

Signs of the Time

*Nte?kepmx Resistance
through Rock Art*

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1

A Theory of Everything

After he got to the moon and got to be very powerful,
he could do anything.

– *Annie York*

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IN SEPTEMBER 1985, as part of their contribution to an archaeological impact assessment for a proposed logging road into the Stein Valley, Randy Bouchard and Dorothy Kennedy engaged Ntɛʔkepmx linguist Mamie Henry to interview a well-known Lytton elder, Mary Williams, about her cultural knowledge of the Stein River. During the interview, which was not in English due to her preference for her native language, Mary Williams gave the following account, which Mamie Henry translated into English:

A trapper up the Stein sought shelter in a cave. He lit a fire and promptly fell asleep on a natural rock ledge around the inside perimeter of the cave. During the night he was awakened by an unusual sound, “tss-tss-tss.” He looked up and saw that the walls of the cave were covered with pictographic figures that were now pulsating in the firelight. The man fell asleep again, but early in the morning he was awakened once more, this time by a voice saying *tsuxwíkw* [could be *cuywíkw*ʷ] (“it is morning”). (Bouchard and Kennedy 1988, 117)

The phrase “it is morning” is not a regular expression in Ntɛʔkepmxcín and “would only be used in a situation relating to a mythological or profound experience” (Bouchard and Kennedy 1988, 119). In the story, a twentieth-century trapper from Stʔáyn encounters rock paintings that pulsate and emit sounds in a cave that “speaks” at dawn, the most

auspicious time for miracles to occur (Teit 1900, 316–17, 344). This chapter explores the Nl̓eʔkepmx world view as a social theory of reality that includes everything material and spiritual. With Indigenous theory, or knowledge of spiritual aspects, it may be possible to have a better understanding of the material rock art of Nl̓eʔkepmx.

Mary Williams’s narrative assumes an understanding that depends on local knowledge. In keeping with a story told in Nl̓eʔkepmxcín, a language rooted in long intergenerational occupation, the fluent listener would be able to place the story into its proper cultural context without extensive explanation (see discussion in Atleo 2004, 3). Archaeology and ethnography can establish the form, content, chronology, and diversity of the practice of rock painting, but this information, though valuable, is descriptive and inadequate for a Nl̓eʔkepmx understanding of rock art.

North American rock art studies based on Sém̓eʔ epistemologies of deductive reasoning tend to assume that universal rules can be used to explain complex localized cultural phenomena (Heizer and Baumoff 1976; Loendorf 2010; Whitley 1998, 2001). The historical reality is far more complicated (Martindale and Nicholas 2014; Wylie 1993). Carol Patterson argues that quantitative methods of collecting data based on typologies that are absolutely foreign to the culture create “false taxonomies” that “cannot be analyzed scientifically because they are not real classes of entities in the real world” of their creators (Patterson 2007, 345). As many have argued, subjective non-Indigenous typologies are limited because they do not replicate Indigenous understanding (Atalay 2012; Bednarik 2007, 153–65; H. Harris 2006; Little Bear 2000; TallBear 2014; Wobst 2006). Likewise, Indigenous theory differs from traditional anthropology in that it is a theory of social relations that includes all animate and inanimate entities, as well as the spiritual, in the sense of unseen dimensions that can have visible manifestations in the world. Indigenous theory is an independent North American scholarly tradition with its own theory and methods of acquiring knowledge (Atalay 2012; Atleo 2004; Laforet and York 1998; Little Bear 2000; Manuel and Posluns 1974; L.T. Smith 1999, 2015; Turner 2014; York, Daly, and Arnett 1993). Much of this knowledge resides in oral traditions. The challenge for travellers in Indigenous places is to find an appropriate translation.

As many scholars are beginning to appreciate, non-Indigenous and Indigenous world views “represent two quite different knowledge

systems” – the former stress “bounded entities, discontinuities and individualism,” whereas the latter “tend to emphasize linkages, continuities and relationships” (C. Smith 2007, 35). The two extremes may not be incommensurable, however. Nuu-chah-nulth scholar Richard Atleo (2004, 117) argues that Indigenous theory “appears to be similar, even identical to some contemporary theoretical ideas that employ the concept of context in social science and environmental discourse.” Context is all about nested relationships of meaning. This aspect of Indigenous theory has something in common with semiotician Charles Peirce’s idea of synechism, “the tendency to regard everything as continuous” (Peirce Edition Project 1998, 1). Peirce conceived of semiotics, the study of signs and symbols and their interpretation, as an irreducible way of life, where “continuity governs the whole domain of experience in every element of it” (Peirce Edition Project 1998, 1). Everything is, and can become, a sign in an ongoing semiosis, or process of signification. Everything animate and inanimate, physical and spiritual (non-material), is connected and emergent.

Indigenous theory resonates with the epistemology of realism (Bunge 1996). As Bruce Trigger (2008, 30) states, realists consider “not only what can be perceived with the senses or conceptualized with the brain but all that exists and happens. Thus, realists pay equal attention to all things, whether they can observe them or only their effects. Ideas are viewed as processes that occur in the human brain and hence can be studied from a materialist perspective.” Art history and the anthropology of art show that shared ideas may find material expression during certain periods (Gell 1998; Panofsky 1939). Similarly, archaeological materials, such as rock art, lithics, and other objects, are the tangible remains of activities that serve as a proxy or measure of non-material events.

Indigenous theory is also congruent with actor network theory (Latour 1993) that decentres humans and “accentuates the relational, subjugating the specific importance of individual actors within networks in order to focus on the multiplicity of mutually constitutive and positioning ‘actants’ which together serve to hybridize agency” (O. Jones and Cloke 2008, 80). By employing metaphors of networks and hybridity, non-human agents become “an essential element in how the natural and social flow into one another” (O. Jones and Cloke 2008, 84). Nature in all its guises becomes “both a real material actor and a socially constituted object” (Demerit 1994, 183). Scholars already

invoke animic ontology, relational epistemology, and rhizomic networks of personhood to theorize a “new Animism” to disrupt Western standpoints and their assumptions of autonomous personhood and the privileging of human agency (Wallis 2009). Indigenous theory similarly decentres human agency and Western theory to broaden the discourse of interdisciplinarity to include non-human agency in the (re)construction of rock painting practice. Recognition of the hybridized agency – the combined influences of human and non-human actors – from an integrated perspective of Indigenous ontology and archaeological data furthers understanding of site formation processes and the material agency of Nl̓eʔkepmx and Salishan rock art landscapes in the past and the present.

Such an approach is consistent with an Indigenous theory of context which “assumes that any variable must be affected by a multitude of additional variables that can be found in a variety of contexts across different dimensions of experience” (Atleo 2004, 118). In the Nl̓eʔkepmx world, where people and things “have the capacity to exist in more than one domain,” the material and non-material are interconnected (Laforet and York 1998, 63). Therefore, a holistic archaeology that reflects Indigenous values “will demand more rather than fewer variables for any given study” (Atleo 2004, 118). In an archaeological context of Nl̓eʔkepmx rock art sites, such variables would include the relationships between the material culture and the landscape, the language, travel corridors, origin stories, colonization, ethnography, and intergenerational history. In some ways, the last, intergenerational history, is the most poignant and salient, with its direct connection to the ancestral dead – powerful agents in the Nl̓eʔkepmx world.

The French anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu (1981, 1) wrote that “the progress of knowledge presupposes progress in our knowledge of the conditions of knowledge,” which means that the success of the interpretive exercise is always relative to the degree of prior knowledge of the objective and subjective relations of the viewer toward the subject. Without a sense of Indigenous historical consciousness and scholarly tradition, we have little idea of what we are looking at when we look at rock art, beyond its empirical description, which is in itself an imposition. The non-empirical is less obvious, and it relies on prior knowledge of place in its material and spiritual aspects. This knowledge

has authority that may be determined by critical attention. Archaeology, like law, must not only listen *to* Indigenous perspectives where they exist but must also look *for* them (B.G. Miller 2011).

How do we as twenty-first-century travellers in Nl̓eʔkepmx space begin to understand Nl̓eʔkepmx rock art? Aside from living with the people on the land, language is a window to understand the behaviour that produces the culture (Coffin 2007; H. Harris 2006; O'Regan 2007). Recognition of the combined influences of human and non-human actors, from an integrated perspective of Indigenous ontology and archaeological data, furthers understanding of both site formation processes and the material agencies of Nl̓eʔkepmx and other Salishan rock art landscapes in the past and the present.

In the following section, I explore Nl̓eʔkepmx terms and ideas associated with the practices of rock art. In other jurisdictions such as New Zealand, where archaeology actively, respectfully, and successfully embraces Maori terminology and community research, knowledge of the past is enriched for all parties (Coffin 2007; O'Regan 2007; L.T. Smith 1999). Similar trends are evident in British Columbia, demonstrating the value of combining oral traditions, archaeology, and ethnohistory (Martindale 2006; McLaren 2003; McLaren and Gauvreau 2016; Merchant 2011; Reimer 2003, 2006; Velliky 2013). Here, I work from Nl̓eʔkepmx sources *toward* a Nl̓eʔkepmx understanding. Few archaeologists are linguists or students of Indigenous language, but Indigenous words and their meanings can aid in the interpretation of Indigenous (archaeological) sites and can balance ethnocentric bias by translating material culture data into a cultural identity that we can use to interpret site formation processes. In what follows, seven Nl̓eʔkepmx concepts are described to expand the list of Indigenous non-material taxonomies that are helpful to understanding how rock art sites came into being. They are useful terms to keep in mind, prior knowledge if you will, in visiting such places.

Tm̓íxʷ and Xaʔǵáʔ

As Andrea Laforet and Annie York (1998, 61) write, two concepts are “central to Nlakaʔpamux [Nl̓eʔkepmx] economy, thought and literature.” These are tm̓íxʷ (tm-EEW-hw) and xaʔǵáʔ (nature power). Tm̓íxʷ means “earth, ground, land,” but it also has a more inclusive meaning – “encompassing the earth and all that which is in and on it,” physical

and non-physical (Laforet and York 1998, 60; L.C. Thompson and Thompson 1996, 968). It is a dynamic cosmological unity with polarities of existence that range from positive creative forces to negative and destructive ones. The theory of tmíx^w assumes that the universe is complex, interconnected, and interrelated. It is a theoretical position based on long-term local sustainable intergenerational connection to land (Atleo 2004, 2011; Battiste 2000; H. Harris 2006; Manuel and Posluns 1974; J. Miller 1998; TallBear 2014). As Ntē?kepmx elder Dr. Ruby Dunstan explains, “tmíx^w is not just land. It’s everything. It’s you, your family, your kids, your dog, your cow – everything is your tmíx^w, the mountain, the fish – *everything*. That came from the elders” (Ruby Dunstan, pers. comm., 2008). In this relational universe, mutually dependent life forms require mutually acceptable protocols to maintain balance and harmony.¹

Knowledge of protocol is gained by exposure to χα?χά?, the other central Ntē?kepmx concept, which is described as “the daily presence in the waking world of what in English would be called supernatural” (Laforet and York 1998, 62). Χα?χά? refers to anything “having supernatural power, powerful, haunted, forbidden, taboo, abnormal, spooky mysterious” (L.C. Thompson and Thompson 1996, 416–17). Encountering χα?χά? invokes crossing thresholds of experience to participate in physical and non-physical realities simultaneously. Given this, χα?χά? is “the point of vital connection between human beings and the Earth and all it represents” at the spiritual level (Laforet and York 1998, 62). It is sometimes described in English as “nature power” (York, Daly, and Arnett 1993, 2). James Teit (1914, 311) defined it as

the belief that a certain mysterious power pervaded all nature, its manifestations varying in different objects as to kind and degree. It was the effort of the Indians to obtain as much as possible of this power from those animals and objects in nature that appeared to possess it in the greatest degree or that manifested the type of power considered the most valuable. Thus the sun and day-dawn were among the chief objects of veneration and supplication, as were certain mountain peaks, the thunder and rocks and trees. In the animal kingdom such creatures as the eagle, raven, owl, wolf, and grizzly bear were venerated, and young men tried to obtain them for manitous or guardian spirits.

Rock art sites are $\text{x}\alpha\text{?}\text{x}\text{?}\text{ú}\text{y}\text{m}\text{x}^{\text{w}}$ (a place of $\text{x}\alpha\text{?}\text{x}\alpha\text{?}$) or, as Teit translated them, “the haunts of mysteries,” in reference to their powerful spiritual component. The geomorphology of a rock painting site is not merely a convenient canvas, and the art is not positioned randomly. The place itself is an agent in a spiritual landscape that anchors and participates in the social relationships that create reality. $\text{X}\alpha\text{?}\text{x}\alpha\text{?}$ might also be “a mysterious person, person gifted with mystery, magic, superhuman or wonderful powers, a wizard, etc.” – anything “magical” or a “mystery” (Teit 1912, 312n1). People could become $\text{x}\alpha\text{?}\text{x}\alpha\text{?}\text{um}$, a condition that “changed the effects they might have on their environment and those around them at particular times of their lives” (Laforet and York 1998, 109). Rock paintings themselves could be $\text{x}\alpha\text{?}\text{x}\alpha\text{?}$, especially those made by the $\text{x}\alpha\text{?}\text{x}\alpha\text{?}$ of the place or by a person “gifted in magic” (Teit 1898, 118n283).

Spték^{wł}

For $\text{N}\text{ie}\text{?}\text{k}\text{e}\text{p}\text{m}\text{x}$, the present-day world is the physical manifestation of the transformations of the $\text{spték}^{\text{wł}}$, a term used to describe both an age before the modern era, a traditional narrative or origin story, or a being of that time. The word literally means “the story,” and $\text{spték}^{\text{wł}}$ describes the physical and spiritual unity of life (see examples in Hanna and Henry 1996; Laforet and York 1998; Teit 1898, 1912; L.C. Thompson and Thompson 1996, 433).² In the beginning, all things were indistinguishable by form until they were transformed by the actions of beings collectively called $\text{Q}^{\text{w}\text{í}\text{q}^{\text{w}\text{ł}}\text{q}^{\text{w}\text{ł}}\text{ə}\text{ł}\text{t}$ at the end of the $\text{Spték}^{\text{wł}}$. As Teit (1900, 337) wrote,

The mountains and valleys were given their present form by a number of Transformers who travelled throughout the world. The greatest of these was the Old Coyote, who, it is said, was sent by the “Old Man” to put the world in order. At the same time three brothers named $\text{Qoa}'\text{qLqaL}$ [$\text{Q}^{\text{w}\text{í}\text{q}^{\text{w}\text{ł}}\text{q}^{\text{w}\text{ł}}\text{ə}\text{ł}\text{t}$] travelled all over the country, working miracles. There lived still another Transformer, whose name was Kokwe'la (*Lomatium macrocarpum*). The brothers were finally transformed into stone, while the Old Man travelled over the country. The beings who inhabited the world during the mythological age, until the time of the Transformers were called $\text{spetak}'\text{kL}$ [$\text{Spték}^{\text{wł}}$]. They were men with animal characteristics ... They were finally transformed into real animals. Most of the

rocks and boulders of remarkable shape are considered as transformed men or animals of the mythological period.³

Annie York described how $Q^{w'iq^{w'\lambda q^{w'\epsilon\lambda t}}$ transformed people into the biodiversity of the present world:

You see $Q^{w'iq^{w'\lambda q^{w'\epsilon\lambda t}}$ was one of the Gospels and he was told to look at the people, what they're doing and they all got bird's name so he just turned them into a bird 'cause they were doing something funny just the same as the little chickadee. A little chickadee – they were humans, but they were tattlers, always tattle-telling things so when $Q^{w'iq^{w'\lambda q^{w'\epsilon\lambda t}}$ came he says, “Ok, you people been always tattle-taling, telling all kind of things,” so he turned him into a bird. That's why sometimes ... you see them yesterday. There was one flying around that tells on *you* [laughter]. So that's what's $Q^{w'iq^{w'\lambda q^{w'\epsilon\lambda t}}$'s doings. But people ... That's what I told that Debbie [Spuzzum First Nation leader]. I says: “When you go to court about Stein you mustn't tell people this, that the birds were *not* human beings in the first place – they *were*”! But we tell religion ... we call religion bear, but their name is bear. Just the same as any white name. And the birds name is *časkíkik* [chickadee], *hihihe?* [Canada jay] all these people, that's their name. So when $Q^{w'iq^{w'\lambda q^{w'\epsilon\lambda t}}$ came around, they were watching them, what they were doing, wrong things, so he turned them into a bird and told them. “People gonna call you that name.” (Annie York, interview by Richard Daly, September 16, 1989)

The Stein River was one of the places where the Transformers stopped on their way down the Fraser River from the Secwepemc country, leaving a reminder of their visit, as they did everywhere. Teit et al. (1917, 13–14) recounted the activities of two Transformers named Sesulia'n and Seku'lia upon their arrival near the mouth of the Stein River:

They were good men, and taught the people many arts. They transformed those who were proud, while they helped those who were grateful for advice and instruction. They reached Styne [Stein] Creek at dusk. A number of people were living in an underground lodge just north of the creek, and their dogs began to howl when the Transformers approached. A man went out to see who was coming. When he saw the Transformers, he made fun of them. Therefore they transformed him, the house, and the people into stone.

When leaving this place, Sesulia'n left the mark of his right foot on a stone, and a little farther down the river Seku'lia left the mark of his left foot. Both these impressions of human feet may still be seen in the woods near Styne.⁴

Salish origin narratives, places, and upbringing are templates for learning. Places and things have inherent agency within a social order that includes non-human agents. These agents are collectively understood through the individual personal transformative nature of the vision quest and by the accumulative knowledge of place. The central teaching is that all knowledge comes from a spiritual (in the sense of non-physical) place and is communicated in the present through stories of place and practices with layers of meaning proportionate to cultural initiation. Spték'wł demonstrates that the path to that spiritual place is blocked by self-interest, greed, and other anti-social behaviour. The rock formations where art is found had their origin in these moral lessons turned to stone. The story does not explain the rock; the rock explains the story.

Sx'wáým

Sx'wáým, to “transform someone/something into something else,” also describes “a personage of the myth age turned into a natural object or animal or a natural object that resembles a person or object such as a fossil” (L.C. Thompson and Thompson 1996, 433; J. Miller 1999, 30). In a broad sense, the word describes anything transformed by Q'wíq'wáq'wəłt in the course of their work to make the world fit for people to make a living. Sx'wáým (or the plural sx'wəx'wáým) are specific terms for rock formations that represent spték'wł actors or other things turned to stone (L.C. Thompson and Thompson 1996, 1338). As Teit (1900, 337) noted, “most of the rocks and boulders of remarkable shape are considered as transformed men or animals of the Mythological period” (Figure 8). Although much of the history regarding these entities is lost, a few stories associated with these “metamorphosis beings” are known (see Chapter 3).

Chief Baptiste Michelle of Lytton told Charles Hill-Tout an origin story about another sx'wáým on Harrison Lake in the southwest corner of the territory. During their travels along the western edge of the lake, one of the Transformers, Q'wíq'wáq'wəłt, or Benign-face as he is called here,

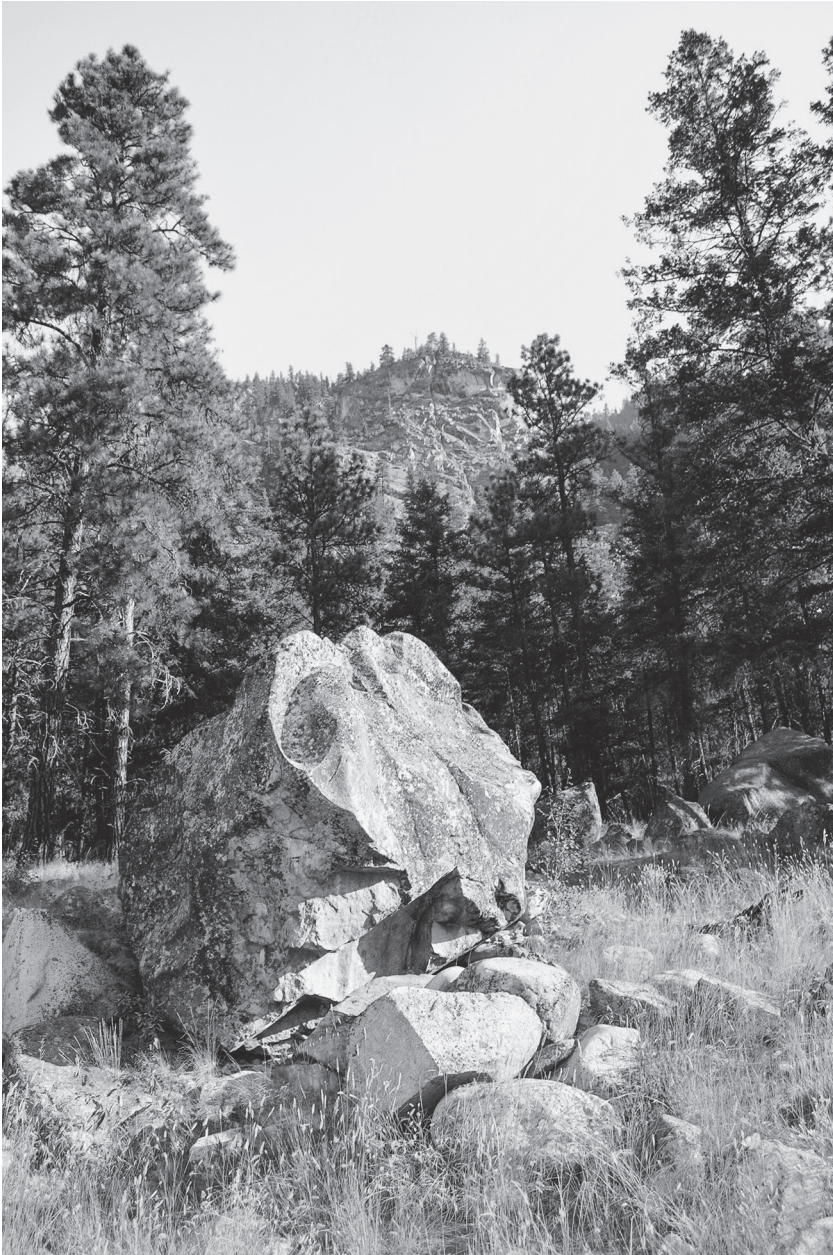


Figure 8 An isolated, erratic waterworn granite boulder in the Similkameen Valley. The unusual geomorphology of this and other rock art site locations suggest that they represent transformed beings (sx^wəx^wáy^m) of the Spték^wl.

heard of a man [səx^wnéʔm] who caused windstorms to arise at his wish, so that those who were on the lake were never sure of getting back safe again. He did this to upset their boats, in order that his cannibal brother, Seal-man, might have their bodies for his dinner. Seeking this man out, Benign-face [said] to him, “I am told you are a very great man, and have medicine to make the wind rise when you wish to. Is the report true?” The shaman, not knowing who his questioner was, and proud of his powers, declared it was quite true. When asked what use he put his powers to, he boldly confessed that he used them to upset and drown people on the lake, that his brother might have their bodies. This made Benign-face very angry. And, calling Seal-man to him, he deprived him of his arms and legs, giving him flippers in their stead, and commanded him to eat no more human flesh, but to feed thereafter on fish. Thus it is that the seal has flippers, and feeds on fish. But the shaman he punished by transforming him into a smooth-faced rock, whereon men might paint, which rock may be seen on the shore of the lake, according to Mischelle, with its painted figures upon it, to this day. (Hill-Tout 1978b, 38)

Elsewhere, for example along the old trail along the Thompson River, Q^wíq^wλ^wq^wəʔt transformed the vulva of Coyote’s Wife and her basket kettle into two large boulders, both of which were later painted (see [Chapter 3](#)). These Nl̓eʔkepmx sources reveal an intimate connection between s^wəx^wáʔm and the later production of rock art. The few known origin narratives of rock painting sites suggest that all geomorphology associated with the paintings was gendered and that it represented transformed beings, or s^wəx^wáʔm. A survey conducted by archaeologist Gordon Mohs (1987, 78) of Sto:lo and Nl̓eʔkepmx spiritual sites along the Fraser River identified numerous places where people, animals, and artifacts were turned to rock by the Transformers and were “believed to have residual power.” It was not so much the physical characteristics of these places that mattered, but “what each site represents and the individual feelings that are held toward it.” In this respect, elders often refer to many sites as “stone people” and regard them “as ancestral, physical manifestations of Indigenous spirituality” (Mohs 1987, 72). Physical manifestations of transformed mythological beings embody narrative and transpersonal experience by the very fact that they were once flesh and blood “humans.” S^wəx^wáʔm



Figure 9 Xolokwaxa, “rattlesnake woman,” at Nkaxwil, Thompson River Valley (see Teit 1912, 366). Her vulva faces the river; her “rattle” is discernible in the outcrop to the right. Only certain $sx^w\text{ə}x^w\acute{a}ym$ were selected as rock painting sites. Most, as is the case here, are not marked.

is to be changed, transformed, transfigured into something different – physical reminders of the reality of the transformative catharsis that is a central feature of training for spirit power, or $\text{?éc}x\text{e?}me$.

A $sx^w\acute{a}ym$ can be $x\acute{a}?\acute{x}?\acute{u}ymx^w$ – a haunted area or place. Certain $x\acute{a}?\acute{x}?\acute{u}ymx^w$ (“land mysteries,” according to one of Teit’s translations) possessed culturally significant properties that attracted the attention of painters. Although contact with these sites could be fatal to some, they could “also be of service to those who seek them and wish to gain wisdom from them, for many shamans have trained in these places” (Teit 1912, 333).

The mimetolithic quality of known $sx^w\text{ə}x^w\acute{a}ym$, whereby the geomorphology takes on the appearance of something else (Dietrich 1989) makes us alert for these features at rock art sites and to other less tangible qualities – non-visual things such as echoes or other acoustic phenomena. Since anthropomorphic elements are a feature of $sx^w\text{ə}x^w\acute{a}ym$ and are often universally recognizable, archaeologists should consider that any instances in a landscape, particularly those

marked with red paintings, are culturally significant beyond the material culture of the paint. Knowing the cultural context of a rock as a $sx^wáy\dot{m}$ and $\chi a\lambda\chi\acute{a}?$ (mysterious/spooky), we can theorize beyond the signifying role of the human agent and include him or her in a larger field of actors. The geological substrate is both a geological and a social entity that existed long before the art was added. Many known $sx^w\acute{e}x^wáy\dot{m}$ carry rock paintings, but many do not, which suggests that only specific examples were selected for painting during a specific period (Figure 9).

The network of actors increases our understanding of the archaeological record. “Stone people,” or $sx^w\acute{e}x^wáy\dot{m}$ and $\chi a\lambda\chi\acute{a}?\acute{u}y\dot{m}x^w$, as “non-human persons” are not static geomorphology but share with all life forms an ability to interact with each other. By virtue of their physical similarities to humans or animals or artifacts, anthropomorphic rock landscapes possess other human values, such as the capacity to share or withhold and to be kind or vindictive. They can also be quick to take offence at human hubris. We can assume that many such places were recognized prior to the massive depopulation and its impact on social memory. For archaeologists, awareness of Indigenous frameworks at a theoretical level will enlarge the interpretative database. A cliff or boulder as an agent takes on a social significance when other “persons” make a mark on it.

The geomorphology of rock art sites is a catalogue of the powerful forces that created the world – a visual and tactile reminder of things that have gone before yet that still exist. A $sx^wáy\dot{m}$ is possessed of a unique story, concealed in its appearance or “body,” which is the basis of its agency, and perspective, its point of view, as a subject. Through its sheer physicality, landscape could be “a foundation for all thought and social interaction” (Tilley 2008, 271). As such, $sx^w\acute{e}x^wáy\dot{m}$ are “living” manifestations of the ancient stories and their teachings, which significantly predate the paintings on their surfaces.

Séytknmx

Séytknmx (SHAYT-kn-muh, person) expresses the inner metaphysical unity under the outer physical differences imposed by the Transformer’s work. The word is not limited to people but is inclusive of all things organic and inorganic, visible and non-visible (Laforet and York 1998, 209, 249n65). Among $N\acute{e}?\acute{e}kpmx$ the list would include *Homo sapiens*, bears, trees, rocks, artifacts, water, clouds, tools, rock art, and much

more, each distinguished by its outer appearance yet qualitatively equivalent under its surface covering, be it skin, bark, or stone. People are not former animals, as evolutionary theory would have it; rather, animals, trees, and rocks are former people. James Teit (1900, 357) was told, “Every living thing has a soul. All animals and everything that grows, such as trees and herbs and even rocks, fire, and water are believed to have souls, since they were people during the mythological age” [sptékʷɪ].

Qʷíqʷáqʷəłt created the biodiversity. Transformation between species is a frequent theme in Annie York’s discourse on the Stein River drawings, and she often mentioned that Qʷíqʷáqʷəłt changed various people to their current forms. She referred directly to the concept of séytknmx in her discussion of the rock paintings. Noting a drawing of an anthropomorphic figure with deer antlers, she said, “Yeah you see it’s a man but he’s got a horn ... You see in the legend it’s called the deer *smiyc*. *Smiyc* is a deer and in the beginning walks like a human being” (Annie York, interview by Richard Daly, July 1, 1989). And again during discussion of another anthropomorphic image from the Stein, with rays emanating from its head (Figure 10), she remarked,

- AY: Oh of course that’s a human being. You see [counting digits of figure] One, two, three, four, five, you see? Got fingers.
- RD: And it’s got a little body ... but all the things coming out from the head like the sun why is that?
- AY: Well you see the Indians ... always ... The sun was a human being in the first place. This is what I was saying to you before.
- RD: Is this the sun?
- AY: Yeah that’s the Sun. Yeah well this Sun always looks at us. And the Sun, this is the thing, you see now that’s coming to that; *the Sun was a man on this earth. There was no Sun.* Earth was something like the planet so he was told “Ok you, you always wanting to be very bright so we gonna give you a job. So that’s why ya got a head like that” [rayed arc]. So that man was thrown up there from here. The woman was told, “Your children ... you’re gonna always be seeing your father up there.” (Annie York, interview by Richard Daly, September 17, 1989)

The natural world, of which humans are part, is the cultural world, one reality characterized by social relations between humans and



Figure 10 “Sun” painting, Stein Valley (digitally enhanced).
The scale in the foreground is in centimetres.

non-humans that are experientially based. Physical environments, events, and material culture are possessed of agency. Places, objects, and things as subjects can influence people’s actions and reactions. These may leave traces of practice as the various agents interact. Understanding the relationship requires a non-anthropocentric view (see Knappett and Malafouris 2008).

Social relations, then, are not limited to human society but are inclusive of the entire world. Anything is a potential subject with a unique perspective. In a multi-natural context, it is no longer a question of what we as Western scientists know and model onto the unknown but a consideration of the multiple relationships that might be invoked in any archaeologically represented moment. A single

human-like figure rendered in paint may be the séytknmx humanity of any number of entities. To view the Nl̥ʔkepmx world from a perspectivist position is not a matter of subscribing to Nl̥ʔkepmx belief but of translating Nl̥ʔkepmx metaphors into the work of archaeology (Martindale and Nicholas 2014; Nicholas 2010; Wobst 2006).

Cultural ecology is the “study of the processes by which a society adapts to its environment,” and yet archaeologists rarely consider the spiritual links between society, technology, and the environment (Steward 1968, 5). Causalities beyond economic necessity must include the time invested in seemingly non-utilitarian activities. Such investments invoke non-discursive knowledge forms that find expression in aesthetics of materiality and practice (Gell 1998). In this cultural context, rock formations, as subjects, are not blank canvases or anthropomorphized (culturally constructed) landscapes but are social agents that are qualitatively equivalent to all others through the absolute agency of their bodies and synergies. They are important participants and players in a cosmogenealogy that does not differentiate on the basis of anthropocentric hierarchies but instead shares an ancient cultural tradition of intergenerational relationships (knowledge) (LaDuke 2012). They represent a theory that may be tested by a research method.

ʔécʔme

The Nl̥ʔkepmxcín word ʔécʔme means “go questing for spirit power” (L.C. Thompson and Thompson 1996, 3). Separating themselves from society, individuals went to an isolated area, usually high in mountains, where they sought spiritual guidance and fasted until power came in a dream or vision. The goal was to acquire a sn̥ʔm (power song) to guide one through life. Also known as the “vision quest,” ʔécʔme is a fundamental “religious” experience of people in North American non-state societies, as may have been the case among all peoples (Atleo 2004; Hines 1993; Hultkrantz 1997; Jilek 1982). As a research method, ʔécʔme physiologically reveals the interconnection of all things and validates the truth of the origin stories that everything is connected socially, materially, and spiritually by revealing the shared personhood of séytknmx.

Annie York’s discussion of ʔécʔme demonstrates her authority regarding cultural matters. As she explained, Nl̥ʔíksmtm (in-GLEE-sum-tum, Son of Coyote) was “the first one done that” – in other

words, he was first in accessing the spiritual realm to acquire knowledge. Several versions of his story are known from the late nineteenth century but Laurence Thompson and M. Terry Thompson (1992) recorded a more recent account of Nłíksmtm by Annie York. The inter-linear English translation of the original Nłeʔkepmxcín text follows. The setting is łqəmcín (Lytton),

It is said that the Indian people didn't have anything at all. The people didn't know anything at all. So this fellow made his space canoe in which he was going to go to the moon. "I'm going to find out what their way of doing things up there." He got inside and he went up until it reached the moon. He parked his craft and he walked around and he saw winter houses built here and there but he didn't see any Indian people [séytknmx]. He went into one of the winter homes and he saw many, many baskets were placed there with all sorts of patterns. They say there were cedar roots piled up all about. It is said that awls were lying here. They say all kinds of things were lying about which were baskets of patterns and he heard them talking, Indian women, that he couldn't see and he said to himself. "Ok I'm going to take one of the baskets." When he took it from there, then they [all the baskets etc] fell on top of him from the shelves. So he couldn't stand up and the people said to him "Stop taking this that you'd be stealing. Put it back here where it belongs." So he returned it there they say and as soon as he laid it there then everything went back up where it was and he went out of the house. (L.C. Thompson and Thompson 1992, 200–8)

After visiting three other houses, where the same thing happened,

he got to a very small winter house. He went in. Some elderly people, a married couple [named after Skékiʔt (sku-AYK-EE-t, Spider)] welcomed him. They said, "You're one of the poorest that has come to this world. You couldn't see them, those people [in the houses]." It is said that they were kind to him. Then they cooked for him. They made a bed for him. Dawn broke and it was morning. They gave him his bow and arrow. They said to him. This here is to use for hunting. This here is going to be yours. The old people gave him what were going to be his artifacts – all those things they would give him. They say he did some hunting there and then he got lonely so he went to weeping as night fell. He remembered his family. The old people said to him "You're probably lonely. We're

going to finish our work and you can go home.” They say that the old people there were twisting fibers until the middle of the night for their piece of equipment [a rope]. They say he said to himself, “That must be for something the old people are going to use.” They made him his lunch for the journey home. It is said they gave him all kinds of things, that was going to be his patterns, the way all the things are going to be made back in the world. They put him aboard. The old woman tied to her wrist her pack strap. Her husband did the same and they said “All right now, this morning our grandson is going to go home. Goodbye now, You won’t see us anymore.” They knelt down and prayed and they put the cover on his craft and then they lowered it by rope. They let it fall down and they sang “Lower away, lower away.” Then the old people said to each other “He has made it, our grandson to the world.” Then he saw that it was the land from which he had come. He went over to his parents. They said to him, “Where have you been?” He said “I’ve come from another world.” He untied his pack and the people saw what he had. How things were to be done in this world. (L.C. Thompson and Thompson 1992, 214–22)⁵

On its return to earth, the space canoe landed on a large flat stone south of the village near the edge of the Lytton Creek ravine. Nłáíksmtm unloaded Skéki?t’s [Spider’s] gifts, and the space canoe returned to the otherworld. He shared the patterns he had been given – patterns for baskets, goat hair blankets, awls, skin clothing and footwear, combs, stone hammers, hunting and fishing equipment, and bows and arrows. Thus, everything needed for survival in the material world had a spiritual origin. As Annie York put it, “Everything’s that’s on this earth they drew that up there before it came down here” (Annie York, interview by Richard Daly, September 17, 1989). The rock where Nłáíksmtm and his ship landed bore the marks of his footprints and the landing gear. The place is called łe?kńix (tlah-MEE-w, forever; John Haugen, pers. comm., July 2016).⁶ After this, everyone lived well for millennia.

In the story of Nłáíksmtm, the metaphors of travel between worlds and spiritual realms to achieve knowledge are obvious, as is the admonishment against self-interest (theft). Another theme is the realization that everything is séytknmx. Prior to his quest, Nłáíksmtm was poor because he lacked knowledge of the spiritual realm. As an earlier

storyteller explained, “When he went to the other world [he] was ignorant. When he returned he was skilled and wise, for his grandfather the Spider advised him to train himself, and instructed him in all manner of magic; and thus he became possessed of the power and knowledge for which he was afterwards distinguished” (Teit 1912, 104n50). Annie York told Richard Daly that the journey of Nłíksmtm was significant because prior to him “an Indian never went. Tried to do that before” – that is, tried to access the spiritual world (Annie York, interview by Richard Daly, September 17, 1989). Given the central importance in the oral traditions surrounding the Stein rock art, York often drew on the Nłíksmtm narrative in her interpretations (see York, Daly, and Arnett 1993, 100, 167–72, 178, 187).

The institution of the vision quest revealed the universe through physiological experience, through contact with $\chi\alpha\gamma\acute{\alpha}?$ – a state of being not restricted but accessible to everyone. “Spirituality” was not based on texts but was directly experienced in the body. There was no monopoly on vision states, only on the amount and type of power sought or acquired. The quest allowed people to see past the physical discontinuity of nature created by $Q^w\acute{1}q^w\lambda^w\acute{\alpha}l\acute{t}$ to reveal the unity of $tm\acute{x}^w$. To go questing for power demonstrates undeniably that all knowledge comes from the spiritual realm and that everything has $s\acute{e}ytknmx$.

Sné?m

During $?\acute{e}c\chi e?me$, people sought places and things with $\chi\alpha\gamma\acute{\alpha}?$ to help them acquire a $sn\acute{e}?m$ (spirit power/spirit power song) (Laforet and York 1998, 63; Teit 1900, 311–21). The word $sn\acute{e}?m$ is derived from the root $n\acute{e}?$ (NAH, song), underlining the important aural component – the song (L.C. Thompson and Thompson 1996, 212). People did not always actively seek these entities. $N\acute{1}e?kepmx$ $sn\acute{e}?m$ songs and narratives describe the acquisition of $sn\acute{e}?m$ in the most unlikely places (see Teit 1912–21, Nos. 81, 84, 92, 110, 130, 131, 203; see also Laforet and York 1998, 65). Once acquired, $sn\acute{e}?m$ appear in dreams to give guidance in various activities such as marking with red paint.

$X\alpha\gamma\acute{\alpha}?$ is the conduit to access $sn\acute{e}?m$. The late $N\acute{1}e?kepmx$ elder Albert Seymour said that $\chi\alpha\gamma\acute{\alpha}?$ is like a tape recorder and that $sn\acute{e}?m$ is the tape (Wickwire 1988, 187). According to Andrea Laforet and Annie York (1998, 63),

If his training was successful, his fasting and repetitive exercise led to a dream, *Sʔikʷlxʷ* [sh-EEK-eewuh], and a meeting with a being who spoke to him, explained the gift he would have, and left him awakening with a song that symbolized both his new power and their relationship. In the waking world the being encountered in this way moved through the world as a bear, a crane, or water. To the dreaming person it appeared as a human being. In their relationship, which was expected to be lifelong, it was his *snéʔm*.

James Teit (1900, 320) recorded similar explanations a century earlier:

The ceremonial rites continued until the lad dreamed of some animal or bird. These particular animals or birds then became his protectors or guardian spirits for life, and to them he afterwards prayed. Besides helping him, and protecting him from danger, they also became mediums, imparting to him power and magic, also knowledge concerning the world of the living and that of the dead. They furnished him with a song, with which he called them up.

Snéʔm were essential to success in the physical world. In the case of hunting, as Annie York explained, “He wants to go hunting, he sends his dream first and when he gets there whatever animal he wants, he kills them, he shoots them” (Annie York, interview by Richard Daly, September 7, 1989). Individuals understood the world not in terms of an ideology (in the sense of state-institutionalized education) but through intergenerational teachings and direct experience. People did not often speak of their personal *snéʔm*. Songs and imagery were used only in exceptional circumstances – life and death issues. When references to power did occur in dance or in costume or painting, they were always indirect.

The relationship between a human being and a non-human guardian spirit is a model for universal sociality and practices. It is not particularly amenable to Western methods of analysis, however, as it involves a private experience, the very thing that anthropologist Ronald Mason (2000) and others point to as a privileging of information and knowledge inaccessible to Western peer review. In the case of *snéʔm*, nobody knows the private experience except the actor. *ʔécxʔme* has physiological aspects that validate theory in the body, producing individuals who are culturally confident and, more often

than not, generous. Spiritual gifts obliged recipients to share their talents for the benefit of the community, humility and generosity being an adaptive strategy for long-term survival. What *is* known is that something is there and may be made manifest in the real world, either by acts or by material culture.

When Richard Daly interviewed Annie York about a Nl̓eʔkepmx rock painting that depicted a circle, two perspectives emerged: that of semiotics (that the paintings were a proto-writing) and pragmatism (that Indigenous people knew the world was round by observing views from mountain tops). York's perspective revealed her encounters with snéʔm and the cognitive and physical process that informs the abductive logic (or synthetic inference) of Indigenous theory, "which always assumes a relationship between variables" (Atleo 2004, 131). As Daly and York sat in her kitchen at Spuzzum, he showed her drawings of a rock painting from the Stein (see York, Daly, and Arnett 1993, Fig. 86) shaped like a circle:

RD: So, it's the circle of the earth, the circle of the moon and what about this "cycle of life" – the "cycle of the seasons"– is that there, too?

AY: The cycles of life.

RD: Is that a circle?

AY: It's a circle too. What's this? [Annie's attention is drawn to another image] Hah ... that's the way they have that. All people ... [she begins to change the subject away from "circles" and "cycles" towards ʔécxeʔme, "spiritual training"]

AY: All people ... If you are to live in the mountain you see it. Your life is not like the same down here. You go up the mountain you know it.

RD: You know that the world is a circle from on top of a mountain.

AY: Yeah, you go up the mountain.

RD: That's clear.

AY: You go up there your life changes. You don't feel the same and you go up there. You could see things that other people will never see. If you go to sleep there, trees, animals, and any kind of thing, that's why I was saying to people: "You don't know what you don't – *see* it." If you sleep there by yourself you know it. Anything – trees can speak, water can speak, and rocks can talk to you if you want to know. But your life changes there. It's just like a circle

that goes like this but it has no end. What you learn never ends.
(Annie York, interview by Richard Daly, August 16, 1989)

On another occasion, she described a different solo experience in the mountains, likening the surrounding forest to a crowd of friendly folks: “It’s just like there were people talking all around you. That’s what I was telling people. They think I’m crazy. When I went to sleep it sounded like I had lots of friends talking” (Annie York, interview by Richard Daly, November 6, 1990).

York discussed her own training as a *syúwe* (ethno-botanist/ seer), using fir and spruce boughs. She also mentioned the “elves” (*ncəmeʔsqeálxʷtn*, n-tsa-mah-shk-WEL-hu-tun), in this instance the Indigenous humanity of cedars who bestow the songs:

- AY: Yeah and those that’s gonna be a medicine woman or those that are gonna be a *syúwe* they got aallll different training – all of them. A young girl that’s going to be a *syúwe* – a *syúwe* is a different thing on the Fraser language [i.e., a seer or Prophet]. Here it’s a girl that goes up in the mountain and you wash yourself cleeeaaann until that dream comes to you. These little people, little elves, comes to you then, and that little elf is connected to the cedar tree and this tree.
- RD: Which tree, the one outside the front here?
- AY: The spruce tree ... that’s connected with that. When you going to be a *syúwe* you must bathe with that – oh its spiny!
- RD: It’s prickly.
- AY: Yeah ha-ha. But you know, when it’s wet, it’s not as prickly when you dip that in the water.
- RD: You mean when it’s wet?
- AY: A cedar, the cedar ...
- RD: You must be covered in blood all the time if you wash yourself with the spruce boughs!
- AY: No you don’t. I didn’t.
- RD: It must be very prickly.
- AY: No I didn’t ... They do it like thiiiiiss, four times.
- RD: They stroke you from the head, top of the head down the body four times.
- AY: Yeah, all the branches is made like that ... You keep thaaat, some girls wouldn’t stand it, and they stay up there.

- RD: Stay up on the mountain.
 AY: Stay up in the mountain and here that comes, those elfs,
 little elfs.
 RD: The power or the spirit power ...
 AY: Yeah.
 RD: From the tree.
 AY: Yeah, that's the power from the tree and they sing a different
 song. Hahahahaa they sing a different song. That's why those
 kind people are friendly. They're good to all our people. You got
 to dream about them four times before you know it's your own.
 RD: Four times oooh. (Annie York, interview by Richard Daly,
 November 6, 1990)

During a different interview, while discussing the bat sné?m of a *ywiní* (witch), York indicated that sné?m had four aspects: “the one that heals, the one that protects the family, the one that gathers things, and the one that does bad things. There's four and all of them come from the bat. And the person that's wicked, he's using the wicked kind. They carry that with them” (Annie York, interview by Richard Daly, November 17, 1989). Sné?m conformed to people's dispositions. In general, people had community interests in mind, though Teit (1900, 356) noted a certain hierarchy of power: “Each person partook of the qualities with which the guardian spirit was endowed. For this reason certain guardian spirits were considered more powerful than others. Thus a man who has the grisly [sic] bear or thunder for his protector would become a much better and fiercer warrior than another who has a crow, a coyote, or a fox. Annie York revealed something of her special person, *lépi?st*, the Pacific rubber boa (Figure 11), in an eloquent statement on the underlying humanity (*séytknmx*) of all things:

It comes to a person, you know, when you're dreaming. Yeah, I know it. I won't tell you this. I sleep, many times I sleep in the mountains. You know that “superstitious snake” [rubber boa]? You ever see that? ... I see one up in the mountains I feel bad. I look at them and I said, said in my heart, “Why do you have to do that to me for?” I says, “Why don't you keep out of my way? Because I'm just a poor person travelling around.” So I went to sleep. My mind was on it and I went to sleep. Sun was just beginning to shine and I wake up and in my dream it says to me “Look, never be scared of me ... when you see me, you see the way I looked?”



Figure 11 λέπι?st, Pacific rubber boa (*Carina bottae*), Stein Valley. | Photo by John Arnett

Oh it was a beautiful lady. Her hair was down like this. Her hair was yellow and she says to me, “That’s the way I am,” but she says, “You’re foolish to be scare of me. Nothing’s going to happen to anything. Whenever you see me you talk to me and I’ll never bother you.” (Annie York, interview by Richard Daly, September 17, 1989)

This account is important as it reinforces York’s knowledge by reference to her own vision quest. Her experience should effectively eliminate any question of her authority regarding oral traditions. Produced by the various techniques of fasting, holding vigil, exercising, ingesting plants, and chanting, the altered state of consciousness enabled an experience that, as a “research methodology,” tested the validity of

Sptékʷl, ɣaʔɣáʔ, and sɣʷáym – bringing individual experience into accord with “certain invariant attributes of reality” (Laughlin and Troop 2003, 7; Atleo 2004, 71–94). There are an infinite variety of snéʔm, and the list provided to Teit by his informants included plants, people, body parts, animals, rocks, landforms, waterways, reptiles, artifacts, clouds, colours, and innumerable other phenomena, both Indigenous and not (see Teit 1900, 354–55). The diversity of snéʔm across species, environments, and manifestations is a testimony to the inclusivity, heterogeneity, and complexity of tmíxʷ. It is mirrored in the subject matter of Nl̓eʔkepmx art, where many of the conventional images might represent snéʔm either wished for or attained.

York’s account of her training (which probably occurred at about the time of the First World War) made no mention of rock painting, suggesting that young women in the Fraser Canyon did not always practise it at that time. It did continue elsewhere in Nl̓eʔkepmx country. On their last visit together, Daly asked York if she had ever made rock paintings herself. She said no and then related a story of her own, indicating that any such practice was guided by snéʔm:

- AY: You know I’m going to tell you something. That’s why I neeeeever wear green. The kids here, they were going to give me something that has green, and I tell them I never wear it.
- RD: Oh I know I remember.
- AY: I burned that tree and that tree spoke to me. “From now on, you can’t wear our clothes.” Ahahah! It’s a woman! It come out as a woman and told me. I was sleeping and she came into my dream and told me, “From now on, you can’t wear green, because you burned our clothes!” That’s why I neeeeever wear green.
- RD: So you didn’t do any paintings, no writings on the rocks?
- AY: No, no. I didn’t do it, but I respect it same as these other things that people always very superstitious about. (Annie York, interview by Richard Daly, March 3, 1991)

In his ethnographic works, James Teit often described the synonymy of snéʔm and marking events as if they were active participants. Research on plateau pictographic imagery among Coeur d’Alene, who shared many cultural traits with their neighbours to the north, further clarified the purpose and agency of snéʔm-inspired “art.” As Teit (1930a, 192, emphasis added) wrote,

Men painted images or representations or symbols of their guardian spirits and pictures of their most important dreams on their clothes, robes, shields, and weapons ... Pictures and symbols of guardian spirits were also often painted or tattooed on the body. *It was believed that these pictures had offensive or defensive power derived directly from the guardian spirit.* Thus a man, who had an arrow tattooed or painted on his arm, if the arrow was one of his guardians, believed that his arm was made more efficient for shooting. In the same way a mountain tattooed or painted on the arm rendered it strong, provided the mountain was a guardian spirit of the person. Likewise the reproduction of a bear on the arm gave the person skill in bear and deer hunting, provided these animals were the guardian of the hunter.

Pictures with “offensive or defensive power derived directly from the guardian spirit” clearly had agency for those who employed their “weaponry.” Ethnographies and Indigenous practice state that many of the designs on nineteenth-century pipes, jackets, shields, and rocks originated with, and are given by, *sné?m* to human beings. Thus, *sné?m* are part of the extended personhood and a core, inextricable part of the individual – his or her “protecting spirit” (Teit 1898, 110n167). Early anthropologists in the western United States misconstrued the local meaning when people explained that paintings were made by “water babies” or “mythological beings.” In fact, they were describing the power that motivated the painter (Whitley 1992). As Annie York explained, “Your dream comes to you and tells you: ‘It’s this way.’ And then you do it” (Annie York, interview by Richard Daly, March 3, 1991).

Emerging practice in British Columbia is beginning to acknowledge Indigenous world views in the interpretation and research design of the archaeological record (see R.E. Ignace 2008; R.E. Ignace and Ignace 2017; Losey 2010; Martindale and Nicholas 2014; McLaren 2003; McLaren and Gauvreau 2016; Nicholas and Andrews 1997; Reimer 2003, 2006; Wylie 1993). This is due to the strong cultural and historical continuity of Indigenous peoples. Despite the enormity of the cultural barriers, the trend is an opportunity to reconcile Indigenous and scientific world views. North American Indigenous theory will enhance the *Séme?* holistic landscape archaeologies that seek to incorporate “the term landscape in its broadest possible sense ... to describe the entire material, spiritual and emotional world of people

in the past” (Chadwick 2004, 33). Thus, human artifacts such as tools, pottery vessels, buildings, towns, cities, trackways, and roads are as much a part of landscapes as natural features – trees, animals, plants, rocks, mountains, rivers, and lakes, all of which contribute to the human experience of landscapes, as do memories, myths, and stories (Bradley 2000; Chadwick 2004; Ingold 2006; Tilley 1994, 2008). Indigenous theory argues that not only do these things contribute to human experience, but that they also participate in it as equals.

Some Séme? contend that matter has physical and metaphysical aspects, not in the sense of being beyond or above nature (supernatural) “but by being a category defined in relation to a whole field of other fundamental concepts, including form, reality, mind, ideal, time, and space” (T. Taylor 2006, 297). This gives materiality a discursive relational aspect beyond the material object itself. Thus, material culture is not just the artifact or the painting but could be “the extended artifact, the artifact with its extension into space and time” (Robb 1998, 333; see also Gell 1998) – a Séme? lens to articulate, however imperfectly, Indigenous theory.

Indigenous theory is a method for a symmetrical anthropology/archaeology by its focus on a broad range of contextual relationships in a very localized context. Along with the material culture of archaeology, which includes artifacts, fauna, flora, and texts, an Indigenous historical consciousness includes the “non-empirical environment” as part of the cultural site formation process (Burch 1971). Indigenous theory is a dynamic and accumulative process, where meaning can be grasped in field contexts when the palimpsest of place and its non-material aspect are revealed in a sudden flash of insight, or realization, possible only when various internalized teachings are activated by a situation (see discussion in Bierwert 1999).

Interdisciplinarity between Indigenous theory and the archaeology of a place with rock paintings begins with the geomorphology, the sx^wáým, as the primary data of the site formation process. By definition, the natural site formation, or the initial context, predates any cultural transcription by Nte?kepmx or the archaeological world view. The idea of geomorphology as a social entity is essential to understanding the cultural processes of site activities to answer questions such as, “Why did people paint here?” The rock is possessed of its own unique story in its physical presence – its “body,” which is the basis of its agency – and its perspective as a subject in a societal space. The paintings

and site activities are evidence of human interaction. Any reconstruction of the Indigenous past must take this expanded social system into account as one hedge against ethnocentric bias or exclusion. Technology (tools and rock art) is an active agent in a social world.

According to Indigenous theory, many rock painting events at $sx^w\acute{x}^w\acute{y}m$ are the work of humans acting in collaboration with non-humans. The latter include $sn\acute{e}m$, who may provide the imagery, $\chi a\acute{?}\chi a\acute{?}$ the access, and the rock $sx^w\acute{y}m$ as the site of interaction. The non-material cultural site formation process embodied in the rock is not visible in material remains per se, but we may assume it is there, given ethnographic and current cultural practice associated with the use of the paint. Appreciating Indigenous theory of place moves us past undue focus on the imagery of rock art to include a much wider range of variables. This encompasses the rock, as well as the cultural intangibles. In considering the rock art in the Northern Territory of Australia, Ken Mulvaney (1993, 110) writes,

The mythological meaning is contained in more than just the painted images, though often the art of a site is the only tangible (constructed) manifestation of the mythological world. For the custodians the art is secondary to other considerations, such as the Dreaming associations of the place. In contrast, for the researcher, casual visitor or tourism promoter, the art is the primary focus of their concerns.

In a similar fashion, archaeological models of the Nl\`e\`?kepmx past should expand beyond S\`e\`me\`? notions of what constitutes society, social agents, or “rock art sites” to acknowledge that multiple variables must be considered in any analysis of the site formation process. In this sense, Nl\`e\`?kepmx rock painting is the material expression of deliberate individual and collective interactions with place. Marking events are permanent reminders of specific activities that were constrained or enabled by the social contexts of the day. Rock art, like other forms of material culture, is a social construct within a dynamic cultural process of historical contingencies (Arnett and Morin 2018; Martindale 2006; Pauketat 2001). Z\`u\`c\`mn, the red ochre paint, was the medium and the message used by experts who understood its properties and the places to do their work, with an image and the future in mind.

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