Western worldviews. Things which he writes are “designated as being beyond trade” countering directly colonial capitalist models of ownership and consequent exploitation that sees everything as commodity. This he describes as a process of resistance for Indigenous people in “the perpetual, active refusal of complete engagement: to speak with one’s own, in one’s own way; to refuse translation and full explanations; to create trade goods that imitate core

---

96 Garneau, “Imaginary Spaces,” 33.
98 This discussion comes from a paper Garneau presented on the topic for the *Indigenous Acts: Art and Public Space* conference panel; “All Our (Public) Relations”, where participants were asked to think about the concept of *irreconcilable spaces of Indigeneity* in the public sphere, and the ways in which it is negotiated through various public art forms in a settler colonial context.
culture without violating it.”100 And that these elements of refusal, fundamental to Indigenous concepts of sovereignty101 and survivance, can be read in various types of Indigenous art from performance to painting, from the time of first contact with European cultures. His term Sovereign display territory102 draws on these elements but considers them within contexts in which the art is intended to engage a broader audience. At the same time, it is performed, narrated, representing; it keeps elements from the viewer and works to subvert audience expectations by withholding or changing certain aspects. By refusing, overtly or surreptitiously, to give a non-Indigenous audience the “whole picture,” the terms of the performance or representation are shifted between viewer and viewed, and a particular agency or sovereignty is exercised.

The concept of visual sovereignty, perhaps most prominently taken up by Seneca scholar Michelle Raheja, offers rich possibilities into rereading the often-narrow range of artistic expression afforded Native people in western film traditions, locating the places of survivance embedded in the texts, by suggesting ways for reading; “the space between resistance and compliance.” On the term within the context of Indigenous culture, Raheja states; “While legal and social science discourses have used the term to describe a peculiar, problematic, and particular relationship between the Anglophone colonies/United States/Canada and indigenous nations of North America, I would like to suggest a discussion of visual sovereignty as a way of reimagining Native-centered articulations of self-representation and

100 Here Garneau references ‘screen objects’ that imitate important objects in Native cultures but are created to be decorative pieces that mimic the originals and are intended for non-Native people. This allows the original cultural belongings to retain their sacred meaning and essential qualities within and for Indigenous communities. Giving an example of Haida argillite ‘pipes’ not intended for use as the stem and the bowl do not connect, meant as aesthetic copies that only resemble sacred pieces. Ibid., 32.
autonomy that engage the powerful ideologies of mass media, but that do not rely solely on the texts and contexts of West.” These strategies, expressing various forms of transmotion; withholding particular elements, culturally specific references, private jokes, inverting the gaze, or directly addressing the camera, from early ethnographic works such as Robert Flaherty’s Nanook of the North, to Hollywood westerns, exercise various forms of resistance to dominant western readings. Subverting from within, the circumscribed boundaries of conventional colonial narratives. She argues for the radical potential for Visual sovereignty as a technique, to engage and in many ways, reclaim, the Indigenous stories, values and signifiers embedded in western visual media, as important sites of resistance.

"The visual, particularly film, video, and new media is a germinal and exciting site for exploring how sovereignty is a creative act of self-representation that has the potential to both undermine stereotypes of indigenous peoples and to strengthen what Robert Warrior has called the “intellectual health” of communities in the wake of genocide and colonialism." "

As Blomley outlines, Indigenous peoples in the city have made their places there in creative ways that have been both aided and constrained by urbanity. Arguing, like Simpson, that settler colonialism is an inherently unfinished project, and remains a process of regulation and resistance between colonizer and colonized, with Native people resisting dispossession and containment through various actions, including petitions and delegations, direct protests and land-based education projects that include Indigenizing walking tours, reclaiming gathering and ceremonial sites, and other decolonial actions. Gathering beside the viaduct for the Restaging was a conscious continuing of this tradition of resistance to colonial assumptions of

---

103 Raheja, “Nanook’s Smile,” 1161, 1163.
104 “Native stories create a sense of presence, a tease of memories, a resistance to pictures of victimry. These elements of resistance, Vizenor describes as superseding the narrative closure of the ‘interimage indian’”. Fugitive Poses, 154.
105 Raheja, Ibid., 1159.
106 Blomley, Unsettling the City, 107.
Indigenous disappearance, and as Peter Morin describes, a kind of reclamation as well.

_The creation of the piece felt kind of weird, like this double thing going on, like we were content, but it also felt like we were on display. Poor indians sitting on the side of the hill in the middle of the city. I thought that was interesting too, a weird sort of friction, so when I asked everyone to stand in a circle with me there was that history or experience, that was part of it too._\(^{107}\)

African American scholar and poet Fred Moten terms _the act of refusal:_ a refusal to participate, to perform for the other, to meet expectations, or to fulfil constructions or stereotypes. \(^{108}\) Thereby creating a kind of freedom, a liminal space, a generative place that can never be ceded.

As Indigenous people in this process of art making, involved in a creative action, something was being shared, we were in public and something was also being held back, directed inward, toward each other. An intervention into the colonial assumption the _other_ is ever fully knowable, any coherent reading of the act would have been impossible to the outside onlooker. In the deliberate act of engaging in a collective art work, holding ceremony, in this peripheral place, for each other, without permission from the state, we were manifesting our sovereignty through refusal.

The uncanny setting, both highly public and inexplicable, transcends a colonial framing, and interrupts the static Indian of _manifest manners._ While disrupting the impression of the “God’s-eye view,” by collectively reclaiming authorship. Unlike the original image, the viewer _is_ implicated.

When we linked hands and turned towards each other with our backs to the roar of the traffic and the curious, bewildered and sometimes hostile looks, comments, shouts of the passersby, the police car driving back and forth, holding the

---

\(^{107}\) Peter Morin (artist). Interview with the author. 2015.

\(^{108}\) Moten, “Blackness and Nonperformance.”
rattle, praying, sharing and singing songs, we created an uncedable and sovereign space.
Reflections

When we do important work in our longhouses — such as naming our children, honoring the coming-of-age of our youth, conducting marriages, or confirming important relations between First Nations — we require individuals to act as witnesses to our work. It is through witnessing that our work is validated and provided legitimacy. The work could not take place without honored and respected guests to witness it — they are asked to store and care for the history they witness, and most importantly, to share it with their own people when they return home.¹

Being called to witness then in Coast Salish culture is an act of great importance, and with this project it has been my responsibility to do so. My son and I were honoured to be invited to witness a Musqueam xwá̓y̓x̱w̓ay ceremony to commemorate the naming of two children from the community in Vancouver in August of 2017. The event is highly private in nature and the taking of video or photographs is strictly forbidden. I can recount that honoured guests are welcomed to a private ceremony by the host family where they are expected to attend to the important work of being called to witness the proceedings. This involves feasting, speeches, songs and dancing, all centred on the power of Native oratory and performance, intended to affirm a family’s relationships to community, and their connections to land and place. The given name of the person is repeated three times, each time linking the name to the land, this person, from this family in this place.

In many ways engaging the art works in this project was about doing this, witnessing the ways each work expresses people’s relationships, to the works, to their cultures and relations and to the land beneath their feet.

Choosing not to work from (a) discipline, but to draw on multiple, was a deliberate choice that only felt possible from Cultural studies. This project looks at the radical shifts in public understanding and discourse around Indigenous contemporary art in Vancouver since the 1990s and the political and social context

for that shift. It is intended as a witnessing of this moment in Vancouver from the 1990s to the present, not as a defining document, but more an engagement with what Stewart Hall would call, the present conjuncture.

**Feeling Citizennships**

Audra Simpson refers to *Feeling citizenships* as being ‘structured in the present space of intra-community recognition, affection and care, outside of the logics of colonial and imperial rule’\(^2\) The first time I met the Elders at the Woman’s Centre in the 2018, I was about to introduce myself (the basic Indigenous protocol of who I am, where I am from and how I come to be in that territory), when someone asked me first, “are you First Nations?” I welcomed the question, as it allowed me to share my story with them as I so often pass for white and worked to reassure them that their group was not being “watched” or intruded on by a non-Indigenous person. In this way, I was held accountable to them, and my intention of approaching them with humbleness and the intention of earning, not expecting, their trust, was integral to that process. The Women’s Centre is situated in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside neighbourhood, providing a number of services including hot meals, showers, clothing and housing advocacy to a large number of inner-city Women, many living with chronic mental and physical health issues, disability and poverty. As the course of the summer progressed, I worked very hard to carve out a space for the Elders group, to listen to them, to take direction from them, to consider them, and to bear witness to the incredible amount of unacknowledged labor and care they put into the DTES community every day. Through this initial exchange, and the consequent work of making and attending to respectful relations, I felt a particular *feeling citizenship* with the Indigenous community there.

---

\(^2\) Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus*, 76; see also Simpson “On Ethnographic Refusal.”
These kinds of sovereignty of motion and *feeling citizenships* were expressed throughout, threading through the art works as well and the methodologies. Maintaining and attending to community and extended kith and kinship networks,⁴ are manifestations of the kind of cosmopolitanism as contingent and relational, that Vizenor’s work expresses. My methodologies extended to: reaching out to an interlocutor’s partner about her own art practice; connecting with Sec wep emc artist from my Granny’s territory, Tania Willard, who curated Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun’s show in 2016 at the Museum of Anthropology and discovering we shared a similar experience of witnessing his show at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1996; Running into TahlTan artist Peter Morin several times last Summer in Vancouver; spending time at the Uffizi in Florence with Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun, or accepting an invitation to Mi’kmaq artist Jordan Bennet’s opening at the Canadian pavilion for the Venice Biennale. All of these, in their own way, deeply reflect the spirit of *transmotion* that Indigenous people embody and which shapes our experiences of the world.

---

⁴ Kim Tall Bear refers to “situated knowledges” (Harroway) and her own scholarly process which includes blogging and social media as methodology, and way of being in relation and in good relation with our human and non-human relations and/or place. Kim Tall Bear. “Decolonizing Sex,” *All My Relations* podcast.
Decolonization

This project is concerned with Decolonization and the possibility for urban Indigenous art in settler colonial societies to counter narratives of Native disappearance and express *survivance* and enduring relationships to land, and as such, was never intended as an impartial study. The field of Decolonization is a growing trend in academia, but if it is not grounded in *relation* to communities, it’s an empty exercise. In their podcast *Constellations of Co-resistance*, Daigle and Ramírez discuss this in relation to Leanne Betasamosake Simpson’s work on *radical Indigenous resistance*. They argue against interpreting her writing in a proscriptive way, and instead, for Indigenous scholars in particular, to think of how this might be situated within the context of ones own Nation or community knowledge. Urging “if
something resonates, for people to go do that work of relationship building within their own communities.”

I organized an outing for the Indigenous Elders Group when I was working at the Woman’s Centre in summer of 2018, to attend a show called *Haida Now* at the Museum of Vancouver. An extensive exhibition organised around the museum’s collections of Haida cultural belongings curated by the Haida artist and curator Kwii awah Jones. My job as a Cultural Programmer there included organizing outings, talks, workshops and trainings for the centre users, working closely with their Elders Group, many of whom have been there since it started in the late 1970s. They are a diverse group of Indigenous Women from throughout the Northwest Coast-Salish, Nu’Cha’Nulth, Haida, Gitskan, Kwakwaka’wakw, Heiltsuk and Nuxalk to name a few, in addition to Cree, Anishnaabe and others from out of province territories. Despite their marginalization, they hold an incredible wealth of cultural knowledge and experience, and it felt important to use my position at the centre to connect them and other Indigenous Women there, with the major museums, galleries and cultural spaces in Vancouver that exhibit Native art. These included the Museum of Anthropology, the Vancouver Art Gallery, the Museum of Vancouver and the Bill Reid Gallery among others, contacting them to ask that we get invitations to their shows and any related events, as in many cases the exhibitions showcase the patrimony of many of the Women’s territories.

The first thing we saw on arriving at the museum was a large-scale map of the Native Nations of British Columbia. The Women excitedly started pointing out where they were from up and down the coast. A Coast Salish Woman talked about traveling

---

to other villages on Vancouver Island, a Giskan Woman in the group pointed out her territory and spoke about the responsibility being a twin carries in her community. The Haida Woman looked proudly at all the pieces and the accompanying photos, recalling what they were used for and what family they belonged to. A Cree Woman said she’d had no idea there were so many Native Nations and cultures on the coast.

The larger movements of Decolonization depend on grassroots community work, and so my project is co-related, dependant on, and I hope some contribution to, the extraordinary work done every day by Indigenous artists, Trans & Two Spirit people, activists, scholars and Elders in East Vancouver and throughout unceded Coast Salish territories.

Native Transmotion

The themes of transmotion, survivance and fugitivity, that act as a poetic framework for the first three chapters, draw in particular from the books Fugitive Poses, Native American Indian Scenes of Absence and Presence, and Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance. The word survivance was striking to me, as I’d heard it used in Indigenous art and studies circles, and I was interested in contextualizing it within Vizenor’s writing as a potentially useful concept in my own project. I first read Fugitive Poses in 2013, in the first initial stages of field work, and though I found it insightful, and intellectually dense, it didn’t resonate on the page in the same way it did when it was used by and about Indigenous art and artists. As the project progressed, reading and re-reading the books and articles, including the Transmotion journal (based on Vizenor concept, including Joseph Bauerkemper’s piece on transmotion, cosmopolitanism and Vizenor’s involvement in drafting of the White Earth constitution in his home community in Minnesota, where the capacious concept is applied at its most practical and applicable), it began to take shape.
The three concepts cannot be comprehended on their own as discreet and separate from one another, but must necessarily be seen in relation, each to the next, to be understood and applied. Vizenor's articulation of Indigenous survivance in the context of a carceral colonality that seeks to contain Native cultures and lifeways, cannot exist without being animated by transmotion, nor can the space of fugitivity as site of resistance, flight and possibility. As Ritskes and Martineau write, “The terrain of the everyday maps our experiences of contemporary colonialism and it is within these localized sites of creative engagement that we trace evolving articulations of Indigenous resurgence that break the vow of silence and invisibility demanded of Indigenous Peoples by settler society.”

Thus it was in the writing up stages of my project, thinking the concepts through, alongside my recorded conversations, kitchen table and studio visits, walks around and through East Vancouver and Stanley Park, frequenting the spaces and places where the art works were or had taken place, that they began to animate the project and the art works it engages. Rather than constraints or analytic device I could use to examine them, it became about the art works narrating in different ways, the kind of sovereignty of motion that Vizenor quietly and powerfully articulates. Transmotion is naturally embodied in all the works engaged, enlivening them, along with the makers, the land, the histories and the presences I was writing about. And that it was necessary to consider them first for the concept to come alive and make sense.

Resistance to closure threads throughout Vizenor's work and philosophy, something he argues denies the sense of movement and sovereignty of motion at the heart of Indigenous life ways, and which attempts to fix active Native presences,

5 Ritskes and Martineau, “Fugitive Indigeneity,” III.
reducing them to *interimages*. “That Native sense of presence has been mediated amiss by theistic discoveries, social science theses, the “final vocabulary of dominance and master narratives.””

This project’s form was influenced by Vizenor’s *Fugitive Poses: Native American Indian Scenes of Absence and Presence*, a compendium of six essays, a form he describes as a contingent and immersive, which “instead of reducing cultural phenomena, the essay immerses itself in them as if in a second nature.” Reflecting *transmotion* and Native presence, story and *survivance* over the fixed and contained image of the *Indian* in the western imaginary.

Chapter one, marking a shift in thinking about Indigenous art as contemporary art, in the exhibition of Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun and Emily Carr, forming a kind of rupture in the Vancouver art scene, begins with *transmotion*. Which then animates and informs the following chapters on *survivance* and Susan Point’s Welcome Post Gateways, into the *fugitivity* of the Through the Eye of the Raven mural. Closing with the fourth chapter on *refusal* and re-storying *The Storyteller*, where the narrative, rather than flowing outward begins to curve back on itself and create a generative space of Indigenous flourishing from the inside. Not seeking recognition from external colonial systems. “The freedom realized through flight and refusal is the freedom to imagine and create an elsewhere in the here; a present future beyond the imaginative and territorial bounds of colonialism.”

Standing in the museum exhibition with my Elders from the Woman’s Centre, in front of a map on the Native Nations of the Northwest Coast. It began to reveal a dense network of stories and connections, and roots and routes that has thread

---

7 “The essay is contingency, not the succession of native time or nature, because there is no final, absolute measure of creation or the unnamable.” Ibid., 24.
8 Ritskes and Martineau, “Fugitive Indigeneity,” IV.
people to place for thousands of years. It was a powerful moment to witness, and one that served to remind me of the power of Indigenous art to tell stories of our survivance, connect to the land beneath us, express our relationships to the territories we reside on, and to each other, and to ultimately imagine otherwise.
Bibliography


———. “West Coast Indian Art.” In Exhibition of Canadian West Coast Art-Native and Modern, edited by Eric Brown, 3–4. Published in conjunction with an exhibition of the same title, organized by and presented by the National Gallery of Canada, 1927.

Barman, Jean. “Aboriginal Women on the Streets of Victoria: Rethinking Transgressive Sexuality during the Colonial Encounter.” In Contact Zones:


**Meeting Place: The Human Encounter and the Challenge of Coexistence.** Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013.


**Representing Place: Landscape Painting and Maps.** Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002.


———. “World-Systems Analysis in the Context of Transmodernity, Border Thinking,


Glossary of Terms

Citizen/Citizenship: refers to having Indian status as recognized by the Indian Act of Canada.

DTES: The Downtown Eastside geographic area of Vancouver.

Enfranchisement: Legal term that refers to the termination of one’s Indian status in order to become a Canadian citizen. It was a key component in the Canadian government’s attempt to assimilate Indigenous peoples.¹

First Nations: A term for the first or Indigenous peoples of Canada. Other terms that may be interchangeably used are Aboriginal, Native, Indigenous and “Indian” which is considered contentious by some groups, and a term not generally in common usage by non-Native people to describe people of First Nations origin.


The Indian Act: “The Indian Act is a Canadian federal law that governs in matters pertaining to Indian status, bands, and Indian reserves. Throughout history it has been highly invasive and paternalistic, as it authorizes the Canadian federal government to regulate and administer in the affairs and day-to-day lives of registered Indians and reserve communities. This authority has ranged from overarching political control, such as imposing governing structures on Aboriginal communities in the form of band councils, to control over the rights of Indians to practice their culture and traditions. The Indian Act has also enabled the government to determine the land base of these groups in the form of reserves, and even to define who qualifies as Indian in the form of Indian status. While the Indian Act has undergone numerous amendments since it was first passed in 1876, today it largely retains its original form.”²

Looking Forward Looking Back: Public art project in the DTES funded by the Vancouver Native Health Association. Initially a website with DTES artists stories which went on to include the Through the Eye of the Raven mural on East Hastings Street.

Lower Mainland: The name for the region surrounding and including the city of Vancouver British Columbia Canada. This included two regional districts: Metro Vancouver and the Fraser Valley Regional districts.

**Northwest Coast:** A geographic, linguistic and cultural term for the Indigenous cultures of the North West Coast of British Columbia whose presence in the area, archaeologists date back between 13,000 and 8,000 years BCE. Identified by five main language groups:
- Haida
- Tlingit
- Tsimshian - Nishga (Nisga’a) and Gitksan
- Nuu-chah-nulth (Nootka) - Haisla, Heiltsuk, and Kwakwakw’akw (Kwakiutl)
- Salishan (Nuxalk and Coast Salish)
- Nuxalk: The Indigenous people of the Bella-Coola valley on the central coast of British Columbia.

**Potlatch:** A name given to most Northwest Coast chiefly and commemorative celebrations and feasts. It comes from the Nuu-chah-nulth word “pachitle” meaning “to give.”

**Regalia:** Northwest Coast term for ceremonial clothing worn by Indigenous people.

**Repatriation:** The act of restoring Indigenous human remains, artifacts, ceremonial and sacred objects to their homelands of origin.

**Residential school:** Also called Day or Industrial schools, education institutions operating from the 1870s to the 1970s made compulsory by the Canadian state and run by Christian churches for the assimilation and training of Indigenous children. Many of whom were forcibly removed from their homes and communities and physically, emotionally and sexually abused.

**VNHA:** Vancouver Native Housing Association
Sample of Artist Interviews
Duane Linklater Interview, 2015.

AS. Couple of things I was going to say in response (to your studying in New York), it’s funny I’m friends with Jason Lujan (Aboriginal Curatorial Collective) we connected in the Fall, and I know him and his wife live in NYC, just today I was thinking about this stuff and some things I was going to ask you. I was in touch with him on facebook and sent him this message asking him “What’s it like to be Native in NYC?” Living in Europe it’s a different land, not Turtle Island, it can be isolating and hard, especially feel it when you lose family etc and you’re not on your land. I wrote him on that and he said “I’ll need much more space to write than fbook, send an email” Thinking about that in relation to what you were saying about studying there. And his wife is also an artist?
DL. Yes, Jason’s a thoughtful guy. I have known Maria Hupfeld for a long time, we were in undergrad together at U of T, know each other since 1997.
AS. Cool, interesting convergence of people that came together for the Indigenous Acts conference, intersecting in a really interesting way. Thinking about your work in general and the re-staging in particular and that fight against invisibilization in a way, and the idea that Native land is rural and can’t be in the city etc. I gave a presentation on it as a way into talking about urban Indigeneity this Fall and one of the profs said “I don’t know what he’s doing? (I attributed the idea to you and had taken some photos) he said is it homage or critique? I’m unclear! I was actually quite frustrated because it was like you as an Indigenous artist weren’t given the room to do both of those things. Has to be a particular way, feels kind of reduced or something, like It can’t be nuanced like the reality, reminds me of what you say about critiques when you did your MFA.
DL. Yes, I understand, this guy’s response to the work is probably... good in a way. That (in one way) this is a very common question about what I do and me being an artist and projects that I’ve done. People have difficulty in terms of placing or naming it or trying to figure it out how it functions. In a way that’s good because it’s telling me that the work can function in multiple ways simultaneously. It can, what I was going to say, I hope that the work, that art work reflects the (my) complex relationship to the photograph and to Jeff Wall and to Vancouver, because it’s a multiple thing it’s not one thing brought on by the photo. It became so much more than just the photograph, it became about the experience rather than the photo itself which elicits a kind of experience but then there was the other kind of form and experience that happened. Difficult for people to think about or critique or figure out what it was that we were doing because I wasn’t even sure. Like this person was saying, an homage, a critique, could be these things at the same time. Because there are other works that I’ve done that address the complicated nature of my generation and its relationship to a previous generations work, ontology was done with that in mind specifically around that relationship to say Norvelle Morisseau and his generation of artists and the sort of roles fulfilled? At any given time. In one regard the work was a homage and in other ways a critique of his work and the things he was doing were really problematic. The same kind of strategy is used for The Storyteller, I don’t even know what to call the work because I think I use a similar strategy something that happened in a previous generation that I had a complex relationship to which I was drawn to the work of Morriseau as a young person, and to the work of JW as a person at school, and I still am. But at the very same time I’m simultaneously drawn to them I’m very critical of them and this complex relationship with white people in North America using Indigenous people as “content” in their work. To me that is
really important. Ok, so you’ve done this really interesting photo and Rebecca
Belmore’s in it and Indigenous people in the urban landscape, and like you were
saying this is not the only way Native people function in that landscape. For me I’ve
always lived in the city, left the city, returned to the city. I lived in the country for the
past 5 years and recently moved back to the city or town this year so again there’s a
nuance there that the picture does not address. I thought maybe we can address this
in a way, like what it means to be in Vancouver for me anyway temporarily, and for
other folks who were from there, literally, like Cesnam and all that. The nuances of
that connection to Vancouver were hopefully addressed in that we were there for just
over an hour for for some those relationships were different, people from there that
on reflection were drawn out by the idea of that place. For me it was a really simple
thing, maybe not simple, but it seemed an economical idea or something, like “let’s
go have lunch there” about eating and being together but also a really economical
thing to do.
Maybe we would have done it despite the picture, like maybe we would have done it
anyways.
AS. Makes me think about this fluidity in a way between city and country and like
Peter Morin says “Native People have always been travelers on the land.” He says
rural or urban it’s not such a deep divide because in the mainstream or settler
imagination there is a deep divide, again those complexities are not addressed.
Funny what you say about economy because it kind of unfurled into something
complex. Also talking with Dylan Robinson afterwards, he said it felt like a
“sovereign space” and it felt that way for me as well. Thinking about your work and
your other work, going to see a Modest Livelihood in Edinburgh and having a really
good experience with it I was missing home and sat there for the hour by myself, no
one else there and it made me feel connected I guess, connected to home. One of the things about that or a way into talking about this work or what it means for me was this idea of kind of manifesting a kind of sovereignty. Davi Garneau’s ideas of ‘Irreconcilable spaces of Indigeneity’ and then these spaces in terms of art. Alex Janvier’s map paintings where he’s depicting something but also holds something back and there’s something deliberate in the holding back that can be a kind of resistance, to the colonial gaze, an exercise of sovereignty. So for example it’s like as an Indigenous artist just because you’re making art and or putting something out there, doesn’t mean you have to share ‘everything’ or that the audience needs to know about the work in say the way an Indigenous audience might. What I mean by this is when I went to see a Modest livelihood I came away with this impression really strongly, having to do with the silence. The Elder is sharing this knowledge about the land and about hunting, at least this seems to be going on, and yet we can’t access that in the way you guys could in the film. Was that something intentional or that informed your thinking when you made that work?

DL. Oh yeah, that was really intentional. We wanted to use silence as a certain kind of position, a certain measure of sovereignty because the film is about certain nuanced positions of sovereignty (land). It became silence as a really important position to use. Thinking of previous work done by Indigenous artists and silence is a kind of unusual position to take when it’s been used so violently against us. Thinking about that, it became quite unusual and unnerving and unexpected that we took that position. Not only that position but utilizing silence in a kind of a way it might have had certain effect on other artists and other people not understanding why we did that. For us, it has to do with what you’re saying, about the gaze and in particular documentary film making, about who the document is for, etc. “I give you information,
clearly, concisely and objectively” and we were interested in that idea and some
documentary conventions. Because at the same time we had, because there are
certain tropes of specifically Indigenous men being on camera, that we had to
contend with, there has to be a kind of a strategy to negotiate those tropes and
taking the sound out was a very, very careful and thoughtful choice. For us it means
a lot of different things, in one way it protects us and it protects (Jack) and the things
that were happening in the film, for us that “protection” was really important.

AS. Interesting how those two elements can coexist in terms of engaging, you can
still engage and still be a spectator or audience engaging with a work or a piece of
art work for example, and at the same time be asked to stand back or something in a
way.

DL. Yeah, I think a big part of the position for us was that the film was done “on our
terms” when non Indigenous people are directing and controlling the content, there
are problems, there are problems with that relationship. The Storyteller reflects that I
think, for me to choose and identify that as something I wanted to work with. Having
done this other work is also important. I’m not quite sure how to articulate the
relationship because there are things in and about that photograph that I find really
valuable like The Exiles by Kent McKenzie, a 1961 film set in L.A. by a director who’s
not Indigenous but follows a group of Indigenous folks around one night and it’s done
in this quasi, pseudo documentary style. Parts of it are very very beautiful and parts
of it are extremely problematic like the way the director wanted certain things to
occur, he had a role in that, so that film, I know for Raymond also, (Boisjolly) sort of
represents something that could have been important in certain kinds of ways and in
others it is what it is. It’s complicated as Indigenous person because there’s so much
there that needs to be talked about and worked through, Raymond has done some of the work. I’ve done some of the work. But what it does offer (and the) photo does it too, is an invitation. Where non Indigenous people are using Indigenous people as content, there is something in that I’m interested in critically but also interested in working and engaging with. Kent mckenzie passed away, so we have this film that’s sort of left there to work with, Jeff’s still around and I’ve never talked to him directly but I can address his work so there’s something there that I think should be discussed. On the one had I’m very tired of being someone else’s content, I’m tired of representations of Indigenous people being content for somebody else. There’s a sense of feeling really fatigued about it in many ways because it’s so... disgusting and then the appropriation or taking of some of these things are not disgusting, like in the Exiles important things there, like showing Native people in the city in the 1960’s is really important and there might be a really interesting discussion that could happen between Indigenous people around those two pieces, The Storyteller and the Exiles, a productive comparison between those 2 works in relation to Indigenous representation in film and photography. When you have for example, a non Indigenous person directing there’s a door there, there’s a door Indigenous people need to engage. Often that engagement has been welcome and often that engagement has been dismissed. There’s an artist on Instagram right now at Art Basile in Miami, she made some typee with designs on it showing her giving this stereotypical salute. My first thought was this is the most terrible thing! And so I wrote that in a comment and others also made their own comments and she came back on and made this deluded response about being inspired by the universe, so it’s super problematic and in terms of contemporary art where it can go from something as interesting as The Storyteller while also being problematic, but the
photo wants to engage in a way. There’s a sense with the Instagram thing it’s about
someone appropriating this symbol she has no idea about and then no discussion
happening either.

AS. Kind of reminds me of the Polish artist you talked about using the image of
Leonard Peltier, it’s like a sense of entitlement in a way almost unconscious perhaps,
that if something appeals aesthetically or fits into your personal politics you can use
it.

DL. Yeah I think the word entitlement is important. With J Malinowska, there was an
engagement there by a critical Indigenous artist which shook her up and I’m glad it
did. Though I do credit her for having a long drawn out conversation and
engagement about it where the Jen Stark Instagram thing was really about her
entitlement and getting what she wants as a white woman, her response spoke to
that by not engaging. There should be dialogue there. That might be an interesting
discussion in why *The Storyteller* seemed to suggest itself or the artist were willing to
engage. I was sensitive to this, I picked up on that and thought, I will with the
economic idea of eating together.

AS. And it’s a brilliant idea, it just really appealed to me. I think for the reasons I
described in the beginning. When Dylan Robinson told me about it, I was so excited.
I always loved the image the original, there were things about it that were really
beautiful to me, touching and also problematic for a lot of the reasons you talk about.
Makes me think about the Tribe Called Red and seeing them in Edinburgh talking
about these weird images of Indians in films like Charles Bronson movies and stuff,
and at the same time they were badass guys, they were cool dudes, (DL Right!) for
Native kids to be watching these movies and the identification there, but of course positioned in particular way by non Native filmmakers. Such a complicated relationship with representation for Indigenous people, and like you say an engagement can really bring those things to light in an interesting way in sense of critique but also as homage to those people and the kinds of resistance that did manifest in those kinds of things as well. Interesting discussion, like your talking about Norvelle Morisseau and your Mom being really attached to her pictures which made me smile because my Mom also had his pictures up and she grew up in a time when being Native was a dirty word, off reserve growing up, Granny married a white man etc., pretty common story in what I know which is BC, so it was empowering for her, this was Native work and Native art and partly what it was to be Native in the world, it’s complicated. I liked that your Mom wouldn’t give them to you (laughter)

DL. Yes she holds onto things, she has a small collection, that’s good. Have you seen The Exiles?

AS .No, but I want to now, maybe I can find it online?

DL. In parts, it’s really worth getting, you can order it from this place. I’ll send a link.
Milestone.

AS. .Is that your dog? (Barking) the dog that you took around with you (from another art work)?
DL. No, she or he is back on the Blood reservation. It’s a bit less than 90 minutes and you should buy it. I return to it often. I was in L.A. for a residency and I run a lot so I was randomly running one day and it happened to be the same place that they went (A. Wow!) I know, and so I thought a lot about them while I was there and Bunker Hill, which was their neighbourhood and a lot about their experiences of living there at that time post war. When they were there, it was actually important for me to know they were there and in that way the film becomes really important to me in that regard.

AS. Beautiful, did you see any Native people while you were there?

DL. Yeah, I met a friend at a bar and we were just visiting and talking and this guy tapped me on the shoulder and said “Are you Native American?” He said “My wife is Native” and then she sat back down and we visited a bit and she was Pima from South Arizona. Just coincidence that we sat there but I did notice while I was there, guess I’m always thinking about histories of cities and places in North America. Well this year I went to a (place) right by the La Brea Tar Pits, this archaeological site near L.A. where they found a lot of evidence, archaeological evidence, of a lot of Indigenous people living there. It’s always on my mind when I go to a different place and thinking about those places is a lot of the work that I do. I somehow want to articulate not only my own presence, (which not as important to me) because to indicate or suggest the presence of Indigenous people who were there or are there for some time. For me that’s important, like the Beothuk piece.
AS. I love that work too, about trace and time and passage and Indigenous presences, exploring them in a really nuanced sort of way. I find that about all your work. It really touches me, I think that is why I found *The Storyteller* such a special thing to be a part of, is that it’s about that, about those Indigenous presences too that are there that are all around us, it’s a matter of looking and how so often they are invisibilized.

DL. Yeah. Jeff Wall has done other photos with Indigenous people in them, but this one in particular was about the kinds of things I’m interested in, the space too was a kind of stage, had a stagelike quality.

AS. Interesting, I hadn’t thought of that, I was thinking of it as more like in David Garneau’s piece (which I’ll send to you) as a ditch, that’s the metaphor he uses for the interstice or border etc. and being Metis from Road Allowance people, a marginal space, an in between place, but your point about the stage makes a lot of sense too.

DL. Yeah, if we think about the photo and using this kind of industrial space, the support for this overpass, and thinking of it as a stage. Thinking about that being about what a photograph is too, it’s interesting because it begins to sort of unpack how it is a staged photograph, it is a staged setting, a highly controlled environment. For me that’s kind of a problem, especially when Indigenous folks are the content. There must be a way to address that that idea of the stage and the control, also the anthropological display or documentary “impartial” photo, museum display etc. (and how this shapes understandings about the Indigenous other). For me, like I said, in an economical very, very human need to eat and eat together might offer at least
temporarily to loosen that controlled nature of the JW photo. Suggesting to people to use their smartphones and put it on your Instagram and it opened up the authorship of the original photograph, which was so obviously authored by one white man. It went to having multiple authors.

AS. Almost felt like a reclaiming of the space.

DL. At least temporarily, but I was more interested in it as an entrance into the work because Jeff Wall is so representative of connecting to Vancouver and that photo conceptualism, that success he’s had because of Vancouver. Something about the specific authorship of that photograph that makes it a fairly open space to eat and be together for 1.5 hours to eat and have multiple authors and different vantage points. (returning the gaze, the anti spectacle) Perspectives of those new photos become really important, where we were taking pics from our own perspective of each other, of eating, laughing really mundane things.

AS. I have a great one of you I’ll send.

DL. These Photos I hope bring an everydayness into that picture and that space. And a specific kind of indigenous everydayness into that stage and space. This indigenous everydayness took form in eating a catered lunch and Peter wanting to do what he did in that space and having that openness there. He could address the things he needed to address and do the things he needed to do, it also became really important. Took that particular atmosphere from being Really every day and informal eating and sitting on the grass to be really kind of formalized and a formal
address of each other in this circle. (B. Still not about spectacle but about ceremony as sovereignty, we did it despite the gaze) That was important, just in terms of that little space so much complexity happening in terms of how we wanted to do things, and that wanting to do things depended on each other not just the authorship of one person. It worked the way it worked, because There were so many People to be honest I was a little hesitant to want to do the idea at first. I thought of it, "Oh, this might be interesting and I often speak to my wife first and she said "yeah that’s really good, you should do it" and I was worried because It was only a few weeks away and pretty last minute, but Dylan was really receptive to it right away and a lot of credit goes to him for making that happen and he really facilitated that. It wasn’t just me, In terms of him facilitating that and Candace as well and being flexible enough to make that happen.

AS. So many elements to I, I went down in the car with Candace (Hopkins), Raven (Chacon) and Cheryl (L'Hirondelle) and we had such an amazing visit and then when we got there we were talking with Raymond Boisjolly and Mimi Gellman about their relationship to the work and feelings about what we were going to do, and then Peter’s prayer circle and the mine spill, which was on my granny’s territory, when I think about it it’s just so rich.

DL. Complicated 90 minutes, including going there from the university and then a spreading out through the city afterwards, those things are all elements of the work. (Not contained or fixed, the borders around the original work were loosened) It was similar for me, I can’t remember who I drove with but it was an academic person who told me about an article written on the piece in a now defunct art magazine from
Vancouver. Then the police being there which was really important, for me anyways. A lot of valuable info from people taking photos out of the stage rather than the other way around. A kind of agency was happening in multiple ways, in fluid ways, that whole afternoon, it makes me feel good that the idea was simple And then multiple things happened, at least for me, that need to be thought about some more. Just from this simple idea of going there and eating together.

AS. Really good to talk to you about it and your sharing a bit about what your feelings were as a fellow participant. I’m planning to interview another woman about it who went to SFU when JW was teaching there and had a really problematic experience with him as an Indigenous woman, not individually but a complicated and problematic experience in one of his classes and then Peter said he’d talk to me. I’m looking forward to hearing his thoughts on it too. Before I go, do you guys have any plans to come to Europe at all?

DL. No, no that’s a different story altogether, right now I’m just working on an exhibition for the Utah Museum of Fine Arts next month, what I’m doing now. I have a show coming up at the VAG this Summer and a few other things. No, no plans of coming to Europe. I’ve never been to Europe and I’m not sure I will ever go.

AS. I guess I supposed you were at the opening for ‘a Modest Livelihood’ at the City Aart Centre in Edinburgh.

DL. No, I was invited but I declined. I get invited to travel to Europe but I specifically decline. At least at this point, speculating about what it is, what Europe is? Not
geographically but ideologically. Not sure where this thinking will take me, it was initiated by wanting to do some kind of counterbalance to Jimmie Durham’s self exile I guess from America. I thought there should be some kind of similar gesture for an Indigenous person in North America to say maybe I’ll never go to Europe like him saying “I’ll never go back to North America. Think it’s important to have some dialogue or at least conversation about that with people.
Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun, Interview 2014

LPY. Let’s say I’m not making Indian head dresses for traditional purposes.

AS. Been such an appropriation of that. When really, like you’re talking about those guys like Robert Davidson, there was a time, when that work, even just making the work was a radical act.

LPY. Well, I Think it was in terms of having traditional work, there was a revival of the ‘totem pole’ and tourism Canada and the Department of Indian Affairs were handling/engaged with the tourist industry and they pumped a lot of $ into it. There was a lot of vested interest, They wanted people going down to the totem park to look at the carvings, a lot of plastic carvings they wanted People to buy. You know they sure as hell didn’t want to down to Skid Row and see a real Indian, they sure as hell didn’t want to allow anyone to go to a reservation and look at Indians and how they kept them and where they ‘kept’ them and how they housed them. Reservations in this country, good for treaty, you have big land but here we are non treaty and we got stuck with small little reservations in BC. Even the name BC, this is ABORIGINAL territory, traditional Native territory. This province should change its name to TNT (Traditional Native Territory) We’re not going to settle land claims, I would rather shoot my chief who tries to settle land claims, use him as a human shield. If he’s talking land claims he’s going to go to the white man and settle? You should grab him and hang him from the nearest tree. Why should I surrender to the white man, I’m still talking about land claims, nothing’s changed, I don’t have time to carve. I’ve wanted to talk about land claims and paint land claims and record history and engage with this construct and say “you know”, to the outside world and all the
immigrants who live here, “why do you want to keep me on my reservation, Limit my People, limit my economic development, why do you want to oppress me, cut all the trees down, take all the minerals and not pay for it?” And then they’re going what? This is a usafruct! I wake up every morning in a usafructory position, like I’m bent over and violated, every day that I wake up. I’m violated by colonialism, I’ve been fucked up the ass. Like a priest’s had his way with me and I’m going “you bastards, it’s abusive colonialism, and we’re stuck in this vicious circle of, this is my ‘traditional’ territory, you’re using it, you’re benefitting from it. I’m sitting on the reservation with a status card and you’ve got to abide by our colonial rules and shut the fuck up or we’re going to kill you. It’s not an easy thing, the usafruct or land question, its been a long journey for Aboriginal people to wake up to, even understand, it’s like ‘what do you mean the whole province is yours?’ Some of them don’t even know, “oh well, pass me another joint, I’m young, I’m 19, I just want to party, it’s not my problem. I can’t change that.” There’re kids, like 5 years old, what do they know about Land Claims, they’re just kids. But they’re saying ‘you can’t blame me for everything’, since contact 600 million salmon have come down to to 40. I didn’t poach all those salmon. I didn’t poach those salmon, not in my freezer. Loss of salmon, loss of lifestyle, loss of everything! We keep losing, we’re not winning. It’s not something shared in a way that prospers everyone. The bar treaties were set up from contact, the Native took down the fish weirs so the fish could swim down to the ocean and the white man catches them All and turns around and sells them and says, “you can have boats too and we all make dollars”, not all but a certain group of us get very very wealthy but that’s capitalism. You have a system that works in the first place, we don’t like it cause we’re not making dollars but that’s what capitalism is about. Greedy needy people. I watched the salmon go the way of the buffalo in my lifetime.
Sparrow vs Sparrow went to the Supreme Court of Canada, we had to go to the Supreme Court of Canada to fight this country! So an Indian could catch a fish. Like what’s wrong? Fuck off, take your colonial fucking system with you and take a break! Do you have to take all the time? When am I going to have a racist free day? This is one of the questions I asked myself.

Modernism was like walking into a restaurant and they ask do you have a reservation? And you say no, and they say we’re not going to serve you because you don’t have a reservation. I’m going ‘I do have a reservation, you fuckers can’t keep me out. I’m off the reservation.’ I don’t actually like reservations but I need one for this place, Do I really want to stay in this place? It’s a problem, where Indians would go to the dentist and be treated very violently, where they wouldn’t be treated at the hospital. Even a problem trying to find rentals, What is this racism about? Why do they hate Indians so much? What is racism? And the fears of others. I don’t understand you so I fear you, if I don’t get your Catholic beliefs, your church, your God, you’re against me. When you say something like that Bush for example either you’re with me or against me, It becomes a dangerous thing. Then they go out and kill somebody, the code breaker for this was Geronimo, but he was never a terrorist, he was defending his own homelands, his own Homeland Security. Like the t-shirt with the native guys and underneath it it says “homeland security” or the one that says ‘All my heroes killed white people” Red Cloud, Sitting Bull, Geronimo, all these warriors.

I’ve coined a lot of phrases ‘neosavage’, ‘a bad colonial day’, I’ve always talked in ways that use humor or even titles to things, about how to communicate to the
outside world about the plight of Aboriginal people. I know it won’t change things, but it still has to be recorded. Traditionalism has a certain function, a certain staying in place that contains, that structures itself to the cultural identity of its people.

Modernism is an assault, "ok lets do the portrait of the crystal meth Indian on a drug trip and this is the reality, or lets deal with brown on brown violence, why Indians kill Indians. I went to prison with my Dad once and we saw a man who had murdered this woman and he was in jail doing life and we don’t talk about that. It’s an ugly place to go to. I’d like to look at the modern and not be afraid to say anything. As artists we should be freely capable to say anything against anyone on this planet and be willing to accept the consequences of what you say. How do you tell the world that 83% of our groundwater is unfit for human consumption? Trillion dollars spent on fossil fuels they’ve taken from the ground, these industries destroying vast amounts of environment without there being any consequences. The history of the world “we didn’t like the tsars, we didn’t like their wealth and their concept so we lined them up and shot them all, that’s what the Russians did. They were really happy about that, they had their revolution and got rid of them, it was so greedy that only a certain few could get away with it and live that way, so they killed them. The French were upset with their’s so they beheaded them, The Kings and Queens, and created a republic. I’ve said publicly The Royal family should all take a cyanide pill. I would volunteer my services to euthanize every one of them. We will not move forward on the planet until all these people are gone, the one 1%ers. If you want to save the planet, maybe we should be looking at them and lining them up and shooting every damn one of them, because they’re killing the planet.
AS. Thinking about the planet, thinking about land, and connections to that, I like to ask people who they are and where they’re from, and their connection to city too. Did you grow up in Vancouver?

LPY. My Dad is Salish from the island, so he’s Salish, and my mother’s Okanagan, but I grew up in the city. This is Salish territory, a problem with colonialism that it indoctrinates. Some would say that I’m an Island Salish person. I’m a separate Salish person on the mainland, but I’m Salish. I’m living on my traditional territory! I don’t belong to Musqueam. I don’t belong to Squamish, I’m not a band member. Before contact we were just Salish, now Musqueam is a nation. I don’t know how the hell they became a nation, Squamish became a nation, they all claim this colonial paradigm as validation of their identities. Strange in a way they would claim it but aren’t recognized as shareholders in that land and still aren’t benefiting from it. As a Salish Person we use our identities under the Indian act?? Salish are an example of groups divided by colonialism, 500 Years ago if a person went over this mainland to the island to Duncan or Tswassen from Tswassen over to Starklit (SP?) to the longhouse for ceremonies, they would take their canoe and go there and they were Salish. We were all one group, together in this territory, this is why we held this territory because we were such numbers, high density numbers. We didn’t have a problem with other natives raiding because it was all one nation and territory. It’s like the Carrier nation, It’s a vast area, now you’re from Burns Lake or you’re the Takla nation. Natives tend to take the colonial road because of government Chiefs and validation. I’m still going to claim I’m in my traditional territory and I don’t need Musqueam’s permission. I don’t need Tswassen’s permission, or Squamish’s permission to tell me I’m Salish. I don’t need a government status card to tell me i’m
a Salish person. I live my Coast Salish territory and I exercise my traditional ways. I respect all tribes for what they are. I accept they’re Salish. And I understand that they are, we are, one nation and as such, we should look after our territory as we should. It’s so complicated when you live in a usufruct, there’s no rule, there’s no power under the Indian act. Oh, it’s an apartheid system. “You will be consulted”, it’s like saying “you are a prisoner on your own land and we’re going to cut down and kill and destroy whatever we want in front of your face so fuck off and die.” It’s Very difficult to watch this process in my lifetime watching clear cuts and salmon destruction, it’s mostly destruction. Are we getting anywhere, are Native people any better off? If you’re a government chief maybe.

AS. People are becoming louder, organizing, vocalizing that more. But in terms of actual change, that’s low. This mass extractionism is pushing Native people into more and more of a corner.

LPY. Even in the corner, 80% of them are living off reserve so there not even benefiting from the reserve construct and who wants to live on a reservation in that way? Very little economic development, what’s the dichotomy of a reservation? In most cases, in the 60s, most Natives didn’t own and operate their own companies, they were run by the Department of Indian Affairs, lots of control and band office control and corruption, still that way.

AS. Hard not to internalize those structures in a way.
LPY. Should pass a resolution and say you cannot run for chief with a grade 3 education. You can pass all kinds of resolutions but abide by it! You can run with a great 3 education, but it gets changed, so you say no one without a grade 6 education, they’ll laugh and change it, now I want you to say no one without a grade 9 education can run for chief, the laughs stop and it becomes serious, and gets to the point of ‘who the fuck are you?’ You want Indians to get an education, you’re a traitor. So the education to the degree of band office has become a problem, this is an Indian band office, this is our community, we have somebody with a grade 5 education and that’s all he’s got and we’re going to stay that way, we don’t evolve ourselves.

AS. Don’t you think there are lots of ways of being intelligent just because someone’s not educated doesn’t mean they’re not intelligent. Of course I agree with what you’re saying but I think there’s a way to bring those things together.

LPY. I think there’s too many excuses for the uneducated Indian that we have, under residential school, which was about total control, under residential school they were able to go up to grade 12 but are not allowed to go to uni. An 80% Failure rate for Aboriginal people meeting great 12 criterion. “I want you to end up being drunk, to have a record, to end up in jail.” Yes, I want change but I want them to get up themselves and make change. I want them to exercise that right to education! Not the grade 3 Indian anymore, that was the 60s, things have changed. We have such a high density of Native people in turmoil on drugs, abuse at this young age, they are
bombarded with hallucinogens, cheap crystal meth, heroin, etc, so many drugs on the street, not getting someone to grade 12, you can see why. People are asking their great spirit for their children to go successfully through this journey and make it. I have kids and they’ve had their troubled times. I went through it but I quit. If I can do it, live through this colonial change and survive, then these Natives can as well. I want equality, it’s not segregation, it’s equality, if I want a Native school, to not send my kids to a white school. This province sits and talks to native People and Chiefs get millions but this land is worth billions and trillions of dollars, why would I talk to that person? You can’t take them seriously, so we are stuck in this world of not sharing and containing! Indigenous People all over the world are stuck in the same dilemma, under colonial occupation in different countries. First Nations in Brazil or in Australia, but there they have death squads that will hunt you down and shoot you like a dog if you want to F*** with them, in South America, it gets really ugly out there. Here we have the biggest clear cut in the world, so they’re cutting it down, frontline destruction, that’s where I see the problem, and how much you need. I don’t mind people putting up a dam because we put up fish ladders too. Don’t put them through a generator. They did these really ugly things like People would be traditionally fishing and they turned around and blow them up, in their traditional territories. It got and stayed ugly, it’s creepy. That’s difficult to change, how much do you need, how many trees, mines, logging? There’s no moratorium on logging trucks in BC, everything is take, and the Indians are just sitting there, at least pay them for part of a tree so they can build a school. So if I talk about emancipation it’s only a dream but I can still have a dream and tell my children that someday they won’t have this power over us, me, our people.
AS. Would you say your work is an expression of that dream? Your work seems to come out of those concerns.

LPY. Yeah, we don’t have rights, the grand chief doesn’t have rights, it’s an apartheid system, talking about rights is a joke. Rights! When the national chief protested and the parliament sat in Ottawa recently, our national chief is standing outside the door like a commoner, like a peon protesting. Why do we have the Assembly of First Nations, to have control over what, for pay, so they can be bought off and make more resolutions? I’ve listened to resolutions all my life, I’ve heard more Indian resolutions in meetings that have never done anything for Aboriginal people, sounds good when they say it because it’s like I’m talking in a bag. We don’t know how to take control over our own lives yet, we haven’t taken a position that says enough is enough. Some get wonderful amounts of per diems and salaries but the biggest problem is our education, it’s a complete failure to move ourselves, so closed into our indoctrination of colonialism that we can’t stick our heads out of the sand.

AS. When I look at your work I think about the power art has or can have to tell stories about our communities not told in other places. Is that something intentional in your work for you? Making a point, asking a question or making a statement?

LPY. I’m just at a point now where it’s almost like well, let’s just watch our world die, you might as well enjoy it and make it as colourful as possible but it is dying. Slowly, slowly, pulp mills, toxic land bases dangerous unfit toxic sites. I’m looking and going,
'I can't do anything, my chiefs can't say anything'. There's nothing that can be done, it's hopeless, it's their Canadian army, it's their RCMP, it's there Department of Fishery and Oceans, it's their forestry, just try to stop them.

AS. I remember before I moved to Europe, before 2003. (LPY. Yeah, a few shows at that time)

AS. I remember going into the Vancouver Art Gallery and I've never really been a fan of Emily Carr but that's when I first started thinking about your work and was first exposed to your work. I was walking through the Gallery and I was so surprised, here amongst the Emily Carr were your pieces. It blew my mind, not because I hadn't thought about those issues before but because you had them shown in such a way. Such a radical curation, how powerful that was to me. (LPY. They were upset with that show) AS. Here you have this Emily Carr and it's the Canadian art and the canon and it's juxtaposed with your work that was like a challenge to that, like an address to Emily Carr's recording of these “lost and dying” Indian cultures. It said 'No we are still here, we are not dead and this is the shit we are having to deal with!' That was really powerful to me, about not only the work but how the work was placed and that kind of dialogue and that kind of challenge to Emily Carr. It made a huge impression and I wondered if you could talk about that a bit, how it was curated. Were you part of that? Who was responsible for that, do you know? And did the VAG buy any of that work?

LPY. The Gallery have a few pieces. Over the years they've collected one or two pieces. It's interesting with that show it's taking the lessons of colonialism. I've
always thought painting is a European construct, this whole painting thing a
European construct. What I’ve done is taken my own culture and morphed it into
their cultural language and what it does is allow Native people to look at their own
language being morphed into a European culture, in colour and not so much
traditionalism, it’s more about the feeling of being an Indian, the mind of an Indian.
I’m very much a surrealist.

AS. It’s interesting about that piece of it, but I’d like to ask you more about being a
surrealist and if there was a possibility or a way for you with that, did they act as a
bridge between the two perhaps?

LPY. Europeans came over before they wrote a manifesto for surrealism, they
looked at primitivism and they encountered the North Westcoast and they did the
research and they took it back with them. The North Westcoast has always been
surreal at creating its form. I just released it in another format. I didn’t bother with
traditionalism. I took a photosynthesis in my mind, turned it into a color composition
and translated it out to the world, so it has two dualities. When a Native person reads
it, he understands it and feels it and knows it’s from a Native perspective and they
see their culture transformed into a different form, that symbolism is used to become
a mountain for ex. That show was par for par, about making Emily Carr accountable.
Andrew (Hunter) I think, was the curator, not an Indigenous curator but he always
liked my work, and that show was about that gaze and the other was about the lived
experience. She (Emily Carr) Was looking out from her colonial perspective, her
tower, taking, embracing control from a colonial culture, expropriating to record this
dying thing. Mine was about the lived experience and the Indians who do dance and have their culture and continue to create, it par for par, dealt with everything she had to say. The paintings were done with fine, triple 6 O brushes, very fine. Either that or big brushes. The history of art is a magical gladiators arena of talent and I’m just there to challenge it in a way. We all dream of creating the great work. It creates a style nobody has ever done before, that no one’s ever experienced culturally up until that time in history.

AS. It’s interesting as I can only come to it as a viewer, as a reader of that work and like you say, your painting and then it’s up to them to interpret that in various ways. But rather than a break for me with tradition, I see your work, as radical as it is, within a tradition, a long and unbroken tradition of North Westcoast work. I mean with all ovoids, with the faces and beings, and everything alive in everything else. The trees and presences alive in everything, like what you said, about this studio being Salish land and Salish cement. Indigenous presences are everywhere, and I see it as very much a part of North Westcoast tradition and also the pun or the double entendre/saying something with something else, the visual puns in it.

LPY. I’m not feeling any different than the other Natives experiencing their homeland falling down in front of them. They are iconic of the North Westcoast Coast, Bella Bella, Bella Coola, Kwaglulth, Haidas, Nisga’s, all of those territories. The symbols are there, and it is symbols of all of the territories being cut down and destroyed.
AS. But Then the radical use of color, the kind of sickly hues and the artificiality, ex. *the Red Man watching the White Man try and fix a big hole in the sky.*

LPY. That type of work when I first did it, people didn’t understand what I was doing at the time. I knew what it meant, that I was recording history in a way that had to be done. I made a post card, (for?) Larry Garfinkle. These little postcards started to trickle out into the world and Internet was just starting, that they had a way of meeting everyone, not just Natives or Native art.

AS. You’ve used that word a few times and I really like it. “Meeting” and I wanted to ask you about it.

LPY. IT was trying to, though I was sitting on a res. When I made it, really odd, as I remember. Then I sent it out and it went to the show and then the scientist found me up and ask for permission for it as they were having a world conference on the ozone. I thought ‘that’s a good cause’ and he said ‘great, we’re in NYC and I have a postcard of the image, Not a very good photo but we can project it because it shows us what we should be doing, the direction of where we need to go in the world and I said ‘fine’. Then they called me 10 years later and asked if they could make a poster of it for the world conference 10 years on and I said “fine but on one condition, That you never asked permission to use it again!” He (the same guy) said ‘how come?’ I said ‘If you have to ask to use it again by then it will be too late. Don’t ever call me again cause if you do I’ll be very disappointed. So i found myself in places where it’s not just about me painting, but about the planet and what’s happening to all others suffering the consequences of these actions of certain people. So I realized this
meeting point was about teaching people to love the land, you may be 1st /2nd generation here But you have to teach people to love the land. I have to teach them to love the land as much as I do, because Environment Canada’s not going to. The Harper Government’s such an example of throwing the book away on environmentalism! Very dangerous People, conservative, whatever party is the power of the day, have taken environmental policies of Canada and thrown the book out. Not an environmentally friendly world to live in, lakes contaminated! Can only eat 5 fish a year from the Great Lakes. Greatest freshwater lakes in the world so contaminated, we have lost the tribes, the environment., I know how it feels. I hear all the stories, listen to all the news how places where moose and deer were, now contaminated. I’m just an Indian, just a person, no one special, just making these things to show what it’s like to die on this land like an Indian and be oppressed like an Indian. What it feels like to suffer colonialism stress disorder.

AS. Can you describe a bit what’s going on here for me? (the painting)

LPY. The Shaman has his stick with the landscape bleeding onto the ground, the mountain side has been so mined it’s just oozing toxins. Mother earth is getting sick with colonialism. It’s so toxic that the skies polluted and destroying the ozone. What we’re doing to the planet, it’s a very sad and an ugly thing and the Shaman/Medicine Man Is standing there with his spirit helper, kind of looking at the ground. You’re standing there and he’s not looking at you anymore, you’re the one standing there seeing all these things. He can pray for the land but he can’t fix it, it’s done and dying. It’s about death, destruction, mining, globalization. It’s all symbolism but very
surreally done, In a very magically captured way. In a beautiful way but it’s going to
die all the same a beautiful, ugly gruesome death. I might as well make it romantic,
that’s how they want to see it anyway! The 1% have an agenda and this is it. If
anyone can say this isn’t sure, show me? Show me a place where this is not. I’ll go
there and say ok maybe this place, wee place, is a utopia but I’ll take you to the
other side of the hill and make you look at that. I think sometimes when I do the
Shaman/Medicine Man... is it me? I always look at it and think it is me, I’ve created
this metaphor. Yes I am the shaman, virtual Shaman, the alter ego, with my eyes
boggled wide open, saying nothing just looking and will give my prayers to the great
spirit world but this is all a part of it. I’ve always loved the land, so the paintings
beautiful you can’t take that away. I love the land so much I can’t help but make a
beautiful painting. I love it that much, it does have its problems but I love my land.

AS. And it expresses to me that deep and abiding connection to land.

LPY. Yeah, I like landscape painting, I like environmentalism and like to talk to the
world.

AS. You talked about the exhibition that I mentioned, what was it called? LPY. Don’t
remember.

AS. Did you say it was controversial or not received well?

LPY. Oh they thought it was because it made Emily Carr look bad
AS. Wasn’t that the point? (laughter) meant to challenge those assumptions that people go into an art gallery with.

LPY. Yeah, they were championing her and I made her look silly. Par for par my painting surpassed her level of painting. Painting is a very challenging world, the history book is there, no Indians in it though one day there will be. It’s going to take time for them to change it, but when you make something as beautiful as that, that equals to a lot of other painters in that world. In this world of art, I make these things, I challenge. I like the history of art, I liked the impressionists, I love the surrealists, I like Vermeer, the whole world of art and these ways of seeing. Indigenous art from the Americas. I like seeing primitive art from South America, the traditional artist there, Mayans, Inca’s, the world they created. Yeah, I think Natives will understand these things and enjoy the love I give and homage paid to the land. It can make a person depressed, sad, caught up, angry, cry, just gritting your teeth and suffering.

“Haven’t you made me look at this already? And now you want me to look and enjoy this Lawrence? Already an Indian and now you want to give me more fucking pain? Fuck you!”

AS. Also about voice though, something very empowering about them. What it says is that, I can speak this, I can speak my truth and speak this truth. That’s the power art has.

LPY. I put a lot of love into art. I love making art. When I first started this painting there was no direction, was an open free mind, i had an etching, (here somewhere) That’s the etching i did years ago. I did another similar but the landscape was very
challenging in its symbolism. Thought this could be a nice painting. Bit disappointed I made it this small, but happy I did it anyways. This is my 40th year of painting, I’m getting bigger in scale, and think I’m mastering a style the world has never seen. It’s important in that it allows me to address the plight of Aboriginal people in a way that’s good for them. I have bad colonial days and I have good Indian days. I created The manifesto of avoidism which is existential thinking, free thinking and I created the concept too, so I could emancipate my own mind, free will, and thinking as a human being, that wasn’t going to be written in the rules by the likes of Bill Holm and Bill Reid having a Conversation and talking about what the rules of the North Westcoast are. I’m an Indian. I’ll make the rules. I’ve broken about every North Westcoast rule that ever existed. (laughter)

AS. Yet you’re very North West Coast.

LPY. Sure but I’ve broken them and worked them into a modern arena where they’re just modern art and it loses the word Indian.

AS. Do you feel your identity as a Native Person is still very bound up with that or do you feel that you’ve worked beyond that?

LPY. I’ve been a masked dancer, a Salish spirit black faced dancer, Swayxway dancer, I came from tradition. I have come from position of tradition, I haven’t left it, it’s always there. I’ve not left tradition I’m just working in modernism, the neosavage recording this culture and this world to translate back and forth. These paintings go simultaneously from one culture to the other back and forth. The Native can translate this into his own culture and a European too. I went to New York, were they ready, not yet, 20 years behind. Australia still 10 years I’d say behind. In South America
they don’t even let Aboriginal people have a voice. I’d say I seem to push the boundaries of freedom of philosophy, expression, of voice. Yes there is a Canadian art, CSIS Canada, RCMP, Yes I am a national security risk, but I haven’t hurt anyone. All I’m doing is saying that deer have a right, that an ant has a right. That a bear has sovereignty, that grizzly bear has a right. You can’t kill all the bears, all the Cougars, you shouldn’t go live there, they do need space. You have to give. The right I use is the right to have a voice, having the right to speak out, (not) Like Indian Chiefs in Ottawa. Right to speak out publicly to exercise that voice on television, but where Natives need to be, at universities and talks and lectures to communicate to the outside world and stand together. Some of my friends became card carrying members of Greenpeace and I say that’s fine, but I’m Brown peace. I exercise my Brownpeace like any other Native person who has a right to stand up for their sovereign nationhood, for that traditional Aboriginal title or homeland or whatever. I just happen to do it in painting.

AS. Really intrigued with this idea of meeting and of art as a meeting place, and what you say about Europeans reading certain things into the work and natives reading into the work. This idea of really engaging this in a meaningful way. Do you think your art can provide a way to do this? Engaging Indigenous issues.

LPY. We’re in the age of technology, I don’t have a book, a few small catalogs here and there but no book. And a lot of People who come to me and say “I like your work, I love what you say. The message and how you talk to the world, don’t stop.” Communications through Internet is huge, I love the Internet, my work is on the
Internet, you have to look it up. It’s controlled in a certain way, it’s an odd machine and the highway of information. If you Google surrealism you won’t find me, but if you put in my name you will. So there is a certain control, how this world communicates. A generic structure you have to get in somehow and weave into this world of knowledge and play. I managed to flip a few pages into that web and allow a voice to freely say things i’m not afraid to say. That allows, brings other people to think if he can do it so can I. We want our own voice. So I have no problem with AIM as a movement, as a construct. And I look forward to the day Aboriginal people will move forward And I tell my kids these are some of my dreams and they will see them come true. It’s a big world I seem to play in it. It’s not work, it’s fun. I’m funning Today. It’s been a lot of fun to create a style. Rembrandt, I’ve looked at his stuff and Picasso and Goya, Vermeer and Vincent. All the Impressionists and Expressionists. Everyone had their time, I’ve seen the Warhols, the Raushenberg’s, the Henry Moore’s. I’ve seen *The Raft of the Medusa*, *And the Garden of Delights* in Madrid. I’ve been there and to Barcelona, and seen the Spanish artists. I’ve seen the DaDa in Switzerland and Germany. The world art is a creative place to direct your life, some people are wired a certain way. I was, I’m not a traditionalist though I come from a traditional background. Black face dancer, it gave me that grounding. It’s a great philosophy to take care of mother earth and look after her and take only what you need, pray for an ant, pray for a butterfly, for the sovereignty of an insect, a fly just because he’s a fly. It’s interesting to feel it and be in for a long time and it’s influenced a lot of what I’ve done. I took from it and was influenced by the world and their culture and morphed it into what I create now, modern identities. The roots are there.
AS. How is your name pronounced? Never come across it before?

LPY. (Yuck-well-upton), means man of many masks. And then there’s Letslotsulton, which means Man who possesses many colors. I use both, it’s my new Indian name, I’ll grow into that one too. I still carry the old one, it’s a very old name, I’ll be remembered for, what’s the name of very famous man who changed his name. He was revolutionary in that he said ‘the yellow man is not my enemy’, Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse, Chief Seattle, Chief Joseph, Black Elk? A big influence on me, I understood him somehow. I’ve met old Indian Medicine Men and always thought they were... I was Lawrence Paul, then became Yuxwelupton and earned that respect and now I’m Letslotsulton. Life going through all these changes, a new history. Native people they had to live through certain times, like Sitting Bull, and they had their day. I’m living my time and having my day and I represent and live a part of the Native world we’re all going through at the same time, and now people are catching up and starting to understand. I wasn’t making Indian art, walking in a way no one could understand. I entertain them in a way. They can meet and talk, AND say I don’t need you, I don’t like your legislation, don’t need your Indian Act. Some student asked if I’m a racist, when you’re up the boot end of something you’re going to get mad. You want to make people think about how they’re treating people, how to walk in (a good) way, you coast along but can’t stand there and speak just for yourself, now it’s speaking for the whole world, I’m the neosavage, the modernist, We are not asking so much, not saying we want everything, we just want to work together. Someday Aboriginal day will be a national holiday and they’ll be grateful for the day off they got and will thank an Indian. That’s what I want from this country, change BC’s name to Traditional Native Territories and make Aboriginal Day a
national holiday. Land claims will never happen, too many like me that will say no, we'd rather share it and look after it so we can all share it. Hope that helped you out.
Tania Willard, Interview, 2016.

AS. `I know from talking with you a bit before and from talking with P Morin that you used to live in Vancouver and that you worked together on Red Wire.

TW. Yeah, (shows tattoo with “East Van”), I use to live in East Van too, lots of activism, anti-poverty, media, youth work, Indigenous rights. East Van was home for all that.

AS. I remember saying I hoped to talk to you about a few things, one was that you said you’d also seen the LPY show at the VAG in 96 and of course you’ve been involved in curating this big exhibition of his, “Unceded Territories” at the MOA. I wonder if you can share a bit about your experience of the 96 show and then thinking about this new show 20 years later and working with Lawrence Paul on this show at the MOA.

TW. Yeah, it made a big impression on me, that’s why I jumped on board when Karen Duffek contacted me about working on it. His work was really influential to me, I first became familiar w. his work around the time of that show. I can’t remember the title or anything but I remember seeing that work and the juxtaposition with the Emily Carr works and specifically chose “The Transformation of Bill Wilson” piece (great piece, because of seeing that show and the impression it made on me. As a young artist coming from a small town and relationship to the reserve and art school and then all of a sudden this work showed me how, what was possible and the work juxtaposed with E Carr really opened up these deep conversations. Definitely the influence of that body of work made me jump at the chance to have some kind of voice and thoughts about his work and curating it. And at such an interesting and complicated venue as a museum of anthropology.

AS. So fraught. When I saw LPY last year, he told me this show was coming up and at the MOA and that you’d be curating it. I was like wow, that’s going to be rad, because that it was at the MOA was in and of itself really, really interesting to me because of what he’s always said abt museums and anthropology, but not just him the whole idea of the MOA and the politics around it in Vancouver and I thought it’s going to be really cool and then because you do such radical and interesting work. It was so exciting. And funny, almost word for word you’ve described my experience of that show in 96 except that im not an artist. I was at SFU at the time and if you wanted to do anything around Native art you had to take an anthropology or an archaeology class and this was in 1996. You couldn’t find any Native presences in art history and or art at the time. Had to really seek it out and I remember walking in and seeing it and it was the element of surprise and like you said ‘encounter’ that really impressed me. (Story of Andrew Hunter, co curator working there at the time with experience working in Kamloops and other small galleries, identifies as a white settler guy and he always liked LPY’s work. So said “lets do something with all this E Carr here, kind of a guerrilla style thing. So surprising!

TW) Yeah, he calls it the “morgue”. was it during ARTropolis? AS, might have been TW, I think that’s what I associated it with and why I was there, at the same time or on a different floor maybe.I think that’s why I was there to see Artropolis and I encountered LPY’s show.
AS. It was an encounter for me too, like street art, had a radical quality that the Mand H gallery the year before didn’t have, where you have to seek it out. I liked that a couple from Ontario say, could have stopped in to see E Carr and then “what? E Carr and LPY, what does it mean? (Laughter)

AS. So yeah thinking about that and then approaching this exhibition, you said some of the reasons why you did it but I’m also wondering about your experience 20 years later. Did it feel really different, dealing w. the work and how its received?

TW. Hmm, yeah it was one of the questions behind the show was how was it different from the solo show before 20 years ago, what does it mean to show it now, to show it at the MOA? Um and for me the politics are unchanged, if anything they’re in hyper drive and lawrence’s enviro, political landscapes, you know there’s so much that’s so current in that work. And you know changes in museum practices too, in terms of wanting to bring a show like that to the museum. Anthony Shelton, the director he was behind it. It’s not like I petitioned the MOA to have a show of LPY, they had it on the books as something they wanted to do and they had a conversation with Lawrence about the curators and I ended up getting the draw, the vote. I just really jumped on board because his work was so important, he’s part of a group of Indigenous artists whose work has changed the face of contemporary art in Canada. Rebecca Belmore and Dana Claxton and other works that’s been so omnipresent in Vancouver and I’ve been so lucky to have benefitted from that work that they did when those spaces were not available and free and you had to work really hard for that. So that work was just so important to me I couldn’t miss a chance to kind of give that voice to this show.

(Conversation about kids..)

As. Connecting back to when you had to seek that work out, thinking back to 96 and I was working at the Woman’s center in the DTES. Right abt the time a Woman was going missing every week it seemed like from down there. All this stuff that was happening in the Indigenous community in the DTES/East Van and then “the art world” you know like there were Native people and there was the art scene in Vancouver. Obviously there were loads of Native artists making amazing work in Van and all through that time, its not that it wasn’t there. It was that you had to seek it out you know.

TW. Well it was in the artist run center movement, it was not in the institutions really, rarely. The exceptions were those landmark exhibitions like “Land, Spirit, Power” in the early 90s but largely that was happening in the artists run center movements. The part that was really interesting for me was that the work resonated so much and I can put words to it and think about it, It’s effect and its resonance. In working so closely with him and the museum and with the exhibition material, it was really interesting to know how much of an impact or how much of an impression, it made on him growing up in Kamloops. That there was a lot of cross over with the interior and the politics out of the interior and the coast Indigenous rights focused, land rights focused politics from the late 1800s to the time when Lawrence was a young man. It was interesting to see that embodied in his work and layered references, not just on the surface, though sometimes they are. They’re really layered in to his kind of
conceptual approach to his work and interesting again to see his relationship to that place and my own.

AS. Yeah it was something I was going to bring up with you and again relating it to the MOA, what you’ve just reminded me. When I was reading about the show it was something I read K Duffek talking about which was that his show there can be read as “an intervention in that space.” I really liked that and share that feeling, for a couple of reasons. Urban Indigenous artist making work today and its in a museum, of anthropology, so intervening in that narrative. But also a second kind of intervention too which is that kind of privileging (but critical of that word re. native people) but the I guess, the focus, on the high NWC and that whole narrative which eclipsed Coast Salish in the Lower Mainland for so many years. TW. And also Interior Salish which was not even considered!

AS. Right, which is so interesting with what you say about his time in Kamloops for sure. But that he’s a CSalish identified artist intervening in that space which was always so much about Bill Reid and Haida work and the upper NWC, thought that was interesting as well. I wondered if that aspect effected you in your work on that show at all?

TW. Yes, though I spent little actual time at the museum, it was mostly time in Karen’s (Duffek), office or just walking through that space. Though I do go there when I get a chance to, their so fraught but at the same time I want to visit and visit ancestors, baskets, I want to visit the objects and hang out with them. Peter Morin did a beautiful comedy piece there [Love Song for Totem Poles”. So its about the kind of relationships we can have and those interventions that happen all the time! In the cases of just people coming in and relating to things. In this case, I am interested in inserting myself in these kinds of things. At the same time I was looking at this BC historical photography thing and interested to have a chance to be inside that and have a voice within it. When for me growing up it was rare that I had a voice or reflection of myself in culture. Still a major issue in the interior for exposure and that’s after centuries of working to have our cultures and our lands recognized.

It’s very fraught some of the reasons that NWC art practice has such a tension was anthropological and ethnographic work that heavily documented those cultures and dispersed them internationally and of course beautiful aesthetic form but there is a “shaping” going on throughout all of the arts of BC, a kind of shaping by museums, by connoisseur, by the market. What materials were “the ones’ to use etc,. And what ‘LPY’ s work does is kind of punch through all of that. He only made one silk screen print and coming out of art school the height of NWC art of print making, serigraph, silkscreen and he choses to be on his path as a painter and a modernist and to do that at that time is all kinds of negotiation and inner strength to hold to your own vision and give yourself the cultural agency to do that both within your own community and in the contemporary art world. That’s why it resonated so much it cut through all of those disguised conversations all of a sudden we are seeing the transparency around how Native art is being shaped and who is digesting and consuming this work and why can’t it be just an artist whose speaking to the world? Why does it have to be in a particular container and he just blasted out of there I that amazing “moment” you know.
As. Absolutely, I thought a lot about that when I interviewed him and he talked about being young and wanting to go to art school and he said you were very strongly encouraged to be a carver and to go to K’san and learn from the masters (Haida masters. And he didn’t want to, like “why would I want to carve in the Haida style when I’m a CS artist? Im more interested in Srealism or these other kinds of forms and the freedom he felt they offered to step out of a very circumscribed idea of what Native art was at the time.

TW. A lot of agency.

AS. When you were working on the show, did you spend time in his studio and help to choose the works and stuff or did he have a pretty clear idea of what he wanted to show?.. (laughter..

TW. Well yes, part of it was kind of arguing with Lawrence who would have curated the whole show himself (laughter. But no, he’s firm but really generous. He had some works that were key in what he felt he wanted for the show and we did the legwork to make that happen. Part of the work is that, contacting the big institutions and museums etc. Some work we took from local places and wanting to include things that were nearby because shipping etc is crazy and has its own whole crazy logistical thing. Wanting to gather certain things, like the rifles used in “An Indian Shooting the Indian Act” so we got those kinds of things. I didn’t spend that much time with him in the studio partly because I have family and life commitments here on my territory. If I did go it was coordinated with Karen and we’d meet at the studio. One time I spent time there was with Larry Grant (Musqueam Elder, to kind of have some dialogue between them to make this introduction from him in the book/catalogue maybe more comfortable for both of them,.. because they’re coming from very different places. It was an interesting moment sitting with them both in Lawrence’s studio and have Lawrence listen to the different strategies Larry has used in his important work. I tried to make that softer by making a stew, I brought some meat from my reserve and made a stew and it made the moment more comfortable. He doesn’t really have that many works in the studio anyway. At the same it has a highly politically charged content its also work that selling so..We were really chasing it down.

AS. Really need the book, excited to get one.

TW, They’re really selling out and will have to go reprint so I’ll get you one.

AS. Thanks so much I appreciate it. Also what you’re saying about him and Larry Grant having pretty different relationships to maybe land and city and different ways of relating. I read that it was the best attended show of any at the MOA, that there were just loads of People there..what was that like?

TW. Yeah. More than 2,000 people were there! I mean he’s an established artist, he has a following I the art market, he has a following in the artist run spaces, in the institutions, so I knew it would be successful opening and he’s local and people want to see him and what’s he going to say at MOA the place he calls the “Indian morgue” what that was going to be.
But it was really moving and really beautiful. His nephews drum group came out and he was really touched by that and I’ve never seen at an opening a long line up of folks to say hi and asking for his autograph. (Laughter..) But yeah it was record setting turn out. They did the push on social media etc but I think it was also a significant moment and the amount of work and folks wanted to see that and at the MOA. There was this pressure on him his entire career that he wasn’t a carver and he wasn’t doing Native art in the way everyone expected to consume Native art and the moment of the opening it seem like there was a coming together. With work that had had to position itself so differently could now be understood as part of that lineage as opposed to so differentiated (part of that art historical frame, it was an interesting moment to see the and in the Great Hall with thousands of people around and Lawrence at the podium and the drum group and that cultural connection and all his ‘Daughters and everything and to have that reflected and feel that it was a kind of taking back of the great hall. Really amazing!

As. Thank you for sharing that. It really looked like it from the photos. Think it was Paul Wong’s photo I saw of LPY standing between 2 Musqueam house posts at the great hall and a sea of people in the background. From archaeology to unceded territories, an important moment!

TW. I felt it. On that scale and in a personal way. The politics and what’s happening, kind of necessitated an uneasy distance that was important politically to say yeah im not a carver I’m a painter and I can still be doing this and talking about this and to kind of open that space.. Something that that older generation of artists did, feel lucky as younger generation in that way, its not easy to open space and you don’t know what’s going to come through when you open that space. I guess it was a moment when that space was so firmly opened that you can never shut that door again.

AS. Amazing, think about how important that was/is for Aboriginal art in Van. They kind of kicked the door open you know and to be an “urban” Native artist and still be a traditionalist which he says “I’m a traditionalist, I’ve never left my tradition, I was born into that. I was raised to dance in the longhouse b. I’m still urban and a modernist. I can be all these things and be an Indian at the same time. And that’s a really powerful thing. I remember going to meet him at his studio at he said “I’m living on my CS land, this is Coast Salish cement, this is my Coast Salish studio. I’m living my land, I’m on my land I don’t need to live on a reserve to justify my being Indian to anybody. So those deep connections going into the ground one way and then a broad connection to everything else. Kind of free in that sense which is very impressive. Resisting anthropologists and the settler gaze and non Natives telling him what tradition was and what authenticity was.

TW. And Native People too! He’s made no bones about resisting that in non native as well as Native spaces and that’s a harder stance to take, in your own community, and an important one. Our work is not just in the wider place of institutions and making them relatable to us its also making space in our communities and our spaces and making a place for that radical art making.

AS. For sure. Its interesting, kind of consider myself to be from Vancouver in away and I guess I’ve kind of grown up in away with LPY’s work and talking to other native
artists and makers most people either know him or know his work. Some folks felt kind of like me and really excited about the show and for him and some folks had more “complicated' things to say like it was a “sell out’ etc which for me was a complete missing the point of having it there, it was a strategic place to have it.

TW. Yes. And at the same time he’s business minded and theres a place for that, that’s great! Its also interesting to see how that itself is shaped. We had some collectors email the gallery and cc te National gallery deriding his work, saying he “uses his politics to sell his work” Really problematic coming from a rich white man who collects art.

AS. Thinking about the radical politics in the work, the environmentalism that’s a real thread in his work. The last time I saw you was at Indigenous Acts and we part of the prayer circle Peter (Morin, did when we were restaging The Storyteller just after the Mt Polly mine spill which is on your territory and thinking about our lands and waters as Native People, that haven’t been that many forward steps there. It was 2 years ago and considered one of Canada’s worst mining disasters. Thinking about that but also the what is your feeling about the cultural landscape I guess for Native art in the last 20 years, do you feel that changing and opening up?

TW. On a broader scale, politics and art