



Dancing Chiaux, Dancing Sovereignty: Performing Protocol in Unceded Territories

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S7aplek¹ (pronounced *Sah-ap-lok*) is a composer, choreographer, and a dance group² leader from the Squamish Nation (Photo 1). His people's traditional and unceded territory includes the lower mainland of Vancouver, Howe Sound, and the Whistler corridor in British Columbia.³ An Indian Residential School survivor, S7aplek (English name Bob Baker, born 1946) has dedicated his life to reviving, learning, and enacting Chiaux (Squamish protocol) through his leadership and involvement in ocean-going canoe journeys, private Coast Salish ceremonies, and public performances with his dance group Spakwus Slulem. All of the members of Spakwus Slulem are from the Squamish Nation (Photo 2). Their name means "eagle song dancers." They publically perform the songs that they have inherited the right to through their Nation, families, and communities as well as songs and dances that are newly created by S7aplek. Chiaux (pronounced *Chee-aak*) not only governs the use of Squamish songs and dances in Spakwus Slulem performances, it is foundational to S7aplek's process of song-composition, choreography, and collaborations. Through my analysis of his collaboration on *Thunderbird* (2011) and *Trees Are Portals* (2015), I will demonstrate that Chiaux is much more than the boundaries of S7aplek's practice or merely a set of restrictions. It is an artistic lens through which he creates performances affirming Squamish land rights, epistemology, and hereditary privileges. These assertions of sovereignty, which are grounded in Squamish governance, are an embodiment of politics and self-determination which I refer to as *dancing sovereignty*.

Dancing sovereignty is the theoretical framework I have created to critically engage the ways in which sovereignty is embodied in Northwest Coast First Nations dance practices through complex negotiations and responsive assertions of *protocol*—bodies of law which form Indigenous legal systems—both in the creation of performances and performances themselves.⁴ I define dancing sovereignty as self-determination carried out through the creation of performances (oratory, songs, and dances) that adhere to and expand upon protocol in ways that affirm hereditary privileges (ancestral histories and associated ownership of songs, dances, crests, masks, headdresses, etc.)

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Photo 1. S7aplek (Bob Baker) performing with Spakwus Slulem at Klahowya Village in Stanley Park for Aboriginal Tourism British Columbia. Vancouver, BC. June 30, 2013. Photo by the author.

and territorial rights to land and waterways among diverse audiences and collaborators. These assertions of sovereignty are not moored to Western legal definitions; rather, they are articulated through protocol foundational to Indigenous nationhood and governance. My theorization of dancing sovereignty is a confluence of my engagement with the literature on visual sovereignty,⁵ Anishinaabe scholar Gerald Vizenor's concept of transmotion,⁶ and Canadian philosopher and dance artist Erin Manning's work on relationscapes.⁷

As will be seen in my analysis of S7aplek's practice of dancing sovereignty, as exemplified in *Thunderbird* (2011), the transmotion of Chiaux integral to his process of song-composition, choreography, collaboration, and dance group performances situates audiences and collaborators as guests in his Nation's unceded territory. By affirming Squamish land rights through his transmotion of Chiaux throughout the collaborative process, S7aplek activates the response-ability of his collaborators through forging Chiaux-based relationships and generating host/guest relationscapes.⁸ Before my analysis, I must make clear that as a Tsimshian First Nations dance artist myself, I have personal connection to dance artists and dance groups throughout the Northwest Coast.⁹ Regardless of these pre-existing relationships, it takes a great deal of time to build the trust necessary for an in-depth inquiry into their practices. Holding myself accountable to shared protocol governing the use of songs and dances as well as the ethics inherent to conducting research in First Nations communities, I have sought and received S7aplek's permission to research and write about his practice. Out of deep respect for Squamish, and other Coast Salish, winter ceremonies (which are closed to both

the general public and academic study) the focus of my research is S7aplek's practice of dancing sovereignty which is exemplified through his process of song composition, choreography, collaborative work, and performances with Spakwus Slulem's performance in the public realm. I am grateful for his trust and permission in allowing me to do so.

S7aplek's Practice of Dancing Sovereignty

To being to understand S7aplek's practice of dancing sovereignty, one must first understand the great lengths he has gone to learn and revive Chiaux after ten years of being subjected to the heavy-handed assimilation efforts of Canada's Indian Residential School system. From age six to sixteen, S7aplek went to St. Paul's Indian Boarding School in North Vancouver for his primary education and to Kamloops Indian Residential School for his secondary.¹⁰ After Residential School, he dedicated his life to learning his peoples' ways—both Squamish and Kanaka Maoli (Native Hawaiian)—and to composing and choreographing new songs and dances for his and other Northwest Coast First Nations.¹¹ He moved from North Vancouver to Hawai'i in 1977. He lived in Oahu for seven years and on Maui for nine. He continues to be an active member of the Kanaka Maoli community. While living in Hawai'i, Leialoha Baker, a native Hawaiian from Nanakuli, Oahu, gave S7aplek his Hawaiian name, Lanakila, which means "to be victorious." An avid surfer, he spent much of his time learning to be both a puller and skipper of different styles of Kanaka Maoli ocean-going vessels. While participating on journeys throughout the South Pacific, S7aplek witnessed and participated in Kanaka Maoli canoe protocol. Much of it, he noticed, was similar to Chiaux, as well as the canoe protocols of other Northwest Coast First Nations peoples. He states:

I watched, very carefully, the protocols of the Hawaiians, how they land with their voyaging canoes, when they are visiting other islands in the South Pacific. Watching what they did, and being involved in the Hawaiian community, I was always close to it—the respect for canoes and canoe landings. There's a moment of history that is taking place there—you have to acknowledge that, you can't just come ashore—you have to stop and think where you are, what you are doing, and what's being represented at that point [of coming ashore]. As for the protocol of the Hawaiians and the [Squamish] protocol here, our teaching is that it's the canoes that makes the journey. The people are the ones who make the canoes go round but it's the canoes that are remembered. . .we know that we have to acknowledge that moment, and that protocol, so that it gives people time to think about what is taking place—this historical moment where the canoe is touching someone else's land.¹²

S7aplek's experiences with Native Hawaiian seagoing vessels led to his decision to move back to Vancouver in 1990. He wanted to strengthen his knowledge of Squamish canoes, canoe journeying, and Chiaux. There were very few First Nations canoes in use on the Northwest Coast at that time. S7aplek researched Squamish canoes housed in museums and private collections in British Columbia and Washington and worked with carvers to create a Squamish style canoe.¹³ In 1992, he, along with Sekyu Siyam (Chief Ian Campbell), and Latash (Maurice Nahanee), established a Squamish Canoe Family composed of many of their friends and relatives.¹⁴

One of S7aplek's intentions in helping establish the Squamish Canoe Family was to participate in Paddle to Bella Bella—a tribal canoe journey to the community of Bella Bella, British Columbia, hosted by the Heiltsuk Nation in 1993. Also known as 'Qatuwas, it was one of the first large tribal canoe gatherings. For a year, a large part of the Squamish Canoe Family's preparation for 'Qatuwas consisted of what S7aplek refers to as "doing homework" by speaking with elders and other knowledgeable people in their Nation about protocol. As S7aplek recounts,

We had to know our protocol in order to get anywhere. I made sure that we did our homework for about six months before we left our shores. By that I mean, everyone was required to research their family names, what songs we could use, how to use the songs, and where they can be used. . . . We knew that the songs had never been used in a canoe journey [like this] before. So we tried to figure out how we can use the songs, where, what the songs represented, and how we can choreograph dances with those songs in the various landings and long houses. So that was part of our homework.¹⁵

Researching and following protocol that protects and governs the use of names, songs, dances, and other hereditary rights is a core responsibility of canoe families because it not only structures their way of being on the water and along shore, but also how they conduct themselves in relation to the host Nations whose territories they travel through and land upon. When approaching shore, it is a shared protocol that they ask permission, through oratory, songs, and dances, to land their canoes in another Nation's territories. Once allowed to come ashore, they participate in the ceremonies of the host Nations and communities—once again through protocol, oratory, songs, dances, and in many cases gifting of both tangible and intangible wealth—to reciprocate the honour of being allowed to land their canoes and to show gratitude to their hosts.

While Chiaux is specific to the Squamish, it is a part of a wider system of Indigenous governance. Significant aspects of protocol are held in common by Northwest Coast First Nations people. In order to create a foundational understanding that will allow for a deeper discussion, I will begin with a basic description and expand upon it through an analysis of S7aplek's practice of dancing sovereignty. The relationship between protocol and Northwest Coast First Nations dance practices is immensely complex. The fundamental connection is that protocol governs both the right to perform songs and dances and how performances occur. Among Northwest Coast First Nations people, rights to songs, dances, and associated masks, headdresses, robes, and ceremonial regalia, are vehemently guarded as they are not only integral to individual and collective identity but they also define ownership of territories (both land and waterways). As such, the ways in which Northwest Coast First Nations dance artists assert, negotiate, and enact protocol—a process I refer to as the transmotion of protocol—is entrenched in local politics: family, clan, community, and Nation, all of which informs how their work engages with wider provincial, national, and international politics.

Rights to songs and dances, which are primarily hereditary, are expressed through oratory at the time of the performance in terms of ownership and permission. For example, in S7aplek's leadership of Spakwus Slulem he enacts Chiaux by relaying through oratory the history of each of the songs they perform, the ownership of the song, and their rights to perform it immediately before he begins to sing. Or in the case of an entry song (a song used to enter the dance floor), all of this information is shared through oratory just after the song is sung. While this protocol is shared in common with other Northwest Coast First Nations, S7aplek's adherence to Chiaux requires that he acknowledge the presence of ancestors by singing ancestral songs before sharing newly composed songs. The term *ancestral songs* refers to songs that have been passed down through hereditary lines, or ancient songs that the singers have permission to use from those who have the hereditary rights to ownership.¹⁶ One of S7aplek's ancestral songs "Siyam Slulem" illustrates the ways in which inherited songs engage with wider political realms. His rights to perform "Siyam Slulem" comes to him through his great-great grandfather Chief Joe Capilano (1850–1910) of the Squamish Nation, whose proper name was S7aplek.¹⁷ Chief Joe Capilano was renowned for being a pre-eminent political activist for Aboriginal rights. He travelled to Victoria and Ottawa to advocate for the recognition of his people's land and subsistence rights by the Canadian government.¹⁸ Chief Joe Capilano also travelled to First Nations communities throughout BC to urge them to assert their claims.¹⁹ He is best known for heading a delegation of Chiefs and elders who bypassed the governments of British Columbia and Canada by traveling to London in 1906

to petition King Edward VII for land, fishing, and hunting rights as well as a repeal of the potlatch ban in Canada which outlawed First Nations ceremonies.²⁰ While in England, he sang a Squamish song to King Edward that is referred to today by his descendants and others who have the right to this song as “Siyam Slulem.” When S7aplek sings “Siyam Slulem” during his performances with Spakwus Slulem today, he recounts this history through oratory. As the majority of Spakwus Slulem’s performances occur in Vancouver and the surrounding area, S7aplek enacts a transmotion of Chiaux that situates audiences as guests within unceded Squamish territory. This transmotion of Chiaux enacted through their oratory, song, and dance does more than just refer to their people’s past to historicize the City of Vancouver in the present. By emphasizing their survivance in and ongoing relationship with their territories (both land and waterways) and that of other Coast Salish Nations, S7aplek’s transmotion of protocol ancestralizes the present through their assertions of Squamish hereditary rights to the land and waterways. As my analysis of S7aplek’s collaboration with Julia Taffe, artistic director of Aeriosa, on *Thunderbird* (2011) in the next section will demonstrate, his practice of dancing sovereignty not only situates audiences in relation to Squamish territory, but also to collaborators.²¹ His transmotion of Chiaux throughout the collaborative process on *Thunderbird* and during its performance also generated host/guest relationships through forging Chiaux-based relationships with settlers and reaffirming Squamish land rights.

***Thunderbird*: Activating Chiaux-Based Host/Guest Relationships**

S7aplek’s and Taffe’s collaboration on *Thunderbird* brought together his dance group, Spakwus Slulem, with Aeriosa—a Vancouver-based company that combines contemporary dance techniques with safe rope-rigging systems—in order to “create three-dimensional performances that reinterpret gravity and respond to the performance location” (Aeriosa 2007; Photo 3). Founded in 2001 by Taffe (b. 1968), an aerial dancer and choreographer, Aeriosa’s mission is “to create unexpected experiences of dance” by “dancing in non-traditional environments and proposing unusual performance scenarios to artists and audiences alike” (Aeriosa 2007). Spakwus Slulem’s collaboration with Aeriosa evolved out of *Inspired by Place*, a site-specific work choreographed by Taffe as part of the Whistler Winter Arts Festival and the 2010 Cultural Olympiad.²² Taffe considers her initial experience of learning about Chiaux from S7aplek, during the 2008 cultural workshops held to develop *Inspired by Place*, as the impetus behind her initiation of their collaboration on *Thunderbird*. She explains:

When I learned from Bob [S7aplek] about the canoe protocols [Chiaux] of his dance, and the whole idea that their songs and dances are the identity of the people that are doing them, and they are essential to the communication linking all the communities in the water so that you know who people are because of their songs and dances—it is such a simple and resonant concept for me that really explains to me why I dance despite everything. The whole idea that your work is not going into an empty studio and conjuring a story but that it is telling a story of who you are and where you are and what is going on. And that once a dance is created—it is what it is and it has that life. There is certain appropriate times and places to share that dance. But when you have something new to say, you need to make something new.²³

The teachings that S7aplek shared about Chiaux and the ways in which songs and dances function to communicate collective identity activated Taffe’s response-ability, her ability to respond relationally to protocol, began to form a relationshipscape. She approached S7aplek about collaborating on a performance where Aeriosa, after learning more about Chiaux from him, would be able to respectfully enter Squamish territory.²⁴ S7aplek agreed to the collaboration, emphasizing again the importance of creating new songs and dances to address the unique demands of such a performance.²⁵



Photo 2. *Aeriosa* performing on the tower near Library Square in *Thunderbird*. July 12–13, 2011. Photo courtesy of Julia Taffe.

In March of 2011, Taffe received a Canada Council for the Arts Production Projects in Dance Grant and a City of Vancouver 125th Anniversary Grant to support the development of Spakwus Slulem's and *Aeriosa*'s collaboration on *Thunderbird*. In her application, she stated:

From *Aeriosa*'s perspective this special performance is an important chance to acknowledge that we are fellow dancers working in traditional Squamish territory and it will be a meaningful professional honour for *Aeriosa* artists to create a new story by dancing alongside Spakwus Slulum [sic].²⁶

In her description of the performance, Taffe explains that acknowledgement of Squamish territory will occur through *Aeriosa*'s participation in "an ancient Coast Salish protocol for respecting traditional territory."²⁷ An investigation of the transmotion of Chiaux enacted by S7aplek and reciprocated by *Aeriosa* in *Thunderbird* demonstrates how their collaboration generated the type of host/guest relationscape that is foundational to S7aplek's practice of dancing sovereignty.

Both the performance site and *Aeriosa*'s use of space in *Thunderbird* informed S7aplek's transmotion of Chiaux during the collaborative process. *Thunderbird* was performed on the outside wall of an office tower next to the Vancouver Public Library and on the ground at the tower's base in Library Square. Six of *Aeriosa*'s members danced while rappelling down the twenty-two-story tower as seven of Spakwus Slulem's dancers performed at Library Square (Photo 4). During their collaborative process, S7aplek and Taffe discussed how their dancers would engage with each other and with the site's location within Squamish territory. S7aplek shared with Taffe that he conceptualized *Aeriosa*'s collective descent down the building as "a canoe arriving into Squamish territory from the sky."²⁸ He then enacted a transmotion of Chiaux common to Northwest Coast First Nations canoe landings where each canoe is introduced into the territory through song, dance, and oratory by its paddlers, who then ask the Nation or community they are approaching for permission to land. S7aplek observed that the "Thunderbird Song," which he had been in the process of composing, would be appropriate because "it was a sky song—a song belonging to the sky."²⁹ He described *Thunderbird* as a supernatural being that perches his feet on top of two North Shore mountain peaks, known to the Squamish as The Sisters.³⁰ Explaining why it is important to acknowledge *Thunderbird* in relation to *Aeriosa*'s use of space and location near the top of the tower, he states, "We thank the ancestors when we are on the water for allowing us



Photo 3. Aeriosa performing on the tower near Library Square in Thunderbird. July 12–13, 2011. Photo courtesy of Julia Taffe.

to have safe passage, we thank the animal kingdom in the water, we thank the creator, and thank our mothers and all of creation for allowing us to have a harmonious journey and for allowing us to make the right decisions.”³¹ In the same manner, his “Thunderbird Song” asked Thunderbird’s blessing for Aeriosa’s passage through its domain so the dancers rappelling down the building could descend safely into Squamish territory.

S7aplek and Taffe created choreography for their dancers to perform to the “Thunderbird Song.” Responding to S7aplek’s conceptualization of Aeriosa’s descent as a canoe landing, Taffe choreographed what she refers to as “canoe patterns,” where Aeriosa’s formations and motions emulated the movement of waves as they roll in and out along the shoreline.³² While Aeriosa danced in canoe patterns in the air above, four female dancers from Spakwus Slulem performed a Thunderbird dance choreographed by S7aplek. Each dancer represented the Thunderbird as it called to the four directions before calling Aeriosa to the ground.³³

The final segment of Aeriosa’s performance along the side of the tower was the most treacherous. The ropes they used ended about thirty feet above the ground so as not to interfere with access to the tower’s entrance and also to ensure the safety of the audience members below. Consequently, each dancer had to be lowered to the ground with the assistance of a rigger. This was especially risky because the riggers and the dancers could not see one another as they were on opposite sides of the tower.³⁴ To further ensure Aeriosa’s safety, Spakwus Slulem sang a prayer song while members of Aeriosa were being lowered. Explaining how this part of the performance adhered to the Chiaux enacted during canoe landings, S7aplek stated, “we would do the same kind of a thing when we receive canoes—a blessing song, songs of our ancestors, as we know that the ancestors are there



Photo 4. Aeriosa and Spakwus Slulem dancing “Eskaugh ta Spakwus” (‘gathering of eagles’) in Library Square in celebration of the coming together of their two groups. *Thunderbird*. July 12-13, 2011. Photo courtesy of Julia Taffe.

[with us] at the time so we acknowledge them.”³⁵ Because all of the members of Aeriosa are female, he chose to bless the occasion with “Skemelh Slulem,” the women’s paddle song. Through his oratory he explained that the history of “Skemelh Slulem” goes back to the Great Fire of 1886, when nearly the entire city of Vancouver burned down. He states:

It was the women who started to rescue the survivors and in the process of doing that, paddling the survivors to the north shore, they created a song to keep the spirits light in the canoe. That song has come down to us over the years, the women’s paddle song. We used that to mark the occasion, to bless the occasion, [Aeriosa] being on the ground with us, coming together, our meeting.³⁶

Using “Skemelh Slulem” as a prayer for Aeriosa’s safety is not only an example of using ancient songs to ancestralize the present; it also illustrates the continuity of his people’s practice of writing their engagement with the wider population of what is now known as Vancouver into their songs and dances. Once Aeriosa landed, Spakwus Slulem sang “Eskaugh ta Spakwus” (‘gathering of eagles’) in celebration of the coming together of their two groups. Aeriosa then joined Spakwus Slulem in dancing the Squamish eagle dance and they also invited witnesses to participate in their dance together (Photo 4).

S7aplek’s transmotion of Chiaux throughout the collaborative process and performance of *Thunderbird* affirmed that Squamish territory is not limited to land and sea but also encompasses the sky. Taffe’s response-ability to his transmotion of Chiaux allowed for her dance company, Aeriosa, to safely pass through the domain of the supernatural *Thunderbird* and respectfully enter into Squamish territory. Together S7aplek’s transmotion of Chiaux and Taffe’s response-ability generated a host/guest relationscape between them, Spakwus Slulem, Aeriosa, and unceded Squamish territory. As will become apparent in my analysis of *Trees Are Portals* (2015), this host/guest relationscape challenges settler notions of unceded Coast Salish territories and its Indigenous governance.

Trees Are Portals

Thunderbird was to be remounted in Stanley Park in August of 2014 under the title *Trees Are Portals*. S7aplek’s and Taffe’s objective was to turn *Thunderbird* in a site-specific performance at X^wway X^wway, a Coast Salish village that was brutally destroyed in the creation of the park. There were at least eleven families who lived at X^wway X^wway when Stanley Park was established in 1886. They were violently dispossessed of their land, homes, and ceremonial big houses during

the late Nineteenth Century through the colonial policies enforced by the City of Vancouver and encroachment by land surveyors and road workers. In their efforts to destroy homes in X^wway X^wway, workers plowed roads through the centre of houses whose residents were away and knocked down walls while family members were still inside.³⁷ X^wway X^wway was also the site of a sacred burial ground (Mawani 2005). In a heinous act of erasure of the Coast Salish histories in this area, road workers paved the roads in Stanley Park using shell middens and human remains from these ancient sites (Barman 2005).

In Taffe's grant application, she directly confronts the City of Vancouver's role in this history by positioning the Spakwus Slulem/Aeriosa collaboration as bringing attention both to the colonial violence through which Stanley Park was founded and to the need for its reconciliation. She proposed to do this by honoring the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh, their protocols, and territories in ways that contribute to the City of Vancouver's on-going reconciliation efforts. She explains,

With this project we will be painting a fuller picture of local history and as such another impact is the aspect of reconciliation that comes with honouring Coast Salish ancestors and descendants and acknowledging that people were displaced from their homes with the establishment of Stanley Park at the turn of the century. There are sacred sites in this park, burial grounds and archaeological sites with evidence of 3000 years of human occupation. Vancouver's Mayor has declared this a year of reconciliation and our project will help contribute to that civic goal. (Taffe 2013b)

Taffe is referring to how, on June 21, 2013, the City of Vancouver became the first municipality in Canada to proclaim that it would dedicate a year to reconciliation. As Mayor Gregor Robertson described it, the goal of Vancouver's Year of Reconciliation was to build "a common future together, one that acknowledges the historical impacts that have shaped the experiences of Aboriginal peoples across Canada" (The City of Vancouver 2013). He went on to state, "we are supporting Reconciliation Canada as a way to help all cultures within our community to develop new relationships, heal from the past, and move forward with shared understandings and respect" (The City of Vancouver 2013). The City of Vancouver's declaration of The Year of Reconciliation came as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) was preparing to host its British Columbia National Event in Vancouver on September 18–21, 2013. The TRC was formed out of the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement (IRSSA) in 2007. One of the goals of the TRC is to address Canada's 150-year-long history of Indian residential schools by compiling the testimonies of survivors, and those who suffer intergenerational effects, in order to create a fuller historical account.³⁸ The TRC's National event in Vancouver was the sixth of seven mandated by IRSSA. Organized by Reconciliation Canada, it aimed to "provide an important opportunity for those affected by the legacy of Indian Residential Schools to share their experiences with the Commission and the public" (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2003). Through their collaboration, Taffe and S7aplek brought to the City of Vancouver's attention, as this grant is administered through their Office of Cultural Affairs, the need to address other aspects of its colonial history—namely the dispossession of the land—and its lasting trauma. Since Stanley Park is located in the overlapping territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh, S7aplek's and Taffe's preproduction plan included approaching all three Nations for permission to perform *Trees Are Portals*.

Trees are Portals shares essential sequences with *Thunderbird*. The title refers to the trees in Stanley Park as "living witnesses" to this history (Taffe 2013b). It also makes reference to Aeriosa's point of entry. Instead of dancing while rappelling down the side of a tower as they did for *Thunderbird*, Aeriosa proposed to dance around and down trees at or near X^wway X^wway using a non-invasive system called tree huggers. S7aplek would begin their performance through a transmotion of Chiaux that identified himself and Spakwus Slulem as Squamish people and situated themselves in relation

to their territory. Together they would carry out this transmotion of Chiaux by pulling a Squamish canoe from the shores of North Vancouver across Burrard Inlet while singing their paddle song to introduce themselves before landing on the shore below Lumberman's Arch in Stanley Park. S7aplek and Spakwus Slulem would then continue to sing and form a procession to *X^wway X^wway*, where Aeriosa would begin their section of the performance to the "Thunderbird Song."³⁹ The rest of the performance was in development when their production was brought to a sudden halt in April of 2014 by the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation (henceforth referred to as Park Board) who deemed Spakwus Slulem's performance their paddle song a "claim upon the land" in Stanley Park that could be contested by the Musqueam and Tsleil-Waututh Nations.⁴⁰

The Park Board's assessment that Spakwus Slulem's paddle song is a land claim is more than justifiable—it is factual. As this essay has shown, Northwest Coast First Nations songs are declarations of hereditary rights to ownership of land and waterways. Paddle songs, in particular, are sung in relation to the Nations and territories they are addressing. While paddle songs act as statements by the singers of where they are from, the same songs are also used to respectfully situate dance groups, families, communities, and Nations within territories that do not belong to them. It is not as though the lyrics to the Spakwus Slulem's canoe song deny Musqueam and Tsleil-Waututh claims; rather, they situate the singers in relation to Squamish territory, and in this case, to their history at *X^wway X^wway*. Simply stated, it is not an exclusive claim but it is most certainly a relational one.

The Park Board's action is directly related to declaration made by the City of Vancouver formally acknowledging that they are located on the unceded territory of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations. Passed unanimously by Vancouver's City Council on June 25, 2014, the declaration states that the traditional territories of these three Nations were "never ceded through treaty, war, or surrender" and that each has "millennia-old protocols for welcome, blessing, and acknowledgement on their territories" (The City of Vancouver 2014). The concluding paragraph urges City officials to directly engage in developing and enacting protocol. It states,

Further that Council direct staff to invite representatives from the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations to work with the Mayor and Council and the City Staff to develop appropriate protocols for the City of Vancouver to use in conducting City business that respect the traditions of welcome, blessing, and acknowledgement of the territory. (The City of Vancouver 2014, 6)

It is commendable of the City of Vancouver to make such an unprecedented declaration of their position as settlers by acknowledging their occupation of land and waterways that do not belong to them or to the colonial nation-state. Three years before this declaration, however, Taffe and S7aplek were working together to forge such a Chiaux-based relationships. The City of Vancouver's recommendation to develop protocols for conducting civic business was being used to counter the authority of protocol as it currently exists and is enacted within the three host Nations, in their Nation-to-Nation relationships, as well as in the work of Northwest Coast First Nations dance artists.

Undermining S7aplek's ability to self-determine and enact the transmotion of Chiaux necessary to respectfully ask the permission through oratory, the Park Board demanded that he obtain official letters of permission from "Chief & Council" of all three Nations to satisfy the "cultural protocol" that they are developing for Indigenous performances in the Stanley Park.⁴¹ S7aplek refused to adhere to their demands. It is not a protocol of any Northwest Coast First Nation, to ask permission from chief and council of their own Nation or any other Nations for dance group performances or collaborations to occur in Stanley Park—or anywhere else. His resistance is a part of his practice of dancing sovereignty, as he would not allow his practice to be governed by anything other than Chiaux. Taffe's commitment to honor S7aplek's request to remain uninvolved in the email "protocol

negotiations” with the Park Board until a meeting could be held in-person, and resilience in pushing back against their imposition of what they considered protocol, demonstrates her deep investment in their host/guest relationshipscape.

In order for *Trees Are Portals* to occur within the time frame required by funders, it appeared as though the performance would have to be moved to a location outside of Stanley Park. Taffe and S7aplek considered hosting it alongside a building in downtown Vancouver, on which images of Stanley Park would be projected in order to “take the story out of the park.”⁴² Taffe stated, “I’ve always wanted to find a way to erase the buildings from the skyline and put the forest back and there are theatrical ways of doing that.”⁴³ She and S7aplek also considered how this venue could bring even more attention to the history of X^wway X^wway by reaching a larger scale audience than is manageable at Stanley Park. This would also give them the opportunity to generate a wider dialogue around protocol through holding presentations about their collaborative process and the fraught dealings with the Park Board that led to their decision to change their performance location.

Before deciding whether or not to move the piece out of Stanley Park, however, S7aplek and Taffe remained open to working with the Park Board to have their performance happen in the park, in a good way, and without conceding their position. In many ways, S7aplek’s practice of dancing sovereignty and Taffe’s response-ability to his transmotion of Chiaux not only kept their collaboration intact, but also strengthened their host/guest relationshipscape. Together they underwent eighteen months of negotiations with the Park Board involving in-person meetings, phone calls, and emails. S7aplek stood firm on his decision to not engage in protocol negotiations over email. He either participated in the face-to-face discussions or Taffe shared his feelings, with his permission, through email. Through this process, he and Taffe came to the realization that although the Park Board “was not ready for their message” about X^wway X^wway, it was of the upmost importance that the performance happen in Stanley Park in order to assert the rights of the Coast Salish people to continue to perform their songs and dances in their unceded territories.⁴⁴ On August 30, 2015, *Trees Are Portals* premiered in Stanley Park. The message of their performance shifted slightly, from specifically honoring X^wway X^wway to honoring the presence of all the Coast Salish ancestors who lived throughout the area before it became a park. Their long awaited performance was celebrated by many, including Squamish elders who travelled together to witness its premiere. The collaborative performance by both Spakwus Slulem and Aeriosa in *Trees Are Portals* was a powerful testament to S7aplek’s and Taffe’s determination and perseverance as well as to the on-going resistance and resilience of the Coast Salish people in the face of their current political realities.

As I have argued in my analysis of *Thunderbird*, *The Trees Are Portals*, and in the many case studies that inform my work, for Northwest Coast dance artists, protocol is more than a set of restrictions. It is the artistic lens through which they create performances affirming their people’s land rights, epistemologies, and hereditary privileges. These assertions of sovereignty, which are grounded in Indigenous governance, reach diverse audiences and collaborators. Performances by Northwest Coast First Nations dance artists and their dance groups are an embodiment of politics and self-determination that I refer to as dancing sovereignty.

Notes

1. I am of the Tsimshian Nation of Metlakatla, Alaska—Annette Island Indian Reserve. I have learned through our feasts, potlatches, and other ceremonies that deep respect for each other is shown through the use of ceremonial or ancestral names. Through this action we acknowledge each other’s hereditary lines, territories, and histories. When we continue to do so outside of our ceremonies it reinforces this sign of respect. As such, I refer to Northwest Coast First Nations dance artists by their ceremonial or ancestral names rather than following the scholarly

convention of referring to them by their surnames. This is why I choose to honor Bob Baker by referring to him by his Squamish name S7apek.

2. The term dance group, not dance troupe or company, is commonly used by Northwest Coast First Nations people to refer to collectives of singers, drummers, and dancers who perform songs and dances owned by their Nations, families, and communities. There are upward of three hundred dance groups located in urban and rural areas along the Northwest Coast, which includes Southeast Alaska, British Columbia, and Western Washington. Regardless of the context of their performance or the makeup of their audience, dance groups and their leaders—who I refer to as dance artists—govern themselves, their performances, and in many cases their collaborators, by protocol.

3. The term “unceded territory” means that Squamish Nation has never ceded their territory to the provincial or federal governments through treaty, warfare, or surrender. Their land claim with both branches of government remains unsettled (Jacobs 2011, vi).

4. Dangeli (2015). I use the term Northwest Coast First Nations to refer to the Indigenous people of the coastal regions of what is now known as Southeast Alaska, British Columbia, and Washington State.

5. Dancing sovereignty, just as visual sovereignty, functions both as a term that describes the ways in which Indigenous artists assert sovereignty through their work and how these assertions are an integral part of their process of creation. See Rickard (1995, 2011), Dowell (2013), and Raheja (2010).

6. My analysis individual practices of dancing sovereignty focuses on the ways in which protocol is asserted, negotiated and enacted—a process that I refer to as the transmotion of protocol—by dance artists in their song-compositions, choreography, collaboration, and dance group performances. Vizenor (1998) uses the term transmotion to refer to Anishinaabe practices of sovereignty rooted in physical and metaphorical movements through time and ancestral territory. For him, transmotion is conveyed through the motions and meanings of oral histories, subsistence, and visual art. My approach extends his conceptualization to include dance in order to investigate practices of sovereignty specific to Northwest Coast First Nations dance artists, their epistemologies, and territories.

7. Through their continuous transmotion of protocol, Northwest Coast First Nations dance artists forge new relationships while reinforcing existing ones. This relationality is made manifest through embodied practices—oratory, song, and dance—which can be seen as producing what Erin Manning refers to as *relationscapes*. Manning (2009) describes relationscapes as relational nexuses generated between land and people through the ability to respond relationally or what she refers to as response-ability. I draw upon Manning’s concept of relationscapes in order to examine the relationships that are formed and performed through the transmotion of protocol which are integral to practices of dancing sovereignty.

8. Ibid.

9. For the past thirteen years, my husband Mike Dangeli (Nisga’a Nation) and I have had the honor of leading the Git Hayetsk, a Northwest Coast First Nations mask-dancing group located in the unceded territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh peoples, known today as Vancouver, BC. The forty members in our dance group are from nine different Nations from Northern British Columbia, Southeast Alaska, and the Yukon. We have performed at events and participated in ceremonies throughout Canada, the United States, and Asia. I am currently an artist-in-residence at the Scotiabank Dance Centre in Vancouver. I have written extensively about our practices of choreography, song-composition, and performance in the essay “Dancing Our Stone Mask Out of Confinement: A Twenty-First-Century Tsimshian Epistemology” (Askren 2011).

10. Indian Residential Schools were created by the Canadian government and administered by Christian churches with the objective of assimilating First Nations people into Euro-Canadian society. From the 1870s to the 1990s, over 150,000 First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students were removed from their families, homes, and communities, many when they were as young as four, to attend the approximately sixty-nine Residential Schools across Canada. The current estimate is that twenty thousand children died in Residential School of communicable diseases and other

causes. Those who survived the alienation, dispossession, disease, and abuse (physical, emotional, psychological, and sexual) they experienced in this horrific education system are referred to as Residential School Survivors.

11. S7aplek is Native Hawaiian on his Grandmother Caroline Sparrow's side. She was Musqueam and Native Hawaiian. In the oral history maintained by S7aplek and his family, there were two brothers with the last name Baker, one was an architect and the other was a mapmaker, aboard Captain James Vancouver's ship. S7aplek states, "the architect jumped ship on the big island of Hawaii and married a chief's daughter, so there are Bakers down there; the other one jumped ship and married a Squamish so we have Bakers here." When S7aplek was living in Maui, he came across a Baker who was a sheriff. Recalling their encounter, he remarked, "I think I was paying a ticket [laughing]. I was leaving the judiciary building and the sheriff came running after me, 'Mr. Baker, Mr. Baker, Mr. Baker. . .' I looked at him and looked at my car like can I make it [laughing]. I was thinking awe geez what did I do? He said what does your middle initial stand for - my name is Robert H. Baker. Why? [The sheriff replied] because this building is Robert H. Baker Building. My middle initial stands for Howard. He said well this building is Hoapili. So it's called the Hoapili building after Robert H. Baker. He said I am a Baker too. I said I'll be damned. He looked like one of my Uncles. When I came back here I was talking to Peter Baker Sr., one of Simon Baker's sons, he was telling me about the Bakers and that ship. He told me that when Vancouver was naming things, he named that mountain – Mount Baker – after the Bakers on his ship. So there is a lot going on here in the spirit of Hawaii." Bob Baker (S7aplek), personal communication, September 23, 2011.

12. Bob Baker (S7aplek), personal communication, September 23, 2011.

13. S7aplek worked with carver Sedrick Billy (Squamish) and the late canoe historian, Jerry Jones (Tulalip Nation). Bob Baker (S7aplek), personal communication, September 23, 2011.

14. *Ibid.* The term *canoe family* is used to refer to those that train to pull together (i.e., paddle a seagoing canoe) on extensive journeys along the Northwest Coast. Those in the same canoe family develop an incredible bond as they depend on each other to pull great distances on the open ocean and share the responsibilities of camping along the shoreline. The discipline and accountability of each member is guided by protocol. A protocol shared by Northwest Coast First Nations peoples is that the canoe is held in the highest regard. It is both the head of the canoe family and its core. Pullers proudly identify themselves by their canoe and/or canoe family, which in many cases have the same name.

15. *Ibid.*

16. Bob Baker (S7aplek), personal communication, March 22, 2013.

17. I refer to him as Chief Joe Capilano rather than the abbreviated Chief Capilano as there are other people, past and present, who hold this title among the Squamish, Musqueam, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations. Bob Baker (S7aplek), personal communication, September 23, 2011.

18. Bob Baker (S7aplek), personal communication, September 23, 2011; Fisher (2003).

19. Robin Fisher, "Su-Á-PU-LUCK," *Dictionary of Canadian Bibliography* 13 (2003). http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/su_a_pu_luck13E.html (accessed September 24, 2013).

20. The delegation included Cowichan Chief Charlie Isipaymilt, Secwepemc Chief Basil David, and translator Simon Pierre of the Katzie Nation. Although accounts in the oral history of these Nations maintain that "Royal Promises" were made to the delegation in response to their petition, including a promise of compensation for alienated lands, both British and Canadian governments denied compensation. See Carlson (2005).

21. Born in Toronto and raised in provinces throughout Canada, Taffe (b. 1968) is a first generation Canadian of Jamaican, Irish, and Polish descent. She trained at the School of Contemporary Dancers in Winnipeg (1981–1989), the Royal Winnipeg Ballet (1981–1984), as well as Toronto Dance Theatre, York University, and San Jose State University among other institutions. In the early years of her career, Taffe devoted herself to original works by choreographer Ruth Cansfield. In 1997, Taffe received her Rock Guide Certification from the Association of Canadian Mountain Guides and since then has brought together her training as a climbing guide, rigger, and stuntwoman with her work as a dancer and choreographer. In this context, a

rigger is a person who specializes in safe-rope rigging techniques used in vertical and aerial dance as well as mountain climbing. Taffe has toured internationally with Amelia Rudolph's *Bandaloop*, a pioneering project in vertical dance that reinvents the art of rock climbing as an aerial dance practice. Since 1999, she has choreographed more than twenty-five works for locations such as Stawamus Chief Mountain in Squamish, BC, Taipei City Hall in Taiwan, Cirque du Soleil Headquarters in Montreal, The Banff Centre, the L Tower in Toronto, as well as many sites throughout the lower mainland of Vancouver. Julia Taffe, "Julia Taffe Biography," (2013a).

22. Performed as a work-in-progress by Aeriosa and dancers from Squamish and Lil'wat Nations in February 2009, *Inspired by Place* was created by Taffe in collaboration with Artistic Director of Raven Spirit Dance, Michelle Olsen, (Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation), composer François Houle, and project designer Tim Matheson. Taffe also worked with composer and singer Russell Wallace (Lil'wat First Nation) as well as S7aplek and Chixsten (Wes Nahanee) of Spakwus Slulem. According to Taffe, the objective of *Inspired by Place* was to "bring together the communities in Lil'wat and Squamish to try to represent what Whistler was prior to being made into a ski hill and tourist destination—to have some resonance of what Whistler meant before the developers turned it into what it is now." Together, Wallace, Olsen, S7aplek, and Nahanee provided cultural workshops to contextualize the performance site of *Inspired by Place* and generate a dialogue about what it means to create dance connected to its landscape. *Inspired by Place* was commissioned by the Whistler Arts Council through funding from Arts Partners in Creative Development in partnership with the Province of British Columbia, City of Vancouver, Canada Council of the Arts, and the Vancouver Foundation. Leading up to the 2010 Olympics, funding for this project was also provided by the Vancouver Olympic Committee and 2010 Legacies Now. See Fitzgerald (2008), Fraughton (2009); Julia Taffe, personal communication, July 18, 2013.

23. Julia Taffe, personal communication, July 18, 2013.

24. Ibid.; Bob Baker (S7aplek), personal communication, September 23, 2011.

25. Julia Taffe, personal communication, July 18, 2013.

26. Taffe (2011).

27. Ibid.

28. Bob Baker (S7aplek), personal communication, September 23, 2011.

29. Ibid.

30. In 1890, Judge John Hamilton Gray renamed the peaks "lions" during the colonial mapping of Vancouver. See Akrigg and Akrigg (1997).

31. Ibid.

32. Julia Taffe, personal communication, July 18, 2013.

33. Bob Baker (S7aplek), personal communication, September 23, 2011.

34. Julia Taffe, personal communication, July 18, 2013.

35. Bob Baker (S7aplek), personal communication, September 23, 2011.

36. Ibid.

37. Barman (2005) also cites firsthand accounts from Squamish families who were victims of this colonial violence as well as accounts of road workers and other perpetrators.

38. As Indian Residential School architecture historian Geoffrey Carr (2013) observes, the TRC's process of creating a fuller historical account is highly problematic. He notes that the TRC does not have the authority to force residential school staff members who are guilty of crimes to make public disclosures (9). Thus, the TRC's method for gathering information not only has the potential to re-traumatize victims, it cannot actively seek justice for them. In fact, as law scholar Ronald Niezen has shown, the identities of those who committed crimes against children will not be disclosed in their final reports because the TRC has prevented the names of the perpetrators from going on record (4). These are just two of the numerous highly problematic issues with the TRC and its process. See also Niezen (2013).

39. Bob Baker (S7aplek), personal communication, March 28, 2014; Julia Taffe, personal communication, March 28, 2014.

40. Julia Taffe, personal communication, July 28, 2014.

41. Jil P. Weaving, email to Julia Taffe, March 11 2014; Hilary Davis, email to Julia Taffe, April 29, 2014.
42. Julia Taffe, personal communication, July 28, 2014.
43. Ibid.
44. Julia Taffe, personal communication, August 21, 2015.

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