

COLONIAL VESTIGES:

Representing Forest Landscapes on Canada's West Coast

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INTRODUCTION: COLONIAL LEGACIES

What “post-colonial” certainly is not is one of those periodisations based on epochal “stages,” when everything is reversed at the same moment, all the old relations disappear for ever and entirely new ones come to replace them. Clearly the disengagement from the colonizing process has been a long, drawn-out and differentiated affair. (Hall 1996, 247)

SPEAKING BEFORE THE PEARSE COMMISSION IN 1975, Simon Lucas, then chair of the West Coast District Council of Indian Chiefs, outlined his people’s frustrations: “We feel more isolated from the resources to which we have claim than at any time in the past,” to which he added simply, “this is becoming more so.”¹

This poignant statement articulated the experience of many Natives during and after the rapid expansion and consolidation of British Columbia’s coastal forest industry in the 1950s and 1960s. In the twenty years preceding the commission, traditional “Nootka” territories on the west coast of Vancouver Island had been rationalized within the regional and global space-economies of industrial capitalism and in the interests of investors and forestry-based communities far removed from their villages. Segregated on reserves and surrounded by forests of immeasurable value, the Nootka increasingly found that they had almost no access to the resource wealth of their lands (except on the shifting margins of the White

¹ Pearse Commission public hearings, Victoria, 30 October 1975. Until the 1980s, anthropologists referred to the indigenous peoples of the west side of Vancouver Island as the “Nootka,” an appellation commonly attributed to Captain Cook. The West Coast District Council of Indian Chiefs is now known as the Nuuchahnulth Tribal Council and consists of representatives of the council’s fourteen member tribes from the west coast of Vancouver Island.

wage labour force). Today, almost twenty years later, it is not clear that much has changed. As is evident in submissions to the recent Task Force on Native Forestry (Derickson 1991), many Native groups continue to find themselves marginalized in their own territories: as workers they remain underrepresented in an industry where seniority and Native seasonal practices have been at odds; few hold forest tenures; and, as was evident yet again in events leading to the Clayoquot Sound land-use plan of 1993, decision-making often occurs from a distance — both spatial and institutional.² The result has been that Native communities have seen the landscapes and ecologies historically tied to their cultures and polities increasingly remade by industrial forestry.³

This marginalization has not gone unchallenged, as non-Natives in BC have been made forcefully aware. From the Nuu-chah-nulth in Clayoquot Sound to the Haida in Haida-Gwaii and the Gitksan and Nisga'a in the Skeena and Nass Valleys, Native peoples have fought to be heard amid the often rancorous debates in non-Native society over the fate of the forests and forestry in British Columbia.⁴ Yet, as the task force discovered, Native voices — if heard at all — are usually incorporated, as one among many “special interests,” into systems of forest management that were founded upon earlier colonial divisions of space that separated and segregated Native “reserves” from “Crown lands.” Today, the marginalization of Native peoples

² In a report released six months after the decision, the provincial ombudsperson claimed that the Nuu-chah-nulth had not been adequately consulted during the events leading to the development and release of the controversial land-use plan (Office of the Ombudsman 1993). Following the release of the report, an interim agreement was signed between the central-region tribes of the Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council and the provincial government that incorporated the Nuu-chah-nulth as co-managers of certain regions. Interim agreements are increasingly prevalent as First Nations and the provincial government seek ways to manage resources on traditional Native territories while treaty negotiations are ongoing.

³ It *is* true, as Nettie Wild (1993) has shown in her controversial film *Blockade*, that Native peoples — as individuals and communities — have actively participated in the transformation of their traditional territories by industrial forestry. How this is documented, however, matters greatly. If allowed to stand alone — without noting the complex dynamics that inform the lives of Natives in BC (from physical segregation to contemporary economic dependency) and without paying sufficient attention to the romantic assumptions underlying the notion of “ecological” Indians — such statements risk providing a basis on which to dismiss the legitimate concerns of contemporary First Nations.

⁴ Indeed, since contact First Nations on the West Coast have routinely contested the imperial and colonial rhetorics that abstracted and displaced resources from their local social and cultural relations (see Clayton [in press] for an account of these displacements). In recent years this has taken the form of blockades, court challenges, film-making, intergovernmental negotiations, contestatory practices in West Coast Native art, and political activities on a multitude of other fronts.

on their own traditional territories often appears to be a matter of “common-sense,” in part because the power relations generated by colonialism have become buried — and thus are reproduced daily — in the categories and images through which disputes over the environment, resources, and economic development are framed.

This article explores the *discursive technologies* by which First Nations continue to be excluded from discussions of “rights of access” and “responsibilities of use” in BC’s forests by interrogating a series of *representational practices* that, in different ways, have worked to abstract the “forest” from its cultural “surrounds” and resituate it within very different cultural logics — the “market,” the “nation,” and, recently, the global “biosphere.” The significance of these practices, I argue, is that they authorize very different people to “speak for” the forest: these people are no longer traditional “owners” and “stewards” (such as those articulated in the Nuuchahnulth system of *hahwulhi*) but, rather, forestry corporations, professional foresters, economic planners, and environmentalists. Stated simply, this article traces and represents the *mechanics* of this authority, and it does so in order simultaneously to subvert and to replace (Bhabha 1994, 22; see also Rose 1995). It is written, then, not to *speak for* First Nations but, rather, to respond to demands by Native peoples that, as non-Native Canadians, we learn to recognize how a colonial past continues to infuse a so-called “postcolonial” present — how colonialist practices are not only part of an “ugly chapter” in Canadian history, but are still endemic today, inscribed into the very ways that we visualize and apprehend the world around us.⁵

To explore these questions I draw from forest industry literature, economic theory, and preservationist discourse. In each I locate the persistence of colonialist practices in the present rather than focus on how colonial relations were imposed in the past. What such an approach offers is an analysis of contemporary “itineraries of silencing” that have contributed to the marginalization of Native voices in present-day resource development and land-use conflicts. More theoretically — but no less important — it also raises questions about how colonial power *operates* (i.e., in and through practices of representation) as opposed to how it is *wielded* (i.e., in juridical-political fields). As Edward Said (1994, 7) has noted in *Culture and Imperialism*, the “struggle over geography” in nineteenth-century

⁵ An excellent discussion of how North American culture remains infused with colonialist practices is found in Shohat and Stam (1994).

imperialism was not only about “soldiers and cannons,” but also about “ideas, about forms, about images and imaginings” — or, in other words, about representational practices that organized what was visible (and what remained invisible) and that, in turn, authorized the administration and regulation of foreign lands and life (see Mitchell 1988). This remains the case today. Seen in the context of *contemporary* political struggles faced by BC Natives, writing the “war in the woods” as, in part, a *crisis of representation* does not reduce it to “mere” philosophical or literary concerns. On the contrary, it insists on the political significance of representation. This is especially important since today Native groups must not only seek redress for past colonialist practices (dispossession of lands, the physical separation and segregation of Native peoples on reserves, the paternalistic administration of “Native affairs” through the Indian Act, and so on), but they must also confront a growing non-Native backlash that has girded itself in the seductive rhetorics of liberalism in order to question why Natives should be granted “special privileges” to which everyone else is not entitled, or which might limit individual freedoms.⁶ The purpose of locating and representing the operation of neocolonial rhetorics is precisely to disrupt them and to build other possible rhetorical and political spaces in which Native rights — based on cultural, political, and spatial practices stretching from before contact, through the present, and extending into an open future — can be viewed as legitimate, rather than as the complaints of spoiled children. In other words, Native peoples must today not only contest state and corporate jurisdiction over their traditional territories, but they must also struggle against an array of contemporary representational strategies that legitimate non-Native rather than Native authority over these territories. As I show, with each representation of the forest as *only* a “resource landscape,” with each staging of the BC economy as a sphere of production and exchange *unrelated to the colonial production of space*, and with each declaration of “wilderness” as the absence of *modern* human presence, existing Native presence and Native rights are marginalized, and, in a sleight of hand, the forest appears as an uncontested space of economic and political calculation: an entity without either history or culture, where no claims other than those of the “nation” and its “public” are seen to exist.

⁶ These rhetorics have become prevalent in policy statements issued by the BC Liberal party and the federal Reform party (i.e., “one people, one law”).

ABSTRACTING TIMBER, DISPLACING CULTURE:
 LEGITIMATING EXTRACTIVE CAPITAL
 IN THE TEMPERATE RAINFOREST

Modernity, since Marx, has been characterized by a maelstrom of change, whereby social life is continuously made subject to ever-new forces of “creative destruction” and is experienced as “perpetual disintegration and renewal” (Berman 1982, 15; Harvey 1989). If this is true of *social* life, then its corollary must certainly be that *nature* itself has been subject to violent change, made and remade in the image of commodity production and technological change. Today this occurs on a global scale. From industrial agriculture and suburban sprawl to global warming and acid rain, the material landscapes of advanced capitalism have been reordered to such an extent that one writer has spoken of the “end” of nature (McKibben 1989), and, in one of the great ironies of the period, the preservation of nature necessarily follows the logic of the commodity form, such that “ecological reserves” *produce* nature in the mirror image of capitalist production.⁷ Canada’s west coast differs from this general claim only in the predominance of a *single* commodity: timber. Perhaps best captured by the model of the “normal forest” (see Figure 1 — nothing more than the rationalization of *timber* production amid the heterogeneous, unruly, and culturally infused temperate rainforest), the production of nature on the west coast of the continent centres so completely on the practices of scientific, industrial forestry (or, conversely, on the preservation of its mirror image, “pristine nature”) that forest conflicts have tended to focus entirely on the *proportions* of the landscape dedicated to each.

In the face of this continual remaking of nature, ecologists have argued that, in advanced capitalism, specific entities — constructed and given value as commodities-for-exchange within systems of signification and circuits of capital — are violently abstracted and displaced from their ecological surrounds, threatening the continued viability of ecosystems and wildlife populations. Indeed, this has become perhaps the most compelling “green” critique of capitalist

⁷ In his *The Mirror of Production*, Baudrillard (1975) shows how Marxist theory cannot escape the orbit of a bourgeois capitalist imaginary. In a similar way, green movements are irrevocably (and necessarily) tied to systems of nature’s production in industrial capitalism. Thus, the preservation of nature comes to mirror the relentless commodification of nature, as capital stalks the earth in search of surplus value. Indeed, one of the ironies of the environmental movement’s attempts to preserve “wilderness” is that it can do so only through the language of “value” (see Demeritt 1996).

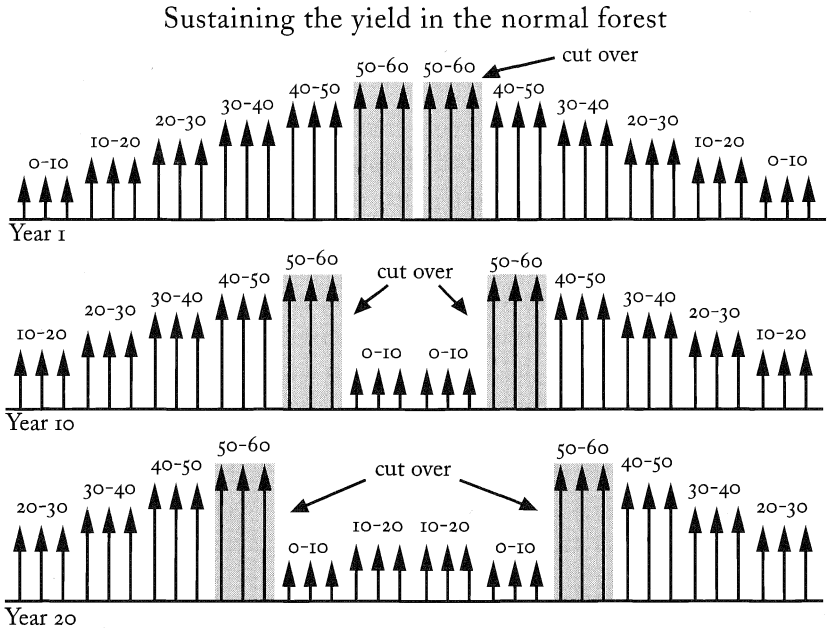


FIGURE 1 Remaking the forest in the image of the commodity. The 'normal forest' rationalizes forests in terms of the production of equal and sustained annual timber yields. Ecologists have argued that this abstracts the commodity from its ecological surroundings, threatening the continued viability of ecosystems and wildlife populations. Such models also take the forest to be only a physical entity thereby abstracting trees from their cultural surroundings. In British Columbia this often results in the displacement of resource landscapes from existing Native territorialities. Reproduced with permission of David Demeritt.

modernity — that nature becomes displaced into systems of signification, production, and exchange that have no intrinsic relation to an underlying ecological order.⁸ Without reducing the force of this critique (although its own rhetorics must not be allowed to escape scrutiny), I want to borrow its central insight but turn it in a different direction. If industrial forestry on the Coast has been guilty of abstracting the commodity from its *ecological* surrounds (with devastating consequences for local ecosystems, including hydrological cycles, fish stocks, and wildlife populations), then it has equally been involved not simply in the abstraction of "timber" but also in the abstraction of the "forest" (as a unit of production) from its *cultural*

⁸ It can be argued that all cultures, and not only those of advanced capitalism, displace nature into abstract systems of commodities and exchange (see Appadurai [1986] for an excellent discussion of commodities and culture).

surrounds (with equally devastating effects on local Native communities). With this in mind, I want to begin my discussion of contemporary “itineraries of silencing” by turning to the representational practices of BC’s forestry industry and its strategies of legitimation.

Custodians of the forest

In many ways MacMillan Bloedel (MB) has come to represent the corporate face of industrial forestry in BC.⁹ Perhaps for this reason it has been the subject of continual public scrutiny. Since the mid-1980s, MB — like most other forest companies operating in the province — has actively sought to legitimate its authority as the forest’s “custodian.” It has done so in a variety of ways — public relations pamphlets, television advertisements, visitor centres, and forest tours being among the most visible. In this section, I trace the mechanics of building corporate authority and, in so doing, locate the simultaneous displacement and marginalization of Native voice that has been necessary in order for this authority to appear legitimate.

MB builds its authority through carefully crafted representational strategies. Fully aware that legal arguments regarding tenure are inadequate (especially since most tenure-holdings in BC are granted by the Crown and are not held in fee-simple), MB sets out to legitimate its authority by extending an invitation to evaluate its forest practices in terms of three criteria: *expertise*, *efficiency*, and *responsibility*. Expertise is conventionally demonstrated by appeals to science and technology. For instance, in the company’s many glossy, attractively packaged pamphlets, MB depicts a vast army of scientists, resource managers, and “environmental specialists” shown working in the field, in the lab, or with computer simulations, while tables and graphs provide the reader with extensive “technical” information about the forests and forest management (Figure 2).¹⁰ Adapting new technology, readers are told, allows MB to “simulate the growth of

⁹ That MacMillan Bloedel has come to represent corporate forestry in BC is the result of a number of factors: it is one of the only large corporations working in BC’s forests today that began as a local firm (and thus is highly identified with the province and closely tied to various stages in the development of the forest industry, including its internationalization); its forest tenures include some of the most spectacular stands of “old growth”; these same tenures are accessible to Vancouver residents; and it has at different times publicly challenged environmentalists, which has resulted in considerable media exposure.

¹⁰ I explore MacMillan Bloedel’s representational strategies in greater detail in Willems-Braun (1997).

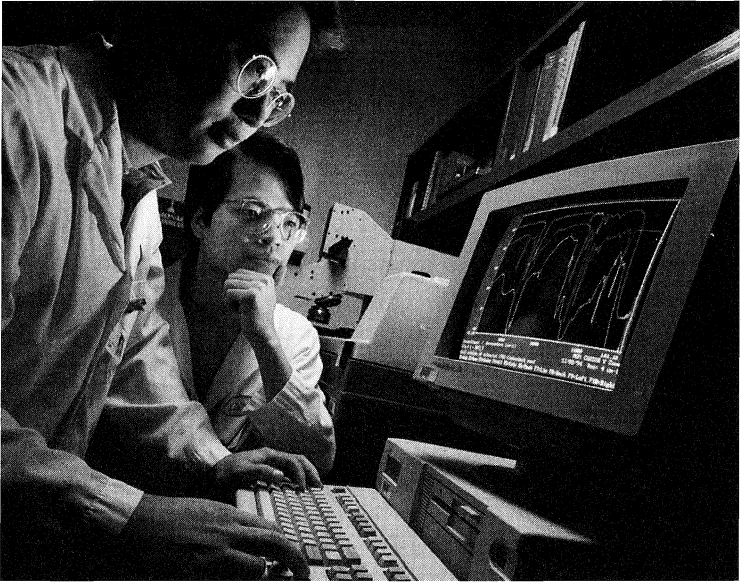


FIGURE 2 The mechanics of authority: expertise and forest management. By displacing legitimation from the realm of practical reason (ethics) to technical reason (technique) forest companies authorize their right as the forest's "custodian." Reproduced with permission of MacMillan Bloedel.

present and future forests for 200 or more years and examine the results of different constraints" (MacMillan Bloedel n.d., 6). Likewise the exhibits and interactive displays at the company's visitor centres in Port Alberni and Tofino describe MB's forest management cycle, invite visitors to "test their knowledge" of temperate rainforest ecosystems, or, as in one computer game, ask visitors to imagine themselves corporate forest managers whose natural objective is to maximize profits through rational management practices (the moral, of course, is that this is possible only by understanding and accounting for "nature"). In the case of MB's forest management cycle display, the focus is firmly on scientific expertise, documenting the careful assessment and monitoring necessary to develop ecologically sensitive "site-specific" plans. The display informs visitors that after harvest "a site treatment plan is prescribed based on consideration of soil depth and texture, the amount of wood debris, and the species and health of small trees already growing on the site." Like a kind father guiding a child in the bewildering public spaces of the city, MB guides urban visitors through the alien spaces of the "working forest." Authority is therefore constructed through a comforting story of rational management, following a common practice in the "modern"

West of displacing questions of political legitimation from the realm of “values” (or moral reason) to the realm of “technique” (instrumental reason), whereby technical interests come to be established as “values” in their own right (Habermas 1972; 1987). MB, we are told, holds the most advanced knowledges and employs “state-of-the-art” technologies; left to the company, the forest will be renewed, if not improved, for future generations.

MB also sets out to demonstrate that it is managing the resource in the public’s best interest. This takes two forms: (1) showing that the company obtains the greatest value from the resource (efficiency) and (2) demonstrating that the company is responsive to non-timber forest values (responsibility). The first is accomplished by drawing direct links between MB’s activities and the consumer demands and economic health of the province. MB explains that its operations are necessary, since it is meeting society’s basic material needs by “grow[ing] and harvest[ing] trees and turn[ing] them into quality forest products that help satisfy society’s need for communication, shelter and commerce” (MacMillan Bloedel n.d., 2). At other points, MB emphasizes its contributions to employment and government revenues, showing itself to be indispensable to the provincial economy. Likewise, in a recent series of TV ads, the company responds to the criticism that it is more interested in achieving windfall profits (by liquidating forest resources and selling them as raw material or primary manufactured goods) than it is in contributing to the further development of the provincial economy. By focusing on new “value-added” products (like Microllam and Parallam [laminated veneer lumber and parallel strand lumber, respectively], which can use fibre from “less-than-perfect-trees”) the company demonstrates that it is committed to obtaining ever new and increased value from the forest resource and, by extension, to putting less pressure on “old-growth” forests. MacMillan Bloedel, we are assured, is “making the most of a renewable resource.” Finally, the company demonstrates its corporate responsibility. In its literature it notes that it facilitates and takes into account public input, opens “its” forests to multiple uses, and far exceeds legislated responsibilities for the preservation of wildlife habitat. “The forests of British Columbia,” readers are told, “are a great source of pride and concern for the people of the province. No one wants to see them decimated or devoted exclusively to timber production” (MacMillan Bloedel n.d., 12). Indeed, the corporation establishes itself as a “disinterested” manager, mediating between the claims of various “interest” groups: “The company’s forestry policies

are based on achieving an optimum balance for all users taking into account economic, recreational and environmental factors” (p. 12).

*Public fictions and fictional publics:
producing pure spaces of economic and political calculation*

Debates over forest management are vital, but equally significant is the manner by which MB's authority is built. By focusing exclusively on its forest management practices, MB carefully delineates the terms upon which its authority is to be evaluated. The open invitation to the “public” to judge whether it has been a good custodian of the resource, for instance, displaces attention from its corporate interest (capitalizing forest resources) and from the province's tenure system (which provides multinational forestry companies with long-term access to the resource in the belief that lengthy tenure over large areas of forest land will be the most efficient, stable, and sustainable way of organizing industrial forestry).¹¹ What interests me, however, is something quite different. Accepting MB's invitation to evaluate its *practices* as the basis for establishing authority is to fail to recognize the colonialist rhetorics that operate *through* them.

If we read MB's literature against the grain, it is possible to discern the subtle mechanics of MB's authority. MB's rhetoric of “custodianship,” for instance, can be seen to pivot on the mobilization of a potent (and often necessary) political fiction — the “public.” MB's authority appears legitimate because the company is seen to be meeting the standards of rational management, economic development, and ecological sustainability that the “public” demands. As Bruce Robbins (1993) notes, in Western democracies the “public” has often served as a rallying cry against private greed, propertied interests, and corporate and bureaucratic secrecy. But it has equally served to silence minority concerns. In this case, constructing and appealing to a “public interest” serves MB well. Through doing this the company is able to posit a *singular* body politic, situate the reader *within* it, and thus assume a *unified* collective interest in the forest that all readers, on sober reflection, must share. This allows the company to draw an important equation: the health of the resource is by extension the health of the province and its “citizens.” Legitimacy is thus solely an issue of who is the best manager of the resource.

¹¹ Public sustained yield units (PSYUs) are leased for twenty-one years and can be renewed subject to the leasee meeting performance standards. There have been very few instances in which renewal applications have been rejected.

This merits further attention. Not only does this rhetoric flatten out differences *within* BC society — in this case rendering Native concerns either illegitimate or, at best, only one of many “special,” and thus self-serving rather than “common,” interests — but it also enacts an important erasure that in many ways structures and enables the company’s representational practices. What remains unmarked in MB’s literatures, TV advertisements, and visitor centres is a subtle rhetorical manoeuvre: by displacing the “forest” into the conceptual space of the “public,” MB abstracts the “forest” and the “land” from their specific cultural and political contexts and relocates them in the rhetorical spaces of the “province” and the “nation.” Such an abstraction is possible, of course, only if the forest can be made to appear as an unmarked, abstract category emptied of any social and cultural content. Indeed, in the Tree Farm Licence maps and satellite photographs found on the company’s visitor-centre walls and in its promotional literature this is achieved: the forest appears as a purely “natural” object without historical geographies. Ultimately, MB’s forests are at once *any* forest and *no* forest at all: they appear simply as pure spaces of economic and political calculation. Emptied of *cultural* histories, the forest becomes a unit governed by *natural* history and, thus, is free to be subsumed into a discourse of resource management (recently bound to a new, powerful metanarrative of sustainability) and tied to the administrative spaces of the province rather than to the local lifeworlds of its Native inhabitants. Indeed, it is this *absence*, rather than the positive discourse of scientific management, that makes MB’s claim to “custodianship” transparent. In this light the “normal forest” so dear to BC foresters is much more than a model of the most rational means of forestry; it is also perhaps the clearest articulation of the abstraction of timber from its cultural surrounds and its relocation within temporal and spatial logics that have no intrinsic relation to local Native communities. As one critic has noted in relation to the Clayoquot Sound dispute, MB’s forest planning maps impose an entirely different cultural geography on the landscape, erasing and displacing already existing territorialities (Ingram 1994).

THE ABSENT PRESENCE IN STAPLES THEORY

Race and ethnicity are frequently treated as “add-ons” to political economy writings, as if these phenomena were peripheral to the way that Canadian society has unfolded historically and to the connections that have developed between the economic system and ideological, cultural, and political orders . . . [Political economy accounts] recognize that a profound racism permeated the dynamics of both European-Native interaction and working-class formation in Canada, but they incorporate racism as a phenomenon of an exceptional “ugly chapter” of Canadian history, rather than as a constituent and explanatory feature of Canadian historical development. (Abele and Stasiulis 1989, 242, 244)

My second example of colonial rhetoric is drawn from economic theory. It is fashionable to dismiss the academy as an “ivory tower” with only tenuous links to the “real world.” Yet, as Donna Haraway maintains, theory is anything but inconsequential. Indeed, as individuals we live social and economic theory daily, whether consciously or unconsciously. Amid the naturalization of social relations, *writing theory* is a necessary, albeit politically fraught, practice, which, Haraway (1992, 295) suggests, produces “patterned visions” of “how to move and what to fear in the topography of an impossible but all-too-real present.” Haraway’s statement can be read in two ways: theory is a *necessary* practice wedded to a political imaginary; theory *as* practice is “situated” rather than universal. At once a tool by which to negotiate the present, it can never aspire to complete knowledge. At best, it provides a patterned vision, a lens.

For Canadian political economists, staples theory — developed by economic historian and communication theorist Harold Innis in the 1930s and 1940s — has provided a particularly valuable lens through which to understand the dynamics of Canadian economic and social life. Innis’s writing, and that of those inspired by it, has been required reading for generations of Canadian students. Equally important, staples theory has provided Canadian economic and social planners with maps by which to develop state industrial and economic strategy, as is evidenced in the royal commissions and state policies of the 1970s and early 1980s (and the continued appeal to versions of staples theory by lobby groups like the Council of Concerned Canadians). Indeed, staples theory has been employed to address a wide array of contemporary political and economic questions: levels and forms of industrial development; regional disparity; degrees of corporate

concentration; the amount and significance of foreign ownership; dependency (on foreign capital and on staples production); types (and necessity) of state intervention; levels of vulnerability to global economic change; and the production of specific resource and industrial landscapes.¹² But to say that staples theory provides a “patterned vision” is immediately to suggest that, like all theory, its explanatory value is rooted in specific concerns and in particular historical and institutional contexts. And, like all theory, its picture of the world provides the appearance of order, in part, by drawing parameters around what is made visible and what remains concealed. Extending the visual metaphor, in this section I suggest that staples theory — especially as it has been applied in British Columbia — suffers from a colonial stigmatism that may require the application of yet another corrective lens.

It is conventional to describe BC’s economy as a “staples economy” based on the development and export of natural resources and primary manufacturing products like lumber, pulp and paper, and food goods (Shearer et al. 1973; Bradbury 1978; Hayter 1978; Marchak 1983; Davis and Hutton 1989; Hayter and Barnes 1990). Indeed, Roger Hayter and Trevor Barnes (1990) recently concluded that staples theory remains a useful heuristic by which to understand not only BC’s economy but also the particular production of its territory. Their conclusions were based on a survey of BC manufacturing, wholesaling, and producer service firms during the severe recession of the early 1980s. The authors found that, despite upheavals, BC’s “global role” with respect to staples production was essentially unchanged from that of earlier periods. In the process of making their case, Hayter and Barnes articulate one of the clearest expressions of staples theory as a “conceptual framework” by which to explain the BC economy. In this section I read Hayter and Barnes’s account through an anti-colonial lens in order to locate how a colonial imaginary continues to structure the staging of BC’s space-economy. By interrogating their central categories, it becomes possible to locate an *absent presence* (the production of colonial space) that structures both economic relations in BC and the theories deployed to explain them. I argue that a colonialist imaginary is reproduced whenever economic development (both contemporary and historical) is seen as separate from, and unrelated to, the colonial production of space. However,

¹² For some of the many highly contested uses of staples theory in Canadian political economy, see the volume edited by Clement and Williams (1989).

my reading is in many respects sympathetic. What makes Hayter and Barnes's model useful — as I hope to show — is that while structured by a defining absence, its emphasis on institutions, technologies, and geography allows it to be reworked in ways that make it useful for a politics of decolonization.

The Innis triad

Among the many reasons Hayter and Barnes (1990, 157) find Innis's staples theory attractive is that it requires "an acute sensitivity to geographical and historical context." This reflects more than the disciplinary allegiances of two economic geographers. Rather, as many others have noted, staples theory has the advantage of taking seriously the specific conditions of Canadian economic development in ways that theories of development constructed with other regions in mind — namely, the "Old World" — simply cannot. Innis remains attractive because he wrote theories *of*, and theories *from*, the margins of empire. Thus, over time, Hayter and Barnes argue, he developed a "distinctively Canadian" theory of economic development. Innis's particular insight — by now "common sense" — was that Canada had developed as a producer of staples for metropolitan countries (initially Britain, later the United States), and that this had resulted in (1) particular institutional and geographical forms of Canadian economic development and (2) a series of structural relations between global markets, institutions (such as the state and the firm), and technological development. Later writers would expand this into generalized theories of truncated industrial development and colonial dependency, the merits of which remain highly debated.¹³

Leaving these aside, my focus rests on what contemporary articulations of staples theory include and exclude, or, said differently, what this economic theory *of* and *from* the margins itself marginalizes. I will rely on Hayter and Barnes's recent attempt to describe staples theory schematically, in part because it is open to strategic adjustment. These writers suggest that Innis's staples thesis can be broken down into a *triad* of concerns: geography, institutions, and technology (Figure 3). Indeed, it is precisely this that makes Innis's theory sensitive to specific contexts. Within this triad, Hayter and Barnes argue, one can explain the formation of a distinct and unique Canadian *territory*. And, indeed, in Innis's own historical studies all

¹³ Important texts in these debates include: Levitt 1970; Naylor 1975; Clement 1977; Britton and Gilmour 1978; Laxer 1985; Williams 1986; and Bradford and Williams 1989.

three elements are woven into complex stories in which no single one is allowed to explain the specific historical and geographical forms of economic development.

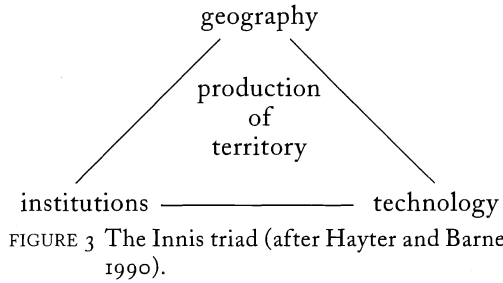


FIGURE 3 The Innis triad (after Hayter and Barnes 1990).

Despite Innis's careful work, critics like Abele and Stasiulis (1989) have found in it a strange omission. Innis's historical studies of the fur trade make much of Native agency — to the point where the trade emerges as a series of highly negotiated exchanges.¹⁴ Yet, when he turns his attention to the present, Native peoples are absent. At one level this only seems reasonable; after the end of the fur trade, the settlement of the Prairies, and the appearance of extractive capital, Native peoples are increasingly marginal to daily economic activity. In other words, they do not show up as actors — as labourers, technological innovators, or owners of the means of production. BC historians and economists have generally followed the same path. Peter Ward (1980, 272), for instance, noted that “the Indians of BC lost their central role in the economy of the region with the decline of the fur trade.” Likewise, Patricia Marchak (1983, 32), in her study of the BC forest industry, relegates the erasure of Native peoples to a short parenthetical statement: “Native peoples were pushed aside as their role in the history of furs became irrelevant.” At one level both writers are correct: Native peoples were no longer “visible” actors. But both writers accept the separation and segregation of Native peoples as a *fait accompli*, after which the pressing issue becomes their *integration* into the workforce and associated problems of discrimination. What is not explicitly noted is that BC's staples economy, rather than operating *without* and *apart from* Native participation, operates *on the basis of their absence* and, further, that this absence was accomplished through the production of colonial spatialities (about which more shortly). Following the production of colonial spatialities in which indigenous populations were physically separated from “resources,” it no longer seems necessary

¹⁴ This approach is developed much further by Ray 1974; 1978; Trigger 1985; and Thistle 1986. For BC see Fisher 1977. For a more detailed discussion of a period characterized by a highly negotiated “middle ground” between Natives and Europeans in the Great Lakes region, see White 1991.

to include Native peoples when theorizing the BC economy. This economy stands as a sphere of production and exchange apparently *unrelated* to Native peoples, who, at best, are now understood as an army of “reserve” labour. Indeed, where Natives are “written into” BC (and Canadian) political economy, they generally appear in three guises: as historical agents in the fur trade, as still present land-based producers (in peripheral regions), and as wage-labourers. The corresponding political responses are, respectively, nostalgia, preservation of “traditional” economies, and struggles against employment discrimination. But to what extent does this adequately recognize the continuing role of Natives in the BC economy, even if this role is, in essence, expressed in the negative, as an *absence*? What happens if we understand BC’s staples economies not solely as the products of technological change, physical geography, and the institutions of state and market, but as social and historical products, where the form of the economy — and its ability to operate in the way that it does — is inseparable from the histories that have made these economic spaces and social relations of production possible?

Let me again return to Hayter and Barnes’s model. If its triad of concerns represents Innis’s single most important contribution to Canadian economic theory, then it is also, as I hope to show, this same triad that later writers have developed in ways that incorporate a series of buried colonial assumptions. In order to unpack this it is necessary to pay attention to what is included in this triad, especially as it applies to BC. As outlined by Hayter and Barnes, all three elements are necessary. *Geography* is essential in two ways. First, *physical* geography is seen to make a difference in ways that orthodox economics, with its isotropic planes, rarely specifies. Innis’s staples theory is insistently material, partly because the lay of the land (and the distribution of elements of the landscape) provides an initial template over which human activity is organized, but mostly because at every turn the economic, the technological, and the geographical are wound together: territorializations are always co-productions among these constituent components. Second, Innis emphasized *spatial relations*, in particular, relations between the “metropole” and the “periphery.” These went some way to determining Canada’s role in the global economy and the nation’s particular forms of production. The same can be said of BC. Likewise, *institutions* could be divided into three distinct aspects: markets, firms, and the state. Innis insisted that all three were important, with the state — especially in staples-

producing regions like Canada — having an essential role for the regulation of land, the development of public works and infrastructure, and the financing of resource production. Finally, *technology* helped to define the kinds of staples available in hinterland regions (indeed it helped to produce regions *as* hinterlands) and the types of staples demanded by the heartland. Not without reason, Innis has been seen as, at times, writing technological histories in which innovation appears to be the defining element; the production of territory on the margins of empire, after all, has always been tied closely to how technological innovation reworks spatial relations and gives rise to institutional responses. The introduction of specific technologies to the coastal forest industry, for instance, can be seen as central to the changing spatial patterns of forest operations, the centralization of industry, and the dominance of a few large firms.

In the hands of economic geographers and historians, this broad model has been asked to bear the weight of explaining the development of BC's economy, something that Hayter and Barnes argue it does quite well. In many ways they are right; staples theory provides an acute sensitivity to the particularities of place — to explaining the “good life” around Idaho Peak (Harris 1985). Likewise, by developing this triad of concerns, staples theory presents a theory of dynamic change grounded in the continually shifting constellation of technical, economic, institutional, and geographical relations, which provides a conceptual framework for the planner to deploy in projects directed towards social and economic regulation and the administration of “populations.” As useful as this framework may be for charting the historic and future course of economic development, it provides little means by which to assess the colonial relations embedded in BC economic development. By returning to Innis's triad, I hope to suggest that a very different “patterned vision” can be articulated — one that allows other stories to be told about the development of British Columbia's staples economy and that reveals the *politics* of writing accounts of economic development.

Erasing the production of colonial space

If Hayter and Barnes, as geographers, are sensitive to the place of geography in staples theory, then they have a constrained notion of geography in mind. Geography, in this case, is limited to (1) physical geography and (2) spatial relations. No attention is paid to the *production of space* (except as an artefact of staples economies), and it

is precisely this absence that allows staples theory to operate in a way similar to orthodox economic theory — as though space were only a matter of geometry and not infused with either history or social relations. What is missing from this model (and from most recent accounts of BC's staples economy) is the recognition that BC's economy has been founded on the production of *colonial* space, by which I mean the division of the province's territory in the latter half of the nineteenth century into two distinct *orders* of space: one "aboriginal" (primitive), delineated and contained within the reserve; the other "national" (modern), encompassing all that lay outside the bounds of the reserve (see Tenant 1990 for a discussion of the Indian land question). This division of space is inscribed into the very administration of the nation and its lands. The administration of aboriginal space, for instance, is still vested in the federal Department of Indian Affairs, while the administration and regulation of "Crown lands" is located in specialized provincial ministries. The BC Ministry of Forests, for instance, has as its object of administration provincial forest lands, which are seen as entirely separate (geographically and administratively) from Native communities. Indeed, this division of space and authority allows the naturalization of what might be called a colonial optic: a way of rendering each spatial domain visible *without reference to the other*. It is precisely such a colonizing vision that permitted Judge Sloan, in the 1940s, to propose a tenure system and the rationalization of the province's forests within a system of "working circles" across virtually the entire extent of the province's territory. Without reference to local Native communities, the Sloan Commission inscribed a colonial spatiality on a scale never before encountered and, in the process, allowed forestry (and its space-economies) to appear entirely separate from Native communities and existing territorialities. It is this representational logic that lay behind the increasing feeling of "isolation" that Simon Lucas and the Nuu-chah-nulth experienced in the 1970s.

By staging BC's economy as solely a matter of physical geography and spatial relations, staples theory fails to account for how this organization of space continues to structure present-day economic development. Drawing on the earlier work of Shearer et al. (1973), Hayter and Barnes, for instance, outline the geographical, institutional, and technological characteristics that gave rise to the "long boom" that BC's staples economy experienced after the Second World War. In terms of geography, they relate, resources were

plentiful and cheap, foreign markets (e.g., the USA) were expanding, and Vancouver was emerging as a city of metropolitan status. Institutionally, state investment in infrastructure, long resource leases at low rates, and large externally controlled corporations pursuing various integration strategies contributed to the province's economic growth and stability; technologically, the province continued to rely on corporate research and development outside its boundaries. What is peculiar about this potted history is not its focus on multiple geographical, institutional, or technological "factors," but what *counts* as a factor. Certainly it makes sense to include the large unions as part of this institutional matrix, but if these, then why not the juridical-political apparatus that, until the 1950s, criminalized obtaining funds to pursue land claims? This raises a fundamental question: What lies within the bound of the "economy"? How are staples commodities (and economies) built? Is it solely a matter of physical geography and spatial relations? Why is it that resources were cheap and plentiful? Upon what basis did Vancouver emerge as a city of metropolitan status? For Hayter and Barnes territory is seen to emerge from *within* Innis's matrix (which appears as the "natural machinery" of the production of space); yet, is there not a production of space that *precedes*, rather than follows from, BC's staples economy? If this question is not asked, then the economy is allowed to appear as autonomous from colonial legacies, as though operating by nature. The result — to rephrase Abele and Stasiulis (1989, 244) — is that economic theories incorporate colonialism "as a phenomenon of exceptional "ugly chapters" of Canadian history, rather than as a *constituent* and *explanatory* feature of Canadian historical development" (emphasis mine). Accordingly — and this is evident not only in BC but across the nation — efforts to deal with the underdevelopment of Native communities have taken the form of "appending" or "incorporating" Native interests into an economy that, by its conceptual separation from its founding conditions, is presumed to pre-exist, rather than to be built upon, Native marginalization.

Viewed through an anti-colonial optic, Innis's objective to "write from the margins" appears ironic. Situated in Canada, looking back at the imperial centre, staples theory is resolutely anti-imperial, both in the tools it provides for understanding the margins of empire and in its resistance to the imperialism of metropolitan theory. Yet, when the gaze of staples theory is directed towards the territory of the Canadian nation, it is remarkably Eurocentric. Once Natives are no

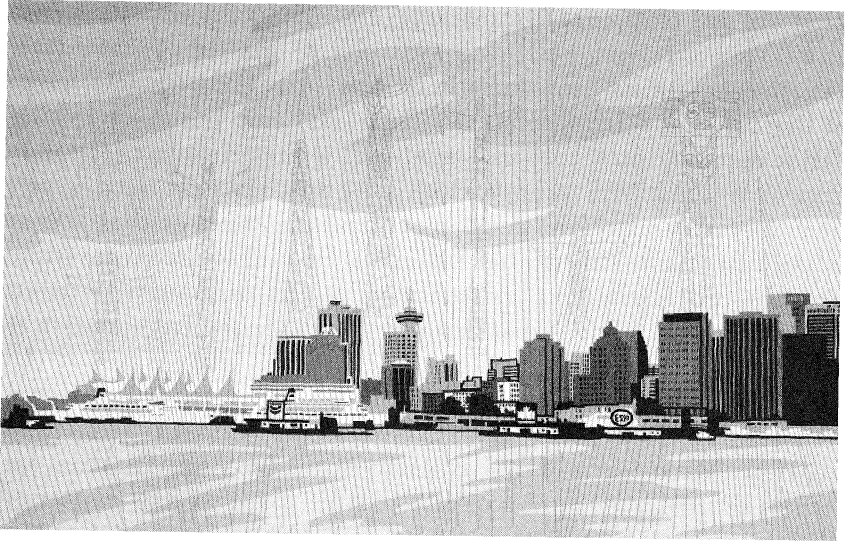


FIGURE 4 *Vancouver* [1988] Roy Henry Vickers. Reproduced by permission of artist.

longer visible as active agents in the economy (after the end of the fur trade) they disappear. The economy operates as if *without* history.

With this in mind, Roy Vickers's *Vancouver* (Figure 4) can be read as an explicitly political articulation. The shadowy totem poles that loom behind the Vancouver skyline do not simply conjure nostalgic or romantic images of a long-vanquished Native past. Rather, they assert — in the very landscape that is built upon and erases colonial space — a continuing Native presence. Indeed, placed alongside a recent widely read article by Davis and Hutton (1989), which outlines the changing dynamics and relations between BC's "two economies" (Vancouver and its hinterland), Vickers's images remind the viewer that the replacement of totem poles by skyscrapers was not a natural development but something that occurred, in part, through a silent colonial violence. In texts drawing on accounts of BC as a staples economy, Vancouver is seen as emerging from its location between, and relation to, both a resource hinterland and global markets (Davis and Hutton 1989; Hayter 1978; Bradbury 1987; Barnes et al. 1992). This may be true, but what is never stated is that Vancouver's material landscapes, including the skyline that Vickers's work places in question, incorporates as a condition of its possibility the isolation of Native peoples from the resource landscapes of the city's hinterland. In the face of White backlash to Native political expression, Vickers's image makes manifest the political unconscious of the province: the

landscapes of the heartland are built upon an absent presence. Ironically, Innis said much the same of the metropole.

PRISTINE NATURE AND THE TROPES
OF TRADITIONAL CULTURE

If Judge Sloan, in the 1940s, homogenized and rationalized a provincial “forest” so as to make it available to industrial forestry, his vision of the forest and forestry has since been widely contested. Many critics have identified problems arising from the structure that the forest industry took following Sloan’s report, arguing essentially that too much control has been centralized in too few actors (see Drushka et al. 1993).¹⁵ Indeed, in this vein, debate has turned on the relations between tenure (private vs. public; corporate vs. community), corporate concentration, forest practices, levels of employment, and, ultimately, who benefits from the present structure of the industry (local communities, state ministries, corporations, labour). But the most vociferous critics — and, arguably, the most successful in terms of public opinion — have been the province’s environmental groups, which have consistently resisted industrial forestry for its transformation of physical landscapes. Against the remaking of nature solely on the basis of economic rationality, they have asserted an *ecological* rationality that visualizes nature as consisting of a series of interrelated systems, where the disruption of any one results in reactions and modifications throughout the web of relations that link local ecosystems with a global biosphere. Indeed, since Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* (1962), ecosystem theory has provided a powerful and remarkably flexible set of concepts that have radically reconfigured the production and politics of place and nature in Western cultures.

In British Columbia, as in other places where extractive capital has extended its reach into the traditional territories of Aboriginal peoples, environmentalists and Native groups have forged important alliances. However, such coalition building is, almost by definition, fragile. As I will suggest through this final example, Native peoples on Canada’s west coast have good reason to be wary of the representational practices of the environmental movement, for whom “nature” is often understood in radically different ways than it is by

¹⁵ Indeed, in 1975 the Pearse Commission had already come to many of the same conclusions. However, forest tenure has remained a most contentious issue, one that no government has been willing to address in a comprehensive fashion.

Native groups. Certainly many perceived benefits have resulted from cooperation with environmental groups (especially in forestalling logging and asserting Native land rights; notably, on Meares and South Moresby Islands and in the Stein Valley), and many individuals and groups in the environmental movement are strongly committed to an anti-colonial politics. Yet it is not immediately clear that the environmental movement's concerns for *preservation* can be mapped onto Native *land claims* or, for that matter, onto the social and economic ambitions linked to these claims. At certain moments the rhetorics of the environmental movement are resolutely neocolonial.

Wilding nature

North American environmentalism brings together and often combines two vision of nature: wilderness (nature as the absence of culture) and ecology (nature as system). As they are applied in BC, both present problems.

As Ramachandra Guha (1989) and William Cronon (1995) have noted, radical American environmentalism is fundamentally preoccupied with wilderness, which, in many ways, is a legacy of European settlement of the frontier. Indeed, the desire to preserve wilderness emerged just as the frontier was understood to be closed (Nash 1967). For many in the environmental movement, wilderness is at once ontological (an objective thing to be *saved*) and ethical (a moral call to *let be*). Yet, as Patricia Jasen (1995) has recently shown in her brilliant discussion of nature tourism in Ontario, what counts as wilderness is not so much an essence as a *relation*. For Western urbanized subjects, it is heavily invested by, and tied to, structures of *desire* (see also Cronon 1995). Indeed, as she notes, this is achieved through representational practices that divide the world between the modern/industrial/humanized and the pre-modern/primitive/pristine. Wilderness thus becomes that place where the former has not fully infected the latter, and the latter — scripted through Edenic narratives of a natural harmony before the “fall” — becomes freighted with moral values and cultural symbols.

Wilderness is thus less a physical place than a semiotic relation: it is those sites that can most appear as characterized by the absence of culture, or, in other words, those areas that show few signs of human modification and thus promise an unmediated experience with *primal* nature. These areas can be coded as “wild.” In short, wilderness represents a flight from history: “wild” places exist outside time.

Represented thus, what appears as industrial society's "other" becomes a terrain across which a whole series of metropolitan anxieties can be played out, including, as Jasen demonstrates, concerns over stress (brain-fag) and physical deterioration in late nineteenth-century urban cultures and, today, as is evident in the growing popularity of adventure travel, anxieties over the technologization and commodification of "life" — a most perplexing condition that seems to threaten what it means to be truly *human* (and, often, what it means to be *male*). What makes wilderness an object of desire, therefore, is a relation of *difference*: the further a particular site can be made to appear from the inauthentic, de-naturalized spaces of the city, the easier it is to appropriate it into a desire to rediscover and recover the lost essence of the "human" and a world before the "fall." Wilderness is the "pure" and the "uncontaminated."¹⁶ And, as middle-class White Americans have learned, in wilderness — from Henry David Thoreau to Edward Abbey — lies the path to wholeness.

Ecosystem ecology has provided other metaphors that are equally implicated in positing nature as being outside history. At one level the science of ecology is little more (but no less) than the mapping of flows of energy and matter and, thus, does not differentiate between "culture" and "nature." Yet this is hardly how the environmental movement has deployed the language of ecosystem ecology. Instead, in North American environmental literatures, ecosystems are almost invariably represented as stable, self-regulating "natural" systems external to human societies. As Demeritt (1994) has noted, the romantic metaphors that permeate ecosystem ecology — balance, equilibrium, harmony — seem ready-made to highlight human disturbance.¹⁷ Thus, these "natural" systems appear everywhere to be *under threat* by humans. This introduces a peculiar and highly problematic logic: visible signs of human presence imply the modification (and thus destruction) of a pre-existing "pristine" system

¹⁶ As has been frequently noted, the same nostalgic rhetorics have been inscribed, not only on the body of "nature," but also on the "Native" body, which, in its signs of difference from we moderns, promises the same recovery of not-quite-yet-lost communion with primal (human) nature. This is also why the "modern" Native, dressed in "Western" clothing or, worse, consuming "Western" commodities, is so often a disappointment to Western travellers (see Zurick 1995).

¹⁷ The rise of "dynamic ecology" in the 1980s, which emphasizes disequilibrium and disturbance, has placed in question the "scientific" basis of much romantic environmentalism, yet it appears to have resulted in little change in either the rhetorics used by environmental groups or in the way that the science of ecology is enrolled in projects to "save" nature. See Botkin 1990 and Worster 1990 for accounts of the "ecology of chaos."

as well as, following the logic of cybernetics, a series of further ramifications on both local and global levels.

It is important to note that there is no necessary relation between romantic notions of “wilderness” and the rhetorics and principles drawn from the science of ecology. As both David Harvey (1993) and Andrew Ross (1994) have noted, New York City is as much an ecosystem as is a putatively uninhabited atoll in the South Pacific. Yet, by removing humans from ecosystems, notions of “wilderness” and “ecosystem integrity” are drawn into close proximity, so that, in both rhetorics, what is seen as the most fundamental problem is nature’s humanization. In both nature is “wilded” — it is that which pre-exists culture.

*The absence of the “modern”:
neocolonial tropes in the rainforest*

Rhetorics of wilderness are problematic in two respects. First, as Cronon (1995, 80) persuasively argues, its flight from history represents the false hope of an escape from responsibility. It provides “the illusion that we can somehow wipe clean the slate of our past and return to the tabula rasa that supposedly existed before we began to leave our marks on the world.” Our very presence in nature represents its fall, thereby displacing attention from urgent questions over what *kinds* of marks we wish to leave on this world to nostalgic desires for the preservation of the “primal” and the “pristine.”¹⁸ Second, the escape from history that is at the core of rhetorics of wilderness is deeply problematic for Natives, since it is their traditional territories that often become caught in the resulting semiotic webs. The trouble with wilderness becomes immediately evident in the representational practices of West Coast environmental groups whose literature frames nature in such a way that only certain things are allowed to appear within the visual field. This has been particularly evident in various publications of “nature” photography, where the lens of the camera has been trained so as to construct scenes of West Coast nature that appear “pristine.” At one level this

¹⁸ From such rhetorics flow programs of action, and one only needs to compare the vast resources directed by BC environmental groups towards the defence of wilderness with the meagre resources directed towards producing healthy urban environments (or towards ecologizing forestry) to see how “wilderness” operates ideologically and, perhaps more perniciously, becomes implicated in class relations. “Wilderness,” Cronon (1995, 81) writes in a statement certain to raise the ire of preservationists, “poses a serious threat to responsible environmentalism at the end of the twentieth century.”

provides the environmental movement with its emotional appeal: nature is *either* “pristine” or “spoiled,” there is no middle ground (the sexualization of this imagery is immediately apparent, more so in the not too infrequent equation of the body of nature with the eroticized female body). The message is clear: like masculinist constructions of virginity, once spoiled never again pure. Yet, as is now well known, West Coast lands are *not* unoccupied wilderness and have not been for millennia.

As I discuss elsewhere in greater detail (Willems-Braun 1997), West Coast nature photography is marked by a tension between representing “wilderness” and representing a Native presence. Adrian Dorst’s spectacular(ized) photographs of Clayoquot Sound are instructive in this respect. Despite representing a region inhabited (and extensively modified) by a large Native population, Dorst’s photographs rarely admit the presence of Native peoples. More important, when a Native presence appears within the frame, it does so *only* under the guise of the “traditional” (see Figure 5). In many ways this is unfortunate. Dorst’s photographs present compelling reasons (both aesthetic and ecological) for resisting the intrusion of



FIGURE 5 Locating the ‘traditional’ in Clayoquot Sound. By conflating the ‘traditional’ with the ‘natural’ BC environmental groups are able to reconcile the presence of Native peoples with their rhetorics of ‘wilderness’. Photograph by Adrian Dorst. Reproduced with permission of Western Canada Wilderness Committee.

industrial forestry, yet by containing Native presence within the rhetorics of the “traditional,” they simply update deeply held, highly romantic, and resolutely Eurocentric notions of the “ecological Indian,” where “traditional” practices are assumed to be “ecologically harmonious.” *Modern* Native activities, and the use by Native peoples of what are taken to be modern (European) technologies, never appear in the pages of these books, nor, for that matter, do they appear elsewhere in the literature of BC’s environmental movement. Technology is equated with an intrusive modernity that imperils wilderness and that, in the hands of “traditional” Natives, appears inauthentic. This is a disempowering logic that belies the support for Native land rights that has been articulated by environmental groups such as the Western Canada Wilderness Committee and Greenpeace. Such rhetorics — whether intended or not — equate “traditional” Natives *with* nature, narrowly delineating the positions that Native peoples are able to occupy within forestry debates and presenting them with an imperative: resist modernization or risk losing both your identity and your voice! By equating “wilderness” with the absence of modern culture, and by representing First Nations only through the lens of the “traditional,” the BC environmental movement risks a subtle imperialism that denies First Nations their voice as *modern cultures* that are not solely interested in preserving what, at the end of the day, is little more than a mirror-image of industrial production and the object of a middle-class urban desire: wilderness. Native culture becomes encased in the same museum exhibit as does nature.¹⁹ For BC First Nations, situated in the hinterlands of a global staple trade, industrial forestry in itself is not the problem; rather, the problem is who has authority over the *production of nature* in their traditional territories.

POSTSCRIPT: ARTICULATING SOCIAL NATURE

In this article I have attempted to link the “isolation” that Simon Lucas expressed to the Pearse Commission in 1975, and that is still widely experienced by many Native communities, with the “itineraries

¹⁹This is mirrored in “official” environmental literatures and not only in nature photography allied with the movement. Environmentalists frequently refer to culturally modified trees and to the importance of the forest to “traditional” Native cultural and spiritual practices. Thus, when the Sierra Club interprets Nuu-chah-nulth resistance as a call “for the permanent protection of their cultural and spiritual values, environmental subsistence sites, marine resources, and salmon bearing streams and rivers,” they foreclose on an “open future” for the Nuu-chah-nulth on their traditional territories (Sierra Club n.d., [1993?]).

of silencing” that have marginalized Native voices in debates over rights of access and responsibilities of use in BC’s rainforests. What I have shown, in the three examples chosen, is that Native peoples must negotiate a representational terrain marked by colonialist practices. Of course, not all foresters, staples theorists, and environmentalists operate under the thrall of these representational logics, yet they continue to frame the “forest,” its “custodians,” its “publics,” and its “economies.” To leave the story here, however, would be to represent only the effectiveness of colonial power without recognizing practices of resistance. As is evident in the many court challenges and political actions of Native peoples, such representational logics have been challenged on numerous fronts. I wish to conclude by turning in more detail to an example of what might be called a contestatory politics of *articulation*, which — like the Vickers painting discussed earlier — disrupts the “itineraries of silencing” found in colonialist rhetorics and articulates alternative rhetorical spaces.

Over the past number of years the work of Coast Salish artist Yuxweluptun (Lawrence Paul) have been widely exhibited, most recently in a one-person show at the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery at the University of British Columbia. Trained at the Emily Carr School of Art, Yuxweluptun has forged the sort of hybrid vision that is so unsettling to Western histories of art and artefacts. Combining the cosmologies and visual motifs of Northwest Coast culture with the modernist tradition of surrealism, Yuxweluptun’s work is sufficiently aesthetically sophisticated by “Western” standards (i.e. it is not considered to be “primitive”) to garner considerable critical attention, yet it is resolutely grounded in the traditions and politics of West Coast Native life. Already an industry of critique has begun to weave stories around his art, debating its relation to, and points of intersection with, “West Coast Indian Art” and “European modernist” traditions, questioning its position vis-à-vis the institutions of artistic production in Canada, and worrying over the wedding of aesthetics and politics.²⁰

For my purposes, however, what is intriguing about Yuxweluptun’s “salvation art” (the phrase is his) is the manner in which it unselfconsciously combines politics and aesthetics in a landscape vision that destabilizes accepted renderings of nature on the West Coast. As Charlotte Townsend-Gault (1995) notes, Yuxweluptun

²⁰ See the catalogue that accompanied the Belkin exhibit (Yuxweluptun 1995).

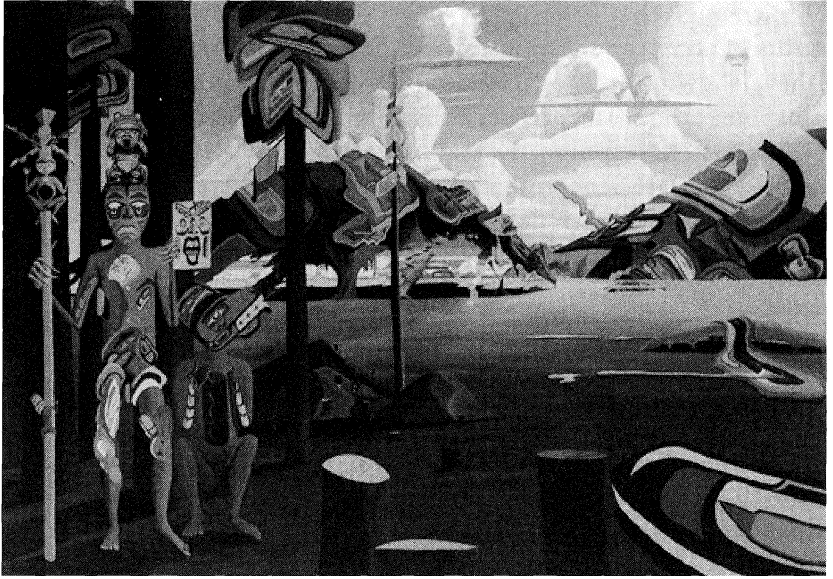


FIGURE 6 *Scorched Earth, Clear-cut Logging on Native Sovereign Lands, Shaman Coming to Fix*. [1991] Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptin. Reproduced with permission of artist.

paints not landscapes but land *claims*. If Emily Carr — still mythologized as the “artist of the West Coast” — purified coastal landscapes into two elements: the decaying artefacts of a dying Native culture and a brooding, spiritualized, all-encompassing nature, then Yuxweluptun does the opposite. In his work nature does not overwhelm a vanquished culture; rather, the “natural” landscapes that he paints are *built from* West Coast Native motifs. His *Scorched Earth, Clear-Cut Logging on Native Sovereign Lands, Shaman Coming to Fix* (Figure 6), for instance, is unapologetically political on a number of levels. On the one hand it can be read as a critique of the ecological violence of industrial forestry. The land weeps, as do the sun and a human figure resting on a distant hill. But this painting articulates much more, for, as Townsend-Gault notes, Yuxweluptun does not simply paint a “green” critique but asserts Native *rights* to a land being destroyed. The various components of the landscape itself — trees, mountains, the sun, even tree-stumps — are constructed out of Native motifs. These is no nature apart from these. Further, it is from within Native culture — rather than from yet another intervention by non-Native authorities — that this violence is healed. In a similar way, *Clayoquot* (Figure 7) depicts the violence of clearcuts as the interruption of Native culture, as gaping wounds in a cultural

landscape, its square rational spaces gouged into hills formed from Coast Salish ovoids.

Yuxweluptun articulates a landscape politics that resists incorporation within a colonialist visuality, an image of the land that refuses to let it settle as only a resource landscape, as only wilderness, or as an entity without a constitutive Native presence. His vision is of a social nature. It is a vision without pure essences, where Native presence and Native authority must be seen to exist. His landscapes are dynamic and fully historical — sites of cultural and political contestation where Native identity and the physical environment are never “fixed” in a timeless relation but are part of a complex dialectic of society and nature. Far from being *outside* history (or simply empty spaces available to economic and political calculation) these landscapes are at once fully Native and fully modern but still deeply ecological.



FIGURE 7 *Clayoquot*. [1993] Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun. Reproduced with permission of the artist.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am grateful to Trevor Barnes, Derek Gregory, and Cole Harris for their encouragement and critical attention during the preparation of this article. Research was supported through a doctoral fellowship from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

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