

see-to-see

***Spill* by Carolina Caycedo, Nelly César, Guadalupe Martinez, Teresa Montoya, Anne Riley, Genevieve Robertson, Susan Schuppli, &T'uy't'tanat-Cease Wyss (Morris and Helen Belkin Gallery, Vancouver, 2019)**

Jessica Evans

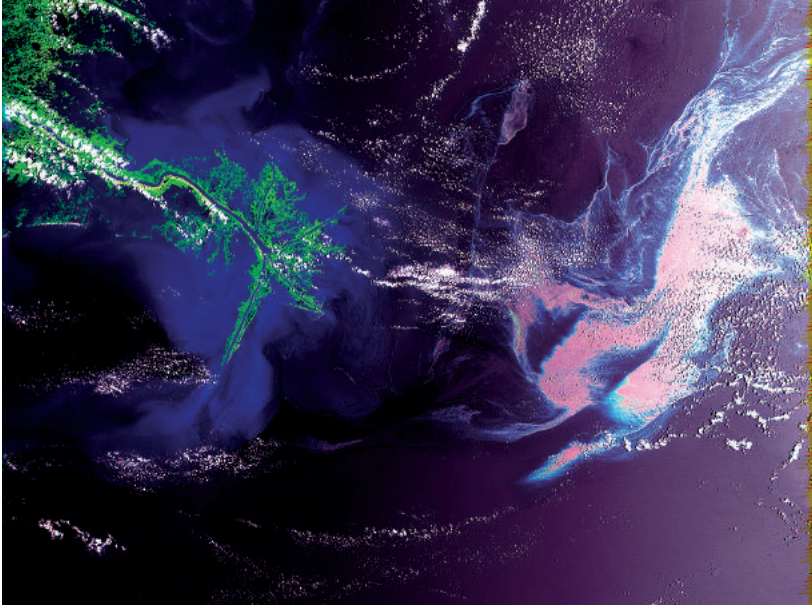
It's likely the average visitor to *Spill* interacts with water all day, every day: washing, bathing, consuming, and redirecting water that comes up from the ground and down from the sky seemingly free of obstruction. A growing awareness may be creeping into mass consciousness that infinitely procured clean water is a luxury, not a given (or at least not for very much longer). But becoming aware is not the same as experiencing the actual material consequences of water scarcity.

Spill is a multi-project exhibition that features installations, performance, live research, and radio programmes centred on the reality that our oceans and waterways have been irrevocably altered by contamination and industrial interference. If the media coverage of climate change provokes in us a distant anxiety about the future, can artistic interpretation close that distance and provide a more intimate, immediate recognition?

At *Spill*, environmental crises are mediated primarily through language and signifiers of scientific analysis: the installations by artists Susan Schuppli, Carolina Caycedo, Teresa Montoya, and Genevieve Robertson include graphs, charts, dates, and text. Audio, essays, and serialized podcasts offer additional statistics and explanations. All of this is informative, yes, but raises questions about how the current state of nature is aestheticized.

Robertson's video installation *Still Running Water* (2017) illuminates the gallery with crisp, straightforward footage of the Columbia River. Images of fresh mountain water transitioning into a robust river system are delivered without narration. The title card, by contrast, tells us that the construction of hydroelectric dams along the river devastated aquatic habitats and salmon populations and destroyed significant Indigenous sites. The video's imagery reminds us of the limits of simply looking and that what really happens often remains below the surface.

Schuppli's *Nature Represents Itself* (2017) is a multimedia piece on the 2010 BP *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill, inspired by BP's own surveillance footage of the disaster. Schuppli uses videogame software to simulate the flow of crude oil into ocean water, showing the alchemic changes and reactions in what she terms an



Susan Schuppli, *Nature Represents Itself* (detail), 2018.
Photo by Rachel Topham Photography. Image courtesy of the
Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, UBC.

“independent mode of cinema.” Though the cinematic potential of an oil spill is both figuratively and literally murky to me, I do appreciate how, in a separate installation, Schuppli steps back to look at BP’s own complicity in visualizing the disaster. The company released a digitally altered photo of their Houston command centre to cover up the fact that three of their underwater monitors had been turned off during the event. Schuppli presents this image as an apparent still, which, when looked at closely, can be seen to fade and transform, revealing the video under the surface of the photograph.

These works, along with Caycedo’s and Montoya’s, show considerable research and attention to their subjects, but as an exhibition, *Spill* relies heavily on the premise that facts and figures will bring us closer

to an understanding of mass ecological catastrophe. My concern is that the extractive methods of scientific analysis and discovery have not, in fact, improved our relationship to the earth. Art has the potential to change this in specific and enduring ways, but in order to do so, needs to be supported as its own form of knowledge.

***Treaty 6 Deixis* by Christine Stewart (Talonbooks, 2018)**

Dallas Hunt

In *Treaty 6 Deixis* (2018), Christine Stewart writes: “Where is this when I say this where I am here when I am here How can I a / person of white settler descent engage in a living poetic

practice that points / to this place” (113). Stewart locates herself spatially and temporally through her use of *deixis*: “a word or phrase—like ‘this,’ ‘that,’ ‘now,’ ‘then’—pointing to the time, place, or situation in which a speaker is speaking or a writer is writing” (back cover). In many ways, Stewart’s long poem grapples with complex notions of inheritance, and how a person might engage ethically in relation to the histories that precede their arrival.

Here, I think, is where some important conceptual questions / approaches to Stewart’s collection hinge: what does it mean to be “here” in relation, beyond poetic speech acts? More specifically, what if, accounting for the current material structural relations in place, we refer to “here” not as a (already in place) relation, but rather as an ongoing occupation? Finally, who can inhabit particular spaces, and whose voices are read as palatable (and thus worthy of engagement) when speaking to these issues?

In her 2006 article, “The Phenomenology of Whiteness,” Sara Ahmed asserts that “bodies are shaped by histories of colonialism, which mak[e] the world ‘white’, a world that is inherited, or which is already given before the point of an individual’s arrival” (153). And indeed, this is something to which Stewart gestures. But, as Ahmed continues, “Whiteness might be what is ‘here,’ as a point from which the world unfolds, which is also the point of inheritance. If whiteness is inherited, then it is also reproduced. Whiteness gets reproduced by being seen as a form of positive residence [...] an

orientation that puts certain things within reach ... not just physical objects, but also styles, capacities, aspirations, techniques, habits” (154). Thus, we should always ask from whose orientations or aspirations do these lines of inquiry emanate? From whose reach?

More precisely, what I want to foreground here is how particular ideas, ideals, orientations, and sentiments cohere around particular bodies and viewpoints and, when articulated from these bodies, are given a kind of institutional legibility. The issue here has less to do with Stewart’s subject position—though this is not unimportant—but rather more with how the issue of Treaty Six and its implementation (or lack thereof) is granted import when brought into focus by white settlers, while the work done for decades on this topic by Indigenous thinkers, artists, writers, and authors (Emily Riddle, Matt Wildcat, among others) receives little to no sustained attention comparatively. Although Stewart’s articulations of the fraught affects of being in relationship through Treaty are important and admirable, such as when she writes “[a]ttend to what I do not / know and to the reasons why I do not know” (115), the collection risks being read like the all too easy declarations that “we are all treaty people,” articulated by writers like Roger Epp or John Ralston Saul.

Crucial as it is to recognize one’s position in a space and one’s relation to the peoples, laws, and other-than-human kin inhabiting this place, I wonder how settlers might go beyond this recognition

of living within a shared geography. While an individual acknowledgement of one's occupation (and I use this word intentionally) of a space may be generative, these acknowledgements do little to change the very real, systemic relations that currently structure and sustain the asymmetrical relationships instantiated and maintained by colonialization.

Stewart recognizes these complex entanglements while writing nestled near the kisiskâciwani-sîpiy. Yet this recognition encourages further questions: on whose specific lands is that building currently situated? What particular dispossessions had to occur for that edifice to occupy the space that it does and how does its presence continue to dispossess? What kinship relations had to be, and are still currently, sundered? Whose orientations are currently prioritized?

These questions are among those that propel Stewart's collection forward, and reading *Treaty 6 Deixis* prompts me as a reader to ask them. But her book also prompts me to ask, what else might poetry do, especially poetry that not only takes up these questions but also takes up the spaces from which these questions can be asked and articulated? If simple acts of recognizing how one inhabits a space are important but insufficient, then there is much more work yet to be done. Indeed, Stewart herself admits this: "I am absolved of nothing . . . This labour is infinite" (118).

Beau Dick: Devoured by Consumerism (Figure 1, 2019)

Micaela Hart D'Emilio

Devoured by Consumerism opens with a memory: an image of Beau Dick's Atlakim mask burning during a potlach ceremony in Alert Bay, BC in 2012. The image sets the reflective and critical tone for the images and essays that follow. Released in conjunction with Fazakas Gallery's 2019 exhibition of the same name, the book expands on Chief Beau Dick's life and work through excerpts from his own words and the voices of his apprentices, Alan Hunt and Cole Speck, alongside essays by LaTiesha Fazakas, John Cussans, and Candice Hopkins.

Together, their voices speak to Beau's resistance against the forces of consumerism and capitalism, and offer invaluable insight into Northwest Coast art, Kwakwaka'wakw culture, and the history of colonialism in Canada. The book connects Beau's carvings to the potlach ban, the 1990 salmon protection actions, and ongoing Indigenous land rights. In Chief Beau Dick's words, "Yeah, it does become political. It becomes beyond political; it becomes very deep and emotional" (14).

John Cussan's essay "In the House of the Man-Eater" critiques the "unlimited appetite" of modern consumerism from the perspective of the recurring motif of "gaping and grimacing mouths" in Northwest Coast art (22). In her essay "To See and To Burn," Candice Hopkins contextualizes Beau's solo exhibition at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 2012 and the potlach mask

burnings that proceeded it. Returning to the opening image, Hopkins describes Beau's burning of the masks during potlatch ceremonies as sacred and disruptive acts that subverted the continued fetishization of Northwest Coast ceremonial objects and effectively demonstrated that Northwest Coast culture "cannot be owned" (35).

The final half of the book leaves the reader with vivid images of Beau's masks alongside didactic definitions which provide an entry point for any reader curious to learn about the figures represented in Beau Dick's work and their cultural significance within Hamat'sa ceremony. As a whole, the book gives the reader a glimpse into Beau's character—his resistance to the accumulation of wealth within the art market, and the generous

spirit he extended to his community. It extends Beau's message to look after the environment, living beings, "all of us" (19).

Reading *Devoured* sparked memories for me of the many stories Beau Dick told of the Kwakwaka'wakw potlatch and Hamat'sa secret society during his time as an Artist-in-Residence and instructor at the University of British Columbia. I remember taking his 2015 seminar, and the many descriptive tales of the trickster he told, in which he would often embody the trickster in his storytelling and relate him to his own life and journey. The book left me in a state of reflection about the time I spent in Beau's seminar—about the ways in which he would prompt us to learn and know more about Kwakwaka'wakw culture and the creative mysteries within it. ◇



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