SPECIAL EDITION
Kinship

CITIZEN ARTIST NEWS

examining Indigenous and non-Indigenous perspectives autumn edition: 2019

Rethinking 'resources': understanding trees, fish and deer as kin

This newspaper follows on from a previous publication called *Citizen Artist News: Clouded Title* that was distributed on Pender Island in the Summer of 2018. It invited readers to consider the implications of one's own residency and claim to 'owning' land on the Island/ W̱SÁNEĆ First Nation traditional territory, through the lens of differing interpretations and histories of the Douglas Treaty: a history of the Treaty as, on the one hand, an alleged sale of land (to the Crown) and on the other, as a Peace Treaty and being "owned by the land" (Tsawout First Nation, 2015).

This newspaper takes the discussion of the Douglas Treaty one step further. Enshrined in the Treaty are the rights of the W̱SÁNEĆ to "hunt and fish as formerly." But what exactly does this mean? Hunting and fishing are clearly actions; to say someone has a 'right' to perform an action is to say that they can access and legally 'do' that thing within a terrain. But it also suggests that they can 'use' that terrain in a specified way: they can claim what is 'taken' (e.g., trees, fish and animals etc.) as their (personal) legal 'property'. So, the colonial interpretation of the Treaty actually makes two claims: 1) about the purported 'ownership' of land as State 'property' (that in turn sanctions 'ownership' of 'private' property) and 2) about the 'use' of land and its animals as 'property'. Implicit in this colonial orientation of seeing land and what one 'uses' as 'property', is the idea that other forms of (non-human) life are *material* '*resources*'. This conception of non-human beings as material 'resources' and as bodies to be 'managed' (reproduced or killed etc.) for human 'use', desire and/or industry, profoundly shapes (indeed, skews) how we live with non-human beings on a daily basis. It also deeply impacts on the well-being and *survival* of non-human beings (e.g., trees, fish, deer etc.) on the island as their lives and habitat continue to be threatened, degraded or wholly destroyed.

With this in mind, readers are invited to reimagine non-human beings, such as trees, fish and deer, not as 'resources' or bodies to be 'managed', cut down, culled, or manipulated to make way for human desires (suburban development, leisure and tourist activities etc.). Instead, the aim here is to see the island anew: to explore how humans and non-humans are bodily and familially *connected* and to consider what this entails for living *with* rather than *on* the island. To help us think through this complex shift in perspective, this newspaper therefore explores a few W̱SÁNEĆ cosmological stories that describe non-human beings as human *relatives* and importantly, as *kin* relations. Seeing trees, fish and deer (among other things) as kin relations uniquely entangles us in rethinking how and what we do to the beings on and of the island.

For those of us who are non-Indigenous, there are certainly hurdles to grasping how say, a tree, can be seen as having an agential role in the community with needs that *require* us, as inhabitants, to first and foremost respect, protect and *prioritise its life* and that of the deer, the fish etc. But is this really that difficult an imaginary leap? The most complicated part is getting started. This newspaper therefore gives thanks to the W̱SÁNEĆ people and honours the value and importance of their perspectives and understandings of kin and ancestral relations to islands, trees, fish and deer.

Central to W̱SÁNEĆ stories is the notion of transformation of one bodily form to another, from human to non-human body and sometimes looping back and forth or changing between animals and trees etc. These transformations emphasize *connectedness* between the souls of human and non-human 'people' and/or between animal or tree-'people' etc. I invite readers to take seriously what these descriptions of change entail, even though their meaning may be somewhat cryptic or opaque for non-Indigenous readers. As Donna Haraway says, "we need stories (and theories) that gather up the complexities [...] for seeing old and new connnections [between human and non-human beings]." My hope is that these stories provide a platform for thinking more clearly about the social, political, cultural and ethical implications of the (mis)treatment of non-human beings on the island and to inform our individual and collective responsibility to entities such as trees, fish and deer.

Accompanying these stories is the artwork of Doug LaFortune (Tsawout First Nation). Doug and I have been working on this project for almost 2 years and I am immensely grateful to him and his wife, Kathy, for their interest, enthusiasm and friendship. This project was also much enriched by the participation and friendship of other members of Tsawout First Nation: Earl Claxton Jr., Belinda Claxton, Robert Clifford and Mavis Underwood. I also thank Crystal Carvill (Carcross Tagish First Nation) and (settlers) Debra Auchterlonie and Denise Holland for their invaluable contribution. The research for this publication was funded in part by the Canada Council for the Arts. I thank them for their support and hope that as members of the Island community, you too will enjoy sharing in this discussion.

Fawn Daphne Plessner

Overcoming more than a 'species barrier'

The notion of kinship, as indicated above, is a foundational concept and a cornerstone of how Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities differently view land and other forms of non-human life. But what does this entail for those of us who live on Pender Island and within W̱SÁNEĆ territory? Seeing trees, fish and deer as kin has deep and important implications for understanding (political) membership of the island's community. *Who* is counted as living on the island? *Who* exactly is *entitled to have their needs recognized and their lives sustained?* Should human desire (dream and holiday homes, tourist and recreational activities etc.) be privileged over the lives and well-being of this wider group of beings, the meagre few who have so far survived the rapid and relatively recent increase of human presence and suburban development here?

Exploring W̱SÁNEĆ conceptions of kinship and rethinking membership of a community, in addition to assessing one's ethical and political obligations to non-human beings, is the point of this publication. It is aimed at making visible and taking responsibility for how settler colonial desires and practices continually disenfranchise W̱SÁNEĆ perspectives by not making way for more complex and nuanced understandings of human and non-human relationships. As residents within W̱SÁNEĆ territory, being responsible to the W̱SÁNEĆ people, and also non-human beings, matters if there is to be any honest and purposeful engagement with reconciliation. It is also of vital importance for the well-being and survival of all the non-human inhabitants of the island. Numerous species of animals have disappeared from this island in the last 40 years. Trees, fish and deer have declined in health and number by the rapid increase of human activity and exploitation. Non-human beings have had to endure considerable violence to their environ and lives as a consequence of the infrastructural decision-making of recent decades that has prioritized the expansion of the built environment.

The real story of Pender Island starts with trees. The following passage is from the writings of Dave Elliott Sr., a W̱SÁNEĆ Nation Elder, Historian and Linguist (1910 - 1985). He tells of the first moments of British colonization, the felling of trees and the exploitation of 'resources'. This passage begins this newspaper's exploration of the idea of 'resources' versus 'kin' and the implications for living within W̱SÁNEĆ territory.

"There are many, many things that have brought us to where we are – broken promises discrimination, legislation. Just take the Saanich Peninsula; the Saanich Peninsula was the homeland of the Saanich People for who knows how long. [...] When James Douglas moved himself and his people into Victoria Harbour he moved right in with the Songhees people, the LEQENEN [sic]. He made that the headquarters of the Hudson Bay Company. Then after some time they began to claim the land, they began to exploit the land. One of the things they were doing was logging this beautiful stand of [trees] in Cadboro Bay area. [These trees were] tall and slim going straight up, no limbs 'til almost way up to the top, maybe sixty, seventy, eighty, one hundred feet high. A beautiful stand of timber in great demand for ship's masts. This is why they [Douglas's men] were there. Of course you know all shipping those days was by sail. This is why masts were in such demand. They were taking them away by the shipload for the purpose of using them for masts."
(Elliott, D. 1983, *Saltwater People*).

Citizen Artist News
is an art project led by Fawn Daphne Plessner (artist/editor) in collaboration with Doug LaFortune (artist) and Denise Holland (artist/co-editor).
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Canada Council for the Arts

W̱SÁNEĆ Law, Cosmological Stories and Kinship

In conversation with Robert YELḰÁTŦE Clifford

"Indigenous peoples have been standing [...] in front of Canadian institutions like the NEB [National Energy Board] for decades upon decades, often with very little success in creating what we would call meaningful change. The reason that we do this and that we will continue to do it is that we are obligated to act. And speaking in these institutions is one of the ways in which we do so. So our laws, Indigenous laws, that is, the laws of my W̱SÁNEĆ people, which is distinct from Aboriginal law branch of Canadian law that deals with Aboriginal people – it requires us to act and to protect our homelands and the other beings that are within it, the islands, the salmon, the whales, the water, and much, much more [...]. It is a positive obligation within our law."

Robert YELḰÁTŦE Clifford, Trans-Mountain Pipeline Hearing, National Energy Board, November, 2018

Fawn Daphne Plessner: Robert, thank you for the opportunity to talk in more detail about your presentation to the National Energy Board (NEB), Trans-Mountain Pipeline Hearing and more widely about W̱SÁNEĆ Law and culture. I'd like to draw out a discussion about W̱SÁNEĆ approaches to kinship in particular, but first, would you mind sharing your personal reflections on the presentation you made to the NEB?

Robert YELḰÁTŦE Clifford: Yeah, going in front of institutions like the NEB is tricky for me. I mean, I realize that there's a lot of tensions in doing that. A big part of me wonders why it has to be us sitting in front of them in the way that that's structured, justifying ourselves and what our laws are, and you know, there's a very problematic side to what's happening and with my legal background as well. I started my presentation to them saying that we've sat in front of institutions like that for decades upon decades but what we say has very little meaningful success in terms of any type of understanding or change on their side of things. But that the reason why we keep doing that is because in following our laws, we have an obligation to act, to protect those islands, for instance, and going in front of institutions like the NEB is one of the ways that we can do it.

FDP: It is something of a riddle (to me) as to why members of our various legislatures and parliaments never absorb (or perhaps intentionally ignore?) the lessons of Indigenous knowledges, understandings and orientations to land and non-human beings. On the one hand, it's obvious that the Canadian State upholds capitalist imaginaries that objectify 'land' as a 'resource'. It does so on the excuse of the purported needs of its capitalist 'economy' and in support of a few private individuals and corporations who profit from the exploitation of such 'resources'. But it is also worth pointing out that the origin of the word 'economy' is the Greek word aeconomie, meaning "one who manages a household, specifically a steward" (Oxford Dictionary). Indigenous peoples consistently talk about stewarding, as you say in your speech to the NEB. The notion of stewardship is not actually a foreign concept in the history of 'Western' thought either, and yet the idea of 'the economy' is now centred on a corporate-capitalist world view, which was realized within and gained momentum through the expansion of the British colonies, especially in the last century, in particular. This cultural orientation to exploiting 'resources', rather than stewardship, is unfortunately, what dominates understandings of the 'economy' here today in Canada.

To my mind, part of the problem of these destructive behaviors, lies in the fact that non-Indigenous people are not immersed in a terrain that is visibly and culturally inscribed with the markers (and their meaning) of the local First Nation. At the NEB Hearing you described the connection between SENĆOŦEN place names for the land and non-human beings within W̱SÁNEĆ territory, most of whom are viewed as relatives or ancestors and to whom you are connected through different cultural societies within your community. You also pointed out that it is through W̱SÁNEĆ law that the (W̱SÁNEĆ) community honours and maintains these relationships and has done for thousands of years. Can you say more about the braiding together of topography, place names, law and kin relations to non-human beings?

RYC: I often use the creation story of our islands to talk about this sort of thing. T̓ET̓ÁĆES is an island and it means relatives of the deep and relates to the creation story when those islands were once W̱SÁNEĆ human ancestors that the Creator XÁLS had taken and thrown out into the ocean, creating the islands that are there today. It relates to teaching to one of our laws about how to care for those islands and how those islands are to care for us as well – they provide a way of life for us – and so there is a mutual relationship and responsibility. I think that that story really points toward seeing islands, land, as something that Canadian Common Law sees as an inanimate object rather than as having being and agency. The Creation story and in turn, W̱SÁNEĆ law, is cast differently than typical Western world views, which really depend on making nature something external to us because it assumes that we're not really a part of nature. Consequently, many humans feel justified in exploiting nature or the land or doing all of these things that as W̱SÁNEĆ and other Indigenous people we often see as being quite harmful and damaging and disrespectful to these relationships.

Trees Are The Measure of All Things

"The forests that were here [on all the islands] had great huge trees, eight, ten, some twelve feet in diameter. I once stood beside a windfall on Mayne Island, part of our territory. This huge cedar was lying on the ground and actually I was looking up and it was at least 12 feet high. In some places you can still see the stumps today [i.e., in 1983]. This whole country that we live in was just covered with trees like that. The forests were like a beautiful park, because there was no underbrush. You could see a long ways in the forest. When you walked, it was on a big mat of moss like a beautiful carpet. It was completely untouched. But everything else was the same. There were great herds of deer, great herds of fur-bearing animals. There were so many ducks that when the ducks rose up to fly they actually blocked out the sun, the day became dark, because they covered the sunlight" (Elliott, D. 1983, *Saltwater People*).

FDP: This is the perennial problem, isn't it? To my mind, the operative concept is 'kinship'. How does one address the harm being done to non-human beings, and especially, when seen as kin? Can you give an example of the challenges that you and your community face in protecting these relatives from harm?

RYC: You can see it unique ways. I mean, I took a group of my law students from UVIC to SNIDȻEŁ which is right next to Butchart Gardens and we had a very interesting discussion about some of the tensions or complexities that are there because you see, SNIDȻEŁ is our first village site. That's where SŁEMEW̱ Grandfather Rain, the first W̱SÁNEĆ man came to the earth in the form of rain, so it is a sacred place for us and it was really devastated with the cement company that had operated there, which was funded by Robert Butchart and you know, the inlet is mostly a moonscape now. There are just jellyfish living there, one of the indicator species of low oxygen levels and huge amounts of cement and other contamination and right on the opposite side of the fence you have Butchart Gardens, which is world renowned for its beauty. Built in the big quarry, it's a big, kind of sunken, garden in the quarry where the cement factory operations were happening.

Also, there is the disruption to the land by bringing plants that are not native from all over the world and transplanting them there and often plants are unable to survive here without moving them into green-houses over the winter and so forth. It's a place of a lot of creation stories and place names are very intimately tied to relationships with that place. Butchart Gardens is an example of taking things from a very different context and transplanting them. So in trying to protect relatives from harm, things gets a little bit more involved, you know, community laws, liberal constitutionalism etc. are very much assumed to be ideas applied more universally and not to be connected to place in the same type of way, in a lot of instances.

So, yeah you can see interesting and difficult tensions in ways that that plays out when you look at any given place like that. I mean, you might say the same of ŁEL,TOS, James Island, which was used as a dynamite factory and golf course and all sorts of other things. There's a long history of things that have happened to that island. That island went into private ownership and we weren't able to have the same type of access and thus the ability to care for that island. It hasn't meant that our laws have gone away or anything like that, it just shows that our laws remain important. That's why the Paddle for ŁEL,TOS (September 2, 2018), where we went out and paddled around the island, I saw that as demonstrating that we were still there and still remembered.

FDP: It is disturbing to think of Butchart making his fortune out of cement, a staple item of the contemporary built environment. It's a horrible foreshadowing of the escalating plastering over of these islands. Only 100 years ago Pender Island was all old growth forest (Elliott, 1983) but the most intense human impact has happened since the mid 1970s when there was a recovering forest with abundant animal life on Pender. In the 70s, many hundreds of different animals lived on the island; a pod of sea lions used to regularly bask on the rocks in Hope Bay in the Summer; literally thousands of deer (with a population count of 5000+ across Salt Spring, Saturna, Mayne and Galiano in the 1970s) would roam the islands; quail, pheasant, grouse etc. were always at the road side, large pods of killer whales would pass very near to the cliffs of Thieves Bay annually, massive flocks of sea gulls were everywhere and the waters and beaches were rich with fish and shellfish. Humans were the minority population (approx. 400 permanent residents, compared to 2500+ today, with approx. an additional 800 holiday homes that are busy during holiday seasons). In such a short period of time, all of these animal lives and habitats have been replaced by a suburb of 'dream homes' with hundreds of machines and boats and docks and trucks and cars and animal pets etc. All the beaches are contaminated and the few remaining animals, for example, the deer, are reduced to foraging amongst dog feces at the roadside and dodging barking dogs and vehicles to survive. It's telling too that the deer are considered pests by some people, which shows how little public awareness there is that their food sources and travel routes have been replaced, interrupted or blocked by human activity. The State's management of urban expansion (that is, as we know, deeply entwined with the rapid increase in the global market of land acquisition by foreign governments and private corporations since 2006) has not only tacitly continued the 'settling' of unceded W̱SÁNEĆ territory (see *Citizen Artist News: Clouded Title*) but it also privileges human excess over the wellbeing and survival of the animals and the island habitat.

Responsibility to non-human beings, especially in the way that you describe it above as a kind of first principle of governing, is obviously not understood or practiced by colonial subjects and especially, by government agencies. So, the more you speak, the more visible it is how Crown appropriation of land, suburban 'development' and attendant conceptions of land as a 'commodity' and a 'resource' (logging of trees, including the few last remaining old growth forests, the extraction industries etc.), continues to obfuscate Indigenous perspectives in deeply problematic ways.

RYC: Well I think that's why some of the claiming of place names has been important. It's not just a symbolic thing. One of the big ones was PKOLS for Mount Douglas but there's more that's going on with place names. There are a lot of differences between the way SENĆOŦEN place names work and the way that many places are named around here; James Island after Sir James Douglas or Mount Douglas after Sir James Douglas, again, and you know, we see a lot of the names of early British colonizers in Victoria in general. In Canada generally there is this notion of naming and it's kind of like asserting human over nature and over place. Whereas SENĆOŦEN naming doesn't work like that. It's not about objectifying a place or claiming a place. The way that SENĆOŦEN names work is a reflection of a relationship, or an experience, of place. So ŁEL,TOS means splashed on the face because that's sort of the characteristics of that island for instance. You know, our sacred mountain, LAU,WELNEW, is 'place of refuge' or 'healing' that comes from when we anchored our canoes there during the time of the flood and where we became W̱SÁNEĆ, the emerging people connected to that story. So when you start to recapture what these names do, that is, to put these names back to that place, I think it's also reemphasizing that relationship, forging a different relationship than the colonial approach, and making visible that this is how we relate to that place. This is how we understand that place as its own being, characteristics and why it's important to us.

You know, PKOLS for instance was kind of a soft border between W̱SÁNEĆ and Lekwungen people. It was our meeting place and a place that, as I was taught, was not particularly claimed by either community, but a place where we come together. So, it wasn't a strict boundary or exclusion, like we see with the colonial traditions today or even what we get forced into in the Treaty process – the idea that 'this is ours, this is yours' and the government wants you to relinquish all title upfront. That mentality is very much an objectification of claiming these lands in a way that these creation stories, if you take them and the beliefs that they relate to in a very meaningful way, that's something that I view as problematic or inconsistent.

FDP: This is really important because it shows us that colonial systems of claiming and using land are not the only way to organize, or indeed, govern a place. At the very least, I would certainly welcome a more widespread installation of signage with SENĆOŦEN place names on Pender and more widely in W̱SÁNEĆ traditional territory. I think it is important to see these islands as, first and foremost, First Nations territories and that requires more prominent, visible markers. My own experience is such that the ubiquity of British place names (of individuals or family names or twee descriptors etc.) tell

me nothing about where I am actually living but instead, require that I concede to a very blunt insistence that British-colonial ethnic histories are representative of all people who are resident here. It is very artificial and weirdly skewed inscription and an erasure of the complexities of peoples and place, indigenous and ethnic migrational histories. Hearing these W̱SÁNEĆ stories, learning about their actual geographic locations and being able to think through and discuss them is not only an important formative experience, but is grounding and strange to say, genuinely 'settling'.

RYC: Yeah, these are not just place names, or names of 'rocks' or 'land', but many of these names, such as YOS (the Malahat), SPÁEŦ (McKenzie Bight), T̲EK̲TEK̲SEN (Saturna Island) etc., are sites of transformation or spiritual places and are sacred.

FDP: That makes it even more painful to see the impact of industrialization and the real estate industry on these ancient spiritual and sacred places. Would any government dare to sanction say, the bulldozing the Ka'aba in Mecca to build 'dream homes' or tracts of condominiums or a sprawling suburb? Would any corporation dare punch a pipeline through the Vatican, or frack the Wailing Wall? It is scandalous that W̱SÁNEĆ spiritual and sacred places are not at all respected or protected.

There is so much more that we could discuss about this alone but for now, I'd like to return to what you said above: I'm fascinated by these acts of transformation of human to non-human beings within W̱SÁNEĆ cosmological stories and in turn, law. You already mentioned the transformation of humans into the islands. But I am also thinking of the transformation of SMÍEŦ into a deer; a story that was very generously shared with me by Earl Claxton and one that appears in the pages of this newspaper too. I think a lot about this story and about the implications of these bodily changes of transformation from human body to non-human and how one might understand the scope of kinship relations that are predicated on these transformations. The story of the islands and SMÍEŦ truly *embody* relations to place. And just to say too, I do not see these stories as simply 'stories' but as important aesthetic experiences. What are your own thoughts about this?

RYC: In terms of the transformation stories and the name, SMÍEŦ for instance, deer, when XÁLS walked the earth, SMÍEŦ was one of the W̱SÁNEĆ men who was plotting to kill XÁLS because he didn't want to be transformed. The thing about these stories is that they leave this openness, right? I think that they let you take from them in different ways and kind of learn from them in your own way, in a sense. And so, because I've done a lot of thinking about this kind of divide between human and nature, I guess you might say, and how that works within Western traditions. I start thinking of that story as, you know relating about this type of being, that this person, this W̱SÁNEĆ person was scared, didn't want to become an animal, was trying to avoid becoming an animal, didn't want to be transformed into an animal and I had myself wondering, why is that? Did he have something that was showing, you know, that we're better than animals or something like this, and that lesson was kind of a teaching of, "no, we're all the same". We're all made of the same sort of thing, and that the animals and humans are not distinct from one another. I used to also wonder, why did they have a human spirit? Is that some type of anthropocentrism? Why the human? I wondered, was there something special about the human but then I came to think of it as more of a notion, that we weren't better than, or different than, we were both of the same thing and related relatives.

So the name, SMÍEŦ carries a lot of that with it, but there are other stories about deer as well that I think are important. My Aunt Belinda often says, I think it's pronounced ÍNES, it means grandson or grandchild and she talks about when you're hunting deer you don't use the name SMÍEŦ, instead you refer to it as ÍNES – grandchild. You don't use the name SMÍEŦ, as I understand her point. If you're even just using the name SMÍEŦ while hunting, you might recall his intentions to kill the creator and in a sense, replicate his bad intentions. This also reminds one that it's wrong just to kill. You hunt for food when you need it, not to waste life and so forth, so the name SMÍEŦ isn't used while hunting. These names are rich with all of these lessons.

So I guess that's the other important thing I like to think of, that even when we're talking about an island or a deer, or something else as having its own being, it's never static. We're always changing from what we were when we're young to when we're older or over the span of a life. A relationship between two people is always shifting, the same is true with deer or islands. It's not a relationship between two fixed points but rather two things that are moving through life in their own way, albeit islands change in a much slower way than humans do, but an island is not an inanimate thing. It changes and therefore the relationship and care for one another requires different things at different times. The story of SMÍEŦ reminds me of that when we're hunting, and the fact that we don't use the name SMÍEŦ at such times, is a reminder of the shifting nature of these relationships.

FDP: It's interesting how you see SMÍEŦ's behavior as motivated by fear. I've often wondered about the cautionary point in the story. Just to say too, I find the binary of man vs. nature an increasingly problematic one, especially when reflecting on the notion of an island as a non-human being and indeed, a kin relation, in the story of ŁEL,TOS that you relate above. The man/nature binary really starts to collapse once one sees the logic of the island as a living being and especially, when one remembers that the world is a collection of different forms of beings, where man is simply one form of existence among many.

But to the point of SMÍEŦ; when he was a human he wanted to subvert or usurp or perhaps, transcend XÁLS, but is XÁLS not the essence and force of nature, a transformer? I'm imagining XÁLS not as a 'god' per se, but as 'nature' and 'change' itself. I have in mind a poem by Dylan Thomas called *The Force That Through the Green Fuse Drives the Flower*. Thomas illustrates this abstract idea of an entity that we call 'nature' by describing how all things in the world (rocks, flowers, blood in a human body etc.) are made animate by the ineffable 'force' of 'nature'. "The force that through the green fuse drives the flower, Drives my green age" and "The force that drives the water through the rocks, Drives my red blood" etc. The distinction between man and nature is collapsed. In the story of SMÍEŦ, it is as if he imagined that he could somehow interrupt this connectedness to and dependency on the force of nature and distinguish himself through the act of killing. I find this a deeply provocative aspect of the story and one that also illuminates the impulse of many people, perhaps, who believe they are 'managing' the natural world about them. SMÍEŦ's intention to thwart XÁLS is not that dissimilar to the current actions of say, property developers, or the building of massive highways, or the extraction industry etc. – indeed, we have the example of the escalation of 'construction' currently tearing up the southern tip of Vancouver Island. Nothing good will come of destroying vast swathes of habitats (the death knell of non-human beings) and it is unspeakably cynical not to take seriously one's responsibility to preserve and protect habitats for the wellbeing of both human and non-human beings alike. To my mind, the story of SMÍEŦ brings to the fore this warning about gratuitous killing while also reminding us of our bodily connectedness and relation to other beings.

RYC: Yeah, many WSÁNEĆ stories do appear to have an element of punishment about them. XÁLS walks the Earth transforming people into animals and stone, thereby making an example out of them – sometimes a good example and sometimes a bad example. In the story of SMÍEŦ he appears to be punished for his intention to kill or harm the Creator. In this case, the punishment is not coming from a decision maker in the community who is 'policing' behaviour – though W̱SÁNEĆ law does have mechanisms for when behaviour strays. Rather, the force doing the 'punishment' is spiritual (the Creator). Or, perhaps, the story may also reflect the presumption that there are simply direct consequences that manifest when we live in a state of unhealthy relationships. For example, our arrival into the Anthropocene and global climate change is certainly a direct consequence of living in unhealthy relationships with the world around us. In this regard, it is interesting that

The Transformation of SMÍEŦ

as told by Earl Claxton Jr., Tsawout

Long ago, there was an extremely handsome young man and his name was SMÍEŦ (pronounced Sm-eye-eth). SMÍEŦ felt he was too good, too smart, too good looking to be changed into something. So he decided that he was going to kill XÁLS, the Creator, because he didn't want to be changed into something. SMÍEŦ traveled out to Sooke and he collected some mussels that only grow on the outside part of the island from Sooke, all the way up to the other end of the island. He brought the mussels back to the Saanich territory, and he cooked them up and he ate the mussels. Then he broke the shells apart, and he had a hard, hard stone where he started putting an edge and making a point on the pointed end of the mussel. When he finished, he decided that he was going to make the sharpest arrows ever so that he could kill XÁLS. He started sharpening his arrows, and as he was sharpening his arrows, there was a man watching him and the man said to him, "What are you doing there?" SMÍEŦ said, "I'm making these arrows the sharpest arrows ever so I can kill XÁLS with them, so that I don't get changed into something." And XÁLS said, "Well, I'm XÁLS, so bring me those arrows." SMÍEŦ picked up the arrows and walked over and he handed them to XÁLS. XÁLS took some magic dust out of his pocket, and threw it on SMÍEŦ and transformed the young man into the four-legged creature that we know today. XÁLS then took the two arrows that SMÍEŦ had been sharpening, and he stuck them into the back legs of SMÍEŦ, and that's why the deer has a bent leg in the back because the arrows are still in there yet. And then SMÍEŦ started to walk away, and XÁLS said, "Wait a minute. Come back here. I haven't finished with you yet." And then XÁLS took the two shells that SMÍEŦ had been sharpening and he stuck them into the top of SMÍEŦ's head to make them his ears. If you look at a deer head-on, the shape of the ears do look exactly like the mussel shells.

The place that this happened is in the W̱SÁNEĆ territory. It's down along West Saanich Road, and there's a place called Red Barn, and there's a lake or water body in behind there. It was at the north end of that water body that Smiet was transformed into a deer. The name of that place is called W̱SMÍEŦson in SENĆOŦEN, and whenever you hear "whooh" at the beginning of a SENĆOŦEN word, it means "the people of." So that place means "the people of the deer."

Interview continues on page 8

How The People Got Salmon

as told by Johnny Claxton, Tsawout

Once there were no seals so the people were starving. They lived on elk and whatever other game they could kill. Two brave youth said to each other, "Let us follow them." So the two youths followed the salmon for three and a half months. They travelled day and night with the fish. Every night they took quathmin and burned it and saw smoke from quathmin (consumption plant) that steelhead, sockeye, spring and other variety of salmons were burning, each for itself, in their houses. The youths stayed in this place for a month. Their hosts then said to them, "You must go home tomorrow. Everything is arranged for you. The salmon that you were looking for will muster at your home and start off on their journey. You must

were. They were given food to eat and after they had eaten, their host led them outside the house and said, “Look around and see what you can see.” They looked around

half months. Then they came to a strange country. When they reached the shore a man came out and welcomed them, saying “You have arrived.” “We have arrived,” the youths answered, though they did not know where they for their hosts had said to them, “Burn quathmin along the beach when you reach land, to feed the salmon that travel with you. Then, if you treat the salmon well, you will always have them in abundance.”

go and see if we can find any salmon.” They embarked on their canoe and headed out to sea, not caring in what direction they travelled. They journeyed for three and a that the salmon might feed on the smoke and sustain themselves. Finally, they reached Discovery Island, which is (ketes) where they burned quathmin all along the beach,

Richling, B., 2016, *The W̱SÁNEĆ and Their Neighbours*

In conversation with Robert YELḰÁTŦE Clifford cont.

SMÍEŦ has a fear of physically becoming an animal, which we might view as a resistance to the notion that humans are no more or less important than other non-human beings. In this light, the story speaks directly to ontology. In any case, the principal role of an agent within WSÁNEĆ law is then to understand and develop the self-discipline to live in a respectful manner with the rest of creation. The notion of self-discipline is explicit in many WSÁNEĆ stories and is, as I understand it, one of the central purposes of bathing ceremonies, for instance.

FDP: That's a very helpful clarification. I'm interested in the implications of the bodily connection to non-human beings and especially this expanded notion of kinship not only because it is absent in post-Enlightenment capitalist imaginaries (settler orientations) but also, it opens up a new way to think about political membership. Your point about duties and responsibilities as principles within W̱SÁNEĆ Law requires us to consider non-human beings as political members of a community because of being bodily related kin. And that is definitely different from Western understandings. So, I am intrigued by all of these permutations.

RYC: Yeah, I mean I guess that it tends to be how I, if we asked ourselves, "What do these stories do?" I think what these stories are always doing has been pointing us beyond the story in itself to a particular relationship, relationships that we always need to embody and sort of engage with and continually work through. So I tend to see the stories as the starting point, as you mentioned, the guide that points you there. The stories acculturate you to a relationship with islands and deer etc.

And then the actual learning really comes from the doing side of things. That is, these stories are not simply a set of 'ideas'. I mean obviously you have to understand it in your mind as well, but you don't just know it in your mind – that is not what it's about. It's about knowing it on a deeper level as well, sort of internalizing it and taking it in and allowing that to shape the way that you act on a day to day basis, how you enter into relationships with other things and how you orient yourself. And so I tend to see that that's what these stories are doing in a big way.

FDP: I think I understand. The openness of the stories, as you said, requires that we do the practical work of thinking through the implications and various meanings of the stories. It's about knowing through practice but also taking up and performing the responsibilities and duties that entail, including honoring one's relation and connection to beings of different form. Am I understanding you correctly?

RYC: Yeah, I think that embodying responsibilities and respectful relationships is the most important part.

FDP: Can we discuss your point about understanding the 'is/land' as its own 'being' a bit more? This is one of the key hurdles for non-Indigenous Canadians to grasp, in my view. There is nothing in the English language, or in Common Law, that extends kinship relations to include non-human beings, i.e., seeing trees and islands as 'relatives' or 'ancestors'. This is evident not only in the behaviour of individuals, in the treatment of land (as mentioned above), but more widely, in how the courts in Canada, the State and especially, Industrial corporate bodies, do not factor in – or rather, cannot grasp – how an island, or an animal, has agency; that it has a right to be free from harm; that it has a right to life. Perhaps you could give an example of what non-human agency might be like?

RYC: I guess one part of that that came to mind was out harvesting cedar bark with my Aunty Belinda. She was teaching me about how it's important to come to that with good intentions and good feelings because there's a lot of power in that bark. But she kind of went on to also talk about how she was out harvesting some medicinal plants one day and that she was with someone and that person was unable to find this plant, they were out searching together and she couldn't find that plant and my Aunty Belinda was saying, "It's right there. It's right in front of you." And she just couldn't see it because the plant wasn't presenting itself to her. She said that that plant had known that she came to harvest it with bad intentions so it wouldn't show itself to her and she decided to go home for the day.

So, I mean, it goes beyond just having an intention. That is, certainly there's an element of the intentions that you bring to say, harvesting but part of those intentions really influence the being that you are in a relationship with. There's also the relationship part that, if you don't have good intentions, it might be that the plant or the animal knows that you can be harmful to the relationship.

FDP: Your description of the activity of harvesting really draws out the aesthetic experience of land-as-being and how it is observed, sensed and felt, rather than simply conceiving of it as an inert substance or even, seeing it as a pretty 'view'. Your story also sheds some light on how the element of harm is invisible to non-Indigenous people because land isn't regarded as a living entity. Even animals, "wild" animals, are mostly celebrated only as a form of spectacle. (Hence, the recreational and tourist activities that facilitate say, "whale watching" etc.). There is also no general understanding or appreciation of the complexity of W̱SÁNEĆ kin relations and how these relations are woven together into systems of governance, ethical obligations, identity, culture, spiritual practices etc. The closest that we come in this Anglicized culture is the language of animal 'rights' or rather, the granting of 'legal personhood'. However, W̱SÁNEĆ relationships with non-human beings, as I am understanding you, cannot be reduced to the language of legal 'rights'. Although acknowledging the rights of animals or islands is a useful legal tool (or can be where granted) for challenging the harm perpetrated by the State, Industry, property development etc., the problem is that rights are contingent. They can be granted or stripped from a legal body. Rights also depend upon the good will of the State to not only acknowledge them but also to uphold them and the State, as we know, is not always good. However, I am thinking of the Wanganui River. For readers, the Wanganui River in New Zealand was granted 'legal personhood', and in turn, the right to be free from harm.

RYC: Yeah, I've thought about the granting of legal personhood to the Whanganui River in New Zealand. It depends on how you look at it. In some sense, it's better than where we were. In another sense, you know, embedding it in a rights framework means that there's a lot of other things that are operating around it that can limit the rights of that river or that, you know, things can happen where you put a different label to it, which, in one sense, is not a big stretch. I mean, corporations have been legal people for a long time. If a corporation can be a person, then a river can be a person.

So, in some sense, the granting of legal personhood to the Whanganui River has moved us along but it still has, I think, problematic elements and it requires much more of a fundamental shift than that. This comes back to some of the dangers with the way colonialism works in implicit ways now too as well with the way things are just translated or you know, kind of ... what's the word? I don't know. Kind of like twisted? I don't know, I can't think of the word …

FDP: kind of distorted, maybe?

RYC: Yeah, so it becomes a little bit distorted from ultimately what you're hoping to envision and what ends up playing out, so I guess that's a difficulty here. You're almost kind of faced with a catch 22 in some ways. On the other hand, you risk having your voice not heard at all or, it does not make

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Fawn Daphne Plessner is an artist and professor at Emily Carr University of Art & Design. She lives on SḎAY,ES/Pender Island, WSÁNEĆ First Nation territory. In addition to her art practice, her doctoral research examined new modes of belonging and (non-statist) membership as enacted within the fields of social and activist art practices.

Pitch used to go fishing before the sun rose, and retire to the shade before it became strong. One day he was late and had just reached the beach when he melted. Other people rushed to share him. Fir arrived first and secured most of the pitch, which he poured over his head and body; Balsam obtained only a little; and by the time Arbutus arrived there was none left. Arbutus said "I shall peel my skin every year and have a good wash to keep me clean." But just then XÁLS appeared and said "You shall all be trees, and Fir shall be the boss." So now the arbutus sheds its bark every year and the fir has more pitch than any other tree. Richling, B., 2016, *The WSÁNEĆ and Their Neighbours*

On Saltspring Island, a hunter shot a buck, which fell on its back with its four legs in the air. When he walked up to it, however, he found only a stump pierced by his shot. A few weeks later, when he returned to the same place, the stump had disappeared, having changed back into a deer. Richling, B., 2016

"In the dawn of the world all animals, birds, and fish, were human beings, but the powerful XÁLS transformed their outward shapes without depriving them of their souls. Whether or not there were trees in those earliest days the Saanich could not say; but trees, too, they believed, possessed souls, and even wept when one of them was blown down by the wind. Richling, B., 2016

The trees remember every experience they've had since they sprouted and our Elders implanted this belief that these trees could remember and retain knowledge for us. Miller, B. (n.d.) *Teachings of the Tree People*

any type of change. I see advantages in the legal personhood of the river but it still has problematic aspects. I'm cautious about it and also think that we have further to go as well.

FDP: Could we discuss the relatively recent logging on the Saturna Island? Like you, I was present at Tsawout's community meeting (March, 2019) where this issue was discussed. I was very touched by what people had to say and the logging on Saturna has, to my mind, made apparent the pressures that bear on the W̱SÁNEĆ community as a whole. Without doubt, it is a complicated issue, rooted in and exacerbated by the legacy and problems of the Douglas Treaty too (see *Citizen Artist News: Clouded Title*). Leaving aside the discussion of the financial problems that the community faces, throughout the meeting, many spoke of the very real duty to live in line with W̱SÁNEĆ values; to care for the islands, animals, trees etc. One moment in particular stood out for me: an esteemed Elder (and a very elderly woman) talked about the importance of practicing respectful relationships with the trees and the forest. She spoke very tenderly of the necessity for humility and gratitude; for giving thanks to the trees and the plants. She was followed by her son who stood up and started his speech with "We are the Tree People; We are the Salmon People…" Their words, in concert with many other speakers, made palpable the difficulty of navigating two conflicting conceptions and treatments of trees: as a 'resource/commodity' versus as 'beings' and 'relatives'. The politics of trees here play out in far more complex ways than for non-Indigenous people who do not see trees as beings, let alone as kin. Could you share your own thoughts on this multi-faceted dilemma that you and your community have to face?

RYC: I think it is important to identify this issue as fundamentally connected to not only colonialism, but the ongoing colonial project. Canada, as a nation-state, is a colonial, and specifically capitalist, state. It has always been preoccupied with Indigenous lands, seen through the lens of 'resources'. Without this, it cannot survive as it is. Of course, Indigenous people have been subjected to and entangled with this project in complex and harmful ways. As Elliott often says, colonialism has made us poor in our own homelands. We once had all we needed for a good life. Now we are constantly having to navigate these structures all around us, many of which would force us to sacrifice our values and worldviews – something we are obviously reluctant to do.

FDP: What do you think W̱SÁNEĆ law would look like in practice, if the kind of kinship relationships that are articulated within it were more widely and fully understood by the non-Indigenous community and especially those of us residing on W̱SÁNEĆ territory?

RYC: I suppose it's like with any type of grass roots 'movement', (if you look at it that way). You're trying to, you know, rebuild what has been harmed or re-implement or re-engage with cultural values and legal principles etc., and have others engaging with it too. Lots of times you're left not knowing exactly how it will work or how it will play out, or there's not even really a finished product so to speak, because it's a process more than anything, right? I don't know if there's any type of end goal or vision so much as moving towards the idea that we can't continue on in the way that we have been and that there's other important beings here as well and that we have to start acting and forming our relationships in ways that make that meaningful. What any given relationship might look like in a particular context is somewhat left up in the air. But that's sort of how relationships work, different things at different times are needed so, yeah, it's more the process that is the focus for me.

FDP: Robert, thank you very much for your time and for sharing your knowledge and insights. Opening our minds to seeing non-human beings as bodily related kin rather than 'resources', and putting the needs of non-human beings at the centre of the political community, could actually alter how and what the State and settlers do here. It seems to me that that really would help to put us on the path to reconciliation.

The State still responds automatically to the shibboleth of the 'freedom of the seas'. Professing to believe in the 'inexhaustible resources of the oceans' it brings species after species of fish and whales closer to extinction.

Adapted from Gareth Hardin's article *The Tragedy of the Commons*, published in 1968, this quote reminds us of the long history of seeing nature as a 'cheap' resource. "Cheap nature is at an end: cheapening nature cannot work much longer to sustain extraction and production in and of the contemporary world because most of the reserves of the earth have been drained, burned, depleted, poisoned, exterminated, and otherwise exhausted. [What is needed is] joining forces to reconstitute refuges [sanctuaries] to make possible robust biological-cultural-political-technological recuperation and recomposition" (Haraway, 2015, *Making Kin*).

Deer Foils Raven

as told by David and Mrs. Latasse, Tsartlip

Raven went out to hunt deer. Instead of going ashore and pursuing them in the woods he sat in his canoe and called to them. Three or four came down. “Where have you come from?” he asked them. “From the tall trees,” they replied. He did not think them fat enough so he went farther and called for fat deer. More came down to his canoe. “Where have you come from?” “From the salal berries.” They were not fat enough either so he went on. Again he called and more came. “Where have you come from?” “From the places where there are many blossoms.” “Well, get into my canoe.” Still, Raven wasn’t satisfied. He thought he could get still fatter deer. He went on and called again. More deer came. “Where have you come from?” “From the berry bushes.” “Get into my canoe.” They got in and he paddled home. When he reached the beach he called to his wife. She came out to the house, “Bring me that …” he called, not daring to name what he wanted lest the deer understand him. She did not know what he wanted. At last, he became exasperated and called, “Bring me my skinning knife.” But the deer understood this word and upsetting the canoe ran away.

Richling, B., 2016, *The W̱SÁNEĆ and Their Neighbours*

The Two Deer Brothers

as told by Earl Claxton Jr., Tsawout

There were two SMÍEŦ (deer) brothers and they used to fight all the time whenever they were together. One of the brothers didn’t like fighting and arguing all the time and so he used to go down to the ocean and stay there and meditate and think and be calm. That way he didn’t have to be fighting with his brother. Then one day, XÁLS the Creator came to visit him while he was down at the ocean and he said to him, “I know that you don’t want to go back into the forest and be with your brother because all you do is argue. I’m going to transform you into a crab so that you can stay here at the ocean. To help you out, I’m going to put a picture of your brother on your back.” When he was transformed from a deer into a crab, he wasn’t completely transformed. Some of the fur that the deer has is on the underside of the crab. You’ll see that if you look at a Dungeness crab, it has fur on the underneath part of the crab.

Transcribed from an oral storytelling, 2019.

XÁLS Helps the People

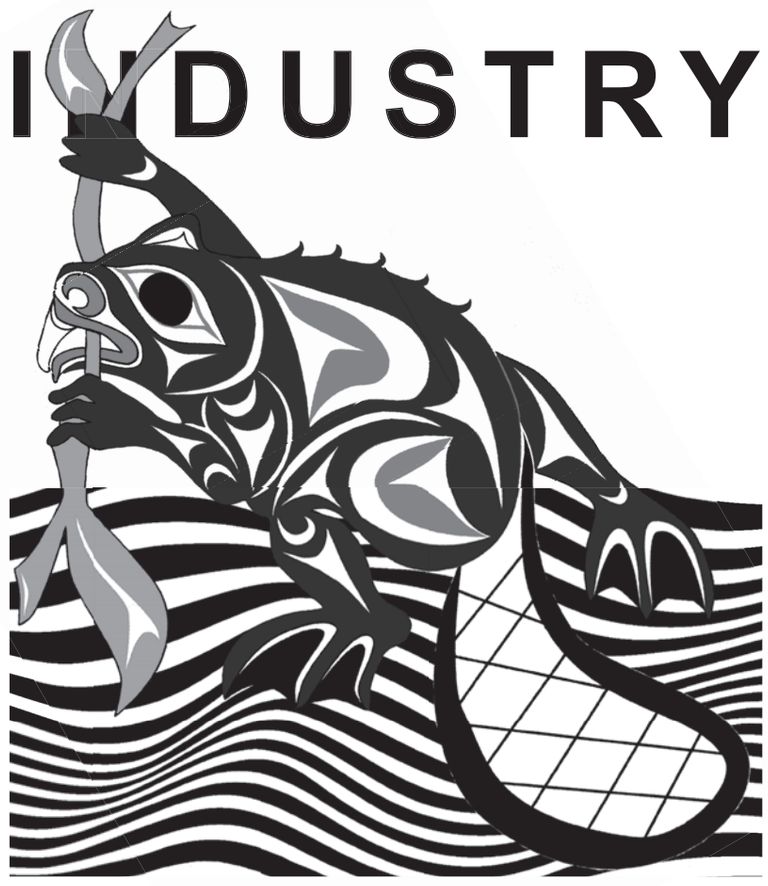
as told by Louis Pelkey, Tsawout

At Pender Island [S,DÁYES] there lived a man name Kwinakus, whose legs were covered with long hair. Whenever he shouted the hair shouted with him, intensifying his cry a hundred fold. One day he was catching young perch in his canoe. He filled the bottom of the canoe with grass, turned it on its side so that the small perch, two or three inches long, would enter the grass, then tipped it right side up, bailed out the water, and extracted the fish from among the grass. (A few Indians still do this.) Kwinakus turned his canoe right side up and shouted. Just then XÁLS and his companion Mink were coming round a hill. Mink said to XÁLS, “There must be a great number of people here.” XÁLS said, “We’ll see.” Kwinakus saw XÁLS approaching and said to himself, “That must be XÁLS.” When XÁLS drew near Kwinakus said, “You have come, my grandson.” XÁLS was pleased at being addressed so politely. Kwinakus told him that they could not cross over the narrow channel where he was fishing because of the strong current. XÁLS said, “I’ll soon arrange that.” He picked up a piece of bark and a stone, laid the bark on the ground in front of him, placed the stone on top and stamped on it. Immediately the channel became dry. Water, however, was seeping through it. XÁLS picked up the bark and stone again, told Kwinakus to place his canoe beyond them so that they would be on the right side, placed some clay under the bark, stamped down the stone on top of it again. Now the channel was completely sealed by dry land.

Kwinakus said further to XÁLS, “We cannot get fresh water here for though there are two pools some monster attacks us when we dip our pails.” XÁLS said, “I’ll amend that.” He took a pail and dipped it in one of the ponds. Immediately, a giant devil fish and octopus caught hold of him and dragged him under. He called to Mink, “Come and help me.” But Mink answered, “Why don’t you turn the devilfish to stone?” XÁLS, who was unable to disentangle himself called out again, “Dive and bring me my knife. I’ll call you my older brother and you shall live longer than I.” Mink dived with the knife. XÁLS cut off all the arms of the devilfish, then drew it up to the surface and flung the different parts of the monster to various parts of the country, naming them Sooke, Clallam [sic],Pender Island, etc. So, now devilfish are found in all these places. He threw the body of the fish to Clallam, that is why the devil fish there are larger than in other places. Only the Fraser Delta he omitted, because devilfish there would spoil the salmon fishing.

Richling, B., 2016, *The W̱SÁNEĆ and Their Neighbours*

INDUSTRY



The proud beaver is a fitting symbol of Canada: A social, industrious creature known for thriving in cold climates by bending their surroundings to their will.
The Weather Network, 2019

Resources: 1. a source of supply, support, or aid, esp. one that can be readily drawn upon when needed: a natural resource; a commercial resource. 2. resources, the collective wealth of a country or its means of producing wealth. 3. Usu., resources. money, or any property that can be converted into money; assets.

The beaver was given official status as an emblem of Canada when “An Act to provide for the recognition of the Beaver (Castor Canadensis) as a symbol of sovereignty of Canada” received Royal assent on March, 24, 1975. However, the Beaver was part of the Canadian identity long before Parliament passed the National Symbol of Canada Act.

After the early European explorers realized Canada was not the spice-rich Orient, the main profit-making attraction was the beaver population. In the late 1600s and early 1700s, the fashion of the day demanded fur hats, which needed beaver pelts. As these hats became more popular, the demand for the pelts grew. King Henry IV of France saw the fur trade as an opportunity to acquire much-needed revenue and to establish a North American empire. Both English and French fur traders were soon selling beaver pelts in Europe at 20 times their original purchase price.

The trade of beaver pelts proved so profitable that many Canadians felt compelled to pay tribute to the buck-toothed animal. Sir William Alexander, who was granted title to Nova Scotia in 1621, was the first to include the beaver in a coat of arms. The Hudson’s Bay Company put four beavers on the shield of its coat of arms in 1678 to show how important the hard-working rodent was to the company. A coin was created – which was known as a “buck” – that was equal to the value of one male beaver pelt. The French Kebeca Liberata medal, created in 1690 to celebrate France’s successful defence of the City of Québec, depicts the image of a seated woman (representing France) with a beaver at her feet (representing Canada). Sir Sandford Fleming featured the beaver on the first Canadian postage stamp – the Three Penny Beaver – in 1851. The Canadian Pacific Railway company still includes the beaver on its crest today.

Despite this recognition, the beaver was close to extinction by the mid-19th century. There were an estimated six million beavers in Canada before the start of the fur trade. During its peak, 100,000 pelts were being shipped to Europe each year; the Canadian beaver was in danger of being wiped outGe:
Government of Canada, Official Symbols of Canada, 2019

This prompts the question: is it right that some beings (trees, fish etc.) are regarded as ‘property’ and in turn, ‘resources’? Does it make sense for, say, an organisation like a corporation to have rights while animals and other beings do not?

Individual human beings have legal rights (natural, social and political rights) and in principle, at least, are protected from harm etc.. However, so are multinational and national corporations. They too have rights and protections as ‘legal persons’ under the law and can press a government for say, loss of *projected* earnings (hence, the final cost of buying Kinder Morgan at 4.5 billion). The legal personhood of corporations is one of the key mobilizing conditions for the rampant exploitation of ‘resources’ (non-human beings) and the accumulation of private (individual) wealth.

Corporations as we know them came into being in Britain with an 1844 Act allowing them to define their own purpose. The power to control them thus passed from the government to the courts. In 1855, shareholders were awarded limited liability: their personal assets were protected from the consequences of their corporate behaviour.

In 1886 a landmark decision by a US court recognized the corporation as a ‘natural person’ under law. The 14th amendment to the Constitution: ‘no state shall deprive any person of life, liberty or property’ - adopted to protect emancipated slaves in the hostile South - was used to defend corporations and strike down regulations.”
New Internationalist, 2002, https://newint.org/features/2002/07/05/history/

The Beaver teaches people to have the ability to be productive in all ways and not to limit their options.

TEAMWORK

Spirits of the West Coast Art Gallery, 2019.

The Beaver helps people to understand the dynamics of teamwork and to appreciate each individual’s talents and contributions in order to accomplish anything. He is a determined, builder of the mind, body and soul and symbolizes creativity, creation, cooperation, persistence and harmony. The Beaver also is a serious, hard worker and will not quit his job until he is done.

All life shares a common creation, and all life is considered to be kin-relatives. The [...] phrase “all my relations” illustrates this concept well. Some animals are referred to as “Grandfather” or “Father” or “Grandmother” or “Mother”, indicating a family relationship. In fact, many clans trace their descent from some animal.
Miller, B. (n.d.) *Teachings of the Tree People*

‘Kin’ mean[s] something other/more than entities tied by [human] ancestry or geneology. [All] earthlings are kin in the deepest sense, and it is past time to practice better care of kinds-as-*assemblages* (not species one at a time). Kin is an assembling sort of word. All critters share a common “flesh”, laterally, semiotically, and genealogically. It matters how kin generate kin. So make kin, not babies!
Haraway, D. (2015) *Anthropocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin.*

[Colonial] civilizations look at life as resources, and as long as they use that term for life as resources, you’re never going to gain anything. When you recognize life for what it is: a tree as a spirit, a tree as a living being, a tree as a grandfather. [...] When you recognize that there is a reason for all of these beings and that these beings are interlocked, that we depend on one another; and if we can change the definitions, we can have people speak about life for what it is -- as life with equal value, as life necessary for survival and not as commerce and not as resources, then we may have a chance. But as long as we look at forests as resources, as long as we look at these things as board feet of lumber or we look at fish runs as resources for people, we’re going to continue to use them without restraint and without guidance.
Miller, B. (n.d.) *Teachings of the Tree People*

Recognizing the legal standing of nature poses a threat to corporate America because it threatens the very thing that keeps corporations all-powerful; the exploitation of natural resources.
Pavlik, S., 2015, *Should Trees Have Legal Standing in Indian Country?*

[Our people] believed whatever was here had a right to live, even the insects that walk on the ground. The trees, birds, animals, rivers, lakes, our people respected everything. They would not waste. If they killed a fish, they ate the whole thing: the gills, liver, the milt, the row. When they returned the bones to the water, they gave thanks to the Creator for having provided for them. They would not cut down a living tree unless they had to. When they had to cut a living tree down, they would go to the tree and address it by its sacred name. They would tell the tree how sorry they were to have to take its life, but their need was so great that they had to take it. When you cut a tree down, you take its life.
Elliott, D. Sr., 1983, *Saltwater People.*

My elder from Vancouver Island said, “look at the hills, what do you see?” And I said oh that was an easy answer, the forest, the trees are there. And he said well that’s exactly the answer 90 percent of the people would give you. But what you see there is the oldest teaching since creation. He said it’s the teaching of the Tree People. He said, you look up there and you say you see trees, but what you see is many nations of trees living side by side from the beginning of time in harmony. We were told in this teaching that we were never to infringe on the diversity of the forest. We need to respect all the things that the other races of [non-Human] people have contributed to this earth. Not to look for the differences but to look for the things that we have in common. This will keep the earth in harmony.
Miller, B. (n.d.) *Teachings of the Tree People*