Sean Robertson – Biography

While his family traces its roots in Canada to mid-19th century Quebec, Sean Robertson was raised in Vancouver. As an undergraduate, he swam varsity during his first year and studied social art history. This led to a master’s degree in architecture and a burgeoning curiosity in political issues and ideas which he felt could be addressed more directly outside of a largely visual profession. After studying law, articling at a commercial litigation practice and being called to the Bar of British Columbia, he finally returned to the dark side to complete a doctoral degree in human geography. His study of the politics of intellectual property, legal clerkship at a development-oriented NGO in the United Kingdom (FIELD), and participation in a civil society organization, The Forum on Privatization and the Public Domain, led to his interest in learning from Indigenous communities about the importance of their knowledge.

Sean’s research focuses on contemporary Indigenous politics and, in particular, the protection of cultural heritage in its tangible and intangible forms; Indigenous laws and social ordering; and, social theory, including the intersections of feminist theory and more-than-representational theory with Indigenous political philosophy. Across these areas, his abiding concern with spatiality may be seen in his exploration of the role of spatial arrangements, practices, and representations in social phenomenon. In his research with Indigenous peoples in Southern BC, he explored the geographies of rights, the geographies of abandonment, and the spatial politics of affect through three case studies. In more recent scholarship in Nunavut (with G. Ljubicic and R. Mearns, Carleton University), his work examines Inuit legal traditions in relation to caribou as an embodied practice through an elder-directed land camp methodology.

Sean’s teaching experience and interests include courses on Aboriginal Legal Issues, Contemporary Perspectives in Native Studies, the Politics of Cultural Heritage, Social Geography, and Political Geography. He has published in peer-reviewed law journals, such as University of Ottawa Law and Technology Journal, and peer-reviewed international, interdisciplinary social science journals, including Law and Social Inquiry and Environment and Planning “d”: Society and Space (forthcoming).