NEW MEDIA REVIEW

A Tradition of Evolution:
The Vancouver Indigenous Media Arts Festival

Carleigh Baker

Vancouver Indigenous Media Arts Festival: Vancouver, British Columbia, 25-26 May 2017. The festival featured film and new media presentations, including a “Turtle Island Shorts” program (May 26); VR and augmented reality presentations (May 27); and youth, international, and Indigenous justice screenings (May 28).

nə́čəʔmat ct (/Naat-sah-maat/) means “We are one” in the Musqueam language of hən̓q̓əmən̓əm. This name was given to the Vancouver Indigenous Media Arts Festival (VIMAF) 2017 by Musqueam knowledge keeper Shane Point to recognize the tradition of bringing communities together in a modern context to share and celebrate arts and culture. Indigenous arts are both rooted in tradition and constantly evolving. The stories shared through generations are not museum pieces – preserved behind glass for perpetuity – but, rather, are able to grow and adapt alongside cultural and societal changes. This makes the field of media arts a challenging and dynamic space for creators. VIMAF organizers Steven Eastman and Dr. June Scudeler assembled a collection of films and presentations that reflected the intersection of digital media and traditional knowledge, celebrating the creative minds of our diverse and multi-talented community.

The festival kicked off at Studio 1398 on 25 May. After cultural knowledge keeper Shane Point generously provided some context on the meaning of nə́čəʔmat ct, Musqueam artist Christie Lee Charles (a.k.a. Christy Lee) performed what she called hən̓q̓əmən̓əm hip hop – a blend of stories, traditional teachings, and beats. Charles’s approach to music – which is created with permission from elders and adherence to protocols – is a prime example of how modern forms are used to bring cultural teachings to new audiences. Charles opened with a song she wrote for her daughter, and she accompanied herself on the drum. As she...
moved into hip hop, rapping in both English and hən̓q̓əmin̓əm̓, she used pre-recorded beats, skilfully laid down by DJ O Show. This blending of tradition and innovation would be reflected throughout the weekend’s events.

The Turtle Island shorts program on 26 May included filmic explorations of language and cultural resurgence, with work by Elizabeth LaPensée, Gregory Coyes, and Cara Mumford. Coyes’s short film *Strutting for Our Sisters* (Good Medicine Media) documents a march conducted in Vancouver by the Warriors Against Violence to raise awareness of violence against women. Coyes, who is of Cree, Mohawk, and mixed European ancestry, is a member of the Indigenous Performing Arts Alliance and teaches at Capilano University. The men in the film spoke passionately about intergenerational trauma, reversing patterns of violence, and honouring women. This show of solidarity – with a nod to Indigenous resurgence via the building of strong communities from within – felt particularly appropriate to the idea of nə́cəmət ct since, as the film points out, the men literally walked a mile in high heels. In *Strutting for Our Sisters*, Coyes uses sound to great effect, centring the voices of Indigenous women. In the opening montage, feminine laughter is cut short by an ambulance siren – a nod to the devastating effects of violence. While the interviews are mostly with male participants, the first and last speakers in the documentary are women. At the film’s close, an unseen speaker praises the marchers, appealing specifically to their “feminine side”: “These men are not just brave and smart, these men are compassionate. These men have a power and a beauty and a grace that more men need to own.” Coyes’s choice to anchor his film with female voices reminds viewers that, although it’s entertaining to see men teetering in heels, this was a day of honouring our sisters.

The second day of the festival focused on digital media, featuring two mobile apps currently in development. Adrian Duke, from the Muscowpetung First Nation in Saskatchewan, is building an Indigenous knowledge network through an app called Wikiupedia – a location-based tool for collecting, preserving, and sharing traditional stories and knowledge. Duke sees the app as a way of increasing engagement between youth and elders by creating a digital database of stories to which interested users can gain access through their smart phones. This database includes augmented reality “virtual tours” that, at marked locations, allow users to experience on-site story vignettes on their phones. For those who aren’t able to take the tour, the archive will also be available simply by searching online.
Duke recognized the ability of technology both to facilitate and to impede communication, and his company is working with this knowledge. With the idea that elders and youth can get together – the former as storytellers and the latter as digital scribes or “story catchers” – Wikiupedia promises to make smart phones a tool for generational connection. Duke also has some well-known story catchers helping to build content for the app, including Gregory Coyes, Ryan McMahon, and Ronnie Dean Harris.

But collecting and sharing traditional knowledge brings many challenges as Indigenous stories come with a significant amount of context and protocol that must be observed and honoured. In his presentation, Duke acknowledged the need for a story authentication process to ensure that the information posted by users is appropriate and relevant. Questions with which app developers might not commonly wrestle – such as “who told you this story?” and “Do you have permission to tell this story?” – need to be translated into an efficient, accurate vetting system. Also, stories change over time and are altered by storytellers to serve specific purposes at specific times, which makes verifying authenticity difficult.

Duke freely admitted that the app is a work in progress, and he is working directly with Indigenous communities to develop it. Users on the Wikiupedia website can register as a story catcher (someone with a story to share) or as a cultural guide (someone who can help with authentication). So, for now, good old-fashioned community power is fuelling this digital knowledge network.

Also presenting were Michael and Caroline Running Wolf, who are assembling hundreds of hours of VR 360 film shot at the Dakota Access Pipeline water protector camps, with the goal of creating a narrative that highlights the community building and support networks that occurred during the occupation. They discussed how the scant media attention that the occupation did manage to receive was focused on police and military presence. Although this was vital information for viewers, the Running Wolfs felt that the experience of being in the camps and witnessing the resilience and strength of Indigenous peoples who came together from all across the globe should also have been foregrounded.

All attendees received a free Google Cardboard viewer – which allows users to turn their phones into virtual reality headsets – and access to the app. This resulted in a crowd of thrilled participants creeping around the theatre with arms extended, with the Running Wolfs close by to provide any necessary tweaking. Currently supported by Google and Mapbox,
the Running Wolfs envision an app that, via oculus gear, will eventually take users from Standing Rock to anywhere on the globe.

For scholars, locating Indigenous perspectives in digital space offers unparalleled opportunities to interrogate dominant narratives, unfettered by colonial territorial boundaries. Virtually sharing alternate stories to those provided by mainstream media could potentially allow for Indigenous self-representation on a global scale. However, both the prohibitive cost of oculus gear and the tremendous amount of work required to build VR worlds are still major challenges for the Running Wolfs’ project – challenges they appear to be facing with unbridled enthusiasm and a wealth of knowledge.

Concluding with screenings of youth-made and international short films, as well as an Indigenous justice program, the Vancouver Indigenous Media Arts Festival reached wide to bring together a diverse collection of artists and developers both to showcase where we are as a community and to provide an exciting look at what’s to come. Holding a mirror up to the communities it represented, VIMAF left the impression that we are rooted in tradition, that we are changing, and, as Elder Point acknowledged with the title of nə́čəʔmat ct, that we are one.
Literary Land Claims: The “Indian Land Question” from Pontiac’s War to Attawapiskat
Margery Fee
Megan Harvey
University of Victoria

Amidst the celebrations for the 150th anniversary of Canada’s Confederation this year, scholars and citizens alike are calling for national reflection on what this anniversary is meant to commemorate. To this end, Margery Fee’s Literary Land Claims is timely reading. Beginning with the question of how literature claims land, Fee draws our attention to the ways our stories support or trouble the settler claims to Indigenous territories that constituted the founding acts of the Canadian nation-state. By exploring a refreshing range of textual material, Fee also challenges what counts as “literature” in the Canadian canon and makes space for diverse voices. Alongside the more conventional fare of literary studies seen in John Richardson’s early Canadian fiction and Tekahionwake/E. Pauline Johnson’s poetry and dramatic works, Fee’s chapters focus on the transcripts of Louis Riel’s final court hearing, Archibald Belaney/Grey Owl’s conservationist writings, and Syilx elder Harry Robinson’s oral histories. Together with a conclusion that engages the public discourse around Idle No More, Attawapiskat, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission on Residential Schools, Fee analyzes texts from 1796 to 2013. Importantly, she teases out the entangled ways in which “identity is connected to land rights” in this country, marshalling an impressive depth and breadth of knowledge relating to Canadian literary criticism and the history of Indigenous-settler relations (3).

The main chapters offer bold rereadings of well- and lesser-known works by authors who possessed “varying relationships to Indigenousness and therefore to land” (3). Other than Robinson, her subjects are not easily slotted into the categories of Indigenous or Canadian, in their time or in ours. The question of identity here is critical to Fee’s broader concerns about the legitimacy of Canada’s claims to land. She thoughtfully unpacks the social and legal contexts...
that shaped how figures as diverse as Richardson, Riel, Johnson, Belaney, and Robinson lived, wrote, and spoke. She demonstrates how all five expressed “dissident positions” in their own time with respect to the prevailing narratives on what it meant to be Canadian or Indigenous, and how land rights accrued or were denied to people as a result of how successfully they could be slotted into one category or the other or work them to their advantage.

Some of Fee’s subjects, however, are more easily apprehended as dissidents than others, which is the great strength of this fascinating book. Fee characterizes the current critical climate in Canada as one in which “agonizing discussions about who is authentically Indigenous often overwhelm discussions about the content and quality of what people actually did, said, or wrote” (3). Her refusal to allow her own readings to be similarly overwhelmed produces sensitive interpretations that challenge her readers: it is the skilful analysis of figures as controversial as Belaney, for example, that makes this work so compelling.

Throughout, Fee encourages us to understand her subjects for the complex positions they inhabit in relation to a set of stories about Canada, the land, and Indigeneity in distinct historical periods. She asks that we resist dismissing those whose biographies and behaviours confound easy categories and, at the same time, offers accounts that are at once redemptive and acutely conscious of her subjects’ limitations.

The result is a rich and thoughtful book that will appeal to anyone writing or teaching in fields relating to settler-colonial, Canadian, and Indigenous studies. Historians in particular will find Fee’s chapters a valuable complement to the original texts she discusses.

**New Treaty New Tradition: Reconciling New Zealand and Maori Law**

Carwyn Jones


232 pp. $95.00 cloth.

**Fragile Settlements: Aboriginal Peoples, Law, and Resistance in South-West Australia and Prairie Canada**

Amanda Nettelbeck, Russell Smandych, Louis A. Knafla, and Robert Foster


336 pp. $95.00 cloth.

Neil Vallance

Victoria

Neither book under review has an explicit connection with British Columbia. Nonetheless, both deal with subjects of great relevance to the province. In *New Treaty New Tradition* Jones addresses the complexities of the New Zealand treaty settlement process, which has many similarities to the modern BC treaty process. In *Fragile Settlements* the authors undertake an ambitious overview of the (imperfect) imposition of state jurisdiction over Indigenous peoples in parts of Australia and Canada, generating a variety of insights applicable to the BC experience. At first glance the two books do not appear to have much in common, but they grapple with two aspects of the same issue — namely, the tensions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous legal systems, past and present. Nettelbeck et al. describe the
growth of state law in settler colonies and Indigenous peoples’ resistance to it, while Jones foregrounds the resurgence of Maori law and the resulting pushback by the New Zealand state.

Jones is schooled in Maori legal traditions by virtue of his Ngāti Kahungunu and Te Aitanga-a-Māhaki descent, and in Canadian Aboriginal law through his time as a PhD student at the University of Victoria. Each chapter of the book begins with a story told to a Maori child by his father, illustrating an area of Maori law discussed in the body of the chapter. This is an explicit adoption of John Borrows’s powerful technique of using storytelling as a way to capture the essence of Indigenous legal systems. Jones explains the underpinnings of Maori legal theory and connects them to the theoretical work of Canadian legal scholars such as Borrows, Gordon Christie, Jeff Corntassel, Val Napoleon, James Tully, and Jeremy Webber. The first part of the book “lays out important historical, theoretical, and conceptual background to the analysis of Maori law” (22). Jones summarizes five central concepts of Maori law: relationships, mana or authority, nurturing and stewardship, recognition of the spiritual dimension, and reciprocity (66–77). The second part “focuses on the treaty settlement process” (24), by which he means the implementation of agreements providing redress for past wrongs, the allocation of land, and the co-management of resources such as fisheries and forests. He warns that the present settlement process has had the unintended consequence of undermining Maori legal traditions and impeding the reconciliation of Maori law with the New Zealand legal system (30). In large measure, this is due to the fact that the government remains wedded to the attainment of certainty and finality rather than accepting this process as “a new beginning” (356). His conclusion applies with equal force to the BC treaty process, which is additionally hobbled by the fact that First Nations legal traditions are not as yet adequately represented in negotiations. Until this imbalance can be addressed, reconciliation is unlikely to occur.

Of the four co-authors of Fragile Settlements two are Australian academics and two are Canadian, which ensures well-informed commentary on both regions under study. They state: “this book sets out to examine the legal and institutional processes that shaped efforts to assert sovereignty and secure jurisdiction over Indigenous peoples, to consider how they differed … and to ask to what degree they succeeded” (ix-x). They acknowledge that the Numbered Treaties (1 to 7) blanketed the Canadian Prairies, while no treaties were concluded in the territories of South and West Australia; nonetheless, they argue convincingly that useful comparisons can be made between the colonial experiences of these disparate regions. Chapter 1 provides an overview of British colonial policy in the first half of the nineteenth century. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the development of colonial policing, Chapter 3 describes in detail the gradual application of policing to the Aboriginal populations of the two regions, and Chapter 4 provides a thoughtful consideration of the role of “Native Police, Trackers, and Scouts.” Chapters 5, 6, and 7 consider the contributions of government officials (“Protectors of Aborigines” and “Indian Agents”), the court system, and the church to the project of bringing Indigenous communities under state control. Chapter 8 points out examples of Indigenous resistance to colonial authority but does not attempt to outline the role played by Indigenous legal traditions in this struggle. Chapter 9
makes the case for the relevance of this history to the future of Indigenous-settler relations. All of these comparisons bring up a host of potential parallels with and contrasts to events in British Columbia, begging for the attention of this province’s scholars.

*Fragile Settlements* reads like an edited collection of essays, resulting in a disjointedness that could have been offset by more effectively pulling together its component parts. This cavil aside, the authors are to be commended for their courage in making comparisons across such a wide range of temporal and geographical contexts. In this undertaking they have succeeded, thus making a major contribution to trans-colonial studies. *New Treaty New Tradition* is beautifully written, and its engaging style renders complex Maori legal concepts accessible to Canadian scholars, students, and the general public. Readers will come away not only with an understanding of Maori legal traditions but also with an appreciation of the principles informing Indigenous thinking in many jurisdictions, including British Columbia.

**The Contemporary Coast Salish: Essays by Bruce Granville Miller**
Bruce Granville Miller and Darby C. Stapp, editors
347 pp. $19.95 paper.

**Brian Thom**
*University of Victoria*

I was a third-year undergraduate at the University of British Columbia in 1990 when Bruce Miller joined the Department of Anthropology and Sociology, launching his second career after having taught high school. Between 1991 and 1994 I took several of his classes, worked as his research assistant, and benefited from his joining my MA committee. My experiences with Bruce were of crossing borders – between archaeology and cultural anthropology, between the United States and Canada, between Coast Salish and newcomer understandings. Many of these same concerns are reflected in the themes of this book. Navigating borders, as Miller shows, involves grappling with state power, colonial history, cultural identity, and settler ignorance. This collection represents much of Miller’s published work since the 1990s, and it will benefit not only academics, those interested in public policy, and legal audiences but also Coast Salish communities themselves. In addition to nineteen previously published works, *The Contemporary Coast Salish* includes two important new chapters and several other brief contributions. These are organized into eight themes that could be broadly characterized as engaged political anthropology, set in the context of decades-long partnerships with various Coast Salish communities, most significantly those of the Upper Skagit (in which Miller did his doctoral research) and several Stó:lō communities (in which Miller and his graduate students have carried on a close research collaboration for over twenty-five years).

Several of the chapters stand out for their critical insight into issues that continue to be of pressing concern. Miller and Boxberger’s “Creating Chiefdoms” (Chapter 4) crafts a carefully ethnohistorical study that problematizes dated anthropological theories that are imposed on Coast Salish peoples with ongoing consequences. In a series of chapters on “folk,” or “customary,” law (7,
Miller works to make Coast Salish law recognizable in contemporary contexts – leading-edge work that informs developing legal practices. In Chapter 8, “Bringing Culture In,” Miller provides an illuminating discussion of contemporary Coast Salish potlatch, feast, and longhouse practices without stepping into the problematic and private areas that might reveal too much, instead sharing insights from historic and contemporary practice that can move us forward towards the goals of reconciliation. His post-9/11 chapters (19 and 20) sensitively relay how the hardened border affects identity and citizenship, salmon fisheries, health services, and spiritual dignity. The concluding chapter, based on his electric plenary talk given at the 2012 Vancouver Island Treaties conference (https://vitreaties.wordpress.com/conference-videos/), is as much an analysis of the nature of knowledge and history as it is a consideration of the possibilities of more just and equitable treaty relations in the twenty-first century. With these chapters collected in one volume, Miller and Stapp provide readers from within and beyond academia with ready access to critical insights into contemporary life in the Coast Salish world. Only Chapter 2, the introduction to another of Miller’s books, seems out of place, with its summaries of chapters from another text. The first third of that chapter should have been edited out, and the useful (but now ten-year-old) literature review updated with recent scholarship by and with Coast Salish peoples.

What makes The Contemporary Coast Salish special is the fact that Miller’s three decades of experience with Coast Salish peoples is not a product of grant-funded academic research programs; instead, the problems and questions Miller addresses have, by and large, emerged from communities that have set the research agenda and benefited from Miller’s role as cogent mediator between institutions and communities interacting within the Coast Salish world. This being the case, the book is of vital importance to one of the major social questions society now faces: the place of culture in seeking social justice and equality within legacies of colonialism.

Throughout The Contemporary Coast Salish, Miller maintains his distinctive style, not relying on long quotes or decentring his own voice but, instead, offering a tell-it-like-it-is narrative as commentator, critic, and, at times, authority. The chapters are in dialogue with trends in academia, often providing a cold counterpoint to fashionable theories – sometimes clearly ahead of their time – and articulating principles that are relevant beyond anthropology, extending into law, public policy and history, and health. Miller challenges us to not be “stuck with the concepts of seasonal rounds, watersheds, or the notion of the historically passive Coast Salish” (339) but, rather, to embrace a diversity of social theories and disciplinary insights to reconfigure the place of Coast Salish peoples in contemporary society. This position demands that anthropological analysis focus attention on substantive matters of cultural concern rather than try to represent or recreate so-called traditional forms of culture. Miller’s approach offers a genuine position that would enable anthropologists to be powerful partners in supporting Indigenous efforts towards attaining self-determination. His infectious enthusiasm and socially grounded research have made important contributions to transforming how the contemporary lives of Coast Salish peoples are represented and understood.