

# Charting a Different World: Sound Mapping Together on Coast Salish Territories

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*Just on the other side of this little point they call Helen Point today, our name is XIXNEŠEN, for that place, it means the sacred track. But when the creator made these islands, they made them from our people; they were human at one time. He made them from our people. He threw them from WSÁNEĆ—where we live—he threw them from there and they landed in different parts of the straits, out at sea and they became those islands. . .*

—J,SINTEN/Dr. John Elliott, quoted in *Mayne Island Soundmap*



Fig. 1. Image from "XIXNEŠEN," a piece on the *Mayne Island Soundmap*.

Click [here](#) to listen to the story.

When European settlers first came to the West Coast of North America, they made maps. As they did so, they charted into being the world both as they understood it and as they wished it to be (Berland; Luckert). As Métis-Cree educator, curator, and filmmaker Kamala Todd writes, “in the rapacious rush to possess and settle the land, the European newcomers called the land empty, free for the taking . . . Appointing themselves authors of the ‘new world,’ the newcomers wrote Indigenous people out of the story, inscribing their own narratives onto the remade land” (8). Maps have often been central to these processes of dispossession (Blomley; Rose-Redwood et al.). However, different map-making traditions have always existed. Making maps differently can “challenge our relationships with the environment and the dominant culture,” offering a change in perspective and a glimpse into a different way of being (Engel). It is in the context of these histories and cartographies that the *Mayne Island Soundmap (MISM)* was created.

SK̓FAK̓ or Mayne Island—nestled off the coast of what is known as British Columbia, Canada—has been traditionally used by a large number of Indigenous nations including the Lekwungen, Snaw-Naw-As, WESÁNEĆ, Scia-new, T'Sou-ke, Mlahat, S̓c̓əwəθən M̓steyəx̓<sup>w</sup>, and the Hul'qumi'num Musitimuhw, including Stz'uminus, Cowichan, Halalt Lake Cowichan, Lyackson, and Penelakut. The ways in which these nations managed overlapping sovereignties is challenging for settler worldviews to understand and is a complex issue for local communities.<sup>1</sup> Mayne was claimed and named by European settlers in the nineteenth century, and Indigenous nations' access to and control over resources in this area was interrupted. Since

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<sup>1</sup> We refer to these groups as Coast Salish in the title of this piece not to diminish their unique and individual characteristics but to reflect the ways in which many nations have used Mayne Island rather than just one.

then, Mayne has been a majority working-class settler community.<sup>2</sup> Around 1900, many Japanese-Canadians came to the island until their forced resettlement and internment during World War II (M. Elliot). Today, no permanent Indigenous community exists on the island; there is a reserve with very few inhabitants, and individual Indigenous folks live amongst settlers. The European-settler past and present is well represented in publications, the local museum, in the lived experiences and memories of residents, and in how the island presents itself to the world.

The *MISM* is a digital mapping project hosted on a website. Produced by Russell Gendron and Sadie Couture (the authors of this essay), it features a visual depiction of the island with thirteen sound pieces embedded in various locations (see fig. 2). Mayne is a special place for Gendron, whose European-settler family's presence in the region extends from the early 1900s to the present day. Couture, a casual visitor to Mayne and a scholar and artist of European-settler descent, offered an outsider's view.<sup>3</sup> The *MISM* emerged from a desire to look more closely at Gendron's settler roots and to interrogate notions of home and feelings of belonging and ownership. It was also a deeply collaborative project: both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people connected to Mayne, residents, historians, local artists, plants, animals, the

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<sup>2</sup> SK̓FAK̓ is a SENĆOŦEN name shared with us by Elder John Elliot of the WJOĒĒLP people, which describes what is roughly known as the area that includes Mayne Island, Active Pass and Galiano Island. Many nations have traditionally used Mayne, and refer to Mayne on their own terms and in their own languages. There is no one Indigenous name for the island or for specific places on the island. In the mid-nineteenth century, the island was named after a British naval officer, Richard Charles Mayne (M. Elliot 2-3), and this name remains in broad use.

<sup>3</sup> Both Gendron and Couture were born and raised on unceded and occupied x<sup>w</sup>məθk<sup>w</sup>əy̓əm, Skwxwú7mesh, and səli'wətaʔ territories.

land, and the water all shaped the map. Some volunteered while others were compensated for their contributions.<sup>4</sup>

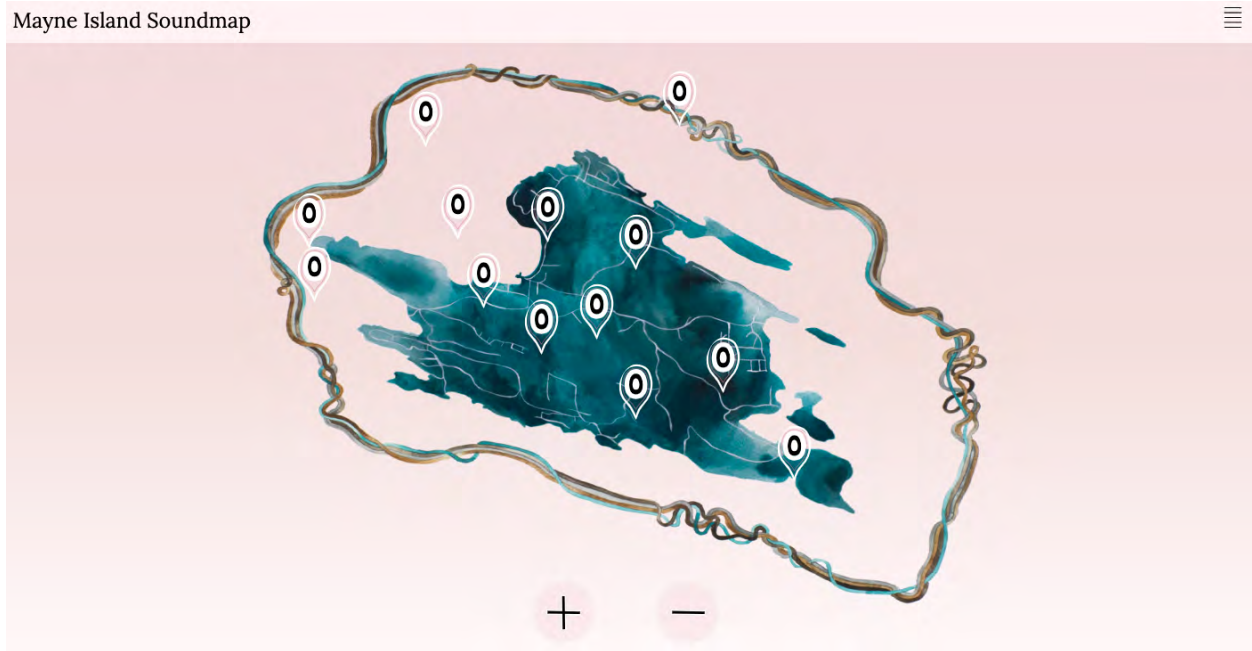


Fig. 2. The homepage for the online component of the *Mayne Island Soundmap*.

The *MISM* aims to complicate listeners' notions of place, history, and futurity through audio-visual representations of space and time. Some pieces on the map directly address the history of colonization and dispossession in the area while others center on different topics. Visitors hear about the Indigenous past, present, and future of the island, about the Japanese-Canadian islanders, about invasive deer, mental health challenges, folk musicians, and friendly

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<sup>4</sup> J,SINTEN/Dr. John Elliott, Joanna Weeks, Bill Weeks, Marie Weeks, Alan Weeks, John Aitken, Jenny Ritter, Emile Scott, Jon Schmidt, Miyuki Nagata, Kai Nagata, Jennifer Iredale, Claire Gendron, Paula Bucholz, Saoirse Soley, Eyvan Collins, the seals of Miner's Bay, Black Tail and Fallow deer, two ravens (and numerous other birds), the wind, and the water all generously shared their understanding of Mayne Island. Without them, the map would not be possible.

ghosts. The map offers a whisper of a small island community and the ways in which it has been entangled in power structures, big and small.

To map is to be political, and to map is to be hopeful. It is an attempt to make a place legible for oneself and for future visitors. The *MISM* was created in this spirit. It's an attempt to represent a place in a way that is already embodied and known to some, with the hopes that it will help others find their way. The map is also an invitation to question: Can we chart new territory in how we relate to one another and the land? Can we map ourselves a different world?

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The *MISM* embraces some traditional Western mapping conventions while challenging others. Each sound piece has a symbolic home on the map chosen for specific reasons. Geographic location, desire, memory, and imagination all played into these placements. Pieces such as “Sweet Dreams” (about a haunted road and nightmares) and “The Joy of Cooking Fenison” (chronicling the introduction of an invasive species of deer) exist visually on the map in the areas where the stories take place. “Canoe Walk” (sounds of an afternoon paddle) and “Queen of Nanaimo” (an audio essay about a retired ferry) are placed in more approximate locations reflecting the movements of the vessels. “Chairs Weren’t Made for Dancin’”—an improvised country song connected to a different island—is situated out in the ocean: a reminder that Mayne does not float alone on your screen or in the world. In other cases, the markers were placed deliberately to obscure; collaborators felt that it was not appropriate to share some information publicly (such as where an event took place), countering the “Western imperative for all knowledge to be accessible at all times” (Robinson 21). Standing out from the bunch is “Fumbling Towards Reconciliation,” a conversation between an Indigenous resident on

Mayne, John Aitken (Coast Salish, Haida, and Scottish), and a non-Indigenous part-time resident, Marie Weeks (British, Irish, and French). When Aitken was asked where the dialogue might best be situated on the map, he suggested creating a braided, twisting ring around the island to emphasize the flexible and encompassing nature of his work and his experiences.

We omitted place names as well as common landmarks like the Agricultural Hall, the ferry terminal, and local businesses. Our map attempts to honor the land, the waters, and what they have been through: various uses, claims of ownership, transfers of property, periods of beautiful stewardship as well as eras of neglect and disrespect. Its visual simplicity also allows room for, and draws attention to, an equally central tenet of the project: stories and sounds.

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While sounds are no more inherently anti-colonial than images, the unfamiliar coupling of cartography and audio challenges *MISM* visitors to reconsider their assumptions about place and how to orient themselves in relation to it. The design of the media player does not allow for skipping or scrubbing, forcing map visitors to slow down and listen as the pieces unfurl. Sound as a medium also made sense for this specific community. On Mayne, music, storytelling, history, and news happen in-person and out loud. The customary way of being there is to be in conversation. Working with sound was a way to respect this aspect of the island's operation, enforce a certain relationship to temporality, and offer a reorienting opportunity to *MISM* visitors.

To achieve these goals, we leaned on existing and newly formed relationships. We recorded audio across the island at different times and through different seasons, creating a localized sound bank, with the goal to blend commanding sounds—generators, ferry horns,

television, tractor trailers, wind, birds—with quieter ones—water droplets, a gate’s chime, a paddle in water, bon fires, scotch broom. Edited together, these soundscapes, interviews, music, and narrations make up the stories on the map. Just as some sounds are louder than others, the same is true for voices and opinions regarding what stories to share and which perspectives to relay.



Fig. 3. Image from “Granny,” a piece on the *Mayne Island Sound Map*.

Click [here](#) to listen to the story.

As Stó:lō scholar Dylan Robinson has convincingly argued, listening is informed by one’s social position and experiences (10). Settler forms of perception are often characterized by notions of extraction, possession, and ownership, states of being which fundamentally influence what we hear and how we hear (14). Robinson argues for “forms of listening otherwise” that challenge settler colonial perceptual regimes (15), listening which honors

relations between the listener and listened-to, and through which listeners “feel responsible to sound” (Robinson 15).

Especially on the West Coast of British Columbia, soundmaps, soundscapes, sound walks, and other forms of experimental sound art exist in the shadow of the World Soundscape Project and the work of R. Murray Schafer, Hildegard Westerkamp, and Barry Truax, among others. These artists and scholars fostered an interest in acoustic ecologies and sonic environments. In this tradition, sound recordings can both authentically represent place and highlight the extent to which contemporary sonic environments are “polluted” by non-natural or mechanized sounds (Akiyama 55; Thompson 88). Though these people and projects have been very influential, they have also been rightfully critiqued for assuming the whiteness and settlerness of their subjects and listeners (Akiyama; Jordan; Kelman; Robinson; Thompson). The *MISM* was created in conversation with these legacies of sound studies and the realities of living in a world dominated by settler perceptual orders in which sound work is and has been complicit. It embraces context-specific recordings that previous traditions popularized but veers away from attempting to create authentic, accurate, or transparent representations of place. With narration, first person accounts, and many layers of audio, the pieces included on the *MISM* are stories rather than sonic snapshots. They mark whiteness and settlerness when they are present, pay respect to the multitude of histories and communities connected to this place, allow competing and contrasting accounts to remain unresolved, and foreground both human and environmental concerns.

The Listening Post—a free standing, solar powered console and speaker accessible to the public year-round—also offers a way to listen otherwise. The post, located on the Mayne Island Museum Grounds (see fig. 4), is a way to access the *MISM* offline and in situ. By



pressing a button, listeners can hear a selection of snippets from the map. The post stands alongside three new information panels describing current and traditional Indigenous relationships to the island and region. These installations are some of the only additions to the Museum in decades, and the post offers a way into the *MISM* for a community in which offline interaction remains vitally important.



Fig. 4. The listening post on the grounds of the Mayne Island Museum. Photos by Sadie Couture.

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Collaboration with both humans and non-humans in accordance with participatory research methodologies were guiding principles in the creation of the *MISM*. Mayne artist Jenny Ritter illustrated the project while local musician Emile Scott produced a full audio story. Web designer Jon Schmidt helped bring our vision of the map to life. Others shared stories, memories, songs, a place to record, a borrowed canoe, or a meal. Like life on Mayne,

the *MISM* offers a conversation, an ongoing discussion about our colonial inheritances, our stories, our varied pasts, and our possible futures.

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