

DR JOHN CUSSANS
DEPARTMENT: FINE ART

REF OUTPUT 2
2014 -2020

THE SKULLCRACKER SUITE

A LONG-TERM INTER-DISCIPLINARY
ARTISTIC RESEARCH PROJECT
INVESTIGATING PROCESSES OF CULTURAL
DECOLONIZATION IN BRITISH COLUMBIA.



RESEARCH STATEMENT

The Skullcracker Suite is long-term inter-disciplinary artistic research project investigating processes of cultural decolonization in British Columbia. The name is inspired by Hox'hok, the giant cannibal crane of Canadian First Nation legend who cracks the skulls of humans to eat their brains.

The project was conceived in the Summer of 2015 during a meeting with Steve Calvert, a Canadian artist who, between 2012 and 2014, had documented the potlatch ceremonies and copper-breaking protests of the Kwakwaka'wakw artist and chief Beau Dick.

Inspired by the idea of combining aspects of the winter ceremonial and potlatch traditions of the Kwakwaka'wakw peoples with decolonial, ecological and science fictional currents within contemporary art and critical theory, **The Skullcracker Suite** was imagined as a dramatic theatrical allegory for the 'permanent decolonization of thought' proposed by the Brazilian anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro.

In June 2016 I was awarded a **Leverhulme Research Fellowship** to begin the first phase of research. This culminated in **BC Time-Slip (The Empire Never Ended)**, a multi-component portfolio of works investigating the science fiction writer Philip K. Dick's fateful visit to Vancouver in 1972.

BC TIME-SLIP (THE EMPIRE NEVER ENDED)

The project takes its name from Philip K. Dick's 1964 Mars colonization novel *Martian Time-Slip* and a mystical vision he had in March 1974 that the Roman Empire had never ended and that North Americans were still unwittingly living in its Black Iron Prison.

BC Time-Slip began with a one month residency at Dynamo Arts Association in Vancouver in August 2016.



Myself as Philip K. Dick outside the Museum of Anthropology, Vancouver, August 2016 (Photo: Stephanie Moran)

During the residency the gallery was converted into a research installation investigating Dick's visit to the city.

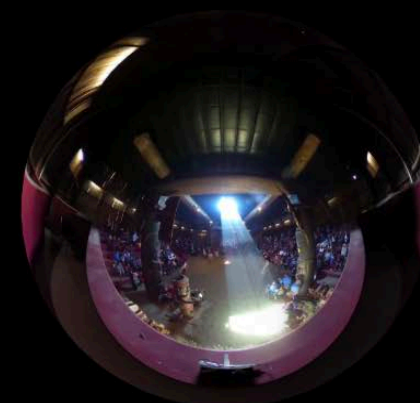
Dick's space colonization and time-travel narratives were used as a pretext to raise questions about the ongoing legacy of British colonialism in the region, the relevance of science fiction for thinking through the actualities of colonialism and parallels between Dick's mystical visions and the mythology of Canadian First Nations peoples.



Installation views of the Special Investigations Room at Dynamo Arts Association, Vancouver (Photo:John Cussans)

At Dynamo Arts I created a series of 360° videos depicting Dick's time in the city (myself playing the author) and conversations with colleagues about the project, which were projected in the gallery during the show. A selection of the video spheres can be found [here](#).

The 'Special Investigations Room' was open to the general public for the duration of the residency.



During the residency I hosted a series of public lectures, discussions and film screenings in the gallery and other venues to which a selected public was invited. I documented several group conversations about the the contemporary politics of decolonization in British Columbia which were documented and posted online.



Stephanie Moran, Jay White, Marina Roy, Barb Atwell, Randy Lee Cutler and Naoko Fukumaru discussing decolonization, Stanley Park, August 2016

Following my return from British Columbia in 2016 I produced two video works combining material generated during the residency with found footage, images and audio interviews with Philip K. Dick. These works are rough sketches for a future BC Time-Slip video installation. The second of them can be seen [here](#).



Still from *Sketch 2 for a Time-Slip Installation* (2016)

Towards the end of the residency at Dynamo Arts I was invited to attend the potlatch ceremony of Chief Alan Hunt at the Tsaxis Big House in Fort Rupert. The Skullcracker team were given permission to document all the dances performed at the event. A selection of images and videos can be seen [here](#). In March 2019 the edited video documentation was given to Alan to use for educational purposes within the Alert Bay and Fort Rupert communities.



In December 2017 I met with David Berner, founder of X-Kalay, the rehab clinic in which Phillip K. Dick had stayed in 1972, and filmed a 50 minute [interview](#) with him. In it we discussed the origins of X-Kalay, its transformation into an influential drug-recovery program; the politics of decolonization there; his memories Dick's time at the clinic; and his criticism of contemporary drug-rehabilitation policies in Vancouver.



David Berner Interview (Part 1)

from **John Cussans**



COME TO X-KALAY'S OPEN HOUSE

BY MARTHA JAN WALLACE
 The school teacher was on her way up the walk to Alexandra House one Saturday night when a tow-headed, teenage boy hailed her from a car. "What's happening in there?" he asked, waving at the lighted windows on the main floor. "X-Kalay Open House and everybody's welcome," she replied, continuing on her way. "That's all I want to know. This is the place," she heard the boy say. And he and his friends soon followed her inside.

Sometimes after the concept period there are skits put on by house talent. Vaudeville is alive and doing well at X-Kalay. Other nights the concept is followed by a brief rundown of X-Kalay events by one of the directors.

But always there are refreshments and dancing. Recently the dancing has been stirred up by the "live rock" of the "Twenty-four Hour Debut" whose dominated time and talent have been enthusiastically approved by the young and able. Those who prefer their social expression on a verbal basis gather in the now conversationally arranged "concept" room, which is ear-by-mouth to the gym, where the dancing is. When a dancer bursts forth and makes his panting way to the refreshment table, the music bursts with him. All the talkers adjust their voices and cup their ears until someone jumps up to close the door.



X-KALAY MEMBER Henry McBryan at "Open House with regular guest Bob Hamilton

Open House attracts a lot of young visitors--and it is not just the band. They like being there. The vibes are good. They'd say, "This X-Kalay bunch is in a good space." Between numbers they like to sit down and rap.

Older guests are drawn by much

the same mystique--even though curiosity first brought them in the door. Here is a minister, there a radio commentator. That woman is "house mother" to a group of Indian students. Those girls are university students. And there's an editor, a professor, an MP, an Indian dancer, a secretary, a parole officer.....

In a large room, X-Kalay members and guests were sitting on a motley assortment of sofa and straight chairs discussing a concept ("Imagination is better than action") that one of the directors had written on a portable blackboard. Anyone could agree, disagree, or extend the idea. Each contribution was listened to thoughtfully. The goal was not mass agreement but provocative exchange and mental stimulation.

It really doesn't matter how diverse the backgrounds are--the common bond is human caring, and the thing that keeps people coming back is human warmth. You have a good time when you go to the X-Kalay Open House.

"Would you like a cup of coffee?" "Have a piece of cake." "Let's sit here and talk." "Won't you join us?" "Do come again, and bring your friends!" "It's X-Kalay Open House and everybody's welcome. ALEXANDRA HOUSE, 1726 West Seventh, between Pine and Burrard, 8 P.M. every Saturday.

The Game Lively Verbal Interaction En To Learn About Themselves



Multi-Mission Man's Busy Life

Earl Allard, Director of X-Kalay, wears many hats -- speaking up for a future member in court, handling the legal aspects of zoning, getting involved in real estate, acting as a social worker, or flying off to deal with government officials.

X-KALAY MEMBERS play a Game at Simon Fraser University. A sociology student, Dorothy Wise, video-taped this Game sequence so that players could see themselves in new light. Players (clockwise from right of microphone) are: Alna Kagis, Ann Kagis, Henry McBryan, Dave Berner, Marvins Finesdy, Wayne Allard, Earl Allard, Luis Nolino, Mary Corcoran and Tom Ballyay (See story at right)

X-Kalay has received support from the community in many ways. Local businessmen have shown their enthusiasm by means of generous donations. For example, Tin Pegg of Vancouver Supply Co., Floyd Britton of Canada Starch, and David Yaspolsky of Western Food

Contributions From Community

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While in Vancouver I began a conversation with LaTiesha Fazakas, Beau Dick and Alan Hunt's gallerist, who I had met at Alan's potlatch. Our conversation was guided initially by the formal similarities between a recently created print by Beau called *Devoured by Consumerism* (2016) and an image drawn by Phillip K. Dick to illustrate what would become known as *The Exegesis*, his attempt to understand his 1974 visions.

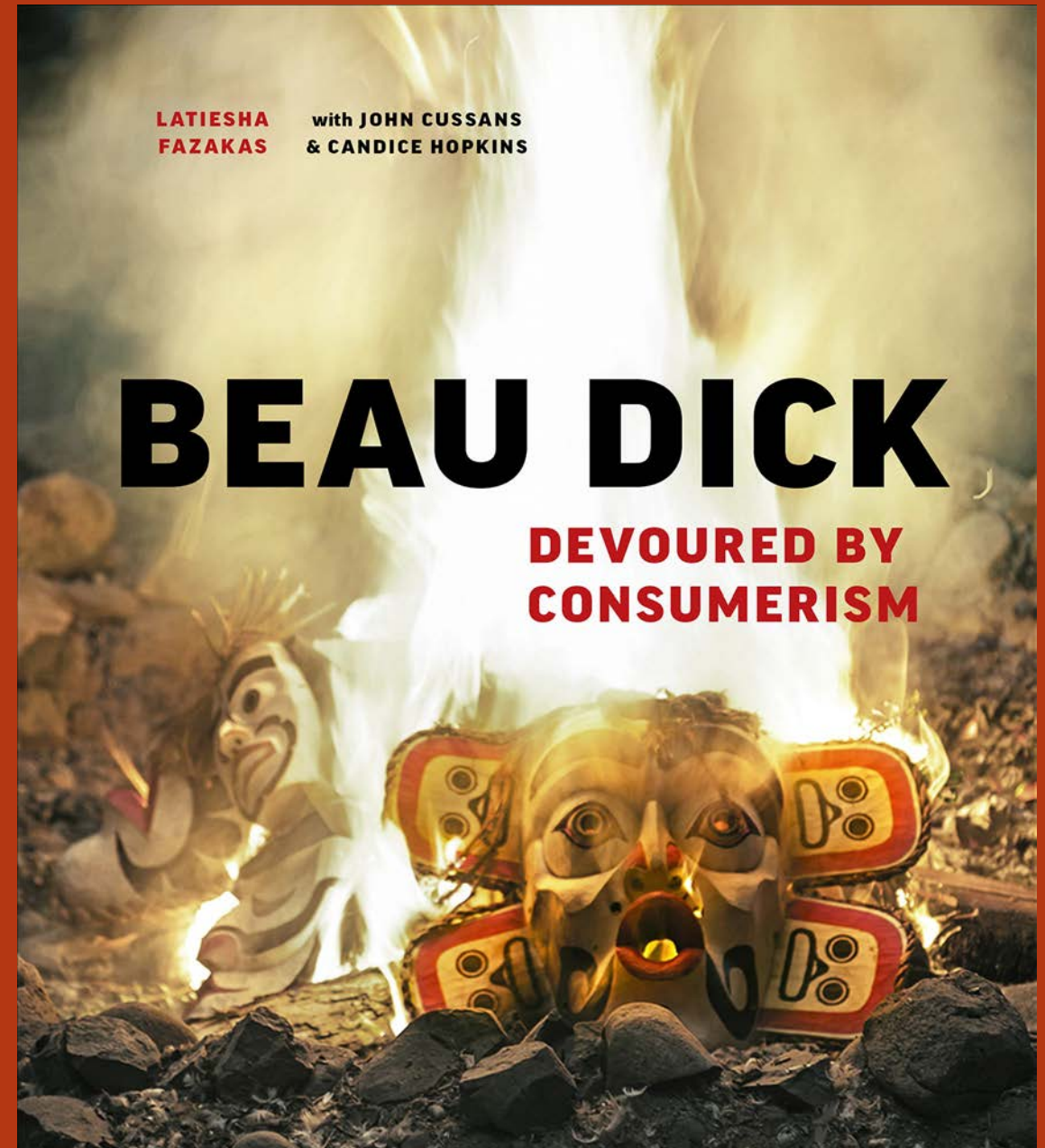


Beau Dick
Devoured By Consumerism (2016)

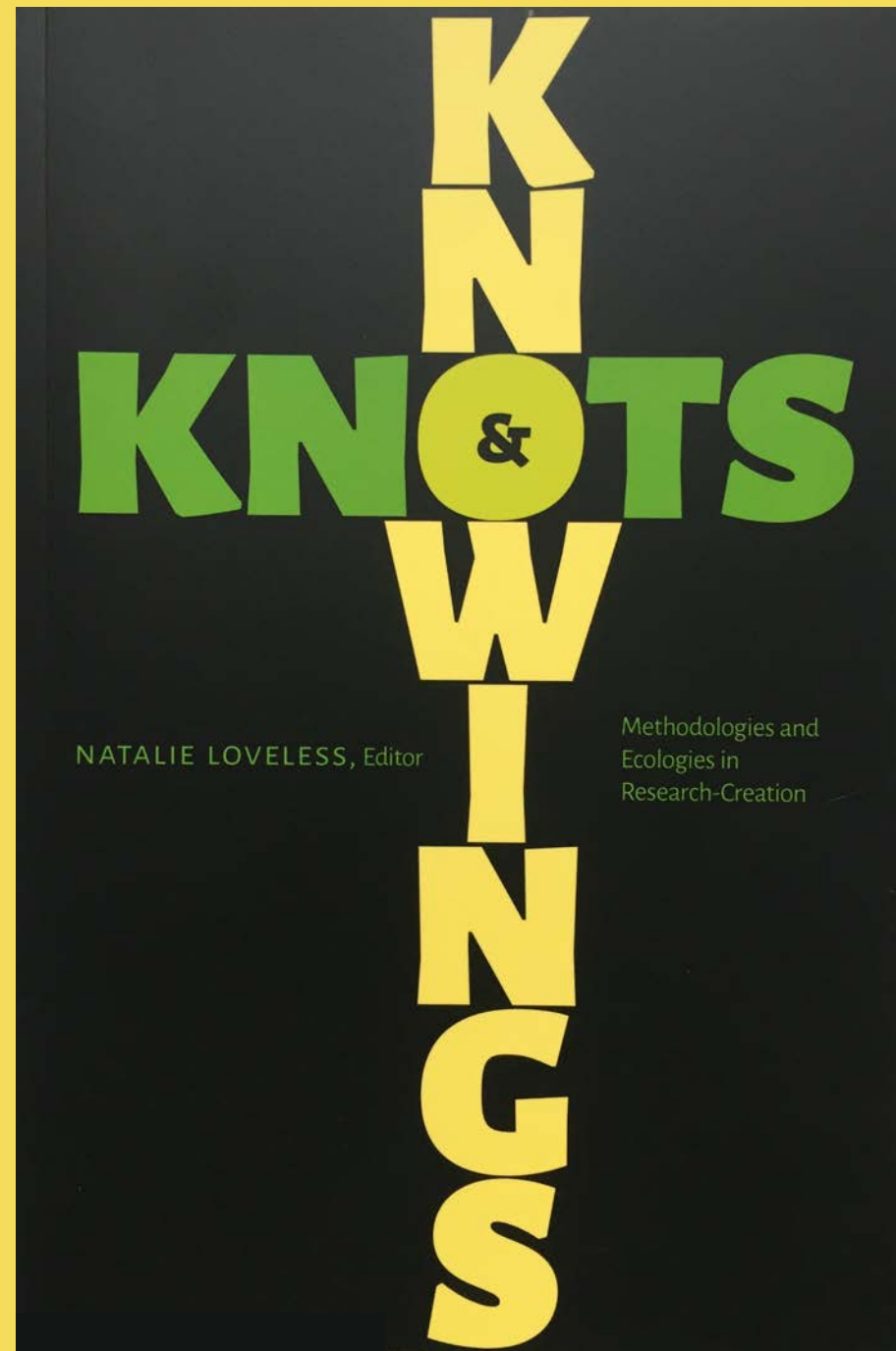


Philip K. Dick
Fomelhaut Albemuth graphic
July 8th 1974

My discussion with LaTiesha led to a planned visit by Beau Dick to the Ruskin School of Art in Oxford in April 2018 and a commission to produce a catalogue essay for Beau's posthumous *Devoured by Consumerism* exhibition which took place at White Columns gallery, New York in April 2019. My essay 'In The House of the Man Eater' was published in the exhibition catalogue.



In 2019 I was interviewed by my colleague Randy Lee Cutler from Emily Carr University of Art and Design, Vancouver about the research methods used in The Skullcracker Suite. The interview 'Special Investigations' was published in *Knowings and Knots: Methodologies and Ecologies in Research Creation*, edited by Natalie Loveless (University of Alberta Press, 2020).



ISSUE 2 / SEPT 2019

IN THIS ISSUE

[Kevin Healey](#) / [Mark Poole](#) / [Pavel Prokopic](#) /
[Sara Penrhyn Jones](#) / [Vicky Smith](#) / [Brian](#)
[Fagence](#) / [Michael John Goodman](#) / [Katherine](#)
[Chediak Putnam](#) / [Bethany Wakefield](#)



Contemplative Photo-collage in Media Studies Pedagogy

by Kevin Healey, University of New Hampshire

Welcome to the second issue of the International Journal of Creative Media Research. It has been a busy few months since launching our inaugural issue back in March, but we have been absolutely delighted to see and hear such a positive response to the journal across the wider academic community.

[READ ISSUE 2](#)

I am currently writing an article about BC Time-Slip for the forthcoming (July 2020) *International Journal of Creative Media Research* Special Issue: *Fiction Machines* edited by Charlie Tweed (Bath Spa University), Tony D Sampson (UEL) and Andy Weir (Arts University Bournemouth).

**PUBLIC TALKS ABOUT *THE SKULLCRACKER SUITE*
AND *BC TIME-SLIP***

Presentation of **The Skullcracker Suite** and **BC Time-Slip** as part of the **Remote Proximities** Fine Art Research Event, Goldsmiths, London, 15 Nov. 2019

Presentation **The Potlatch Never Ended** at the Etic Lab Annual Seminar, Gregynog Hall, Newtown, Wales, 26 Jul. 2019

Talk **BC Time-Slip/Cannibal Metaphysics (Part. 2)** for the group show **Morphologies of Invisible Agents**, Space Studios, London, 4 May 2019

Talk on the **The Skullcracker Suite** for the FHI Social Practice Lab, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina, 17 Apr. 2019

Talk **Passing for Human at the Alien Encounter Group** at **The Shaping of a Message** event, Goldsmiths, London, 15 May 2018

Presentation of **The Skullcracker Suite**, Powell River Public Library, Powell River, British Columbia, 19 Dec. 2017

BC Time-Slip Research blog

<https://bctimeslip.skullcrackersuite.org/>

BC Time-Slip exposition on the Research Catalogue

International Data Base for Artistic Research

<https://www.researchcatalogue.net/profile/show-exposition?exposition=720351>