

**WHAT THE WHALE WAS:  
ORCA CULTURAL HISTORIES IN BRITISH COLUMBIA SINCE 1964**

by

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## **Abstract**

My thesis argues that indigenous historical narratives demonstrate an understanding of the killer whale subjectivity that settler society is only beginning to comprehend. Set in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, a period when human relationships with killer whales were undergoing a fast-paced reconfiguration, my research explores the spaces of orca-human encounter in regards to three killer whales: Moby Doll, the world's first orca held in captivity; Skana, the first orca showcased at the Vancouver Aquarium; and Luna, the orphaned orca of Nootka Sound. Each example speaks to the common process by which humans project culturally-specific narratives and beliefs onto the lives of the whales. In the case of Moby Doll, I argue that the dominant discourse regarding the whale conformed to a strict gender script that functioned to silence other narratives and realities of Moby's captivity. In my following chapter, I look at how the close relationship between Paul Spong and Skana inspired the scientist to abandon his most fundamental assumptions about orcas in favor of new affordances for orca subjectivity. Furthermore, I argue that the scientific research of John Lilly, a scientist who had a similar conversion experience with dolphins, inspired whole new literatures and imaginations of intelligent dolphins in New Age culture. Finally, I return to the recent story of the orphaned whale Luna to explore how these changing understandings of killer whales accompany an emergent recognition of the validity of indigenous ways of relating to both animals and the past. I argue that the conflict that arose between the Department of Fisheries and the Nuu-chah-nulth First Nation over the relocation of Luna is an instance of the informal negotiation of differing conceptions between settler and indigenous society over what is natural, what is right, what is history and what is the killer whale.

## **Preface**

The research in this thesis was done according to the guidelines of the University of British Columbia Behavioral Research Ethics Board (BREB). Interviews of human subjects were approved under BREB certificate of approval number: H10-00216.

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The thesis, of course, wouldn't be possible without the whales. Though much of my encounters with their intelligence have been second order, I nonetheless feel their exhilarating presence. I should also acknowledge all the other non-human animals whose company has inspired me, my cats Pickle and Mud Pumpkin as well as the herons and hawks, the meadowlarks and chickadees, the marmots and porcupines, the catfish and chipmunks and coyotes too.

## I. Introduction: What we talk about when we talk about orcas

The day Luna died, his mother was nowhere to be seen. Under normal circumstances, an orca whale would stay by his mother's side, even far into old age. But six-year old Luna had been separated from his pod for almost his entire life as he was swept 200 miles north along the Pacific coast. The day Luna died, he had been socializing in the only way he knew how, playfully rubbing his huge black and white body against the boats that passed through Nootka Sound off the coast of Vancouver Island. It was during this attempt to replace the intimate physical bond orcas have with their pod mates, that he became tangled in the propeller of a tugboat, his mangled two-ton body sinking to the ocean floor. The day Luna died, what would normally have been the simple, tragic loss of an orphaned animal carried a much larger undertow, capping an ugly four-year conflict among scientists, environmentalists, fishery officials, local residents and native people in the region.<sup>1</sup>

Although divergent understandings of nature have ignited disagreements between Aboriginal and settler societies for centuries, recent debates over orca captivity and relocation has inspired especially intense cultural conflicts over what is nature, what is right, and what is true. To the Nuuchah-nulth peoples, Luna was Tsuux'ill, their reincarnated chief, as just four days prior to his arrival, Chief Ambrose Maquinna had died, vowing to return to his people as a kakaw'in, or orca. To scientists, he was *Orcinus orca* L-98, especially interesting due to his dialect that incorporated sea lion sounds into his familial dialect. To non-native local residents, Luna was either a friend or a nuisance,

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Woodward. *The Globe and Mail*. "Famed Killer Whale Dies in B.C.: Six-year-old Luna sucked into tugboat's propeller in Nootka Sound." March 11, 2006. p. A2.; Scott Sutherland. *The Globe and Mail*. "Human Friends Help Delay Luna's Capture." June 19, 2004. p. A2.; Peggy Andersen. *Associated Press*. "Waterfront meeting addresses proposed move of stray whale." October 9, 2003. ER LEXIS/NEXIS.; Daniel Francis and Gil Hewlett. *Operation Orca: Springer, Luna and the Struggle to Save West Coast Killer Whales*, 2007. Mark Hume. *The Globe and Mail*. "Luna savior couldn't be saved from fierce seas." July 28, 2006. A3.

depending on who you talked to. And to many more, he was a charismatic cultural icon, representative of the Pacific Northwest and the New Age movement.<sup>2</sup>

The conflict over Luna had reached an apex two summers earlier when the Canadian Department of Fisheries had decided -- after consultations with scientists, aquarium officials, and environmentalists -- to capture him for relocation. Plans were made to lure Luna into a net-lined enclosure behind his favorite jet boat, lift him by crane onto a truck, and ship him hundreds of miles south to a sea pen where he would be held until his pod was within acoustic range. Mike Maquinna, the new chief, organized a resistance as he saw the intervention as an attempt to forcibly relocate his father -- or worse as a ploy to put Tsuux'ill into permanent captivity. As the Fisheries officials attempted to entice Luna to enter the net enclosure, the Mowachaht-Muchalaht people arrived on the scene in canoes, singing their traditional songs. Suddenly enamored with attention from every direction, Luna's fate hung in the balance. Francis and Hewlett describe the tense moments that followed:

At this point the jet boat was deployed to lure Luna into the pen. Several times he followed the boat to the entrance but he was reluctant to venture all the way inside. He seemed to be of two minds what to do. Should he enter the pen or should he turn around and swim away?<sup>3</sup>

For days the relocation attempt slowed to a standstill as unplanned contingency of Luna's participation hung in the balance. Luna did eventually enter the enclosure but left almost immediately, following the Mowachaht-Muchalaht canoes up the coast towards the Gold River, never to enter the nets again. By week's end, the Department of Fisheries abandoned the relocation attempt permanently.

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<sup>2</sup> Francis and Hewlett, 2007; Neil MacLean. *Sunday Times (London)*. "Killer Whale Country." May 16, 2004. ER Lexis/Nexis.; Davis Wiwchar. *Windspeaker*. "Mowachacht/Muchalaht Mourns Loss of Luna." April 2006. ER Proquest.

<sup>3</sup> Francis and Hewlett, 235.

While such conflicts are products of humans alone, the histories that make sense of them are interspecies collaborations. The role of the orcas goes far beyond that of object of our perception – as scenery or spectacle. Rather, these histories are constantly molded by the actions of individual orcas as much as by individual humans. As Luna’s story indicates, these histories are complex interplays of chance, desire, fear, and power – negotiated between humans and non-humans. Accordingly, my history casts the orcas as subjects more than objects. Oftentimes, this task demands more than the historian’s sources can muster.<sup>4</sup> However, my research insists that their communications are not entirely lost in the failed interspecies translation. Can the playful rubbing of an orphaned whale be seen as inter-species communication? What about the drooping dorsal fin of a captive whale? Can the majestic leaps of Shamu be bracketed as bridled subjectivity? Can the agency of the orca be seen in the state of awe that follows the huge triangular dorsal fin as it cuts the ocean in two? My research suggests that there is more happening in these encounters than the human imagination run wild, that these orcas have a subjectivity that resonates deeply in our histories. Whatever the cultural dispositions or philosophical predilections, orcas have written themselves into our stories.

Given the difficulty of writing a history of orcas without relegating the whales to the shallow end of the story, a framework for exploring the relational spaces of these encounters is necessary. In this regard, Traci Warkentin offers a compelling methodology. Arguing that present-day captive environments “shrink human imaginations of whale lives and limit possibilities for whale ethics and etiquette,”<sup>5</sup> Warkentin fashioned her PhD research to prioritize non-verbal forms of communication in an effort to highlight the dynamic agency of the whales that she argues can “surprise and subvert

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<sup>4</sup> I have yet to come across the collected papers of a whale in the archives – and have begun to wonder if they have any care for the historical record at all.

<sup>5</sup> Traci L. Warkentin. *Captive Imaginations: Affordances for Ethics, Agency and Knowledge-Making in Whale-Human Encounters*. PhD Dissertation, York University. September 2007. p. iv-v. ER Proquest. Warkentin’s interest in encounter was inspired by her intimate interactions with the last three captive orcas at the Vancouver aquarium, early mornings playfully spraying the orcas with a hose. In particular, her work emphasizes the importance of the physical infrastructure to dictating the etiquette of human and whale participant, the common sense readings of the encounter.



the conceptual lenses of their human observers.”<sup>6</sup> Even as her approach functions to limit the anthropocentrism of traditional approaches, it is not without limitations. While such a reorientation of attention is possible when carrying out new observational fieldwork, historical sources rarely step outside their patterned ways of seeing and knowing. Even so, Warkentin’s observations about the power dynamics inherent in her encounters are an indispensable reminder of how the dynamics of every encounter with captive whales: “I held the power and our interactions were almost exclusively on my terms.”<sup>7</sup> The same recognition of power must accompany any history, especially one that hopes to tell the story of animals, beings unlikely to read or refute any faulty interpretation of their place in history.

But before jumping into these particular histories, it is necessary to provide background on the orca itself. The most cosmopolitan species of mammal, Orcas are known to inhabit every ocean of the world and were most recently brought into urban centers in their role as aquarium specimen.<sup>8</sup> Through this forced migration to aquaria, orcas have come to symbolize both pristine nature and performance culture, straddling the land and sea divide in our imaginations. In this way, orcas are cosmopolitan in another sense. Perhaps as much as any animal in the Pacific Northwest, orcas have come to inhabit diverse niches of cultural memory: as mascots or totems, as circus performer or conduit to other worldly intelligence. Each of these social constructions has its own history, and much of that history has been inspired by the few hundred orcas that inhabit the sea along present-day Washington and British Columbia. In these waters, the first exhibition of captive orcas was held, and from these waters the majority of the world’s performing orcas have been pulled. The formal

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<sup>6</sup> Warkentin, 12.

<sup>7</sup> Warkentin, 7-8.

<sup>8</sup> Perhaps orcas are even more cosmopolitan than humans with oceans covering more than half the Earth’s surface. See Rick Ledue. “Delphinids Overview.” *Encyclopedia of Marine Mammals*. William Perrin, ed. p. 300.

scientific study of orcas has its earliest roots with these whales, and, each year, thousands of tourists pile aboard whale watching boats to catch a glimpse of their passing dorsal fins.<sup>9</sup>

But what exactly are orca whales? The answer depends on who you talk to. If you were in a conversation with a scientist, such as the preeminent killer whale ecologist John Ford, you would learn that *Orcinus orca* is a species of apex predators found at the top trophic levels of the ocean, a species which can be subdivided into various categorizations: into subspecies separated by genetic drift stretching back tens of thousands of years, into populations of fish-eaters (residents) and marine mammal eaters (transients), into pods, into matrilineal groups, into families, and finally, in the case of Pacific coast orcas, into a chart that contains each individual orca placed into a perfect family tree complete with a photograph of their every distinctive dorsal fin.<sup>10</sup> If you ask a philosopher, you will get a different answer; for example, the environmental philosopher J. Baird Callicott argues that orcas are best understood as “people of the sea,” as he compares them to our Stone Age ancestors in terms of life span, similarly sized and proportioned brains, as well as a comparably complex social life and language.<sup>11</sup> The cultural theorist Susan Davis sees the orca – specifically Sea World’s Shamu – as the embodiment of paradox: “animal and humanlike, wild and tame, threatening and gentle, primitive and tied in with progressive science, obedient and rebellious, female and male.”<sup>12</sup> The ecofeminist theorist Donna Haraway would likely expand on this analysis,

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<sup>9</sup> While millions of mice have contributed to the production of scientific knowledge, it is likely that there has been more ink spilled per animal with these few hundred orcas than with a population of any species anywhere. For detailed accounts of the Pacific Northwest orcas, see: John Ford et al. *Killer Whales: The Natural History and Genealogy of Orcinus Orca in British Columbia and Washington State.*, 2000; Erich Hoyt. *Orca: The Whale Called Killer*, 1990; John Ford. *Transients: Mammal-hunting Killer Whales of British Columbia, Washington, and southeastern Alaska*. 1999.; Daniel Francis and Gill Hewlett. *Operation Orca: Springer, Luna, and the Struggle to Save West Coast Killer Whales*, 2007.; Alexandra Morton. *Listening to Whales: What the Orcas Have Taught Us*, 2002.

<sup>10</sup> John Ford, et al. “Linking killer whale survival and prey abundance: food limitation in the oceans’ apex predator?” *Biology Letters*. February 23, 2010. Vol 6 no. 1. 139-142; John Ford et. Al. “Dietary specialization in two sympatric populations of killer whales (*Orcinus orca*) in coastal British Columbia and adjacent waters.” *Canadian Journal of Zoology* 76 (8): 1456-1471. 1998.

<sup>11</sup> J. Baird Callicott. “Whaling in Sand County: A Dialectical Hunt for Land Ethical Answers to Questions About the Morality of Norwegian Minke Whale Catching.” *Colorado Journal of International Environmental Law and Policy*. Winter, 199. ER Lexis/Nexis.

<sup>12</sup> Susan Davis. *Spectacular Nature: Corporate Culture and the Sea World Experience*. 1997. p. 224-6.

noting how a captive orca is in reality a cyborg creature. Part natural organism, part machine, part cultural text, orcas have become entangled in systems of mechanization from the moment a crane lifts from off the helicopter and casts them into a carefully calibrated tank environment regulated by computers to both roughly replicate the ocean ecology and create a sterilized habitat for the purpose of staging a spectacle that sell tickets and trinkets, meanings and texts about human domination and the natural world.<sup>13</sup> A radical constructionist such as Ernst von Glasersfeld would likely take the critique even further, insisting that everything is a human construction, all of nature and culture equally reducible to contingent systems of meaning-making within the mind's ecology, such that the whale is best understood as a mere signal for our cognitions, a resource for our individual psychology, such that the orca is just one fleshly appendage of life that inspires a particular set of ideas about ourselves and the world around us.<sup>14</sup>

Yet, by their nature, killer whales refute any reduction of their lives to mere human construction or projection. Even an infinitely rich array of projected meanings, metaphors, insights, stories, and scientific studies aiming towards the inner life of the orca whale will fail in its attempt to capture the essential elixir of orca-ness.<sup>15</sup> Orcas are more than repositories for our feelings of awe, more than screens for our projections of sublimity or violence or beauty, more than passive receptacles for the bioaccumulated toxins of our industry, far more than the roles we cast them in as friends or beasts—and surely they are even more than the fabric of metaphors for eco-feminists like Haraway or social constructionists like von Glasersfeld to interrogate and deconstruct, disassemble and interweave again. Their subjectivity insists on limitations to our own subjectivities. Although their mammalian need for oxygen and their peculiar curiosity for humans invite us to gaze down

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<sup>13</sup> See Donna Haraway. *The Haraway Reader*, 2003; *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science*, 1990; and *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, 1990.

<sup>14</sup> See Ernst von Glasersfeld. *Radical Constructivism: a Way of Knowing and Learning*, 1995.

<sup>15</sup> D. Graham Burnett. "A Mind in the Water." *Orion Magazine*. May/June 2010. ER at <http://www.orionmagazine.org/index.php/articles/article/5503>

into their complex social worlds, orcas insist on a life below the surface of our meaning-making. The wondrous architectures of their undersea social worlds remain hidden from our imaginations and metaphors, even as our language becomes ever more specialized, our descriptive frames ever more extravagant, and our scientific instruments ever more elaborate. What is the orca whale? Even our best guesses leave that question as a mystery.

Though I too subscribe to a constructivist position, I differ from the more radical ontology offered by those like von Glasersfeld. Instead, I argue that the meanings and knowledge that arise out of our encounters with killer whales are shaped by our social realities and co-constructed in the sense that the ideas, insights, and stories are driven as much by the object as by our own minds and ideas. An example of how the killer whale is socially constructed is most clear in the case of the captive orca. Susan Davis' account of Sea World's Shamu brilliantly showcases how orcas are socially constructed products, as much icon as animal due to the long process of presentation, training, and marketing that has transformed the killer whale into a brand. Though more subtle, the same process accompanies the wild orcas. Like the captive Shamu, the whales dashing across the far lens of the whale watcher's binoculars and those sounding into the receiver of the scientist's hydrophone are also being perceived and understood through a particular patterns of social and technological convention, whether that means conforming to the expectations of the guild of eco-tourism or that of the scientific enterprise. Following the example of Harriet Ritvo, the renowned historian of animals, I find that our discourses about animals reveal much about our human social systems of power and hierarchy.<sup>16</sup>

Given this distorting veneer of our social constructions, the interpretation of animal lives may seem impossible—or just beside the point. However, I insist that we are obligated to listen closely to animals since the conversations we have are not with ourselves alone. Even as the social

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<sup>16</sup> Harriet Ritvo. *The Animal Estate*. 1987.

constructions spring from our own imaginations, the process by which they form is shared with our non-human companions. Within post-enlightenment culture, animals are assumed to be silent, an assumption that is not shared by most indigenous cultures.<sup>17</sup> And researchers have noted that with marine mammals, our perception of silence is often just a failure of our ears to hear the frequency of their sonic emanations.<sup>18</sup> But the history of listening is often a history of silence. “Almost all of history is eerily silent,” notes cultural theorist Leigh Schmidt, “so, to evoke those stilled and faded voices, the historian must act as a kind of necromancer.”<sup>19</sup> To Schmidt, the historian speaks to the present for the past functioning as a hearing aid for society, adjusting and amplifying an array of whispers, echoes, and silences, all in the hope of fashioning something more than noise out of the amplification. As the historian Michel-Rolph Trouillot notes, the silences of history are not mere absences but created through an active process. “One ‘silences’ a fact or individuals,” argues Trouillot, “as a silencer silences a gun.”<sup>20</sup> Although Trouillot has the history of humans in mind, his view of history as “bundles of silences” is particularly relevant to the dismissal of animals as subjects in our histories.<sup>21</sup>

If one takes seriously the notion that the orca is a historical subject, then one must be willing to imagine the life of an orca, the sense experience of the whale. How does the world appear when space is sensed primarily through the reverberations of sonar through the ocean? What is it like to travel in three-dimensional space? Do their immense and contoured brains suggest an

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<sup>17</sup> David Abrams. *The Spell of the Sensuous*. p. 87.

<sup>18</sup> John Lilly. “A Feeling of Weirdness.” in Mcintyre, p. 71. To address this deficiency of our perception, my history attempts to listen to orcas in the broadest sense of the term possible, incorporating a diverse set of approaches to killer whales while also leaving a space for their own voice.

<sup>19</sup> Leigh Schmidt, “Hearing Loss,” in Michael Bull and Les Back, *the Auditory Culture Reader*. p. 41.

<sup>20</sup> Michel-Rolph Trouillot. *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. p. 48.

<sup>21</sup> Much attention has been given to how history as a discipline preferences certain mediums of representation. When an oral culture comes into contact with a literate one, the availability of historical materials will likely be biased to the culture that makes a practice of producing static, physical records of their past, a process which says more about the boundaries of “history” than it does about the cultural interaction itself. Less attention has been given to how history preferences certain sensualities, how history itself is a product of a hyper-literate, visual centric culture. And, even as historians pay more attention to the subaltern, little scholarship has linked the creation of subalternity to the differences in sensuality, especially in the context of non-human animals.<sup>21</sup> Orcas challenge this bias.

emotional complexity to their lives, a sense of identity or of history? Just a half century ago, these questions were not being asked since, as the cetacean historian Graham Burnett notes, whales were seen mostly as meat, fertilizer, or “kegs of fat,” never as intelligent or spiritually enlightened.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, orca whales have been the target of demonization within the Western cannon from the earliest accounts. Almost 2000 years ago, Pliny the Elder observed a pack of killer whales near the Gulf of Cadiz, asserting that “a killer whale cannot be properly depicted or described except as an enormous mass of flesh with savage teeth.”<sup>23</sup> In 16<sup>th</sup> century North Atlantic, Olaus Magnus described them as monsters “armed with ferocious teeth, which it uses as brigantines do their prows, and rips at the whale’s genitals or the body of its calf.”<sup>24</sup> These reports are echoed in the journal of explorers and whalers throughout the age of sail as described them as “unappeasably voracious” and demonic creatures.<sup>25</sup> It is peculiar that this hate was inspired by seeing the animals attack large baleen whales, precisely the job of the whalers themselves.

That vilification had taken up residence in the Pacific Northwest by the middle of the twentieth century. A Navy Diving Manual from the 1960s described the orca as “a ruthless and ferocious beast,” recommending that divers leave the water immediately if encountered.<sup>26</sup> It was thought that the animals would “attack human beings at every opportunity.”<sup>27</sup> Judging by the public policies and civilian attitudes of the times, nothing less than the extermination of *Orcinus orca* was the goal. A machine gun turret was placed at Seymour Narrows north of Vancouver to thin out the pods as they migrated along the coast. The army used the animals for target practice, and plane strafing

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<sup>22</sup> D. Graham Burnett. “A Mind in the Water.” *Orion Magazine*. May/June 2010.

<sup>23</sup> Pliny the Elder. Quoted in Callum Roberts, *The Unnatural History of the Sea*. p. 175-6.

<sup>24</sup> Olaus Magnus. Quoted in Roberts, p. 176.

<sup>25</sup> See William Dietrich. *Natural Grace: The Charm, Wonder, and Lessons of Pacific Northwest*. p. 208-210; Randall Reeves and E. Mitchell. “Killer Whale Sightings and Takes by American Pelagic Whalers in the North Atlantic.” *Rit Fiskideidar*. 1988: 11: p. 7-23; Roberts, 175-8.

<sup>26</sup> Hoyt, 28.

<sup>27</sup> William Dietrich, 205. Citing the *Anartic Sailing Direction*.

runs were commonplace.<sup>28</sup> Local salmon fishers had a “shoot-on-sight” policy with orcas given that the schools of fish would vanish once a pod arrived.<sup>29</sup>

Though many indigenous cultures saw the orca as a monster of the deep, often to be respected through avoidance, only one culture – post-enlightenment colonial culture – sought their extermination. In November 1961, a diseased killer whale was taken into captivity near Los Angeles, California, but the animal died within days.<sup>30</sup> Other than that whale, none had been successfully captured or held captive despite their reputation as the “ultimate aquarium species” within the oceanarium industry.<sup>31</sup> Attempting to capitalize on this reputation, a crew from Marineland traveled up the coast from California to Puget Sound in the summer of 1962 to capture a killer whale. Though the men successfully caught a female in a hoop net, they were so terrified by the ensuing struggle that they shot and killed the whale.<sup>32</sup> This botched attempt at capture only had the effect of solidifying the orca’s reputation as a ferocious beast. In the spring of 1964, the Vancouver Sun echoed these views, reporting that orcas were a sinister animal that produced involuntary shudders in humans who were unfortunate enough to encounter them.<sup>33</sup> That the world’s love affair with orcas would stage its first act in Vancouver that very summer is especially unexpected.

To explore this fast-paced reconfiguration in human-orca relationships, I drop myself into the ocean of stories that have been told about orcas in the Vancouver area. In the section that follows, I explore the discourses around Moby Doll, the world’s first orca held in captivity, arguing that a romantic gendering of the whale functioned to silence other narratives and realities of the captivity. Furthermore, I dispute the standard retelling of Moby Doll’s life for how it exaggerates the importance of that first capture to human-orca relationships. In the second section, I turn my

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<sup>28</sup> Johnstone Strait Killer Whale Committee. “Johnstone Strait Killer Whale Committee Background Report.” 1991; Hoyt, 258.

<sup>29</sup> Hoyt, 93-4.

<sup>30</sup> Hoyt, 17, 258-9.

<sup>31</sup> Craig Philips. *Captive Sea*. 1965.

<sup>32</sup> Erich Hoyt. “The World Orca Trade.” 1992. From *The Performing Orca: Why the Show Must Stop*. ER <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/whales/keiko/world.html>

<sup>33</sup> Jack Scott. *Vancouver Sun*. Editorial. June 4, 1964.

attention to Skana, the first orca showcased at the Vancouver Aquarium, illustrating how Paul Spong's relationship with the whale inspired him to abandon his most fundamental assumptions about the world in favor of countercultural substances and approaches that included spaces for orca subjectivity. His research provides entry into an exploration of John Lilly's research on bottlenose dolphins which has inspired whole new literatures and imaginations of dolphins which insist on different understandings of animal subjectivity and historical causality. In the concluding section, I suggest that the historical narratives of Northwest coast indigenous peoples contain superior ways of comprehending orca encounters. I return to the story of Luna to explore how these changing understandings of killer whales accompany an emergent recognition of aboriginal title. By revisiting the stories of Moby Doll and Skana from indigenous perspectives, a more compelling history of killer whales emerges that incorporates non-human subjectivity into our accounts of the past.



## II. Constructing a killer whale: gender, objectification, and Moby Doll

“The accusation of anthropomorphism – of projecting our thoughts and feelings on other animals; of trying to guess at what a whale’s day might be like... – has been obviated by the increasing evidence that such creatures have parallel days of their own, ones as distinctly intricate and woundable and, ultimately, unknowable as ours.”  
—Charles Siebert<sup>34</sup>

“I wonder what that animal is thinking with my brain,” said Dr. Pat McGeer peering down at a killer whale as two bearded men pulled alongside his float plane, idling their 40-foot Corsair.<sup>35</sup> The bearded duo was comprised of Sam Burich and Joe Bauer, the former a sculptor and both skilled fishermen—and after two months lying in wait for a killer whale, they had finally shot one. McGeer, a neuroscientist at the University of British Columbia, had jumped on a plane as soon as he heard the news, flying across English bay from Vancouver to Saturna Island. Next to arrive on the scene was Murray Newman, the director of the Vancouver Aquarium, the man who had commissioned the whale hunt. Newman had promised McGeer the opportunity to dissect the brain of the dead whale. The only hitch: the animal was very much alive, swimming calmly on the end of the 600-foot harpoon line. The lack of aggression challenged all their expectations and assumptions about the notorious killers. Thought to be far too dangerous for captivity, no one had ever successfully kept a captive orca – with only a few even entertaining the notion. But the whale’s composed demeanor persuaded Newman to spare its life. McGeer’s dissection would have to wait.

When Newman had commissioned the hunt in the spring of 1964, he sought a sculpture, not a live whale. The inspiration for the hunt was his vision for the aquarium’s new British Columbia Hall of Fishes: life-size sculptures of local oceanic megafauna suspended from the ceiling. The basking shark and orca whale were the species selected, each maligned in their own right. Both an

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<sup>34</sup> Charles Siebert. “Watching Whales Watching Us.” *New York Times*. July 9, 2009.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Joe Bauer, April 2010.

artist and a fisher, Sam Burich was hired to make the whale sculpture.<sup>36</sup> It was thought that all the previous measurements of orca whales betrayed the true form of the animal since they had been molded from dead corpses. Because Newman hoped to represent the orca in perfect accuracy, the plan was to harpoon an orca in the wild, keeping the animal below the ocean's surface until divers could measure the natural mold.<sup>37</sup> After consultation with the Department of Fisheries, the location of the hunt had been chosen, an expanse of sandstone on the east point of Saturna Island, above a deep trough where pods of orcas were known to migrate. Seemingly the ideal vantage for the hunt, the location offered a 300 degree view of the ocean. Records kept by the lighthouse attendant for the previous three years indicated that killer whales passed by the point almost every day during the summer months.<sup>38</sup>

But to their surprise, not a single whale had ventured within range of the old Norwegian harpoon gun in the first eight weeks, and the two remaining hunters had decided to abandon their perch, the hunt doomed to failure. Slowly packing up camp as they nursed hangovers from their raucous night drinking homemade sake with the lighthouse attendant, Burich tossed Bauer's shaving kit far into the ocean joking about how he needed to keep his beard when he returned to civilization. Watching the kit drift away, Bauer spotted the pod of orcas approaching the shore. After a scramble to load the harpoon gun, Burich fired the line. The harpoon shot was in itself against the odds, piercing the animal in the fatty tissue behind its skull, one of the few non-vital portions of the animal. Two other orcas came to the animal's aid, helping it resurface for air as the men went out on the boat to retrieve the buoy at the end of the line. To their surprise, the animal showed no signs of aggression. They radioed the news back to Vancouver.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Jack Scott. *Vancouver Sun*. Editorial. June 3, 1964. Murray Newman Fonds, Vancouver City Archives, #619 A-3 File 6; *Vancouver Sun*. "Small Boat Battles 5-Ton Whale." July 16, 1964. p. 1.

<sup>38</sup> Pete Fletcher. "Hunt for a Sacrificial Killer Whale." *Times Colonist*. March 8, 1992. p. M1.

<sup>39</sup> Bauer, interview.

Plans were made to tow the whale back to Vancouver, dragging the whale behind on the harpoon line. But towing would not be necessary as the orca quickly learned to keep the line slack, following lockstep alongside the boat. For this reason, Bauer and Burich decided to name the whale Hound Dog in homage to its unexpected docility.<sup>40</sup> Arriving in the North Vancouver harbor the next morning, the orca was placed inside a submerged dry-dock in the North Vancouver harbor. The harpoon was removed, and McGeer administered antibiotics and liquid vitamins through a syringe with an eight foot handle.<sup>41</sup> The whale generated headlines in Vancouver – and across the world as Time and Newsweek sent reporters to cover the story, and the National Film Board produced a movie on Moby, later released in 43 countries.<sup>42</sup> The world’s top whale scientists were coming too with hopes to study every facet of the animal’s biology including its heart, brain, blood, DNA and vocalizations.<sup>43</sup> There was the hope that the super-sized organs would be valuable in furthering our understandings of human disease. Newman suggested that the study of the whale’s heart “could be invaluable in helping to cope with the problems of the human heart.”<sup>44</sup> One scientist thought that studying the orca could improve the designs of submarines. McGeer, wondering if communication with orcas would be possible, joked that advances in communication with orcas could play a role in winning the Cold War.<sup>45</sup> Though multiple aquaria made bids in excess of \$20,000 for the whale, Newman decided not to sell because of these potential scientific advances.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> “Aquarium Lands Killer Whale.” *The Province*. July 17, 1964.

<sup>41</sup> Fletcher, M2.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Unlike much of present-day orca science that seeks an intrinsic understanding of the animal, the studies were justified for entirely human purposes.

<sup>44</sup> “Whale to Leave for New Corral.” *Vancouver Sun*. July 19, 1964.

<sup>45</sup> Himie Koshevoy. “What are Whales Saying?” *The Province*. July 28, 1964. McGeer continued, probably in full jest: “Just imagine. We could tell them to hunt out enemy subs. Think of North America being ringed by pods of whales on defense for us. They could alert us where and when the enemy would attack. But the Russians might also discover the whales’ code. After that we’d have Marxian whales and Democratic whales and the fight would be on to win the uncommitted whales of the world over to our side.”

<sup>46</sup> Al Birnie. “Throw Whale Back, Residents Urge: Poll Shows Only One Wants Vancouver to Keep Moby Doll.” *Vancouver Sun*, July 1964.

A few days after the capture, a public exhibition was held to showcase the world's first captive killer whale. Although enthusiasm emanating from the marine biologists and aquarium officials, the excitement was lost on the crowd of twenty thousand as they gathered at the harbor under a steady rain.<sup>47</sup> Instead, the spectators mirrored the behavior of the whale as it slowly circled in a counter-clockwise direction, inattentive to the throngs peering down at its sleek 15-foot, 2-ton body. "I wouldn't pay good money to see a fat fish swim around," said one of the bystanders.<sup>48</sup> "I was very disappointed and so were the other people I talked to there," complained another: "It was much smaller than I expected, and it wasn't very interesting to just stand there and watch it swim."<sup>49</sup> Another onlooker described the animal as "a hunk of expensive blubber."<sup>50</sup> In all, of the 50 people interviewed by the Vancouver Sun that day, only one person thought the venture was worthwhile citing the economic potential of the whale as a tourist attraction. Though one might expect that the first exhibition of killer whales would have carried much of the flair and enthusiasm now associated with the Shamu Show, there were no proclamations of awe and no ponderings of the animal's intelligence from the Vancouver crowd.<sup>51</sup>

Since scientists were still unsure about the whale's sex, it remained officially unnamed. Vince Penfold, the assistant curator for the aquarium, passed along the scientific consensus noting that there was a "slightly better than 50 per cent" chance it was female—not exactly the boldest statement.<sup>52</sup> Originally, Burich and Bauer thought their harpooned Hound Dog was a male, in part

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<sup>47</sup> "Killer Whale to Quit Dock for Jericho Beach Pen." *Vancouver Sun*, July 19, 1964; Fred Allgood. "Docked Hound Dog Faces Wacky Trip Across Harbor." *Vancouver Sun*, July 20, 1964; For an account of the aquarium industry's perceptions of the potential for killer whale captivity before 1964, see Craig Phillips. *The Captive Sea*. 1964.

<sup>48</sup> Al Birnie. "Throw Whale Back, Residents Urge: Poll Shows Only One Wants Vancouver to Keep Moby Doll." No date, interviewing Dave Mapleton, *Vancouver Sun*, 1964. Murray Newman Fonds, Vancouver City Archives, #619 A-3 File 6.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, interviewing Oliver Gates.

<sup>50</sup> "Whale by the Tail." *Newsweek*. :p. 49. August 31, 1964.

<sup>51</sup> Al Birnie. "Throw Whale Back, Residents Urge: Poll Shows Only One Wants Vancouver to Keep Moby Doll," interviewing Mike Hubbard, *Vancouver Sun*, July 1964; Ian McDonald. *Vancouver Sun*. "Is Our Whale Calling for Poppa?" July 20, 1964, p. 1.

<sup>52</sup> "Maybe Doll is Really Dick But Shots are In For Sure." *Vancouver Sun*, July 23, 1964. Murray Newman Fonds, Vancouver City Archives, #619 A-3 File 6.

due to Bauer having glimpsed what appeared to be male genitalia during the tug-of-war following the harpooning.<sup>53</sup> The name Hound Dog encapsulated the unexpected gentleness of the animal, highlighting the subservience of the animal, the newfound potential for domestication. However, the name subtly gendered the animal as male, and Dr. McGeer had a divergent opinion, thinking the smaller dorsal fin was indicative of a female whale.<sup>54</sup> Perhaps for the simple fact that McGeer was a scientist and Bauer just a fisher, the newspapers were quick to correct their earlier reports of a bull whale: “Since it was discovered that the whale is female, a more glamorous name is being sought.”<sup>55</sup> A contest was held to name the whale, and Newman settled on the name Moby Doll, a reference to Melville’s white whale.<sup>56</sup>

Due to the earlier hesitation to confirm the whale’s sex, some took to calling the animal Moby Maybe.<sup>57</sup> In response, Penfold, the same person who declared the ambiguity, announced the animal’s femaleness just four days after his earlier admission of complete uncertainty. As the *Victoria Daily Times* reported:

Moby is definitely a doll. Vancouver’s captive killer whale, the world’s only penned specimen, was dubbed Moby Doll by her captor, Dr. Murray Newman, Vancouver Aquarium curator. But doubt was raised later whether the 17-foot mammal was a mature young lady or an immature young bull. Sunday after the 2.5 ton prize had been referred to as Moby Doll, or maybe Dick, or Moby Maybe, aquarium officials determined the whale is definitely a lady and the name Moby Doll stuck. Vince Penfold, assistant curator, said he was able to get close enough to take a discrete look and dispel doubts once and for all.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Bauer, interview.

<sup>54</sup> “Whale to Leave for New Corral.” *Vancouver Sun*. July 19, 1964.

<sup>55</sup> “Whale Gulps Down Meal of Flounder.” *Vancouver Sun*. July 21, 1964.

<sup>56</sup> Fred Allgood. “Curator Tags Lady Killer: From Now On, It’s Moby Doll.” *Vancouver Sun*. July 22, 1964; Many names were passed up in favor of Moby Doll including Jericho Jenny, Bo-Peep, and Calamity Jane. The suggestion of Bo-Peep came from a little girl named Wanda Robinson who raised two dollars for the killer whale and thought the squeaking noises it made were like peeps, Aquarium Newsletter, October 1964; Calamity Jane was suggested in reference to the indigenous protests to the captivity that warned of impending doom. “Whale Gulps Down Meal of Flounder.” *Vancouver Sun*. July 21, 1964.

<sup>57</sup> Davis MacDonald. “The Saga of Moby Doll.” *The Reader’s Digest*. April 1965. p. 34.

<sup>58</sup> *Victoria Daily Times*. “Moby’s a Doll, Maybe on a Diet.” July 27, 1964. p. 3.

No clear reasoning exists as to what Penfold's "discrete look" had found,<sup>59</sup> though one account suggests that the sex-typing was made mostly on the basis of the animal's nipples. This appears to be a rather flimsy justification given that both sexes of mammals have such physical features.<sup>60</sup>

Following the exhibition, Moby was transported across English Bay to a semi-permanent holding pen made of meshed steel at the Jericho Beach army base. As the handlers tried to funnel Moby into the pen enclosure at Jericho Beach, the orca resisted and slapped its tail on the water.<sup>61</sup> "Moby Doll lost her iron self-control and gave a display of feminine temper," reported the newspaper: "She squirmed in the water, thrashed angrily, twisted in many directions and howled... she continued to panic as the raised bow of the drydock was lowered by pumping operations and the aft gently lifted."<sup>62</sup> In nearly every account of Moby in the months that followed was colored by those same feminine expectations; Moby was to be respectable, civil, well-mannered, dignified, and unobtrusive. Moby was to be a passive and beautiful object. Almost every newspaper account of Moby was refracted through this frame of Moby as a lady. The animal's impressive docility was that of a "girl."<sup>63</sup> The refusal to eat the strange foods thrown into the pen was a matter of a "fussy lady" on a diet.<sup>64</sup> When a photograph of her captors scrubbing the fungus off her skin appeared in the paper, the caption read "she receives a beauty treatment."<sup>65</sup> When behavior suggested issues with health, the possibility of Moby being pregnant rose to the fore instead of the more obvious culprits such as her harpoon wound, refusal to eat, or the closed confinement of a 45 foot by 75 foot pen

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<sup>59</sup> The justifications were not reported in detail leaving us to assume that the animal's small size and small dorsal fin formed the basis for its sex-typing. Murray Newman and Patrick McGeer. "A Killer Whale at Vancouver Aquarium." *International Zoo Yearbook*, 6: 257-259. Zoological Society of London. 1966.; "Aquarium Head Will Seek Permanent Home for Moby." *Vancouver Sun*. August 20, 1964.

<sup>60</sup> Bauer interview.

<sup>61</sup> "Killer Whale to Quit Dock for Jericho Beach Pen." *Vancouver Sun*. July 19, 1964.

<sup>62</sup> "Moby Doll Flips Into a New Home." July 1964. Murray Newman Fonds. #619 A-3 File 6.

<sup>63</sup> *The Reader's Digest*. p. 34.

<sup>64</sup> *Victoria Daily Times*. "Moby's a Doll, Maybe on a Diet." July 27, 1964. p. 3.

<sup>65</sup> *Vancouver Times*, "Argument Settled, Moby Doll a 'killer,'" October 1, 1964.

which only had a depth of 10 feet at low tide.<sup>66</sup> Scientists used the gender distinction to explain their observations of the whale. William Schevill, the Harvard whale scientist, explained the whale's failure to respond to distant calls along a gender distinction: "The males among whales are the gabby ones. The females are usually quiet."<sup>67</sup>

So heavily patrolled were the boundaries of Moby's femaleness that sometimes the news itself amounted to Moby's deviancy from the framing as lady. The loud vocalizations were notable as aberrations to Moby's lady-like manners:

Moby Doll forgot she was a lady for a time on Tuesday and whistled at her captor Sam Burich. It may not have been a polite thing for a lady to do, but Burich was delighted and so were other Vancouver aquarium officials. Burich, who harpooned the killer whale two weeks ago and led her into the harbor, sat on the edge of her pen Tuesday and whistled. At first Moby Doll, a 17-foot, two and a half ton monster, reacted in typical lady-like fashion -- she paid no attention. Soon the serenade proved too much of a temptation. First she murmured, then spouted and feebly whistled back."<sup>68</sup>

Here we see the standards of feminine politeness, and the familiar trope of the tempted woman. These expectations soon had solidified into a full-blown narrative: Moby Doll was a damsel in distress. Soon after the sex-typing, one headline asked: "Is Our Whale Calling for Poppa?" and placed Moby into a romantic narrative: "Scientists are hoping the bleeping voice of Vancouver's captured female killer whale will turn into a siren's song," read the Vancouver Sun, "They hope her calls might entice a brave or amorous young bull close enough that he might be captured alive."<sup>69</sup> This story continued until Moby's final days when the Vancouver Sun reported that Newman was on an exhibition to find a mate for the lonely Doll. When the underwater hydrophone picked up the sounds of other killer whales communicating with Moby, the headlines ran: "Moby Doll Seems

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<sup>66</sup> "Whale by the Tail." *Newsweek*. p. 49. August 31, 1964; *Star Weekly*. "The Saga of Moby Doll." September 26, 1964. "After weeks of anxious concern about whether she was pregnant (she probably isn't) and healthy (she definitely is), the only killer whale..." Just two weeks after the *Star Weekly* published this proclamation of health, Moby Doll was dead.

<sup>67</sup> "Whale by the Tail." *Newsweek*. August 31, 1964. p. 49.

<sup>68</sup> *Victoria Daily Times*, "Whale Gets Friendly, Whistles at Captor." July 30, 1964, p. 9.

<sup>69</sup> Ian McDonald. *Vancouver Sun*. "Is Our Whale Calling for Poppa?" July 20, 1964, p. 1.

Deserted by Hoped-for Boy Friends.”<sup>70</sup> Scientists joined the media in this match-making, hoping that Moby Doll would “entice another killer whale, preferably a male, to keep it from pining away in loneliness.”<sup>71</sup> Finally, the story was gaining epic form: a lonely female whale who was calling out for the help of her male lover. Yet the story of Moby’s gender troubles was as fictional as her namesake.

How much significance should be attributed to the gendering of a single killer whale? Does an unfortunate but basic scientific gaffe really say much about how people related to the whale or anything about society in general? I would insist that the discourses on Moby’s gender do matter. While the private reasons and subconscious biases of the scientists who sex-typed the animal as a female will never be known, it seems that seeing Moby as a female was the path of least resistance. The animal was originally seen as a bull<sup>72</sup> and dissenting opinions were recurrent throughout Moby’s captivity, but, in the end, there was much more traction in the idea of the whale being a lady. Perhaps the docility of the animal reminded them more of women, a better fit within the gendered dualisms of enlightenment culture: women, nature, passive objects on one side of the divide with men, culture, and active subjects on the other. Perhaps the scientists were simply venturing their best guess, sure that any further hesitation would be incompatible with their role as the scientific authority on such matters. But even so, what historical significance lies in this sexualization of the whale?

I argue that this romantic narrative functioned to insidiously silence the critics of captivity as it muffled the abhorrent conditions for the whale. The cacophony of coverage describing the troubles of a lonely, embittered lady whale drowned out a story of a suffering creature. Moby’s poor health was dismissed off-hand as feminine loneliness. The newspapers covered such criticism in the first days of Moby’s confinement but that faded in regards to the gendered storyline. Mrs. Florence

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<sup>70</sup> Fred Allgood. “Moby Doll Seems Deserted by Hoped-for Boy Friends.” *Vancouver Sun*. July 31, 1964. Murray Newman Fonds. #619 A-3 File 6.

<sup>71</sup> “Whale’s Wound a Cause for Concern.” *The Province*. July 22, 1964.

<sup>72</sup> *The Province*. July 18, 1964. Murray Newman Fonds, Vancouver City Archives, #619 A-3 File 6.



Barr referenced the intelligence of the animals before claiming that the orca “suffers just like a human being.”<sup>73</sup> D.H. Beeching, the provincial director of the SPCA argued that the endeavor was “crazy” and made a pointed comparison, “Thank God [Newman] didn’t want to do a model of a Roman Circus; it would have been hard on the Christians.”<sup>74</sup> This variety of empathy led Dennis Price, the president of the Vancouver Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA), to call for “a quicker way to render the whale senseless” so as to avoid any unnecessary suffering.<sup>75</sup>

The most vehement criticism came from Maisie Hurley, the editor of the *Native Voice*, whose doomsday prophesy was featured in the *Vancouver Sun*. Hurley predicted that a terrible disaster would befall Vancouver for capturing Moby and that the animal would soon die.<sup>76</sup> Although she was a Welsh immigrant, Hurley was a leading figure in the indigenous community, working closely with the Gitksan and having been given the title of Chief Slim-Klux, Mother of the Fin-Back Whales, a reference to orcas.<sup>77</sup> To support her claims, she related the story of an Indian princess who was brought back to life through an agreement with killer whales. Hurley warned that the capture of Moby violated that negotiation.<sup>78</sup> Newspaper columnists were dismissive of her claims, suggesting that there were Native legends that could be used to say most anything and calling such indigenous stories “a rather hilarious bit of byplay.”<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> *Victoria Daily Times*. July 22, 1964. p. 2

<sup>74</sup> Fletcher, M2-3.

<sup>75</sup> “Aquarium Lands Killer Whale.” *The Province*. July 17, 1964.

<sup>76</sup> Moira Farrow, “Whale Will Bring Disaster to City.” *Vancouver Sun*, July?? (no date) 1964. Murray Newman Fonds, Vancouver City Archives, #619 A-3 File 6.

<sup>77</sup> For more on Hurley’s names, see: “High Honor Bestowed On Maisie,” *The Native Voice*, October, 1964, Vol. 18, no. 10, p. 3: “Maisie Hurley was twice honored by the Native tribes of the Skeena River, the second time in 1956 when the House of Haklgout gave her a Chief’s name Men-glug-um-kee-pikee, the Eagle that flies low and spreads its wings over the people to protect them. Earlier in 1949, Chief Arthur McDames of Kitsequecla (Skeena Crossing) gave her the senior names of his house and made her a Chief of his clan, the Clan of the Lathaila, which belongs to the House of Gookshan. The name she received was Shim-clux -- Mother of the Finback Whales of the House of Gookshan, who was given power over 14 villages. ...”

<sup>78</sup> Moira Farrow, “Whale Will Bring Disaster to City.” *Vancouver Sun*, July?? (no date) 1964. Murray Newman Fonds, Vancouver City Archives, #619 A-3 File 6.

<sup>79</sup> Himie Koshevoy. “What are Whales Saying?” *The Province*. July 28, 1964.

As those critics disappeared from the pages, Moby's condition only worsened. When Ted Griffin, the director of the Seattle Aquarium, secretly visited Moby a month after he was captured he described an animal with lifeless eyes. "The whale looked gaunt, skin-pocked without a sheen, its movements lethargic."<sup>80</sup> Re-reading accounts of Moby Doll gives the impression that he was suffering from a state of depression common to captive killer whales, drooping dorsal fin. Yet, however obvious the suffering of Moby Doll, the story was not fit to print. Lost in the barrage of feminized imaginings of Moby's inner life, was the wholly apparent state of suffering for the a 17 foot animal trapped in a 40 by 60 foot cage, the rough equivalent of a harpooned human stuffed inside a hot tub.

Indeed, the consequences of the false gendering are real in that Moby Doll is forever castrated in our recountings. Even after the autopsy confirmed that Moby was not a Doll, the earlier sex-typing remained. Explaining why the media was banned of taking pictures of the corpse, Newman employed an analogy in a familiar template of femaleness, saying, "It would be like photographing the body of your poor old maiden aunt."<sup>81</sup> And nearly forty years later, a *New Yorker* feature on killer whales retold the story of Moby's capture, captivity and death but failed to re-gender him as male.<sup>82</sup> It seems that the historical memory of Moby is as inaccurate as the first hurried observations.<sup>83</sup>

Of course, the scientists and journalists did give voice to Moby. Yet, the voice was that of a ventriloquist doll, an imagined voice of the female other. In this way, anthropomorphism functioned to deny Moby the empathy that was so brutally obvious. The silencing of Moby was not a function

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<sup>80</sup> Ted Griffin *Namu: Quest for the Killer Whale*, 65.

<sup>81</sup> "Moby Doll, Misnamed, Needed Sea." *The Province*. October 10, 1964.

<sup>82</sup> Susan Orlean. "Where's Willy: Everybody's favorite whale tries to make it on his own." *The New Yorker*. September 23, 2002.

<sup>83</sup> So imprecise is our attention to history that Philip Hoare's recent *Leviathan, or the Whale*, scrambles the history of Moby Doll on three accounts in just three sentences claiming that it was Newman, the curator, who did the harpooning, that Moby was kept alive on horses' hearts and baby seals, and that the public reaction was "the first real indication of a new attitude to whales." (348) The first is a factual mix-up, the second inattention to detail, and the third a fiction.

of science's inability to translate the systems of clicks and whistles but one of humans unwilling to empathize across species lines. These feminized babblings attributed to Moby were an elaborate ritual in their own right, a story that her captors told to themselves to distance themselves from the violent exercise of power embedded in Moby's capture and captivity. In retrospect, Doll may have been the most appropriate of surnames. Indeed, to her captors, Moby was a plaything for their imaginations. The name "Doll" unwittingly reveals that Moby was whatever her captors dressed him to be, a moldable medium for the projection of human gender anxieties. Lacking an understanding of the orca – scientific or otherwise – Moby was mistakenly cross-dressed as a lady whale, his every action conforming to a gender script foreign to his nature. Moby's captors had no patience for mystery or androgyny, perhaps seeing their inability to determine the animal's sex as an admission of their scientific ignorance.

If you were to read every story written about orca whales, the narrative that would rise to the surface again and again is that of how humans came to discover the soft and sensitive underbelly of a long misunderstood beast. In *Free Willy*, the Hollywood version, the orphaned cleaning boy at Sea Land plays the hero, and the turning point is the touching moment when the childlike wonder of the boy mystically connects to the other-worldly intelligence of the fearsome killer whale. In the contemporary journalistic version, you just replace the floppy-haired, unfortunate boy with a white-coated scientist and pivot the plot around a paragraph about Moby. According to the familiar story, it was in 1964 that "attitudes began to change."<sup>84</sup> "Moby Doll's behavior eliminated in two months a notorious reputation which had been held for many decades," writes one scientist: "The 'true nature' of the killer whale was at last revealed."<sup>85</sup> Moby is given credit for awakening "the first true glimmer

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<sup>84</sup> Charlie Anderson. "B.C.. Waters are Now a Safe Haven for Our Whales. It Wasn't Always that Way." *The Province*. October 1, 1997. B1.

<sup>85</sup> Stefani Hewlett. Correspondence to Kamloop's News. January 19, 1981. Robin Best Library Archives.

of public sympathy for a creature historically feared and hated.”<sup>86</sup> Before Moby, there “was no appreciation for [killer whales] and no desire to conserve them [as] ambassadors.”<sup>87</sup> In this narrative, scientists are cast as the saviors who assured that orca whales would no longer “be treated as a vermin to be destroyed.”<sup>88</sup>

But as the memory of Moby Doll has been whittled down to this totem symbolizing science’s ever-growing appreciation of the killer whale’s true nature, the body of scientific knowledge about orcas has grown immensely in the last half century. Starting in the 1970s with Michael Bigg who began his research by dissecting Moby Doll’s corpse and into the present with John Ford who attended Moby’s exhibition as a young boy, scientists have gleaned incredible insights into the complex social worlds of orcas: new understandings of pod-specific diets and dialects, whale subspecies and genetics, breeding patterns and food sharing, individual identifications and demographic mechanisms, even studies describing the nascent forms of orca whale culture.<sup>89</sup> All of this research is laudable, functioning as an implicit argument to protect the vulnerable populations of wild orcas, a sentiment that is rather new in the context of settler society’s historical relationship to orcas. However, the plot sequence of this metanarrative—a steady progression from a state of brutish ignorance to profound understanding thanks to “discoveries” by scientists and exhibits by education aquariums—has yet to be questioned.<sup>90</sup>

Even as this narrative has revealed much about the complex social lives of orcas, the story has a function of concealing both competing narratives and long-standing ways of knowing *Orcinus orca*. The tired narrative conceals the multiple legacies of Moby Doll, the public and private

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<sup>86</sup> Erich Hoyt. “Whales in Touch.” *Beautiful British Columbia*. Spring 1984.

<sup>87</sup> Murray Newman. “Farewell Bjossa: BC’s last captive killer whale is gone.” *Diver Magazine*. 1992.

<sup>88</sup> Aquarium History of Moby Doll, No date. Robin Best Library archives, Vancouver Aquarium.

<sup>89</sup> See among others: Michael Bigg et al. “Social organization and genealogy of resident killer whales (*Orcinus orca*) in the coastal waters of British Columbia and Washington State.” *Report of the International Whaling Commission*. 1990. p. 383-405; John Ford. “Vocal traditions among resident killer whales (*Orcinus orca*) in coastal waters of British Columbia.” *Canadian Journal of Zoology* 69. 1991. P. 1454-1483; Luke Rendell and Hal Whitehead. Culture in whales and dolphins. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 24. 2001. p 309-324.

<sup>90</sup> See Hoyt, Francis and Hewlett, Newman, and Harmon for accounts that, however excellent, follow this plot.

discourses over how Moby was to be known, categorized, treated, and remembered. In this rather emaciated rendering, the peculiar fixation on Moby's femaleness is forgotten, and the heated debates about the rightfulness of captivity are postponed until the arrival of Greenpeace in the 1970s. Even more problematically, the contemporary narrative has the consequence of pushing indigenous relationships to orcas from the margins to off the screen entirely as it quietly assumes that science was the first on the scene just as Moby was the first whale under the microscope. Rather than conceiving of itself as one way of knowing among many, science insists on the packaging itself as the true way of knowing the orca.

Rereading the story of Moby Doll allows for fresh questions to emerge that trouble these stale narratives. What were the ways of knowing used to "story" Moby? How and why were these different narratives constructed? By whom and for whom were these stories told? What do the stories say about the storytellers? And finally, what would Moby have to say if given the chance? My research suggests that by returning to the first exhibition of orca whales, it is possible to see through some of the murky layers of cultural meaning that now cloud our view of the killer whale. As Moby was showcased, the black and white splotches of Moby's skin failed to lend themselves to the impression of a tuxedoed stage performer, and the small confines of the pen prevented even the wildest imaginations from tossing the breaching whale through a succession of fire-lit hoops. Indeed, at the first exhibition, the contemporary wardrobe of social constructions had not yet been stitched, and the physical infrastructure of the Oceanarium had not yet been molded. As Moby circled in the tiny sea pen, even animal welfare reformers failed to see a prisoner behind bars. The contingencies of present-day social constructions were laid bare.

However, to examine the orca whale in its initial move to center stage is *not* to see the true nature of the orca – precisely the opposite. Instead, the story of Moby Doll is about impossibility of escaping our social constructions and the inevitability of seeing through the lens of our expectations,

assumptions, and culturally-informed values. Moby tells the history of the hurried application of all-too-human frameworks by which to view the animal. Like the first lenses offered at the eye doctor's office, the perceptions of Moby were blurred and arbitrary, distorting the animal more than bringing its particularity into focus. Strangely enough, Moby Doll was storied most passionately through the framework of gender, placed into a human narrative of romance. Rather than providing insight into the inner life of the orca, the newspapers projected Vancouver's own private anxieties about gender onto Moby's body and behavior.

Though Moby is often given credit for teaching humans about the "true nature" of orca whales, the familiar misguided sentiments remained in his eulogy. "The next one may not be the same," remarked Newman, "Moby Doll was extraordinarily tame. Most of them would probably eat us if they got the chance – gently of course."<sup>91</sup> Despite this first impulse to see Moby as exceptional by returning to deep-seated biases against killer whales, the legacy of Moby was considerable. Perhaps the biggest legacy was the emergence of the captive display industry itself. The partial success of Moby Doll made the long-appealing possibility of a killer whale show seem possible. A price tag had been placed on orcas, and both fishers and adventurous entrepreneurs were paying attention. The orca spectacle industry was booming with Sea World grossing more than \$35,000,000 from its three killer whale operations in 1968.<sup>92</sup> The global market for live killer whales was adjusting to keep pace as the price for a live orca had skyrocketed, from just \$5,000 a whale up to at least \$100,000 by the end of the decade, with some offers even breaking the million dollar threshold.<sup>93</sup> Though Moby himself did not provoke the sea changes in orca-human relations that people have since given him credit for, he did inspire an entirely new economy for their display – and with it, a proliferation of new forms of intimate encounter between humans and orcas.

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<sup>91</sup> *Life Magazine*. Vol 57, No 19. November 6, 1964. p. 114-115.

<sup>92</sup> Paul Spong. "Orcas Open Symposium." *Vancouver Aquarium Newsletter*, Vol. XIII. No. 1. Jan-Feb 1969. p. 3.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid*, p. 3.

### III. Tripping with Skana: science, subjectivity, and telepathy in the New Age

“The whale’s the highest creature. Believe you me, baby, and I’ll prove it to you one of these days, see? I won’t prove it, excuse me Skana, I won’t prove it, the whale will prove it. Let me tell you, as soon as I can get some liquid crystals in my hand, the whale will start talking to us, talking to us in English. In words that we can see, like the I Ching....

I take droogs and they said, Why do you take droogs, Dr. Spong? And I said, It helps me work. Helps me tune into the killer whale space. Cause when I take droogs, the killer whale warms up her nose, and steam comes off her nose, and who knows. They didn’t understand, man, but that’s ok, they’ll come round, y’see, cause the I Ching says so.

I was thinking of destroying the Vancouver Public Aquarium, and letting the whale do. I was just beginning to get into Skana’s space, just beginning to feel what the whale needed, what the whale wanted, WHAT THE WHALE WAS, just beginning to feel it, man.”

—Paul Spong, uninvited address to the Western Psychological Association, June 1969<sup>94</sup>

A hippy raving about the transformative power of drugs in a public park was not in itself a newsworthy event during the summer of 1969. But the fact that this particular hippy was a professor of Psychiatry at the University of British Columbia and the lead killer whale researcher at the Vancouver Aquarium brought the rant to the front-page.<sup>95</sup> Expelled from the aquarium premises the day before, Dr. Paul Spong had planted himself on a velvet pillow outside the entrance to the aquarium. Dressed in loose-fitting linen clothes, his long hair flowing into a full beard, Spong looked every bit the iconic hippy. Scattered around him was an eclectic collection of musical instruments: a guitar, a flute, a zither, a sitar, a mandolin, a tambourine, a conch shell, a three-stringed gartwang along with a mess of electronic sound amplifying equipment with no viable power supply. Spong demanded entry to the aquarium so that he could swim nude with Skana and play her music.<sup>96</sup> “I wanted the whole bloody city to know [Skana] loves electronic music,” proclaimed Spong, “she’ll

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<sup>94</sup> *The Georgia Straight*. Interview by Stan Persky. No date given (circa 1969). Robin Best Library Archives. Also cited in Weyler, p. 203.

<sup>95</sup> Murray Newman. *Life in a Fishbowl*, 116.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid*, 116.

flip her skull when she hears it.” Spong was ecstatic: “When I start playing this stuff, Skana is going to start dancing all over the place.”<sup>97</sup>

Earlier in the month, Spong had delivered a public lecture about the results of his nearly two years of research on Skana, the aquarium’s first orca put on permanent display. Claiming that Skana was “starved for stimulation,” Spong called for the Vancouver Aquarium to release her from the harmful “sensory deprivation environment.”<sup>98</sup> On the basis of his observations, Spong asserted that the acoustically monotone pool was causing “abnormal mental functions,” and that orca’s strong familial bonds made the isolated captive environmental unsuitable.<sup>99</sup> Murray Newman—the director of the aquarium and Spong’s employer – wryly responded to his position by suggesting an alternative solution, “Perhaps if we put several killer whales together it might solve the problem.”<sup>100</sup>

However dissonant Newman’s suggestion was to Spong’s findings, expansion was the policy of the Vancouver Aquarium in the years to come. In 1966, the Aquarium was struggling to survive: a worker strike had led to a 30 percent drop in attendance and Newman was contemplating leaving for better employment.<sup>101</sup> But the arrival of Skana had boosted the attendance and profits of the aquarium considerably.<sup>102</sup> A larger killer whale pool was around the corner, and a cadre of killer whales would be shipped in for further display and research. By 1970, dozens of aquariums had acquired killer whales and soon laws would regulate the captures from local waters.<sup>103</sup> Of course, Spong and his musical friends would play no part in future studies. Spong’s expulsion from the aquarium was accompanied by a similar dismissal from the University of British Columbia. Called

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<sup>97</sup> Moira Farrow. “Skana Loses Spong the Skinnydipper.” *Vancouver Sun*. June 16, 1969. Murray Newman Fonds. 619 A4 File 3.

<sup>98</sup> Weyler, 208.

<sup>99</sup> Ron Pervical. “Friend Wants Skana Freed.” *Vancouver Sun*. June 1969. Murray Newman Fonds, 619 A4 File 3.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> Vancouver Province. “Aquarium Sinking: Curator to Quit?” June 14, 1966.

<sup>102</sup> Vancouver Sun. “Newman Views Aquarium as Big Economic Source.” April 22, 1969.

<sup>103</sup> See Hoyt, 256-8.



into a meeting with his department head, Spong was fired and forced to check in downstairs in the psychiatric ward.<sup>104</sup>

Though brief, Skana and Spong's relationship had long-standing consequences for environmental activism, the future of cetacean captivity, and the New Age understanding of orcas and other dolphins. Rex Weyler's history of Greenpeace provides a detailed history of Spong's involvement in the organization's transition to the "Save the Whales" campaign.<sup>105</sup> Instead of revisiting this history, my focus here will be on the history of how dolphins (orcas included) became an icon of the New Age movement. Spong's relationship to Skana will function as the first case study of how these creatures have inspired conversion experiences in those who have worked intimately with them. To complement that history, an account of Dr. John Lilly's research on dolphins and consciousness will be used to further explore the wellsprings to New Age beliefs about cetaceans during this time period. Though Lilly's research involved bottlenose dolphins, his research provides a critical context for Spong's studies while also speaking more broadly to the changes in perceptions to intelligent marine mammals during the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As historians note, whales and dolphins were not imbued with intelligence let alone spiritual enlightenment prior to the 1950s, instead being seen as "huge kegs of fat (useful for making soap), meat (good to feed to chickens), and fertilizer (best thing to do with what was left after you took the fat and meat)."<sup>106</sup> This section highlights the incredible changes in perception from the days before Moby Doll to the present adoration of whales and dolphins.

Like with Moby Doll, questions about Skana's sexual identity arose upon her arrival in Vancouver. Ted Griffin had been busy since visiting Moby Doll, fine-tuning a technique for corralling pods of orcas with a seine net. An orca bounty hunter of sorts, Griffin had succeeded in

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<sup>104</sup> Newman, 108.

<sup>105</sup> Weyler, 205-235.

<sup>106</sup> D. Graham Burnett. "A Mind in the Water." *Orion Magazine*. May/June 2010.

capturing dozens of killer whales—keeping some for display at his aquarium in Seattle and selling others to aquariums in the United States, including the sale of the burgeoning star Shamu to Sea World. One whale remained from his latest round-up, and Griffin decided to tow Walter the Whale up to the Vancouver Boat Show. Griffin had been inspired to this line of work by his trip to see Moby Doll, and he knew that Murray Newman sought a whale for permanent display at the Vancouver Aquarium.<sup>107</sup>

Griffin's tank was rather crude: a small plastic pool that he would refill with tap water each day. But despite the makeshift display, Walter was a hit in Vancouver. Newman wanted the whale – and a deal was struck with payments coming to Griffin each month the whale survived captivity. Not wanting a repeat of the embarrassing gender confusion with Moby, Newman insisted on a close examination of the whale's sex – finding that Walter was a female whale. The name “Skana” was chosen for the whale, a reference to *S'quana*, the Haida word for killer whales. At Pat McGeer's persuasion, Newman sought to diversify the scientific team that would study Skana beyond the typical zoologists they had on staff.<sup>108</sup> McGeer recommended hiring Dr. Paul Spong, a promising young scholar hailing from New Zealand who had received a PhD in psychology from UCLA. Spong had experience researching the central nervous system of primates as well as the pathways of auditory and visual stimuli in the brain.<sup>109</sup> His research proposal to Newman was to study those same basic pathways with orcas. Though studies had been done on the acoustic capabilities of the whales, no research existed on the visual acuity of orcas.

Spong began his research with a simple experimental design. Christopher Whiting, his collaborator, describes the parameters:

It was designed to test the whale's powers of observation, and it was also a psychological test to see what she could be taught. The object was for her to touch a two-line card in

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<sup>107</sup> Griffin, 216-8.

<sup>108</sup> Newman, 110.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid, 110-1.

preference to a one-line card. Skana was supposed to come out of the water and choose between the two cards. Gradually, the two lines got closer together, more like one line. Every time she picked the two-line card, she would get a fish.<sup>110</sup>

But halfway through the replications, Spong and Whiting encountered mind-boggling results:

For a while she scored high -- about 80 per cent accuracy -- then all of the sudden she turned around and in protest hit 100 per cent wrong. We know it was in protest because she did it something like 100 times in a row.<sup>111</sup>

Spong's interpretation of the unexpected results was that Skana was bored of the repetitious iterations of the study. Her refusal to accept the reward structure moved Spong to replace the fish reward with alternative prizes, discovering that Skana preferred rewards of music more than food with a particular preference to new sounds and Beethoven.<sup>112</sup>

Spong was astounded. He decided that we would have to reevaluate more than his reward mechanisms and question the assumptions he brought to the experiment as a scientist, his very approach to Skana as a mere object of inquiry. Spong had begun to notice Skana studying him, manipulating his results and conducting its own experiments on him.<sup>113</sup> Later, as Spong became to approach Skana on a level outside the boundaries of formal science, he began to observe even more strange behaviors:

Early one morning I was sitting on a training platform at the edge of Skana's pool, dangling my bare feet in the water. Skana approached me slowly, as she usually did, until she was within a few inches of my feet. Then, suddenly and without warning, she opened her mouth and slashed it quickly across my feet, so that I could feel her teeth dragging across both the tops and the soles of my feet. Naturally, though probably with a slow reaction time, I jerked my feet out of the water. After a pause for reflection and recovery from shock, I put my feet back in the water. Again Skana approached and slashed her open mouth across my feet. Again I jerked them out of the water, and after a while put them back in, only to have her and myself repeat the procedure. We went around in this circle ten or eleven times, until finally I could sit calmly with my feet in the water, controlling my urge to flinch as she

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<sup>110</sup> Charles Flowers. "Between the harpoon and the whale." *New York Times*. August 24, 1975. ER: Proquest.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> "Explorations and Experiments: Professor Plays Music to Study Whales By." UBC Alumni Chronicle. Summer 1969. p. 1-2. Robin Best Library Archives; Ron Pervical. "Friend Wants Skana Freed." *Vancouver Sun*. June 1969. Murray Newman Fonds, 619 A4 File 3.

<sup>113</sup> Spong in McIntyre, 173.

flashed her teeth across my feet. Then she stopped. Remarkably, I no longer felt afraid. She had very effectively and quickly deconditioned my fear of her!<sup>114</sup>

Spong felt that desire for intimacy was mutual. Instead of continuing with his planned experiments, Spong began to approach Skana in new ways. He invited many of his musician friends to the aquarium to play music for Skana. He started swimming nude with Skana. Due to this more intimate interactions, Spong's final observations were not typical of scientists: "I concluded that *Orcinus orca* is... exquisitely self-controlled and aware of the world around it, a being possessed of a zest for life and a healthy sense of humor..."<sup>115</sup> His depictions of Skana as "the highest thing alive" could well have been descriptions of himself at the moment.<sup>116</sup> Perhaps the same process of projection from accounts of Moby Doll is occurring here with Spong.

However novel and bizarre Spong's studies on killer whales may seem, his research was not without precedent.<sup>117</sup> Indeed, Dr. John Lilly, one of the most well-known scientists of the 1960s, had embarked on a similar journey into the mind of the orca's cetacean cousin, the bottlenose dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*). In the early 1950s Lilly had pioneered a surgical technique for non-invasively implanting electrodes in mammalian brains. Lilly's interest in brain states led him to invent a sensory

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<sup>114</sup> Spong in McIntyre, 173-4. Spong provided another account of this moment in his relationship to Skana that was written less for the scientific audience and more for the counter-culture. In his interview with Stan Persky as printed in the *Georgia Straight*, Spong says of Skana: "I have climbed on her belly, on her back, I have put my arms around her, and put my head in her mouth, I have put my feet in her mouth, and she has gone across my feet – pshhhhhew! – so the top of her teeth went across here, and the bottom of her teeth across here, just enough to let me know that Yin is yin and Yang is yang And let it all hang out, baby Let it all hang out."

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

<sup>116</sup> *The Georgia Straight*. Interview by Stan Persky. No date given (circa 1969). Robin Best Library Archives.

<sup>117</sup> Graham Burnett, a scholar on cetacean cultural history, argues that Lilly's vision drove Greenpeace towards whale activism – with a "Lilly clone" named Paul Spong at the wheel. Though Burnett is right to note the influence of Lilly, he goes too far when he simply casts Spong as a clone of Lilly. Despite the similar biographical arcs of Spong and Lilly – promising young scientists whose mystical encounters with the cetacean mind provokes a psychedelic exploration of their own consciousness – their subsequent bodies of work differ in important ways. Spong's experiences led him to the wild orcas, to environmental activism and scientific research on behalf of whale conservation. Lilly's experience led him inward, to the exploration of his own consciousness as well as the cosmic connections between self and god, belief and reality, dolphins and the divine. See Burnett, *Orion Magazine*. 2010.

deprivation tank, a dark saline vat where a person's mind is left to wander inward as senses faded into the background. Believing that the tank environment led to exceptional levels of awareness and sensory acuity, Lilly wondered about the mind of intelligent mammals whose brains and societies had evolved in this state of immersion.<sup>118</sup> Neurological research on the large-brained marine mammals seemed the logical convergence of his two areas of innovation, and, as chance had it, Marine Studios in Florida had recently succeeded in keeping bottlenose dolphins alive in captivity. So in 1955 he left the National Institute of Health with his talking dolphin Elvar in tow and began using his electrode mapping techniques on a cadre of dolphins, and by 1958, he had his own facilities in the Virgin Islands and hundreds of thousands in government grants.<sup>119</sup>

Tapping into the idealistic energy of the time, Lilly's dolphin research quickly expanded beyond the simple monitoring of brain states, aiming to probe the very nature of non-human communication and consciousness. Lilly sought to analyze his growing archive of dolphin vocalizations in order to break the language barrier between humans and dolphins.<sup>120</sup> One of Lilly's most successful experiments involved isolating one of his interns, Margaret Howe, in a partially flooded room with a dolphin named Peter for more than two months, wondering what would happen when a human and dolphin only had each other to communicate with for a long period of time.<sup>121</sup> Though his attempts at one-to-one translation stalled, Lilly felt that his dolphin research was coming into contact with "Something, or Someone, who was on the other side of a transparent

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<sup>118</sup> Michael Kieran. "Tanks for the trip down memory lane." *The Globe and Mail*. February, 9, 1981. ER Lexis/Nexis. Citing Lilly's research.

<sup>119</sup> Mind in the Waters, 73. D. Graham Burnett. "A Mind in the Water." *Orion Magazine*. May/June 2010.

<sup>120</sup> It seems that Lilly's claims of interspecies communication were not well received by mainstream marine mammalogists. Reviewing Lilly's early work, Joseph Curtis Moore makes fun of Lilly's optimistic claims: "...Dr. Lilly himself is informally illustrated in five of the photographs in the books and formally and splendidly portrayed on the back of the dust jacket. These photographs will be of sentimental value if Dr. Lilly does teach dolphins to communicate vocally with man, and should even be enlarged in future editions if the dolphins begin to read books." *Journal of Mammalogy*. Vol. 43, No. 2 (May, 1962), p. 286. ER: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1377123>

<sup>121</sup> Lilly, *The Mind of a Dolphin*. p. 200-209.

barrier which up to this point we hadn't even seen."<sup>122</sup> Rather than a dictionary for interspecies translation, Lilly instead found the portents of an intelligent consciousness below the surface of their sounds. As he immersed himself in the world of his dolphins, Lilly perceived barriers of his own making, limitations based in his own basic assumptions and cultural beliefs. He noted that "one's current expectations determine, within certain limits, the results attained with a particular animal at that particular time."<sup>123</sup>

Believing that the barriers to communication were entirely self-imposed, Lilly turned his attention to his own mind once again, this time incorporating Eastern meditation techniques and powerful psychedelic substances into his use of flotation tanks. Lilly devised meditations that were meant to dissolve the culturally imposed limits to his mind, believing that "All and every thing that one can imagine exists."<sup>124</sup> By ingesting large and frequent doses of LSD and ketamine, Lilly hoped to make his mind more porous to other-than-human consciousness.<sup>125</sup> Thinking that dolphins had brains of similar complexity as his own, he shared his drugs with the dolphins, observing euphoric and strange behaviors in the psychedelic cetaceans as they seemed to probe the earth with their sonar.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>123</sup> Lilly, "A Feeling of Weirdness." In McIntyre, 71.

<sup>124</sup> *Center of the Cyclone*, 51. Lilly's worldview advanced a strong version of the New Age belief in co-creative idealism, the idea that humans collectively shape reality through their own mental processes. See *Center of the Cyclone*, 210.

<sup>125</sup> LSD proved that a minuscule amount of chemical alteration could cause incredible shifts in the perception of the world. Psychedelic experiences confirmed that the world could not be interpreted through old ideas of objectivity and rational thought, instead indicating the importance of intuitive, subjective insight. See Kimberly Allyn Hewitt.

"Psychedelics and psychosis: LSD and changing ideas of mental illness, 1943—1966." Dissertation, 2002. ER Proquest. p. 1.

<sup>126</sup> In this context, it is important to read Lilly's conclusions – as well as Spong's positions and New Ager's worldviews – through the lens of their drug experiences. The text should be framed from the perspective of their state of mind at the time. We must make note of the instances where the psychedelic experience brings one through the complex landscape of euphoria or paranoia. Such a reading is essential not because the drug use diminishes in any way the significance of the text; but to the contrary, such a reading allows us to explore the historical role of the 1960s counter-culture's pharmacopeia, to illuminate the critical but as-of-yet-unexamined ethno-botany of the 1960s culture. Indeed, the revolution wasn't just a sector of the North American youth rallying against the establishment of post-war traditionalism, conformism, technologism, and consumerism, it was those people doing so in concert with particular psychedelic plants and substances. To deny the agency of the LSD and marijuana in the thoughts and actions of the individuals is to deny the natural and cultural components to the history. Though it is likely that the people who lived the Summer of Love would insist on the centrality of the drug experience, historians have yet to adjust their tools of interpretation to account

Of course, many found his research methods to be on the fringe of acceptable science. However, the power of Lilly's work came from this "far out" nature of his claims,<sup>127</sup> so easily condemned as the madness of genius terribly warped by large and frequent doses of horse tranquilizers – yet so thoroughly observed and meticulously detailed in the formality of a scientist that resists those guttural jolts of skepticism. Indeed, he never abandoned the pillars of his scientific training, seeking to always "maintain a dispassionate and objective point of view."<sup>128</sup> His body of work in the years that followed – *the Center of the Cyclone*, *the Scientist*, *the Dyadic Cyclone*, and *the Science of Belief* – points to the success of his explorations on the fringes of consciousness. Lilly described encounters with an assortment of non-human beings, including guardian angels, demons, extra-terrestrials, and spirits of all sorts. Lilly believed that the mind operated under programming from other-than-human beings, and that his thoughts were merely the channeling of other-dimensional beings. To Lilly, the large dramas of the world were really the interplay between the malevolent Solid State Intelligence (SSI) and the Earth Coincidence Control Office (ECCO), an organization to which Lilly had devoted himself.

Though most scientists would be quick to dismiss these thoughts as madness simply for the lack of acceptance within larger society, Lilly had the confidence to see them as existentially valid for having been formed.<sup>129</sup> Lilly was well aware that the results of his self-experimentation would be

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for the subjective position of mind-altering plants and chemicals. See: Interview with David Jay Brown. "From Here to Alternity and Beyond." ER: <http://www.mavericksofthemind.com/lilly-int.htm>.

<sup>127</sup> As one reviewer of the book noted, "what today we scorn as the visions of mystics, tomorrow may be the common knowledge of unexceptional schoolboys." Nolan Miller. "Review" *The Antioch Review*. Vol. 36, No. 3. Summer 1978. P. 386.

<sup>128</sup> Lilly, *Center of the Cyclone*, 119.

<sup>129</sup> Lilly's lack of censoring of his own thoughts is reminiscent of Terrence Mckenna's description of the 1960s psychedelic shamanism: "Indeed in the institution of shamanism we felt that the normal and the paranormal were somehow merged, and in the shamanic world, physical manipulation of psychic space via hallucinogens is raised to the level of science – more precisely of folk science. We assumed that the merging of the normal and the paranormal and the use of hallucinogens were directly related. Unlike more researchers, we did not seek to reduce the paranormal aspects of the shamans world to mere psychologisms; instead, we set out with the open-ended premise that in matters as mysterious as the nature of mind, surprises might well be in store. We sought to experience shamanic phenomena on whatever level of existential validity they could present themselves." In Mckenna, *Invisible Landscape*, 12-13.

disregarded either as the warped thoughts of delusion and psychosis or as simple science fiction. Yet, this territory of thoughts beyond the limits of the thinkable was precisely where he strove to journey, to the wilderness beyond cultural programs and metaprograms of the brain.<sup>130</sup> Even as Lilly's thoughts had strayed to cosmic planes, they never lost contact with dolphins. ECCO informed Lilly that dolphins gave humans LSD, perhaps the most important consciousness-expanding substance of the 1960s.<sup>131</sup> Lilly's most fantastic conjectures on dolphins are found in the final chapter of his metaphysical autobiography *the Scientist*. There, Lilly envisioned a future world where humans and dolphins have broken down the barrier of communication. He imagined that interspecies communication with dolphins would yield thirty million year old "teaching stories of the dolphins and whales."<sup>132</sup> Lilly thought of dolphins as the untapped archive of planetary history, as beings with oral traditions that told of natural cataclysms, shifting continents, and our own human evolution. In his utopian vision, Lilly imagined that these conversations with dolphin intelligences would help resolve international disputes, fuel space travel, connect humans to other worldly intelligences, and teach us about the interdependence of the world, our proper place within the galaxy.<sup>133</sup>

More than Moby Doll's captivity, the scientific research of Spong and Lilly marked a new era of beliefs about dolphins and killer whales. After dismissal from the aquarium, Spong's activism forever altered the course of environmental politics. It seemed that even as Spong had lost his employment and credibility within the mainstream institutions, he had gained repute within the counterculture. Adamant about the wrongfulness of whale captures and display, Spong worked to

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<sup>130</sup> John Lilly. *Programming and Metaprogramming in the Human Biocomputer*. "Summary of Experiments in Self-Metaprogramming with LSD-25." 1967.

<sup>131</sup> Interview with John Lilly. Kutura Decosta, March 19, 1997. ER: [http://www.newrealities.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=106&Itemid=170](http://www.newrealities.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=106&Itemid=170)

<sup>132</sup> Lilly. *The Scientist*, p. 206.

<sup>133</sup> It is fitting that Lilly would end his autobiography this way, envisioning a future world where society's charges of lunacy and insanity towards his world would be refuted and his body of research redeemed as the most meaningful and critical discoveries in the history of the world stem from his ecstatic pipe dreams of communication with non-humans.



persuade a small anti-nuclear weapons activist group named Greenpeace to take up campaigns on behalf of threatened whales all around the globe. His leadership in re-orienting Greenpeace towards environmental issues would bring the organization to the world stage. Spong was also busy forming his own killer whale research laboratory near Alert Bay on Vancouver Island. There Spong conducted research on wild killer whales, recording vocalizations, developing identification systems for the wild populations, and assessing the impact of human activity on their lives.

Despite Lilly's scientific research yielding few formal results in regards to dolphin communication, his work had a profound cultural influence, inspiring science fiction writers and New Age practitioners to produce a steady stream of books in the decades since that describe the incredible depth of dolphin lives. Building on Lilly's research, in 1977, an Australian group called Dolphin Embassy raised \$100,000 to build a 50-foot long floating station to stage an interspecies communication project.<sup>134</sup> Just a generation earlier, dolphins had been treated in similar fashion to sharks, but now they were seen as a "nation of armless Buddhas."<sup>135</sup> As the 1960s youth movement aged into adulthood, a mythology of the dolphin was emerging in the growing New Age movement, that of aliens who could convey "profound cosmic wisdom to humans in distress."<sup>136</sup> Indeed, dolphins started to be described as healers and were thought to radiate energies of "non-aggression, compassion, spirituality, and intelligence."<sup>137</sup>

This veneration for dolphins is not new. As one commentator notes, "the Minoans dedicated temples to them, the Greeks wrote poems for them, the Romans made mosaics about them."<sup>138</sup> But in the decades since the 1960s, the volume of writing about the paranormal connection between humans and dolphins is immense. Whole bookshelves could be filled with the

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<sup>134</sup> *The Washington Post*. January 15, 1977. ER Lexis/Nexis.

<sup>135</sup> Robert Hunter. 1980. p. 135.

<sup>136</sup> *Cosmodolphins*, 63.

<sup>137</sup> *Cosmodolphins*, 168.

<sup>138</sup> Margaret Mallon. "Is dolphin therapy a myth?" *Daily Record*. October 14, 1998. ER Lexis/Nexis.

science fiction tales of alien dolphins, parapsychological takes on telepathic dolphin communications, and self-help manuals on the healing powers of dolphins. Lynn Andrews, a best-selling New Age author wrote of “dolphins who transmit Australian aboriginal dream visions via a eucalyptus tree antenna.”<sup>139</sup> The popular science fiction author Douglas Adams described alien dolphins that flee Earth on the eve of its destruction. In Madeleine L’Engle’s Newberry Prize winning novel, *A Ring of Endless Light*, dolphins are featured as super-intelligent beings that can telepathically communicate with humans and move backward in time.<sup>140</sup> Another sci-fi novel features talking orcas and cyborg-dolphins deployed to fight wars for a recently reformed Soviet Republic in the year 2015.<sup>141</sup> *The Magic of Dolphins. The Music of Dolphins. The Wisdom of Dolphins. Telepathic Love from the Dolphins*: New Age accounts feature dolphins as super-benevolent mid-wives, dream guides, and as shamans.<sup>142</sup> In the Pacific Northwest, orcas have similarly been incorporated into romantic narratives. There, the theme is musical collaboration with these killer dolphins. “They’ll get classical music and jazz,” explained Mel Gregory, a Vancouver musician, “but no rock. Whales don’t like rock.”<sup>143</sup> Nonetheless, rock bands like Fireweed jammed out with orcas on floating stages in the 1970s. The Seattle City Cantabile Choir performed an hour long concert written for the family members of a recently deceased orca, the music piped through an underwater speaker system.<sup>144</sup> Interspecies Communication Inc. released 10 cassettes and CDs of jam sessions between orcas and musicians, including an anthology release of “Orca’s Greatest Hits” that featured the “interspecies band.”<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Lisa Aldred. “Plastic Shmans and Astroturf Sun Dances: New Age Commercialization of Native American Spirituality.” *American Indian Quarterly*. Vol. 24, No. 3. Summer 2000. p. 331-2.

<sup>140</sup> Madeleine L’Engle. *A Ring of Endless Light*. 1980.

<sup>141</sup> Alexnder Jablovok. *A Deeper Sea*. 1993.

<sup>142</sup> See the extensive bibliography of books on these connections to dolphins:  
<http://www.dolfunswims.com/staying%20connected.htm>

<sup>143</sup> Charles Flowers. "Between the harpoon and the whale." *New York Times*. August 24, 1975. ER Proquest.

<sup>144</sup> *New York Times*. Sam Howe Verhovek. “Friday Harbor Journal: Serenading the Whales (Who Seem to Like it).” June 28, 1999. ER Lexis/Nexis.

<sup>145</sup> See [www.interspecies.com](http://www.interspecies.com).

The youthful hippie movement was dying by the middle of the 1970s and a new movement was taking its place. Taking its name from the idea that humanity was on the brink of a new spiritual era marked by a transcendent transformation of peace and harmony,<sup>146</sup> the New Age movement is seen by scholars as the most persistent remnant of the 1960s counter-culture.<sup>147</sup> There are, however, some important differences between the New Age movement and the underground from which it was born. Andrew Kimbrell has noted that this new movement differed profoundly in its focus on individual, not social, transformation.<sup>148</sup>

The hodgepodge of beliefs and practices included under the umbrella of the New Age movement is a result of both the individualistic orientation the spirituality that values relativity and incorporation over strict canonization as well as the reactionary genealogy formed at the confluence of global awareness and consciousness. The eclectic array of influences, ranging from Eastern and pagan religions to shamanistic and indigenous ways of knowing, has led to a diverse set of rituals. One central tenant of New Age beliefs is the idea that “All life, as we perceive it with the five human senses or with scientific instruments, is only the outer veil of an invisible, inner and causal reality.”<sup>149</sup> Scholars have noted that even as the New Age movement borrows much of its language from modern science, the beliefs themselves often conflict with the scientific consensus, remaining open to the existence of such phenomenon as astral travel, levitation, and telekinesis.<sup>150</sup> Historians have written about how New Age thought constructed dolphins as a sort of “noble savage,” a being that

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<sup>146</sup> Douglas McCabe. “Higher Realities’: New Age Spirituality in Ben Okri’s ‘The Famished Road.’” *Research in African Literatures*. Vol 36, No. 4. Winter 2005. p. 6.

<sup>147</sup> Miller 135-6.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 136, citing Andrew Kimbrell. Another important distinction is the level of political involvement: although the counter-culture may have appeared uninterested in politics, their engagement with the New Left politics and communes were significant forms of political involvement; in contrast, the New Age movement was more apolitical, abandoning many of the central political positions vital to the counter-culture including much of the class politics. See Miller.

<sup>149</sup> McCabe citing Bloom. p. 6.

<sup>150</sup> McCabe.p. 1-21; Hugh Urban. “The Cult of Ecstasy: Tantrism, the New Age, and the Spiritual Logic of Late Capitalism.” *History of Religions*, Vol. 39, No. 3. 2000. p. 268-304. ER JSTOR.

opposes technocivilization, materialism, and violence while embracing free love, sexual liberation and peace.<sup>151</sup>

One New Age writer, Joan Ocean, fits this paradigm as she has dedicated her life to interpreting the visions and messages of dolphins. With insights aided by her telepathic communication with dolphins, Ocean offers an alternative history of dolphins in the last half century. To Ocean, the captivity of dolphins came to be for reasons deeper than the economics behind marine parks like Sea World: by coming into aquaria, dolphins entered humanity's consciousness.<sup>152</sup> Through the inculcation of our affinities for them, dolphins had almost leapt into venues where they could display the intelligence and simplicity of their lives. Intentionally and masterfully, dolphins had created a space to transform misguided human materialism, violence and arrogance. In a sense, Ocean takes the term "ambassador" literally, insisting that what appeared as human-led captures of cetaceans were in actuality done at the behest of dolphins. She interprets the creation of television programs like Flipper and the brain research done by Lilly as merely human responses to dolphin persuasions. In this worldview, dolphins had not just consented to captivity but intended it as a gift to humanity, a window into another way of living marked by altruism, cooperation and freedom. More than values, Ocean felt that "Dolphins were showing us an entirely new method of understanding, experiencing and interacting with our environment."<sup>153</sup> Perhaps corporate-run concrete tanks were the ideal setting for this lesson. Despite their obvious drawbacks

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<sup>151</sup> *Cosmodolphins* 168.

<sup>152</sup> Ocean's sources for this position are important to note. She claims to be telekinetically linked to dolphins, telekinesis, the channeling the ideas and images from the dolphins themselves. Much of her work is grounded in these mental exchanges. Her beliefs concerning the deeper history and evolution of dolphins are thus rather fantastic, making intriguing claims about the nature and malleability of time and history: "[T]he dolphins told me they had arrived around the 1940's... How could that be? We had all read the thousands of stories about their history among the Greeks and Romans, the myths and legends, the drawings, Petra glyphs, carvings, artifacts, fossils and more. ... But NO, the dolphins told me they entered Earth's time line through a Window in Time. Carefully, very carefully, they chose the perfect place along our horizontal time line and they entered in to help us. ... In doing this, they inserted themselves into the oceans of the world all at once. They came in their physical bodies, and they also came with all their created history, entering our belief systems, in tact." from "An Interdimensional History from the Dolphins." 2009. ER <http://www.etfriends.com/Time.html#anchor782844>. Ocean lays out this history in more detail in her book *Dolphins into the Future*. Kailua: Dolphin Connection, 1997.

<sup>153</sup> Joan Ocean. *Dolphin Connection*. 1989. p. 13

for the animals contained within, Ocean argued that this setting was necessary so as to “fit into the life patterns and cultural beliefs of Earth people.”<sup>154</sup>

The claims about the powers of dolphins were not limited to just those spectators at dolphin shows. Estelle Myers, another New Age practitioner, was influential in popularizing dolphin-swims and underwater dolphin birthing. Myers claimed that she had a spiritual awakening in 1976 when she was telepathically contacted by dolphins. Since then she has been exploring “dolphinsity,” what she describes as the magical interface between humans and dolphins, one step beyond synchronicity.<sup>155</sup> Myers and other dolphin birthing advocates claim that these underwater births produce a new kind of human being attuned to peace and harmony. These “human dolphin babies” are born straight from the womb into the ocean.<sup>156</sup> Like many New Age practices, justifications are couched in both the language of science and the spiritual beliefs of indigenous peoples. In regards to science, advocates claim the benefits of dolphin birthing and therapy come from sonophoresis, a process on the biochemical and electrical level that involves ultrasonic energy filling microscopic holes between cell membranes that result in the release of hormones beneficial to nervous system tissue development.<sup>157</sup> Myers supports her beliefs with reference to the Dogongs tribe of Africa, saying their Legend of the Golden Dolphin described whales sacrificing themselves to save the Earth and dolphins as messengers of the Holy Spirit sent from the planet Sirius.<sup>158</sup>

Though New Agers makes frequent appeals to science, the boundaries of science are not firm. As Ocean argues, the dolphin’s teachings “will not mirror our old paradigms of intellectual

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<sup>154</sup> Joan Ocean. “An Interdimensional History from the Dolphins.” 2009. ER <http://www.etfriends.com/Time.html#anchor782844>. Ocean lays out this history in more detail in her book *Dolphins into the Future*. Kailua: Dolphin Connection, 1997.

<sup>155</sup> Dan Bloom. Australian 'Dolphin Lady' Pushing 'Dolphinsity'. *The Daily Yomiuri*. June 23, 1992. ER Lexis/Nexis.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Amy Iggulden. Citing the claims of Elizabeth Yalan. In “Does it work? Dolphin therapy.” *The Daily Telegraph* (London). October 31, 2005. ER Lexis/Nexis.

<sup>158</sup> Margaret Mackey Payne. “Babies of the ocean -- Kiana one of the new breed.” *Sunday Mail*. December 17, 1989. ER Lexis/Nexis.

hypothesis building in the name of ‘science.’”<sup>159</sup> Bobbie Sandoz-Merrill, another New Age writer, claims that it’s the boundaries of science which are to blame for the lack of scientific validation to dolphin telepathy. She notes that the most important discoveries about dolphin intelligence happen “outside the structure of research protocols.”<sup>160</sup> The inherent boredom of scientific replication and the shallow structuring of rewards underlie the poor performance of dolphins in scientific studies.<sup>161</sup> Describing a scientific study investigating the possibility of dolphin telepathy, Sandoz-Merrill argues against the conclusion that the dolphin failed to read the mind of the trainer noting that the dolphins preemptively performed the behavior before the designated moment. To Sandoz-Merrill, this failure of science to adjust its scope to incorporate their exceptional telepathic abilities “underscores the difference between our two species” and “reveals the kinds of valuable information we miss as a result of our strict adherence to scientific experimental designs.”<sup>162</sup> To Sandoz-Merrill, the ability of dolphins to telepathically communicate is clear despite the inability of science to construct fluid enough research protocols on their behalf.<sup>163</sup> These New Age perspectives raise the question of whether and how science is epistemologically distinct way of knowing.<sup>164</sup>

Skeptics of dolphin therapy argue that friendly animals with a curiosity for humans have always led to extravagant forms of veneration. These critics insist that people are drawn to the cute noises dolphins make, the false anatomical smile that evolution has plastered on their faces and the

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<sup>159</sup> Ocean, 13. Ocean’s vocabulary demonstrates one the language of New Age culture combines blends into scientific language: Zones of reality, DNA, crystalline matrix of our bodies, evolution, Universal Oneness, Theatre of Transformation, Temple of Truth.

<sup>160</sup> Bobbie Sandoz-Merrill. *In the Presence of High Beings: What Dolphins Want You to Know*. p. 70.

<sup>161</sup> Sandoz-Merrill, 72.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 78-80.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>164</sup> Paul Nadasdy asks this question in regard to his research on the Kluane people’s relationship to animals. To Nadasdy, knowledge is simply too fluid and heterogeneous to ever cordon-off science from other forms of knowledge. Instead, he turns to the analytic tool of power to delineate science from non-science. To him, knowledge is inseparable from its social context. He insists that the distinctiveness of science is used by proponents to privilege the knowledge and by critics to suggest that other systems of knowledge are equally valid. Nadasdy is skeptical of those who see the problem of knowledge-integration as mere “technical difficulties that can be solved through improvements in research methodology.” See Paul Nadasdy. *Hunters and Bureaucrats: Power, Knowledge, and Aboriginal-State Relations in the Southwest Yukon*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2003. p. 132-138.

seemingly playful breeches that are likely just a complex hunting ritual for rounding up prey.<sup>165</sup> Furthermore, researchers note that dolphins are far from a perfect fit to perceptions of their peacefulness and non-violence, instead displaying predatory instincts.<sup>166</sup> From the skeptic's vantage, Ocean, Myers and Sandoz-Merrill might be merely channeling their own anxieties rather than dolphin thought images. Perhaps the idea of the dolphin as an alien savior sent to heal the Earth is just an imaginative means of calming New Ager worries about the state of the ever-polluted world, the possibility that science is all there is, and a culture myopically fixated on material wealth. From this perspective, dolphins may very well be therapeutic healers, placebos of hope for humans who do not want to live in a world lonely of other intelligences and doomed to a technological dystopia. Like the projection of gender anxieties on Moby Doll, perhaps these New Age accounts of dolphin communication say as much about the culture from which they came as they do about the animals themselves.

The hope for communication with another species is an understandable goal. That humans had to capture dolphins and orcas from their habitat, place them in concrete tanks, stick hydrophones below the water, and conduct scientific experiments for three decades, all before we could locate the meanings hidden within their sounds only proves how grandly out of tune post-enlightenment culture has been with these animals. The expectation of John Lilly that nature would speak to us in a dialect translatable to English was not merely a failed project of psycho-linguistics, nor was it reducible to a drug-induced delusion of some blissed-out hippy-scientist who soon encountered an insurmountable yawning chasm separating our human language from that of

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<sup>165</sup> Margaret Mallon. Is dolphin therapy a myth? *Daily Record*. October 14, 1998. ER Lexis/Nexis.

<sup>166</sup> Nigel Blundell, "Killer Dolphins Baffle Marine Experts." *Daily Telegraph*. January 25, 2008. ER <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/earth/earthnews/3323070/Killer-dolphins-baffle-marine-experts.html>; Matt Walker, "Dolphins Seen Trying To Kill Calf." *BBC News*. May 18, 2009. ER: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/earth/hi/earth\\_news/newsid\\_8048000/8048288.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/earth/hi/earth_news/newsid_8048000/8048288.stm) . Reports of aggressive, violently and overtly sexual encounters with dolphins are relatively few. However, a man in Brazil who harassed a dolphin was rammed and killed. See: Matthew Campbell. "Anger at 'dolphin frolics' park." *Sunday Times (London)*. November 28, 1999. ER Lexis/Nexis.

cetacean. Instead, that work was part of a larger project that continues into the present, that of revising the cannon of scientific knowledge about the natural world that has historically denied the attribution of meaning, agency, intelligence, and intentions to the natural world. As easy as one could dismiss Spong and Lilly as recreational drug users whose fantastic trips compromised their clear-headed perception of their cetacean subjects, such an interpretation misses the successes of their work. Indeed, Lilly and Spong succeeded by momentarily lifting the cultural veil that has fostered the illusion in post-enlightenment culture that nature cannot already speak to us. Lilly was dismantling a gaudy veneer to the non-human world that muffled the bodies of language that abound in nature, countering a culture that could only hear its own loud words and so spread silence over the landscape of meaning.<sup>167</sup> Lilly soon found that most dolphins' emanations occur at frequencies that our ear interprets as silence.<sup>168</sup> Though basic, this lesson may have been one of his most important discoveries, a simple recognition that reality is not human-centric – instead being plural, polyvalent, and often contradictory.

The closer we get to the orca, the more profound our respect for the animal. Conversion experiences abound with these animals as trainers, scientists, and spectators describe mystical moments where the animal's intelligence and subjectivity cause profound changes in their basic disposition towards the animals. Paul Spong is but one example in a long line of people who worked closely with captive orcas who later became vocal opponents to captivity, even activists for the campaigns to release killer whales back into the wild. Richard O'Barry, the trainer of Kieko (Willy) and Stefani Hewlitt, a scientist and trainer at the Vancouver Aquarium for 14 years, both were outspoken in their efforts to end captivity for orcas.<sup>169</sup> John Lilly too saw the error of his earlier

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<sup>167</sup> See Abrams, *The Spell of the Sensuous*.

<sup>168</sup> John Williams Malone. *Unsolved Mysteries of Science*. 2001. p. 106.

<sup>169</sup> Mia Stainsby. "Killer Whales' Removal Urged by Former Staff Biologist." *Vancouver Sun*. March 25, 1992. p. 3; *Frontline*. "A Whale of a Business: Interview with Richard O'Barry." ER:<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/whales/interviews/obarry1.html>



ways, eventually shutting down his dolphin studies comparing it to continuing to run a “concentration camp for my friends.”<sup>170</sup>

Although the high hopes for dolphin communication have yet to be realized, I would insist that Spong and Lilly’s work has actually been successful. That these cetaceans could make hippies and mystics of well-trained scientists, that dolphins could inspire accounts of telepathic exchanges and alternative histories, that Skana and Elvar could stir such profound transformations in Spong and Lilly just by being the objects of their prodding and prying – these are examples of the communicative power of dolphins and whales. The importance of psychedelic substances should not be overlooked either but seen as an opening to this beyond-language recognition of subjectivity in the non-human. Emerging from within the consciousness of enlightenment rationality was a nascent imagination of beings with as much depth as humans.

Skana arrived at the Vancouver in 1967, the same year that Moby Doll’s sculpted likeness was hung above the expanded facilities.<sup>171</sup> She was soon joined by more killer whales – Hyak, Bjossa, and Finna – and their presence became the driving force behind the continued expansion of the aquarium. Paradoxically, as the Aquarium provided a venue for people to learn about orcas, the public’s attachment to the orcas led them to question the rightfulness of captivity. Animal rights activists – led by Greenpeace – were busy lobbying the government and public in this regard, and a moratorium was placed on wild captures of Pacific Northwest killer whales in 1976.<sup>172</sup> After Skana died of a fungus infection in 1980, the Vancouver Aquarium side-stepped the regulations to import two female orcas from Iceland at the rumored price of \$200,000 each.<sup>173</sup> But when an Aquarium visitor saw one of the new whales “displaying a certain physical characteristic that was obviously

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<sup>170</sup> Hoyt, 44.

<sup>171</sup> Murray Newman. “Thirty Years of Progress at the Vancouver Aquarium.” 1986. Murray Newman Fonds. #619 A-6 File 4.

<sup>172</sup> Randy Green. “Vancouver’s Whale Dispute.” *Seattle Times Pacific Magazine*. February 22, 1981. p. 20.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 18-19.

male,” the Aquarium had to admit again that she was a he.<sup>174</sup> Unfortunately, the consequences of the error in identification were more serious than with Moby Doll: in an act of male territorial aggression, the new male Finna rammed the old male Hyak, fatally wounding the orca’s already damaged lung.<sup>175</sup> Yet even more than the high mortality rates, the repeated failure of the captive breeding attempts at the Vancouver Aquarium likely provided the most fuel for Greenpeace’s continued campaign to end orca captivity in Vancouver. Bjossa was shipped to Sea World in 2001 after her third newborn calf died, marking the end of killer whale captivity in Vancouver.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> *The Global and Mail*. “Curator sheepish: she-whale’s a he.” January 26, 1981. ER Lexis/Nexis.

<sup>175</sup> Gil Hewlitt. “Oral History.” Interview by Murray Newman. August 11, 1992. Murray Newman Fonds. #619 B-6 File 9, p. 6.

<sup>176</sup> Daniel Girard. “Vancouver’s Last Orca Ships Out.” *Toronto Star*. April 21, 2001. ER Lexis/Nexis.

#### IV. Conclusion: Assessing the reality of the situation

“Nature is, however, a topos, a place, in the sense of a rhetorician's place or topic for consideration of common themes; nature is, strictly, a commonplace. We turn to this topic to order our discourse, to compose our memory. As a topic in this sense, nature also reminds us that in seventeenth-century English the “topick gods” were the local gods, the gods specific to places and peoples. We need these spirits, rhetorically if we can't have them any other way. We need them in order to reinhabit, precisely, common places – locations that are widely shared, inescapably local, worldly, enspirited; i.e., topical.”  
—Donna Haraway<sup>177</sup>

Though histories often feature indigenous people in the opening pages, their presence tends to disappear by the end of the narrative. My history is different – and necessarily so. Where there was once a simple and thoughtless disdain for the creature, there is now nuance and speculation, wonder and respect, laws for their protection and spaces for their subjectivity. This rich history of attention to orcas may be new to the enlightenment mind, but, to Northwest coast indigenous people, these sentiments were familiar. As the enlightenment mind has gained a finer beat on what killer whales are, the expanse of possible meanings for the orca has only broadened. Here I argue that indigenous historical narratives demonstrate an understanding of the orca that scientists, historians, and New Age thinkers are only beginning to approach – that their religious traditions and stories present superior ways of knowing the reality of killer whales. After offering some general background on indigenous approaches to animals, I will return to the stories of Moby Doll, Skana, and Luna to see reexamine the events from outside that cultural tradition in which they were formed.

Charlotte Townsend-Gault notes how the realms of humans, animals and spirits overlap in many Northwest coast worldviews. She suggests that this “imaginative closeness between species [is] based on an understanding of the absolute dependency of the human species on the others.”<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Donna Haraway. “Cultural Studies and its Theoretical Legacies.” in Lawrence Grossberg et al, eds. *Cultural Studies*. 1992.

<sup>178</sup> Charlotte Townsend-Gault. “Northwest Coast Art: The Culture of the Land Claims.” *American Indian Quarterly*, Vol. 18, No. 4. Autumn, 1994. p. 445.

Where Westerners would tend to segregate everyday experiences from spiritual ones, animal encounters from human ones, the world of the living from that of the dead, indigenous perspectives would put them in conversation. Henry Sharp's ethnography focusing on Chipewyan hunting suggests that where the post-enlightenment cultural perspective might explain an outcome with reference to human success or failure, an indigenous perspective would likely emphasize the animal's role. What would appear as happenstance or coincidence to a Western observer could be especially meaningful to another. As Sharp notes, "the explanations we assume to be empirically sound and scientifically valid expressions of the true nature of physical reality are in fact no more than presumptions about the nature of physical reality and the nature of causality."<sup>179</sup> Sharp implies that the Dene toleration for mystery is one feature which makes it distinct from Western ways of knowing. This space of mystery was inhabited by animal spirits.

I have no intention of demystifying these spaces of encounter in my research. Interpreting killer whale encounters from the indigenous perspective is a task that should be left to those in the community who own the knowledge and stories. Instead, I hope to merely sketch, from my distant vantage, the outlines of those spaces that the post-enlightenment mind has tended to abandon in regards to Moby Doll, Skana and Luna. Indeed, moments that have been overlooked in these stories – as chance or coincidence, beside-the-point or not history at all – appear ripe with meaning from indigenous perspectives and are informed by the historical experience of colonialism.

The historical narratives of Northwest coast indigenous people speak to a long-standing and intimate relationship with killer whales. Along much of the Pacific Coast, orcas were commonly used in family crests, religious ceremonies and artwork. The oral traditions of the Tlingit, Haida, and Nuu-chah-nulth First Nations feature shape-shifting killer whales that transcend the boundaries of life and death, ocean and shore, human and animal. Oral histories tell of killer whales that save

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<sup>179</sup> Henry Sharp, *Loon: Memory, Meaning, and Reality in a Northern Dene Community*. 2004. p. 44-7.

fishermen in danger while devouring those that disrespect the animals. In these accounts, orcas are often seen as spiritual beings. As the Nuu-chah-nulth scholar Charlotte Cote says, whales are “central characters in our stories and legends.”<sup>180</sup> To the Nuu-chah-nulth, a whale “would give itself up to the whaler” so long as the individual had gone through the proper rituals and approached the whale with respect.<sup>181</sup> The success of the hunt depended in large part upon the spirit world. “When they asked the whale’s spirit to come home with them, it did.”<sup>182</sup> For the Nuu-chah-nulth, the whale was a gift. Often stories would highlight the gaze of mutual recognition between whale and whaler, the collaboration of the hunt.<sup>183</sup> The Nuu-chah-nulth believe that the “anthropomorphic spirit resided in the dorsal fin” and that “the body of the whale was its canoe, which carried the human spirit.”<sup>184</sup> To the Kwakiutl, killer whales shared souls with humans in a cycle of connected life forms.<sup>185</sup> One narrative attributed to the Haida describes the killer whales as protectors of their people after one of the chiefs turned into a *Sgaana*.<sup>186</sup> The Tlingit also saw orcas as guardians and for that reason refrain from hunting them.<sup>187</sup>

One common thread within indigenous relationships to animals was this greater emphasis on their subjectivity. Recalling again Sharp’s work with the Dene First Nation, there seem to be fundamental differences between settler and indigenous cultures in how animal relationships are understood. Where a Westerner would simply see a whale as “passive and mechanical, merely a target,” the Dene’s explanation would likely involve the orca as an active participant in the hunt, so that a successful shot would be “predicated upon the willingness of the animal/person to sacrifice

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<sup>180</sup> Charlotte Cote. *Spirits of Our Whaling Ancestors: Revitalizing Makah and Nuu-chah-nulth Traditions*. p. 9.

<sup>181</sup> Cote 32.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>185</sup> Knudtson, Peter. *Orca: Visions of the Killer Whale*. p. 16.

<sup>186</sup> Rochelle Constantine. “Folklore and Legends.” *Encyclopedia of Marine Mammals*. William Perrin, ed. p. 448.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

themselves for the benefit of the Dene.”<sup>188</sup> The extent to which we control our own perception of animals is itself questioned. As Jim Nollman notes, indigenous myths often feature animals that can deceive humans by appearing in other forms. His example is of an orca that metamorphosed into a man with a broken boat in order to solicit help from the fisherman.<sup>189</sup>

In light of these different means of understanding killer whale encounters, I return to the story of Moby Doll where I contend that much about the harpooning of Moby gets lost in the typical journalistic retelling. First, the extraordinary timing of Moby’s passage by Saturna Island comes to mind. Though whales were known to frequent the point on a daily basis, none approached close enough to the harpoon gun until the very last morning of the hunt. The harpoon shot itself was hard to believe, piercing the whale’s fatty tissue but not mortally. Furthermore, the way Moby’s sexual identity remained hidden through the months in captivity despite the constant observation and public exhibition. All the stranger, Moby Doll’s captors knew she was a he for the final months of captivity but never released the information. Indeed, it would have been almost unspeakable since the true sexual identity of Moby was only revealed to Vince Penfold’s four year-old daughter.<sup>190</sup> What makes this gaffe all the more amusing is the irony that it was Penfold who announced the absolute certainty of Moby’s feminine identity. These events raise questions. Could we interpret Moby’s harpooning through the framework of “gift”? Could we see the intentions or orientations of Bauer and Burich as causal factors in the hunt? Did Moby intentionally hide his sexual identity from his captors, only revealing it to a small girl?

Similarly, Spong’s accounts of his relationship with Skana suggest a depth to killer whales that, while mind-blowing to him, may have been easily comprehended from an indigenous perspective. Instead of blindly responding to the stimuli of his experiments, Skana seem to be

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<sup>188</sup> Sharp, 46.

<sup>189</sup> Jim Nollman. *Animal Dreaming: The Art and Science of Interspecies Communication*. p. 93

<sup>190</sup> Correspondence with Gil Hewlitt, sharing his conversation with Pat McGeer, May 2010.

experimenting on Spong, purposefully sabotaging his studies. Spong noticed how Skana challenged the assumptions he brought to his research as a scientist. Skana responded more to rewards of music than of fish. He noticed that Skana was aware of his emotions, seeming to decondition his fears. By the end of time with Skana, Spong had come to attribute the insights of his research to Skana's intellect, seeing her as the teacher.<sup>191</sup> This reversal of subjectivity and reciprocal relationship that Spong described is reminiscent of the relationships that had existed along the Northwest coast for many centuries – relationships that persist into the present. The Northwest coast indigenous people know these beings – their power and intelligence.

While New Age practitioners pay scant attention to provenance, heritage, or the importance of place and family, the opposite is true of the Northwest coast indigenous people to whom the territory and genealogy were often at the center of everything. Socially privileged and culturally nostalgic, the New Age movement was often about individual self-realization whereas indigenous mythologies often have deep roots in specific places and communities. Although New Agers came to new understandings of orcas, they did so with little guidance from their own traditions, instead choosing to borrow from other cultural traditions. However, those traditions were often from the Far East rather than the near shores of British Columbia. As a result, there are still profound differences between the New Age perceptions of orcas and those of Northwest Coast indigenous peoples. That said, Spong's relationship with whales – like those of New Age writers John Lilly and Joan Ocean – is reminiscent of both enlightenment and indigenous relationships to cetaceans.

Returning finally to the story of Luna, Spong was himself caught in the middle between these two worldviews. His ugly divorce from the Vancouver Aquarium and years of mistrust had recently been set aside in favor of cooperation with fisheries officials and Aquarium scientists. In 2002, Spong's organization Orcalab had provided instrumental assistance during recent efforts to

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<sup>191</sup> *Georgia Straight*. Interview by Stan Persky. No date given. Robin Best Library Archives. Also cited in Weyler, p. 203.

reunite another lost orca with his pod.<sup>192</sup> Anticipating a similar situation with Luna, Spong had agreed to assist in the relocation. However, upon arriving at Nootka Sound and observing Luna's behavior, Spong's support for the relocation waned.<sup>193</sup> Spong felt that the Nuu-chah-nulth people should have been consulted about the relocation effort instead of being excluded from the key negotiations. He still supported relocation but felt that the Nuu-chah-nulth should be the ones to do it. Spong suggested that the DOF commission the First Nation Nuu-chah-nulth to lead Luna down the coast instead of continuing with their own plans.<sup>194</sup>

Spong's position of compromise did not please Marilyn Joyce, the Department of Fisheries official in charge of Luna capture. After the Nuu-chah-nulth successfully stymied capture efforts, Spong was excluded from future meetings as Joyce suspected him to be sharing information with the Nuu-chah-nulth people.<sup>195</sup> Joyce accused Spong of completely turning against the capture operation from the inside and providing a direct conduit to Maquinna and his people. Spong denied any sabotage efforts, saying that he only believed that the Nuu-chah-nulth's opposition to the capture of Luna needed to be recognized, not denied – and that the Department of Fisheries would be better served “to work within the reality of the situation.”<sup>196</sup>

Though Luna's life ended tragically, the lessons of this history are rather hopeful. While I question the scientific narrative of progress about killer whales wherein humans are slowly peeling away the skin of the killer whale to discover its true essence, I do perceive a progression of sorts in how cultures have developed in conjunction with orcas – and how cultures have come to know each other through the whales. What is common to each history is the profound intimacy of self and animal, the blurring of boundaries between what humans perceive in the whale and what they

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<sup>192</sup> Francis and Hewlitt, 228-9.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, 218.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, 237-9.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, 237.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, 238.



perceive of themselves, a common layering of cultural discourse on the biological form of the whale. This confirms the sentiments of environmental historians that the natural and cultural have never been distinct.<sup>197</sup> Sometimes unwittingly, when people describe orcas, they are often describing themselves – their perceptions of women or confinement, their state of bliss or interconnection, their connection to an idea of nature or to a particular place. These projections of ourselves onto orcas seem inescapable. What varies throughout this history is the level of intention, the extent to which people were aware of this reciprocal blending of human to orca, ways people understood – or conveniently forgot – how the animal was a reflection of themselves at the deepest levels of meaning and ecology.

The story of Luna is hopeful in another sense. The drama over Luna was only possible because of the changing political context for indigenous perspectives. An advocate for indigenous legal standing, Maisie Hurley helped launch the first case on aboriginal title in British Columbia.<sup>198</sup> In 1963, Hurley arrived in the office of criminal lawyer Thomas Berger, smacking her cane against his desk, insisting that he defend two aboriginal men from Nanaimo who were arrested for killing six deer on government land.<sup>199</sup> Berger took the case and succeeded in much more than simple criminal defense when the judge in *Regina v. White and Bob* acquitted the two men and acknowledged the validity of a 1763 proclamation that guaranteed the Nanaimo First Nation hunting rights on unoccupied land. Prior to the ruling, it was assumed that the very idea of aboriginal title had died in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. For this reason, Berger's victory is considered a watershed moment in aboriginal title law.<sup>200</sup> Two years later, Berger took the case of a Nisga'a man named Frank Calder who asserted that their First Nation had never given up title to their land.<sup>201</sup> Though the judges in the Calder

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<sup>197</sup> See Bruce Braun and Noel Castree, eds. *Remaking Reality: Nature at the Millennium*. 1998.

<sup>198</sup> Paul Tennant. *Aboriginal Peoples and Politics*. p. 235.

<sup>199</sup> Jean Sorensen. "UBC Alumni Bring Forward Landmark Aboriginal Rights Cases: Rap of a Cane and a Time of Change." *UBC Law Alumni Magazine*. Winter, 2008. p. 6-7.

<sup>200</sup> Thomas Berger, cited in Sorensen, 2008, p. 6-7.

<sup>201</sup> Sorensen, 2008, p. 6-7.

decision did not rule in favor of Calder, the ruling paved the way for further appeals. In 1997, the Delgamuukw decision established aboriginal title as a substantive legal right, validating the formal legal standards by which oral history is seen as real history and the extent to which indigenous claims are taken seriously as knowledge.<sup>202</sup> The effect of these rulings is not limited to British Columbia as they have the potential to be used as a precedent globally, potentially placing the burden of proof on colonial governments instead of individual tribes.<sup>203</sup> Even so, scholars have noted these rulings on indigenous rights have provided little in terms of enforcing specific policies, with even Delgamuukw offering minimal details on claim resolution. The simple recognition of title still leaves the difficult negotiations over how to settle competing claims and conflicting interpretations of the past.

Even so, if the level of involvement over the relocation of Luna is any indication of the larger shifts in native politics, then much has changed in regards to indigenous land claims since the 1960s. No longer would the presentation of indigenous knowledge be treated as a “rather hilarious bit of byplay” as with Maisie Hurley warnings over Moby Doll. Instead, the perspective of the Nuu-chah-nulth community was seen as valid by the media. The Department of Fisheries still excluded the Nuu-chah-nulth from official deliberations, going ahead with their plans to relocate Luna. However, the combination of traditional cultural actions and modern media publicity thwarted the implementation of the plan. Whether or not Spong’s counter-cultural past had inspired him to sabotage the DOF efforts, the fact remains that the Nuu-chah-nulth had the confidence and resources to mount a successful campaign. In other eras, the formal power of the law might have been enforced on rule violations for harassing the whale. But the public sentiment quickly swung in favor of the Nuu-chah-nulth position – and the Department of Fisheries quickly gave up the fight.<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> Daniel Boxberger. “Whither the Expert Witness: Anthropology in the Post-Delgamuukw Courtroom.” In *Coming to Shore: Northwest Coast Ethnology, Traditions, and Visions*. Marie Mauze et al, p.323-339.

<sup>203</sup> Sorensen, 2008. Citing Louise Mandell. p. 15.

<sup>204</sup> Francis and Hewlitt, 233-8.

In this regard, my history suggests negotiation is an ongoing process, happening in venues as informal as a small fishing bay full of jet boats, Native canoes and a confused killer whale. Through our common fascination and connection to the killer whales, settler and indigenous societies are working out their differing conceptions of what is natural, what is right, what is history and what is real. As the newcomers to the Vancouver area begin to appreciate the persisting presence of this place's co-inhabitants – human and whale – they are starting to realize that these negotiations are just beginning.

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