

# SPEAKING WITH

The text given here is part of an ongoing attempt on my part to understand testimony given by Haida woman Diane Brown before His Honour, Justice Harry MacKay (here called Kilsli), in B.C. Supreme Court, November 6th, 1985, in the matter of the application by Frank Beban Logging and Western Forest Products Ltd. for an injunction to prohibit Haida picketing of logging roads on Lyell Island, South Moresby, in Haada Gwaii. The injunction was granted two days later, and 72 Haida, including Diane Brown, her 80 year-old father Watson Price and other Haida Elders, were subsequently arrested, tried and convicted for continuing their blockade.

The civil disobedience action was part of the Haida struggle to protect their traditional homelands and have aboriginal rights and entitlement recognized before logging completely denudes the Islands, South Moresby, as those who followed the story will know, has since been declared a national park, although the aboriginal entitlement issue has not been addressed.

Justice MacKay, in a remarkable departure from conventional courtroom practice, allowed the Haida to give testimony in traditional oral fashion, without lawyer intercession, and it is this element which drew me to the text. Working from the printed transcript (for which I thank the Council of Haida Nations) I attempt to "hear" Diane Brown's words in a way that might, hopefully, give them meaning in the white, Eurocanadian context of this magazine.

The reader might situate her or himself, in approaching this text, as a kind of eavesdropper on an ongoing interethnic, intercultural conversation. Part of the problem of Eurocanadian-aboriginal communication and discourse is the question of place: how, and therefore where, does the discourse happen? On the printed page, the oral, which is essential to the Haida way of speaking, is rendered mute. On the other hand, if the text that oral testimony produces does not get "out," beyond the specific location where the words happen, its political potency is reduced.

So, in resituating my text, I present it as a kind of "dialogue," and maybe, hopefully, a "duet" of voices. The more I work with this text, the more it becomes clear to me that it will ultimately only work in an oral, performance, perhaps theatrical context. And ultimately that's what I will write it for.

# DIANE BROWN

## A Text-in-Progress

*Norbert Ruchsaa*

In the meantime, the reader here will perhaps collaborate with me and overhear as much meaning as we can now make. In my original presentation of this work, in the context of a university communications programme, I said I wanted to approach Diane's testimony "shipwrecked and naked," aware, in other words, of the kind of research and exegetical techniques Europeans have imposed on local texts, but casting these off in favour of a more direct kind of speaking. The university, amazingly enough, listened to me, and so I'm encouraged now to go out a little further into the world with my (and Diane's) project.

The section of *Speaking With Diane Brown* presented here is a section of the longer work-in-progress: it focuses on the specific theme of translation/transformation as the dual or twin process by which transcultural meaning might be made, even in something as austere and restrictive as a Canadian courtroom (and/or magazine text). My point of departure was my own identity as an immigrant Canadian: I approach Diane Brown's text as an immigrant facing an Aboriginal inhabitant. Diane's voice is given in a separate typeface as a mark of respect for this asymmetry. The piece begins with an initial question from Justice MacKay:

*Mrs. Brown, I understand you want to speak in the Haida way as well.*

Yes, I do. Kilsli, Kilsligana, Kiljadgana, Taaxwilaas. Your Honour, chiefs, ladies held in high esteem, friends. I thank you for this opportunity to speak today. I was aware that I could get a lawyer, but I feel you lose if you go through another person.

My first language is Haida. My second language is English. Therefore I can express myself better in English. I feel through another person, a lawyer, they also speak another language, and I would have lost what I hope to help Kilsli understand and feel.

The Haida have asked His Honour, Mr. Justice Harry MacKay, at the start of the hearing whether they may call him "Kilsli," the Haida appellation for a respected, honoured, important person. The strategy here is quite simple: the project is to transform "The Queen Charlotte Islands" (a place) into "Haada Gwaii" (another place) via the medium of a third place (the courtroom), then it is strategic to transform "His Honour," the "respected person" in the discourse of that third place, into a respected personage (title) of the place one is trying to achieve or construct. The "Courtroom" thus becomes not (or not only) a place where Canadian law and justice (read: power; authority) are rendered and reinforced, but also a place where Haida transformation (of persons into their masks, their "naming") can occur. By "naming" Kilsli, Diane Brown makes room in something as alien as a Canadian courtroom for a Haida way of speaking.

A person-place relation is offered, in which person ("His Honour/Kilsli") is allowed to serve as a metaphor, or, more properly, act metonymically for place — i.e., to be privileged in a way that (I suspect) is counter to conventional Haida discursive practice where place, *Haada Gwaii*,

**In denying the Haida a way of legitimating their past in their own culture and language, Canada compels them to imagine one.**

would normally be the reigning metaphor and persons — "the people," Haada Laas — emanate from there.

Note then how the other (Haida) respected persons present are brought into the discourse and aligned with Kilsli; made "like" him (and he like them) by contiguity. Kilsli is then, in a reverse or reciprocating gesture, reintroduced as "Your Honour" — to secure his own, independent agency in the discourse, I presume, and at the same time bound this agency within the now established convention of "Kilsli." "Chiefs" then comes in to buttress this: "Chiefs" is white man's language for respected Indians in the same way that "Your Honour" is white man's language for Kilsli. Thus, syntactically, Diane "respects" the classification "white man's language" while at the same time requesting that it respect the classificatory convention established by her initial salutatory string of Haida namings.

"Ladies held in high esteem" appears at first glance like an enigma. It breaks both court convention and, by its placement in the "English" part of the salutation, suggests it is not normal Haida usage either — at least not in this form/translation. On the other hand, Haida traditions are matrilineally received, and I think it is the attempt to put this idea on the agenda — and specifically on the English agenda —

that is behind this gesture. Ladies held in high esteem directly confronts the male hegemony associated with Canadian court procedure.

Diane then thanks the assembled persons named for the opportunity to speak. The point to note here is that, in opposition to court etiquette, where the judge alone confers the right to speak, it is here requested of and felt to be given by the entire assembled community. A listenership and a co-authorship is proposed, and a transcultural, tran-sethnic/linguistic community is hypothesized in which Diane's discourse can "take place."

She knew she could get a lawyer, but feels "you lose if you go through another person." In view of the metaphors Diane will employ later in her speaking, it's worth taking this construction quite literally. You — not "I," or "one," but the generic second person — lose by going through another person. The image given is a physical one of being born — the only time in life you literally "go through" another person — and Diane simply states here, I think, that she does not wish to be born through the words of a male. If the lawyer's words are the normal route (body; "code") by which one travels from one's place (*Haada Gwaii*) to this place of speaking (the court), and if speaking is a bit like being born, then "lawyer" (man) is the wrong vehicle. "You" — all the assembled — lose something, i.e., your collective and personal body. It is impossible to be born (move from one plane of speaking/being to another) in this manner.

My first language is Haida. My second language is English.

This phrase addresses me as an immigrant Canadian. I too have a first language and a second that I learned here. Except I usually phrase it another way: "My first language was my European one, but now it's English because I can speak it better." Linguistically, thus, I have arrived at a different "place" with my second language than has Diane. This is only to be expected, in view of the fact I am an immigrant and she is not. For me the "here" of language is "English" (better second), and I reveal myself therefore as a displaced European, rather than an indigenous person for whom the "here" is still Haida (first language).

Therefore I can express myself better in English.

So a turnaround of my normal construction. What I hear in it is the gap, the silence that occurred in Haida culture when children were shipped (right up to the present generation) to residential schools and forbidden to speak their language. This strategy of the church and the Canadian state of annihilating the culture by cutting it off at its roots, at its vocal cords, so to speak, is a form of cultural genocide not often discussed or understood in the Canadian body politic. Diane expresses its pain in the syntax of her sentences. In the gap between "first" and the

"better second" languages speaks the silence of someone whose language has been once removed from their body — and for whom memory thus becomes always partly an act of imagination, of reinventing.

The idea of the second or "other" language is then curled around to include the other person, the lawyer, who is normally the keeper or speaker of second languages (and second guesses about language) in this place. What's notable here is the movement of agency in the sentence — from "I" through "another person" to "a lawyer" to "they," and then back to "I" and "Kilsli" who are the true "dialogic" partners (to use Bakhtin's term). What I think the sentence means is that even though English is a second language for her, Diane, into which she must translate from Haida, this is okay because lawyers translate too, from the street to the courtroom.

Thus the idea of regional/spacial separateness of languages, both "first" and "second," is maintained, while the paradigm of translation — between places and between languages — is acknowledged and upheld. Diane Brown constructs a link between herself and "lawyer" by this method in order to gain the authority to speak for herself in the courtroom. This two languages theme becomes a key one in my analysis.

Note then the important connection between understanding and feeling — which for Europeans, of course, are separate moments: one hypothesizes separate "selves" in order to appropriate them. For her project to succeed, Diane Brown must reconnect these in the construction of "Kilsli": in order to make him understand, she must also make him feel. It is in this sense that it is vital she not "lose" herself.

Since the beginning of time — I have been told this through our oral stories — since the beginning of time the Haidas have been on the Queen Charlotte Islands.

The Charlottes were named thus in July 1786, by Captain George Dixon, after his ship the *Queen Charlotte*, which traded sea otter furs in the area for the King George's Sound Company.

That was our place, given to us.

It's unclear here by whom the "place" is given. Its placement directly after the English nominalization makes it ambiguous. The Haida creation story says that *Haada Laas*, the people, were born from a clam shell discovered by Raven on Sandspit Beach.

For a good discussion of the "time immemorial," "beginning of time" theme, see Hugh Brody's *Maps and Dreams*. He discusses there the conflicting evidence, scientific vs. mnemonic, and the resulting stories, those told by scientists vs. those told by oral historians, and how objectionable European theorizing on this subject is to many coast native people. He indicates clearly that the Bering Sea migration the-

ory, proposed by white archeologists and prehistorians, is seen by many aboriginal coast people as just another in a string of discursive efforts by which white Eurocanadians try to "assimilate" Indians into the former's immigrant culture and thereby deny them the very idea of aboriginal rights or title. More importantly and cruelly, it takes away the native peoples' right to speak about their own past — to tell their own creation story — and in this aspect participates in the cutting of vocal cords mentioned earlier. Another way of putting this is to say that, in denying the Haida a way of legitimating their past in their own culture and language, Canada compels them to imagine one.

We were put on the islands as caretakers of this land.

I think this construction demonstrates the almost seamless join (to use a Christian metaphor here) the Haida have achieved between ancient local and imported Christian traditions. The idea of "caretakers" is a key value here. It offers a bridge by which to travel or translate between the two languages, cultures, localities under discussion. It welcomes the European reader/listener.

Here is the first time in Diane's text that an action is proposed which directly connects self and place in time. Note then how "history," European time, enters in the immediate next sentence:

Approximately 200 years ago foreigners came to that land.

"This land" has changed to "that land" in one sentence, concomitant with the arrival of the "foreigners." A first meeting. A first transformation of time directly into speech, one might say.

The Haida are very hospitable people. The people came.

Clock time begins to interact with narrative/myth time. Note the tense change: already we don't know who is coming and going here. The Haida "are" in the perpetual present, but "the people" came in historical time. A translation/transformation, occurs — not only between people and languages but between orders of time. The metaphor is that of the Haida people coming to the beach, then as now, to greet the foreigners who are also coming (who came and are still coming); a joining-in-the-place-of-the-act-of-coming (impossible to say in English). This is a welcoming ceremony in which one people is transformed (syntactically here) into the body of another — in an attempt to join and become "the" people. "Hospitable" is the key value here.

They were welcomed. We shared.

This close musical movement of pronouns brings "we" and "they" together in vocal alignment without forfeiting independent agency. The strategy is rhythmic

(as opposed to syntactical). The balance of passive and active voice has the effect of moving the pronouns, the "selves," even closer together. "Welcoming" and "sharing" are the key joining ideas.

They told us that perhaps there is a better way to live, a different religion, education in schools. The Haida tried this way. The potlatches were outlawed. In many schools my father attended in Kokalitz, the Haida language was not allowed to be spoken. He was punished if he used his language. To this day, Watson Price, my father, understands every word of the Haida language, but he doesn't speak it.

is a body split in two.

Watson Price speaks only English (second language) but understands (hears) every word of Haida (first language). He says, and his daughter says, "Watson Price," but he hears, and I imagine she hears, his (unspoken) Haida name. (She does not mention it, speak it, out of respect for that silence, I think, substituting the generic "my father.") This rupture between speaking and listening self (between word and its absence; between a name and its unravelling) corresponds, on the level of physiology, I think, to the rupture on the geographical plane between "Queen Charlotte Islands, B.C., Canada," and *Haada Gwaii*. One hears one place and speaks another: one speaks one name and



So the two-language theme again. Haida and English. Watson Price, my father: note the naming sequence. One hears a silence where the other name should be, the Haida Watson Price. Note how closely the naming-language question is linked with the outlawing of the potlatch. Potlatches were the places where you received/were given names: with their outlawing, naming is silenced. Language is outlawed at its base. The vocal cords which connect self with place are torn.

This silence is, on the one hand, that between a father and a daughter, a gap between bodies connected through kinship, and, on the other, a silence within the man, Watson Price, himself.

I want to listen closely to this silence. When I do, it opens and I discover that it is in fact two men I am listening to. Or it

hears another. This is another way of conceptualizing the place/self dichotomy.

So the people came.

Ambiguity here about who "the people" are at this point. Or rather: we are transported back to the welcoming ceremony described earlier, by which the boundary between the two types of "people" was negotiated and made fluid. Bodies blending into each other in the place of meeting and coming, etc. It is interesting to note in this connection how the original Haida structuring of society into two "sides" or moieties which "meet" during the potlatch is echoed in Diane's rendering of this first contact story. Potlatch meetings were the locations/places where separate "kinds" of persons (one is

Parade through Vancouver after the arrival of the "Save South Moresby National Caravan," March, 1986. Photo by Martin Roland

almost tempted to think of them as species) met, talked, danced, gave gifts and therewith negotiated social, spiritual and economic boundaries and continuities.

In reiterating this structure here, Diane Brown attempts to place the Contact Story into the larger aboriginal frame of "time immemorial," I think. She accommodates the "newcomers" within the tradition. She welcomes them, we might say, into her speaking.

We tried their way. Their language.  
Their education. Their way of worship.

Historical time is on the horizon now and the effort is to accommodate it (welcome it into) a native (i.e., local) way of speaking. One could formulate it this way: with the arrival of the Europeans in her narrative, Diane Brown needs a way of structuring their narrative time — i.e., "history" — into the aboriginal narrative time — i.e., "myth." She doesn't want to continue telling a story about "time immemorial" unless she can incorporate clock time into it.

Watson Price, because he accepted and welcomed the language of the foreigners into his world, his being (his ears and his voice), became unable to tell himself the story of how he came to live in *Haada Gwaii*. Thus he is also unable to tell the story of *how he still lives there/here*. He is cut away from his place and his time, and functions, in the portrait Diane provides of him, as a kind of mute inhabiting an alien world. It is this mute "otherness" that Diane wishes to undo with her current speaking.

I might state it this way: if Diane wishes to keep the "myth of origins" (how people and places were first connected) alive, and thereby keep alive the very concept of myth as a theory about time, she must discover or unearth (I'm tempted to say) a way to "speak" these ideas in English. She must find a way, in the "second" language, by which these "first" language concepts can come alive. If she adopts the strategy of her father and simply discards the first language, these ideas will die — and the person becomes severed from his or her place. If, conversely, she refuses to speak the "second language" on the grounds that it cannot or will not contain — or, worse yet, will destroy — these first language ideas, she will not be understood in this courtroom where she has chosen to speak. She will become a mute.

Her task, therefore, becomes the construction of a "place" in the second language where the first language ideas can occur and be "heard" and a "self" that can "speak" those ideas in that place. Since this self must speak in the "second language," it must constitute or "speak itself" in that language — even as it recognizes or "hears" the first place ideas in her speaking. She must bring Watson Price's two selves back together, is the metaphorical way of saying this.

What appeared at first glance, therefore, to be a problem of translation — language A into language B — reveals itself

more and more to be a problem of transformation. What Diane Brown must "bring over" from one linguistic system to another is not words but ideas. She must carry meanings. In the case of *Haada Gwaii*, "history" (the story of Watson Price) has shown that these meanings cannot be severed from the persons and places in which they occur and that they represent without a rupture or loss (of self and place). They are inviolably connected in part of their being with the persons and landscapes they articulate. It is thus not a matter of translating "language" A into "language" B, but a matter of transforming persons and places *whole*, so to speak.

The next part of her testimony enacts, I think, this physical movement. It works by way of the transformation of a body into a place, and then the reciprocal transformation of a place into a body. The resulting "discursive location" becomes a site where meaning is said and heard, and heard to be said and heard. It's a place of witnessed speech, we might say. Again, it echoes the potlatch as a place of witnessing.

In giving this testimony, in turning a place into a body (and also vice versa), Diane Brown pushes to the very edges of the discursive regimen she is here operat-

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ing under. She transforms the "courtroom," as site of speaking, into another kind of place.

I want to touch on a very important area of my life as a food gatherer. It is my job, my purpose, to insure that I gather certain foods for my husband and my children, and I want to share one part.

She touches an area of her person (self) which is food gathering, and wants, like food, to share this.

It's called *gkow*. That's herring roe on kelp.

*Gkow* does not mean herring roe on kelp: it is herring roe on kelp (and not somewhere else).

In the spring, the herring come and they spawn on kelp. For many years now I have been harvesting that and putting it away for the winter.

Story begins like a fairy tale, in time immemorial — each spring, forever, the herring come, and I come...etc.

But so far I haven't heard what — why is food-gathering spiritual?

This is very important. The rupture (again) in syntax must be listened to with great care. Begin like a fairy tale: my life is a fairy tale, but so far I haven't heard...what?

She hasn't heard the fairy tale about her life, is I think what she's trying to tell here. Or, more profoundly: my life is not a fairy tale because it doesn't, or hasn't yet, told itself — the world — the story about what it means. The fairy tale idiom as a narrative mode stops short here. It can't work.

The meaning is not: life is like a fairy tale; the meaning is: my voice is taken away. In the rupture in syntax we hear again (as a kind of echo) the "story" of Watson Price; the physical discontinuity between a person and his/her life, experienced now as a speech hiatus or jump in the speech act of the story-teller, the hero's daughter. We hear the silence that has placed itself at the centre of their connection.

How is food gathering spiritual? What is the story of that? The profoundly simple point here is that "English," the second language which Watson Price and the other Haidas of his generation welcomed into themselves and tried to share, has not been able to tell that story. It has not found a meaningful way to connect cultural and natural "series" in a way that would show "spirituality." Thus, in speaking it, the Haida have been cut off from themselves and from their land.

In the testimony that follows, Diane Brown will try to heal the rupture by re-telling that story. She will use English, her (better) second language, to reconnect the cultural and natural first language series in a way that re-establishes contact between people and places, humans and their things.

It's a spiritual thing that happens. It doesn't just happen every year. You can't take that for granted. We can't take that for granted because everything in the environment has to be perfect.

Note how this language accosts the boundaries of what we normally think of as testimony or legal evidence. To bring up something as lofty as the word "spiritual" in a Canadian courtroom questions the bounds of its discourse; to connect this concept with the notion of a "perfect environment" leaps over them.

The climate has to be perfect. The water temperature. The kelp have to be ready, and the herring have to want to spawn.

We are asked to believe, in this story, that there is a perfect place in the world where herring have desires — i.e., they are willful creatures, a bit like humans are — and where kelp can exist in alternative states — one of readiness and one of unreadiness.

But I want to share what goes on in my spiritual self in my body come February.

"In-my-spiritual-self-in-my-body" is one place, one time, one-body-and-voice come February. I'm reminded of the earlier place of meeting and coming, the welcoming and sharing ceremony constructed when Diane retold the First Contact Story. Here, I discover, I am also hearing a Contact Story, albeit one that tells of a person meeting her place, a land sharing its body. Note how the ideas (persons/places) are separated rhythmically, vocally, while being in every other way — syntactically, semantically, logically — joined.

And I feel it is an important point. That's what makes me as a Haida different from you, Kilsli. My body feels that it's time to spawn.

What makes her different as a Haida is that her body spawns — "feels" the place and the story and the time of spawning. This piece of testimony is the transformative moment where Diane Brown transforms herself — and thereby the courtroom — into a Haida place or way of speaking.

Here are the steps by which she moved to this point:

- she touched an area of herself which is food gathering, i.e., which equals food gathering;
- she shared this part (her self as *food gathering*);
- she called it, named it something — *gkow*;
- first in Haida (first language);
- then in English (second language);
- transformed it thereby into "Herring-Roe-on-Kelp."

In this naming, this "placing," the location, "Canadian Courtroom," is transformed, (rhetorically) into part of *Haada Gwaii* — which is also, as I have said, a part of Diane Brown's person (body). The "courtroom" becomes, at least in part of its being, "Herring-Roe-on-Kelp-Place" — at the same moment, in the same gesture, as it is a Haida woman speaking. There is no separation, in other words, between body and place in language.

Note how she observes the "correct" sequencing of first and second languages I described earlier — first language becoming better second one, rather than the immigrant sequencing where second languages replace (and thereby partly dislocate) original ones. In the new sequencing, we "hear" both languages, (first-in-second) as we speak, and we "speak" both languages (second-in-first) as we hear. In this way the rupture of sense and self experienced by Watson Price and his generation is assuaged.

For in the immigrant sequencing we can already hear the silence, the rupture that disconnects words from their places, people from their meanings, when original first languages are lost or pushed aside.

This "rupture" corresponds, incidentally, to the period in Haida/Canadian history during which the federal government pursued a dual policy of segregating native cultures from the mainstream by locating them on reserves, on the one hand, and trying to assimilate them into the mainstream via European ("school") education, on the other.

When first languages are abandoned or confused in this way, original meanings (spirits) begin to wander and lose their hold on real places. The language "forks," we might say, away from its landscape, and we are unable to perceive local meaning.

*Gkow*, which is one thing, one place, one activity-and-time in Haida (in *Haada Gwaii*), can only be spoken in English (in



this courtroom) as a sentence. It can only "be" a relation between a subject and a predicate, in other words. *Gkow* becomes not a place or a name at all, but simply a semantic relation, a verbal construct.

To get around this problem and "translate" the subject back into the object (and vice-versa) in correct order, Diane takes the bull by the horns (or the *gkow* by the seaweed, so to speak) and makes this semantic relation a place. *Gkow* is, becomes, "Herring-Roe-on-Kelp" — a named place. Haida and English. This is the new verbal ground Diane offers as a basis of speech in this courtroom. Naming-as-transforma-

tion, rather than semantic translation, becomes the rhetorical practice.

In giving this new name, this "English" place, Diane heals a rupture between things and their names, people and their culture, time frames and their "stories," etc., that opened during the original Haida-European encounter, and has been structurally replicated in subsequent Haida-European(Canadian) relations.

It gets ready in February. I get a longing to be in the sea. I constantly watch the ocean surrounding the islands where the herring spawn. My body is kind of an edge of anticipation. Finally the day comes when it spawns the water gets all milky around it.

Here the transformation is consolidated. The day spawns, the place spawns, the body spawns, the water spawns grammatically and logically in this sentence — all in one continuous movement and transformation of semantic energy. The rules of English grammar and sentence structure (so dear to courtroom etiquette) are suspended, and a way of speaking emerges that is "pure Haida." The speaking of "Finally the day comes when it spawns the water gets all milky around it" leaves us, as European "native" speakers of English, breathless and concerned about sense of place. It is as if an earthquake had suddenly come and transported us, by the sheer force of Diane's language, to a different location, a different "hearing" or perception — of our own language.

In this new hearing, people and places, subjects and objects, names and their places, are connected by a different logic than the one I have been taught to become used to. Instead of subject-verb-object, I witness a pure display of transformative verbal energy that has no apparent need of or regard for proprietary rules of English grammar. It is as if, indeed, I had been transported in my "hearing" to another location, where everything participates in this act, this place or event of spawning — "Herring-Roe-on-Kelp-Place":

Finally the day comes when it spawns the water gets all milky around it.

Haida going into court in Vancouver for sentencing, December 6, 1985.  
Photo by Martin Roland

In this "place" I experience a pure tension, a pure force of oscillation between apparent contradictions. The energy released by this oscillation of meanings excites me. Its release, in the centre of Justice Harry MacKay's courtroom, gives room to breathe and imagine a way of speaking — about land and people, about Haidas and Europeans — that has not been spoken or heard there before.

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