

# BROADCASTING SOVEREIGNTY:

## *Exhibiting Nuxalk Radio at the University of British Columbia*

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### INTRODUCTION

As I WRITE THIS ARTICLE, the exhibition *Haida Now* recently opened at the Museum of Vancouver (MOV),<sup>1</sup> created in partnership with the Haida Gwaii Museum by guest curator Kwiaahwah Jones in collaboration with MOV curator Viviane Gosselin, and *Culture at the Centre* just opened at the Museum of Anthropology (MOA),<sup>2</sup> co-curated by five Indigenous-run cultural centres and museums in British Columbia representing the Nisga'a, Haida, Heiltsuk, Lil'wat, Squamish, and Musqueam, facilitated by MOA curators Pam Brown and Jill Baird. Exhibitions such as these are becoming more common in museum practice in British Columbia in which First Nations, often with their own display spaces, choose to self-represent in mainstream heritage institutions, in many cases located outside of their home territories.<sup>3</sup> First Nations choosing to actively exhibit within non-Indigenous spaces is part of a long story of contention over the place of Indigenous Northwest Coast material culture displayed in museums and galleries as well as of larger issues of representation and self-representation. Exhibitions like *Haida Now* and *Culture at the Centre* can be seen as one response to the history and critique of exhibitions concerning Indigenous peoples on the Northwest Coast curated by non-Indigenous people and displayed in museums and galleries outside of Indigenous control.<sup>4</sup> They are also

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<sup>1</sup> *Haida Now: A Visual Feast of Innovation and Tradition*, Museum of Vancouver, 16 March 2018 – 15 June 2019.

<sup>2</sup> *Culture at the Centre: Honouring Indigenous Cultures, History and Language*, Museum of Anthropology, 18 March 2018 – 30 September 2018.

<sup>3</sup> Squamish and Musqueam are the exceptions because they have traditional territory in what is now called the city of Vancouver and the University of British Columbia's endowment lands.

<sup>4</sup> For history and critique of Canadian museums' exhibitions of Indigenous culture, as well as discussion of attempts to address these, see Michael Ames, *Cannibal Tours and Glass Boxes: The Anthropology of Museums* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1992); Lynda Jessup and Shannon Bagg, eds., *On Aboriginal Representation in the Gallery* (Hull, QC: Canadian Museum of

evidence of museums' increasingly visible commitment to collaboration.<sup>5</sup> Further, they are part of an extensive tradition of Indigenous people representing themselves and their cultures to audiences in non-Indigenous spaces.<sup>6</sup> Indigenous people's decisions to share their languages, cultures, and treasures in non-Indigenous institutions illustrates an understanding of the strategic benefits of representing themselves in these locations.<sup>7</sup> These places can offer opportunities as "sites of representational power"<sup>8</sup> – sites in which Indigenous people can self-represent and, in so doing, mobilize awareness about their own political agendas.<sup>9</sup>

I begin with this discussion in order to introduce a third exhibition, *Nuxalk Radio: One Nation, Many Voices*, which opened on 1 March 2018 on the Vancouver campus of the University of British Columbia (UBC), notably located upon the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the hənq̓əminəm'-speaking Musqueam people (see Figure 1).<sup>10</sup> Like *Haida Now* and *Culture at the Centre*, this exhibition too shared the language, culture, and treasures of a First Nation far from its home

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Civilization, 2002), especially Jolene Rickard "After Essay – Indigenous Is the Local," 115–26; Ruth Phillips, *Museum Pieces: Toward the Indigenization of Canadian Museums* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011); Karen Duffek, "Inside Out and Outside In: Contemporary Art, Traditional Knowledge, and the Ethnology Museum," in *Northwest Coast Representations: New Perspectives on History, Art, and Encounters*, ed. Andreas Etges, Viola König, Rainer Hatoum, Tina Brüderlin, 145–62 (Berlin: Reimer, 2015); Karen Duffek and Tania Willard, eds., *Yuxweluptun: Unceded Territories* (Vancouver/Berkeley: Figure 1 Publishing, 2016); and the special issue of *Art Journal* on "Indigenous Futures" edited by Kate Morris and Bill Anthes, especially Kathleen Ash-Milby and Ruth Phillips, "Inclusivity or Sovereignty? Native American Arts in the Gallery or the Museum since 1992," *Art Journal* 76, 2 (2017): 10–38.

<sup>5</sup> Curator of ethnology at the Royal British Columbia Museum, Martha Black gives an excellent explanation of the various strategic reasons that First Nations on the Northwest Coast would collaborate with museums on exhibitions. See Martha Black, "Collaborations: A Historical Perspective," in *Native Art of the Northwest Coast: A History of Changing Ideas*, ed. Charlotte Townsend-Gault, Jennifer Kramer, and Ki-ke-in, 785–827 (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2013). See also Ruth B. Phillips, "Introduction to Community Collaboration in Exhibitions: Toward a Dialogic Paradigm," in *Museums and Source Communities: A Routledge Reader*, ed. Laura Peers and Alison Brown, 155–70 (London: Routledge, 2003); Christina Gish Hill and Medeia Csoba DeHass, "Digital Representation of Indigenous Peoples through Sharing, Collaboration, and Negotiation: An Introduction," *Museum Anthropology Review* 12, 2 (2018): 40–54.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Paige Raibmon, "Theatres of Contact: The Kwakwaka'wakw Meet Colonialism in British Columbia at the Chicago World's Fair," *Canadian Historical Review* 81, 2 (2000): 157–90; or Wolfgang Haberland, "Nine Bella Coolas in Germany," in *Indians and Europe: An Interdisciplinary Collection of Essays*, ed. Christian Feest, 337–74 (Aachen: Herodot Rander Verl., 1987).

<sup>7</sup> Duffek, "Inside Out and Outside In," 147.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Martha Black astutely notes: "First Nations participation in anthropological and museum projects has been, and continues to be, strategic. It is designed to further community development, self-governance, and political agendas" ("Collaborations," 794).

<sup>10</sup> *Nuxalk Radio: One Nation, Many Voices* closed on 3 April 2018.

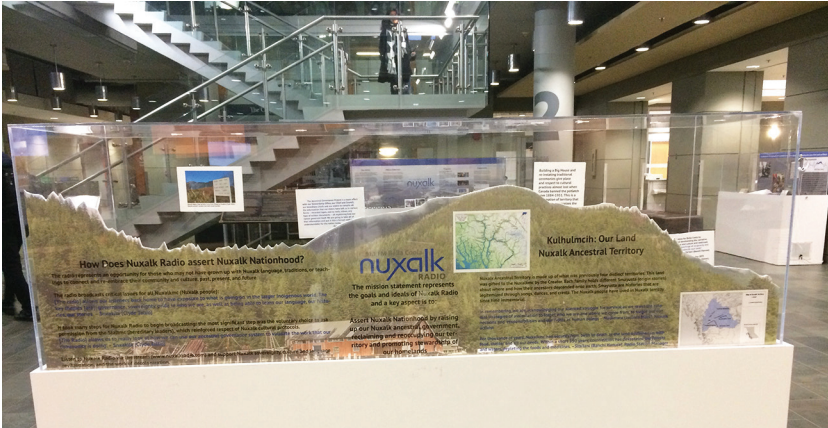


Figure 1. A view of the exhibition with Case 3 on Nuxalk Ancestral Governance and Nationhood in the foreground and Case 2 on Nuxalk Radio and Case 4 on Nuxalk Language in the background. Photo by Jennifer Kramer, 2018.

territory, but it was curated by sixteen non-Indigenous UBC students in a museum methods course and was located not in a museum but, rather, on a busy thoroughfare in a campus building.<sup>11</sup> As the instructor for this course, I wanted students to be able to experience some of the challenges and to think about the implications of producing an exhibition about Indigenous people in the twenty-first century. I encouraged them to adopt an approach that would do more than just attempt to follow the expectations for collaboration that have become common for museums:<sup>12</sup> I wanted them to adopt an approach that would also acknowledge and respect Indigenous people's ability and right to represent themselves. In this way, they were able to facilitate the use of a space at UBC to foreground Indigenous sovereignty and, at the same time, to create opportunities for intercultural dialogue and understanding.

The exhibition itself was created with the permission and under the guidance of the Nuxalk Radio Board. Comprised of eight discrete cases in the foyer of the Irving K. Barber Learning Centre, I suggest that it did more than display the history and content of Nuxalk Radio 91.1FM. I contend that the exhibition served to aid Nuxalk Radio's mission for

<sup>11</sup> ANTH 431 "Museum Practice and Curatorship" is a course in the UBC Department of Anthropology composed of upper-level anthropology, history, and art history undergraduates. I instructed this course from September 2017 through April 2018 and was assisted by museum anthropology master's student Emily Leischner.

<sup>12</sup> See Black, "Collaborations."

the Nuxalk Nation to return to ancestral governance by reaffirming Nuxalk sovereignty through respecting Nuxalk cultural protocols. Because the work of the Nuxalk Nation was displayed in a university gallery space, UBC students and other visitors witnessed another form of broadcasting Nuxalk knowledge and authority – one that mimicked a potlatch, wherein guests legitimize their host’s history and rights to land and resources through seeing them ceremonially enacted in speech, song, dance, and materialized crests. By acknowledging the authority of Nuxalk ways of knowing and communicating, the student-curators modelled the kind of behaviour they hoped to elicit from non-Indigenous viewers of their exhibition.

#### DEVELOPING NUXALK RADIO: ONE NATION, MANY VOICES

##### *Nuxalk Radio 91.1FM*

Nuxalk Radio is a non-commercial radio station administered by the non-profit Alkw Media Society and run by a youthful and energetic volunteer board made up of Alhq’uxlikwana (Dayna Tallio), Slts’lani (Banchi Hanuse), Snxakila (Clyde Tallio), Nunanta (Iris Siwallace), and Aycts’mqa (Lori George).<sup>13</sup> Tellingly, *alkw* means “speaker for the hereditary leaders” in the Nuxalk language. Therefore, the very name of the radio society, along with its tagline, reflects the radio station’s goal: *Lhulhamktulhs ala ts’ktaliwalh alb ti s-kulhulmcilh t’ayc n wa sulutilh ats* (Broadcasting the laws of the lands and waters). In fact, Nuxalk Radio board member Snxakila<sup>14</sup> created this tagline by employing the

<sup>13</sup> Nuxalk Radio is part of a long trajectory of Indigenous radio and media pertaining to self-representation and political activism. For more on this history, see Valerie Alia, *Un/Covering the North: News, Media, and Aboriginal People* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1999); Valerie Alia, *The New Media Nation: Indigenous Peoples and Global Communication* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010); Miranda J. Brady and John M.H. Kelly, *We Interrupt This Program: Indigenous Media Tactics in Canadian Culture* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2017); Marian Bredin, “Indigenous Media as Alternative Media: Participation and Cultural Production,” in *Alternative Media in Canada*, ed. K. Kozolanka, P. Mazepa, and D. Skinner, 184–206 (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2012); Kathleen Buddle, “Aboriginal Cultural Capital Creation and Radio Production in Urban Ontario,” *Canadian Journal of Communication* 30, 1 (2005): 7–39; Kristin Dowell, “Pushing Boundaries, Defying Categories: Aboriginal Media Production on the Northwest Coast,” in *Native Art of the Northwest Coast: A History of Changing Ideas*, ed. Charlotte Townsend-Gault, Jennifer Kramer and Ki-ke-in, 826–63 (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2013); Faye Ginzburg, “Embedded Aesthetics: Creating a Discursive Space for Indigenous Media,” *Cultural Anthropology* 9, 3 (1994): 365–82; Sigurjon Baldur Hafsteinnsson and Marian Bredin, eds., *Indigenous Screen Culture in Canada* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2010).

<sup>14</sup> Besides being part of Nuxalk Radio in many capacities (co-founder, board member, and occasional radio show host), Snxakila is a fluent Nuxalk language speaker and a Nuxalk knowledge holder who serves as *alkw* (speaker) for the *staltamc* (hereditary leaders).

potlatch word *lhulhamktulhs*, meaning “to tell the news to the guests of the traditions gone through by the initiate” and translating into “to tell the news today,” implying broadcasting on the radio.<sup>15</sup>

As Snxakila shared:

It took many steps for Nuxalk Radio to begin broadcasting: the most significant step was the voluntary choice to ask permission from the *statalmc* [active group of hereditary leaders working together at the present time], which reinforced respect of Nuxalk cultural protocols. [Nuxalk Radio] allows us to really look at how we can use our ancestral governance system to validate the work that our community is doing.<sup>16</sup>

Nuxalk Radio 91.1FM began transmitting through unceded airwaves on summer’s solstice,<sup>17</sup> 2014, from Bella Coola, British Columbia, with a licence signed by the *statalmc* and posted in the trailer from which they broadcast. The station also operates with a licence exemption from the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC).<sup>18</sup>

### *Curatorial Research Process*

Having a long-standing relationship with the Nuxalk Nation since the early 1990s, and knowing the time constraints of a typical university course schedule, I thought that Nuxalk Radio would make an expedient exhibition subject and provide an opportunity for students to learn about collaboration and the responsibility of representation. I personally knew its board members and was aware of their centrality to the cultural strengthening work occurring in Bella Coola. To begin the curatorial research process, I paired each of the students with a contributor to Nuxalk Radio, whether board member, paid or volunteer radio host, knowledge holder, or language teacher. The students interviewed these stakeholders one-on-one via telephone to ask about the importance of Nuxalk Radio both to the individual and to the community. They also

<sup>15</sup> Snxakila, personal communication with Jennifer Kramer, 31 July 2018.

<sup>16</sup> Snxakila, telephone interview with Brendan Neary, 25 November 2017.

<sup>17</sup> Not coincidentally, 21 June happens to be National Indigenous Peoples Day in Canada.

<sup>18</sup> With their intention to promote Nuxalk ancestral governance via the Nuxalk Radio, the radio co-founders Ts'xwiiixw (Megan Moody), Slts'lani (Banchi Hanuse), Snxakila (Clyde Tallio), and Qwaxw (Spencer Siwallace) expressed their willingness to host a “pirate radio station” along the model of Secwepemc Radio 91.1 FM founded by Neskie Manuel (see Neskie Manuel, “Secwepemc Radio: Reclamation of Our Common Property,” in *Islands of Resistance: Pirate Radio in Canada*, ed. Andrea Langlois, Ron Sakolsky, and Marion Van der Zon, 71–74 [Vancouver: New Star Books, 2010]). However, they resisted the label’s implication that they were somehow thieves and so were okay with receiving a licence exemption from the CRTC for being a non-profit community radio.

asked what should be included in an exhibition about Nuxalk Radio held on a university campus hosted on unceded Musqueam territory, and whether there was any specific content to display, issues to raise, or subjects to avoid.

Snxakila responded that he wanted the exhibition to emphasize the way the radio station followed Nuxalk protocol by operating in a transparent manner with the community: “I think that a really important thing that we can highlight here, from what we’ve learned from what we’ve been doing [with the radio station] is that our methods of working with our community are all inclusive. So it’s really important, I think, that we talk about that. How when we make decisions, we make decisions together.”<sup>19</sup> Nuxalk Radio host Laqwmays (Jerrel Nelson) answered: “Whatever you guys feel is important to help, because you guys want to bring us out onto a bigger platform, right? So I think, almost everything really to show how we’ve grown and to show the kind of content that we’re bringing up now.”<sup>20</sup> Slts’lani, who is not only one of Nuxalk Radio’s co-founders but also the station manager, answered: “I think even the fact that you guys are asking us is already a positive step, like what we want, and want to see in the exhibit.”<sup>21</sup>

It is clearly important to the Nuxalk that the student-curators recognized their right to speak for themselves. To this end, the exhibition would not have gone ahead without the permission of the Alkw Media Society and without the approval of the Nuxalk Radio Board, the members of which reviewed all of the text and images before they were put on display. Thus, authorization and control over Nuxalk representation remained with the Nuxalk. A curious doubling occurred, reflected in the exhibition’s text, which emphasized not only the Nuxalk Radio’s decision to follow cultural protocol to broadcast but also the UBC students’ effort to follow respectful and responsible protocol, which asked for permission to represent. Through this action, the students were recognizing Nuxalk authority over their own identity and its representations.

### *Balancing Past, Present, and Future*

A central concern in developing the *Nuxalk Radio* exhibition was deciding how much of the Nuxalk past needed to be conveyed in the exhibition text in order for visitors to understand Nuxalk present and future needs for healing and wellness. When asked their opinion, interviewed

<sup>19</sup> Snxakila, interview with Brendan Neary.

<sup>20</sup> Laqwmays, telephone interview with Madeleine Seed, 25 November, 2017.

<sup>21</sup> Slts’lani, telephone interview with Anna Nielsen, 17 November 2017.

stakeholders responded differently – some suggested emphasizing only the positive inspirations and outcomes achieved by Nuxalk Radio and others thought it important to share the historical reality of Nuxalk experiences under British colonialism and Canadian assimilation. Acwsalcta School culture and language teacher Spuxta Nelson said she wanted the exhibition

[to represent] in a positive note, obviously. I mean, there isn't a lot out there. I don't know of any other radio stations along the coast that [are] doing what we are doing, so hopefully it is something that is an inspiration to other Nations to say, "Oh look at these people, they managed to get their own radio station and are broadcasting their own language and songs." Maybe an inspiration for others to do the same.<sup>22</sup>

Nunanta, a Nuxalk Radio board member and host stated: "I want it to be raw and show some rawness. I want to make people aware of the past trauma from our catastrophes. I think we need to talk about these things to help us, not move on, but help our community heal, and move forward with positiveness."<sup>23</sup> Radio host and artist Nuhawhawta (Sheldon Tallio) expressed a combination of the above two approaches:

[Culture is] everything our Creator has set for us and what our ancestors carry: our myths, legends, stories, and songs, which keep getting passed on from generation to generation. At one point it was like, "Stop: You can't speak the language!" Potlatches were banned ... We have to remember what we went through and say that we're proud of who we are as we breathe life back into our culture.<sup>24</sup>

The student-curators had to balance exhibition messaging about the ongoing trauma of what the Nuxalk term "the four modern catastrophes" – the smallpox epidemic, the relocation onto reserves, the creation of residential schools, and the banning of the potlatch – with messaging that emphasized the powerful work of Nuxalk Radio to move the community forward to healing, wellness, and what Snxakila calls *stl'mstaliwa* – "the full human experience." It was a challenge to emphasize Nuxalk agency and future-focused voice while contextualizing it within the residual legacies of Euro-Canadian colonialism. The students were sensitive to the issue of misrepresenting Indigenous people as victims without agency and conscientiously aware of the paramount need for working in collaboration to avoid this outcome.

<sup>22</sup> Spuxta, telephone interview with Susanne Haupt, 11 December 2017.

<sup>23</sup> Nunanta, telephone interview with Patricia Chisholm, 15 November 2017.

<sup>24</sup> Nuhawhawta, telephone interview with Nathan Clark, 1 December 2017.

### *The Responsibility of Representation*

The student-curators were tasked with considering how this exhibition might be beneficial to the Nuxalk when it was being held on a university campus 430 kilometres from the heart of Nuxalk territory. Cognizant of the weightiness of this undertaking to represent responsibly and respectfully a First Nation that already had the means to self-represent, the students decided to use the mission statement of Nuxalk Radio to inspire the organization of their exhibition. Each case theme attempted to cover one of the goals of Nuxalk Radio as expressed on the station's website:

Promote Nuxalk language use, increase the fluency of semi-fluent Nuxalk language speakers, inspire new Nuxalk language learners, raise the prestige of the Nuxalk language and reaffirm the fact that the Nuxalk language is relevant today;

Contribute positively to physical, mental, spiritual and emotional well-being;

Assert Nuxalk Nationhood by raising up our Nuxalk ancestral government, reclaiming and reoccupying our territory and promoting stewardship of our homelands;

Share Nuxalk history and culture; and

Promote the common goals of our neighbouring Nations and other Indigenous groups.<sup>25</sup>

The students brainstormed and workshopped potential titles and themes for the exhibition after taking into account the content contributions and suggestions from each of the Nuxalkmc the class interviewed.<sup>26</sup> Eventually, they ended up with a narrative arc: Case 1, "This Is Nuxalk," introduced the Nuxalk Nation and *kulbulmc* (unceded territory); Case 2 "*Lhulhamktulhs ala ts'ktaliwalh alh ti s-kulbulmcilh t'ayc n wa sulutilh ats* (Broadcasting the Laws of the Lands and Waters)," described Nuxalk Radio 91.1FM's mission and programming; Case 3, "Nuxalk Ancestral Governance and Nationhood," explained the importance of sovereignty and territorial stewardship; Case 4, "*Anustsayanmaxw* (All of You Listen)," explored the ways the radio station enhances Nuxalk language learning; Case 5, "*Stl'mstaliwa* (Full Human Experience) – Mind, Spirit, Body,"

<sup>25</sup> Nuxalk Radio, "About," *Nuxalk Radio*, <http://www.nuxalkradio.com/about>.

<sup>26</sup> Nuxalkmc means "Nuxalk people" in the Nuxalk language.



discussed the station's contributions to community wellness; and Cases 6 and 7 worked in tandem to discuss Nuxalk intangible and tangible culture and history. Case 6, "What Makes You Cultural?," examined written and oral methods of disseminating the authorized voice. Case 7, "What Does 'Art' Mean to You?," unpacked the meaning of material culture through dialogue with two Nuxalk regalia makers. The final case, Case 8, "*Putl'alt* (Those Not Yet Born) – For the Generations to Come," discussed Nuxalk community building and cultural strengthening and the future of Indigenous radio.

## THE WORK OF NUXALK RADIO

### *Radio for Understanding, Education, and Connection*

Nuxalk Radio co-founder Ts'xwiixw (Megan Moody) explained her vision for the impact of Nuxalk Radio:

We are trying to educate our community and other communities on Indigenous rights and our voice as Indigenous peoples. Starting Nuxalk Radio I see as a grassroots start where we show in our community how everything fits together – language, history, culture. It is a very important piece for our community to be able to learn, share, and flourish as a people. I think that the more our people listen, the more they will understand, and the more we can share with other communities. I think it is a very powerful tool.<sup>27</sup>

Another Nuxalk Radio co-founder and radio host, Qwaxw (Spencer Siwallace), echoes Ts'xwiixw's feelings, seeing the larger picture of what the radio station can accomplish: "Better understanding of ourselves or of the Nuxalk people: our history, our laws, and our ways, and how it is we're bringing them back and sharing different ideas, and how we can move forward not just locally, but globally, in a good way."<sup>28</sup> It is apparent that the radio station is a powerful connective tool between Nuxalkmc, between Nuxalk and other Indigenous communities, and between Nuxalk and non-Indigenous people. It broadcasts a complex soundscape expressing contemporary ways of being Nuxalk, from Acwsalcta School youth composing rap songs in Nuxalk, to ways of

<sup>27</sup> Ts'xwiixw, telephone interview with Sophie Yamauchi, 23 November 2017.

<sup>28</sup> Qwaxw, telephone interview with Raquel Robbins, 24 November 2017.

achieving environmental sustainability and food sovereignty, to bingo and karaoke.<sup>29</sup>

### *Listening to Radio like Witnessing a Potlatch*

Nuxalk history is affirmed through oral narrative, which runs the gamut from sharing family-owned *smayusta* (origin stories) embodied in regalia marked with ancestral crests and displayed and danced during potlatches to everyday stories that convey ways of living on and from the land, such as how to harvest cedar bark for weaving. A number of Nuxalkmc interviewed by the student-curators noted how Nuxalk Radio serves a parallel function to Nuxalk potlatching as both share oral teachings through *smayusta* and songs, and require listeners and viewers to actively witness the histories being shared and the work being done. Alhq'uxlikwana, chair of the Nuxalk Radio Board, said:

If you go to a feast or a potlatch [in Bella Coola], your role, as an invited guest, is to witness, and to remember. Because without that, things don't actually happen. If nobody remembers and tells the story of what they saw, then there's no record of it having happened. So you could argue that the radio station is a contemporary extension of that witnessing and remembering.<sup>30</sup>

After bringing his UBC First Nations and Endangered Languages class (FNEL 380: Technologies of Language Documentation and Revitalization) to view this exhibition, linguist Mark Turin reflected: "Indigenous communities like the Nuxalkmc have leveraged the formerly analogue medium of radio in compelling and transformative ways, breathing new life into old transistors, and using this now old communicative medium for the transmission of stories, song and conversation."<sup>31</sup>

### *Radio as a Powerful Tool for Language Learning*

Alhq'uxlikwana astutely observed:

The radio station is a language tool. That's the perspective that's really beautiful and unique ... Nuxalk culture is an oral tradition. There isn't traditionally a written language here. So all of the cultural knowledge is communicated by voice, in one way or another, and also by art – the

<sup>29</sup> The Acwsalcta School, founded in 1987 and run by the Nuxalk Nation, has been educating Nuxalk youth from pre-kindergarten to Grade 12 for thirty years. See "We Are Medicine," song and music video created by the Acwsalcta students with the mentorship of N'we Jinan artists in December 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VeWqgLLCefo>.

<sup>30</sup> Alhq'uxlikwana, telephone interview with Karina Greenwood, 24 November 2017.

<sup>31</sup> Written in an e-mail to Jennifer Kramer, 28 July 2018.

imagery that's included in carving and painting is an important way of communicating. But thinking about the radio station as an extension of that oral tradition I think is a really interesting direction.<sup>32</sup>

Thus one of the most significant parts of the radio station's mandate is to inspire Nuxalk language learning by providing greater access to Nuxalk language. It does this in multiple ways. Storytellers and potlatch speakers, such as Laaqwmays, Nunanta, and Qwaxw, serve as Nuxalk Radio hosts in order to publicly share teachings and stories, have conversations, and translate or parse Nuxalk words and phrases into English. Acwsalcta School language teacher Nukiklikmacw (Dale McCreery) produces Nuxalk language curriculum with Snxakila to be broadcast on Nuxalk Radio in order to teach both casual and ceremonial Nuxalk language. Through playing recordings of now deceased elders speaking and singing, and through reading on the air the published work of ethnographers and linguists who tape-recorded speakers and singers such as Sisinay (Dr. Margaret Siwallace),<sup>33</sup> Axtsikayc (Agnes Edgar Sr.), K'wisus (Dan Nelson Sr.), and Stalywa (Felicity Walkus), Nuxalk Radio is "kind of like a revitalization. It gives the community access to language where we didn't have it before."<sup>34</sup>

Nukiklikmacw explained that, due to the trauma inherited from the residential school experience, "All across Canada, people who are trying to re-learn their own languages often have less confidence, they're more critical, they're more judgmental against themselves, they're hard on themselves when they try learning, this is connected to that history."<sup>35</sup> Therefore, Nuxalk Radio makes a point of having young radio hosts such as Txta (Roland Mack) and Keanu McKay to demonstrate active language learning on the air. These people are willing to make mistakes and to have fun doing so. "Recent studies demonstrate both the central relevance of language to many aspects of community well-being and how the transformative healing nature and holistic benefits of language revitalization have an impact beyond nurturing linguistic vitality alone."<sup>36</sup> Beyond the achievement of individuals listening to and practising Nuxalk language on a daily basis, such as in the car while driving somewhere or at

<sup>32</sup> Alhq'uxlikwana, interview with Karina Greenwood.

<sup>33</sup> Dr. Margaret Siwallace was recognized with an honorary doctorate of letters in 1985 by the University of British Columbia for her work on preserving Nuxalk language and culture.

<sup>34</sup> Spuxta, interview with Susanne Haupt.

<sup>35</sup> Nukiklikmacw, telephone interview with Elizabeth Haupt, 21 November 2017.

<sup>36</sup> Pam Brown, Jennifer Carpenter, Gerry Lawson, Kim Lawson, Lisa Nathan, and Mark Turin, "Uplifting Voices," in *Reflections of Canada: Illuminating Our Biggest Possibilities and Challenges at 150 Years* (Vancouver: Peter Wall Institute for Advanced Studies, 2017), 266.

home while getting ready for the workday, it is evident that contemporary Indigenous language use benefits overall community health.

### *Demonstrating Reunification – Generating Wellness*

Nuxalk Radio was repeatedly identified as a locus to heal trauma and to generate health and community well-being, all of which transmits as Nuxalk pride. Nuxalk Radio board member, singer, dancer, and carver Aycts'mqa (Lori George), when asked what Nuxalk Radio meant to her, responded: "It means so much to me. It shows independence: the building as a nation to take back what was taken. A reawakening. Having the freedom to broadcast our thoughts, opinions. It shows who we are. It is who we are. It is a way to self-represent."<sup>37</sup> Or Ximana (Nola Mack), a chef, Indigenous food sovereigntist, and former radio host answered the same question: "It's opening the doors for people into understanding who we are. It's allowing us to represent ourselves. Not many people know Nuxalk, they know Mohawk and other stuff out there, but Nuxalk – a lot of people don't know about us. I'm kind of excited about it."<sup>38</sup>

The Nuxalkmc interviewed perceive that broadcasting Nuxalk language, culture, and history binds them together and demonstrates a totality. This unity is the strength of Nuxalk identity. One of our exhibition labels expresses the important, unifying work of the radio station by employing Snxakila's explanation for the term *tl'msta*: "Tl'msta is Nuxalk for 'human.' It also is the word for 'being,' one who awakens themselves to their land, their surroundings, and their culture. Tl'msta means to aspire [to] sharing knowledge [with] the next generation with one heart and one mind. Tl'msta is more than just a word: it is a cultural totality."<sup>39</sup> Nuxalk Radio is recognized as a source that promotes Nuxalk community wellness through integrating mind, body, and spirit. And it does this by "reunification:"<sup>40</sup> connecting land, culture, history, and language. For example, Spuxta recalled the effect of hearing her deceased grandmother's voice on Nuxalk Radio:

I was feeling pretty down and I went for a drive, and I turned on the radio, and I heard my grandmother telling a story. And there was such a connection that you just don't get when you turn on the radio normally, right? There was the voice of my grandmother who had

<sup>37</sup> Aycts'mqa, telephone interview with Nora Van Trotsenburg, 15 November 2017.

<sup>38</sup> Ximana, telephone interview with Samantha Marsh, 17 November 2017.

<sup>39</sup> Snxakila, interview with Brendan Neary.

<sup>40</sup> Nuhawhawta, interview with Nathan Clark.

passed on, like fourteen years ago. Suddenly she was there. And I could hear her voice and [it] just brought comfort to me.<sup>41</sup>

Emily Meikle, a scholar in museum studies who interviewed Ojibwe radio hosts about the impact of Indigenous-run radio in Ontario, crucially noted that “voice, both in terms of sound and authority, plays an important role in ... healing and knowledge sharing.”<sup>42</sup> For this reason, the exhibition labels were replete with Nuxalk voices, printed in the colour recognized as “Nuxalk blue” by Nuxalkmc and scholars alike so as to visually emphasize Nuxalk agency. Clearly, Nuxalk Radio 91.1FM is a technology of self-representation, and the student curators wanted to highlight this in the exhibition.<sup>43</sup>

## THE IMPACT OF THE *NUXALK RADIO* EXHIBITION

### *Amplifying Nuxalk Voices*

While Nuxalk Radio is limited to a local audience by radio airwaves blocked by the mountains surrounding the Bella Coola Valley, live streaming via the internet creates global accessibility ([www.nuxalkradio.com](http://www.nuxalkradio.com)). Even so, it made strategic sense for Nuxalk Radio, which speaks for and with the approximately three thousand Nuxalk people who make up the Nation,<sup>44</sup> to allow for their representation beyond Nuxalk territory. In this way, the exhibition at UBC amplified Nuxalk voices and increased the radio station’s prospective audience. With over fifty-four thousand UBC students on the Vancouver campus, of which over fourteen thousand are international, *Nuxalk Radio: One Nation, Many Voices*, on display in the major thoroughfare of a central campus building, had the potential to promote the relatively young radio station’s existence and to capture a much greater number of listeners.

<sup>41</sup> Spuxta, interview with Susanne Haupt.

<sup>42</sup> Emily Meikle, “Artifacts on Air: Cultural Coherence, Collaboration, and Remote Access in Indigenous Archaeological Collections” (MA thesis, University of Toronto, 2016), 43.

<sup>43</sup> For a pertinent scholarly evaluation of “Indigenous Media Futures,” see the Openings and Retrospectives section (edited by William Lempert) in *Cultural Anthropology* 33, 2 (2018): 173–232.

<sup>44</sup> According to Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, the registered population of the Nuxalk Nation is 1,735 as of February 2018. See Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, “First Nation Detail, Nuxalk Nation,” [http://fnp-ppn.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/fnp/Main/Search/FNMain.aspx?BAND\\_NUMBER=539&clang=eng](http://fnp-ppn.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/fnp/Main/Search/FNMain.aspx?BAND_NUMBER=539&clang=eng). “However, according to traditional Nuxalk government, the true Nuxalk population is closer to three thousand. This number includes people of Nuxalk ancestry who are not registered or may be registered to another ‘Indian Band.’” See Nuxalk Nation, “About,” *Nuxalk Nation*, accessed 31 March 2018, <http://nuxalknation.ca/about/>.

The student-curators had the difficult job of conveying Nuxalk Radio's central function (i.e., to stimulate Nuxalk language learning) within a small exhibition footprint comprising only two audio outlets attached to individual headphones. Ironically, in an exhibition about the transmission of voice and song over the airwaves, these eight cases existed within a study space located between libraries, which meant that sound had to be kept to a minimum. Even so, building upon Alhq'uxlikwana's perspective of Nuxalk Radio as another technology of communication, I argue that this exhibition amplified Nuxalk cultural knowledge transmission through another form of doubling – the act of representation and collaboration.<sup>45</sup>

Aware that reception of the exhibition's messages was just as important as the content of the labels and photos, the students made sure that the exhibition text emphasized connections between Vancouver visitors and the Nuxalk. Cognizant that most of their audience would be UBC students viewing the exhibition cases as they walked through the Irving K. Barber building, the student-curators consciously engaged student attention by posing questions that were intended to stimulate empathy, such as:

“How do you connect with your community?”

“How would you make sure your community's values and customs are sustained?”

“How much time and effort would you put back into your community if you knew your great-grandchildren would call the same place home?”

These queries urged UBC students to think from the perspective of Nuxalkmc who have been connected to Bella Coala intergenerationally since time immemorial. Asking the exhibition's audience to look

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<sup>45</sup> After bringing his UBC First Nations and Endangered Languages class (FNEL 380: Technologies of Language Documentation and Revitalization) to view this exhibition, linguist Mark Turin responded: “Nuxalk Radio: One Nation, Many Voices is an important, timely, and creative exhibition that powerfully illustrates how radio has not been eroded by the rise of new media, whether that be television, video or newer multimodal technologies associated with the internet ... The success of radio for Indigenous language and culture programming is in no small part thanks to the comparatively low cost of operations, its asynchronous nature that supports programs to be consumed at all hours (through repeats, podcasts, downloads and streaming services) and the unusual – even unique – quality of radio being both engaging yet not all-consuming, meaning that a listener can be actively involved in another activity at the same time. This collaboratively curated exhibition gets at all of these issues and more, and I was delighted to see my students engage with the content in critical and effective ways.” Written in an e-mail to Jennifer Kramer, 28 July 2018.

through the eyes of the Nuxalk was intended to show the congruence of the human connection to place and kin.<sup>46</sup> Amy Perreault, a strategist for Indigenous Initiatives at UBC's Centre for Teaching, Learning and Technology (CTLT), commented: "The visibility of Indigenous voices, values, perspectives within public spaces; and more specifically learning spaces at our institution (UBC Vancouver) is a way to disrupt and invite students to a conversation about representation, resistance, resurgence, and decolonization that they may not otherwise encounter in their classrooms."<sup>47</sup> Evidently, the student-curators created an exhibition that attracted non-Indigenous attention and opened up dialogue around Indigenous presence and resurgence.

### *Spreading the Word: Exhibition Audience as Witnesses*

The exhibition's main introductory signage invited visitors "to listen to Nuxalk Radio [www.nuxalkradio.com](http://www.nuxalkradio.com) and to witness and participate in the work of decolonization and supporting Indigenous sovereignty." Therefore, the members of the UBC audience were encouraged to activate their exhibition experience and engage with the Nuxalk Nation through their role as witnesses. Further to this responsibility, Snxakila explained: "When you're invited to a potlatch, you'll hear songs and stories and dances and you're asked to be a witness. When you leave that potlatch, you tell what you witnessed, you spread the word. And so in the same way, with the radio, when we share something, we're sharing it with you so that way you can spread the word of what you heard."<sup>48</sup> Snxakila recognized the importance of exhibition visitors turning into radio listeners and the significance of non-Nuxalk recognition of Nuxalk

<sup>46</sup> Anthropologist and media scholar Kathleen Buddle's research also points to the significance of locality and relationality for Indigenous radio. See Buddle, "Aboriginal Cultural Capital Creation and Radio Production," 9.

<sup>47</sup> Amy Perreault, written in an e-mail to Jennifer Kramer, 2 August 2018. Perreault further observed: "The location of this exhibit within a highly used student space provides thought-provoking entry points to these discussions from the first-hand accounts of community members as leaders, innovators, and experts. The work of the class and the reciprocal nature of both the process and the final product (the exhibition) models ways of engaging with learning that are very different than many of the classes that students take here. Working adjacent to the exhibit, I would casually watch students engage with the exhibit materials. I noticed that they would be drawn into the cases and, as a result, they would move through the exhibit as they headed to their classes. I also noticed that staff and visitors would also stop by the cases and engage with the materials. The exhibit for me as an Indigenous staff member working in a teaching, learning, and technology centre is also an invitation to my colleagues to engage in a conversation that makes them think and reconsider what they might know about Indigenous peoples and, in particular, about the diversity and complexity of our perspectives and ways we continue to connect with one another over territories, over technologies, and over the wavelengths that keep us united."

<sup>48</sup> Snxakila, interview with Brendan Neary.

knowledge.<sup>49</sup> In effect, asking UBC students to remember what they learned through text and audio and to “spread the word” replicates the intergenerational passing on of Nuxalk knowledge through *smayusta*, which are proof of ancestral occupancy of land and ongoing stewardship and governance of territory and its natural resources.

*Making Indigenous Language Visible and Audible to Non-Indigenous Canadians*

Further, it is relevant to the discussion with which I began this article – about why an Indigenous First Nation with its own outlet for cultural transmission would choose to be represented on a university campus by non-Indigenous museology students – to consider the impact of making Indigenous language learning visible and/or audible to non-Indigenous Canadians through exhibitions or Indigenous-run radio. The UBC exhibition makes apparent that there is a role for non-Nuxalkmc in receiving Nuxalk Radio messaging. In a collectively written statement appropriately titled “Uplifting Voices,” Heiltsuk language speakers and cultural educators in collaboration with UBC faculty and staff explain the language revitalization work they are doing in Bella Bella, British Columbia (a close neighbour to the Nuxalk in Bella Coola).<sup>50</sup> They ponder the necessity of raising non-Indigenous Canadians’ awareness of Indigenous language endangerment and ask: “How will non-Indigenous people in Canada respond to Indigenous languages becoming visible again? ... What place do Indigenous languages hold in the national consciousness?”<sup>51</sup> These authors share the potential that community-controlled emerging technologies, such as internet radio, have “to nurture the continued development of their respective diverse Indigenous languages and cultures ... By generating digital visibility and legibility, Indigenous communities claim a presence online and exert control over the terms of Indigenous representation rather than risk misrepresentation.”<sup>52</sup> The exhibition *Nuxalk Radio: One Nation, Many Voices* aimed to demonstrate the essential relationship between Indigenous language revitalization and Indigenous health and also to promote awareness of how control of technology such as broadband and internet radio for the purpose of self-representation generates

<sup>49</sup> See Jennifer Kramer, *Switchbacks: Art, Ownership, and Nuxalk National Identity* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006).

<sup>50</sup> Brown et al., “Uplifting Voices.”

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 267.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 268.



strong Nuxalkmc. It also left a space for non-Nuxalk recognition of the importance of Nuxalk self-representation.

*“Talking Back”: Radio as a Means to Achieve Indigenous Sovereignty*

Anthropologists Lucas Bessire and Daniel Fisher consider ethnographic scholarship on “radio fields.”<sup>53</sup> They review the potential of community radio to be “an ideal tool for an ‘emancipatory’ communication by ‘giving voice to the voiceless,’”<sup>54</sup> but they caution us to “think through the ways that radio matters for local social worlds and theoriz[e] how sound is a medium of human agency.”<sup>55</sup> Media anthropologist Adam Solomonian reflects on Indigenous communities’ use of technology (specifically, the shishálh Nation of Sechelt’s use of digitized photographic archives) to “mak[e] themselves visible to new audiences and publics, in new spaces of interaction.”<sup>56</sup> He reminds us that “Indigenous mediations must be understood as a distinct, tactical, mobilized form of ‘talking back’ that represents increasing Indigenous efforts to incorporate media on their own terms, at the local level.”<sup>57</sup>

Pam Brown, MOA co-curator of *Culture at the Centre* and member of the Heiltsuk Nation, stated that First Nations choose to work with mainstream museums or universities as “a way to get the word out there,”<sup>58</sup> and she further commented on the political nature of this action. Both communications scholar Lorna Roth and media anthropologist Kathleen Buddle pay attention to the tactical and political reasons for Indigenous people to control media representations: it is an act of mediation and of media activism in the service of Indigenous sovereignty.

*Exhibition as Political Activism – Voice and Self-Representation*

Making subtle allusion to the exhibition location in the foyer of a learning hub serving two of UBC’s library branches, the student-curators referenced both oral and written Nuxalk knowledge, including displaying actual DVDs and books about and/or by the Nuxalk which were

<sup>53</sup> Lucas Bessire and Daniel Fisher, “The Anthropology of Radio Fields,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 42 (2013): 363–78.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 368, citing N. Couldry and J. Curran, *Contesting Media Power: Alternative Media in a Networked World* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003); Critical Art Ensemble, *Digital Resistance: Explorations in Tactical Media* (New York: Autonomedia, 2001); J. Downing, *Radical Media: Rebellious Communication and Social Movements* (London: Sage, 2001).

<sup>55</sup> Bessire and Fisher, “The Anthropology of Radio Fields,” 372.

<sup>56</sup> Arthur Solomonian, “‘It’s Nice to See Old Friends Again’: Family Photographs, ‘Advice,’ and Archival Power in a Northern Coast Salish Community” (PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 2018), 240.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> Pam Brown, personal communication to Jennifer Kramer, 1 August 2018.

borrowed from the UBC library. In the following statement, Snxakila reflects on how culture must be enacted and lived every day: “We want to make sure that our traditions, that our teachings that we receive, [are] not just put in a book on a shelf, or just something that the old people practise. They’re part of our daily practice and what we do to sustain ourselves.”<sup>59</sup> The student-curators of Case 6, “What Makes You Cultural?,”<sup>60</sup> riffed off of this statement by wrapping cedar bark around two classic ethnographies of the Nuxalk people (previously referred to as the Bella Coola Indians),<sup>61</sup> conceptually closing the written record of the anthropologists and freeing the voices of the living Nuxalk to represent their own culture as they saw fit. One prominent example on display in the case was a DVD of the award-winning film *Cry Rock* (2010), created by Nuxalk filmmaker Slts’lani. Within this film, Slts’lani pensively narrates her struggle with whether to digitally record her grandmother telling her stories in Nuxalk. This DVD and others on display served as a materialized depiction of intangible culture asserting Nuxalk self-representation.

Snxakila, while reflecting on the interview process and collaborating to share Nuxalk Radio with UBC, mused:

We really need to keep encouraging these conversations. The momentum [towards cultural diversity, respecting others’ traditions] is moving. It’s happening within our Indigenous world, and our First Nations communities. It’s catching on within the whole community of British Columbians. These conversations that we’re having now, they need to move up to the way in which British Columbia operates ... We need to figure out a way to move forward together. And that’s where allies are so important. To have [settler communities] understand the history of this ancient coast, to value what we have here, to be able to see and value what we value. Then, we can all have a good conversation and work together for the betterment of this great part of the world for future generations to come.<sup>62</sup>

Snxakila recognizes the benefit of conversing with non-Native Canadians about Nuxalk expressions of contemporary identity through

<sup>59</sup> Snxakila, interview with Brendan Neary.

<sup>60</sup> “What makes you cultural?” is a statement that was made by Nuhuwhawta (Sheldon Tallio) when he was interviewed by Nathan Clark in 2017.

<sup>61</sup> The two ethnographies included in this case were Franz Boas, “The Mythology of the Bella Coola Indians,” *Memoirs of the American Museum of Natural History* 2, 1 (1898): 25–127; and Thomas F. McIlwraith, *The Bella Coola Indians*, vols. 1 and 2 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1948).

<sup>62</sup> Snxakila, interview with Brendan Neary.

the media of radio and exhibition. He sees the work of healing from the effects of colonialism and assimilation and returning to sovereignty and stewardship over territory to be not only a Nuxalk-centred endeavour of sonic voice and self-representation but also an endeavour that engages non-Nuxalkmc as witnesses and allies.

## CONCLUSION

This article illustrates how a university student-curated exhibition, *Nuxalk Radio: One Nation, Many Voices*, supported the work of an Indigenous radio station to enhance the status of the Nuxalk language; to return to forms of ancestral governance; to assert Indigenous rights; to foster Nuxalk pride through providing a demonstration of unified Nuxalk identity, history, and culture; and to promote community well-being now and for those not yet born. I argue that the student-curators widened the audience of listeners for Nuxalk Radio: *Lhulhamktulhs ala ts'ktaliwalh alb ti s-kulbulmcilh t'ayc n wa sulutilh ats* (Broadcasting the laws of the lands and waters) by following cultural protocol and respecting the authority of Nuxalk voices. The students showed that Indigenous community radio can be a powerful tool for transmitting the many voices of the Nuxalkmc through the airwaves and online. Nuxalk Radio serves as a connecting network and as a form of reconnection that heals the community through integration. But we are not talking simply about a connection between Nuxalkmc, or even between Nuxalkmc and other Indigenous communities: this exhibition helped to build a connection between Nuxalk and non-Indigenous Canadians. I argue that the exhibition *Nuxalk Radio: One Nation, Many Voices* materialized the ongoing interchange between heritage institutions such as MOV and MOA and First Nations communities in British Columbia, such as the Nuxalk Nation of Bella Coola.

When asked “How do you feel about us doing an exhibit on the radio at UBC?,” Spuxta stated: “I think it’s amazing ... They always say the world is listening: now you’re showcasing us. There might be people [in] some other places who tune in and see what we’re doing in our little Nation.”<sup>63</sup> Beyond the role of expressing the goals of Nuxalk Radio and amplifying its listening audience, this exhibition offered a site for Nuxalkmc and UBC students to recognize their ongoing co-existence in British Columbia in the twenty-first century. Indeed, I would suggest that the exhibition curation process became a constituting place of Johannes

<sup>63</sup> Spuxta, interview with Susanne Haupt.

Fabian's "coevalness,"<sup>64</sup> where students and Nuxalkmc could imagine mutual benefits in sharing and witnessing Nuxalk knowledge. The exhibition, however briefly on display at UBC, was a tangible product of a process of engagement and recognition that evoked conversation, authorization, protocol enactment, witnessing, and conscious representation and self-representation. It was an endeavour of cross-community connectivity and an exploration of alliances, now and in the future.

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<sup>64</sup> Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).