Going Local in the Global: A Canadian Literary Bioregional Turn

by

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Abstract

Going Local in the Global: A Canadian Literary Bioregional Turn confronts assumptions that bioregionalism with its restricted focus on the local limits apprehension of global environmental issues. Some proponents of cosmopolitanism argue that bioregionalism and its precursor regionalism do not have the full potential for cultivating a global ecoliteracy because of a traditional advocacy for a parochial-minded 'staying put.' A bioregion's (bio)diverse cultural and material organization, however, particularly as it is represented in literature, refutes such a myopic globalist criticism and initiates a need to redefine what 'staying put' actually entails within a bioregional context. Bioregional literature that departs from strictly social or political demarcations of territorial boundaries, and which focuses on the interactions between humans and other-than-humans and both with their habitats, defies simple categorizations of what or who is at home. Rather, these writings' focus on specificities of place open pathways into the complex entanglements, disruptions and flows of material and cultural interplay that co-constitute the local and the global as convergent, divergent and emergent processes. To capture *the nuances of a bioregional vitality*, we need an equally pluralistic, unsettling reading practice. We need one that is as adaptive and open to diversity, disruption, and unpredictability as the place itself. Few aspects of the local are or remain fixed in/to place. Some of these unsettlings are due to anthropogenic incursions, while others emerge as effects of millennial-long or abrupt local biogeoclimatic processes independent of human interference. These unsettlings, represented by their materialized local outcomes (migrations and pollution, for instance) demonstrate that neither the global nor the local exist in isolation: they co-constitute each other. The equilibrium sought, then, is in ethical, respectful relations between humans and between humans and the biophysical world in which they are immersed—despite and in the face of change and disturbance. If change is constant, then perhaps global and local equilibrium is through *negotiating* mutual concern in that constancy, informed by philosophical and scientific ecological principles, for an increasingly devastated biophysical environment. Bioregional literature offers one such means for conveying these principles in a meaningful, aesthetic form to promote the development of ecoliteracy.

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Lisa Sara Szabo-Jones. A section of Chapter Four, “Adventures in Habitat: An Urban Tale” appears in *Canadian Literature*, Issue 218, Autumn 2013. Permission to reprint in full is granted for "Water Drinker," *Taking the Names Down from the Hill,* Philip Kevin Paul, 2003, published by Nightwood Editions, www.nightwoodeditions.com. Permission to reprint in full is granted for “Mummichog,” *Animals of My Own Kind*, Harry Thurston, 2009, published by Signal Editions/Véhicule Press. Also to reprint in full, “Rat Song” by Margaret Atwood, is included by permission of the Author, available in *SELECTED POEMS, 1966 – 1984*, published by Oxford University Press, copyright Margaret Atwood 1990. Permission is granted to print in full Stephanie Bolster’s poem “In which alice visits pacific rim national park” published in *Canadian Literature* 141, 1994. Permission is granted to print in full “Write on Kew” by Laurie Ricou, *Salal: Listening for the Northwest Understory*, 2007, published by NeWest Press.

Dedicated to the memory of my father,
John Richard Jones
1935-2012

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Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION: Literary Bioregionalism

Going Local in the Global: A Canadian Literary Bioregional Turn challenges assumptions that bioregionalism with its restricted focus on the local limits apprehension of global environmental issues. Some proponents of cosmopolitanism argue that bioregionalism and its precursor regionalism do not have the full potential for cultivating a global ecoliteracy because of a traditional advocacy for a parochial-minded 'staying put.' A bioregion's (bio)diverse cultural and material organization, however, refutes such a myopic globalist criticism and initiates a need to redefine what 'staying put' actually entails within a bioregional context. Bioregional literature that departs from strictly social or political demarcations of territorial boundaries, and which focuses on the interactions between humans and other-than-humans and both with their habitats, defies simple categorizations of what or who is at home. Rather, these writings' focus on specificities of place open pathways into the complex entanglements, disruptions and flows of material and cultural interplay that co-constitute the local and the global as convergent, divergent and emergent processes. To capture the nuances of a bioregional vitality, we need an equally pluralistic, unsettling reading practice. We need one that is as adaptive and open to diversity, disruption, and unpredictability as the place itself. Few aspects of the local are or remain fixed in/to place. The bioregional constant is change. Some of these unsettlings are due to anthropogenic incursions, while others emerge as effects of millennial-long or abrupt local biogeoclimatic processes independent of human interference. These unsettlings, represented by their materialized local outcomes (migrations and pollution, for instance), demonstrate that neither the global nor the local exist in isolation: they co-

constitute each other. The equilibrium sought, then, is in ethical, respectful relations between humans and between humans and the biophysical world in which they are immersed—despite and in the face of change and disturbance. If change is constant, then perhaps global and local equilibrium is through *negotiating* mutual concern in that constancy, informed by philosophical and scientific ecological principles, for an increasingly devastated biophysical environment. Bioregional literature offers one such means for conveying these principles in a meaningful, aesthetic form to promote the development of ecoliteracy.

Ecoliteracy is the cultivation of interrelational thinking. It incorporates ecological systems of interconnectivity and interdependencies into our[1] day-to-day engagement with all life and abiota on this planet. In its materialization of a region's *bios*—the life power that sustains a region's well-being, resilience, and constancy—literary bioregionalism's major emphasis points to how *local* interactive human and material processes communicated through texts and storytelling are integral to widening humanity's location in the functioning of the planet's biotic and abiotic systems. It instructs us how our epistemologies and ontologies are crucial in influencing the manner in which we act toward the other-than-human and each other. Through demonstration of the agential capacities of both matter and humans, ecoliteracy helps to realize literature as materialized practices of imagination and lived experience that shape and alter human perception and behaviour. Yet, I do not suggest that ecoliteracy will automatically or naturally lead to magical outcomes of harmonious interrelationality; in fact, its effectiveness stresses how healthy bioregional living entails respectful awareness of and constant diligence in negotiating the

[1] I refer to 'our' as human species.

tensions that arise out of living cooperatively. Ecoliteracy, like any critical thinking, involves ongoing reassessment and effort, apt for an ever-changing material and cultural dynamic. In this respect, I draw on Lorraine Code's point, that swapping one vocabulary, metaphor, or discourse for another is not enough (7). Ecoliteracy entails a constant wayfinding, re-orienting, and distinguishing of thresholds within a social environment that is as unstable as the biophysical environments. We need to be self-reflexive in our examination of how these processes of thought are constitutive of world views, which colour our ways of interacting with one another and with the other-than-human. Ecoliteracy thus is a process of ecological and ethical subject formation.

Because it prompts alternative, non-linear modes of engagement with humans and other-than-humans, literary bioregionalism is vital to engendering and cultivating ecoliteracies that understand the co-constitutive relationship between local and global ecological issues. As marginal endeavours (often developing out of local grass-roots efforts), bioregional texts challenge critical assumptions, such as Roland Robertson's claim that "locality is in fact done from above or outside" (26). Exemplary bioregional texts, in turn, do not replicate Robertson's definition through inversion: globality is not "done" from the bottom or inside the local. Instead, they complicate both local and global by illustrating how the constraints and flows of matter and ideas move through both spaces to reveal that the two are co-constitutive formative processes, not fixed structures. These subsequent patterns and processes create a world that is in fact a system of intersecting, overlapping bioregional convergences and emergences. In this sense, ecoliteracy developed through literary bioregionalism is cosmopolitan in scope, is global. To cultivate a bioregional ecoliteracy an individual must discover, understand, engage, and negotiate various social, ecological, cultural, political, and communal levels with her local place in relation to a

globalized context. Mitchell Thomashow points out that we "have to start somewhere" (*Bringing* 130), and the bioregion is the locale where the biosphere's "diverse cyclical phenomena intersect" (130); "pattern recognition" becomes a "perceptual tool" for connecting local environmental conditions "to biospheric dynamics that aren't immediately obvious" (131) (an aspect I develop more fully in Chapter Two). By negotiating between the multiple cultural and material spheres that constitute a bioregion, reading for these patterns in bioregional literature aids inhabitants to see the unifying and limiting ways in which they co-exist both within and beyond the perimeters of politically ascribed boundaries.

Understanding the challenges and benefits in negotiating differences calls for having at hand more than one form of approach in reading these bioregional literatures. However, I will argue, though there is no singular way of reading a bioregion, there are more effective, complementary methods of reading that assist in creating an ecological literacy, those that foreground the material interconnections between biophysical and human environments. As global interests exploit local resources with little benefit to regions and the planet, negatively affect community and global health, and threaten the autonomy of local governance structures, a bifurcated world view (local and global; humans and the other-than-humans) is no longer tenable.

Thus as a way of rationalizing my four-pronged methodology—literary ecology, ecophenomenology, new materialism, and ecopedagogy—I suggest a pluralistic reading model that offers means to engender a multi-perspectival view of bioregionalism. When applied to diverse bioregional literary genres (creative non-fiction, poetry, memoir), the approaches may be applied on their own respectively but work collectively to foster a wider representation of a bioregion's human and other-than-human diversity. I demonstrate how

the conceptualization of my four different methodologies when thought together develop a comprehensive (though not conclusive) eco-literacy that brings global environmental issues into dialogue with local ones. Specifically, I employ each approach to draw out the complexities and analyze specific ecological representations in relation to and toward the development of an ecological subject identity. In this introduction, I provide an overview of bioregionalism's and literary bioregionalism's defining characteristics; second, accentuate bioregionalism's dynamic ecological dimensions, in particular as it is framed in terms of resilience; third, offer a cameo reading of a poem to demonstrate how the four approaches work together as an expansive ecological reading practice. Finally, I provide brief synopses of each chapter.

My main primary texts are, in this order, Laurie Ricou's bioregional 'trilogy': *A Field Guide to "A Guide to Dungeness Spit," The Arbutus/Madrone Files: Reading the Pacific Northwest*, and *Salal: Listening for the Northwest Understory*; Harry Thurston's *A Place between the Tides: A Naturalist's Reflection on the Salt Marsh*; and Daphne Marlatt's *Steveston*. I also include vignette readings of other Canadian poets: Philip Kevin Paul, Stephanie Bolster, Basma Kavanagh, Anne Simpson, and Margaret Atwood. The works I turn to are exemplary contemporary Canadian bioregional literature as they accentuate how bioregions are emergent complex entanglements and flows of interactive material global and local processes and properties (human and other-than-human).

I employ the concept of de-colonization throughout my chapters to accredit the other-than-human with its own agency and dignity, and direct our attention away from representations that, to borrow Val Plumwood's words, "leave [the other-than-human] entirely dependent for its meaning upon the 'primary' human term" (58). The biophysical world, with its own self-organizing properties and processes, defies human organizational

attempts, responds to colonizing efforts with unpredictable and agential-affirming actions. The other-than-human emerges, to turn to Plumwood's phrasing again, as "no mere precondition for our own star-stuff achievement, but is an active collaborative presence capable of agency and other mind-like qualities. Such a biosphere is not a background part of our field of action or subjectivity, not a mere precondition for human action, not a refractory foil to self. Rather, the other-than-human can be other ethical and communicative subjects and other actors in the world—others to whom we owe debts of gratitude, generosity and recognition as prior and enabling presences" (60). Plumwood's conception iterates a collaborative relation between human and other-than-human agencies. But as her points suggest, many species can exist without us; we are indebted, dependent on the complex interdependencies of the other-than-human world for our survival. Colonization, because it sets up, as Plumwood observes, "monological rather than dialogical" (63) relationships, humans lose touch with these interrelations. Colonization "block[s] mutual adaptation and its corollaries in negotiation, accommodation, communication and attention to the Other's needs, limits, and agency" (63). By denying or blocking the other-than-human agency, we position it as passive and thus ripe for exploitation.

That reading a poem could expand our comprehension of how human colonizing practices occur, could influence how we write policies that affect land-use management, could change the way we think of global economics, for me these are not an impossibilities. Yet, when faced with those who rarely read literature, particularly when teaching, I am challenged to find ways to engage their interest. Thus, the undercurrent of this project as a whole is motivated by a driving question I ponder in my day-to-day teaching practice: how to instill a curiosity, never mind a will, to read a poem, a short story, or a book on the environment. In other words, as ecoliterary critics, what is our responsibility as

pedagogues? We—students and scholars—come to literature with different interests, expectations, and backgrounds. Correspondingly, we cannot expect a singular way of reading a poem, even if the central focus is the environment. I realize to engage readers, I need to show individuals different modes of reader engagement—provide them with a vocabulary that connects them from the immediacy of their backyards to the ecosphere, and also have at hand different modes that address different levels of curiosity, engagement and commitment without losing the sense of complexity.

Therefore, the aim of my project, since its inception, has shifted away from focusing on comparisons between two coastal bioregions' characteristics and histories (the Pacific Northwest and Atlantic Maritimes) to investigate how select regional literary texts accentuate literary bioregionalism as reading and pedagogical practices. In its flexibility, portability, and dynamic relational thinking, literary bioregionalism offers a means for negotiating responsibly in an intersecting global and local world. In other words, it offers guidance in how to respond ably as an individual and as a collective toward the biophysical environment. Literary bioregionalism—place-based writings that evoke bioregional sensibilities and attributes—acts as a framework by which we can see how food systems, transport connectors, extractive networks, labour, human and nonhuman migration, and species endangerment and extinction occur. These are just a few examples that collapse a clear distinction between the local and the global. But they reveal that any claim to their divisibility, like the terms themselves, are social constructions, political representations that reinforce divides. My emphasis switched thus to exploring the question of cultivating an ecoliteracy that illuminates orienting, wayfinding and negotiating through the multiplicity of "ecological voices" and material realities of living on a planet co-constituted by the complexities of interactive local and global processes. As humans, other-than-humans,

matter, and ideas move through an environment, so too do the reading practices of literary bioregionalism travel. Though each methodology has its limitations, the strategy is to have more than one method at hand. When one reaches its limits, we look to one that extends the former's purview, and when that one reaches its limits, we look for another, and so on. The point, thus, is there is not a totalizing view of bioregionalism, no singular approach, but there are more effective ones than the other. Further, it emphasizes how knowledge production and acquisition is an ongoing process. The plurality of reading approaches aims to widen the focus of how matter (abiotic and biotic) interacts with humans to create a more responsive relation to the biophysical world.

Throughout my dissertation I draw on key terms—bioregionalism, literary bioregionalism, local, global, ecology and resilience —as they all are components of each theoretical approach. Though in each chapter I briefly define the terms, I provide a more comprehensive discussion of their meanings in this introduction. I do not define here my key theoretical concepts (literary ecology, ecophenomenology, new materialism, and eco-pedagogy), as each respective chapter develops and illustrates these concepts through analysis and close readings of the primary texts. However, as way of an example, I do provide a brief cameo reading of a poem to demonstrate on a micro scale that which I explore as a protracted reading of different primary works over the course of the entire dissertation. The anticipated effect of the overall thesis structure is to demonstrate how the various approaches when read sequentially unveil interconnected, and at times interdependent, processes of perceiving and thinking that come together at the end to offer a multi-dimensional and dynamic reading mode. Literature, as human expression, composes the emergent processes and properties of biophysical and cultural interactivities of bioregions, and by extension, the planet as a whole.

Highlighted Key Terms

As the *bio* in the term **bioregionalism** indicates, life processes are the central emphasis of a region. Biological or earth/natural systems, rather than political or geographical markers, define boundaries. The term bioregionalism is credited to one of its early American proponents, Peter Berg, during the early 1970s. Bioregional deep mappings illustrate the value of material, bio- and cultural diversity in maintaining the ecological health of a community and environment. Because this investigative mapping emphasizes respecting and cultivating diversity (homegrown and adopted) as a mainstay of sustaining a healthy bioregional and inclusive local power dynamics, environmental negotiations rely on a combined global and situated ethics, each providing contextualized balance for the other. The global initiates dialogue with interests beyond the region and the local coordinates the action required to maintain a region's diversity, health, and long-term survival. What comes into play is that bioregionalism, as Michael Kowalewski's refutation of Wendell Berry's claim asserts, is not "a map without territory" (32; Berry 82); rather, the bioregional borders are "indistinct and interpenetrating" (Kowaleski 32), conceived in "specific localities as complex, multilayered palimpsests of geology, meteorology, history, myth, etymology, family genealogy, agricultural practice, storytelling, and regional folkways" (Kowaleski 41). Though I can add more to his list, he emphasizes prominent aspects of a bioregion's makeup: they are comprised of dynamic, interrelated material and imaginary processes—both *cultural* and *natural* systems.

Yet, this territory's "mapping" has been continually contested because of differing perceptions of its defining attributes, which range from the biophysical to the spiritual. Within this contestation, however, one universal agreement is that a region is in constant

flux. Jim Dodge's overview of the different forms bioregionalism takes is useful here. He describes bioregionalism as a theory and practice that relies on ecological principles of interdependency among community as "a mutual biological integration on the order of an ecosystem" (355), yet notes that what constitutes bioregional boundaries vary and often appear problematic: 1) biotic shift (percentage of animal/plant ratio in place), which can seem arbitrarily designated; 2) watersheds (river drainage, for instance), but long rivers pose potential disputes between distanced communities; 3) land form (water and topography), which causes similar problems as the watershed criteria; 4) cultural/phenomenological;[2] 5) spiritual, whereby the land has spiritual power presence, "a predominate physical presence" exerted by the inhabited region (357); and 6) vertical/horizontal phenomenon (elevation), mountain inhabitants versus valley dwellers (356-357). Though theorists (Michael Vincent McGinnis, Douglas Aberley, Gary Snyder, Mitchell Thomashow, and Robert Thayer, to name a few) since Dodge's article have revised much about bioregionalism, these defining (and often contested) features of bioregion persist. This continued re-visioning of bioregionalism indicates its thinkers' capacity for adaptation to changing cultural, social, political, and ecological dynamics, as well as making transparent and democratic internal and external contestations of region. Bioregionalism is an integrated inhabitation of place that is as much, as Berg contends, a movement as a way of life that demands attention to responsible living within a region, and by extension the planet (n. pag.). In this way, I extrapolate from these theorists to demonstrate how literary bioregionalism offers guidance to inspire local environmental movement with its grass-roots, bottom up organization and horizontal, non-linear

[2] This view remains anthropocentric, as Dodge notes, "you are where you perceive you are; your turf is what you think it is, individually and collectively" (357).

consensus-making to mitigate and offer counter-transactional modes to capital globalization. As artistic expressions, bioregional literature calls for less reactionary and more responsive participation in local concerns. The local makes transparent the infractions and pressures for remediation of environmental and social injustices created by global capital flow, and shows, to borrow Michael Buzzelli's words, "Where you live matters" (1).

When I refer to ***local*** and ***global***, both have as part of their conception economic import. The local refers, in this dissertation, to the bioregional space, which is comprised of both social and biophysical attributes interactive with, emergent from, and dependent on area-specific ecological conditions (shared biogeoclimatic attributes). The global refers to a planetary scale and the interactive social and material movements as outcomes of globalized capitalism ventures. I use biosphere or ecosphere to denote the planet in its biophysical ecological context. I draw from Arjun Appadurai's conception of locality as "relational and contextual" (204) but, unlike him, situate the local as also "scalar and spatial" (204), rather than re-categorize this quality under another name ("the neighbourhood" in Appadurai's terms). While I agree that locality is a phenomenological complexity of interactive networks of diverse agencies, and so appears more as "a category (or subject)" (204), I do not differentiate the local's materiality from its phenomenological complexity. My reason is that as humans have their own discursive practices and processes of meaning-making, so too do matter. And, these discursive practices, which in turn are emergent properties and processes occurring from the interactions between matter, are what Appadurai identifies as the local. They are "a series of links between social immediacy, the technologies of interactivity and the relativity of contexts" (Appadurai 204). In other words, the two cannot be thought separately because each creates the other's context. Out of this local definition, the global emerges not as a foil but also as a spatialized and

socialized network of discursive material processes co-constitutive with the local and comprised from interconnecting localities (a transbioregionality). Thinking of locality and globality as an entanglement of relational and contextual emergent processes and properties refutes locality and its literary corollaries as Appadurai argues, "a socialization of space and time" (206). Rather it presents it as both a materialization and socialization of space and time and vice versa. In this respect, as my definition above suggests, I use local and bioregional interchangeably, but I do not equate planetary or world with the global, nor as Roland Robertson does with his term "glocal," a simultaneity of "the universal and the particular" (30), as this latter tends to float into a realm of qualitative ambiguity, more so than local and global (and Robertson, despite his "simultaneity" embeds the local in the global (35) rather than presenting the two as co-constitutively entangled).

In the last few years, Canadian critics and writers have challenged these regional demarcations, expanding conceptions of regionalism in the face of increased understandings of local and global exchanges, particularly through migration. In Canadian literary studies reading identity regionally has a long tradition developing from such thematic literary critics as Northrop Frye, George Woodcock, and Margaret Atwood to Laurie Ricou, Frank Davey, and D.G. Jones, and shifting to a new critical regionalism with poststructuralist critics, such as Herb Wyile, Lisa Chalykoff, Pamela Banting, Janice Fiamengo, and Alison Calder. Critics tend in many of these earlier debates to conflate regionalism with nationalism, which situates Canada as a region within an international field, or to narrow subnational territories, such as provinces or clusters of regions with shared historical/extractive characteristics (the prairies, for instance). In regionalism studies, these larger scaled regional territorializations were inclined to construct a uniform regional identity from which to assert autonomy against a perceived foreign external body,

often viewed as threatening or meddling to local interests. Critical regionalist scholars troubled these pan-nationalist/regional identities with overlooked literary representations and histories that challenged claims of a unified, shared "Canadian" experience. Herb Wyile, for instance, demonstrates, with his studies on Atlantic Canada, how false claims of unified national identities conceal the reality of how economic disparity maps regions as "a product of uneven development" (8). Or, as Joseph Pivato argued in the mid-1980s, these nationalist tendencies also ignored the diverse experiences as a result of "industrialization, urbanism, immigration and ethnic heterogeneity" (26). He claims critics would be better served to promote regional literary comparisons (he calls it a "Comparative Literature" (32)) for embodying a more representative Canadian "identity." Overall, regionalism, Laurie Ricou contends, was/is a reaction to Canada's "centralizing tendencies" and "an impulse to define a manageable space" in the nation's wide geographic expanse ("Region" 948). As a result, regionalism sets off Canada as "a loose confederation of provinces, territories, and local affiliations" (Ricou 948). These groupings traditionally cluster into specific wider regional affiliation: Maritime/Atlantic Canada, Québec, the prairies, Ontario, British Columbia, and the North.

The critical shift in regional studies sought to create a regionalist identity more representative of the diversity—or differences—of regions. And so, they began to remap the boundaries of regions and regionalism. These regionalisms countered dominant, homogeneous, typically white, Anglo-European settler narratives with other Canadian narratives that expressed ethnicity, gender, and cultural variation. These accounts transgressed the fixed boundaries set up by dominant discourses to demonstrate that local identity is not only emergent from interactions with the local, but also tied up with other regions from around the globe. In other words, they began to open settler conceptions of

regionalism to a globalized view that represented the cultural differences of Canada, as well as representing the cultural and national distinctions of Aboriginal peoples. As Lisa Chalykoff contends, earlier Canadian literary regionalist scholars upheld "two opposing conceptions of regional space" (161), which prevented a theorization of the complexity of "social differences that exist inevitably within regionalized spaces *and* the complex particularities that issue from a condition of geographic copresence" (161). She notes traditional regionalists set up false representations of regions as a "harmonious collective" of unified regional identity, which overlooked "the inevitability of intraregional group conflict within these 'naturally' bounded spaces" (164). The natural boundaries in region are, however, as her scare quotes imply, arbitrary political mappings. She does not deny the biophysical environment has agency "that impacts subjects within it" (164). She argues, however, that the biophysical environment's influence is rarely uniform (164). The social divisions which she identifies as social spaces (for instance, residential zones, Expo grounds, Halifax's "Africville") "exert uneven social forces on human subjects by enforcing different degrees of freedom on […] access, and mobility within, these diverse spaces" (165). But then, despite her point, Chalykoff captures materiality under human production. I would like to see greater inclusion of how the agency of the biophysical environment invites different interrelationships, which like the social spaces, create non-uniform divisions and affiliations to region.

To admit that matter has this agential capacity and also foregrounding the socially produced aspects of regional formation sets up a co-participatory relationship between humans and other-than-humans that avoids an environmental deterministic position. Readers begin to see then, as many regionalist scholars advocate, how regions are as much imagined communities as they are biophysical realities. Bioregionalism, with its emphasis

on ecology, intervenes at this point of critical regional studies to re-invest environmental concerns within a *bios* frame. Laurie Ricou is one of the first Canadian literary scholars to investigate regions through **literary bioregionalism** and emphasise the complex interrelations between ecology of language and ecology of region as both social imaginaries and as material phenomena. While Ricou focused on the Pacific Northwest, Pamela Banting followed soon after with bioregional readings of Western Canadian and prairie literature.[3] Both critics were instrumental in transgressing, contesting, and re-mapping regional boundaries, but also more importantly not abandoning the environment's role in identity formation.[4]

Yet despite scholars' earlier and ongoing efforts to reconceptualise regions from politically fixed to dynamic organic spaces, regionalist studies still struggle with reconciling the intersections of the imaginary and the biophysical. For instance, in "What Happened to Regionalism?" Alison Calder queries the scarcity of issues in prairie studies that are illustrative of regional dynamics: globalization, transnationalism, and diaspora studies. She observes that in an increasingly "globalized cyber-world," place-based studies are "irrelevant" in a "post-place" world (n. pag.). Calder is right to assert that while globalization helps to keep the larger structures in sight (paraphrasing Herb Wyile), place-based literary analysis foregrounds how these structures and events occur in and develop

[3] For a recent sustained book-length ecocritical regional study of the prairies refer to Jenny Kerber's *Writing in Dust: Reading the Prairie Environmentally* (Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2010).

[4] Ricou and Banting were two of Canada's earlier ecocritics who invested in regional studies. Their critical turn to poststructuralist criticism is reflected in their Canadian ecocritic contemporaries working in the fields of feminism, queer theory, colonial and postcolonial studies, and Marxism (such as D.M.R. Bentley, Catriona Sandilands, Rebecca Raglon, Joel Martineau, Gabriele Helms, Dorothy Nielsen, Diana M. A. Relke, Dorothy Nielsen, and Susie O'Brien, to name a few). For an overview of the development of ecocriticism in Canada see Lisa Szabo-Jones' "Taking Flight: From Little Grey Birds to *The Goose*" and Nicholas Bradley and Ella Soper's "Introduction: Ecocriticism North of the Forty-ninth Parallel" in *Greening the Maple: Canadian Ecocriticism in Context* (U of Calgary P, 2013) edited by Nicholas Bradley and Ella Soper.

out of particular locations. Texts have unique material and social contexts from which they emerge and in which they interact. Neoliberalism tends to flatten "nuance" for a one region fits all. But, Calder emphasizes that the local's diversity challenges these homogenizing forces of global capital: "Places—regions or otherwise defined—are both porous and unique. A place is not stable; it is always in flux. Postmodern conceptions of place suggest that it is composed of simultaneously intersecting complementary and competing forces that shift constantly depending on an individual's relation to them. That relation to place, what place means, is determined by race, class, gender, and a host of other factors. These factors combine uniquely in particular locations" (n. pag.). I am inclined, however, in the midst of climate change induced disasters to stress that the other-than-human (abiotic and biotic) is a central influence that needs greater pronouncement than as "a host of other factors" or as supplemental to more "central" human issues. Biophysical environments must be thought in tandem with social factors as co-constitutive of regional identity formation.

Regionalist studies need to represent place as locally and globally interactively dynamic, and acknowledge how a region's social and physical characteristics are emergent outcomes of co-constitutive local and global interactive processes. One of the challenges regionalism faces is its contrast to urbanism, rather than reading the two as interrelated phenomena that comprises a region. As Douglas Ivison and Justin Edwards point out, traditional regional scholarship tended to be complicit in claiming specific literary rural representations as characteristic of a Canadian national identity that did/does not reflect a majority of urban Canadians' lived experiences (198). (Early regionalist scholars set up

readings of a survivalist (Atwood) or garrisoned (Frye; D.G. Jones)[5] national ethos through select texts that pit human against other-than-human.) Ivison insists, "[t]he challenge for [regional writers], then, is to write about place, particularly a marginalized place […] without reinscribing the series of "stereotypical and reductive" images and assumptions associated with that place" ("It's No" n.pag.). Ivison further notes, "[r]egional writing, then, is expected to examine the particularities of a specific place and explore their impact upon its inhabitants" (n. pag.). What is needed to avoid these reductive imaginaries that Ivison identifies, are more nuanced interpretations that develop the interconnecting pathways between urban and rural environments, human and other-than-human relations, cultural, gender, social, linguistic, sexual and geographic differences. Thus what Ivison, Edwards, and Calder call for is not a "post" globalized place, but a local "placing" cognizant of its relation to other regions and peoples that/who co-constitute a culturally diverse (globalized) place. What their criticisms draw attention to is the polarizing that occurs in regional/global debate that aims to set one off of the other, rather than trying to see the two as entangled *processes* of interacting social and physical dynamics. They are inseparable. Literary regionalism must—can—express the complexity of these two seemingly disparate 'isms'—localism and globalism—as troubling and facilitating one another.

While I appreciate critics' aversion to earlier claims of the environment shaping regional identity and particular local readings as too environmentally deterministic, we

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[5] Thematic criticism was popular during the 1960s and 1970s in Canadian literary criticism, which often associated archetypes or mythopoeic themes to the development of a unified Canadian national and regional identity formation. Some key examples relevant to ecocriticism are Northrup Frye's *The Bush Garden* (1971), Margaret Atwood's *Survival* (1972), D.G. Jones' *Butterfly on Rock*, and Laurie Ricou's *Vertical Man/Horizontal World* (1973). While useful in identifying differences, as well as inequities, the dualisms that thematic criticism focuses on do not go far enough in exploring the entangled nuances, ambiguities, and contradictions that much regional literature from that time conveys.

cannot also go to the other extreme and declare that all identity formation is due to social construction. What is needed is a conceptualization that sees how the two as emergent interactive processes impose constraints and freedoms on one another that influence identity. The assumption in both traditional views is that they posit influence as uni-directional rather than as co-constitutive in a relation of constant flux. Ricou's literary bioregionalism, much like Frank Davey's configuration of literary regionalism, posits a region as relational, a product of historical and social contexts.[6] However, Ricou diverges from Davey in that he does not call for a de-emphasis of geography in shaping regional identity. Rather, as Ricou's writing illustrates, he places biogeoclimatic influences as one of many co-determiners among others. As the biophysical and cultural environments change, so too do those interrelations to nonhuman inhabitants. Though Ricou denies an explicit political stance in his bioregional criticism on the Pacific Northwest, his focus on the diverse and myriad characteristics and movements that challenge border formation itself confronts the dominant politics of what constitutes a centralized interpretation (i.e. national, economical) of region.[7] What Ricou proposes, from a *literary bioregional* perspective, is that within these differing critical, cultural, historical, and geographical deep mappings (which emphasize engagements with languages, multiculturalism, and Aboriginal issues), regionalism does not settle so readily into supposed, to borrow his terms, "separate

[6] I take this overall argument from his chapter "Toward the Ends of Regionalism." *Sense of Place: Re-Evaluating Regionalism in Canadian and American Writing*. Eds., Christian Riegel, Herb Wyile, Karen Overbye, and Don Perkins. Edmonton: U of Alberta P, 1997. 1-17.

[7]Refer to Pamela Banting's edited collection *Fresh Tracks: Writing the Western Landscape* (1998) that collapses the prairie grouping to include British Columbia and the North in a configuration of the west that incorporates a combined cultural and ecological awareness; Laurie Ricou's *Arbutus/Madrone Files: Reading the Pacific Northwest* (2002) crosses the Canada/US border and challenges the Pacific Northwest literatures as siloed in national frames.

uniformities" ("Region" 949). Rather, he contends, these differences tend toward "a shifting dynamic of regional definitions" (949).

In my analysis, I foreground bioregional writings that bring together the complex interplay—**literary ecology**—between natural history, aesthetics, poetics, ethics, ecology, and matter. I situate my literary ecology readings as a critical practice that investigates creative nonfictional and poetic works that exemplify the "messy" entanglement of categories and interdisciplinary interests as evolving genres that parallel the flux of the regions they represent. The literary ecologies of bioregions accentuate the local's potential for constructing critical reading models that can inspire grass-roots environmental activism as a political force that can disrupt global powers by offering alternative narratives to the reductive economic rhetoric employed to validate or repudiate mismanaged land-use. Too often in daily practices and choices, regionalism and globalism place more emphasis on the transactions of global/local capital flow than on the qualitative material social and cultural relations between humans and their other-than-human cohabitants. Bioregional narratives offer a critical corrective to this discrepancy in regional and global discourses by offering alternative exchanges, ones not dependent on economic discourses. Literary bioregionalism as a medium for social and environmental engagement thus creates space for representing these diffuse interconnected cultural and material interactions. We need to dwell in and on our relationships to the lands in which and of which we settle and unsettle.

Global environmental issues can be located and understood with greater effect when we begin in our backyards. The notion that we are "rooted" to one place is a myth. Many of us settle in a place, but through many practices of the day-to-day aspects of our lives (trade and consumer choices, labour practices, educational pursuits, for instance), we knowingly and unwittingly move through and leave traces and marks, impose and settle our presence

in other lands or locales—imprint the globe with our 'ecological footprints.'[8] Further, matter's co-participatory agency in shaping biophysical environments exposes and contests the constraints of representations that limit expressions of regionalism and regions as solely socially, politically, and culturally bound places and spaces. Responsible and sustainable everyday living practices rely on grasping the human's place in that material ecology. Bioregional narratives show how those relations occur and why wayfinding, locating, and orienting of the human subject in relation and respect to an equally vital and agential other-than-human world matters.

Accordingly, cultivating a planetary consciousness—learning how a region emerges and evolves as a biophysical and cultural territory in relation to a planetary scale does not require a cosmopolitan intervention, as some critics argue. The breadth in which literary bioregionalism charts and translates the biophysical and ecological processes of local settlings and unsettlings illuminates the interchanges between the local and the global. Bioregionalism is, already, cosmopolitan. The adage "think global, act local" is false consciousness raising: the local is global, as the global is local—the two cannot be—or rather, should not be—thought of or acted out separately, particularly in a capitalist globalized world.

Rather thinking local and global complementarily aids in responding to the unpredictable outcomes that emerge from the agency of the human self in relation to agencies of physical matter and biota, particularly those outcomes that defy where conventional understandings of human economic returns has no immediate or long-term

[8] "Ecological footprint" is a measurement standard that calculates the impact of human environmental demands on the Earth's ecosystems and their capacity to regenerate. The formulation was presented by Canadian ecologist William Rees in "Ecological footprints and appropriated carrying capacity: what urban economics leaves out". *Environment and Urbanisation* 4.2 (1992): 121–130.

effect. In fact, they more often than not reveal where both humans and other-than-humans are short-changed with long term consequences, such as climate change, ocean acidification, and species extinction. They offer, to borrow Aldo Leopold's observation, "something far broader than mere economic value; I mean value in the philosophical sense" ("Land" 261). We need a new way of thinking, of habituating our minds and actions that transform our stories about, and thus, relations to place. Literary bioregionalism illuminates the philosophical value of the perviousness of local borders, the migrations, flows, and entanglements of material and cultural transactions. The Piping plover summers on the shores of Canada's Cape Sable Island and winters on Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula; both habitats are home. Like the bird's migrations, the movement of peoples create multiple residences. Their interactive engagements with place leave traces of their thinking on the biophysical environment, communicate their relationship with the land. And so ecoliteracy's tendency toward a global consciousness resonates in Mitchell Thomashow's claim of bioregionalism as a global phenomenon:

> [t]here will always be trade and exchange between places. The cultural and ecological relationships that exist between places are transregional. Ideas and concepts move in and out of a particular place, not attached to a region but expressed through an array of medium vectors, or paths—the landscape, air, water, the spoken word and modern technology. These are "mind regions" that cut through bioregional distinctions; meta-regions where the exchange of ideas percolates through consciousness as the wind sweeps through the trees on a gusty day. Ideas move quickly and change with each iteration. But these ideas often settle in a place. They congeal and coagulate, attract supporters and detractors, and form world-views and paradigms that attach temporary order to a complex universe. Meta-

> regional affiliations transcend local knowledge and inform the world of these ideas. A bioregional sensibility provides a basis for those ideas, by sorting them through a local sieve, a place-based gristmill, and considering whether they have any insight or explanation to offer. (129-130)

And so bird-watching the migratory movements of snow geese or Yellowlegs draws attention to multiple influences: hunting practices, drought, water shortages, local wetland reclamation, conservation projects, policy-making, changing global climates, evolving ecocritical communities, and other non- and anthropogenic disruptions both at home and away. Some settle or adapt, while some do not; others unsettle, transform. The bioregion thus marks, shapes, inhabits and is equally marked, shaped, inhabited. Bioregional literature captures these flows and perturbations and provides the imaginative scope for contemplating how the other-than-human intervenes to de-/re-compose those local narratives and give voice to new or overlooked stories to create new forms of social and political awareness.

I perceive bioregion as transregional and thereby it accentuates both internal and external interactions, and allows for horizontal rather than hierarchical relations. The local may be a physical place (another region, nation, biome, work site) or virtual location (online communities). A key feature of bioregionalism is a recognition of a region's ever-shifting and contested boundaries. Therefore, rather than looking at the global or the local as exerting oppressive or reactionary responses on each other, we can reconfigure a region's relationship with the global as a complexity of dynamic ecological negotiations and exchanges that avoids a reductive "us/them." Any claims to divisibility are social constructions, political representations that reinforce those divides.

Dynamic Ecology in Literary Bioregionalism

Reading and writing our relations is an embodied interactive sensorily, materially, and intellectual interconnecting practice that alters our relationship to and thinking about place. Ecology emphasizes the interdependencies and overlap of habitats and ecosystems and makes visible the indivisibility between local biogeoclimatic and biosphere processes. Literary bioregionalism, contrary to critics who posit bioregionalism as insular, elucidates through ecological tropes and observational patterns how the ecological subject is nested within ecosystems nested within ecosystems which are in turn nested in the biosphere. And circulating within this matrix of ecosystems is an intermixing planetary flow of humans and matter. The biosphere is both local and global. Both are systems that converge into each other, though not always, as the term necessarily connotes, smoothly. Ecosystems function through the complex interplay between steady states, perturbation, resilience, constancy, and transformation. Exemplary bioregional writing embodies this ecological dynamic and pushes boundaries, crosses and stops at thresholds and re-situates the identity formation of the human subject as contingent upon these interactive processes.

I base my conceptualization of ecoliteracy on a dynamic ecology that resists traditional economics that pervades ecological discourse. Primarily, the texts I explore offer alternative ecological exchanges that delve into matters that cannot be reduced so readily into economic terms. My ecological understanding is inspired by Daniel Botkin's "discordant harmonies" that situates the planet as comprised of a collective of individual actors and their environments whose interaction "form a network of living and nonliving parts that can maintain the flow of energy and the cycling of chemical elements that, in turn, support life" (10). It is not a mechanistic system, but an organic dynamic of

continually changing, emergent and complex processes and patterns. Botkin abandons mechanistic metaphors for an organic conception where "nature moves and changes and involves risks and uncertainties, and that our judgments of our own actions must be made against this moving image" (325). He does not however address how his own language is rich in economic metaphors of engineering and management. For instance, he observes as noted above, the unpredictabilities of the biophysical environment, yet shortly after this he discusses the varieties of responsible forms of ecological engineering. In these models humans allow environments to undergo ecological processes that benefit its resilience, yet humans remain as the arbiters of what constitutes a beneficial state for resilience. The degree of difference here from the old model and Botkin's is in the recognition of human "power to mold nature into what we want it to be or to destroy it" (325) and to curb action that promotes the destruction of an ecosystem. His point, then, is that with this recognition we have a duty to act responsibly, which "requires our management to be specific" (326). Though Botkin places emphasis on non-scientific modes of expression (aesthetics, philosophy), his views are that ecological science management is the "hope" (319) for prompting this change in thinking. I push this "hope" by inflecting my discussions with philosophical ecology, which queries the values and assumptions that ecological science management may adopt in its role as caretaker of the planet.

More ethical enquiry is needed, as we can see how at least in this context, **resilience** is not so much the inherent capacities of an ecosystem, comprised of both human and other-than-human participants, to respond to and recover from ecological disturbances; rather, it is still thought out in terms of a biophysical system that needs managing by human management systems. Resilience, Susie O'Brien claims, as it is taken up by non-ecological disciplines has become a new catch-word (fn. 1, 3), and as she hints, has the potential to

acquire the same vacuous fate as 'sustainability.' The term in popular discourse, she reveals, retains its ecological association to a system's capacity to respond to and recover from perturbation, but it "has taken on a much more strongly normative flavor" (1). She points out how the term takes up value laden connotations—"optimism, flexibility, fitness, and innovation"—that presents an "aura of a moral imperative" (1). She posits there are positive and negative outcomes in this uptake. For areas of social and environmental justice, the term helps to understand how individuals or cultures "thrive in the face of massive upheaval" (2). In this case, if I read O'Brien correctly, then her understanding of 'resilience' has material presence; it is not just an abstraction used to describe market forces. Further, if human resiliency is measured in relation to the ecological model, then the community's other-than-human co-habitants mark out how "survival and adaptation is an interspecies affair" (1). I add the abiotic, here, to emphasize how it is also an inter-/intra-material concern. O'Brien's point thus becomes even richer when we consider also the material "drivers" and "passengers" that also influence a community's resilience. Climate change forces us to take into consideration multiple determinants that set up the patterns of dominance and inequality that O'Brien identifies as a fact that not all community members face crisis similarly. I agree with O'Brien that the normative values that resilience acquires through these different disciplinary approaches, particularly in economics and by policy makers, tends to "overwrite" the agency and violence enacted by dominant powers and skew theories of ecological resilience in order to naturalize certain opportunistic and determined social and economic discourses around environmental issues.

Ecological resilience's theory of perturbation, and thus a system's inherence for instability as crucial for its stable functioning leads to dangerous and questionably unethical politics. For instance, O'Brien quotes Christopher Zebrowski's observation, "if resilience is

enhanced through 'real' disasters, then experience with these events is not necessarily undesirable—indeed they are opportunities to enhance resilience and test the morphogenetic properties of society" (qtd. in O'Brien 2). During the mid- to late twentieth century we see ecological models shifting to the New or Dynamic ecology model. In this model, ecosystems are viewed as sites of emergence that thrive on disturbance. Ecological communities have built in, self-organizing behaviours and characteristics to respond to and recover from perturbation. This is a natural state of ecosystem function. Ecologist C.S. Holling, borrowing from anthropologist Gregory Bateson's systems model, introduced resilience as a concept to measure an ecosystem's rate of recovery in relation to the magnitude of the disturbance and return to a global steady-state equilibrium. Holling's global steady state has since been challenged with the concept of multiple steady states, whereby an ecosystem may flip from one steady state into a different steady state comprised of different behaviours. But disturbance and transience remain key manifestations of ecosystem function. Holling's approach remains significant, however, in that it challenges the current economic status quo of environmental management that sees natural resource extraction as immersed in a mechanization of biophysical environmental functioning. Holling advocates humans adapting their thinking and practices to manage the unpredictable emergent processes and outcomes from both endogenetic and exogenetic forces (including human interference) rather than adapting the environment to human ends. Thus, in engineering resilience, Holling was calling for greater regulation, as human resource mismanagement can "[shift] equilibrium states and move populations away from equilibria" (2). Though, disturbance is a companion concept with equilibrium, for Holling, human management was essential where resource and human land-use are concerned.

O'Brien draws a historical correspondence between Holling's theory and economist Friedrich Hayek's neoliberal economic theory. We see here an historical moment where disciplinary discourses intersect, but who is inspiring whom remains unclear, though Donald Worster is clear that though economics mapped onto nature is not novel to the twentieth century, it became more dense in the advent of Dynamic Ecology (294). O'Brien describes Hayek's theory as touting "that the economy functions best when left to its own natural rhythms of volatility. Any attempts at regulation or redistribution would harm the resilience of the system" (2). So, in the face of the 2007-2008 global financial collapse, we saw how adoptions of scientific theories, like Holling's theory of resilience, cannot be mapped onto social practices without consideration of its entanglement of material processes—lived human and other-than-human lives. There has become in this mapping however, as O'Brien observes, near "impossible to challenge because […] of the infinitely incorporative capacity of its systems logic, such that interruptions and contradictions are always already accounted for" (2). Moreover, she adds, built into this is the spectre of hope. That in the wake of massive change, humans "can adapt to and even flourish through change" (2), and I am sure she would agree, in many instances, leaves us in a poorer world.

Yet, one challenge is the heterogeneity of diversity that comes into conflict with the homogenizing imperatives of capitalist globalization in bioregions, and bioregional literature has the potential to map and make visible this conflict. We can see in a capitalist globalized system, which thrives on and promotes homogeneous power structures of production, how it fails to align with a biophysical world that "is not very homogeneous over space […] but consists of a mosaic of spatial elements with distinct biological, physical, and chemical characteristics that are linked by mechanisms of biological and physical transport" (Holling 16). The texts that I examine in my dissertation, each in their

own way and through the different reading approaches I offer create a more comprehensive view of the whole bioregion, and by extension planet, that offers alternative economies of language and thinking in response to this conflict between diversity and monocultural production. When co-opted into the realm of human ecology, social resilience attends to social relations concerning the complex interplay between local, national and global constraints. Resilience is defined as the capacity to manage in combination ecological and social systems. The challenge arises in grasping "the social aspects of resilience" that will help to manage natural resources (Gunderson 144). In the Anthropocene era, perhaps this grappling should not be so readily dismissed because of its anthropocentric reach, as it draws relational links between the constraints that make possible and disrupt human and ecosystem ecological processes, yet also emphasizes interdependencies. Thus ecology's discursive weaknesses may in fact be its strengths, particularly as they parallel the fallibilities of other social discursive practices. Through a shift in perspective, ecological discourse may offer a potential as a source of empowerment as it appears, to draw on Lorraine Code's thoughts, "both conflicted and unstable […] It is capable of infiltrating gaps in the discourses of mastery, infusing the interstices with lines of thought that cause them to widen, shift, make way for the multiple and multiply suppressed issues at work just below their surface; of demonstrating how those discourses sit in the wider world; and thus of opening space for examining the character and the effects of these situations" (7). Resiliency (as a material and cultural alliance that sustains stable referent points for congruent co-inhabitation of a bioregion) holds prospective reconciliation between unstable social and ecological determinants.

Habitat underdeveloped by or free of human interference is becoming increasingly rare in the face of neoliberal globalization practices. Humans have become a biogeoclimatic

force, altering the diversity and ecological organization of habitats. And, because of this, we can no longer separate the influences of globalized capital on local biophysical environments (mining is one example). However, we also have to think of the local as having some agency, even though at times this seems minimal at the political level. The hope that O'Brien identifies in resilience may be the way in which globalization, in its homogenization of local forces, binds regions to other locals through a common experiential level (in this instance, I think of mining operations dislocation of Indigenous peoples from their traditional territories). These commonalities are not just phenomenological, but are also fiscal, intellectual, artistic, technical, and more fundamentally, ecological. Despite the fact that William I. Robinson identifies globalization in the 21st century as "the underlying structural dynamic that drives social, political, economic, and cultural-ideological processes around the world" (xv), the local still retains some forms of resistance. To respond and countermand globalizing forces and generate local empowerment, people need to comprehend how this global system goes beyond instituting a dominant ideology and to recognize how this system has the power to limit or cut off access to both global and local resources (clean water, hunting grounds, and heritage seeds). Loss of diversity, particularly of keystone species, may affect the stability of an ecosystem or flip the habitat into an alternative stable state.

With its diverse topical ranging, bioregional storytelling illuminates how economic and, at times, ecological narratives fail to capture a qualitative, relational, and inclusive model of a bioregion. Stability in ecology has two parts: constancy (or resistance) and resilience. Constancy refers to a system's capacity to resist change exerted by external forces. Resilience refers to internal properties and processes that enable a system to return to "some reference state after disturbance" (Ricklef 380). The emphasis on "some reference

state" suggests that ecology has moved beyond Holling's single steady state to consider that ecosystems have multiple states of equilibrium. However, despite the potential to 'flip' from one steady state into another to compensate for the loss of a key system function, there is the potential for the inverse when habitats acquire greater diversity their range of interactions with one another increases, which may create unpredictable and de-stabilizing outcomes (Ricklef 383). Resilience and constancy: these terms rely on presumptions that the established relationships prior to the disturbance have been ongoing for long temporal periods, thus "essentially stable, perhaps with different balances of constancy add resilience" (Ricklef 383). An ecosystem's health relies on the "drivers" or keystone species as their interactions are crucial to the stability of the system's structure. The "passengers" are those deemed insignificant in their alteration of an ecosystem. Yet disturbance or change may alter the roles, making passengers drivers. Ecological resiliency relies on the biodiversity of keystone species and the amount of potential drivers. The key is diversity. Biodiversity help to regulate ecosystem processes: "overlapping influences by multiple processes, each one of which is efficient in its individual effect but together operating in a robust manner" (Gunderson 431). Gunderson claims that human response to the unpredictable and non-linear emergent processes ranges from "patterns of surprise, crises, and reformation" (432). Approaches must, he contends, include not just observing ecosystem behaviour, but also human behaviour, learning to comprehend "how and why people chose to react" (432). In order to do this, though, we must explore the potential of complementary knowledges, find novel and effective ways of reading and communicating. The path for articulating alternate perceptions lies in the arts, specifically in the art of creative storytelling because of its flexibility and innovation. If the environment is always a resource, a bottom line of profit, then there is—there can be no grasp of its agency, of its

integrity beyond economic value. So also at stake is learning to read and differentiate effective from harmful narratives.

Reading Approaches in Action

My four methodological approaches proffer reading models that could stand alone. However, each approach extends the reach of the other and thus optimizes a bioregion's capacity to communicate its ecological vitality. Critical enquiry of one region must accommodate the cultural and bio-diverse overlapping and intersecting of other regions. The well-being and continuance of a region (an emergent cycle of creation, death, decomposition, creation, death…) depends on the varied interactive systems of resilience, constancy, adaptation and cooperation as a human and other-than-human collective. When one method reaches its end-point, another one opens up another route to continue further mappings and travels. An ecological literacy focuses on the specificities of region, the a/biotic artifacts and the names used to map a bioregion, and how their narratives unearth and decolonize the interconnecting politics that comprise a territory. The ecophenomenological draws out perceptual interaction between human and nonhuman as a means to re-consider and collapse subject-object relationality into an inter-corporeal engagement. The materialist approach pushes past the ecophenomenological to contemplate how material processes performed through matter's agency physically transform and alter human ways of seeing and moving through the world. The final pedagogical method focuses on how writing and reading local narratives offer illustrative "teaching/learning" moments for developing a cosmopolitan ecological subject—that is, an ecological citizen of the cosmos, the world. My reasons for this pluralistic approach, and using these four

methods in particular, is to open an ecocritical clearing that allows for the development of a sensorily engaged and materially transformed, ecological thinking subject who recognizes bioregions as comprised of dynamic, multiple perspectives and influences.

Philip Kevin Paul's poem "Water Drinker" (see Appendix B.1), for instance, through its primary attention to biogeographical specificity, sensory engagement, material processes, and emphasis on teaching and learning, invites a micro demonstration of the overlap between my four respective reading approaches. "Water Drinker" or Arbutus tree endures as a way-finder, both spatially and temporally through the local and the global. Its salmon-red bark indicates the proximity of Pacific Ocean, and situates the reader in the Pacific Northwest. Paul's deliberate repetition of both its anglicized and Saanich name maps the tree in an ecological and (post)colonial context. Its habitat—by stream and on a steep slope—suggests that this lone, small, red tree may be a remnant of a rare inland grove islanded among introduced maples. Its Saanich name KO, KO, IŁĆ locates it geographically on Vancouver Island, British Columbia.

Approach One: Literary Ecology

Literary ecology seeks to expose through cultural artefacts the web of interconnections between social and biophysical structures and processes. Though there are diverse approaches to reading these artefacts in their ecological contexts, a common aim is to diminish the binary constructions that separate human and biophysical environments. In "Water Drinker," naming has unsettled memories, memories resonant in a local and global co-constitutive present. The poem carries two names for the tree: "arbutus" and "KO, KO, IŁĆ." Paul repeats both names twice, the anglicized name first, followed by the Saanich

name. We do not know it as arbutus/KO, KO, IŁĆ until he names it first in English with an oblique allusion to its distinct colour of bark: red like fish blood. He directs our attention again to its unique physical characteristic with his imperative "Imagine what the Old People thought / when they saw one small red tree / growing between the grey-white bodies of the maples" (22). He asks how long they had to sit "beside / this single arbutus" and "finally see / the trees around it were dying / because they weren't as deeply rooted" (22). That they sit around a native tree identified by its anglicized name, a name whose roots connect to a distant region, seems to suggest that the tree survives while the maples do not because of a language materially connected to its territory (which perhaps as their "grey-white bodies" suggest, these are not the endemic vine maples, but the introduced Eastern Canadian variety). The tree survives because the Old People remembered and passed on the old name, KO, KO, IŁĆ, which Paul translates as "water drinker," an interactive name that interconnects the tree to the land through biological process.

In the story of local and colonizer's naming, narratives of ecological imperialism emerge in the trees of Paul's poem. (Madrone, the US name remains absent, but with its close 49th parallel proximity, remains more of a conspicuous, haunting absence). A Canadian/British colonial and Saanich cultural and ecological awareness become entwined, where one name shadows the other. We do not lose sight of the arbutus or KO, KO, IŁĆ in this shadowing. Instead, the tree's presence becomes even more pronounced as its temporal narratives expand the spatial dimensions of the territory; the diminutive red tree grows in stature, seems now to dominate its surroundings. It transforms from just a physical way-finder in the rainforest into a marker through time. Conflict, conquest, colonization, health, resilience, continuance of a community, of a culture, of an ecosystem emerge in the storytellings of these two names (habitat and family rooted in "tree"). In Paul's indexical

coupling of "Here" with "I bring you to the place of maples" (21), at first, we are lulled by how we imagine "this steep hill" populated and dominated by this singular maple species. But then, as we near the stream and the rock, we are startled by the anomalous red tree that grows among all this green and grey-white. In that recognition we cannot escape the violence suggested by his comparison of its bark to fish blood resting in stones. The unease grows when we see "the trees around it were dying / because they weren't as deeply rooted" (22). We realize that Paul's imperative that we imagine what the Old People thought when they saw this singular red tree holding its own, surviving among the "grey-/ white bodies" involves re-cognizing how a "tree" shapes its own "streams" of existence. Water drinker survives whereas the "grey- / white bodies" (22) perish because they have no interactive connection to a cultural stream shaped by its land, a land which sustains life, sustains "you." The arbutus/ KO, KO, IŁĆ becomes metaphor for Saanich cultural memory and loss, the maples for colonial settlers. Yet KO, KO, IŁĆ remains a focal point and symbol (a reminder, too) for this interconnected re-cognition—a wayfinder through the "alien light" to re-think one's way home through a land altered by colonial political and regional mappings.

Approach Two: Ecophenomenological

Ecophenomenology embeds the conscious human subject in a biophysical world as a body-subject. Knowledge of the biophysical world emerges from perceptual awareness in bodily relation to the other-than-human. Because we are dynamic beings, our position of relation with the other-than-human is constantly shifting; as we can never access the consciousness of the other, what we know of the other appears unfolding yet also limited.

KÓ, KÓ, IŁĆ's life blood is the music of water. It survives through the songs of the stream. Yet, as Paul observes, the "tree is a reflection / of a river or a stream" (20). The metaphoric declarative is *is*. In the water music that courses through the tree, we *see* a river or a stream; we re-cognize their indivisibility. The water enters through the roots, which break through the soil and rock that line the stream's edge. Its roots, its leaves, its chemistry mingle with soil, water, and salmon blood and decay, which in turn become molecules of air (water) and return as tree music to the stream.

The allusion to music directs us—"I," "you" "Here" in this moment and place—to apprehend, to hear, feel, and see the hidden in the "silence" of the tree. In other words, directs us through sound to imagine the bioregion's ecology, the life-power (water) that moves through tree's 'circulatory system' nurturing limbs, trunk, roots, and sap. Further, on a more fundamental (and comparative) level this image reminds us that water is the sustaining nutrient for all living creatures. We do not just recognize the tree's presence (direct our attention its way), but "learn" through *reflection* the way in which the tree manifests and extends itself through its biological processes and our perception. The tree becomes more than a metaphor of human genealogy. If a "tree is a reflection / a river or a stream" and also a reflection of "you" and "I," then river and stream is also that which sustains us. In other words, all is relational.

Thus, when Paul contemplates sitting "in name of tree" (23), we sit in the presence of two names, of two epistemologies: Western (arbutus)—Linnaean—and Saanich (KÓ, KÓ, IŁĆ)—relational. But as the title hints, emphasis for the relational way for seeing is through the Saanich, the local, way of thinking. Sitting "in name" absent of a definitive article allows for a language play that pairs an adjectival modifier to the action of sitting. Sitting in name, like water drinker, accentuates the vitality of the environment. Yet, more

importantly, as participant-observers, Paul situates the human body as actant in relation to another acting body—inter-corporeal relational processes that manifest through language itself. KÓ, KÓ, IŁĆ as a name that describes its function does what arbutus cannot; it starts from the tree, and not from an arbitrary systematic name imposed upon it. KÓ, KÓ, IŁĆ manifests in both intentionality (human directed attention) and the relational engagement of bodies embedded in the world spatially and temporally. And so, we see a different world view than western thinking; we see a knowledge system performed through language.

Paul's repeated allusion to the tree's bark identifies the tree's solicitation of the "I"/eye. The "skin" of the tree reveals the tree as a body in the world. His emphasis on seeing, hearing, and feeling culminate in the weighted bodies that "sit" on the rock. This sensory engagement emphasizes a continuity between human bodies and the "flesh of the world": rock, tree, and water, salmon. The red bark, like "salmon blood resting in the rocks," its startling visibility among the monochromatic "grey- / white bodies of maples" corrects the 'lens' of our thinking to an ecological mind-set. Its solicitation reveals itself to us, and amplifies the commonplace, surprises us with new forms of interrelatedness with the a/biotic. And in that surprising revelation opens a receptivity to reflections of new and transformative meanings. KÓ, KÓ, IŁĆ reminds us how we are already embedded within cultural, ecological, political contexts. KÓ, KÓ, IŁĆ emerges from a constellation of relations, of which we are just one, that move relationally through space (terrain) and time (forest succession and ancestors).

This embeddedness and intentionality attends to how phenomena are emergent, are always in the process of renewal. Paradoxically the word KÓ, KÓ, IŁĆ, as Paul points out, for instance, is the same but not the same. As landscapes change, as nodes and constellations shift and transform, so too do the languages that grow out of those

environments. They transform, adapt, adjust, decay, die, or regenerate; in the process, new meanings materialize. In Paul's implicit colonial critique, KÓ, KÓ, IŁĆ represents resilience and continuance, but its original intention is altered in the "alien light." Yet, "alien light" (23) remains rather ambiguous in the context of dying maples. It is hard to dismiss the implied references of red bark of KÓ, KÓ, IŁĆ and the grey-white bodies of the maples (a tree given no Saanich name in this poem) to Indigenous and settler cultures (and also trap readers in the act of making that comparison). In its ecological context the maples struggle to take root in the acidic soil in which arbutus thrive; they do not settle well on the steep hills or rock cliffs on which KÓ, KÓ, IŁĆ grows. In this islanded piece of land, the maples die and provide space for the next forest succession. KÓ, KÓ, IŁĆ remains. As the maples die, the canopy opens up a new clearing and an "alien light" reaches KÓ, KÓ, IŁĆ; foreign because it has not been seen for a long time by his people or in the speaker's generation. As the settlers' hold on the ground weakens and dies the "alien light" opens a space for the potential for greater growth. The word is the same but no longer the same in this light, in this place. The meaning-making over generations, from the indeterminate "you" and "I" to the Old People, language and environments change. As Paul indicates, for instance, with the degraded stream where the salmon no longer return, and where generations of Saanich lost their language's roots—their way-finding—this flux does not always occur in relational ways—the corrective is revivifying the relations, the other "music" makers that comprise a bioregion.

Approach Three: New Materialism

New materialism seeks to evoke how the biophysical world has agency that responds to and acts independent of human agency. It goes beyond ecophenomenology to illustrate how the other-than-human inter- and intra-acts with humans and the biophysical environment to induce transformations, sometimes as unforeseen outcomes. As Paul keeps the poem's contents within the confines of the region's biome, so his poetics appear to stay within the conventions of elegiac tradition. He plays conservatively with free-verse, simile, metaphor, end-line punctuation and caesura. The poem appears to follow a movement from praise, to sorrow/bitterness, to consolation. The opening metaphor, "The music in trees / is water" (20) sets up an extended invitation to reflect on a bi-directional comparison between the appreciator and the object of appreciation. Mid-poem he sets up an anticipated shift, a pivot in perspective. "Here" the tree moves from description to name, and we (you and I) come to this point, this place on the steep slope. We see ourselves (you/I/family/ancestors/cultures) in bodily relation to the natural object and the natural object in relation to ourselves. We also see the object in relation to other neighbouring objects as interconnected assemblages comprised of community and nature interacting with a greater surrounding ecosystem. Subsequently, this relational attention sustains our awareness of and focus on the natural object, provides the space to question convention. A traditional rendering that invites an ecophenomenological reading, yet one that for all its convention, cannot prevent the poem from slipping over the edge and…

…plunging readers into Pacific Northwest material interconnections: salmon, arbutus, rainforest. Arbutus bark is rust- or salmon-flesh pink. Its flesh has the softness of the inner forearm. The tree's distinct twisted shape and bark stand alone, contrast with

surrounding cedar, hemlock, alder or maple trees. Paul unlocks the tree's materiality with thick description; the flesh—the language of the poem—that relates to other flesh of the world seeds, grows, and escapes from the pages of Paul's poem to physically alter that "alien light" through a repetition of an "old word": KÓ, KÓ, IŁĆ, Water Drinker, KÓ, KÓ, IŁĆ, Water Drinker. The Coast Salish word, its "foreignness" on the page makes those not familiar with Salishan pause. To settlers and even as Paul intimates, to generations of Saanich peoples uprooted from their language through colonialism, its full caps weight pulls readers down to sit at the level of rock, stream, roots. At this level, KÓ, KÓ, IŁĆ positions us as objects among a relational constellation of other objects: water, trees, rock, language, bodies.

As the red tree calls to us among a forest of uniform grey-white bodies, KÓ, KÓ, IŁĆ's typographical physical presence on the page disrupts elegiac conventions. The poem on the page, the typography, the letters, the words, the punctuation make visible the artistic creation—the poem's material self as agent of change. Poetic expression, seen in this way, manifests itself as matter. It palimpsests the biophysical world with the materialized bodies of old and new languages, Indigenous peoples and settlers, native and introduced and invasive species, healthy and sick waters, existing and extinct salmon runs. KÓ, KÓ, IŁĆ—its full caps, accents, and intersecting lines among standard English words and punctuation brands onto our retinas, sinks into our memories, comes alive and swims in our vision in a similar way the knowledge that salmon will no longer populate that Saanich stream claws a pit in our stomachs.

KÓ, KÓ, IŁĆ, like that "small animal," walks off the page, up our arm, into our eyes, into our ears, into our mouths. We try the word out: KÓ, KÓ, IŁĆ. As native English speakers, our mouths—our vocal tracts—misfire on the language. We imagine how it

sounds, push the air outward, and make the attempt to sound. In the attempt, the double guttural plosive climbs from the trachea and coughs through the vocal fold, and merges breath with air. Next the tongue curls around the I and Ł, lands its tip against the teeth's ridge, lets the air escape along its curled sides, but then hesitates at Ć. Is this hard like a Northwest crow's call or soft like a sea lion's chuff? Where do the stresses fall? Does emphasis fall on KÓ, KÓ or IŁĆ or do they glide together? With this "old word" we feel our throat, mouth, jaw, lips contort, and take shapes like the tree itself in attempt to sound matter. The phonetic acrobatics force us to see the contours of arbutus in a different light, a tree rooted, ancient, and resilient. We, settlers, can never see this land as before; the word, like a virus, now swims among our language. Now when we speak arbutus our mouths form the shape of KÓ, KÓ, IŁĆ, and not as an appropriative gesture of 'going Native.' Instead, because of how Paul introduces the word, how the KÓ, KÓ, IŁĆ's physicality dominates the page, casts its shadow over the non-descript "grey- / white bodies" of maples, the word inhabits our settler's consciousness and decolonizes not just our perceptions, our colonial conventions, but changes the way we move through these coastal rainforests. The poetic matter (re)turns this part of the bioregion to the Saanich peoples. We now walk among the trees and understory as guests, sounding KÓ, KÓ, IŁĆ.

Approach Four: Ecopedagogy

Ecopedagogy, in the case of my dissertation, turns to the ecocritic as environmental pedagogue. The ecocritic as scholar and teacher has the disciplinary tools to show how to unravel and re-weave literary ecology, and by extension, bioregional complexity as accessible. If bioregional literature, in its varying genres, are modes of activism, then

ecocritic is also a co-activist as s/he becomes a guide in disseminating and teaching the works. S/he demonstrates through literary analysis how they affect and inspire change. S/he does this by showing literature as a phenomenological, embodied autobiographical and materially entangled process of social/ecological processes where the constant is change. Yet, within a literary bioregional context, there is a need to situate—narrate—our cultural practices within a wider system(s) dependent upon the a/biotic life functioning. Critics have to do more than counter the denial of a people's or culture's existence through continued declarations of its existence, as ecopoet Jonathan Skinner exhorts (11). We have to move beyond protest as an end in itself. We have to ask: What next?

Paul's "Water Drinker" proposes naming as making bioregion matter. Naming does not have the explicit requirements of a narrative: beginning, story arc, and ending. Bioregional narratives accentuate the indivisibility of culture and ecology and demand we approach and think of place in new ways. They situate knowledge as multivalent and co-constituted by humans and their a/biotic neighbours. In other words, bioregional narratives are methods for translating and materializing the vitality and autonomy of regions. I read method embedded in Paul's repeated emphasis on "learning"; the story of two names, of two stories offers a route to ecoliteracy. The name's repeated rooting and uprooting, settling and unsettling of local narratives in "alien light" and bioregional specificity advocates a learning method through active listening. Pedagogical ecoliteracy teases out multi-pronged approaches to reading bioregion, as illustrated in my three readings above, and puts them into a realm of action, and thus accountability. Paul's writing is an act of environmental practice. My critical readings are an act of environmental educational practice. Though these methods do not enact activities normally associated with activism through participatory engagement—a parade through streets with placards, signing

petitions, mailing letters, or culture jamming—they actively evoke bioregion with an ecological sensibility that challenge dominant and harmful environmental discourses. They are, despite their modest adornment, modes of activism.

Chapter Synopses

In Chapter One, I introduce literary ecology as a concept that applies to various ecocritical practices as a beneficial critical turn in regionalism studies, which leads to a global bioregional ecoliteracy. To reach this end, I advocate a literary ecology that promotes a method of free-associative wayfinding that is conducive to adapting to a dynamic cultural and biophysical world in constant flux. Locally generated ecological thinking is the central focus around which this reading/writing approach pivots to create a global ecoliteracy. I draw on Laurie Ricou's Pacific Northwest bioregional trilogy: *A Field Guide to "A Guide to Dungeness Spit*," *The Arbutus/Madrone Files: Reading the Pacific Northwest*, and *Salal: Listening for the Northwest Understory*. Literary ecology serves as an exemplary boundary-transgressing model for initiating and immersing oneself in the complex relations that emerge in and out of the diversity of place-based writing. Because each work serves as a specific stage in the author's own emerging and developing local ecological identity, I also approach the texts chronologically (as they are listed above). Ricou's bioregional trilogy serves also as a marker of how his move to Canada's west coast also initiated his transition away from thematic to poststructuralism to his eventual salal rhizomatic theorization of bioregionalism. Thus, in this chapter, I investigate the implications and challenges that Ricou's local theory and reading practice evoke, particularly as works that engage with both the local and the global.

In Chapter Two I challenge Ricou's wayfinding method as not going far enough in assisting readers in recognizing thresholds for engaging in responsible ethical practices with the other-than-human. We need to develop a language that embodies our connections to the biophysical world as immersed, respectful perceptual and thinking interactors who are aware of both our limits and limitations. Specifically, I turn to ecophenomenological language as a means of shortening the gap between the human and other-than-human. Rather than look at the specificity of a plant or animal, in this chapter, I examine how Ricou's free-associative method though offering a liberating method for initiating and exploring bioregional literacy stops short of offering a language that offers a common ground for communicating that diversity. I look primarily at Basma Kavanagh's poem "Lines" and Harry Thurston's *A Place between the Tides: A Naturalist's Reflections on the Salt Marsh.* As ecophenomenological texts, I argue that they evoke not only an embodied perceptual language for reading and understanding the diverse representatives of the other-than-human world, but demonstrate through physical engagement a relational model that recognizes and respects the limits and limitations of human thresholds.

Chapter Three transitions from ecophenomenology to new materialism to take up the matter that eludes human consciousness. We need to contemplate how matter inter-/intra-acts with and alters other matter and humans in ways that determine material agencies independent of or responsive to anthropogenic forces. I look specifically at Daphne Marlatt's long poem *Steveston* and its evocation of the Fraser River salmon culture at the delta. Her poem offers in its complex flow and constraints of matter and human cultural relations an ecological vision that has only grown in relevancy since its first publication in 1974. It not only challenges assumptions about static views of the biophysical world, but also challenges the economic and social structures maintained to

hold these static views in place—literally and literarily. Thus Marlatt's ecological material poetics subverts hierarchal power dynamics to introduce a non-linear language and material/cultural discourse that evades the networkings to create a fuller ecoliteracy that takes into consideration the abiotic agencies shaping human interactions.

Chapter Four takes a different direction than the first three in that it puts theory into practice through an ecocompositional arts-based research project on the Norway rat, with cameos of the white-tailed jackrabbit, to present a pedagogy for developing ecoliteracy. We require a pedagogical model that synthesizes and materializes artistic and critical realizations of ourselves as simultaneously locally and globally situated ecological subjects. The chapter provides a discussion of the project as a pedagogical model for ecoliteracy, the critic's role, and the effectiveness of ecocomposition with an illustrative investigation by way of example. The illustrative essay inspired by Laurie Ricou's "Habitat Studies," focuses on the specificity of the Norway Rat as a means to interconnect the local and global; however, it diverges slightly from Ricou's model in that it also brings into conversation an urban ecoliteracy that places the city as processes of varying degrees of human and other-than-human habit(ations) at the centre of the narrative. Cities are not bioregions, but are habitats within bioregions—ecosystems within larger ecosystems. Cities are crucial to an evolving environmental sense of a bioregion's intersecting local and global processes as biophysical and social. Urban ecoliteracy is much more than grasping a system's function, it is "ecological principles along with insights from soil, hydrological, physical and atmospheric sciences […] it attempts to link with [r]elevant social dimensions of urban systems, [which] include political and economic power relations, social identity and change, economics of production and consumption, the nature of livelihood and lifestyle, and questions of social justice and vulnerability" (Pickett, et al. 144).

In the 21st century, as largely urban dwellers in habitats that create some of the greatest ecological footprints on the planet in their "multiscalar outreach, from the intensely local to the expansive global" (Soja 182), we need to evoke engaging models of ecological learning. Naturalist accounts of salt marshes may never induce city-dwelling students to seek out and explore non-urban biophysical environments, but urban tales of other-than-human co-inhabitants may provoke a more receptive engagement with the biophysical environments of a city. The city has much to teach humans about their other-than-human co-habitants and about themselves. I thus elucidate a reading and ecocompositional pedagogy of both matter and texts, which seeks to bring the parts together for a holistic view that expands relationality as an ethic of responsibility. The overall effect is to capture through a deconstructive and reconstructive process a synthesized expression of an emergent and ongoing ecological subject identity through the critical intersections of artistic expression and scholarly research.

CHAPTER ONE: Literary Ecology: Wayfinding the Local in the Global

Introduction: Developing Bioregional Ecoliteracy through Literary Ecology

To cultivate ecoliteracy that encompasses both local and global awareness through bioregional literature, readers need to acquire a method of free-associative wayfinding that is conducive to adapting to a dynamic cultural and biophysical world in constant flux. Locally generated ecological thinking is the central focus around which this chapter pivots to create a global ecoliteracy. To draw out this free-associative wayfinding approach to developing ecoliteracy, in this chapter I adopt a literary ecology reading methodology, which analyzes the texts in an ecological context. As I focus my literary ecology approach in bioregionalism studies, I locate my reading of the ecological context within a specific ecoregion, the Pacific Northwest of North America. I tease out how the writings trace for a reader of literary bioregionalism the pathways between the local and the global to create for us as a human species a sense of living in a co-constitutive biospheric system that is a process of cultural and material interaction. I look specifically at Laurie Ricou's Pacific Northwest bioregional trilogy: *A Field Guide to "A Guide to Dungeness Spit*," *The Arbutus/Madrone Files: Reading the Pacific Northwest*, and *Salal: Listening for the Northwest Understory*.

I choose to work with Ricou's writings as his literary ecology, which emphasizes an engaging reading approach to bioregion that breaks from linear, hierarchical thinking models, promotes and prompts a theoretical and applied approach that is a free-play of

horizontal, reciprocal thinking, getting lost, and surprise. As a result, his work serves as an exemplary boundary-transgressing model for initiating and immersing oneself in the complex cultural and material relations that emerge in and out of the diversity of place-based writing in relation to its biophysical environment. Because each work serves as a specific stage in the author's own emerging and developing local ecological identity, I also approach the texts chronologically (as they are listed above) as separate readings. I investigate, as a reader, the implications and challenges that Ricou's local theory and reading practice evoke, particularly as a literary ecology that engages with both the local and the global. Reading Ricou reading, his own grappling with the literary matter—his works are creative, literary bioregional studies—moreover, provides a means of thinking through the challenges of wading among and untangling the paradoxes of a place in constant cultural and material flux. Thus, Ricou's work composes dynamic human and biophysical ecologies of regions. Places never entirely fix in *place*, never truly cohere, unless we bring some form of order to them, an ordering that Ricou for the most part resists; or at least, he resists ordering in a closed, systematic way. For engaging with an apparently incohering world, we require new forms of reciprocal exchange and innovative ways of reading.[9]

[9] Ricou's move in 1978 from the prairies to the west coast, as he admits, unsettled his assumptions of home: what wasn't *there*/*here* became the "most powerful teaching" (*A/M*, 8). Locating home in those absences became "a profession or an avocation" (*A/M*, 8) for Ricou. Re-locating to Canada's west coast with its "evergreen trees, and even mist" (*A/M*, 8), Ricou found he was no longer in the horizontal lands of Brandon, Manitoba, Toronto, Ontario, or Lethbridge, Alberta, and felt compelled "to read" his way into his new home (*A/M*, 8). The landscape hailed and Ricou went wandering and inter-leaving between text and local natural artefact. His wayfinding revealed how local narratives, mountains, shrubs, trees, waters, and people altered continuously the boundaries of home and challenged his approach to Canadian regional studies, which led him to divest himself of regionalism for bioregionalism. Thus in bioregionalist fashion his literary studies expanded across the Pacific Northwest, ranged across national borders; and, his local locating not only ranged into the United States, but also travelled further afield making literary, cultural, and material connections between the local and global.

Reading across disciplines and cultural boundaries within a bioregional context reinforces an ecoliteracy that understands that healthy ecological and social function and resiliency depends on the complex diversity of collective interactive material and cultural properties and processes. By reading, I mean engaging in a literary ecology that goes beyond the leaves of books to that of the anatomy of an arbutus leaf, which in turn speaks to us through its chemistry, its physics, its biology, its oral histories, and teaches us the interrelational composition of soil, water, air, and directs us in-ever extended directions to the interconnections between local habitats and planetary ecosystems. To make these local/global bioregional connections, Ricou encourages readers of home to step out of their field of reference and engage with other disciplines, other ways of attending to the world, in free-associative way. His wayfinding model, thus, depends on the collaboration between different forms of thinking, of seeing the world as constantly written and unwritten by both human and other-than-human. A singular vision or voice only tells one story. As much as literary bioregionalism is constructed by the structures and paradoxes of language, through its diversity it also pushes against those constraints created by language. With knowledges gleaned from *listening* bodily as much as mentally to the structures and functions expressed by/in/through the material processes of the biophysical world, literary bioregionalism initiates a radical departure from traditional regional studies. Its inclusion of the other-than-human extends and thus challenges the perimeters of traditionally defined regional boundaries. It departs from the way we read region as politically drawn territories to interrogate together human and other-than-human concerns as co-constitutive and interdependent.

Local literatures exploit the interrelational characteristic of region through a network of land "marks" that orient readers spatially, temporally, affectively, and

figuratively within the local biogeoclimatic terrain that is a part of a larger planetary biosphere. Bioregional literature serve as wayfinders for orienting the local in the global. The literature situates the human in a deep network of imaginary and material places that provide direction to other localities, near and far. Bioregional literature communicates multiple orientations through naming, longitude/latitude coordinates, storytelling, landmarks, verbs, terminology, languages, actions, graphics, endemic and invasive/introduced species, migratory routes, peoples, cultures, soil, and weather patterns. They remind readers how environments do not look the same from different approaches. They provide referential cues to give readers a sense of how far and where they have travelled and how much further or where they need to go. Ricou expresses all of these orientations in gerundial terms. The effect is that the artefact is read in a relational dynamic with bioregion as an ever emergent process influenced by and outcome of interaction between human and other-than-human, culture and matter.

Locating

In his creative-critical text *A Field Guide to "A Guide to Dungeness Spit,"* Ricou evokes a simultaneity of absence and presence through a pastiche of mixed disciplinary voices removed from their original contexts to create a disorientating effect that makes the ground difficult to discern and leaves the reader's 'footing' unstable. The challenge—or rather impossibility of seeing fully in wayfinding is thus the point. Interwoven into this archival indexing, he provides brief readings of David Wagoner's poem "A Guide to Dungeness Spit." The result is that readers never get a definitive picture of the region (or the poem). By excerpting the local literature and visual representations, he coaxes out a

different and unsettling picture of the Pacific Northwest bioregion than that traditionally set out by a single dominant narrative or colonialist discourse. My reading emphasis of *A Field Guide* seems an inordinately unconventional approach for a literary ecological reading as I focus on the photos of the text, rather than draw on substantial close readings of the text. The text excerpts, removed from their original contexts, tend to invite theoretical interpretation of the text's over-all structure, or its categorization as a genre (Tamas Dobozy's reading, for instance). Though my reading does not situate in genre theory, Dobozy's genre reading of *A Field Guide* points to a more general characteristic of Ricou's "bricolage" method (Bradley 134) that we find in *Salal* and *The Arbutus/Madrone Files* or as Dobozy observes, Ricou's essay "The Botany of the Liar." Dobozy draws attention to how Ricou draws on a plethora of genres (field guide, poetry, folktales, news articles, for instance) to emphasize the multiple ways that "we might interact with the environment, and also the paths it carves in us" (21). Yet, these textual fragments further remind readers of how de-contextualized writings perform what Dobozy calls a "hermeticism" (26). Removed from their categorizational structures that define their generic identity, Dobozy contends they pronounce more fully how they are "sealed in their own manners of language, fail to account for how partial (in both senses of the term) their practices are, and therefore how far-reaching the consequences are" (26). The photos serve as a visual reminder of what one of those far-reaching consequences were in the Pacific Northwest: the colonization and displacement of Indigenous peoples from their traditional territories. The photos in *A Field Guide* enact *terra nullius* in reverse: it shows the landscape as historically populated by Aboriginal peoples and then its colonized de-populated image as parkland. Neither Nicholas Bradley nor Tamas Dobozy, the only two who dedicate article length literary

analyses to *A Field Guide*, address the photos in sustained breadth or Ricou's presence through absence as his de-colonizing gesture, the last point I return to shortly.

I spend, thus, a lot of time on the photographs, as they are an aspect of the text that is potentially the one area that literary critics are most apt to dismiss as having less relevance than the textual excerpts. Because of Ricou's methods of serious free-play and because he includes the photos at strategic intervals and in a distinct pattern, I believe to overlook the de-colonizing value of the text as a whole (perhaps as deictic adornment: 'you are here'), readers tend to overlook how images are another form of regional map-making that are equally important and influential in our imaginings and construction of narratives of place. He begins with a cover photo that situates readers above a spit. Proportionally pleasing, shot in the rule of thirds, photographer Nancy Pagh sandwiches the sandy spit between white cloud and wild roses. The spit cuts across at a slight curve and tapers into the distance. In a haze of grain and weather, a tanker separates horizon from sky. Small human figures dot the shoreline. The next image that greets readers is a black and white image accompanying "A Guide to Dungeness Spit." Here, the spit juts into Puget Sound in Washington State. It zigs right, then zags left, then right and left again and disappears into a gray cloudbank rolling into the ocean. The Cascade Mountains are barely discernable, glaciers and ridges faintly etching another layer onto the skyline. A meadow, the darkest tones of the image, dominates the foreground and leads the eye to a white house that sits mid-frame, slightly off-centre to the right, just at the place where the spit begins to zag left. Driftwood lines the sandy shore, and darker patches of water suggest a slight breeze riffling an otherwise calm sea. A human figure stands off-centre to the left, caught between fore- and mid-grounds. The resolution is grainy. I cannot tell whether she or he looks toward the camera or mountains.

Four pages later, another photo of the spit. Though the photographer stands further back than in the second photo, clearly s/he uses a telephoto lens. We see now the point from where the second photo was shot, and that the human is not a human after all, but a remnant of a wharf piling. This image reveals that the foreground in the second photo begins at the edge of the Dungeness Spit lighthouse. According to the guide excerpts, which Ricou quotes, we are at the far-end of the spit. And, as the third photo shows, the spit at this point curlicues or arabesques into a cove dissolving the illusion of the earlier photo's zigzagging landforms. All three photos, at varying degrees, look from higher ground seaward.

Wayfinding through the narratives of documentary photographs tends to rely on realist assumptions as they tend to impart a sense of reliability. We believe that what we see is as it is. "So, there you are" declares Harvey Manning in his hiking guide *Footsore 3: Walks or Hikes around Puget Sound* (qtd in Ricou, *Field* 15), standing at the trailhead to "[t]he longest natural sandspit in the United States" (qtd in Ricou *Field* 15). He enjoins us to "Go," pick, and follow a route. He describes in detail what to expect with each approach, the seaward or leeward views, but go where interest takes you, as paths end at the same spot, the lighthouse. Ideally, though, he suggests, "The best plan is to alternate routes" (qtd in Ricou *Field* 15). Don't stick to one path; meander the spit. Ricou takes this advice and compiles a book that rejects a linear narrative trajectory. As with Manning, with the first three photographs Ricou also seems to assert, "So, there you are." But, unlike Manning's sure-footed guide into Dungeness Spit, these three photographs and David Wagoner's opening poem make Ricou's deictic seem more like abandonment—and I mean this in both senses of the term's meaning of being ditched and giving in. It feels like Ricou has given readers a ride to the spit, opened the door, led them to the trailhead, handed them his "field

guide," returned to his car and drove off. When readers flip through Ricou's field guide's pages, they realize all they have are fragments, never have in their grasp the full story, the full map. They have to make leaps of associations between the textual excerpts, and though some of the photos give a sense of familiarity, they also are shot at perspectives that are not conducive to being on foot or allow for wider focus.

Because of these fragmentary texts, however, and the bridges that readers attempt to make between them, readers are compelled to wander further into the text/spit, to seek out the complete story. However, Ricou resists this, and readers end up repeatedly discovering in their place another story. Yet, this quest for completing the narrative is what motivates readers to continue, lures them on and off 'the trail' to make a story of place from the pieces Ricou offers: in other words, become as Ricou, "a bricoleur" (Bradley 133) who has to assemble their place with the material they have at hand. In the case of *A Field Guide*, the fragments are defamiliarizing. As Nicholas Bradley articulates, the disorientation and its revelations in Ricou's writing are a manifestation of surprise, a standard trope and critical method in much of Ricou's writings and pedagogy (Bradley 119; Dobozy 15). Surprise, Bradley notes, is its process of making visible "the alien, the unexpected, the out-of-place, the disruptive presence" (119). The excerpts, textual and photographic, evoke surprise in the reader of *A Field Guide* because they indicate how habituated many readers are of these writings' commonplaceness when removed from their frame of referencing. Out of context, they seem to no longer point at things with as great as accuracy as they once did. They remind readers, Bradley points out, that "the experience of reading and the reading of experience are intertwined and that interpretation and evaluation are shaped by this entanglement" (119). So, in the case of the reader's first encounter with *A Field Guide*,

they begin with what they have, here: a title, a photo, and a feeling of disorienting abandonment. And as readers make their way, already they feel their feet losing traction.

Each photo in its different perspective thus challenges where we are, undermines our certainty in its lack of temporal or authorial references, Pagh's photo the exception. In his acknowledgement Ricou mentions receiving a folder of archival photos of the spit, but he does not cite the images anywhere else in the text. Including the cover photo, there are seven photos and one illustration, which is the last image of the text and bears a barely discernible signature: D? P? Till? Even though each image has a distinct Pacific Northwest *feel* to it, there are no specific landmarks that clue readers as to their exact location. The distant mountains are indistinct, and the lighthouse is, in all senses, like many other west coast lighthouses. Further, Ricou troubles this re-localization by how he orders the images. As each photo progressively zooms in closer, situating where we are becomes more elusive, seems to be anywhere. In the images, much like the excerpts, *despite* the sense that we seem to get nearer to the subject, the readers never really seem to get there. So, unless you have been to this place, you have to trust the authority of these accounts and Ricou's locating.

In *A Field Guide*, however, despite its coverage of the spit's diversity and range of expertise, on closer reading Ricou situates authority so that it always seems to stand on shaky ground, or at least has other excerpts that destabilize that ground. As with many of the excerpts that Ricou includes in his book, in Wagoner's poem, around which Ricou's book pivots and converses, local specificity is not so pronounced. Wagoner's deictic poetic guide to Dungeness Spit, like many of the other "guides" Ricou introduces, can be disorienting in this indexical way for its listing of species: wild rose, Bonaparte's gulls, grebes, goldeneyes. The speaker eagerly, or as Ricou suggests, with the air of "some know-

it-all" (*Field* 24), points to the features of the spit. Yet, his shift from specific to generalized naming makes locating place a challenge: sponge, cockleshell, dunes, and crabs. This is a different naming than Paul in "Water Drinker," which situates the reader in a specific species, place, culture, and language. Together, Wagoner's deictics and labelling set up a reading of *some* but not one particular place. As readers, they cannot *see* "those" birds called grebes. They may not recognize a bird's name, but may know them by sight or sound. Wagoner does not provide a visual description. They are made, as Ricou, to ask, "*What* are cockleshells?" (Field 25). Thus, Ricou via Wagoner via Dungeness Spit sets up thinker and poet Don McKay's observation that "[s]ometimes the proximity afforded by specificity results in an ironic distancing between poet and subject" (*Strike/Slip* 10). For all of this pointing, for all of these excerpts, the reader gets no closer to *seeing* the spit. In fact, being so close they lose sight of the place. They have no clearer picture of the spit than when Ricou abandoned them at the trailhead. So, what then makes this a bioregional poem or book? How, do these writings work as bioregional wayfinders when they appear to write place in ambiguous or de-contextualized ways, seem to take us further than closer to knowing bioregion, to knowing home, reads and writes place in a way that readers actually can't see it fully? Ricou's book becomes one more Pacific Northwest incomplete story, one more fragment, yet at the same time, draws attention to the multiple stories that create more "mistory" (*A/M*, 19) than clarity, accentuates the "missed and misted" (*A/M*, 17) in locating place.

Getting lost, surprise, these are critical strategies that Ricou uses to read—to keep (us) reading—bioregion as living difference together. It is the lure of the seeming possibilities of and the unfamiliarity latent in the everyday that compel us to read and learn more. Ricou's choice of excerpts are deliberately disorienting. His strategy proposes that

readers will always struggle to see region in its totality and thus to see themselves in their entirety; readers, this suggests, can only read their stories of self in relation to this partial view, an outlook as much constructed by others as by one's self. As Ricou observes, "mistory" has an alternate pronunciation as "*my* story" (*A/M*, 19), that persistent self-reflexivity that mystifies this partial view. The diversity of voices that always populate Ricou's writings, however, remind readers that though they share a region they do not necessarily share the same stories. An ecoliteracy, with its emphasis on the value of diversity, reads for difference rather than appropriation or exploitation. As long as we keep in hearing-range and listen to the multiple voices (organic and inorganic) that comprise a region, we will make efforts to learn, to translate, and to share stories. Ricou's strategy in populating his works with the fragments of multiple voices suggests that as long as we continue reading for the specificities that create these differences, we will continue to be humbled and surprised by the multitude of voices, human and other-than-human, and so learn to respect the knowledge that we will never hold a place, a species, or a self in its totality. And as a result, in this understanding, we will never be able to (nor desire to) colonize those stories, those places. The unknowability keeps us unbalanced, develops cultures of uncertainty, for sure. But that is fine. The two strategies do not necessarily need to work together, but they often occur as a result of the other. Abandonment, for Ricou, is not so much advocating that we head into the Coastal or Olympic Mountains without a guidebook, trail map or GPS. Nor does he encourage we lose our sense of direction, but rather that we consider heading out with new guides, taking new paths wearing lighter boots and clothing or plot different approaches to the same route. If the trail is a loop, go counter-clockwise; or better yet, take that deer trail that veers off to the left.

We are surprised, because, ecocritic Travis Mason suggests, the risks in stepping off the beaten path forge new or open neglected paths (*Ornithologies* 213) that "read[y] mind and body for encounters that have the potential to lead away from comfortable assumptions about the world" (*Ornithologies* 215). If Mason is correct and risk is a necessary component to new encounters, then ecoliteracy demands participatory relational engagement. Getting lost means letting go, risk stepping off the trail every once and awhile, closing the guidebook, letting ourselves be a bit disoriented, on edge, uncomfortable in our surroundings. It also entails asking for help from others. Negotiating difference respectfully elicits settling and unsettling rather than colonizing. Paradoxically, when bioregional writers subvert or play with identifiable markers of place (the "totemic" or commonplace)—re-map or refuse to represent a place or its features to dominant expectations, we are surprised. Literary bioregionalism calls for agency, calls for readers to take initiative, to add to the collective knowledge of place produced by the texts and contribute experiential knowledge and stories that fill out a view that is more representative of the diversity of bioregion. Stepping off the trail is not an option but a necessity. What is a cockleshell? Ricou's writing responds: read, listen, go and see, step out into the world, walk down that deer path that seems to wend toward the ocean. Sure, readers may end up walking off a cliff or hitting a dead end in their attempt at a new approach, but at least they came across something unanticipated, something they never knew about their homes. They may emerge on a beach where deer graze on eel grass and a platoon of voracious raccoons converge, eager to take away their trail mix. They may lock gazes with a spy-hopping Orca. A wolf wading in the surf may accelerate their heart rate. A slim, leather-bound volume by a forgotten early 20th century naturalist by the name of Wildwood may beckon from the stacks. Among all of these encounters, we may or may not find a cockleshell. And for the

element of surprise that Ricou advocates, then that is fine, as place is not fixed and the stories that compose the everyday are not always as commonplace as readers have become habituated in believing.

The persistence in seeking and pointing out and naming these features, even in generalized terms—crab, sponge, piper—sets up community relations. All of these things, these species, and these people occupy this place, this habitat. The writer points to what is at hand. This dynamic of bioregional narratives reveals, as Bradley claims of Wagoner's poem "A Guide to Dungeness Spit," a place as "utterly alive, yet held at a remove" (125). I read Bradley's reading of remove not as something to lament, but rather as a positive reinforcement of how to acknowledge the biophysical world's autonomy while still accessing greater intimacy with and insight into its existence. The sets of relationships manifest in a bioregion, and its human and other-than-human denizens perform an "ecological complexity [that] unfolds before […] the reader but remains distant, appreciable but irreducible" (Bradley 125). We begin to see that our bioregions are nodes comprised of habitats reaching out to an extensive planetary web that forms both a patterned and messy system much larger than ourselves, but of which we are an integral part. We shape and are shaped by that larger system. The distance that literature creates provides and expands space for visualizing and altering where we have and should tread (and sometimes will trip up) in relation to that larger system that connects here with there, violently or cooperatively.

Through the local and global, re-articulated as habitat and biosphere, we come to realize how place is a palimpsest of matter, cultural diversity, and imagination. How Ricou orders the images and the written sections in *A Field Guide* illustrates that a singular narrative, specifically a colonialist one, cannot stand alone in such a conjoined

configuration or imaginary. Ricou's choice to presence Indigenous peoples[10] through settler's voices and gazes, further accentuates the absence of how certain places are/were imagined and colonized at the expense of older, settled histories. That which now frames these histories is a strip of land, a spit in the Pacific Ocean, and an accretion of sand, grass, wayward logs, and cultural and natural historical remnants. The layout of the photos, thus, have a precise movement from cover to end. The realism conveyed by the photos is punctuated by the artifice of a painting done in folk art style, which suggests a certain naiveness in its representation, not to mention an evocation of fantasy in its subject matter: a Loch Ness-like, "Dunge Ness" sea monster being harpooned by fisherman in a motorized dory. From three differing perspectives of the spit, we move in from the mainland to the near-tip, to historical peopled Indigenous campsites to a distance image of two children playing on a cluster of beached logs and then to a close-up of one of those washed-up logs. The first three images suggest, despite the lighthouse, an inaccessible or infrequently visited wildscape. And, as the guidebook excerpts indicate, few people make the effort to walk the five miles to the tip. Most, like the figures in Pagh's photo, stay close to the mainland's edge. But the evidently historical photos of the First Nation's encampments at the centre of the book tell another story. In these two photos, canoes, tents, families, bundles of supplies, campfire smoke, drying racks domesticate the spit, present it as a once interactive living human community space. This contrasts with the book's first three spit images. Ricou leaves these two historical images to speak for themselves and in the (non)telling creates an unsettling.

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[10] Indigenous peoples refers to the Aboriginal peoples of North America: Native Americans, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit.

More specifically, Ricou's oblique *presencing* of West coastal First Nations[11] draws attention to how bioregionalism, despite its appropriative roots in Indigenous epistemologies, is not necessarily inclusive of their epistemological claims or authority. The peoples' appearance, the haze of over-exposure, smoke, and old developing processes produces a haunting presence, plays into/up the colonialist tropes of "vanished" or invisible cultures. As a result, the two images flip the deictic "so there you are" into its narrative correlative "so there you have it." Ricou's inclusion of these photos, though, does not support the European *terra nullius* narrative. Instead, his parenthetical arrangement of the two photos stands as a central counter-narrative, a presence that defies assumptions of an untouched or unpeopled bioregion. Rather than begin with the images and move to a depopulated landscape, which would adhere more to the colonial narrative of "vanished" peoples, this placement leaves in the absence of supporting text a question mark. The other images must pivot around these two images. What stories of home do we, as bioregional inhabitants, construct, do we ignore? Of which stories are we willfully ignorant, and which get erased at the expense of promulgating another? In fact, rather than act as parentheses, Ricou's formatting suggests these images serve more as scare quotes. Place for non-Indigenous readers becomes foreign space and for Indigenous readers the doubled recognition of home and occupied land. Though we cannot say with certainty who the photographer is, the technology itself declares its colonial and ethnographic representation (gaze). In such a reading, for Ricou, as a settler, to append text to these images would only

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[11] The First Nations are not named specifically. Though the Olympic Peninsula is claimed by multiple nations, which are of the Salishan language group (Lower Elwha Klallam, Jamestown S'Klallam, Port Gamble S'Klallam, Skokomish, Quinault, Hoh, Quileute, and Makah), the S'Klallam have an established community adjacent to Dungeness Spit, which suggests a specific historical claim to those lands. See Jamestown S'Klallum Tribe website for historical and cultural details on their land ownership: http://www.jamestowntribe.org/index.htm.

add further to the colonialist imperative to occupy. Instead, in their lack of context, he grants the photos the room to tell the stories in relation to the viewer's own perspective and the stories that they may or may not know. What a reader sees as home will have little or no relation to what a descendant of the people in the photo may see and remember. And capturing *here* does not seem to be Ricou's intent; it is to complicate place, to learn to know where one is situated in relation to *here*. Mason claims, the desire to locate does not necessarily mean a fixity in a singular place: "the emphasis on "here" […] also inevitably points us "there" and "elsewhere" ("Seeding Coordinates" n. pag.). Ricou's presence through absence of Indigenous voices accentuates how colonial discourse attempts to erase or redirect contradictory narratives as "elsewhere." Yet, as Mason further points out, elsewhere has the potential to be the perturbation that challenges the resiliency of the colonial story of settlement: "Elsewhere disrupts whatever stability exists between here and there; beholden not to physical place but to the vagaries of mental space, Elsewhere thrills with generative potential and threatens to undo a sense of self accumulated through shared experience (n. pag.). By applying Mason's notion of "elsewhere" to Indigenous writings in Canada, the irony is not lost but deliberate. Thus, *here*, in Dungeness Spit, is also temporal and cultural: they are histories, understandings and imaginings of place that are beyond settlers' reach and knowledge, that have their own languages, their own convergences, translocal and familial relations and historical accretions.

While bioregionalism embraces cultural diversity, de-centralization and heterogeneous representations, labour and resource disputes and exploitation too often undermine attempts to articulate the local as multi-culturally harmonious between settlers and Indigenous peoples and among settlers (European, Chinese, Japanese, Sikh, Finns, French, African-Canadian/American, Ukrainians…). To document this historical and

ongoing aspect of colonialism and globalization, Ricou invokes an indirect political critique. In his presence through absence of Indigenous self-representation, he evokes the unequal power dynamics. Rather than give an authoritative account, he allows the details of the various voices to create a picture of bioregional discourse that is not so settled as the dominant stories suggest. The result is that the bioregional mapping draws up incomplete. By directing attention to the colonial discourse, Ricou opens a clearing for readers to seek out other local wayfinders to speak, to narrate, to guide them home, and to challenge where they are. Invites them to learn the languages of these other stories.

Yet, *presencing* through absence though once a viable strategy for drawing attention to power inequalities and de-centring the dominant discourse, in a world where complexity is more pronounced, this strategy is no longer viable. It does not redress the absence, and it does not allow for the political "generative potential" that Mason envisions, and so diminishes Indigenous people's opportunity to unsettle the colonialist narratives. For many non-Indigenous scholars there is the concern of appropriation of voice, and I suspect Ricou is sensitive to this potential. However, this no longer remains an excuse, as Indigenous scholars, elders, and writers have made clear the ways in which their stories may be told. By not seeking out, following protocol and asking permission and thus recounting S'Klallum or other Coast Salish community stories relating to the spit, despite good intentions, arguably he becomes an orchestrator in continuing a localized forum for the colonial voices. Yet, knowing Ricou's politics and his demonstrated ethical stance on cultural equality and ongoing efforts to trouble colonial discourses, *A Field Guide* situates itself as a text of its time, moving in the right direction but not going far enough. Scott Richard Lyons (Leech Lake Ojibwe) sets out a crucial discernment for helping non-Indigenous peoples who seek to act as allies in de-colonization endeavours (such as post-

secondary education): "appropriate the logic, not the culture itself" (212). Ricou's trepidation at wading into the potential of cultural appropriation is understandable, but as Lyons proposes, by focusing on the method of thinking involved in Indigenous epistemologies, much the way one would study the argumentative methods of other cultures, enables non-Indigenous peoples to consider and adopt other forms of critical thinking. In this manner, Lyons claims, non-Indigenous peoples can then ask themselves how they will "develop forms of socialization that would lead their people to see themselves as connected and responsible to the natural world" and find "new ways of using language to formulate response" (212). Lyons' point is similar to Rita Wong who imagines what radical transformation would occur if immigrant-settlers were to situate their subject identities in relation to "indigenous peoples struggles instead of normalized whiteness" (329). As, Paul's "Water Drinker" proposes, the answer to these shifts would be that we would act as guests, behaviour that has in place a set of socialized protocols for appropriate action. In other words, it is about learning, as Ricou does, to recognize the presence of alternative world views, but then going beyond recognition to facilitate, as an ally, by clearing and sharing space for self-representation and stepping to the edge of that clearing to listen to those alternative world views.

Home, thus, should not map or settle easily. As the photos of and text excerpts about West coast First Nations and the narrative excerpts of Chinese migrants in *A Field Guide* show (and later the migrant and immigrant workers in his work *Salal: Listening for the Northwest Understory*), the point is that a wider and deeper inclusion is necessary for maintaining a healthy politics, one that builds on respect, consultation, and negotiation of diversity. This can only occur when we recognize as Ricou notes in *Salal*, that these stories "outside the mainstream and yet at the centre" (114) are integral to a more complete

understanding of bioregionalism. They are the narratives that underwrite and need to accompany and in some instances overwrite the colonial stories. Or rather, these wayfinders should not so much overwrite as both re-situate and re-read the colonial stories. They then settle into bioregions as stories that refuse to let others write their identities, to tell their stories for them.

The final illustration with which Ricou ends his book playfully draws on traditional western tendencies toward naïve realist assumptions that further uphold the European colonialist narrative: *terra nullius*, the edge of the world where the sea-monsters lurk. The irony, of course, in this image is its anachronistic play on an 1892 sighting: a motorized dory follows the monster in the foreground. This illustration and Ricou's placement of the image question and punctuate the persistence of stories that attempt to definitively locate, capture and pen us in place and in time through a particular way of seeing. But the image's accompanying excerpt dated from the 19th century, its coincidence with a late European settlement of the Pacific Northwest—the last of the 'frontier'—and the folk-art amateurish painting style play on the absurdity and the not-quite-real myth-making that these regions inspire/d. Along with the two encampment photos, the illustration at the end points to the construction of the world implied by the book's "nature" images. The arrangement of the photos, from the cover to the final black and white photo of the driftwood (covered in ice? seaweed?) moves readers from a distanced perspective to a close up. People are distant, rambling figures. We see the big picture, the panoramic view, and then we see the details. Ricou's zooming arrangement and his detailed excerpts are a reminder of a way of reading—an ecologist's and naturalist's gaze: see the big picture, but always keep an eye on the details. It is through the details that we see what is missing in the whole, and so can find our way to settling, but not too comfortably, at home in the world. But how, among all

this attending to wayfinding among the globality of human voices that occupy a region, does bioregional literature enable us to recognize and acknowledge the connections to the other-than-human, to those that have no human voice in which to participate in these negotiations of difference? To answer this question, I turn to Ricou's second text of his literary bioregional "trilogy," *Arbutus/Madrone Files: Reading the Pacific Northwest*.

Compiling a Literary Bioregion

In *Arbutus/Madrone Files: Reading the Pacific Northwest*, Ricou magnifies the diversity (and thus the shared commonplaces) by tracing and compiling files on other boundary-crossing species of the Pacific Northwest: salmon, great blue heron, Sasquatch, salal, and many more. In compiling and reading a literary bioregional imaginary for its human and other-than-human culture and placing, Ricou admits, "I know that I am selecting, manipulating, imaging, proclaiming some entity that does not actually exist. It is cautionary and exciting to acknowledge that every map I see, or guess at from words, has different limits and shifting centres" (*A/M* 26). Ricou's border crossing travels vis à vis the arbutus/Madrone tree, in effect, creates a cross-sampling of Canadian and American texts that engage the tree and other species and artefacts from diverse perspectives: gender, Indigenous peoples, ethnicity, class, and so forth. Ricou exploits arbutus/madrone for its obvious or explicit transregional/transnational linguistic traversing between two nations that share a bioregion. Ricou attends to that slashed space between arbutus/Madrone, 'inter-maps' across Canadian and US borders to make visible boundary transgressions and reifications as a repeated and key practice in settling and unsettling the differences and similarities.

One of Ricou's prominent writing strategies, found in *The Arbutus/Madrone Files* and more pronounced in *Salal*, is the gerund. In *The Arbutus Madrone Files* he employs the gerund as a cross-bordering process that becomes a governing metaphor and structuring of the movement of the other gerund -*ings* he performs in his bioregional writings. The *Files* of *The Arbutus/Madrone Files*, for example, signal the overarching *gerunding*: "filing." It suggests a systematic order and neat division of the literary bioregion. But, as boundary crossing suggests, there will always be transgressions. Ricou explains his choice of "file" as a form of ecological thinking and practice:

> *Dividing* my reading notes into files implies *collecting* [author's emph.] rather than systematic linear argument: stories and words and discoveries clustered according to some shifting set of associations. The *sorting* process that intends to respect a careful system soon comes up with a document that could readily settle in any three or four files. A quick and arbitrary assignment is often essential to getting the *filing* done. And then there's the item that will obviously not fit in any file: to avoid creating still more categories, I sometimes place this article and that note randomly, in hopes that, when next encountered, it will surprise me, and the reader, into some as yet undetected connection. (*Arbutus* 2 emph. added)

His gerunds *dividing*, *collecting*, *sorting*, and *filing* suggest that there is a structured approach to a literary bioregional reading, while his narrative reveals how this method does not resemble a Linnaean taxonomic order. The emergent quality of gerunds suggests, when thought in relation to a literary ecology, that his selections are literary correspondence to a bioregion's function as in a state of constant flux. In this ecosystem functioning, unpredicted outcomes can occur with unforeseen exchanges between inhabitants and their environment. Further, his gerunds also reject the Linnaean assumption of categorizing

based on likeness. Ricou's arbitrary dividing and sorting enables a more representative interaction of bioregional cultures and matter. Thus, his own creative impulse to randomly assign his findings in hopes of discovering new connections matches biophysical environmental "disturbance" and "unpredictability," and also testifies to a bioregion's collective resiliency. Moreover, his particular choice of species defy filing. They run over the edges of containment. Ricou's literary ecological modelling realizes Botkin's point that "[w]herever we seek to find constancy we discover change" (62). Because this static representation never existed to begin with, Botkin—and Ricou by literary proxy—impresses that these old methods of classification or explanation "must be abandoned, for such a landscape never existed except in our imagination" (Botkin 62).

Ricou demonstrates that in many bioregional texts' resistance for neat classification, new or alternate imaginaries emerge: texts that disrupt and change the regional literary landscape destabilize the grounds in which notions of stable regional identity grows. Too, in Ricou's filing system there is an adaptation of the naturalist's methodology and attention to temporal scales (the deep time of geology, the annual and perennial time of botany). As Ricou's temporal ranging suggests in *The Arbutus/Madrone Files*, and later *Salal*, this allusion finds parallel in how the historical overview of Northwest writings that he samples map this shifting view. What makes Ricou's literary bioregional model successful is how he counters the literary regional approach by illustrating how the dialogue initiated by these works is not of a region/nation (or Canada/US) contestation—a definition of region by contrast.[12] Rather his model emphasizes a "reciprocally continuous process" (*Arbutus* 3)

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[12] I borrow this definition of community from Stan Van Hooft's *Cosmopolitanism: A Philosophy for Global Ethics*: "Identity has a horizon: difference. If a group of people share an identity and recognize each other as holders of that identity, they will also define themselves as different from people who do not share that

that gestures how "[h]ome is alive: it changes and moves and grows in a new greening" (*Arbutus* 3). The files simulate ecological dynamism and cross-border transgressions: files overlap and the book's structure divides into two, *Files* and *Afterfiles*. The book's first section of "Files" seems to suggest a definitive categorization. But, the second section, "Afterfiles," disrupts that closed system for an open-ended system by performing an ongoing addition of more findings and suggesting the possibility of others yet undiscovered. The sense is thus a continuity and reciprocity—all file 'inhabitants' proliferate but none dominate. The 'after-filing,' as afterthoughts, promotes a return and defies a linear classification. But, the return does not promote a closed circularity; rather, the structure invites us to revisit and to re-examine the alterations in the literary bioregional habitats, and to see if and how our thinking and habits have changed.

Reciprocity in Ricou's writing entails understanding cultural histories and contexts not as shared experiences but as experiences of differences to share. This becomes the grounds for empathy, for learning to live different together. Take as an example, Ricou's "Kuroshia File." He writes:

> From early in its post-contact history (and perhaps in the most ancient reaches of its human history), Pacific Northwest culture has been a trans-Pacific culture. Consider that in 1880, 16,004 Chinese were recorded in the US Northwest, more than double the number of Germans, Irish, or English, the next largest ethnic groups. Seattle's Japanese population grew from 125 to 6,127 between 1890 and 1910 (Schwantes

identity [...] One could conclude from this point that the human world as a whole cannot be a community because there is no "other" to which members can contrast themselves and from which they can see themselves as different. [...] However, cosmopolitans would urge that people should overcome the tendency to define themselves by contrast to others and embrace difference as an intrinsic feature of world community" (143). I propose, that bioregionalism holds out this potential as a microcosmic model of a world community.

> 187-88). Along with multiple configurations of Asian cultures in many languages/ went an equally durable feature of Northwest society, anti-Asian bigotry of many shades, from the anti-Japanese riot of 1907 in Vancouver to Oregon's Alien Property Act (1923), which prohibited Japanese from owning and leasing land (Schwantes 126 298). (65-66)

As Ricou illustrates the Pacific Northwest bioregion was not just a convergence point for European settlers, but also for Asians as well. But as he also points out, differences were not points of celebration but persecution. The racial and cultural injustices that many of these groups underwent are grounds for readers to question the processes that 'settled' their bioregion. Kuroshia is named after the ocean current that travels the Pacific Rim from the Philippines to the Columbia River where it divides in the California and Aleutian currents. He observes, "This huge churning, affecting climate, vegetation, ocean nutrients, fish population, and beachcombing can stand for the gyrations of cultural mingling and the richness of upwellings" (*A/M* 69). This file explores samplings and histories of Asian literatures and peoples of the Pacific Northwest. In this reading of Pacific cultural gyring, Ricou relates the stories of alternate settlings in the Northwest that do not, as the current metaphor suggests, mix as much as churn up in the flow and confluences of settlement and colonization of Indigenous lands. Ricou thus initiates a de-colonizing gesture through "Kuroshia File" that 're-places' bioregional readers of similarity into readers of difference through the experiences and imaginings of internment, race riots, and racist policies. Through their literary "cracks and through the fissures, alternate regional icons appear: not cedar canoe but Dragon Boat, not arbutus but bamboo" (68). These wayfinders are not fixed, though, as they find the cracks and fissures in Ricou's system and emerge in and de-

colonize other folders, and as we see later with Daphne Marlatt's *Steveston*, affect non-Asian settler regional writings too.

Ricou's filing with its connotation of folders and its attendant etymological root in *thread* and *threading* create an odd mix of metaphors. Thread, a thin fibre, its strength dependendent on its source material, weaves the stories of the Pacific Northwest that Ricou imagines comprises this bioregion. For instance, he explains 'file' as threads "winding and stringing: spin the salmon thread, pull the logging thread until it touches the raven thread" (2). But then he switches metaphors immediately after this to 'texts'. But, if the reader is familiar with the etymology of text, it is intertwined with thread: text derives from the Latin verb *texere*, to weave or to construct. Thus a text is a weaving, an entanglement of threads creating a pattern. Yet Ricou's 'weaving' (again the play on *gerunding* implicit even here), creates forms of "[i]nterruptions, apertures, within the primary text [and] suggest, within the limits of bound serial pages, the disparate forms that often crowd into our files. In a landscape, they would be passages—or, text might be peeling back to reveal another colour or texture" (2). But, then here again, as the last phrase indicates, he creates another implied metaphor of palimpsesting. So as with the arbitrary collecting, dividing, sorting and filing of the literary ecologies of a bioregion, even the form of the file resists a singular metaphoric mapping. Ricou's filing/threading weaves a particular, multi-cultured and bio-diverse tapestry that is a loosely threaded text and/or palimpsest of a bioregion.

Stories bind themselves to and shape our lives in other ever-changing ways and as with bioregions where the constant is change, stories too are susceptible to change. Stories like biophysical processes are emergent and protean. And, if we agree with Thomas King, that "the truth about stories is that's all we are" (2), then we too change along with our stories or vice versa. And so then must our reading practices evolve alongside our stories.

The challenge becomes how we select the stories to read and make sense of them from that "amorphous mass" (Solnit 131). The particular species and regional characteristics that Ricou chooses and files are those which solicit his imagination. They are his wayfinders: mist, island, raven, rain, Kuroshio, salal, Sasquatch, salmon, Woodsworth, Great Blue Heron, intertidal, and Anasayú. Others who take up this filing may select Western red cedar, Rufous-sided Towhee, resident orca, sea otter, Bullfrog, Japanese Knotweed, Cinnabar Moth or Norway rat. But, these alternate wayfinders, as Ricou's files and bioregional writings demonstrate, make their way into and inhabit his files. In fact, as his book impresses overall, no matter how arbitrary his choices are, the ensuing interconnections surface through wayfinders pointing toward other wayfinders in a literary bioregion. "Region emerges in a layering of stories" (Ricou *A/M* 24), and as the –ing of layering indicates, it is an ongoing process of storying the land.

Collecting and the Naturalist's Way

In *The Arbutus/Madrone Files: Reading the Pacific Northwest*, Ricou proposes collecting as a method to begin this recognition process. He suggests beginning with a local species. But of course, this leaves us with the problem of choice in such abundance. Do we, as he does, in certain instances, focus on the 'totem' or keystone species of home (such as salmon, grizzly, moose, Sasquatch), or do we pick, as he also does, the under-represented (lichen, devil's club, field mouse, mummichog, salal)? Do we write a random list, toss the names in a hat and stick with the name drawn (as I was made to do as a student in his ecocriticism class)? Ricou stylizes his method of collecting on naturalist methods. Naturalists are often viewed as amateur dabblers in the natural sciences, yet because of

their singular obsession(s) become frequently more expert than the professional biologist. They become the ones that trained professionals call on for expertise, for witness, for confirmation, for data. There are no tenure, publishing, and professional obligations getting between them and their love. And, it is love in the sense of E.O. Wilson's *biophilia*—a love of nature. Ricou and his literary obsession with arbutus, but particularly salal over the years, is not much different. While I am sure he acquired a few samples of pressed salal, his shoe box of index cards were a growing collection of pressed leaves of another sort, which involved many hours of contemplation. The naturalist's way, simply, is to follow one's interest and see where it will lead. Ricou observes that the species led him to texts. Rather than try to school them into a particular order, he cites them, but "let[s] them have their say, and respond[s] to them, either by interpreting, trying to get at how they have extended [his] own sense of place, or often by writing obliquely and tenaciously off on a tangent suggested by them" (*A/M* 4). There is a misapprehension that the naturalist's focus is too singular, blinkered to the goings on outside of the species' bios. But, the naturalist knows that to know a species we have to also know its habitat, and those that share that habitat. And so, Ricou notes as he makes his way through the literary habitats, "I allow myself to shift focus, sometimes to a non-literary topic, in order to unsettle some of the regionalist's inclination to homogeneity" (*A/M* 4). In other words, he turns to the habitat's other co-habitants of that biome. Often, as Ricou's filing system and later rhizomatic entanglements illustrate, the specific species reader's choose, along with their curiosity, will lead them to negotiate "cultural crossover" (*A/M* 4) with other two-, four-, six-, eight-, and no-legged species sharing or crossing through their literal and literary regions. Reading bioregionally emboldens a free-ranging practice.

As part of this free-ranging, the practice of attending to the local demonstrates and instructs how "places change, too, […] and presents a learning stream with countless tributaries" (Thayer 232), and what form those tributaries take then is up to the reader of the local. Michael Kowalewski observes, "bioregional "mappings" of local environments have increasingly involved an interest in metaphors of depth, layering, resonance, root systems, habitats and interconnectedness—factors that not only connect different aspects of place but that seem to put them into motion, making them move within their own history (both human and nonhuman)" (41). Yet, with rapid global corporate expansion in the 21st century and a growing reliance and favouring of digital technologies, there seems a move away from these "analogue" mappings—at least from a traditional naturalist's way of dirtying the hands in and filling the nose with the scents of loam, moss, bogs and ditches, and digging through the stacks archives and collections for the open air jottings of naturalists, explorers, poets, scientists, artists, and historians. The core problem with this shift from real to virtual worlds, as Ursula Heise rightly claims, is that along with these disruptive changes to sense of place, "through increased [global] connectivity […] also the structures of perception, cognition, and social expectations associated with them" (54) change. In other words, this digital connectivity brings us closer, collapses that local/global divide, but it also removes us from particular and valuable readings of this world that make visible emergent ecological processes, such as bird or salmon migrations.

Uprooting in the local/global tends to only lead to more routings. In *The Arbutus/Madrone Files*, Ricou demonstrates what happens when you try to systematically fill and label a collector's cabinet, neatly press stories into folders and boxes. In *Salal*, of which I move to next, he abandons that approach all together and wades into the understory uncertain but intrigued where he will come out. The effect in both books and Ricou's

literary bioregionalism overall, Nicole Shukin aptly summarizes, is that "nature is approached as an irreducible multiplicity rather than as a single universal truth or story. Moreover, nature and culture are no longer conceived as dialectical opposites or separate domains of knowledge, but as inextricably entangled and co-constitutive" (n.pag.). Region is relation. Ricou's ecological approach, then, as much as it is influenced and constructed by the structures and paradoxes of language also pushes through those constraints of languages to be altered and shaped by attending to and translating the structures and functions expressed by/in/through the materiality of salal and its diverse habitats. The arboreal metaphor of roots and upward growing branches does not—never did—fit this Ricouan regional free-ranging. But then, the arbutus tree does not grow in predictable ways, but is a tangle of branches that tend to grow in multiple directions rather than upward. *The Arbuts/Madrone Files* rather than explain why literary bioregionalism doesn't settle under a treed name, shows how it doesn't work. *Salal* extends the regional narrative (th)readings to an organic model—from human filing system (inadequate) to a native plant system (more representative) that has affected and altered the way this Prairie transplant settles into his new coastal habitat.

Interconnections through a Commonplace

Laurie Ricou executes in *Salal: Listening for the Northwest Understory* through a ubiquitous native plant the linking of biophysical and cultural processes of a bioregional species to global production, flow, and ecological functions in a seemingly natural way through both matter and language. While he uncovers or makes distinct patterns, Ricou does not follow a linear pattern in his methods of "mapping" or travels. He adopts a

narrative structure that translates a salal rhizomatics, which involves in equal measure predictability and unpredictability, uncovers not so much cause and effects as tendencies toward certain relational ways of thinking and acting within the Pacific Northwest and beyond. [13] Like rhizomatic root and branching systems, his narrative unsettles dominant regional stories, thwarts their efforts to crowd out counter-narratives. Nicole Shukin observes that Ricou's rhizomatic mapping of salal is a shift from an arboreal to a rhizomatic ecocriticism (np). But, as I discussed earlier, his arboreal focus is arboreal only in name. The rooting and branching of genealogies that emerges in an arboreal mapping does not surface in *The Arbutus/Madrone Files.* Instead, it uproots treed assumptions and threads through the tangles of a region's understories in a way that foreshadows Ricou's shift to salal rhizomatics. Though the filing suggests attempts at containing, Ricou's efforts deliberately demonstrate the futility of that quest. *Salal*'s rhizomatic form draws out the

[13] Ricou's literary ecological collecting emerges from salal's diverse ecological properties. For instance, he writes "Salal is rooted rhizomatically, ecologically, economically...linguistically" (*Salal* 26). But he clarifies, "In scientific writing, "rhizomatous" and "rhizomatously" are the preferred adjectival and adverbial forms; however, "rhizomatic" and "rhizomatically" are more in common literary and philosophical discourse. In the spirit of cross-pollination, I use both. When discussing the ecology of salal, I favour "rhizomatous," while I like "rhizomatic" where it connects to a slightly broader range of often cross-disciplinary contexts" (*Salal* fn. 4, 210). It is also worth noting, because of their emphasis on a philosophy of rhizomatics and their "proposal that *book* is rhizome" (49), Ricou does at one point briefly cite from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *On the Line*. In this reference he makes an implicit allusion to *The Arbutus/Madrone Files* and his noted shift to salal as he writes: "In a teasing assertion bound to appeal to someone writing about the understory, they announce, "We are tired of the tree" (33). And they go on to refuse the "whole arborescent culture" in favour of the rhizomatic: "only underground stems and aerial roots, the adventitious and the rhizome are truly beautiful, loving, or political" (33). They note that the rhizome "connects any point with any other point," and that it is "made not of units, but of dimensions, or rather of shifting discourse" (77). To a writer struggling to grasp how salal spreads or is rooted, and who takes special glee in a photo of a forestry professor clutching an armful of rhizomes, the possibility of the book-rhizome has special allure. A book—I'd like to think they're talking about this book—is "an arrangement, it exists only in connection with other arrangements" (3). The rhizome, the rhizomatous salal, proceeds by "variation, expansion, conquest, capture, sticking" (78)" (49-50). Though Deleuze and Guattari certainly have an influence on Ricou's salal thinking, this is the only time they are mentioned, largely, I believe, as there are many other factors also at play in his salal thinking that complement but are not derivative of their rhizomatic philosophy.

cultural and biophysical entanglements that push against and transgress the perimeters of containment.

Diversity of language is the most apparent place to begin the necessary requirement of listening for the complexity of cultural difference in a bioregion. In *Salal*, for instance, Ricou opens with a single word: "Salal." As his explorations expand into wider territories and trace further back in human time as possible, his naming here impresses that we imagine a pre-linguistic time before there was a word. Imagine when all there existed was just evergreen mattering. Later, he seems to imply, will come our propensity to name, to search for origin, to construct biography. But in this playful opening he cautions with a humbling gesture: a greeting, a hailing, a solicitation, a calling that asks to be noticed in turn. "Salal" proposes the unfolding of a single story, a single genesis. This opening section he titles "Listening." Opening with a name, we suppose it should then be called "Naming." But that section is five chapters away. Listening is *attending to*, a word and action that populates much of Ricou's literary writings, and is as much a guiding framework as a philosophical approach. In *Salal*, the first place we listen to, as Ricou signals, is the name. In the name we will find a story that will lead us to other stories. Naming is both a gesture of power and gifting. It can be a way of ordering things according to a world view (recall Paul's arbutus/KO, KO, IŁĆ), but it can also be a thoughtful consideration of that person's or thing's shaping of or potential to the world view. Again, it all depends on where we stand in our world views. Ricou's beginning with the writing and sounding of a name suggests that language tells us much of how world views, cultural knowledges are constructed. From the get-go, salal framed by quotation marks, tells us that this will be stories of encounters and convergences.

Ricou's choice to begin with salal's different pronunciations is a wayfinding clue: pay attention to the names, as stories inhabit naming. They will teach us much of how regional maps are palimpsests, over-writings and understories. *Salal* with its pronounced gerundial titles accentuates process as a theoretical thinking of inhabiting bioregion. The gerund, a verb modified into a noun suggests ongoing action. "Listening" is not the imperative "Listen." Here, "Listening" coupled with that single name "Salal," followed by end-stop, solicits our attention. It's a name with its sibilant hiss that tempts us to speak it aloud. It slips off the written page and slides into our mouths: *salal*. Its sibilant slip of air and repetitive jawing of "al-al" makes us chew the word. It occupies the English language, but it is also a name, unlike KO, KO, IŁĆ, that transgresses cultures because it is both foreign and not foreign—depending where we stand: besides its Latin taxonomy *Gaultheria shallon*, it has no English translation of its name. We try it again. Did we pronounce it right? How do we know? And, so from the onset, in our uncertainty, we are humbled by an unassuming, seeming mundane plant.[14] Tracing the paths of naming, we begin to see the faint erasures of lines populating or the tell-tale impressions that no erasing can remove from this Pacific Northwestern map. Readers realize in their attempts to *speak* salal they have already uncovered more than one story for this plant, this one word. They cannot refuse to learn the language, because the name here inhabits the English language; it resisted translation, colonization. Ricou's one word opening, even without the prompt from the chapter heading, serves as a gentle nudge: if readers want to learn the understories they have to listen.

[14] Salal is ubiquitous in the Pacific Northwest, so abundant that it is often overlooked, even, as Ricou's *Salal* documents, in its cultivated form as the leafy accompaniment of floral arrangements.

Through his formal strategies (unedited transcriptions, underemphasizing his presence, short gerundial titles), Ricou opens pathways to bioregional literary imagination as practice, demonstrates through narratives of interaction with place how dialogues begin, continue, fail, travel, transform, and in turn engender new works that facilitate or collapse critical frameworks. In *Salal*, Ricou's reading/writing structure draws from the activities and abstractions that surround the silviculture and bios of salal. He follows, he claims, "no systematic field work or ethnography" (3), but creates a braided form of ecocritical analysis, autobiography, travel book, and field guide. He declares that he refrains from imposing his own narration, and shares the textual space with others, lets "the salal-tellers..."talk" with a minimum of mediation" (5). He does this, he contends, to "disperse authority, allowing the integrity and specialness of different actors with concerns, commitments, and interests very different from mine" (3). The effect of his editorial/narrative method initiates delocalization. The various salal-tellers evoke, as a result, facets of the bioregion that undermine a settled sense of Ricou's (and the reader's) place in and perception of the local. As a result, rather than fight the feeling of unsettledness, Ricou exploits it as a learning opportunity and defers to the authority of those who know the plant, the trade. He sparingly intersects and interjects with his own wading and ponderings, but the fact that he remains largely silent during these interviews demonstrates his struggle with filing the "amorphous mass" (Solnit 131) of stories and lives he encounters. He does not subordinate himself or his stories to other's stories. But as with *The Arbutus/Madrone Files*, he also does not try to fill in gaps where he is not qualified; instead, he lets them speak for themselves out of their own contexts. Similarly, when he can't find a "poem" to help him through certain moments, as a wayfinder, he cultivates the

space for others to step in and guide him, or as I demonstrate in my dissertation's conclusion, he creates a poem.

One of the most moving chapters in *Salal* is "Working," in which Ricou interviews Chuong Chau, Mean A. L. Khim, and Sok Kosal, Cambodian salal pickers. We see here, also, a shift from the appropriative concern that emerges in *A Field Guide*, and a move to make clearings for non-Anglo settler voices and self-representation. In this chapter, Ricou lets the three men's voices dominate and the text typographically bolds and offsets their words with a salal leaf bullet. He interjects their text with normal typeface questions posed by himself or brief explanations proffered by Brian Titus and Wendy Cocksedge, from Research and Extension at Royal Roads University's Centre for Non-Timber Resources, located on Vancouver Island. The physical demands and the long hours the men relate, experienced often under the inclement coastal weather conditions, remind me of Charlotte Gill's descriptions in her memoir *Eating Dirt* of tree planters' grueling workloads. Yet, unlike Gill, these men have had different sets of challenges than her, and so their understories shift perception of how we define the normative composition of British Columbia's forestry and silviculture industries: the men's experience with the Cambodian civil war during the 1970s, their displacement from their homes and family by the Khmer Rouge, homelessness, and a refugee camp in Thailand. Eventually, each man made his way to Canada. Ricou, at this point, chooses to let Chuang's story punctuate the chapter—one that is indicative of what we may imagine many immigrants without resources are forced to endure. But, despite hardships, Chuang remains positive of his experiences in Canada, the opportunities (work and familial) that provided him with a new life. As Ricou observes, these stories were

> a reminder that the understanding of place (and of native plant) will differ greatly from one subgroup (based, say, in gender, or ethnic background, or class) to another. Mr. Chuong's story again complicated a place and a region I treasured as home, with a world I knew by a single name [...] their reading of salal habitat may have little of the sublimity and transcendence of the nature writing I have been taught by. Their story, the story outside the mainstream and yet at the centre of the thicket of salal culture, must be acknowledged here to be an untold story, a still-to-be-told story. Mr. Chuong washing dishes and being hospitalized in Calgary is a "supplement" to this book. Call his story of migration and work and gratitude another version of the understory. (113-114)

These underrepresented understories are the narratives that push against normative readings of bioregion. They indicate, much like Daphne Marlatt's *Steveston*, which I discuss in Chapter Three, that a region, at least in North America, has never been a monocultural space or place—even, pre-contact; as the archeological record and Aboriginal peoples' stories reveal, the movement of trade and migration sets up distinct regions as myths. Whereas bioregions open the possibility to similar criticism of setting up false representations, they differ in that they allow for diversity and movement of life stories as making up the biophysical and cultural makeup. Ricou's *Salal*, and his metaphoric play on its understory, is a political call to let those stories be told and heard. Further, through his structural format, his editorial de-emphasis suggests in a de-colonizing manoeuvre to let, whenever possible, the experiencer be the teller.

Salal, like *A Field Guide* and *The Arbutus/Madrone Files*, reminds readers that literary bioregionalism counters regionalist assumptions, to a large degree, by emphasizing its diverse citizenry as it is situated in a biodiverse other-than-human environment. Literary

bioregionalism considers that the biophysical environment is a co-determiner, along with other determiners such as culture, occupation, gender, religion, ethnicity, in shaping identity. In setting up this relation, it promotes Aldo Leopold's conviction that "the average citizen [...] needs some understanding of the living world" (207). They need to understand how biogeoclimatic and ecosystem processes, along with social, cultural, and political values and practices, influence the movements and demarcations of natural and constructed boundaries both within and beyond the text and shape worldviews. Such thinking, as Leopold suggests, seeks to cultivate an environmental ethic of responsibility that extends beyond human or economic interests, helps to reassert "vital relation" (Leopold "Land Ethic" 260) as living connection to the planet. Bioregionalism focuses on how active interactions that sustain cultural and bio-diversity demonstrate potential to open regional borders in inclusive cosmopolitan and productive ways. This is counter to regionalism's dichotomizing (nation/region) or globalization's homogenizing (singular space) tendencies. Watersheds meander, species wander, humans and their collective cultural and material "baggage" also travel. If we create a regionalism that incorporates the bio (life) into its rubric, then we create a regionalism based on different sets of interacting values, which change the ways in which we act. Values shift to emphasize not just the importance of maintaining the diversity of human life, but also the necessity for difference as a necessary component to sustain healthy communities.

Bioregional thinking, which incorporates ecological understanding, helps to perceive both the local and the global interconnections and reconfigure regional subject identities that can negotiate these two spaces without relinquishing ground in the local. Frank Davey, however, reasons that a regional literature that writes "out of movements toward democracy and diversity of subject positions" no longer remains regional "because

once such a political engagement is achieved, individuals will no longer be constructing themselves as preponderantly regional subjects" (12). Yet, literary bioregionalism that incorporates ecological thinking demonstrates that individuals who situate themselves as regional subjects can still write and story-tell (and read/listen) toward democracy and a diversity of identity positions that does not lose primary ties to the local. Bioregionalism's underlying political drive, after all, promotes decentralization, which occurs independent of globalizing or national flows of economy or homogenizing standards. Arguably, decentralization can take a protectionist turn. Decentralization emerges from the belief that those immersed in the region, those who see and experience immediate tangible effects on the quality of their environments—cultural and natural—can assess more accurately the true value and sustainable course for development and healthy livelihood. However, in economic terms, decentralization serves to disrupt and/or facilitate global economic flow; the main issue is that local residents determine the best for the local, not some removed body or corporation directed by global market demands. In terms of cultural politics, decentralization becomes, if not at times a successful economic plan, a way for regions to claim autonomy and to define and locate themselves, by way of alternative forms of exchange (direct goods for services trade), *in relation* rather than as subservient to national and global exploitative incursions or demands.

Counter to claims that the local might not naturally lead one to the global, Laurie Ricou's trilogy, particularly *Salal*, link bioregional processes to global production, flow, and ecological functions in very evident ways. Ricou executes in *Salal*, by example, the importance of small scale while invoking global ecological networks. Yet, his method, while uncovering, stitching, or making distinct patterns, does not necessarily follow a systematic pattern in his methods of "mapping" or travels. Following where salal leads,

Ricou discovers that these paths are as knotted and free-ranging as the plant's root system, and its coverage interwoven as neglected or over-picked as the under-storied growth of salal. In fact, *Salal*, which begins at the level of bioregional specificity, negotiates the ways in which the local both converses with and counters globalization. Though he holds that his structuring promotes "un-cohering" (*Salal* 16), he creates a coherent representation of bioregion through the networks of interconnections that salal as the connector accentuates. Rather than begin with an environmental abstraction (socio-economic problem, for instance, built from statistical probabilities or liabilities), if we begin with and trace the routes/roots of a local material artefact we uncover the wider web of complexities that lay out the processes that built the problems. We begin to see the limits of a region, sites of transgression, global pressures, historical precedence, and relations that are more web-like (or rhizomatic) than linear or hierarchical, and that can work to develop ecologically sustainable outcomes that are in the interests of the common good than a select few. If we think in terms of the human as a similarly un-cohering subject, we can begin to envision the co-constitutive wider domestic and public influences that affect and influence how we construct a sense of a fixed identity. With such an understanding of the construction of identity, as individuals who undergo much like the biophysical environment constant cultural and material change, we see ourselves implicated in wider public/global arenas, and potentially will be motivated to adjust our behaviours for the common good.

Key to Ricou's reading is that global awareness does not always require leaving home. Sometimes, "in looking for an ordinary plant, I become a visitor to my own home place" (Ricou *Salal* 137). Besides the Cambodian salal pickers, Ricou observes the presence of whom he assumes are migrant workers at Sourcing Northwest, a potpourri manufacturer in Washington: "The bin is surrounded by perhaps eight women, who might

all be Mexicans. They are packing the mix from the box into individual cellophane bags. Ann makes no reference to this process, not to the people" (122). Here, like Ricou, readers have no access to these women's stories (or understories): Ann offers no introductions or explanation and Ricou makes no enquiries.[15] This moment hangs there, loud in its sudden "foreign" human presence among the machinery, bins, and sourced plants: readers learn that with the exception of salal, the plants used as a colourful filler are globally sourced. Like the majority of potpourri ingredients, Ricou's assumption about the "Mexican" labourers sets up a correlation between globally sourced plant and labour. There is a long distance between the salal sourced for Kew gardens and the hibiscus sourced from Thailand for Sourcing Northwest; however, the divide is not too far apart. The plant serves as a focus on the movement not of itself as a commodity (scientific or for-profit), but as a node that makes visible the mobility of migrant labour and capital between the local and the global. Ricou latches onto the metaphoric valences that evoke these "[u]nexpected salal connections" (120), the seeming serendipitous moments that "spring forth" (120). But, then he later remarks, how this global sourcing and out-sourcing fosters "a business devoted to mixture, to the miscellaneous, to the unrelated" (121), and so these seeming serendipitous moments become, really, admonishments for not paying closer attention, to not noticing and taking the time to follow the connections made visible by these miscellany, seeming unrelated events and entanglements, no matter how temporary or enduring.

The connection between Sourcing Northwest and Kew Gardens becomes apparent when we listen to the cues Ricou embeds in his text. Unlike in his section "Working," he

[15] He notes at the beginning of this chapter that the feel of the place "didn't seem like a tape recorder kind of place" (121), which was probably further influenced by Ann Stewart's initial impatient greeting.

embeds in "Sourcing" three lines three quarters of the way through the chapter that call out the irony of the perceived local sourcing as suggested by the company's name. His bemusement is akin to his struggle to make meaning from the Kew botanical folders and their seeming unrelatedness to local context.[16] In both cases, globalizing processes have conflated the local and global into anywhere spaces (folders, warehouse). Ricou teases out from these fragmentary moments of encounter, surprise, and assumption a colonialist or imperialist story updated, a story tied to globalist capital venture. And, in this comparison between these two moments, Ricou embeds in this chapter a single side-bar that mentions Kew.[17] As we see the 'from away' presence in the Northwest, if we are attentive, we will find home in the 'away' places—though the connections may not be so obvious. These moments are translocal, and like salal, we could also do a similar reading from the specificity to the global of hibiscus from Thailand used in Ann Stewart's potpourri mixture, and learn about Thai bioregions.

These moments, too, as Ricou contends, are humbling. They are similar, as he notes, to learning to pronounce correctly the different Indigenous pronunciations of salal. Such efforts serve to humble us, remind us the necessity for decolonizing imperialistic habits and habitats. For, as we do not know the "Mexican" female workers' stories and fumble with the pronunciation of Indigenous languages, our assumptions become evidence of failed communication and relations. But, as Ricou notes, this failure "implies unrealized

[16] In my Conclusion I return to this particular moment in greater detail.

[17] "When I'm travelling, I suppose I'm still sourcing Northwest. Although I do not have time to search out the "living specimens" at Kew Gardens, I have no trouble finding salal in London. It's there, in a plastic pail, on the steps of St. Pancras Paris Church, just across the street from Euston Station—the shop of a casual flower-seller who sets up in the morning and disappears at night. So too at a florist's kiosk in King's Cross Station, and in bouquets set out in front of a florist shop in Kew Village I see salal amid other, less durable, greenery" (124).

possibilities and reminders of the obligation to be open to another way of thinking, a different system of knowing" (*Salal* 29). In taking an unknown trail—the deer path as opposed to the well-worn footpath—Ricou discovers "this apparently simple plant I'm after, this apparently grounded topic, is located in speculation and ramble. I teeter on the edge of specifics, but they disappear in rapture and sometimes anger. And in looking for an ordinary plant, I become a visitor to my own home place" (*Salal* 137). These journeys filtered in relation to the subject's experience provide readers with an imaginative and affective point of view to identify (empathize), from which to compare and to interrogate their own similar or dissimilar experiences and affective responses to the bioregion. The clearing created becomes, thus, a "meeting ground" (116), to use Irene Klaver's words.

Bioregional literature understood as material and cultural flux, as multiple translocalities translated through literature, inflects a diversity of situated voices who negotiate subject identity with and within the local. What occurs is not necessarily a writing out of regional identity, but writing toward a plurality of regionalisms—an understanding that regional subject positions change, constituted by interactions between multiple agencies (human and other-than-human) subjectivities. The bioregional subject who writes from other or multiple positions (feminist, Aboriginal, ethnicity, class) reveals how region constitutes both cosmopolitan and translocal affiliation while retaining political and ecological engagement with the local. Yet though my readings focus on reading difference, Ricou's approach has always been too self-effacing for my politics. I find myself chomping at his claim for political disengagement, of "putting the emphasis on regional study on the politics of appreciating difference, rather than on the politics of control" (*Arbutus* 29). He contextualizes this statement by ascribing to Wendell Berry's belief that regionalism "could be defined as local life aware of itself" (qtd Ricou, *Arbutus*

29). But, as I have set out to demonstrate through reading Ricou, the act of "appreciating" diversity engages politics. The focus on life processes, inclusive of other-than-human communities, is where decentralization occurs—a politicized move away from dominant power constraints.

A politics of difference is about a politics of control, and the act of appreciation through literary criticism, for instance, becomes a decentralizing political practice. For instance, by highlighting in *The Arbutus/Madrone Files* the overwhelming (and by no means comprehensive) array of culturally diverse environmentally-placed literature that exists in the Pacific Northwest, Ricou challenges the politics of institutionalized standards of what comprises "appropriate" literature for critical consumption. In other words, Ricou is writing back against *something*, whether that be a regional identity imposed by nationalism or the particular mythmakers of Canada's regionalisms as foundationally white, male, Euro-settler-based or the social constructivist defenders who reject the notion of region's biophysical world inflecting its presence on regional politics. The "marginalized" literatures Ricou highlights de-stabilize and pluralize the definition of regional identity. Whereas Davey believes that the regional subject writes herself out of the region when she moves toward democracy and alternative identities, Ricou's literary bioregionalism proposes that democratizing processes do not preclude an exodus from region or a loss of regional identity. The democratized regional reader re-reads, re-writes, and transforms identities to more inclusive formations. What I learn from Ricou's approach is that the appreciation of difference is both localized and translocalized movement, one that recognizes the indivisibility between the local and the global through the power of life—all bios.

An ecologically minded writer will always write outward but not upward, toward larger ecosystems, while remaining un/settled in their immediate habitat. To understand why they are able to negotiate larger systems while remaining situated in their own local environments, Lorraine Code formulates a useful illustration: "Ecological analyses work to understand the implications, for organisms, of living where and as they do while constructing strategies for knowing well that are exploitative neither of the habitat nor of other inhabitants. The ecological subject, then, is materially situated: embodied location and interdependence are integral to its possibilities for knowledge and action" (91). A different, and more overtly politicized way of framing Berry's sentiment of "life aware of itself," Code's ecological thinking provides local strategies for living fairly and ecologically sustainably within our bioregions because it sets up a complementary understanding with Ricou's reading of how material and cultural processes converge through interactive exchanges. If understanding that local matters are a process of tangible material and cultural interrelationships, then the region becomes politicized through processes of negotiations between diverse local actors and alliances. This will then determine if and how they will act to benefit the well-being of their dwelling place. Code's ecological thinking enhances the context of bioregionalism's political origin: when local inhabitants realized that benefits from locally extracted resources did not stay in and benefit the community economically, environmentally, and socially, the political became home and home became political. Directly on the front lines, so to speak, affected materially and bodily by exploitive interests, bioregional adherents initiated new approaches of thinking and living (acting) on their terms within their territories. Reading for and through the wayfinders allowed them to step out of their small rooms and see a larger world emerging from their doorsteps.

Conclusion: Settling into Place

Reading home is falling into the "pages" of place, going it alone, getting lost, going underground, and coming out the other end no longer sure of where you are; home appears both familiar and not quite the same. Stephanie Bolster's poem, for instance, "In which alice visits pacific rim national park," though not included in her collection *White Stone: The Alice Poems*, extends and gives voice to the colonial settler challenge of reading home (see Appendix B.2). Because of the topsy-turvy literary world that we know from which she originates, in Bolster's poem, Alice's Anglo-colonial gaze helps to pronounce the potential for exaggerated affect one may experience and absurd articulations one may make when encountering a new environment. Through Alice's eyes, readers see a Pacific Northwest (PNW) that is simultaneously recognizable and not. Her anxiety over the differences between what she is and is not familiar with raises questions of what makes home—bioregion—recognizable. Bolster's poem evokes a place that *we may know* but struggle at times to recognize. The title makes apparent the ironies of visiting (the 'distanced' ethnographic gaze that focuses on the 'strange') a place that is local (a park), yet in its name hints at its transregional scope. By coupling *national* with Pacific Rim, readers see its place as part of a transnational commerce and trade network of Pacific nations and also as a region under federal jurisdiction, a dynamic from which Bolster implicitly evokes the colonial subject and corresponding relationship of subjection. In this way, under the weight of subject/subjection, the visitor's impartial observation remains suspect. Alice's growing dis-ease and over-reaction lends to this reading. For example, we may recognize where she is through the fern, salal, driftwood, ocean smell, algaed stone,

gulls, and waves; we do not need "Tofino" or "pacific rim national park" to identify this place as home. The matter in the poem locates. So though the names situate us on a map, the descriptive language and the species—particularly salal—plant our feet on the Pacific Northwest coast. Deer, lady, leather and sword fern, the cyanobacteria that colonizes intertidal granite and sandstone, and the "too much green" (n. pag.): all that is missing to complete this picture is the ever-present rain in "this untended garden" (n. pag.). Yet, the many types of rain so characteristic of the Pacific Northwest, which saturate the poems in Basma Kavanagh's *Distillō*,[18] for instance, do not make it into Alice's description of *here*—too close to and yet too far from her home's likeness is this wet coastal world. Alice has trouble reading this place because she tries to make comparison with what she is familiar. She finds comfort only in things immediately or proximately recognizable, the built environments: post office, inn, buildings, and winding road. What she knows—or what she prefers to know—is a home that she can spell out, full caps, "melting on her tongue: THAMES." No Nuu-chah-nulth names of local waters wash up on or course their way around, twist, flood, and reshape her English tongue.

So as Alice in the Pacific Northwest defamiliarizes place, there emerges that overwhelming, exaggerated quality that appears "too much" and challenges easy comparison with what we are familiar. It re-orders the senses and makes things peripherally familiar. This place skirts at the edges of eyesight, eludes direct and sharp focus. For the young Alice this is too much, and so she resists rather than immerses herself in the matter that composes this place. She retreats to the seemingly familiar terrain, to an innkeeper with "a familiar lilt" (n. pag.). She "pulls drapes against green" (n. pag.), blocks out the new

[18] I examine Kavanagh's poetry in Chapter Two.

stories. She finds excuses for not seeking out the local stories "because they would not be spoken / in her tongue" (n. pag.). Worse, this new place takes away her words: "she cannot remember what words she used there, / her only speech now a fluttering of hands / like gulls' wings" (n. pag.). This land renders her mute. "She thinks / if this place has any stories they would not be spoken / in her tongue" (n. pag.). The subjunctive "if" coupled with "she thinks" evokes a sense of petulance, a refusal to listen, to learn and to translate this place's own languages. Even her body's attempts to translate fail. No language to fall back on, her body takes over, and communicates ineffectively: "her only speech now a fluttering / like gulls' wings." Yet here, her hand movements do not accord well with the gestures of place. Wilson's Warblers' wings flutter, Golden-crowned Kinglets' wings flutter, gulls' wings flap, hover, glide, appear motionless—almost expressionless—in the air.

For Alice, this land lacks coherence. She struggles to hear the words of those who pass her on the road. Thus, as the poem's title indicates, a nod to *visiting* a park, Alice cannot access—will not read—this place as home as long as she approaches it as a visitor who is "resentful" of difference and the inconveniences that that difference causes her (unsure footing, dirty pinafore, sand in her shoes, "too few people," "too many spices," "too little peel"). This is not the visitor that Paul's "Water Drinker" encourages. Petty problems, in the confines of "her own small room" (n. pag.), take on monstrous proportions. These small nuisances grown large attempt to close off the overwhelming presence of the landscape surrounding her. But they can only do so with the curtains closed, the eyes and ears shut tight to the surrounding world. With the desperation suggested by last full caps scream of "THAMES," the effect reads like that of a final cry of jubilation, of pride, of defiance. But as the word melts rather than thunders off her tongue, this shout is

honeyed with bitter-sweet. This place defies, stares down, makes retreat the colonial gaze, and takes away its voice. And, as British and Canadian colonial history demonstrate, any attempts at relationality gave way to the desire to occupy and control land and immigrant and Indigenous peoples, which too frequently ended in violence, coercion, exploitation and oppression.

A literacy of home engages with the land and its languages to transform the way we move through it while retaining the contexts of how we came to be *here*. Bolster's *White Stone* culminates in an Alice that grows, escapes colonial (English, white male) constraints that "kept her between pages" ("Visitor" 59), re-invests in her understanding and approach to this land and disappears into this new home. She disappears from the poet's grasp; sightings are elusive. We last see a woman who might possibly be Alice as "a rumpled, dimpled woman in a bathing suit" at Alice Lake. She "enters the water quick and / unshivering, eases into a backstroke. She ripples the surface only briefly" ("Alice Lake" 67). The water is not the reflective surface of a mirror. Plants grow along and rise from the water, the "[r]ain quavers their reflections" (67). This older Alice moves with ease through the water, acclimatized, different than her younger self on the west coast of Vancouver Island. Her movements are surer. We do not hear her thoughts or voice. She does not hesitate, and we hear no complaint. The years, it seems, have made this woman at home in the Pacific Northwest. (From the poem's title "Alice Lake" and the native yellow Skunk Cabbage that "skirts the shore like a dirty hem" (67), I surmise we are in Squamish.) And, this time we feel "the grey, the rain" (67), the incessant drip of the Northwest. *Here* dips and surfaces throughout the Alice poems, makes its way across the Atlantic to the Pacific. Now she immerses herself in the land and the land envelops her, the lake is never quite a glassed mirror into which she falls completely. As her near seamless and confident

movement through the lake water accentuates, Bolster's older Alice has stepped out of that earlier resistance and ignorance. For the settler, reading home requires de-colonizing the gaze, the senses, and opening the drapes and stepping out, and wading into all of that green, despite the uncertainty. Rather than resist the touch and tangle of that green mass, it seems Alice learned ways to read and to move in and through it as confidently as she swims through Alice Lake.

But how did Alice—or does someone in a similar situation as Alice get to their Alice Lake moment? What does de-colonizing the gaze entail? How an individual's and collectively a community's behaviours change in relation to different localities begin with changing first the bad habits of mind: the schooled and habituated negative ways of reading and thinking that direct the ways in which we approach and move through a bioregion. Breaking those habits must begin at home, from our own cultural prejudices and assumptions. It must begin with self-reflection and self-critique that includes not just abstract existential enquiry, but engages with our everyday material relations (biotic and abiotic) with the world around us. A means for learning how to break free from and to create new ecologically informed, community-based thinking—eco-literacy—emerges out of reading bioregional narratives as wayfinders. Wayfinders serve as markers to differentiate between those paths that will lead us in beneficial or harmful directions. They help to identify the languages, the land "marks": the nodes, the networks, the habitats, the species, and the shifting ideas that comprise a region. As we make our way through our own backyards, we will find ourselves creating new paths alone and collectively, tramping down old ones, following those made by others, venturing further and further to our region's edges, and then travelling more afield in both the literary and literal terrain. We will find in returning home, we may have to travel the same path back in the opposite

direction or follow a route that loops around or forges a new way. These wayfinders thus are the means to a more situated understanding of global environmental issues. The way-finders—bioregional narratives—are the global guidebooks, the literary tools for finding our way around this planet while keeping and feeling underfoot the vitality of material local ground.

Chapter Two: Ecophenomenology: Reading for Thresholds in Literary Bioregionalism

He is invited to look at himself without indulgence, to rediscover within himself the whole host of fantasies, dreams, patterns of magical behaviour and obscure phenomena which remain all-powerful in shaping both his private and public life and his relationships with other people. These leave his knowledge of the natural world riddled with gaps, which is how poetry creeps in.

~Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The World of Perception*

Introduction: Embodying Limits

Ecophenomenology offers a language that enables readers to arrive at a point of reference as an embedded conscious subject where they can see and appreciate that a bioregion is the outcome of the co-determination of both biophysical and cultural processes that overlap to comprise the planet as a whole. Aware of these overlaps, readers attend to the ways in which different agencies work together to reshape the environment to points where habitats, cultures, species, languages, and ecosystems acquire and lose resiliency. In attending to these points, readers become more mindful of the warnings, and they learn how, as Neil Evernden advocates, "to embody limits" (*Natural* 153) on a planetary body of finite resources. Though Ricou's wayfinding encourages us to go outdoors and move among and read the various unbounded "texts" that the planet authors and his approach encourages a reader's attention to wander and root around and through the understories, to

emerge in unpredictable places, as a free-associative model it can potentially leave these points of reference—thresholds—as under- or unstated. His literary ecology opens up spaces in which the interdependencies between ecological thinking and a practice of locating expose alternative routes throughout and beyond a bioregion. Yet, locating as reading, as salal illustrates, is difficult to contain even with the specificity of a native plant, primarily because, as Tim Ingold claims and Ricou demonstrates through bioregional literature, "places do not have locations but histories" (219). Histories converge and diverge, entangle, colonize, and too often, conflict. They also decolonize. Place then, like the word nature, is fraught with multiple valences. Place is both physical and imagined. Place accretes a material history through sediment, tree rings, petroglyphs and pictographs, books and memory. Locating oneself in place is learning to wayfind through these palimpsests of ongoing "writing" where there never is a complete erasure of alternative histories. Vestiges and hauntings of other inhabitations and migrations leave inscriptions that always push their way through the attempts of effacement or concealment of colonizing efforts. As readers of bioregion we must learn to orient ourselves in relation to the thresholds of these multiple histories of a region (human and other-than-human), which will help us as a human species to put in practice an ethic of responsibility toward the planet as a whole.

Bioregions and their narrative compositions are unsettling terrain, constantly testing a reader's 'balance.' Yet, they also offer the means for finding the reference points (counter-weighting/waiting or counter-acting) for the necessary reflection needed to learn how to cultivate stable lives on such shifting ground. In this chapter, I shift from Ricou's free-associative wayfinding to an ecophenomenological approach as a means to ascertain a language that conjures bioregional thresholds as both perceptual and material references for

ethical pause. As ecosystems reveal, so too with human communities: too rapid or sudden change disables the capacity for regeneration or regrouping to sustain a healthy community. In bioregions' and their literary counterparts' unsettled, dynamic, transient ecologies, stability often comes from referent points that attempt to keep visible a point of focus. An ecophenomenological bioregional ecoliteracy seeks to draw on the different collective interactive strategies of resiliency (cultural and biophysical) and to recognize the thresholds that indicate the fine line between healthy perturbations and irreversible damage through embodied experience with the other-than-human. In its limitations of subjective accountability, ecophenomenology has the potential to teach when to and when not to cross certain thresholds. In other words, it teaches a self-regulated restraint. In the literary texts I examine in this chapter, I look particularly for the perceptual points that engender ethical forms of interaction between humans and between humans and other-than-humans. In order to recognize these thresholds, however, bioregionalism needs an approach that guides individuals how to read for and differentiate between the welcoming and warning signs.

In this chapter, I turn to Harry Thurston's *A Place between the Tides: A Naturalist's Reflection on the Salt Marsh* and his poems "Mummichog" and "Heron," Basma Kavanagh's poem "Line," and Anne Simpson's essay "A Hundred and Fifty Psalms at Twilight." I choose these texts for their combined ecological sensibility and environmental phenomenological attunement with the biophysical world, which present human and other-than-human interaction as exemplary palpable experiences that promote ethical engagement. Their phenomenological language allows for a free-play of imagination and affect, yet at the same time, with their ecological-mindedness, they manage to off-centre phenomenology's anthropocentric trappings (subject/object divide). In the brief pauses caused by the de-centring, the poems open readers to the possibility of an other-than-human

world consciously gazing back. A moment in perception occurs, which Maurice Merleau-Ponty refers to as the chiasmus, an intertwining, the reversability between the toucher and touched. A later development, but inspired by Merleau-Ponty's unfinished work on the chiasmus, ecophenomenology couples ecology with phenomenology. I examine, in this chapter, how it expresses through its attention to the affective processes of life-power (bios) that the other-than-humans presence exerts on the human subject to shape the development a bioregional ecoliteracy, to borrow Julie Cruikshank's words, that supports "a vision that humans and nature mutually make and maintain the habitable world" (3). Through bioregional narrative forms, the other-than-human expressiveness help us to affectively perceive and apprehend the significance of the detailed tracks we and others make in creating and altering the planet. Or as Tim Ingold claims,

> To know one's whereabouts is thus to be able to connect one's latest movements to narratives of journeys previously made, by oneself and others. In wayfinding, people do not traverse the surface of a world whose layout is fixed in advance—as represented on the cartographic map. Rather, they 'feel their way' *through* a world that is itself in motion, continually coming into being through the combined action of human and non-human agencies. (155)

Bioregional literature speaks to a needed sense of collective responsibility through composing and decomposing the tangible "mappings" that enable us to "feel" our way "through a world that is itself in motion" and find our connection to that collectivity as embedded conscious subjects. As globalized capital forces continue to efface ecosystems, such as wetlands, in their reach for more and more resources and development, an ecophenomenological approach to reading bioregion helps to re-establish appreciation and

respect for the aesthetic and intrinsic value of other-than-human (abiotic and biotic) that compose the functioning of this planet.

Ecophenomenology, in its reflective practice in perceptual experience and ecological functioning, sets to diminish the subject-object divide between the human and other-than-human. Phenomenology emphasizes validating the human experience from the point of the biophysical world as humans experience it. There are various methods of experiential description, and I draw from Maurice Merleau-Ponty and his ecophenomenological successors, for their emphasis on the corporeality of the lived experience between interacting bodies. Yet, despite Merleau-Ponty's configuration of the corporeal experience as a relational intertwining of the sensible "flesh" between the toucher and the touched, phenomenology's characteristic of emerging from a descriptive human perceptual field, it cannot entirely discard the subject and object relationship that it sets up between the seer and the tangible. Phenomenology thought alongside ecology opens human consciousness to an agential biophysical world that responds to human presence and intervention. In such a paradigm, if the toucher is touched back, the relational distance diminishes, and a conscious connection is made with the other-than-human that "helps us to overcome our cultural estrangement from the world around us" (Brown and Toadvine xx). The human subject shifts further away from the narrowness of a human subjective view to a wider consideration of the meaningfulness in the other-than-human's own emergent properties and their interaction with their biophysical environment to sustain the planet's functioning.

In literature, because ecophenomenological perception is expressed as a first person subjective experience, the gap too is never entirely closed: only one field of perception, that of the seer, is accessed by the reader. Yet, ecology's inclusion is fundamental for initiating

an embodied interrelational thinking that expands phenomenology. It develops our understanding of our integrated place in an emergent biophysical environment and engages us in and with our bodily limitations within that dynamic. Awareness of our limitations is two-fold. It manifests as both discursive and material practices. It enables cultural and material mechanisms for loosening oppressive constraints, such as appropriative thinking and actions that set up colonizing relationships with the biophysical environment. And, it identifies needed restraints, such as human overconsumption, waste management, and land use management. Dynamic ecology reattaches to and reinhabits disembodied thought with the world.

An ecophenomenological reading approach holds that to realize human limitations, we must begin with not only how we experience—interrogate and reflect upon the abiotic and biotic matters as we encounter them in the world—but where and how we "place" ourselves bodily in relation to the other-than-human. Because ecophenomenological observation is from a first person point of view, the experience leaves observation open to questioning of subjective differences. My perception of and reflection on the return of the American crow with the emergence of spring to Edmonton may not coincide with that of my neighbour. Yet, the common ground in ecophenomenology is how our apprehension of the world emerges out of experiential knowledge on the same planetary chunk of rock. Each encounter on this planet invites different exchanges and thus different values of that interaction. But this does not diminish the value of ecophenomenology's credibility. In a bioregional framework, it remains an invaluable approach for emphasizing a region's composition as habitats comprised of diversity. As habitats are protean, susceptible to change, so residents' perceptions should be "mutable and only probable" (Merleau-Ponty *Visible* 41). Humans may learn to see and share dissimilar apperceptions. This mutability

leaves room for adaptive shifts in personal and collective thinking and behaviour, allows mind-sets to open to negotiation and compromise, as well as to meet the challenges that arise out of new and/or conflicting encounters. Merleau-Ponty articulates how this changeable quality of perception "verifies…the belongingness of each experience to the *same world* [emph. added], their equal power to manifest it as *possibilities of the same world* [author's emph]" (*VI* 41). In bioregional literature, language becomes the conduit for communicating that experience, for mingling other voices (experiences) with human voices. But to grasp the human species' entanglement with the biophysical environment is to recognize that that understanding "must have its roots in an *experience* of nature" (Brown and Toadvine xi), which language too often fails to capture because of its limits of expression. By re-configuring experience as a relational mode of communication between physical bodies, readers push aside the limitations of hierarchical for a horizontal thinking. They relinquish their hold of conceiving the world as passive bodies with pre-scripted identities. Instead, their understanding emerges from its roots in an animate world that is always settling and unsettling. Thus, interacting animate bodies constantly shift perspective, ripple the certainties of a singular identity to that of collective experience of questioning our location in the cosmos.

For instance, in "Mummichog," the sixth poem in Harry Thurston's "Arcadia: Marsh Suite," ecophenomenology serves as a recognition of subjective growth but also as a method for "placing" that subject in respectful relations to his environmental context. Thurston's poem on the surface appears to be a nostalgic lament for the loss of reckless childhood wonder in the natural world. Yet in a greater sense, it becomes an allegory of humanity's own treatment of the ecosphere: humans tend to reduce and compartmentalize the ecological complexity of the biosphere to a static, sterile container. He writes: "A small

life swims round and round, / its world shrunk, fatally simplified" (*If Men* 67). In these two lines, his refusal to name the small life, to leave "it" as an ambiguous referent, Thurston leaves open the question of 'what' or whose life has been "fatally simplified." The fish scooped out of its habitat and put into a glass jar is removed from the complexities that make its bios meaningful as co-extensive of the salt marsh. The grasp of "a boy's naïve wonder, / his need to possess" (6), to colonize, has reduced the diversity of a world. The allegory is not lost in the act. Once a mayonnaise jar filled with clear water, now sullied with silt and salt marsh detritus, the mummichog's world has not only shrunk, but so too has the boy's, and by implication humanity's:

> With heron-stealth, I tiptoe, slink
> to the tide pool's edge, taking care
> not to throw shadow, telegraph sound.
> There darting under the colloidal cloud
> of pond scum, hides the mummichog,
> fat minnow, rough-skinned as carp.
> (I want it for the clear water
> of my mayonnaise jar.) It dives out of reach
> of my unheron-like strike,
> stirring a puff of sediment
> as it buries its rotundness in mud –
> a mistake. I plunge to my armpit,
> clutching bottom, feel the beating mummichog,
> cold heart in my hand, deposit dirt and all
> into my vessel. (67)

The boy's muddied hand divides and blurs relationships between nature and human: the problem, the poem seems to suggest, is in the speaker's (human's) approach to (framing of) and movement (practice) in nature. Thurston identifies the problem as lack of respect for the other-than-human's agency and role in the functioning of the biophysical world. Thurston amplifies this through the boy's misguided approach. At first the boy fails to catch the fish because he attempts to be bird ("not to throw shadow, telegraph, sound"). Yet, the mayonnaise jar embedded in the parenthetical between the kenning (noun modifying noun) "heron-stealth" and the hyphenated adjectival compound "unheron-like" is a materialized foreshadow of ultimate failure, even despite catching the fish.

The mayonnaise jar as human artefact (a material entanglement of commodity, assembly lines, supermarkets, processed foods, lunchbox sandwiches, preserving), disrupts the fluidity between human animal and human-like-animal (nature/culture), and thus symbolically indicates that the boy can only be—should only move as—a human animal. Mimicry of the foundations of hunting (silence, patience, watchfulness), in this instance, is fine, but not appropriative behaviour (acting as heron). How the boy's "heron-stealth" approach ends ignominiously unheron-like alludes to how he bodily perceives this salt marsh as his natural world but has yet to learn his particular embedded placement within a world that is responding in turn. His exuberant clumsiness and the mayonnaise jar locate his inhabited environment as human culture, and so maintain a subject-object distance. Lacking in his approach is a respectful exchange between two differently embodied species that inhabit the same habitat. The boy can only approximate the bird's movement in ineffectual mimicry. The human animal has confused his own "animality" with that of a heron. This point is further illustrated by the boy's presumption that the clear water in the jar will retain its clarity once he captures the fish.

The mayonnaise jar recalls ecologist Daniel Botkin's admonishment that most people's imaginings of nature are "very simple, closed systems that sustain life—algae in a small glass vial with water, air, a little soil harbouring a few species of bacteria and fungi" (*Discordant* 7). The boy's envisioning the mummichog encapsulated in a jar of clear water embodies this closed system of thinking and ecology, which Botkin sees as perpetuating environmentally destructive human behaviour. The jar symbolizes the laboratory over the open field of unpredictable outcomes. But, unlike Botkin, whose solution is the need to change the metaphors and myths humans have constructed of nature, Thurston's poem suggests a more fundamental need: to change relational frameworks that encompass human perceptual awareness and go beyond linguistic expression to bodily sensory and material engagement. What needs to change, he seems to suggest, is attending to how we move through the biophysical environment. The mayonnaise jar coupled with the Thurston's short list of mummichog survival traits (sun exposure, climate, and predation) hints at a more complex surrounding ecosystem, which in turn is part of the greater biosphere. At the same time, though, his list implies a different way of moving in the natural world, one of long-term learned observation of the species in its natural habitat—human and other-than-human—not in a glass jar or in isolation from its community.

His point emerges where the poem structurally pivots on the words "a mistake." Situated at the beginning of line twelve, offset by a dash from the previous line, "a mistake" sits at the centre of the twenty-three-line poem, and is marked dissonantly by a full-stop mid-line—a momentary cause for pause. Whose mistake remains questionable, furthermore, as the boy's and the fish's motion coincide with ambiguous syntax and confusing pronoun referents. A metaphoric reading of the lines proposes a muddied delineation of human relationship/interaction with nature: the present participle "stirring of

sediment" suggests a simultaneous action that coincides, in this case, with the fish's dive into the mud and the boy's "unheron-like strike." Which action is the mistake remains vague: the boy's arm plunging into the water or the mummichog's flight into concealment—the fish's instinct or the boy's attempt to be (to perceive, to know (kenning)) a being he is not? When "armpit" rather than beak plunges into the water the human "need to possess" overshadows the recognition that humans are part of nature, how they are restrained by their own species' limitations, and emphasizes how that oversight results in a destructive behaviour. The mistake as a human one comes to light in the allusions to the water's "colloidal cloud of pond scum," "puff of sediment," and "mud"; the error lies in sustaining a vision of nature as constant, unaffected by external forces: a view fatally simplified. Only with cloddish grasping is he finally able to snatch his prey along with muddied water. Nature loses its seeming clarity and simplicity. Even when the fish and silt settle at the bottom of the jar, the water will remain cloudy. Consequently, not only the fish's world shrinks, becomes sullied, but the boy's world resembles the glass jar.

The glass jar coupled with a child's environmental imagination embodies environmental philosopher Ted Toadvine's contention that the

> problem of [the] place of humans in nature concerns the influence our situatedness within nature has on our ability to comprehend it. If we are indeed to be understood as, in some sense, immanent to the natural world, then what does it mean to think nature "from within"? On the other hand, our immanence to nature may be interpreted as limitation, as preventing us from gaining an objective distance from which to survey it, and therefore, as introducing an ineliminable blind spot into any account of nature or our relationship with it. On the other hand, it may be that our

> immanence to nature is the very condition for our access to it, for our having any meaningful engagement with its matter of being. (11)

The "unheron-like" boy has not yet developed an "objective distance" needed to respond to his natural world, for instance, as the heron does in "Heron" the ninth poem in Thurston's "Arcadia: Marsh Suite" sequence: "reading depth" (71) "through the shallows" (72) hunting for its basic sustenance "the fuel of great flight" (72). Here, we see a practice the boy has overlooked:

> To be that still,
> inert as mineral,
>
> to wait, stalwart,
> without weariness,
>
> staring down the barrel
> of your beak, eyes
>
> balanced like pince-nez
> reading depth.
> (57)

The heron's skill is "stalwart" patience, "eyes / balanced" and "reading depth" in the marsh. The boy, in fact, resembles more a collector (a variant of colonization, in that it objectifies its object of focus) who has yet to learn to apprehend his "situatedness within nature" (Toadvine 11) and approach the world without a need to possess, and study the mummichog in-place (heron-like) through the murky complexities that stir up and muddy

human understanding. The "small life," the mummichog, a hardy species that survives "storm's dilution, the sun's merciless drying / at the neaps, even winter's ice" (67) cannot survive human need to possess, but could survive if humans change their methodological approach to understanding its relation within the biophysical environment.

The reader may be tempted to interpret the "small life" and "fatally simplified" world as symbolic of the consequences of myopia fuelled by "naïve wonder" or trying "to think nature "from within" the perception of the other-than-human. Such small scope of the world becomes emphasized by the active, first person point of view of a young boy. For instance, his body, thus vision, is close to the ground, probably eye-level with "tall grasses / spartina and sedges" ("Heron" 71); the reader feels the arm plunge into water, feels the squirm of rough scales, flesh, and squelch of cold mud as hand hits tidal pool bottom, and is then made to wonder whose "cold heart" it is that beats. Yet, the first-person point of view has the tradition of creating empathetic identity with the speaker. The boy's movement, his grasp becomes also the reader's movement and grasp. From such a viewpoint, Thurston proposes that within the small-scale emerges a larger, reflective, unfolding view. When read as a part that makes up the whole, "Arcadia: Marsh Suite," "Mummichog" becomes a lesson in both human naiveté and anthropocentric value. However, within such vision, Thurston embeds a naturalist description of a less invasive and alternative way to wonderment, one based in observation (the description of the extent under what extremes a mummichog can survive, for instance). These small-scale lessons, the poem appears to suggest, teach readers of a tangible larger world of human and nonhuman diversity that is not "fatally simplistic"; rather the ambiguities in Thurston's poem illustrate humans' uncertainty of place in nature (characteristic of Bolster's Alice): as nature, part of nature, or like nature. Or alternately, Thurston's poem can be read as coming

to terms with and learning to navigate this uncertainty—this "blind spot"—as characteristic of the immanence of human nature, as "the very condition for our access to it, for our having any meaningful engagement with [nature's] matter of being" (Toadvine 11).

Readers must begin, thus, with the understanding that the biophysical world possesses and communicates its own standards of value apart from those humans apply to them. Its value "deserves or demands," Charles Brown and Ted Toadvine claim, "a certain proper treatment from us, must have its roots in *experience* of nature" (xi). Yet, as persuasive as this approach may seem, this experience relies on *human* perception translated into personal narrative. It may be, for now though, the best approximation we have for communicating a biophysical world that has "Languages, but no words" (Tranströmer qtd in Thurston 43). [19] To make up for this lack of words, in its attempts to bring us closer to the other-than-human, ecophenomenology assists in evoking empathic imagery. Unlike sympathy which seeks to apperceive the feelings of another, empathic appeal is an attempt to close that divide, to identify with the other through a motor-sensory perceiving—to contemplate the physicality and motility of the other. It helps to imagine how the other-than-human moves through, interacts with, and inhabits its habitat. It exercises the imagination to identify what it would be like to burrow in tidal mud, feel the physical limitations and freedoms through the push and pull of their skin, feathers, fur, scales.

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[19] Thurston refers to Tranströmer, Tomas. "From March '79." *New Collected Poems.* Trans. Robin Fulton. Bloodeaxe Books, 2011. I borrow the allusion here from Thurston's chapter "February: Tracks in the Snow." To see an online version of the Tranströmer's poem got to http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2001/oct/06/tomas-transtromer-march-1979-nobel-prize.

Ecophenomenological Poetics: A Corporeal Language

Ecophenomenological writers acknowledge that we humans do not hold sole command on artistic expression. Poetry as a marginal literature, often represents a threshold that tests our limits of pain (poetry is hard), but one that in its magnitude through the economy of language tips us into excess of imagination. Ecopoetics invites us to hear the other languages that inhabit and flow through this world. It is a mode of thinking that rejects "lending language to the world" and instead embraces "what is constantly being offered to us" (Simpson 15). Ecopoetics does not try to snatch at the world; instead, it extends out and connects us reciprocally with the world. The ecophenomenological language reads as poetry—is poetry—regardless of the form or genre in which it inhabits. What is it though, that prompts these writers to communicate the other-than-human's expression in a poetic voice? Why do these writers gravitate to the "subjective" expression of poetics rather than try to adhere to the scientific "objective" voice that informs their naturalist and environmental writings? Poetry is an edge inhabitant, it is a genre that resides on the margins of literary consumption and defies the choke hold of conventional grammar. Although poetry still retains its own conventions, in comparison to more traditional literary forms, poetry lives dangerously. It is not afraid of rubbing skin against skin. Anne Simpson observes, " it is often at the edge of language, where syntax begins to slip from order into disorder, that poems make their appearance. The insights of poetry occur at the edges of transformation, where a cell splits, or where words slide into silence" (28). Because of its "edginess," its habit of wandering off the page to dwell where the 'wild' things are, Simpson seems to suggest it has a kinship with other forms of expression. In describing the nature of ecophenomenological poetics, she holds that this unruliness "is part of the reason

why poetry reaches out towards other-than-human thinking and other-than-human langauge: a way of language that is impure, tangled, brawny, brambled. This is a language turned out of the house…a voicing of life that isn't understood, but, nonetheless, weirdly comprehended" (28-29).

Anne Simpson's essay on ecopoetics, "A Hundred and Fifty Psalms at Midnight" as variant of Gary Snyder's and Thoreau's tawny grammar, offers an ecophenomenological poetics of reciprocity that acts as a poetic handle of the world that is loose by design. The looseness lets the ungraspable, that which "isn't understood, but, nonetheless, weirdly comprehended," escape. It is a language that doesn't attempt to totalize an experience by writing on behalf of the other. Rather, it foregrounds the human fallibilities and uncertainties that emerge when encountering the other-than-human or defamiliarizing habitat. Thus the ecopoetic handle does not attempt to strangle the owl or grouse, or presuppose to teach stones to talk. Much like Ricou, Simpson calls for an attention that attempts to *listen to* in order to differentiate a world of human grammar from the grammar of "[a] feathered sort of talk, a language furred with moss, netted with lichen" (15). She admits that in this effort, "[p]erhaps it is beyond us to hear it, to note, or be able, in any sense, to suggest its cawings and clamourings" (15). She notes, "[i]f we were able to convey it, surely it would be overgrown and tangled, dripping with muck, or traced with pollen" (15). What Simpson suggests here is that we need to read in other ways besides with our eyes. We have to read with all senses open; we have to read as bodies, our skin or ears perhaps the closer decipherer than our eyes. What I propose is that Simpson's ecopoetic approach is an articulation of the world as made up of bleeding edges. For her, though, she imagines the contact zone as skins enveloping one another: a flesh on flesh world. Simpson conjures in this metaphor Maurice Merleau-Ponty's chiasmus, as she

concludes that humans as one of many embodied beings, our "human skin could be that which touches the skin of the world: one thing next to the another. Touched and touching" (Simpson 16).

Reading the flesh of the world is an embodied practice. Those who write ecophenomenologically rely on the power of language's affective rhythms to match the body's response with the encounter. If the emphasis is on sight, imagery correlated to sight is foregrounded; if it is sound, then effects of aurality and orality are stressed. As a poet, for Simpson sound predominates. She explains how the poetic reading that pervades her everyday life becomes unwittingly her tool for listening. The cadences of the written and poetic practice she initiates in writing accompany her on walks. The accompaniment in reading—the author, the characters—extends to the habitat at large and includes it in the aural matter of poetics (meter, rhythm). For instance, she writes:

> The barred owl has various names. *Strix varia* is its Latin name, but it is also known as the eight hooter, the rain owl, the wood owl, the striped owl, and the hoot owl: this last one is the name by which it is best known. I'd heard it, in fact, a week before, and thought to myself that I was indeed listening to the call of an owl. No—it couldn't be. I stopped. I wasn't certain it was an owl's hooting, not being well versed in the birder's art. But the call was distinctive, coming in quick, quizzical whoops that ran along in a string of aspirated sounds, hence its name: eight hooter. I though about how the hoots increased in intensity, progressively building to full throttle at the end: *whoo, whoo, whoo, whoo, whoo, whoo, whoo, whoo, whoo-OO-oo*. I realized that I heard it in exactly the same way I listen to a line of poetry; without even knowing I was doing it, I counted beats, trying to catch its particular rhythm. (16)

Note, at first there is the defamiliarizing moment, but also an intuitive recognition created by the hooting. She initially lapses into a bout of uncertainty and self-doubt in her guess, dismissing her identification because she was not "*versed* in the birder's art" (emph. added). Yet, employing the birder's art, which is locating first by sound, Simpson shows a correlation to the the poetic art and the birder's art: aurality. Her language in this passage plays with assonance, particularly the phonetics of *u, hw, w, ou, o.* The phonetic emphasis corresponds to the imagined image of owl with its call. The key to recognition of a specific species, bird or mammal for example, is to be attentive to "its particular rhythm" in relation to its habitat. For Simpson, she accessed this world through the mechanics of her own phonetic repertoire: poetry. In this way, she is able to project onto the other-than-human a sense of sophistication she perhaps would not otherwise attribute to birds. She observes during other similar encounters how these songs are "sophisticated, playful, and other-than-human" (17). Getting the play, the complexities of bird song she likens to the moment when "a hinge between languages as a door swung open" (17). Amorphous sounds suddenly transform into barred owl, warbler, thrush, "jazz riff" (16).[20] And, like any language, she claims,

> [i]t would be many-voiced, as if numerous strands of sound ran through it at once…ever-changing, ever-fluctuating; it wouldn't be fixed or closed. Because of its openness, it would be innovative and experimental, shifting and renewing its protean forms; it would work in all manner of roundabout ways, inquiring,

[20] Thurston similarly describes warbler song as comparable to "the virtuoso of playing of Dizzy Gillespie. Though surely less complicated than jazz riffs, they project the same exuberance" (106). In his chapter "May," he repeatedly describes bird song in relation to various genres of music, but each "contains all the basic elements of human-made music: rhythm, tones, harmony, and melody" (*A Place* 106).

> speaking, shouting, begging, singing, berating, murmuring, coaxing—and calling out. It would sound like poetry. (18)

For Simpson, this break down of poetic sounding is not just a human expression. Her capacity to embrace both the other-than-human as capable of its own forms of creative expression extends Merleau-Ponty's point in the epigraph at the beginning of my chapter: she allows for the overlap of both worlds and so from oral to aural to ink the biophysical world occupies and fills the gaps of natural history and the "poetry creeps in" (Merleau-Ponty *The World* 56). Her acknowledgement of the other-than-human's capacity to generate its own experience, its own creative expression, addresses the unquantifiable "gaps" that science shies away from or has no answers for.

Simpson's conceptualization of ecopoetry steps out of bounds and goes against the poetics of the humanist self to a shared text (world) populated by multiple selves—human and other-than-human. In her vision, ecopoetry is a palimpsesting that accounts for the world's diverse inhabitants while pointing out the limits of language to recount to one another the experiences of that diversity. The silences that poetry embraces are, as she rightly notes, the effacing moments of the human self. They are the spaces where our human voice drops off the page, is silenced, and we are left in the pause mute but listening. What emerges in that silence is "[t]he thresholding nature of poetry, which allows it to reveal more than one possibility at the same time, [and] is the reason why it requires plenitude as much as silence. It shows the way to one world, but it keeps a door open to another" (Simpson 29-30). As the doors open and we stand at the verge of these silences, she continues, we find the paradox of the threshold I note earlier: poetry "while it is language at its most vibrant and dense…is also…language on its way to silence" (30). Ecopoetic language simultaneously galvanizes and arrests (as when I encounter a bison on

the trail my body simultaneously jolts alive and freezes). In these pauses, as Simpson's poetic demonstrates, in these quietudes of ecopoetry, we come to hear what we didn't hear before: we hear the voices commonly drowned out by our own. We become deafened in what Simpson calls the "stillness" that "haunt[s] us with its reverberations" (30).

Drawing Lines of Interconnection

Humans inhabit the flesh of the world and the world inhabits the flesh of humans, and so they narrate this fleshed world together. In their divergences and parallels, these histories that Ingold identifies as region shape also the biosphere. When we re-consider the other-than-human as agents of their own historicities, Ted Toadvine proposes the implications of this thinking as follows: "Intentionality is therefore inseparable from nature's own sense, its own topology, and thus its own originary spacing" (104). But Toadvine's claim, that in this mutual solicitation of one another is "nature's effort, its striving, in its silence, to express its own sense" (105) suggests that the human expression dominates. Nature is not, as Toadvine's phrasing intimates, mute. It is not that nature struggles on its part "to express" its perspective. The other-than-human world is very adept at expressing itself (human victims of any natural disaster will attest to this, as will anyone who interacts regularly with animals or plants). The struggle, in this case, is displaced. As discussed in my first chapter, the challenge is getting humans to attend to the other-than-human. Because even in Toadvine's interpretation of a frustrated, "silent" nature is a configuration of a "ready-made world" (Merleau-Ponty *Phenom.* 241). This accentuates my point that we may initiate the encounter through our intention, but as our body responds to the perceived subject, this belief that we initialized the encounter may fall into question.

The perceived subject's solicitation of our attention—our bodily senses—allows "the sensible [to] take possession of my ear or my gaze…and I surrender a part of my body, even my whole body, to this particular manner of vibrating and filling space known as blue or red" (Merleau-Ponty *Phenom.* 246) or rock, or varied thrush, or Fraser River. This "possession" as Merleau-Ponty describes it, enables a space for the perceived to be seen, heard, attended to. Yet, Merleau-Ponty's notion of surrender situates the human body as passive receptor to the other-than-human's intention. But, this surrender also suggests that the perceived subject willingly defers a part of itself. Willingly, in the manner that this exchange is relational and not coerced. That as we bodily "[seize] and [act] upon" (Merleau-Ponty *Phenom.* 246) the perceived subject, it in turn grasps and acts upon us. The empathetic relation these experiences engender are "not an invasion of the sensor by the sensible" (Merleau-Ponty *Phenom.* 248). In the surrender, the seizing, and the acting upon, there is a call for trust. In a relation of trust, we make ourselves vulnerable, open up to the experience. Yet, here Merleau-Ponty's sense of experience is valuable for intuiting the thresholds as much as the connections. Though this exchange prompts an openness of reception, its potential to expose vulnerability and exploitation may also prompt the opposite.

Even though readers may not entirely grasp all its meanings and nuances, through the poetic pause they feel the flesh of the world expressed through literature. At this moment, silence is deafening. They have been striding along with the rhythms, the sound play, and then they trip, teeter on the cusp. Whether they will regain their balance or slip off remains uncertain. In these silences, the motor-sensory intention gives shape to the meaning of the experience. The encounter becomes literally a 'reverb' that articulates the limits of human language. They hear their own voices rebounding back at them. But, also

"the passing of sensory givens before our eyes or under our hands is, as it were, a language which teaches itself, and in which the meaning is secreted by the very structure of the signs, and this is why it can literally be said that our senses question things and that things reply to them" (Merleau-Ponty *Phenom.* 372). In that moment of the "sensory givens," the encounter between the unspoken human and the "voice" of the other-than-human becomes dialogue. We question them and they respond to us. And, in turn, we engage in a manner where words cannot express intention; we turn elsewhere—to other affective languages to form our responses. We turn to poetry, the language that is adept at working within and transgressing restrictive formal constraints. We turn to the shared language of "inter-sensory correspondence" (Merleau-Ponty *Phenom.* 381), and so this suggests that every engagement with the other-than-human is predicated on its terms and location as much as on our own. The literary locations become material expressions that embody interrelational experience and other-than-human gesturing fleshed out in human poetic form.

Writing and learning to read for signs requires negotiating the thresholds that divide human from other-than-human with complex and delicate foot work. It is a negotiation, through the process of reflection, which never entirely disassembles those divides (as noted, at times for good reason). But, it does offer itself as a starting point and makes us see that "[t]he world is not what I think, but what I live through, I am open to the world, I have no doubt that I am in communication with it, but I do not possess it; it is inexhaustible. 'There is a world', or rather: 'There is the world'; I can never completely account for this ever re-iterated assertion in my life" (Merleau-Ponty *Phenom.* xviii-xix). In its literary bioregional form, the other-than-human's repeated interposition on our perception of this world and with an understanding of our own finite bodies, we learn the limits of our perception of the other-than-human. The other-than-human points out the world. In its rich

poetic and material ecological expression, an ecophenomenological approach remains a mode of pronounced human subjectivity but one that concedes the other-than-human not as mere representation but as a co-participant in shaping the perception of this planet. In these transient and dynamic encounters between humans and the other-than-human fleshed world, ecophenomenology offers a language and an eco-literate and -literary mode that is eyeful of the sensing and sensed perceptions of the human I. Being open to the other-than-human's solicitation we allow our thinking to re-consider the human "ready-made world" for the world we inhabit that is there.

In Basama Kavanagh's poem "Line," for instance, the reader encounters the embedded conscious subject who has found her "place," in which the pull of interaction between human and the biophysical world manifests as a "living line of movement" (26) between bodies—Pacific ocean, human, dolphin, boat, and language. Kavanagh describes the movements in a "kinaesthetic symbio[tic]" (Chisholm 32) ecopoetics: the poetic aesthetics of descriptive, alliterative diction and motor-sensory rhythms capture the kinship expressed through the connecting tensions of all the bodies' physical exertions. In her essay, "Climbing Like a Girl: An Exemplary Adventure in Feminist Phenomenology," Dianne Chisholm adapts Merleau-Ponty's coined term "aesthesiological body," a concept that conflates "synthesis, kinesthesia, and body-world symbiosis" (Chisholm 32) to address the ecological relation between sensory apprehension, the study of bodily movement in interdependent relation to the physical world. Chisholm emphasizes "kin" to pronounce the symbiotic interrelation between the concepts of kinship with the motor-sensory, as well as to play on aesthetic, that enables expression of human and other-than-human respectful engagement. A kin/aesthetic symbiotic relationship thus posits a relationship based on cooperation between bodies through spatial orientation and motility. This symbiotic

relationship—partnership—enables bodies to "[find] intuitively the motility with which to "grasp" the "beckoning" […] world as a "problem," and with which to anchor and transcend itself" (35). I interpret Chisholm's proposal as an invitation for us to approach human and other-than-human interactions not as a problem of "incapability" or impossibility, but as a ground (threshold) on which we can cultivate understanding of one another in terms of testing the "constraints" (35) that trap us in the various antipathies and behaviours that resist overcoming ignorance and the will to relate or empathize with the other-than-human.

Kavanagh's poem, for instance, extends this point through an eco-mimesis, a conceit of composing the embodied encounter as a collaboration through the process of writing as dolphin and dolphin as writing: "Paddles dipped, and dipped" leave behind a "...wake / inky, energetic / ebbing, tracing back" that draw in "the glossy commas" of curious dolphins:

A curl of dolphins,
glossy commas
drawn by curiousity,
delight to follow
this umbilical:
squiggle of breath,
connecting us to them,
the living line of movement—

Her sparse diction, and the almost fragmentary parsing of each line as the distinction between verb and adjective blur, raise the question of whose delight we experience. Kavanagh's allusions to writing, her repetition of "drawing" and "draw" and the words

"inky," "tracing," "commas," "squiggle," "line" and "nib of the kayak, / paddles dipped, and dipped" (26), in addition, collapse the legibility of distinct human and oceanic scripts. The delight suggested here is mutual delight deep-seated in the connection made by the flesh life-line and breath. Both Kavanagh and dolphins ink this page together with their encounter. In inking the encounter, Kavanagh creates an intertwined line that extends and prolongs the encounter from ocean to page. The traces, she suggest, are there if readers know how to interpret them; they mark our passage, even in water. Kavanagh blurs the distinction of what counts as "languaging" an encounter. In her poem, language takes on corporeal signification as inked and lined bodies moving in their own particular way but connected through a shared oceanic element. The intention—the meaning—rendered through the human/dolphin encounter as two 'literate' species rejects reducing the experience as a series of causal connections. The intentionality opens a space for perceiving and reflecting on the moment as exchange as one body encounters another to co-create relational meaning.

How do we make visible these co-creative efforts? Descriptive ecological observation—ecological thinking that communicates through the richness of language—draws out other-than-human meaning-making as relational. The sciences traditionally attribute interrelatedness to causality, but ecology also refers to entities as "intermingling […] parts of the ecosystem. There are no discrete entities" (Evernden, "Beyond," 93). Empirical sciences' view of the biophysical world as sets of causal connections fails "to capture perception as it is lived" (Carbone 116), as experiences that go beyond the range of physical interactions. Along with interrelational bodily dynamics, the perceptual experience also entails the figurative and affective associations these embodied relationships evoke. Phenomenology as the account of how things are connected or appear connected *shows*

how phenomena relationally emerge and cohere materially. It articulates how we, as a species, experience as a complex interplay of physical and emotional interaction. We do not just recognize the presence of phenomena, but generate meaning by the process in which the phenomena manifests itself to us and to which we respond. Thus, in spite of the ambiguity of the subject in the third verse paragraph that confuses whose delight it is to "follow / this umbilical," the interaction attempts a human expression of experience that translates the dolphin's interaction as corresponding delight. Similarly, in the same verse paragraph, the ambiguity of subject again blurs who is "drawn by curiousity." Kavanagh further sets up a sense of collaborative "writing" of this encounter, as "drawn" when read as modifying its precedent "A curl of dolphins, / glossy commas", the verb signals their position as subjects. However, the same three lines may also suggest that it is the poet whose own curiosity has drawn them as "glossy commas." I read this ambiguity as reciprocal "curiosity," as it speaks to the perceptual multivalency of expressions of existence in this world. Our intentionality—our directed, conscious awareness of the phenomenon—and the descriptive process of relationality emphasize that knowledge of one another is cohering through the limits of bodily thresholds (species, elements, language). By focusing on the physical exertions, the paddling, the swimming, and the traces these actions leave, Kavanagh does not attempt to guess what dolphins consciously think, but through their non-threatening and playful behaviour, tries to communicate a shared expression apparent through a shared physical—kinaesthetic—movement in the world.

Perceiving Thresholds as Transformative Spaces

If ecophenomenology's inability to collapse entirely the subject/object position is because of human subjectivity and the constraints of languages, this is also the approach's benefit. The incapacity to completely know what the other-than-human apperceives teaches us to walk lightly, to enter into their habitats with respect. Harry Thurston's *A Place between the Tides: A Naturalist's Reflection on the Salt Marsh* is an ecophenomenological journaled chronicle that spans thirteen years and two separate salt marshes but is condensed to recount the seasonal changes of a year, beginning in January and ending in December; each chapter alludes to a particular activity specific for the time of year. The chapters, though, are not field guide annotations. They are a blending of poetics, philosophical musings, natural and cultural histories, and self-reflective recollection recounted in both the past and present tense. The result is a view of the whole through it parts as they unfold seasonally and spatially. The effect: the habitat expresses itself as alive and ever-changing. Though there are some influences of Aldo Leopold and Henry David Thoreau's ecological thinking, Thurston's text lends itself as a complement to John and Mildred Teal's *Life and Death of the Salt Marsh*, a natural history classic that breaks down the generative cycles of the salt marsh. Thurston's book, however, stands on its own for its much-needed integration of poetics and philosophical bioregional thinking absent in the Teals' book, and a cosmopolitan ethic not addressed by Thoreau or Leopold. Take for instance this moment in Harry Thurston's *A Place Between the Tides* that demonstrates ecophenomenology's power to teach ecoliteracy:

> Halfway across the intervale, I came across a second set of tracks and another shape impressed in the snow that told a story of the night before. There perfectly

> preserved, was the impression of the owl's body at impact, wings outstretched, tail fanned wide as it tried to slow its hard descent. I could clearly see the outline of each feather—in fact, of each barbule. At my feet was a mold of a deadly snow angel. The thin track of a field mouse, which had imprudently crossed the field under moonlight, was obliterated. (43)

In this passage, Thurston situates the event in the context of storytelling, much like Kavanagh correlates her experience with the act of writing. In the scramble for words to communicate the experience, both revert to tropes that relate back to human 'languaging,' but also as a way to ascribe the power of writing to the other-than-human. These animals inscribe their encounters on the land with a different embodied expressiveness. By composing these experiences in a language that seeks some interpretive embodied commonality between human and other-than-human, both writers acknowledge that there are both multiple stories and ways of relating them.

By bringing all of these "prints" together, Thurston indicates how different tales can intersect into larger narratives, episodes that lead readers to the habitat on which these stories play out. Thurston, for instance, accentuates this intersection through his use of "story," "impression," "outline," and his allusions to the experience between prey and predator as a "language of the wild" and "a rune—of the food chain" (43). He describes how he "sees" "clearly" this story, and translates it into a language that readers will grasp. From his reading of the ground, as a naturalist, he re-articulates the owl's moonlit flight and bodily imprint in the snow as velocity. A succession of words such as "impact," "wings outstretched," "tail fanned wide," "hard descent," "mold," deadly snow angel," and "obliterated," all evoke the physicality of the bird's attack. The "thin" line of mouse prints could not compete against such a bold strike. Despite the allusion to "snow angels," it

conjures immediately, in this instance, a particular ominous shape, and so "deadly" signals that the encounter didn't end well for one of the participants.

Thurston's kinaesthetic emphasis makes us imagine and feel the physical impact of the encounter but by foregrounding allusions to human story crafting, he keeps the species respectfully distanced and prevents identification from crossing-over into misrepresentation of the species and our relationships with it and our shared habitat. Thurston avoids anthropomorphizing the encounter, as represented in some forms of naturalist and nature writings. Growing up on a farm, he admits, sentimentality toward animals, both wild and domestic, "was an emotional luxury [he and his family] could not afford" (100). Their low income forced them to rely as much on hunting and foraging as farming (101). By not dwelling on the conjecturing of what the animals are emotionally feeling *in human terms*, readers are not given opportunites to over-sympathize with the mouse in its last moments; similarly, despite the violence conveyed by its imprint in the snow, readers are made to resist consigning the owl as company to the devil. This is February on the salt marsh, a harsh time of year when everything is locked under ice and snow. Though its run across the snow was probably necessitated by hunger or need for shelter, the mouse made an unlucky choice and became food for another. "Nature is no moralist," (43) as Thurston observes. It is a material "expression" of winter existence on the salt marsh. As the mouse and owl leave different tracks on the snow, so we imprint different tracks in the snow and onto the page. Thurston's reflexivity—pointing to the artifice involved in writing this owl-mouse-naturalist encounter—cues us to the limitations of what we can truly know and express about mouse and owl bios.

Reading for bioregional thresholds requires negotiating the concrete and the abstract, recognizing that thresholds are material and cultural concepts. The *Canadian*

Oxford Dictionary defines a threshold variously as made of wood or stone that bounds the entryway to a building, home, or room; a regional border; a moment of crossing over into a new stage of life or circumstance (marriage, puberty, victory or defeat); the degree below which a stimulus does not incite a reaction or response (pain tolerance); and, "the magnitude that must be exceeded for a certain reaction, phenomenon, result, or condition to occur or be manifested." Threshold as a contact space between realms enables nuanced interactions in their transformative potential to initiate new alliances and ethical modes of engagement between humans and the biophysical environment. The test of whether to pause or not on thresholds resides in learning to read the material as much as the cultural signs that help us to respond and act responsibly: to think longterm as individuals who are part of a larger, co-constitutive planetary collective that includes the other-than-human.

Irene Klaver claims, "[b]oundaries are not places where things stop, but where they begin. They do not pre-exist, but materialize in certain practices. They are generative" (163). If boundaries are themselves generative, a result of the interaction between emergent processes and properties, then in their continuous becoming, thresholds also generate new relations. As such, knowing that these are points where relations can shift or begin, then they offer potent incentive to pause and reflect before acting. Thinking through thresholds redefines how we see ourselves in relation to others. Crossing a threshold indicates potential entrance into a realm of new relationships. The threshold thus becomes an interrelational negotiation space where the abiota and biota of bioregional writings intermingle. Ideas, species, cultures, values…move through, settle in, flourish, transform, regenerate, expire, (de-)colonize, go extinct, or leave. They compose the bios of Earth. Yet, these cross-over points are not, despite my emphasis on a collective community, necessarily sites of harmony. Like any family or community, not all interactions are

friendly, reciprocal, or relational, and the desire or capacity of one being or economy to settle in place may depend on or result in the displacement of another to either the benefit or detriment of a region. Seeing the other-than-human's capacity to interact, influence, and shape human-built environments, activities, and discourses is crucial to imagining how these interactive spaces in turn become as much sites of contestation, exclusion, and exile as they do as sites for negotiation, alliances, and community-building. Re-composing humans as just one of many cultural and biological participants in a habitat, writers make visible the seeming invisibility of our indivisibility with the biophysical world: the lines of division blur while also keeping the boundaries in sharp view.

Because Thurston relies on many framing tropes (doorways, binoculars, windows), and calls himself "the marsh watcher" (12) in *A Place between the Tides,* readers understand why Rodd Giblett contends that "Thurston generally privileges the sense of sight and the organs of the eyes over the other senses" (11). However, this assumption derives from the reader's primary reliance on sight and our gravitation toward visual imagery. Closer attention to Thurston's text reveals imagery rich in multi-motor-sensory detail, sensory perceptions specific to the seasons. For instance, he begins his year in January, a time when winter secures the marsh under snow and ice, strips the trees of foliage, sends many residents south or into hibernation: "January is a kind of boreal blankness" (12-13). Diurnal tides push and pull the winter ice and snow over the marsh, stripping the cord grass down to stubble. Those residents who remain through the winter, often hunker down in the protection of mud or the branches of conifers or underground warrens and dens. Thurston observes, that despite this seeming barrenness, winter's "paucity of life is an illusion" (13). Though we employ all the senses to detect the life that thrives on the marsh during this time of year, we rely primarily on sight. Thurston provides

one reason for this: "For me [… winter] it is a time of privation" for human and nonhuman alike (14). Thurston finds in this snow-blanketed landscape, "[m]y eyes hunger for some nourishment" (14) and any movement or singular sound jumps out and captures his eyes' attention.

Thurston's engagement with the marsh leaves little untouched, unheard, untasted, not smelled or unseen. As winter transitions into spring, the marsh quickens with life. The movement "releases food, sound, smell, and sight, enlivening the senses" (Thurston 56). The musk of skunk heralds spring, a "smell of the marsh itself, pungent, mephitic […] a heartening odor; it announces spring and wakens the somnolent senses like a blast of smelling salts" (Thurston 63). Thurston's senses it seems fall dormant or quiet with fewer things to stimulate them. With the season's change, windows open to the warmer air, and external sounds make their way into his home. The marsh becomes once again overlapping voices, and "[s]ound, other than the mechanics of ice, again begins to define my world. It is not only as if bandages have been taken from my eyes but also as if cotton has been removed from my ears" (66-67). The quickening colours rip away the monochromatic sparseness and the returning swell of sound swallows the quiet of the winter marshland. The return of migrating water fowl and fish bring "their succulent flesh melded with the rich taste of their diet of mussels and snails, aquatic plants of wild grain and grasses" (74). His choice to begin his chronicle in the dead of winter strategically shatters, over the gradual seasons' unfolding, the illusion of fixity that an ice-covered marshland inspires. He disproves that salt marshes are barren lands.[21] If he had begun in spring, he risks perpetuating the illusion that the marsh has two seasons: awake and dormant.

But, as Thurston proceeds to show, by breaking down these static or dualistic representations of the marsh, in fact, his static imagery (windows, scopes, doorways) expresses the flux and flow that envelop the world. In particular, he employs this framing in the book's overall structure, which begins and ends with generational tableaux of his family framed in a window looking out onto a marsh: he opens with the image of his mother holding him as a toddler in her arms looking out the window at Chebogue marsh and ends decades later with he and his young daughter staring out the window at Old Marsh on Christmas day. This troping binds together a chronicle of passing time and changing environments but also freezes these moments in reflective photographic stasis, while they look out toward an active, unfolding world.

The key concern in threshold stories is that once the character steps over, the world or home she returns to (if she ever does) will never be the same. By pausing at thresholds, which the window framing "snapshots" aim to convey, readers become aware of a world of movement independent of them. As this world moves around us, without us, readers become acutely aware that where they stand is not in the centre of action. The pause demands they take stock before stepping out into that action. What emerges from this still observation are ecological patterns of succession, migration, disturbance, death, decay, and birth. Perception, he demonstrates, depends on where we stand, how we enter the marsh, how we walk, swim, wade, kayak, ski, and snowshoe. (Or, if you are not sure-footed like me, at times slide or trip or make a quick stumbling retreat while fending off mosquitoes or running from a skunk.) In thematic reading practices, we are schooled to look for the threshold symbols: doors, windows, puberty, weddings, divorce, loss of innocence, death.

[21] See Rod Giblett's *Postmodern Wetlands,* Edinburgh University Press (1996) for an extensive study on the literary and historical perception of wetlands as negative and devalued spaces.

When someone or something reaches or crosses a threshold, we understand that there will be a significant transformation (for the better or the worse). Alternatively, if the character fails or refuses to traverse the threshold her transformative potential is thwarted (again, for better or for worse). At times, the subject has a guide that assists in her crossing; at other times, the subject is led to the threshold and directed to proceed alone. Alone the protagonist is left to intuit her way, get lost, seek out the wayfinders, and along the way encounter a myriad of thresholds. This is not necessarily because the world she left behind has changed, but that because her view of that world has been altered by how she engaged with her new experiences. Ecophenomenological accounts attempt to trouble the dualisms that thematic readings elicit, and in this case, push the threshold trope further to guide readers to the complexities of overlap, indicate the multiple nuances of outcomes when humans cross or limit their stepping out.

Stepping Outside

Thurston collapses the domestic space to blur the distinction between the different worlds we inhabit and their "ongoing stor[ies]" (Thurston 225). He frequently employs as a guiding frame for readers to engage with the outdoors a stylistic pattern that begins with a sighting or hearing of something in the marsh, usually from the vantage of his living room or study. He frames himself first through windows and doorways, and then peers through binoculars or scopes while he attempts to identify the species or locate the source of the sound. When he identifies or wants a closer look at the species or phenomena, he puts down the scope, leaves the window, and steps outside to investigate. Yet, even here, he keeps a distance, and pauses again. As he gets closer to the Tidnish River or the marsh, he

lingers on the intervale, dike or bank before deciding to step into the marsh or turn back. What always causes this pause is a reflection on how his presence would disrupt or not the phenomena, particularly when he becomes aware in the double sense of when he is as much the object of speculation as he is viewer of the spectacle.

The "setting" viewed from his window or through a scope, (rather than the photographic image when readers see him framed within the window) when viewed through his eyes creates a cinematic effect, suggests that all the action occurs external to the viewer, while the viewer appears passive, a contemplative witness to an "ongoing story" enacted by the other-than-human. But, of course, like the family bookend tableaux, this view is illusory. Though Thurston occupies both frames, he is not the same age, and not all the characters are the same. The end frame is not the same as the beginning. Time has lapsed, and much has altered, both for the characters in the window as well as for the marshes. But the overall effect is that these different marsh tales are framed and linked by domestic spaces. In moving across temporal as well as spatial thresholds, there still occurs the oscillation of seasons, residents migrate or stay, unsettle and settle, nest, hunt, survey, and bloom: the commonplace comings and goings of everyday. He writes:

> I obsessively watch the seasonal changes in the landscape—the greening and ungreeing of the marsh. And the incidental changes—for example, the fall of a tree, which leaves a bright new gash on the landscape and will immediately attract the attention of the pileated woodpecker seeking insects, or the settling into the marsh bank of a piece of driftwood shaped like plow handles that will become a perch for a kingfisher. These mundane phenomena are a daily delight. They drive the incremental, geological narrative of this place. The passage of the seasons, the daily

> weather, are cinematic effects that entrain and focus all sense in this grand, ongoing story. (225)

The cinematic—kinaesthetic—effects, thus, are everyday biophysical unfoldings and transformation that solicit the senses, call for participatory involvement. This pulsing of life is what prompts him to continually break that frame. In breaking the frame, we see that he situates himself in a perpetual process of in-betweenness. His emphasis on active words such as "act," "drama," "actions," and "participating" belie passivity on both his and the other-than-human's part. Looking or sight, in this instance, is a participatory act, a means to engage and "share" the experience of the encounter but at a respectful distance. It is a first step to learn the way around a habitat. What this passage stresses more than sight—or at least is an outcome of sight—is how attending to patterns of behaviour and the contours of the land that invite certain interactions—an ideal Kingfisher's perch of "driftwood shaped like plow handles" or what will attract the arrival of a pileated woodpecker—signals an ecological literacy developed over a long-term engagement with that ecosystem.

Thurston's title *A Place between the Tides: A Naturalist's Reflection on the Salt Marsh* further develops this cinematic effect by seeming to reinforce the assumption of human as stationary figure mirrored "on" the marsh. The preposition "on" implies that the marsh relfects the naturalist's image, and as such promotes the static and two-dimensional image he sets up in the window frame. "Between" accentuates how the saltmarsh is an interstitial zone of water and land. This reflection "on" the marsh then is never static. The in-between space is always effaced by the constancy of diurnal tides and seasonal changes. This de-facement proposes that each visit to the marsh is a new unfolding, a reflection for/of renewal of his position in the marsh. For instance, he writes,

> As I'm sitting on the dock, listening to the morning birds and watching the little fishes, the tide is resting, or as we say in the East, "asking high." There is no motion either way, upriver or downriver. Suddenly, however, the tide turns, giving me the vertiginous sensation of being on a spinning planet. For a moment I am aware that I am not only part of the bioshpere but also part of galactic space. The two—life on Earth and the mechanical forces of the universe—are intimately connected, the former deriving impetus and sustaining energy from the latter. We are, through the rhythms of nature, reacquainted every day with the cosmological genesis, the Big Bang, that set everything in motion. For our family, living on a tidal river, the twice-daily comings and goings of the tide are constant reminders of the pull of the moon, the gravitational forces that drive our solar system and the ecosystem of our backyard. On a lesser, but hardly less awe-inspiring, scale, we are connected to distant parts of the planet. (126)

In this passage he relies on reducing ecological connectivity to dualisms to convey the life-sustaining intimacy of interdependency. But, he does this through a telescopic movement. He starts with himself, the human, sitting on the edge of his home (his backyard), the activity of the birds, the stillness of the river and then as the tide turns, its effect on him, a "vertiginous" sensation, shifts his attention away from himself to the wider planetary and cosmological associations. This in effect, erases the significance of his subjective identity, places the human as a tiny figure but grounded (though teetering) within and part of a backyard ecosystem. If this site of constant flux (tidal and cosmological) perpetually erases his reflection and shifts the "between" location, then his presence in the habitat is never fixed or dual, as his "vertiginous" reaction suggests. Where Thurston "ends" and the marsh and the biosphere and the universe "begins" blurs, but not so that he becomes one with the

marsh or biosphere, but that his orientation within the marsh is never on stable footing; it is always "spinning." In such an environment, he must always be aware of where he steps.

In the marsh's tidal flux, Thurston has no fixed point in the marsh upon which to reflect, thus his narrative framing by his seasonal observation. As a result, the point of reflection is himself and his ever-shifting perspectives. He must, in this marsh environment, at this threshold of self-realization, ask in relation to the other-than-human, where is the 'place' of human beings. Within this tidal influx, the world of perception becomes inclusive of both human and other-than-human thresholds. The reflection is making sense out of experience and so does not cast back a clear image of Thurston or the marshes; they create a binocular view, pulling two separate fields closer together to create a whole view. But as anyone can attest to using binoculars, there is always a wavering line that comes in and out of focus between the eyes that prevents the two lenses from completely fusing. And with a scope, we usually have one eye shut. These only serve to remind us how there is always an aspect of the other that remains out of sight, that we have to rely on the other senses, focus more intently on that which is graspable and accept that which is elusive to relying on vision alone.

Thurston aligns with Kavanagh and emphasizes that with a focus on breath, sound, smell, and touch, a richer experience awaits those who eventually put the book down, open the door, and cross out into the natural environment. With Thurston, it is no surprise to discover, that like the dolphins in "Line," curiosity about the marsh and a willingness to "[embrace] its particular rhythms" (Merleau-Ponty *The World* 76) in concert with his own cadences motivates him to engage with his other-than-human neighbours. For instance, Thurston confesses "the little thrill of recognition of" a resident fox "as an individual" and how she pauses "for a few moments to regard me, our mutual gazes suspending us in a

ritual of acknowledgment and acceptance" (101). Foxes, like coyotes, are used to human presence (Thurston 100). Yet, this recognition he admits does not presuppose that he has "[come] to know her" (100) or she him. Only that in the mutual acknowledgement of one another they had "a relationship, a consciousness of each other and our separate places on either side of the river and marsh" (100). Though he feels himself a part of the marsh, and repeatedly collapses the spaces between the domestic realm and the world of his backyard by crossing thresholds, he also recognizes that there are certain points where "[a] larger divide" will always remain. The limit stops at this mutual acknowledgement of one another in a shared habitat, the connection made through habituation, sense of no threat to one another, the mutual pause and the gaze. Not just the physical barrier of river and marsh maintains distance between him and the fox, but also the inaccessibility to "her […] unknowable inner reality" (100). Even though he views the marsh as his "habitat" (214), he and his family refuse "to risk trespassing on [the foxes'] territory" (100) as they "[take] too much pleasure in [the foxes] presence" (100). Thurston, thus suggests how we access the biophysical world further depends on its openness and willingness to engage with us, and our learning to listen and respect the moments and places where it resists our presence.

Ecophenomenology becomes a method for developing a shared realm of meaning-making between both human and other-than-human. These encounters recompose how the reader interprets *human* perception. When thought in terms of the ecophenomenological perception of the other-than-human hailing or rejecting us as well, these writings promise potential radical environmental politics. These encounters as relational, interactive processes between the human and the other-than-human, leave open the potential for interruptions and re-tellings. As with any mode restrained by categorizational limits, it remains open to contestation and redefinition. This generic unsettling, however, is a

positive attribute. In keeping with the dynamic of an ecosystem's ecological and transient processes and indeterminate boundaries, as well as its cultural diversity, it allows room for multiple bioregional narratives to enter the dialogue and continue to challenge the dominance of a singular defining regional narrative. In its capacity to demonstrate the indivisibility between cultural and natural interactive processes, it shows how those systems can both constrain and liberate regional boundaries and draw attention to the other-than-human as a key player in the configuration of locality. In effect, this focus on process, on the defining of locality as ongoing challenges stasis by not favouring one particular perspective over the other. Because of the author's emphasis on the complexity of human interactions with other-than-human agencies, his or her writing accentuates multiple manifestations of the many ways of expressing that human experience. Arguably, those perspectives are still the product of creative design. Yet, the perceptual experience of engaging with another being perceiving the seer in kind, initiates a collaboration in shaping the human ecological subject identity. The multiple voices that inhabit—'print'—the poets' works are the materialization of physical interactions, not just passive face to face or ear to song encounters with other-than-humans. Songs reverberate in ears, chests, along arms and into pens that scratch paper or fingers that tap keyboards and in this manner the other-than-human crosses the literary threshold into the text. Owls leave their winged imprint and willets return from their migrations and nest on the page.

Conclusion: Migrating Back and Beyond

In bioregionalism, Michael Carr claims, "Socioculturally, home means reuniting the personal and the political spheres, the domestic and the public spheres, by transforming both" (79). If by negotiating between both those spheres in a manner that accentuates both the limits and unifying characteristics of both, Thurston's *A Place between the Tides* supports such a domestic and public exchange through his attention to local and global engagement. Though his writing situates in the local, his writing with its temporal observations (seasonal, annual, geological, tidal, migratory) evokes the cosmopolitanism of bioregions and thus challenges different forms of human assumptions about home-place as bounded or as a single fixed abode. For instance, Harry Thurston observes, "Travel yields diversity; residence, intimacy. Staying in one place, looking and looking while the seasons rotate around you, reveals the patterns inherent in the familiar" (*Place* 85-86). Here, Thurston seems to privilege staying put over travel, that intimacy is preferable to the diversity that travel introduces. But, in fact Thurston goes on to illustrate that both are not separate endeavours, but are a combined way of seeing a local ecosystem that is integral to attending to one's bioregion. Residence and travel comprise the local. Thurston notes,

> April marks the time of return for many migrants—of wood ducks and sea ducks, of fishes and the winged and furred fishers who depend on them. They are following the arabesques of their annual migratory paths, north to south and back again in spring. Throughout this continental shuttling, I remain in one place, ever watchful, looking for both the familiar and the exotic, the commonplace and the rare. (86)

Thurston's seasonal and *settled* watchfulness instils an ecological awareness that encompasses the interconnections between local and global ecosystem movements and

patterns; these "many migrants" constitute the wetlands as much as the local "residents" who reside year-round. In other words, Thurston's seasonal observation asks readers to reconsider what constitutes a resident of the local. A tracking of Yellowlegs, for instance, whose range covers a migratory path of thousands of kilometres, leaves traces of temporary, and yet simultaneously millennial-long, inhabitations; the shore birds arrive and begin the process of nest building, mating, and imprinting the salt marsh with their stilt-leg presence. Are the Yellowlegs, then, because of their seasonal inhabitation not to be considered truly local? Transience wears multiple faces. Thurston describes the Yellowlegs' and willets' arrivals to the marsh and their settling as a declaration of their belonging: "sure of themselves, raising a racket with their constant keek, keek, keek, which is shriller than I can make it sound in print. Within days, the willets will demand to be heard, throwing a lariat of sound around the marsh" (88). The willets, Thurston observes, further display the white chevrons on their wings, which he reflects on this gesture as being a homecoming affirmation "to the question, "Is this home?"" (88).

In the 20th and 21st centuries, a competitive globalized market economy, climate change, politics, wars, famine, natural disasters, and resource extraction have accelerated the mass movements of populations (human and nonhuman) and individuals, and have re-articulated the willet's question "Is this home?" in an environmentalist context. If a bioregional ecoliteracy is foundational for comprehending global environmental changes, how does one implement such teaching within such mobility? When people do not reside in place long enough "to observe its ecological and cultural subtleties and nuances" (Thomashow *Bringing* 164), how does one make these teachings portable? Rather than religion, culture, commerce, or family as the essential grouping, how can one shift identity perception to be understood in an ecological context? How do we become a cosmopolitan

local? Are bird migrations really that instructive or relevant, as the examples I have drawn on? As Thomashow asks, "How can we use migration and diaspora, among both people and species, as a means to bring a biospheric perspective to local ecology and community?" (*Bringing* 164). "Can the idea of transience open minds to an ecological cosmopolitanism based on multiple fidelities and the vitality of both biological and cultural diversity?" (*Bringing* 164).

To follow the migratory patterns of birds collapses and expands spatial and temporal spaces simultaneously and so effects a local ecoliteracy with global implication that helps reveal analogies between human and other-than-human and offers answers to these questions of belonging. There are the local residents who live year round, tend to the general overall maintenance of the wetland; during the low season (winter), some local residents retire under the mud, hibernate, while others head south to their summer home. At high season, the wetland becomes a feeding site for species heading further north, and a summer residence for returning populations who further contribute to the maintenance of a now busy "terminus." Thurston's text exemplifies Mitchell Thomashow's tenets that

> A bioregional sensibility must also cultivate a language for expressing the connections between regions. People and commodities from other places "wander through" a bioregion. A bioregion is the stopping place for the migration of assorted flora and fauna, each of which makes its indelible imprint on the ecology and culture of the neighborhoods where they temporarily reside. A myrtle warbler has two addresses. The white winged cross-billed floats through numerous boreal habitats in search of bountiful pine cones on spruce trees. Migrating species have much to offer regarding what it's like to live in different places. (129)

As bioregional theorist Robert L. Thayer asserts, "Bioregions have no walls—only transition zones where one moves from experienced and known territory into lands that clearly feel like another place" (232). Because nature is in constant flux at different temporal rates, either from natural or anthropogenic means, "one can never know one's bioregion too deeply or too well" (Thayer 232). Consequently, the bioregion will always be ground for new ecological and cultural discovery and approaches.

As Rod Giblett observes of Thurston's temporal transition between the Chebogue salt marsh and the Old Marsh, "Thurston's attachment to salt marshes is transportable; his sense of place changes from one place to another, albeit over longish periods; his environment, habitat and landscape are the salt marsh wherever it is" (4). I expand Giblett's observation and insist that Thurston's emphasis on the patterns of thresholds and migration are what make his approach transportable. He invokes Thayer's and Thomashow's insistence that bioregionalism is cosmopolitan, but also demonstrates how the local travels through the global as an applied ecophenomenological practice. Wetlands are transportable for Thurston, but as his other environmental written works demonstrate, bioregionalism is a flexible practice that applies and adapts to any ecosystem. Bioregionalism teaches through the core concept of interrelationality how to negotiate thresholds responsibly. Thus to follow initially the migratory patterns of such species as Yellowlegs in a text, helps to collapse and expand simultaneously the spatial and the temporal and initiate re-examination of what constitutes the local. Bioregional literature offers ground for new ecological and cultural discovery and approaches. The subjective experiential account of ecophenomenology acts as "a local sieve, a place-based gristmill" (Thomashow "Toward" 130) to sort these transbioregional ideas, to galvanize movement—bodily, mental, grass-roots—that extend horizontally from the individual and beyond local boundaries to make

global connections. Ecophenomenology is crucial to developing "conceptual skills to juxtapose scales, the imaginative faculties to play with multiple landscapes, and the compassion to empathize with local and global neighbours" (Thomashow, "Toward" 130).

Ecophenomenology's capacity for conceptual play thus allows for unpredictability that is commensurate with place-based ecological processes. The transbioregional movements of species (human and other-than-human) acknowledge that bioregional residents have multiple affiliations to more than one location or community and thus are susceptible to a multitude of agencies acting on identity formation. These interconnections between regions do not necessarily assume an individual's attachment to one location is superficial or greater than the other; rather, literary bioregionalism that promotes an ecological and naturalist sensibility reveals that attachment to both locations may be equally "settled," though not necessarily stable. For instance, in terms of other-than-human species, this evolves in naturalist observations of migratory behaviour (migratory pathways, feeding locations, mating behaviour, breeding sites, nest building, predation); in humans, this manifests in how they (re)construct their material and cultural interactions with their regions' biophysical environment. In bioregional literature, these groups translate as communities, not just places, and consider how the biophysical environment equally shapes the resident. In this context one consequence of migration—forced or voluntary—that develops in bioregional literature is a realization that rarely do people live in isolation with nature: family, friends, strangers, and institutions all appear at one point or another alongside the other-than-human communities. Understanding the complex interplay between these diverse agencies initiates perception of why we should—must—conceptualize what goes on beyond our bioregional boundaries and that starting point is the embedded conscious human subject. Biospheric systems, species' movements, food,

transportation, educational, commerce/trade, recreational, waste management reveal the interdependencies between regions, reveal material and cultural exchanges as collective and individual responsibilities.

Learning to express the natural histories of bioregion's cohabitants (their histories, evolution, behaviours, their relationships with habitats and other inhabitants) through an ecophenomenological vocabulary enriches the familiarity of a territory. We begin to see how home travels beyond normative (and static) definitions to overlap with and in some cases transform, other regions, other ecosystems, to a biospheric scale. Ecophenomenological accounts, such as Thurston's, Kavanagh's, and Simpson's, illustrate *how* getting to know the 'vocabulary' of local species can uncover the intersections intertwining global/local systems, and create a "place-based perceptual ecology" (Thomashow *Bringing* 72). An ecophenomenologist's sensibility, as I have attempted to demonstrate in this chapter, creates paths of enquiry that go beyond mechanistic outcomes to reveal complex cultural and biophysical *interrelations* between the local and the global that cannot be reduced to simple explanations of cause and effect.

Ecophenomenology communicates the ethical implications and initiates cultural and/or political shifts to change perceptions of human relationships with the biophysical world. With its reliance on sensory apprehension for place-based knowledge-making, a perceptual ecology highlights reciprocity in bioregional interactions. Literary description framed within a bioregional, place-based context activates the imaginative faculties and allows for a consideration of literary descriptions as relevant to and enriching of an environmental aesthetic experience and ethic. Bioregional literatures, with their settling, unsettling, and migratory tropes, offer means for negotiating the spaces between the local and the global, for discovering and celebrating local variations among and between diverse

reading communities, which in turn help develop an ethical relationship with the natural environment and serve as an antidote to the unsustainable practices and pressures of globalization. To conclude, ecoautobiographies illustrate *how* the local can reveal, to borrow Ricou's term, the "understory" of global/local pathways to interconnected earth and anthropogenic systems.

Chapter Three: Daphne Marlatt's Steveston: New Materialism & Ecoliteracy

"Individuals" are infinitely indebted to all others, where indebtedness is about not a debt that follows or results from transaction but, rather, a debt that is the condition of possibility of giving/receiving.

~Karen Barad "On Touching—The Inhuman Therefore That I Am"

Introduction: New Materialism

In this chapter, by choosing *Steveston*, a poem about a significant local and global centre of the Pacific maritime salmon industry and at the confluence of the Fraser River and the Pacific Ocean, I illustrate how Daphne Marlatt brings into play local social and ecological interactions and creates a poetic study of the multi-directional ecological and social feedback that has global consequences. Being aware of the material agencies in an ecological context reconfigures our notions of spatial relationships, both small and large scale, in a bioregion. It helps to resituate the global in the local and the local in the global as co-constitutive. The global is not some external abstraction ungrounded from local processes and the local is not a garrison in lock-down to external influences. Though diversity (a/biotic) is vital to a bioregion's health, what has an even greater impact on an ecosystem's integrity is "the enormous variety of way[s] in which they [diverse inhabitants] combine and interact" (Green, et al. 6). From this view, we begin to see regional problems as an accretion of complex global and local interactions that have coursed through,

realigned, eroded and sedimented particular regional thinking. In *Steveston*, the diversity of human and material interaction underscores how matter's agency becomes a catalyst for physically transforming human power relations with the biophysical world. As a result, the catalyst initiates new terms of engagement with and attitudes and behaviours toward the other-than-human. These new terms in turn can motivate potential ethical political imaginings and implementation of alternative forms of social and material transaction. New materialism expands ecophenomenology's emphasis on the human as embedded in the world to emphasize how matter attunes us to being immersed bodies-as-extensions of biophysical environments.

In her short essay "Daphne Marlatt's "Ecology of Language,"" Lorraine Weir reads Marlatt's *Steveston* as a semiotic field of tensions between word and things, which draws from Jakob von Uexküll's biosemiotic concept of a life world, *Umwelt*. In a footnote, she rejects readings of *Steveston* as a phenomenological text. She writes: "Contrary to the belief of some critics, Marlatt's theory of communication is primarily semiotic, not phenomenological…The extent to which things are separated out from human perception in Marlatt is precisely an index of the non-phenomenological nature of the work" (fn. 3 63). My new materialist reading of Marlatt finds many agreements in Weir's reading of *Steveston*, as we both focus on language and ecology, and there are moments in this chapter where our views find consensus between language and ecology. I depart from her reading that Marlatt separates matter from human perception. While I agree that "[o]ur extension into the world of things, language is also a mark of our dependence on them for "things flame in us as words" (*WM* 45) and writing is a net cast out over the wordless environment, seeking not possession but a moment" (61), Marlatt's work does emerge from perception and expands to encompass material agency. I am not entirely convinced that Marlatt's

writing is "seeking… a moment," so much as performing a material exchange. It configures percepts for actuating human and other-than-human material discursive interaction. In fact, her complex entangling of matter and human, embodied by the equally entangled typographical arrangements on the page, rejects the notion that human experience, matter, and language can be separated. Marlatt's text stands as exemplary because she departs from more traditional ecophenomenological bioregional writers, such as Harry Thurston, and succeeds to bring these seeming irreconcilable elements together. She is not just "wording" the context of phenomena, but extending its materiality into our world.

New materialism removes the sense that the biophysical world and the sensed other-than-human are more than mental prostheses that only have purpose through their utility, are inert matter or abstractions. When we shift our critical approach from an ecophenomenological one to a new materialist one, we begin to perceive the planet as corporealized world comprised of diverse flesh and matter continually emerging and merging in and out of tensions between states of disturbance and equilibrium. The ensuing ecological conditions of an ecosystem thus de-emphasize habitat interaction as cause and effect and accentuate habitat dynamics as emergent processes of complex entangled interrelations. Ecologists David Green, et al. propose, "Interactions do matter, and local interactions can blow up to have large-scale effects. In ecological systems, many of these interactions are not simple, one-way cause and effect relationships, but complex feedback relationships. Only by explicitly studying these interactions can we explain many of the patterns and processes that occur in landscapes" (3).

Matter is agential. New materialism or the material turn is an ontology and epistemology of emergence. In this chapter, I apply this approach as it posits existence and knowledge as evolving processes that emerge out of human *and* other-than-human

entanglements and constraints.[22] The other-than-human (organic and inorganic) articulated thus defies designation as an inert backdrop upon which human lives unfold. Through empirical observation, new materialism attempts to illustrate how matter through its own emergent properties and processes and inter-/-intra- (across and through) actions with its biophysical environment and other matter (a/biotic) generate and alter human bioregional discourse. What is radical in this view is that it complicates humans as sole authors of meaning-making or orchestrators in shaping the world.[23] Matter *matters*. It has both agency and vital importance in the shaping of human habits and habitats. Karen Barad, physicist and feminist theorist from whose work I primarily draw, describes this material/human dynamic as the transmission of power reinforced through repeated pressure of one body on another. Barad does not differentiate human bodies and other-than-human bodies as integrally different from one another. As bodies "they are material-discursive phenomena" (*Meeting* 153) emergent from unfixed inter-/intra-actions that are themselves also materially and discursively emergent. What differentiates bodies from one another are the

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[22] Evolving in this context does not refer to the misreading of Darwin's evolutionary theory as synonymous with progress, the idea that the biophysical world is moving toward some finite form or following a teleological trajectory. Rather evolving here aligns with emergence: interactions between a species and its environment and that species own genetic dispositions create opportunities for predictable and unpredictable transformation, adaptation, extinction. There is no end design, only ongoing responses to "the active role of material constraints and conditions" (Barad "Getting Real" 89).

[23] Though we are in what many now acknowledge as the Anthropocene, where humans are a biogeological force altering the planet's biophysical and climatic features to irreversible degrees (ecosystems, habitats, and species are unable to recover or regenerate under such forces), matter is responding in turn in what I would say is predictably unpredictable ways, further exacerbating and accelerating environmental crises, such as climate change, flooding, and drought. See Nancy Tuana's "Viscous Porosity: Witnessing Katrina" in *Material Feminisms* edited by Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman for a critical analysis and ontology of such a material response to and relationality with human social practices. Though, I tend to favour Donna Haraway's rejection of the term Anthropocene as an inadequate description as to the destructive force that she views is a manifestation of a "very specific, historically situated neoliberal, phallo apparatus"; as such, she prefers to name it the "Capitaloscene" (Seminar with Donna Haraway at the University of Alberta 23 March 2014). Agential matter and its alternative transactional accounts, as performed in *Steveston* acts as the other stories that Haraway calls for to interrupt the Capitaloscene story.

"particular exclusions" and constraints that accompany these constitutive interactions, which are then, as Barad notes, "always open to contestation" (*Meeting* 153). Thus in my reading, *Steveston*/Steveston is a material-discursive body that is itself an assemblage of emergent material-discursive bodies. Marlatt composes unpredictable transformation through formal typographical ambiguities, fragments, ongoing sentences (white spaces, and open-ended parenthesis) and grammatical slippages that situate a biophysical environment as a heterogeneous mixed matter of material and cultural concerns. However, the result is not just a mimetic representation of ecological material processes (it does do this at some level, of course). Instead, as a composing and decomposing poetic performative process we can never entirely fix Steveston in place "as you find it" (Marlatt 19). The pressure that bodies (which Marlatt also expresses with typographical bodies) exert on one another—the constraints—shifts perception of agency between the human and other-than-human power dynamics: "The body reacts to the forces, manifest as shifting material alignments and changes in potential, and becomes not simply the receiver but also the transmitter or local source of the signal or sign that operates through it. It is this responsiveness of the body that makes it the effect and instrument" ("Getting Real," 87). Barad describes this responding force as "agential realism"; however, I prefer material agency to foreground the vitality of matter rather than get pulled into the mire of "isms" of the "real."[24] Material

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[24] Barad defines agential realism as

> epistem-onto-logical framework that takes as its central concerns: the nature of scientific and other social practices; the nature of reality; the role of natural, social, and cultural factors in scientific knowledge production; the contingency and efficacy of scientific knowledge; the nature of matter; the relationship between the material and the discursive in epistemic practices; the coconstitution of "objects" and "subjects" within such practices; the material conditions for intelligibility and for objectivity; the nature of causality; and the nature of agency. ("Scientific" 230)

I attribute Barad's definition to material agency/agential matter and also include literary knowledge production. However, I prefer to avoid "realism" as it tends in literary criticism to lead to reductive debates on the 'real.' I prefer to focus on agency as the key concept of understanding existence as process, thus to draw attention back to matter's vitality and capacity to act independent of or in response to human activity.

agency keeps focus on the other-than-human inter-actors who/that matter. Matter does not passively receive the human touch, but responds, which in turn sets up through its own readjustment or transformations the possibility for new discursive power arrangements. An agential material bioregional politics thus situates in the doings rather than the ideologies. Bioregionalism then becomes a movement which shifts emphasis on the 'acting' in activism. As we exert force on matter, it in turn pushes back, forcing humans to adapt their thinking (and ultimately, their "isms") and activities to work in relation with matter's own terms of engagement.

Marlatt unpacks material and language together as interconnected processes and collapses the space between the two, to materially express salmon and human ecologies as, to borrow Karen Barad's words, "an ongoing performance of the world" (*Meeting* 149). In other words, her writing is a practice that constantly engages with a multiplicity of discursive practices, such that boundaries are constantly determined, challenged, collapsed, and redefined via the performance and transformation of inter-/intra-action. Marlatt's discursive evocation of materiality through experimental poetics translates matter as vital and expressive beyond the signifying capacity of language. It anticipates Barad's contention that it must be conceptualized beyond "mere spoken or written words forming descriptive statements" (*Meeting* 146), which only serve to reinforce "representationalist thinking" (*Meeting* 146). Marlatt's ecopoetics in its unpredictable forms and movements creates a processual thinking. Thus what comes to stand out, as I will demonstrate shortly, is language's possibilities and its limits in expressing (and therefore thinking) about the biophysical world. In this capacity, *Steveston* aligns with Barad's point that "[d]iscourse is not what is said [or what is written]; it is that which constrains and enables what can be said" (Barad *Meeting* 146). In the transformation of boundaries in *Steveston*, which

materially constrains and enables discourse, there exists a potential for violence and exclusion. Though Marlatt illustrates this latter point through her open-ended and net-like literary devices, she demonstrates that matter, ecosystems, and cultures cannot be fully contained within the "containers," within the forms in which we write them.

In *Steveston,* though, the matter that slips out, runs errant, performs unpredictable interactions with humans and other matter, is where the potential to become responsible ecological subjects lies. Being cognizant of how material interacts with us potentially leads us to realize, Barad notes, "intra-acting responsibly as part of the world means taking account of the entangled phenomena that are intrinsic to the world's vitality and being responsive to the possibilities that might help us and it flourish" (*Meeting 396*). If I follow Barad's reasoning, then language is material and is the result of the interactions of other physical material constraints. Language thus has material agency, but as matter, it is an agency in contact with other material discourses that either enable or dis-enable its "field of possibilities," (*Meeting* 147) to borrow Barad's words, for liberating or restraining other discursive practices. Thus, in this "field of possibilities" it is not all free-play. While humans are prone to intervene in the affairs of the other-than-human, so too do the other-than-human intervene in human activities. In this regard, human intervention is not a matter of "merely assembling different apparatuses for satisfying particular knowledge projects," as Barad claims (*Meeting* 206). Other-than-human intervention in the world's unfolding situates humans as "part of the configuration or ongoing reconfiguring of the world—that is, they/we too are phenomena" (Barad *Meeting* 206) whose practices shape the world. The unpredictability of these discursive material encounters disassemble notions of causal determinism for reconsideration of engagement between bodies as a *performative*, relational field of play. As with human to human relationships, the agency of the other and

the potential for conflict cause us (generally) to monitor our words and actions. For discourses are not just utterances or representations of language, they are enactments of inter-/intra-action. If this inter-active matrix that Barad proposes holds a claim to truth, then language (and the human as practitioner) does not stand apart from the world: "Humans are neither pure cause nor pure effect but part of the world in its open-ended becoming" (Barad *Meeting* 150). And so *Steveston* in this field of material discourse becomes not a representation of the Fraser River ecosystem, but in its discursive performativity, an emergent and interactive property of its ecology. By extension, we as readers, are its ecological subjects. And, as such, we need to act responsibly.

The material turn accentuates how little thought humans give to these repeated material constraints on human thinking and moving. We struggle to realize, as Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman point out, the other-than-human "acts, and those actions have consequences for both the human and the nonhuman world" (5). Thus they argue, "We need ways of understanding the agency, significance, and ongoing transformative power of the world—ways that account for myriad "intra-actions" (in Karen Barad's terms) between phenomena that are material, discursive, human, more-than-human, corporeal and technological" (5). We can see, then, there are a variety of "pre-fixed" ways we can perceive our actions. Why, for instance, arguably, limit ourselves to only *inter*- (Alaimo) or *intra*- (Barad), and not include *trans*-, for instance. The two that Alaimo and Barad employ, however, for my purposes help to move away from the economic associations that transaction elicits, and ascribe a different kind of agential exchange, move away from one that is more associative of conscious bartering and trade, which does not seem representative of the relations between humans and other-than-humans. Often, transactions

where the biophysical environment is the resource, the other-than-human has no voice at the bargaining table. Barad rationalizes her neologism as follows:

> "intra-action" signifies the mutual constitution of entangled agencies. That is, in contrast to the usual "interaction," which assumes that there are separate individual agencies that precede their interaction, the notion of intra-action recognizes that distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through, their intra-actions. It is important to note that the "distinct" agencies are only distinct in a relational, not an absolute, sense, that is, agencies are only distinct in relation to their mutual entanglement; they don't exist as individual elements. (*Meeting* 33)

I employ both intra-action and interaction to highlight Stacy Alaimo's point regarding trans-corporeality, in that *inter-* also keeps in view the space where matters encounter each other, "the material interconnections *between* the human and the more-than-human world" (2 *Bodily* emph. added). The in-between space acts, in my view, as the literal complement to Thurston's symbolic thresholds that interconnect and divide the domestic and outdoor spaces in *A Place between the Tides: A Naturalist's Reflection on the Salt Marsh*.

Thus following Alaimo and Hekman's reasoning, I realize these inter-/intra-actions in *Steveston* as performative, which, for the reader, further dismantle assumptions of separation between human and other-than-human. Performativity focuses on the processes of enacting (acting out), and thus draws out the outcomes of the practices and conditions for engagement (Barad *Meeting* 28), and for my purposes in this chapter, bioregions. Maintaining the health of a bioregion depends on understanding the interdependencies between abiota, organisms, their biogeoclimatic environments, energy systems and food networks and acting on that awareness. For developing ecoliteracy, matter emphasizes ecology's dynamic as a material interaction, which further elaborates the

ecological precept that everything is interconnected;[25] in an ever-increasing globalized world this reinforcement is imperative. We need to listen to matter(s) as inseparable local and global concerns. Every *thing* is interconnecting "vibrant matter," to borrow Jane Bennett's phrase. Vibrant matter suggests that matter is not passive, but vital: "I mean the capacity of things—edibles, commodities, storms, metals—not only to impede or block the will and designs of humans but also to act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own" (Bennett viii).

In such a vital material entanglement, the biophysical world has to be thought of as relational, resilient, and in constant flux, but as I argued in Chapter Two, there needs to be in place material discursive percepts for making visible thresholds, a pragmatic application of personal and collective constraint(s). In a new materialist context, the challenge that surfaces is how we create constraints when we are inter-/intra-acting with a material agency that sets up its own sets of exchanges and constraints and/or that may countermand any good-intentioned human efforts. The constant may be change, but unpredictability is also its constant companion. Rather than situating constant flux as undermining any potential for stable ethical relations with the other-than-human, Samantha Coole's observation underlines that matter's unpredictability helps to draw attention to "enduring continuities—such as patterns, path dependency, institutions, systemic logic—whose turgidity and congealing remain particularly important for the analysis of power" (453). Her point

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[25] Barry Commoner, physicist and ecologist, formulates the Five Laws of Ecology: 1) Everything is connected to everything else. 2) Everything must go somewhere. 3) Nature knows best. 4) There is no such thing as a free lunch. 5) Everything has limits. As an advocate for social and environmental change, Commoner insisted on the interconnectedness between social and environmental issues. Commoner identifies one of the obstacles humans have in overcoming is the "paradoxical role" of being biological participants "in the environmental system as subsidiary parts of the whole" while "designed to *exploit* the environment as a whole, to produce wealth" (10).

suggests, that in uncertain power dynamics, we can see which material interactions are beneficial to sustaining the health of an ecosystem, while also keeping in sight how tenuous their continuity truly is. Material agency sets up, I would argue, a respectful cautionary power dimension through percepts that set up physical forms and permutations of artistic practices that trace, contest, open up, and mobilize sight and action, but which in their agential capacities make us tread lightly in relation to these responsive material constraints. What becomes imperative to reading literature, like Marlatt's *Steveston*, is paying attention to agential material performativity as these percepts enact (to borrow Coole's words) "the resistance, recalcitrance, and resilience of matter in social explanation" (454). Constraints facilitate a human self-reflexivity that cannot readily divorce itself from matter as matter, cannot be so readily separated from social conditions. New materialism re-orients ourselves to "the way concepts and experience, meaning and matter, emerge historically and reciprocally as embodied actors with/within material and social environments. In this process, the creativity and intransigence of materiality verify or negate, guide and inspire, theoretical and empirical investigations of evolving structures" (Coole 455). Resituating these relationships as corporeal engagements foregrounds discursive practices as physically located practices. As physically located, they also take on historical location. Catriona Sandilands, for instance, observes, embodied awareness enables humans to be located historically "in the context of different technologies, social relationships, and inter-actions with the more-than-human world" ("Landscape" 270). The re-contextualization carries great political implications for bioregional thinking and activism, as it opens up the practices that made possible the entwined material and social conditions in which particular environmental and social injustices emerged and continue to emerge. A potent political tool for the bioregional activist.

In *Steveston* inter-/intra-active moments, discursive practices conflict, disrupt, erupt and transform into new heterogeneous mixings; the tensions and oppressions surface, run over, and snag. Karen Barad contends, when focus shifts to "performative understandings of discursive practices" ("Posthumanist" 121), emphasis falls on "the excessive power granted to language to determine what is real" ("Posthumanist" 121). This shift relies on reiterating Barad's point "that it is not merely the case that human concepts are embodied in apparatuses, but rather that apparatuses *are* discursive practices, where the latter are understood as specific material reconfiguring through which "objects" and "subjects" are produced" (Barad, *Meeting* 148). In other words, I see Barad's claim that "apparatuses are the material conditions of possibility and impossibility of mattering; they enact what matters and what is excluded from mattering" (*Meeting* 148) finds its complement in Marlatt's *Steveston*. In *Steveston, how* matter engages with each other and humans emerges as poetic material that pushes back, challenges and facilitates the constraining and liberating aspects of human story-making. It accentuates cultural struggles to unpack the world out of generation and generations articulated at the mouth as real material struggles immersed in place.

Steveston/*Steveston*

Daphne Marlatt, a Canadian poet from British Columbia's west coast, wrote *Steveston* in 1974.[26] A collaboration between her and photographer Robert Minden, the

[26] Marlatt published three editions of *Steveston:* Talonbooks (1974), Longspoon Press (1984), Ronsdale Press (2001). All my primary readings are from the 2001 edition. The 2001 edition ends with a new poem commissioned by Ronsdale Press.

long poem emerged from the Aural History project for the Provincial Archives of British Columbia. *Steveston Recollected: A Japanese-Canadian History*, which she initiated along with translator Maya Koizumi and photographers Robert Minden and Rex Weyler in 1972, consists of interviews, photographs, and archival materials. But as W. J. Langlois notes, it "is not a history of Steveston in the conventional sense. Rather, it is an attempt to understand the role of the Japanese-Canadians in this community through the words and thoughts of the Japanese-Canadians themselves" (xiii). *Steveston*, categorized as a long poem, consists of a cycle of twenty-three poems connected by ongoing formal conventions of experimental language, linked thematic threads and first-person narrative. The collection concludes with a series of large-format portraits and townscapes taken by Minden. Steveston located on Lulu Island, today known more commonly as Richmond, British Columbia, was, in the early 1970s, a remnant of the former bustling fishing industry of pre-Second World War. Situated in the delta of the Fraser River, the town has undergone many transformations, largely as a confluence of local and global migratory incursions: historically, British colonization of Coast Salish unceded territory to a major cosmopolitan[27] hub for the West Coast salmon industry (canneries and fishing fleets); to the gradual reduction of the cannery industry due to automation and reduced salmon runs; to the internment of Japanese-Canadians during the Second World War; to a post-war re-turn of and rebuilding of former lives and businesses by some of the displaced Japanese-Canadian residents[28]; to an increasingly economically depressed town from over-fishing,

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[27] Steveston was an amalgam of diverse communities: Coastal Salish, among other Aboriginal peoples from other areas of British Columbia, Chinese, Japanese, Finnish, Greek, British, Sikh, to name a few of the more pronounced groups.

[28] Repatriation by the Canadian Government for its internment of Japanese-Canadians occurred in 1946. In 1947, the federal government initiated a Royal Commission to investigate and establish a financial

continued degraded wild salmon stocks, a shift from small family-owned or small private gill-net based fisheries to home to larger, industrial scale fleets; to the final closure of the remaining few canneries; and to today's reincarnation as a quaint tourist attraction and suburban bedroom community for Vancouver commuters.

While Harry Thurston, in *A Place between the Tides: A Naturalist's Reflection on the Salt Marsh*, raises the primary question of what constitutes a local inhabitant through species migration, Marlatt complicates that question further through a politically nuanced historical global convergence of languages and cultures: human, other-than-human species, and abiotic matter. Marlatt's focus enables the shift from ecophenomenology to new materialism as the matters of concern become more politically pronounced. Though Thurston's species migration has an implicit politics to it—transnational negotiations such as the Migratory Birds Convention Act of 1917, for instance—Marlatt's focus on the material discursive intersections emerging between diverse human and salmon cultures in the Fraser delta (organic and inorganic waste, toxins) opens a political space for the abiotic and biotic other-than-human to enter the human political arena. By having salmon, waste, and delta, for example, no longer occupying its own space separate from humans, she gives 'voice' to the matter that matters rarely and even rarer has influence on human material and social politics.

In an estuarine habitat, flux is constant. Situated at the convergence of ocean and river and terrestrial ecosystems, Steveston is a settling and unsettling point for both trans-regional and global trade, migration, as well the discarded flotsam and jetsam of that flow.

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compensation for Japanese-Canadian's confiscated property. In 1988, the federal government formally apologized, negotiated a compensation package for surviving internees, and restored Canadian citizenship to those expelled to Japan. For a collection of historical reflections about this period, see Masako Fukawa and Stanley Fukawa's *Spirit of the Nikkei Fleet: BC's Japanese Canadian Fishermen* (Harbour Publishing 2009).

As a site constantly disturbed by turbidity, siltation, salt and fresh water mixing, and anthropogenic degradation, the Fraser Delta around Steveston expresses the fragility and resilience of human and other-than human communities reliant on, and to some extent determined by, this intermixing. Marlatt pivots the river's environmental flux around the grand narrative of the salmon's migration and return in tension with Steveston's fraught history of colonialism, industry, and human displacement: Coast Salish First Nations, and then the Japanese-Canadian Internment during World War II. She (de)composes this culture/material confluence as patterns of materialized waste—human and other-than-human lives—that speak to the degradation of the wider ecosphere, which further reinforces the co-constitutive and shifting relationships between local and global migratory flows that make bioregions inherently cosmopolitan.

Steveston holds status as one of Canada's earlier texts to initiate experimental language forms to grapple with the tensions between language and ecological material expression. Its issues of environmental and social justice make it as relevant today as when it was published in the early 1970s. The text implicates humans in the material processes of the Fraser River's own toxic degradation and physical alteration through a material/cultural manoeuvring where human labour practices and technologies comes into tension with the resilience and critical thresholds of organic and nonorganic matter. In this context, resilience shifts away from a human-centric association with adaptive strategies, whereby "[t]rans-corporeal subjects may be justifiably skeptical of resilience—a mode of cruel or cool optimism" (Alaimo, "Bring," 1). Instead, "[r]esilience, when considered from a more-than-human perspective […] reminds us of the worldly agencies, energies, and transformations that can generate unexpected vital beings, life forms, and relations" (Alaimo, "Bring," 1). Marlatt's evocation of industry's exploitation of river, salmon, and

the cannery workers posits Steveston the town as an amalgam of complex, competing material and cultural inflexibilities and resiliencies. It is a place where interrelationality and ecological alliances seem increasingly suppressed. Some forms of competition are a part of maintaining the health of a habitat, allow for behavioural adaptations that lead to co-existence and sharing habitat resources. *Steveston* depicts, though, how certain competing and oppressive human interests undermine the potential for healthy co-existence and subvert any 'profitable' gains in sustaining a healthy ecosystem.

Marlatt establishes how a town under competitive and exploitative constraints is incapable of containing the contents (and thus the dominant narratives) that hold it together and fix it where it stands. Its edges give way under the forces of converging and emerging material and cultural detritus. What overflows under the pressure encourages readers to re-imagine a town not imagined. Consequently, Steveston's "productivity and resilience of matter [...] give[s] materiality its due" (to borrow phrasing from Diana Coole and Samantha Frost), and accentuates "the myriad ways in which matter is both self-constituting and invested with—and reconfigured by—intersubjective interventions that have their own quotient of materiality" (7). The material interventions in *Steveston* manifest as literal bodies—things—encountering, consuming, displacing one another and humans, breaking down, rotting, recycling, dissipating and transforming into other matter, other things. Marlatt's long poem provides a literary (graphic) practice that materially transfigures how we can visualize ecologically the bioregional habitats we inhabit and read.

Marlatt's ecopoetic aesthetics map the entangled ecological and cultural flows and disruptions of material agency to expand conceptions of what comprises bioregion, and by extension literary bioregions and question where and how they stand in the cultural imagination and geography. Through the interactive processes of British Columbia's Fraser

River salmon culture, she invites an ethical and political engagement that grasps "matters of concern" (Latour 231)[29] that flow through (to borrow Alaimo and Hekman's words) the "semiotic force…of bodies and nature" (6), an intermingling signifying literary and material process. I enact a new materialist reading with *Steveston* because the text expresses not just how matter interacts and transforms human and other-than-human bodies, but also how matter emerges to influence human inter-cultural relationships. As I mentioned, Marlatt brings tangible material presence to the poem through the movements of language of the Fraser River and its many confluences, biophysical and cultural. Her poetic form voices the agency of the other-than-human, particularly through her repetitive use of open-ended parentheses, enjambment, ellipses, ampersands, extended and indented gaps, and internal end-stops. Marlatt *presences* matter through the intermixing material properties of literary symbols and language on the white page. Her poetics initiate literary percepts that accentuate the material processes and exchanges that are Steveston; Marlatt's Steveston exists and endures as much as the town does. Her poetics foreground the "multiplicity" of "physical matter," and bestow a new re-valuation on "matter that doesn't matter" (19) as matters of concern, which invites the attention of a materialist reading. The complex ecological interplay of materializing literary language through agential matter receives scarce attention in criticisms of Marlatt's text. Instead, many scholars focus primarily on phenomenological human bodily interactions and ecology as a process of or metaphor for

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[29] Latour's coinage refers to his critique of social constructivist's move away from empiricist analysis. He argues there has been a misapprehension of his critique of science studies. He did not intend a move away from empiricism, but instead a move toward "renewing of empiricism" (231). A new investigation of materiality—"*matters of concern*" rather than focusing on "*matters of fact*" was his intention (231 author's emph.). The former he refers to as a return to a "realist attitude" (231). He makes the example, that while a philosophical debate on a rock may be made into a fact, a rock itself cannot. Its material properties and its complex entanglements with other matter and processes resists being consigned to a matter of fact; instead, these factors show how it is a matter of concern.

representing interrelations between the oppressive racist, gendered and/or working and living conditions of Steveston's salmon cannery industry. Though vital critiques (and an aspect of this chapter), new materialism alerts readers to performative approaches that enable re-cognizing how human interrelations with agencies of matter net and influence the performance of toxic discourses—literal and political. *Steveston'*s emphasis on the waste—organic and inorganic—that pollutes the river brings together inter-/intra-acting bodies of industrial and residential toxic matter and stigmatized human bodies (Japanese-Canadians, Aboriginal peoples) and pronounces the emergent and the forced interconnectivities in the convergence of technology and exploited labour.

Almost every critic who writes on *Steveston* makes mention of nets as its central motif, and I am no different. However, where I do differ in my critique is how the net matters, and here I use the word as a verb. I focus on Marlatt's netting of matter, the matter and mattering of nets and what nets catch, keep, and let through—how the net acts as an edge between nodes—the intra-connector between the flows of cultures, genders, histories, ecologies, material phenomena that always test the limits of and rework boundaries. In "Intelligence (as if by radio?" the flow, the speaker insists,

> It's not linear:
>
> The stainless
>
> steel lines going down in the Gulf echo other trollings, catch
> in the mesh of a net we refuse to see, the accretion of all our
> actions, how they interact, how they inter / read (intelligence),
> receive, the reading the sea, a vanishing marsh, a dying river,
> the mesh we are netted in, makes of *us*.
>
> (46).

In this context, the mesh of networks and "trolling lines" are not so much interconnections, but are, as *mesh* denotes, interstitial. They are the in-between spaces where "the accretions of all our / actions, how they interact," build up and "makes of us." The poem asks that we change our "reading" habits of others and the biophysical environment. If we "refuse to see" how we interact ("the mesh we are netted in") "vanishing" and "dying" will become *vanished* and *extinct*—as such, that which "makes of us" illuminates our relations to the world. Thus, I agree with Diane Relke's reading of Marlatt that part of seeing is not just a refusal, but also the inability to see some of the connections; consequently, "[y]ou have to imagine your way into them" (200).

Within this network configuration, I keep in mind Don McKay's observation of "wilderness" as "not just a set of endangered spaces, but the capacity of all things to elude the mind's appropriations. That tools retain a vestige of wilderness is especially evident when we think of their existence in time and eventual graduation from utility: breakdown" (21). Thus returning to my earlier point, when configuring language as an apparatus, this breakdown or de-composing in *Steveston* manifests as the formation of new material interactions (emergent compositions) along the edges of elements (water, soil, paper). Breakdown transforms matter, collapses that space between word and world, makes visible the hidden and reorients the colonial gaze to the matter that inhabits cannery life. Orientation in "Steveston as you find it:" configures the human bodies as undifferentiated from the technology and salmon, a slurry of blood, metal, water, and flesh:

> We orient
>
> always toward the head, & eyes (yes) as knowing, & knowing us, or what we do.
> But these, this, is "harvest." These are the subhuman facets of life we the
> town (& all that is urban, urbane, our glittering table service, our white

wine, the sauces we pickle it with, or ourselves), live off. These torsos.

& we throw the heads away. (19)

Marlatt engages readers with a subtle collusion between material objects and racialized orientation: "We orient / always toward the head, & eyes (yes) as knowing, & knowing us, or what we do." Her word choice, "orient," plays in opposition to the unspoken occidental capitalized "We," those who orient by appearance. She re-orients the reader's gaze back to the head in the act where "we throw the heads away" and along with it our capacity to think. "We" remove the part of the body that humanizes, the eyes that may solicit and elicit recognition and empathy. "We" reduce these "These torsos" ("mostly Japanese" (20)) to their utility, their "subhuman facets."

As the poem's title suggests, "Steveston as you find it:" is about "the physical matter of / the place (what matters)" (19) as animate and thus always shifting in place. She sets "what matters" as a parenthetical aside, lodged between the enjambment of "the physical matter of / the place" and "meaning" (19). The offset effect, however, foregrounds the statement rather than situates it as an incidental, secondary thought. And, lest the reader think such a statement anticipated by the evocative term "meaning" will lead to abstract reflection, the speaker pulls the reader up short and admonishes, "don't get theoretical now," as she directs the reader to the place (what matters): "the cannery" (19). The cannery though seems less like place than organism:

It's wet,

& there's a fish smell. There's a subhuman, sub / marine aura to things. The cavernous fresh fish shed filled with water, with wet bodies of dead fish, in thousands, wet aprons & gloves of warm bodies whose hands expertly trim, cut, fillet, pack these bodies reduced to non-bodies, nonsensate food *these*

> bodies ache from, feet in gumboots on wet cement, arms moving, hands, cold blowing in from open doors facing the river, whose ears dull from, the in-sensate noise of machinery, of forklifts, of grinding and washing, of conveyor belt. (19-20)

The cannery is "wet" and "slick on the surface" (19), and "packs," chops, and contains the human lives that do the same to salmon bodies. That which is living is "Reduced to the status of things" to "matter that doesn't matter" (19). The "things" (human, salmon, aprons, gloves, box, forklift, "nonsensate" and "insensate" non-bodies and food) are as we find them. Yet, each time, just as the speaker seems to get into the rhythm of describing the town as "you find it," she pulls up short, interrupts the flow to declare, "That's not it"(19; 20), and then again attempts to rearticulate how "you find it"(19).

The growing realization is that Steveston as we find it is a complex network of inter-/intra-actions. This shift in apprehension relies on understanding "that it is not merely the case that human concepts are embodied in apparatuses [such as language], but rather that apparatuses are discursive practices, where the latter are understood as specific material reconfiguring through which "objects" and "subjects" are produced" (Barad *Meeting* 148). Matter has its own discursive practices as do humans, but is also capable of expression of vitality without human intervention; however, it is, like human practices, also part of an emergent material discursive performativity that are the "ongoing intra-actions of the world" (Barad *Meeting* 148-49). In such a paradigm, no *thing* is passive. Marlatt's conflation of human, salmon, artefact, and industrial machine into a seemingly singular indivisible materialized animate entity is this singular intra-action of the world. Her conflation is offset by her indeterminate challenge to the refrain, "It's life.": "*Their* life?" Whose life? Workers, salmon, cannery? The answer is not one but all, as in the poem's

final three lines, the interconnectivity of human/cannery/salmon/river converges and emerge out of the

> pounding with the pound of machinery under mountains of empty
>
> packer pens at night, the endless (white) stream of flesh passing under the knives,
>
> To be given up, gone, in a great bleeding jet, into that other (working) world. (21)

They perform the functioning, atrophying, recycling, and generative exchange called a river ecosystem. Marlatt's conflation of human, technology, and animal flesh (natural resource) as production flowing as a steady stream into the "(working) world" refuses to let human discursive matters escape river ecosystems. As ecosystems overlap and embed in another to make up the larger biosphere, the river matter in *Steveston* thus performs the local in and as the world.

Marlatt's ecopoetic performance emphasizes seeing and imagining the entanglement (or indivisibility) of matter and abstraction to understand the place (world) as it is: merging and changing matters of material and cultural concern. In that mixing are erasures, exclusions, transformations, and new materializations. By extension, the ecological thinking that emerges proffers an ethical model in which to engage with historical and current political issues and injustices. In Marlatt's mattering, thus, I evoke Barad's claim as complement:

> Matter, like meaning, is not an individually articulated or static entity. Matter is not little bits of nature, or a blank slate, surface, or site passively awaiting signification; nor is it an uncontested ground for scientific, feminist, or Marxist theories. Matter is not a support, location, referent, or source of sustainability for discourse. Matter is not immutable or passive. It does not require the mark of an external force like

> culture or history to complete it. Matter is already an ongoing historicity. ("Posthumanist" 139)

Matter has its own historical expressions of the Earth processes that interact with human discourses. As I noted in Chapter Two, the other-than-human inscribes Earth with its history. We can view the Earth's temporal record in the rings of trees, lacustrine sediments, and shale, and we have the scientific vocabulary that offers one mode of translation of this historical record. Yet, as Marlatt's *Steveston* attests, there is another translational mode that is capable of expressing that record's history as a *bios* of vibrancy and affectivity. In other words, as that "great bleeding jet" pours "into that other (working) world" (Marlatt 21), as Barad continues, "[t]he point is not merely that there are important material factors in addition to discursive ones; rather, the issue is the conjoined material-discursive constraints, conditions, and practices" (*Meeting* 140-141). Matter (vital, responsive, affecting and affected by) and discourse (human languages immersed in the elucidation and giving (their) voice to human and other-than-human matters) are co-constitutive; they are not separate. In the case of Steveston's salmon culture those constraints, conditions and practices perform through "the pounding of the pounding of machinery," hands wielding knives processing flesh day in, day out, generating generations at the mouth. Matter translates itself into, materializes, and escapes out of the language of Marlatt's poetry: an iterative inter-/ intra-active material ecopoetic performance comprised of "matters of concern" (Latour 231). It becomes a netting and mattering of fish, human, machine, house, marsh, water, blood, offal, odours, spitting, giggling, clanks, and currents of a "(working) world": "enmeshed as it is with all the other bodies that give it life" (Marlatt, *River's* 39). How we let an ecosystem—our collective body—matter to, with, and through us determines how we interact with and treat other bodies.

My enquiry, particularly concerning Marlatt's ecopoetic practice, has been to question how within these "inescapable ecologies," the distinctions between human and other-than-human become further troubled when language and matter converge to create texts that matter: salmon, river, salt marsh/slough, delta, cannery. Linda Nash's book *Inescapable Ecologies: A History of Environment, Disease, and Knowledge*, from which I take the term, elucidates a history of theories of permeable and racialized bodies and polluted environments to a current understanding of the interconnecting material complexities of interacting bodies (human and other-than-human), physical landscapes, and toxicities. Inescapable ecologies are not just the invisible toxins and airborne pollutants that threaten bodily health, but also the discriminatory practices of locating or ghettoizing and naturalizing marginalized peoples (class, race, gender) in degraded environments that are a threat to their health and well-being. Yet, as her case studies also indicate, toxins and pollutants do not recognize class, gender, or race: the permeable body is a "constant exchange between the inside and outside, but fluxes and flows, and by its close dependence on the surrounding environment" (Nash 12).[30] Her final point is that bodies are intimately entangled—indivisible—from their environments.

What then does this practice of mattering do to our understanding of power relations *vis à vis* humans and the biophysical world? In *Steveston*, ecosystem is body. It is body in the sense that it is not systematic in human objectivist terms; it is a vital planetary supporting function of flux, unpredictabilities, and fluctuation. As a process of motility and transcorporeality, it transgresses constraints of language (and representation) by and

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[30] Stacy Alaimo, who also cites Nash, offers an extensive theoretical literary analysis of the transcorporeality of bodies and environment and the ensuing conflicts between science, culture and politics in her book *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self* (2010).

making its way into text. Matter, with its own agential properties, with its unpredictable qualities and resistance to human machinations, defies but also invites exchange. In *Steveston*'s case, both human and other-than-human bodies comprise one singular body: the ecosystem. This agency becomes more-than-human performativity: a material discursive intra-action articulated through matter's own iterative patterns and behaviour that disassembles boundaries between human and other-than-human and configures them as "open-ended becoming" (Barad *Meeting* 150). To contextualize Marlatt's poetics as more-than-human agential performativity, we need to accept mattering as a productive open process of multi-directional flows, as a *mode* of cross-species, cross-phenomena exchange, but which is also subject to limitations. In *Steveston* "generation" becomes synecdoche for productive processes, but in its allusion to biological processes also encompasses the genealogical (human and other-than-human) accretions of place over time.

Raising Poles of Matter that Break down Relation

With *Steveston*'s epigraph "seeking to perceive as it stands," Marlatt reminds us that in its ambiguity and indeterminate referents, matter remains beyond literal and figurative human grasp. The gerund "seeking" proposes, as Ricou's preference for the form of speech illustrates, an ongoing search, while the infinitive "to perceive" (a refusal to tense the verb in a specific time) emphasizes an aspect of the elusiveness of this task. Perception will vary according to where the individual stands. And, "as it stands," Steveston the place emerges as a complex organic and inorganic entanglement of interacting systems—human and other-than-human—settled, unsettled, transformed. The physical place reveals that it, whatever that indeterminate pronoun "it" may be, was "never that way in the first place."

As such, Marlatt's Steveston is continually composing and recomposing itself on and in collaboration with Earth. It is gerundial and infinitive and so eludes generic mappings (and trappings) of territory.

Her poetic material realizations though are also occasion to demonstrate how the ways relations to language (anthropomorphization, metaphors) materialize in human-to-human non-verbal interaction showing clearly where we stand. Her aim, I believe, is not just to call attention to the power imbalances or dehumanization of the human other, or to mark our dependencies on them, but to illuminate how some of the ways in which we physically interact with material gets confused with its metaphoric expression and finds correlation in the interaction from human to human. Marlatt's equivalence between how we treat matter and humans prompts self-reflective ethical interrogations. In *Steveston*, thresholds are as much ecological as gendered and cultural discourses. For instance, she articulates the gendered and cultural frustrations she encounters in Steveston. In "End of Cannery Channel," the female narrator encounters three Japanese fishermen tending to a lowered starboard pole. She approaches the men and initiates conversation with an all too easy lead-in that invites sexual punning from one of them:

> "Are you going to raise that pole? I'd like to watch."
>
> "She wants to watch! (Laughing, he says something in Japanese
>
> to the other two.) You gonna *help*?"
>
> "Sure. I'll help you."
>
> "I'm kidding. These are heavy poles."
>
> (27)

Her responses to the man seem at first naive, but soon emerge as a form of resistance to exclude the men from her real thoughts, a mimicry of the men's conspiratorial behaviour as

they talk about her in Japanese, and the one man who goads her with sexual innuendo. Each time she refuses to respond in kind to his joking she pulls the conversation back to the work at hand. But he is not deterred. In his exchange with her there is a boldness that seems predictable on the one hand, but on the other creates a sense that she has become afloat in a cultural environment that wrestles with the holdfasts of her own cultural moorings:

> "I'm clearly a woman on their float. Too weak to lift the pole,
> old enough to have tastes — "you know what I mean?" He eyes me
> across the rift of language, race & sex. Should I go?" (28).

Her hesitation whether to stay and bridge that rift suggests an ambivalence to acknowledge difference, one that the man's constant teasing exploits. In this "mere" matter of pole-raising, innocuous in its act as labour, but as a pun on polarities, her presence draws out the complex interplay of the social, cultural and sexual associations expressed through the act. The unsettling interaction between her and the men creates the space for these matters of concern to emerge into the open.

In the end, she does not leave, but stays and watches the raising of the pole, and in doing so appears to challenge the man, and turns sexual innuendo on the men and objectifies them in turn. As they raise the pole, she plays on the gendering of boats, as she notes where "the pole will rise into" and how the men "board her." (28). They "heave, grunt, call" (28) as she "[t]he boat shifts under lifting weight." (28). Finally, after the man "hammers" the pole, it stands erect and locked in, and he calls down to her, grinning, "See what it's like?" (28). As it stands, we do see, but we realize we have seen this entire exchange and activity through her eyes—female, Caucasian, Canadian. As a result, her discomfort at the cultural, linguistic, and gender differences creates a different type of dis-ease. Her inversion at the end, turning the game back on the men through observation and

language succeeds in de-centering the sexism, revealing the circularity to these encounters, but does little to solve the intricacies of cross-cultural communication. In fact, the older man's refusal to engage with the younger man's demands to give her a beer, and instead "simply" (28) handing her a coke and returning to his work, proposes another form of resistance. In this moment, his own discomfort at the dynamics that her presence brings to the dock may be indicative more of his cultural histories, norms, and mistrust of what she represents than the sexism displayed by the younger man and to which she ripostes in writing.

The poem's last line, "See what it's like?" an imperative demand, offset by a colon from the preceding seven long-lined stanza punctuates a building tension, which from her sexualized description of erecting the pole anticipates some form of climax. But, the climax is not so much anti-climactic as unexpected. He does not call down to her with a flip comment or gesture that indicates to her 'that that's how it's done, baby.' Rather his grin, followed by the rhetorical question, "See what it's like?" (28), with its dropped subject, its position as the final line and thus word, seems removed from the preceding sexual banter and innuendo. The grin and the question direct readers to how she stands, how she in turn played the same objectifying dynamic by sexualizing their work. His question is an unmasking of her, calls her out, draws attention to her complicity in what may seem from their cultural perspective, on the one hand, as equally bold and audacious behaviour, while on the other, suggesting their dis-ease with how to negotiate her presence as a white woman on the docks.

These types of encounters serve to remind that poetic materializations of events as well as matter recall how intercultural exchange breaks down and draws attention to the unequal power formations and one's own relation to those dynamics. With her open-ended

form, its allusion to circularity and non-hierarchical patterns, Marlatt reveals how both she and the men resist finding new "channels" of communication and so re-perform the stereotypical power dynamics: sexual innuendo, resistance through silence or diversion. So, they reach an "end" that is a re-iteration of dominant exchanges of oppression: white, colonial, Other, male, female. Her other poems in the collection illustrate that while these practices emerge as a process of repeated patterns of exchange, they also offer pauses where the power dynamics become matter for alternative cultural engagement and thus re-materialized as spaces for empowerment. But that space, as Marlatt's practice reveals, is a net of constant negotiation and renegotiation of exchanges where matter(s)—cultural and material— find their own voice and vitality emerging in, through, and beyond the text. As a part of overlapping ecosystems that create networks of complex social, historical, and physical relationships, a bioregion cannot be reduced to a sum of its parts. Thinking bioregionally entails taking into account the irreducible unpredictable ways that material and cultural relations manifest as processes of flow and flux. Matter, as emergent properties and processes, thus becomes a challenge in that we cannot fully know or predict their forms, their capacities, or represent them until they appear, and even then the latter action remains uncertain. It is also a strategy that points out how poetry-making (performance of the materialization and dissolution of material and textual boundaries) accentuates the interconnection between cultural and environmental exclusionary and exploitative practices in Steveston.

Ecopoetic Currencies of Matter

Marlatt's ecopoetics advocates a simultaneous free-associative and contained imagination. As part of perceiving the larger whole out of the parts in Steveston, her paradoxical poetic processes make visible the creative currencies of natural and human matter as they interact with their surrounding environments. She opens *Steveston*, for instance, with a double imperative: the title "Imagine: a town" and the first line "Imagine a town running" (31). Imperatives are finger snaps, calls to pay attention: directives on how to do something. Marlatt employs the imperative to instruct readers how to initiate the process of mattering that compounds the term's culture and material into an indivisible cultural and material exchange. In "Imagine: a town," Marlatt propels the imperative forward with quick movement, only to have it trip up, preventing imagination from running rampant headlong into a fire or into the river. She writes:

> Imagine a town running
>
> (smoothly?
>
> a town running before a fire
>
> canneries burning
>
> (do you see the shadow of charred stilts
>
> on cool water? do you see enigmatic chance standing
>
> just under the beam? (11)

Though she does not inhibit a free ranging imagination, she appears to caution restraint—or at least, to cultivate an imagination that sees past the "shadows" that often cloud reality for the sake of appearances. Otherwise, one might "go off the edge" (Marlatt, "Imagine" 11). The pauses, the obstacles inhibit the reader from letting the imagination run rampant; yet,

regardless of her attempts to slow the reader down, as the poem progresses, the "chance" of running over the edge is inevitable. Running over the edge, however, does not necessarily lead to chaos. Rather running disrupts a mechanistic for an alternative world view, a more realistic, dynamic view in which unpredictability undermines assumptions of ecological and cultural equilibrium.

She lets the imagination run, but in this instance the imperative direction seems to uphold Don McKay's claim that the poet "is supremely interested in what language can't do" in order to gesture to the biophysical world, to "use language in a way that flirts with its destruction" (32). Such a gesture becomes an enactment of a movement or action of artistic process through a medium (text). The thoughtful poet, then, lets language go wild, run off edges, lurk in shadows under the pilings, and play with chance. As the first poem of the collection, imagination, leaping from generic "town" to personified "town running," is itself set to "running"—imagination flows out into the white space of the page, drops into a blank indented space only to smack into a parenthetical stop that barricades the interrogative "(smoothly?" (11). The typographical layout prolongs and runs the enjambment into a convex "wall" that gives the visual impression of bouncing back, "running" backward to return to the first line, implying that this is not going to be a smooth run. After the interrogative pause, again she urges the imagination to run "like a town running before a fire / canneries burning" (11), only once more to run off into the white space of the page, drop into an indented white space, and smack against another parenthesis, which now encompasses two open-ended questions—questions, like the first one in the poem, that cause the reader to pause and check her impressions, to translate what it is she actually *sees*, not as the poem begins, to *imagine*.

Marlatt thus sets up a guiding reading framework for the poems (and ecopoetics, in general): the different orientations act as impediments to a smooth read, challenging and facilitating the imperative to "imagine" and see the place as relational horizontal interactions or transactions. *Steveston* demonstrates that "chance"—unpredictable emergent processes and behaviour—relies on these forces to run efficiently, to allow matter to intervene and collapse hierarchical frameworks. Material agency thus manifests as "something more than "mere" matter: an excess, force, vitality, relationality, or difference that renders matter active, self-creative, productive, unpredictable" (Coole and Frost 9). Marlatt's poetics alert readers, "to recognize that phenomena are caught in a multitude of interlocking systems and forces and to consider anew the location and nature of capacities for agency" (Coole and Frost 9) and in relation to our own agential capacities. Marlatt's evocation of matter's agential properties directs attention to how matter's self-creative capacity, its ability to transform not only other matter but its own materiality, sets up relational transactions. Read in this context, Marlatt's ecopoetics present the river, the culture of salmon, and the various human and other-than-human actors as co-constituting interrelating, ecological entities.

Marlatt leaves readers with the sense, thus, that this town, this river, these people, these wharves, these canneries, and "pilings" of "bodies of men & fish corpse piled on top of each other (residue" ("Imagine:" 11) are a single, constant shifting currency that emerges from matter that in turn creates matter and so on. But these currencies also have their limits. Marlatt reconfigures ecopoetics (and thus diminishes language's power) by depicting language and matter as inseparable in this re-visioned exchange. To conceive of such a relationship between language and matter "shifts the focus from questions of correspondence between descriptions and reality (e.g., do they mirror nature or culture?) to

matters of practices, doings, and actions" (Barad, *Meeting* 135). Through unstable discursive constraints, Marlatt's ecopoetic performativity exposes an open interactive relationality materializing through flux. Or, to repeat Marlatt's claim, "Poetry, because it enacts the mutability of language and perception, can reflect the instability of our world" (25 *River's*). Poetry as a discursive practice becomes, here, one of many actors in the realizations of matter and our own subsequent responses. Although poetic discourse implicates *Steveston*, to borrow Barad's words, "as an active agent participating in the very process of materialization" (151 fn. 26), it also participates in a dematerialization of an ecosystem. Thus, in her poem "generation, generations at the mouth," for instance, Marlatt calls for "verbing" a different kind of currency, one not market-driven but built on relational material "re-turn" (62) between multiple agencies.

Exchanges of Ecological and Economic Matter

Marlatt's play on the tensions between economic and ecological returns in *Steveston* is a process of where economics and ecology enact (de-)materialization of place, which occurs in colonizing tendencies. Her emphasis on different forms of currency proffer a way to a decolonized thinking that challenges the purviews and practices that support monocultural stasis. Her 'economy of nature' runs on ecological currency. Yet, the ecology she seems to espouse does not fall into the economic metaphoric traps into which the new ecologists writing in the mid- to late twentieth century fall. Her pun of "re-turn" throughout *Steveston*, is one instance. Her ecological model calls for an organic study of emergent forms, processes, and ultimately values, but not those based on financial net gains. The economy that is supposed to keep the economy "running" in *Steveston* is creating

detrimental "net" losses. Though competition is a part of an ecosystem's functioning, cooperation is an even more significant characteristic in maintaining a habitat's health. Competition, Donald Worster points out, is an element of modern economics, but economics also, like an ecosystem, relies on complex systems of interdependencies: "self-reliance, it would seem, is a thing of the past" (293). But Worster importantly suggests, in corporate terms interdependencies are too often a code for inter-relationships built on variances of exploitation, capacity for or resistance to unlimited economic growth. "Cooperation is defined, and absorbed by the functions of production and consumption" (Worster 293). Worster's assertion emphasizes, thus, that the outcome of thinking in these economic relational terms leads us to transferring and applying human expectations of efficiency and managerial practices to the other-than-human world. A material agency foregrounds how absurd and dangerous this thinking is. We live in a biosphere that has "always-changing, non-steady-state systems where chance—randomness—is inherent" (Botkin *The Moon* 285). If we remove the equation of unpredictability, we overlook the other forms of exchange at play in the world that can effectively collapse human economies (climate change related disasters are such examples: the storm surges of Katrina and Sandy).

Marlatt's ecology is not utilitarian. It is one based on promoting biodiversity as a necessity for the functional roles of each member (Fraser River, in *Steveston*) for ensuring the resilience of the estuarine ecosystem, by extension the human and other-than-human lives it supports. But it is also an ecology that is both pragmatic and ironic, as Marlatt herself notes, where ecology is "the inevitable materiality of this world, bodies feed on bodies" (*River's* 39). Her poem "Steveston, B.C." is an example of the ecological net gains and losses when we think only in economic terms. The last poem in the earlier editions,

"Steveston, B.C." plays on the origin of town as both geographically located in British Columbia and its temporal location (before Christ), and records also in abbreviated poetic forms the histories of Steveston. These condensed histories that open the poem, paradoxically, in their economy of language signal that words can never say enough to chronicle the social and environmental injustices that the poem lays out. Further, in their economy, what falls short or is left out becomes a questionable pronounced absence that would make these more comprehensive histories. For instance, Marlatt begins the poem with four verses, each beginning "Steveston:" and then defines the place in different ways. First, she defines Steveston by general geographical features: "delta," "Fraser," "sandbank," "Gulf," and the flow of water and accretions of sand and mud: "Steveston: delta, mouth of the Fraser where the river empties, sandbank after / sandbank, into a muddy Gulf" (56). Second, she identifies Steveston by its commercial successes and failures: "Steveston: onetime cannery boomtown: "salmon capital of the world": fortunes / made & lost on the homing instinct of salmon" (56). Third, she locates Steveston in social injustice:

> Steveston: home to 2,000 Japanese, "slaves of the company": stript of all their belongings, sent to camps in the interior away from the sea, wartime, who
>
> > gradually drift back in the '40s, few who even buy back their old homes, at inflated prices, now owning modern ranchstyle etc, & their wives, working the cannery, have seniority now, located. (56)

Fourth, Steveston she writes is "hometown still for some, a story: of belonging (or is it continuing? / lost, over & over" (56). Her progressive repetition of variants throughout the poem of *locate* ("located," "locations," "locating," and "locates" (56-57)) lead to further variants on local: "(in situ)" (57), and the Japanese wives with their "seniority now" (56)

allude to another local—a union, for instance. Yet, her movement between the various forms of *locate* and local resist the notion that histories, stories, geographies, economies are/can settle into a singular notion of story or location; bioregions constantly initiate an internal reflection, which Marlatt singles out amongst these attempts to locate in a water-washed landscape: "(where are we?)" (57). In her multiple attempts to locate and to define Steveston, this question, she proposes, can never entirely be answered, as "(in situ)" (57) framed in parentheses drifts as a typographical boat through a poem of moving confluences of water and unpredictable language.

Steveston is a place of multiple returns: water, salmon, capital, interned Japanese-Canadians. But as the fourth iteration indicates, "hometown [is] still for some, a story: of belonging." Unlike the other three that are located in material artefacts and events, the fourth Steveston is something more ephemeral, a questionable "continuing?" as "a story: of belonging," and dislocation. The question mark alludes to unpredictable outcomes that emerge from the historical cultural and ecological convergences and disturbances, which in *Steveston* serve as points for re-convening in the present. It is not that history necessarily repeats itself, but *Steveston* suggests that there is a history of neglecting the biophysical and cultural relations that perpetuate (and so become predictable) the same singular patterns of "story." But as the multiple Stevestons and her choice of the article "a" delineates, it is not *the* story. It is only a story told by some, but not by all.

By depicting the town's character as (un)settled in place, Marlatt offers insight into how colonizing and opportunistic engagement with material resources create the predictabilities that are difficult to de-colonize: labour inequity, land use management, speciesism, classism, sexism, and racism. Politics manifest in how Marlatt performs the materialization and dissolution of boundaries, which to borrow Barad's phrasing, "always

[entails] constitutive exclusions and therefore requisite questions of accountability" (*Meeting* 135). These social imbalances come into contact with the ecological dynamics of the Fraser to alter the estuarine ecosystem and its salmon culture through a myriad of ways: toxic waste, reclamation of marshlands, diking the river, over-fishing salmon stocks. Moreover, in "Steveston, B.C." accountability seems to settle in Marlatt's speculation on the parceling up, paving over, floodlighting, and development of Steveston by industry and private owners (56). But there is also implicit complicity when she switches to the inclusive "we." She recounts how "we obscure it with what we pour on these waters, fuel, paint, fill" (57). The poem continues to depict a slurry of intermingling human ("we") and other-than-human, blurring where one begins and the other ends. As she writes:

> This is the story of a town, these are the people, whose history locates inside of dream, in site of (in situ) down by the riverbank a torrent pouring past its sloughs & back channels, boat basins time repeats, this one was Phoenix, this one Atlas, or leaving Hong Wong/Wo's obliterated letters, even whole names along with bits of crockery water washes, dead dogs, web caught up under the shadows of these buildings men would cast, like nets of retrieval, only to cast their names across the line that water washes, away, incessant, swollen, by reaches of the sea our lives respond to, irresistibly drawn, these precarious floats, boats equipt with the best machinery, radar, sonic, scan, drifting, limbs extended, sometimes logs & deadheads, sometimes creatures of motive that swim, *against* the source, but always continuing to return, always these lovely & perilous bodies drifting in spawn, swarm on out to sea.
> (57-58)

As a performative mode of mattering, this passage foregrounds human language as just one of many contingencies that make up and impose limitations on the complex interplay between human and other-than-human exchanges. With its emphasis on cultural convergence, its list of things (crockery, sonar, floats, deadheads) and dead organic matter (dead dogs), Marlatt's poetics here serve to provoke reconsideration of and how matters manifest through the interactions between language and storying of the biophysical world. Steveston, as a result, becomes "a story" we read as one co-written by a large and ever-enlisting cast that performs ongoing materialization.

Conclusion (or Returns): An Open Exchange of Matter

Marlatt's mattering as creative endeavour, a "poem-as-process" (Hall 149) is a respectful, yet critical, performance between cultures and matter as a mesh of constant negotiation and renegotiation. Barad claims, ""Individuals" are infinitely indebted to all others, where indebtedness is about not a debt that follows or results from transaction but, rather, a debt that is the condition of possibility of giving/receiving" ("On Touching" 214). She emphasizes a condition of exchange that is not based on financial re-turns, but on reciprocal debts borne out of an open collective material exchange. In ecological terms, this return is often a collectivity of cooperative reciprocal processes. Marlatt's *Steveston* remains an ongoing reminder, as she observes in "Life Cycles," that "we've managed to forget: this urge to return, & returning" (48). In *Steveston* as a whole, she sets up, what I have been arguing explicitly and implicitly throughout my chapters, that bioregional literature is more than configuring other-than-human and human relationality. It also 'ecologizes' the economies and politics of a region, particularly as they emerge in an

increasingly globalized capitalist environment. Exemplary bioregional literature performs this through the invention and composition of literary forms that create percepts of material exchanges, returns, and flux, which themselves are emergent processes and properties of an entangled process of environmental and human "matters of concern." Here, Barad's observation of poetic modes of expression accentuates Marlatt's open-ended system of ecologizing in *Steveston*: "it brings us into an appreciation of, helps us touch, the imaginings of materiality itself in its ongoing thought experiments with being/becoming" ("On Touching 216). Ecopoetic composition, whether in prose or poetic form, reaches out and initiates the reminder that entanglements are processes not just of interconnectivity leading, as Barad notes, to a unifying "being as one" ("Quantum" 266). Rather, she claims, entanglements are "specific material relations of obligation—being bound to the other—enfolded traces of othering. Othering, the constitution of an 'Other,' entails an indebtedness to the 'Other,' who is irreducibly and materially bound to, threaded through, the 'self'—a diffraction/dispersion of identity" ("Quantum" 266). The ethics arises in the constitution of the relation itself and so not "a calculation to be performed" (Barad 266), but an opening "for reworking the material effects of the past and the future" (Barad 267). As with entanglement, there is also the potential for disentanglement: the opportunity for returns, for unravelling, making amends, and forming new configurations, new knots of relations.

"generation, generations at the mouth" written almost thirty years after the first edition develops as a return to "Sun & Moon thru the Japanese Fishermen's Hospital (1898-1942)." The latter poem refers to Steveston's Japanese-Canadian hospital, which the Japanese-Canadian community founded as a collective, cooperative effort (a counter-currency). U. Yamamura, a U.S. dentist, horrified by the living conditions of the Japanese in Steveston, established the modest beginnings of The Japanese Fisherman's Hospital on

the property of Phoenix Cannery. The hospital also served as a chapel and school. At first congregation members volunteered as nurses, then later certified nurses came from Japan. The hospital was funded by the community, and the Japanese community paid a membership of eight dollars (*Steveston Recollected* 37). An appeal to the wider community in 1898 outlined how the Japanese Fisherman's hospital helped deal with the obstacles of language and the racist and humiliating treatment the Japanese community received at the main hospital located in Vancouver, discrimination further fueled by "anti-Japanese" governmental policies (labour restrictions) (*Steveston Recollected* 35-36). The community's need for the hospital was further corroborated by Asamatsu Murakami's account of a fever outbreak in the community caused by "[u]nsanitary things […] from upriver […] and people below drank the water, so they got sick" (36). Unable to accommodate the numbers, 400 people were laid out in wooden beds on the church's porch (37). The hospital's closure date of 1942 coincides with the Canadian government's denouncement of the Japanese-Canadian community as a potential threat to national security and their forced relocation to internment camps in the interior of British Columbia, which the government funded through the sale of the Japanese-Canadian's businesses and possessions.

The poem entwines historical Japanese-Canadian and material vestiges together in a manner in which they are indivisible from and yet are also another abbreviation of the town Steveston:

> We've come to where, what, changes at the heart: this General
> Ward, white a, widow's mouth (sea glinting just offshore), a
> mother's hole? We've come to generations, generation, Steveston,
> at the heart: our death is gathering (salmon) just offshore, as,
> back there in this ghostly place we have (somehow) entered (where?)

you turn & rise, gently, into me. (50)

This passage, as with the entire poem, is haunted with the ghosts of the past and the present through the ambiguous "you" who accompanies the speaker. Only as we come to this passage above, the last verse paragraph of the poem, which we sense "you" is Steveston. Steveston is personified in such a way that the "hand on the weathered planking" as they climb "up the stairs" of the hospital (49) does not seem an exaggerated troping. Because the body only appears as a hand on the planking, and the eyes (see below) have no discernable face out of which it gazes, the human form as it appears becomes less ghost-like and more corporeal as wood, hospital sign, marsh, and boat. This trans-formation emerges more clearly, if not still ambiguously in the syntax of "We've come to generations, generation, Steveston, / at the heart." One possible reading situates Steveston at the centre of these generations, as the generations' livelihood. That this statement is made in a hospital, a place for healing, and as the dates attest, an institution that stood for generations, speaks to the Japanese-Canadian community's resiliency. Yet, because the speaker repeatedly addresses "you," the response seems an unformed appositive gesture, *you, Steveston*. This reading finds resonance in a moment earlier in the poem:

Siding, planks we climb up (the stairs: there is no way I can avoid
looking your look as you turn:

wharf, boat, yard arms
& the moon glimmering its strange eye down river, down where the
mouth is. (49)

The image of "planks we climb" void of punctuation lets the noun drift, which again sets up the possibility of reading this as another appositive *planks, we*. Further, the strange phrasing "there is no way I can avoid / looking your look as you turn:" evokes not a doubled gaze, seeing what "you" are seeing, but seeing "you" as you look when you turn, "turn" blocked by a colon suggests a metamorphosis. And, it is at this point "you" undergoes a transformation. "You" becomes "wharf boat, yard arms / & the moon glimmering its strange eye down river, down where the mouth is" (49). Steveston is as much the generations of Japanese-Canadians as it is planks, siding as the "wharf boat, yard arms." And, the generations of Japanese-Canadians are as much established in the community as the cycles of "Sun & Moon" that shine "thru the Japanese Fisherman's Hospital" from 1898 to 1942, and as *Steveston* documents, thereafter.

In addition, the speaker notes, "I've known you a long time, I've known you in this marshy / selvedge" (49). "Selvedge," a geological term that refers to a clay edge or verge of a rock mass, an unfamiliar term for many readers, calls attention to itself. As an edge, it sets up a boundary, but the marshy description softens a clear division by merging land and water with grass. Because the word stands out, its more provocative etymological play on the word adds to the poem's meaning: a corruption of "self" and "edge." In the "turn" we see the alternative translation of selvedge, "self-end," emerge. As the poem ends, the speaker also acknowledges her own "self-end" as "we" becomes more pronounced with the last line when "you turn & rise, gently, into me" (50). Again, "you turn" suggests another transformation. As a reader of this poem, we are made aware of how the speaker, the poet is also inextricably entangled through the writing in this new emergent Steveston. But further, as a reader, I too am transformed by and into this collective turn.

When Marlatt then returns nearly thirty years later to "generation, generations at the mouth," this alternative currency, the generative processes of Earth, as Lorraine Weir reads this line (60), are further compromised. The interrelational exchange between corporeal flesh and matter still struggles to free itself from the 'networth' of economics. The insights gained from "Sun & Moon thru the Japanese Fishermen's Hospital (1898-1942)" is a local transmission of place as a "webwork" of "connective tissue" of words that link to the ecological networks that sustain us (Marlatt *River's* 28). What has emerged in this re-turn is an accretion of waste, not an arrival at selfvedge/self end but a sense of being at "stuck / edges […] a frozen exchange streaming emptiness" (62). Steveston's interconnecting web of tissue, the salmon, still thought as commodities for consumption are

> clans of salmon, chinook, coho, gathering just off shore, backbones no longer intact, steam-pressured in millions of cans, picked clean barbecue leavings in a thousand garbage bags ripped open by cats, rats, they can't find their way back (61)

Salmon ("millions") stripped of their mettle ("backbones") and packed in another kind of metal leave in their wake an apocalyptic vision of ecocide. This vision asks what kind of "return" is this as an economy, as a culture, as a "blueprint" (61) for sustaining the health of a biophysical environment when there is no reciprocal exchange. The "giving/receiving" (Barad 214) is lost, and so "they can't find their way back" (61). The "millions" and "thousands" caution the emergence of a tipping point that prevents re-generative return. Marlatt's approach, which is contingent upon the movement and exchange of languages and material, makes matter *matter* through pronouncement of an ever-elusive absolute grasp of the biophysical world. In "generation, generations at the mouth," her writing demonstrates how that elusiveness extends to conceptualizing long-term thinking of place through the extraction and consumption of resources.

Her free-flow writing and open formal structuring demonstrate how languages and materials migrate across, over, through, and beyond the text to evoke how other-than-human agency eludes human appropriation, and thus dominance but are also susceptible to entanglement and degradation. These 'matters' of concern converge as intertwining nets of artistic literary and material expression. "Poetry," she observes, "because it enacts the mutabilities of language and perception, can reflect the instability of our world" (*River's* 25). It is the awareness of instability that opens up thinking of human limitations. Worster explains well, and Marlatt demonstrates, that ecology took much from economics, but economics took little, if anything, from ecology. If this were not the case, then built into economics of growth would be an awareness of "the environmental limits to man's growth" (Worster 294) and implementing policies that incorporate the finite extent of the planet's resources. *Steveston* remains a testament to how forty years later, in 2014, how unlimited growth still persists, the Alberta oil sands a glaring example. Marlatt stresses this incongruence of conflicting models in "generation, generations at the mouth." The scarcity of end-stops creates a buildup of language matter (elisions, enjambments) and captures the waste and potent possibilities latent in Steveston's waterways:

> return what is solid to water, the first peoples said –
> returned, every bone intact
> generates the giving back of race, kind, kin
>
> choked in urban outfalls, fished as they aim for rivers sediment-thick with run-off, *tamahnous* of the wild they hover, sonar streaks, impossible vision-glitches, outside pens where farmed lookalikes grow pale & drugged

kin, wild skin, wild & electric at the mouth where rivers disappear in the that
that is not that, the chinook can't find their way back

come out of the blue: this flow, these energy rivers & wheels, radiant giving
(61)

The regenerative cycle of return that "we've managed to forget: this urge to return & returning" ("Life Cycle 48), which the "first peoples" promoted, has become lost, and in its place the river is "choked," strangled by "urban outfalls." All of this picked over and "ripped open" waste has to go somewhere. As humans exploit the ecological web works, such as the overfishing of Fraser salmon stocks, so too, language becomes a similar mode of exploitation (of both humans and environment) to meet "our own immediate ends" (Marlatt, *River's* 28).[31] Marlatt claims these ends equate as "industrial success" (*River's* 39). Reading her language/ecology analogy, "industrial success" then indicates not just a degraded ecosystem, but also homogenization (degradation) of the diversity of communication in a region. In an interview with George Bowering, Marlatt notes, "Language is leafing out, it's everything that is growing that is organisms, that is body [sic]. It's a body…We live in the world" (60). The "Mouth" of the poem thus takes on double meaning: living estuary and language. Generations of "progress" result in the river's

[31] I, like Marlatt in *Steveston*, use *we*/*our* to indicate the human species' complicity in these processes. I agree, thus, with Beth Curran's interpretation of Marlatt's writing strategy: "Marlatt's use of the first person plural admits her own membership in the culture of consumerism and her complicity in the damaging of the environment, but it also seeks out her reader in an act of collaborative resistance" (198). On the latter point, I believe that it's not so much resistance than the act is a process of urging alliances on behalf of the planet. In order to achieve any form of environmental justice, besides the recognition of cultural power imbalances, we need to frame collective environmental responsibility as an issue pertaining to human species.

deterioration, not re-generation and leaves us poorer, dependent on a material and discursive "progress."

The trashing of and refusal to acknowledge the ecosystem's transcorporeal[32] inter-/intra-actions compromise and inhibit healthy relations with the ecosystem, and subsequently with each other. She asks us, in the outfall of these toxic relations, "[w]ith the salmon disappearing, what is our imprint on this ecosystem?" (*River's* 39). What happens when we "refuse, refuse our interrelation, refuse to pour back / what *is* the body's blueprint? Impermanent, shifting energy blocks in its own becoming" ("generation" 61-62) and atrophies, disappears. As with "Sun & Moon," in "generation, generations at the mouth" Marlatt enacts another metamorphic turn of bodies, except this time it is salmon and river and human. Although at the onset she clearly identifies the body as salmon, as the poem progresses material inter-/intra-actions create and occur from pollution. Her emphasis on "body" as singular becomes, well, singular. Her word choice combined with the material interactions force us to see the interconnections that comprise the whole, toward the "body's blueprint" as mapping an ecosystem. Multiple generations of industrial and colonial discourse manifest as toxic materializations that "block" ecological thinking that would benefit the ecosystem's integrity and by extension human health. But this conflating human and other-than-human into ecosystem, enacts the same move that Alaimo ascribes to transcorporeality: it "denies the human subject the sovereign, central position. Instead, ethical considerations and practices must emerge from a more uncomfortable and

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[32] Transcorporeality is a term that Stacy Alaimo investigates extensively in *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2010). Similar to Karen Barad's materiality and posthuman performativity, Alaimo defines transcorporeality as "Imagining human corporeality as trans-corporeality, in which the human is always intermeshed with the more-than-human world, underlines the extent to which the substance of the human is ultimately inseparable from "the environment""(2).

perplexing place where the "human" is always already part of an active, often unpredictable, material world" (*Bodily* 17). Marlatt forces humans into ethical consideration by placing them in their own waste. In this manner, to borrow Alaimo's word, she "ruptures" (17) the traditional economics of exchange and returns. Her answer to her own question is that we need a materialist "re-turn" ("generation" 62).

> Thus I refer back again to her lines:
>
> what is the mouth of the river now? a toxic O of emptiness? teeming hole of ever-becoming we create? Re-entry. Re-turn. Verbing the noun out of its stuck edges and into occurrence, currents, *curre-* . . . we've lost the verb in our currency, a frozen exchange streaming emptiness
>
> (62)

Her play on consumption accentuates the reciprocal transformative exchanges involved in ecological and cultural processes. The convergence proposes an emergence of possibility: as "bodies feed on bodies" (*River's* 39), bodies constitute bodies. She confirms this transformative process by blending culture and material together so that readers cannot tell what or who constitutes the bodies of salmon, river, humans: "at the mouth of the river, clans of the possible are gathering, the chinook, / the coho rivering just offshore are us" ("generation" 62). Her ambiguous placement of "rivering" centred between "coho" and "us," and the omission of punctuation between "just" and "offshore" blurs the poem's opening distinction of who the "clans of possibility" are. The indeterminacy undermines assumptions of an ecosystem's impermeability. Sewage outflow, industry run-off, corpses, garbage—bodies of wild and penned salmon that travel/inhabit offshore absorb these toxins while their own polluted bodies decompose (those not netted, canned, consumed), feed, and

pollute other organisms. They can't find their way back. In order for them to find their re-turn, humans must also find their appropriate return in and as relation to river and salmon.

Waste and culture are of the same mix. Waste made visible, as Stacy Alaimo points out, does not "[allow] us to imagine ourselves as rarefied rational beings distinct from nature's muck and muddle" (*Bodily* 8). As matter created from our own bodies and interactions with other bodies, waste in Marlatt is us in alternate form; we become part of that mix of muck and muddle. Marlatt thus directs readers to take on a different kind of bioregional immersed perspective that presents the world (of which we are a part) as a vital, (mal)functioning, and abused body: degraded. Yet, she also allows for hope to fall out of that "outfall," that there is a way to reverse or retard our condition. To once again repeat this passage, this time for its typographical emphasis:

> what is the mouth of the river now? a toxic O of emptiness? teeming hole of ever-becoming we create? Re-entry. Re-turn. Verbing the noun out of its stuck edges and into occurrence, currents, *curre-* . . . we've lost the verb in our currency, a frozen exchange streaming emptiness
>
> (they're fishing in London now)
>
> At the mouth of the river, clans of the possible are gathering, the chinook,
> The coho rivering just offshore are us (62)

As the waste is us and we are our waste, so too it is not difficult to realize that the coho and the chinook we eat inhabit these polluted waters and absorb the toxins, so we too become polluted bodies. Potential gathers in seeing the kinship between these toxic bodies, "clans of the possible […] just offshore" and us. The hope, though, is not in the salmon, but in

another place, another river. It drops out of the outfall of "a frozen exchange streaming emptiness": the parenthetical "(they're fishing in London now)." It is a closed aside floating in white space. On the page it is a parenthetical school of words that swims between two banks of lines. It is the last closed parentheses that continues on toward its ongoing becoming as it moves toward the edge of the page, as it heads along that "river" into the larger open-ended parenthesis (ocean) that opens *Steveston* in the first poem "Imagine: a town." The way that the aside pours out of that streaming toxic outfall into an open space and floats, and that there is no closing to *Steveston*'s first parenthesis, points to an "ever-becoming" "possible" return. Again the emphasis on "verbing" points to how this may be achieved. To change our environmental practices, we need to change also our language of currency and our currency of language. Her emphasis that we take pause and verb the noun re-turn "out of its stuck / edges and into occurrence, currents, *curre-* . . . we've lost the verb in our / currency" (62) offers another hope. Change the currents of our language, acknowledging our limits, then perhaps we can change the currency that runs our relations to place.

The Fraser estuary is a "storehouse" (Worster 303) of energy flows, but the more we degrade its body and the parts that constitute it, some of that flow ends. Donald Worster writes, "[t]he ecosystem of the earth, considered from the perspective of energetics, is a way-station on a river of no return. Energy flows through it and disappears eventually into the vast sea of space; there is no way to get back upstream. And unlike water in the hydrological cycle, energy once passed through nature is forever lost, irretrievably lost" (303). Past the tipping point, cut off, the current and the ecosystem collapses. *Steveston* is a warning, forty years sounding on the threshold: "Somehow they survive, this people, these fish, / survive the refuse bottom, filthy water, their choked lives, / in a singular dance of

survival, each from each" ("A by-channel; a small backwater:" 43). But I wonder for how much longer. Sockeye runs for 2014 are predicted to be 72 million (Hume n.p.). Yet, Hume's reflection on the last big run in 2010 run of 30 million Sockeye—packers running out of ice and storage boxes because of the overwhelming quantity caught—I can't help but think that this is a moment of human restraint, of future generations and return lost. We feast and famine, but rarely stop to think that there are other bodies feeding on bodies in this world, feedings essential to the healthy flows of the bioregion, and bodies of matter we are trapping predictably in inescapable ecologies and the inevitable outcomes of their emergent unpredictabilities.

Chapter Four: Ecocomposition as Pedagogy: An Illustrated Investigation

In another moment down went Alice after it, never once considering how in the world she was to get out again.

~Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

Introduction: Ecopedagogy

Knowing a bioregion well entails being open to and willing to explore the layers of complexities that comprise an ecosystem. My travels through the texts of Ricou, Thurston, and Marlatt have been different but complementary approaches to the diversity of bioregional thinking. In their different theoretical frameworks, they demonstrate that we can read the complexity of bioregion in multiple ways. What is at stake, however, is engendering a shared affiliation and responsibility for a bioregion, and by extension the biosphere. The question to be asked of all approaches is how, as a process of reading and writing, they can lead us from ecological thinking to a new or renewed *and creative* pedagogical practice. By practice I mean the act of doing, the performance of an animated cultural and material process as habituated engagement with one's social and physical environments. In an ecological context, pedagogy becomes an enactment of thinking and action that applies ecological thinking to day to day (inter)action. Marianne Gronemeyer, the apparent coiner of the term "ecopedagogy," describes it as "practice-oriented" (75). What she means by this is "learning is a process, which it organizes, initiates and guides, is turned into instrumental action […]

The proper intention is not learning itself, but a specific and determinable change of political everyday options as a result of learning" (75). If political change is integral to this practice, though, a responsive not a reactive method is needed, which often is difficult to cultivate in the heat of environmental conflict and crisis. What is required, then, is a mode that offers that reflective space, but is also politically flexible. Ecopedagogy evokes ecological practice through doing, through applying thinking (theory) to action, such as with arts based research methods. Creativity and innovation are essential for engaging and imparting matters of concern. Thus, in this chapter, I shift to an arts based research ecopedagogy as a methodology for developing bioregional literacy, but also as an approach that ties together multiple reading approaches (such as those I conduct in my previous chapters) to create a fuller expression of bioregional compositioning.

Ecopedagogy, simply defined, is environmental education. However, as a practice it takes diverse forms and emerges out of different politics. Some proponents see ecopedagogy as expanding environmental studies curriculum to include hands-on involvement in community conservation and restoration efforts (David Orr and Fritjof Capra), others as traditional cultural teaching (Jeanette Armstrong) or combining outdoor adventures (hiking, camping) with humanities-based learning (literature, history, art) (Kathleen Dean Moore, Pamela Banting), while others advocate the practice as a political intervention against neoliberal capitalist ventures (Richard Kahn).[33] Yet, all align in their intent to create a global

[33] Richard Kahn provides a breakdown of the diverse forms of environmental education: ecological education, place-based education, humane education, holistic education, commons-based education, transformative education, peace education (11), and problem-posing pedagogy, which diverges, he contends, from the former in that it incorporates the politics of eco and social justice (14). For a sample of descriptive accounts of some of these innovative models see *Ecological Literacy: Educating Our Children for a Sustainable World* edited by Michael K. Stone and Zenobia Barlow (Sierra Club Books, 2005); *Teaching about Place: Learning from the Land* edited by Laird Christensen and Hal Crimmel (U of Nevada P, 2008); and *The Bioregional*

environmental awareness that educates individuals toward sustainable thinking and behaviour that encourages a collective human responsibility. In environmentalist movements there are calls for a consciousness that equates as planetary citizenship[34]—thus the prevalent blue planet as a symbol for a collective global unity—that is intended to cultivate but which I contend inhibits ecological thinking. Despite our geographical and cultural differences, we are, the image and slogans convey, sharing this planet floating alone in the universe. But, this is the problem: the blue planet metaphor occludes difference, which is necessary in understanding and negotiating not just cultural but also environmental complexities.

Unlike the blue planet viewed from space, the biospheric or ecosystemic model that begins at the local stays low to the ground, so to speak, and travels the connections of movements of matter, biotic and abiotic symbioses, ecotones, edge effects, and species migrations. I agree with Ursula Heise's claim that "identities are at their core made up of mixtures, fragments, and dispersed allegiances to diverse communities, cultures, and places" (42). But, I do not agree with her insistence that "what all of these ecological allegories share in common is a sense that the Earth's inhabitants, regardless of their national and cultural differences, are bound together by a global ecosystem whose functioning transcends human borders" (25). Heise's intervention has its place, but she overlooks the sophisticated representations of local/global complexities that bioregional narratives engender. Her oversight neglects the value of how local writing, through its attention to local ecological processes, situates people within wider global systems. At

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Imagination: Literature, Ecology and Place edited by Tom Lynch, Cheryll Glotfelty, and Karla Armbruster (U of Georgia P, 2012).

[34] See Andrew Dobson's "Environmental Citizenship: Towards Sustainable Development" in *Sustainable Development* 15 (2007) and Vandana Shiva's "Earth Citizens" (http://www.globalonenessproject.org/people/vandana-shiva) as just two theorists who advocate for a global environmental citizenship.

times, bioregional narratives write against globalizing or nationalizing initiatives in a protectionist manner, and invite critiques of parochialism. However, the multitude of place-based writings do much to counter typecasting as provincial, particularly ones with a local natural history, ecological, or a/biotic tendency, and that embrace figuratively and literally a biospheric model. They reveal local pathways that move through and across space, disrupt, and transform the global.

Further, as dwellers in local places, we are very much national, provincial, municipal citizens, and it is within these spaces we interact freely or are constrained on a daily basis. Thus, to claim that ecological thinking (particularly at the local level) rarely corresponds to interconnecting global systems, and that a small-scale approach to environmental ethics does not encompass the complexity of how local and the global ecologies constitute one another, creates a misleading representation of one half of the co-constitutive system(s) that shapes and influences planetary systems. Certainly, universalizing planetary images, like the blue planet, are influential on so many levels, as they create what Frank White coined as the "overview effect,"[35] but they remain mediated views. In the crossing between domains, metaphors concretize ideas, help articulate human perception of phenomena. But what needs changing are perceptions of the material and cultural discourses, the processes that produce and sustain these metaphors. In other words, how humans think about and act out their relationships with a responsive and interacting biophysical world. While demonstrating humans' interdependence, such "overviews" have the power to conceal the regional nuances

[35] See online the Overview Effect institute initiated by a group of astronauts and whose name was coined by space philosopher Frank White in 1978 for the effect experienced by astronauts. The institute formed out of this effect and the impact of viewing the results of climate change and human environmental degradation on the planet. Their main belief is that media can convey this space-view of Earth is the tool for unifying a global awareness and action to prevent further harm. http://www.overviewinstitute.org/about-us/declaration-of-vision-and-principles.

and embodied ecological experiences of global systems apparent at ground-view: how the parts function and comprise the whole and how cultures engage differently with those properties and processes. While having their universal appeal, in a climate of ever-increasing de-localization, an emphasis on global metaphors de-emphasizes the sum of the biosphere's parts as they work to create a whole. Insomuch that the metaphor remains useful in evoking a symbolism of universal responsibility toward the environment, the image cannot evoke a *tangible* immersed perception of inhabitation as effectively as local matter and representation can. In planetary view, the fact that we stare back at ourselves is not lost on me, but in that blue reflective surface we don't see ourselves as we interact on a day-to-day basis. We lose sight of what makes up the biosphere.

The bioregional ecopedagogy I present situates in the arts and humanities, but leaves open the possibility for many of the supplementary practices advocated by environmental educators (field trips, community work, and political engagement). However, though I privilege local literature to guide students along the pathways to re-cognize material and human influences as Earth processes that are the outcome of interacting local dynamics, I also advocate a participatory artistic engagement. Again, key is understanding that a local dynamic is a synthesis of regional specificity and globality, and not to refer to Roland Robertson's point, "a polarity" (29). But unlike Robertson, I reject his conclusion that the local is "*an aspect* of globalization" (30). An arts-based pedagogical practice, with its focus on critical scholarship and aesthetic engagement, encapsulates an interactive method best suited to exposing how local and global material and cultural histories converge to develop an ecological sensibility, and for this chapter specifically aimed at the urban dweller. In this chapter, as an example, I weave together ecological thinking, matter, and perceptual knowledge to conceive an arts based

pedagogical practice that evokes interconnecting pathways between the conscious subject, local specificity and the global. Arts based research is an alternative rigorous scholarly process of knowledge acquisition, creation, and dissemination that veers from traditional academic modes (such as deductive/inductive essays) to reach beyond academic circles. As a pedagogical practice, it offers a means to re-invigorate student learning and to diminish their intimidation of tackling complex theoretical thinking. Tom Barone contends, "[a]rts based research is an effort to extend beyond the limiting constraints of discursive constraints in order to express meanings that otherwise would be ineffable" (1). The methodology opens a broad "spectrum of sensory modalities in order to "say" in that form what cannot be said in others" (Barone 1). Barone's point, when thought within a bioregional framework, accentuates how in using these different modes, students and practitioners have a method to become aware of how each mode's discursive constraints limit the full potential of expressing meaning, and so see and negotiate their own limitations through employing multiple-perspectives. Arts based approaches (visual arts, dance, theatre, and writing) increase the breadth of critical tools with which to work toward understanding. More tools, particularly those that seem at odds with one another, open up greater potential for free-play and associative thinking. Moreover, as Barone notes, "the contribution of arts based research is not that it leads to claims in propositional form about states of affairs but that it addresses complex and often subtle interactions and that it provides an image of those interactions in ways that make it noticeable" (3). What stands out in his observation is how conducive the method is for cultivating a bioregional literacy because it endorses in its practice how complexity and interaction are relational attributes of material and cultural affairs. It serves, as any good research, not as an attempt at a definitive answer, but a prompt to further questioning and debate of unresolved issues. It

allows for the uncertainty that encountering difference evokes and opens consideration for the value of multi-perspectival views when deliberating these issues, and presents meaning-making as a collaborative endeavour.

As my artistic mode of expression, by way of example, I employ specifically the braided essay, a form that augments a free-associative wayfinding complementary to a bioregion's unpredictable and disruptive dynamics, but whose deceptively unassociated strands call for a rigorous thinking that seeks out and draws attention to relationality. It foregrounds my perceptual presence of the biophysical world while attempting a respectful orientation to and negotiation with the perceived subject, and in doing so also illustrates the other-than-human's agency in co-shaping both the social and material discourses of place as well as my own development as an ecological subject. In this effect, what I perform is an ecological composition—ecocomposition. Further, as a pedagogical model, I show by example how such a mode may provoke students to recognize, engage, and generate (as active participants) knowledge and the formation of their own ecoliteracy.

In this chapter I investigate and write a specific habitat, the city, which often poses a challenge to cultivating bioregional literacy, as too often its inhabitants' behaviours appear divorced from or willfully ignorant of the life systems that support and sustain its existence. Ecologist William Rees notes, ecological footprint analysis "shows that many rich countries and urban regions have enormous ecological footprints. Cities typically ecologically occupy an area several hundred times larger than their geographic areas" (7). Rees further points out that wealthy cities (he cites Vancouver as one of the examples) are, despite many of their green initiatives, potentially "the least sustainable cities on Earth" as they maintain their "material lifestyles at the cost of unconsciously imposing an enormous material burden on the rest of the Earth (307). They are despite their progressiveness, some of the largest

consumers and producers of waste, residential and industrial. In the Canadian government's 2011 census, 80% of Canada's population occupied urban space (n.p.). In light of this knowledge, city dwellers are a key population in contributing to and averting local and global environmental crises, and so my pedagogical approach promotes a reading practice for understanding a city ecologically and how to live sustainably.[36]

Most urban residents are oblivious to the extent of their impact on the rest of the planet. Rees, for instance, claims part of this arises from a lack of awareness of the flow of material in and out of the city: "resources come into the city through the 'back door,' often at night, embodied in the thousands of tonnes of manufactured goods and foodstuffs that seem to appear miraculously each day on thousands of store and grocer's shelves. The wastes generated in the production of all these goods have been left far behind at many distant points of origin" (307). Canadian literary critics Douglas Ivison and Justin Edwards contend that when "the natural world creeps in and becomes a dominant theme" (198) in Canadian urban literature, it is representative of a nationalist identity politics built around archetypal imagery of nature in Canada (canoes, beavers, lake country, and prairie). These have acted as, and persist to be key (albeit at times tongue in cheek) identifying features of what it is to be Canadian. What do these, they ask, have to do with a Canadian's experience growing up in a city? (198). As their point is useful in setting up the disambiguation between rural and urban representation, it does not address, however, what happens when we recognize that nature doesn't seep in, but that it never left. Or realize with new arrivals' movements (often named invasive or introduced) we apply value-laden or restrictive verbs

[36] Statistics Canada, since 2011, has abandoned the terms "urban areas" for "population centres." Population centres refer to areas that exceed 1,000. They qualify areas by small (1,000 to 29,000), medium (30,000 to 99,999), and large (100,000 +) (n. pag.).

such as sneak, trickle, or 'seep' rather than perhaps more apt verbs such as hitch, graze, follow, trot, or fly, those which would indicate human complicity and other-than-human agency. But what this accounts for is that among all the pages of concrete, steel, and traffic some readers lost sight as to how to register the other-than-human presence, caught up in their certainties that wildlife equates with wilderness, re-assigned those other-than-human co-residents as pest or nuisance species, while others dismissed them as imaginary constructs, backdrops to the unfolding, more meaningful human drama.

Binary distinctions between urban and rural, I agree, are impediments to cultivating a more fluid identity and perpetuate the readings and writings I mention above. Similarly there are substantial differences between the urban and rural that there will always be points of contestation. Then again, as Catriona Sandilands observes, if we think of these differences as zones of contact where material change and co-construction also occur then "a door is opened to a fantastic range of cross-species, cross-disciplinary, and cross-cultural conversations" ("The Marginal" 48). It is important to reiterate that I investigate and 'write' rather than write 'about' the city. I chose the braided essay form specifically for its compositional structure's complementariness to ecological dynamism, but also for the corresponding unpredictabilities inherent in city dwelling.

If creative critical composition is to be a viable form of arts based research practice, for literary studies for instance, then teachers must draw attention to composition as a tool (similar to a paint brush or the way a dancer uses her body). Amidst this range of interdiscursive contact that Sandilands identifies, this compositional reflexivity enables students to learn to identify the ways in which they themselves contribute to the construction of their ecological identity and write (think) themselves in relation to and into the complexities of other cultural and material discourses. In this ecological entanglement,

in addition to human discourses, they come to recognize that just like humans, matter (organic and inorganic) has its own "material discursive constraints, conditions, and practices" (Barad "Posthuman" 141). Consequently, when re-cognized through ecological perceptual tools the ever-present other-than-human becomes visible. They emerge from where they have always lived: in the streams we buried under concrete, from the mudflats we paved over, and on the lampposts and in hydro-poles we erected in place of trees. So too, when we (re)read urban literature within this new ecological context, the other-than-human (re)materializes to challenge these human constructions. As a result, the human, the presumed central figure of that urban drama is knocked off-centre and subsequently, our discernment of the work's meaning and the context.

Coupled with a bioregional-based focus, we (as researchers) expand our understanding of how human discourses constitute identity to consider how material discourses further perform and contribute to that identity formation. The way to learn ecoliteracy, thus, is not just to read a book about a man sitting in an alley documenting rats (as fascinating as that may be); this is only a first or small step toward cultivating literacy. The next step toward a fuller ecological understanding of a bioregion is opening the door and engaging with the diversity of ways of learning about the rat, the city that it lives in and the other agents it inter-/intra-acts with. In other words, cross the thresholds that take one into the worlds of the other-than-human. Become the person who sits in the alley and watches, writes about, photographs, paints, and interacts with the rats and their shared environment. An arts based research ecopedagogy and practice, to borrow Paul Linholdt's words, "shrug[s] off" the officious structures and the holds of traditional academic writing and reading practices (236). Both as a scholarly practice and as an alternative compositional pedagogy, arts based research initiatives forsake the formalities that traditional methods

elicit for an expression of experiential and affective accounts, yet retain their academic rigour through the research process.

Ecocomposition as a self-reflective endeavour allows for, in addition, Christian Weiss contends, practitioners to "consider the impact of our nonhuman relationships in the construction of [ecological] identity" (86). Thus if we follow Rees' claim about urbanites losing sight of much of a city's material movements, a bioregional focus foregrounds, as I have argued in the earlier chapters, the reciprocal relation of transactions between regions, which makes visible the flows of matter into and out of a region, thus illuminating global routes of trade. Thus, in this context, the practice's political potential emerges. Julie Drew's observation of ecocomposition's power to challenge social normative behaviour holds: when confronted with different forms of exploration and expression that deviate from standard academic evaluative forms, students learn to see how their thinking and writing practices evolve out of specific social and material relations. They begin to see how their own work contributes to "the forces that work to produce and reproduce cultural meaning" (Drew 65), and I would add, also limit production or meaning. Students become aware of how pedagogies come in different guises and inflect their lives outside of the classroom and affect the development of their own subject formation. In this regard, particularly as bioregions are culturally diverse, students must also confront how their own cultural practices and biases support but also limit other co-inhabitants.

An ecopedagogy that teaches these processes reveals how intersecting social and material forces work to influence how we approach our biophysical environments and the other-than-human, and has the potential to galvanize individuals in becoming actively responsible members of a bioregional community. Thus, I am apt to agree ecopedagogy, to borrow David Orr's terms, is a process of "remedial learning" (93). Remedial may not be

such a far-fetched conception, as ecopedagogy seeks to resituate humans within their habitats as ecologically aware subjects. An emerging field of intersecting scientific and literary studies, Cognitive Literary Studies, is a field that may offer potential gains in supporting the literal physical transformative capacity of literature on the human consciousness but as a "constrained constructivism" (Hart x). As a field that explores the interaction between imaginary production and biological processes, it does not abandon social and cultural contexts as factors influencing biological function. Cognitive scientists favour a complex organic approach that views the mind and brain as "structurally enabled and constrained by the body" (Hart vii) that is embedded in physical and social environments. The result of this is that material and social contexts play a combined role in cognitive formation. For instance, one cognitive study suggests that arts integrated learning not only improves content retention, but proposes that inclusion of self-reflexive gestures, such as weaving autobiography into the production of a creative rendering (poem or story) of a particular subject, collapses the distance between subject and object. The students' ability to "explicitly relate matter to themselves" initiates "a surrounding context [that] contributes to the establishment of a more elaborate memory trace" (Rinne et al. 91). Further, because students are actively generating knowledge and the expressions to communicate those ideas, they no longer fall into roles of passive learners—they become agents in mapping the trajectory of their expanding ecoliteracy. Though I focus on ecocomposition, arts-based learning encompasses diverse arts approaches: theater and visual arts, for instance. As Rinne et al.'s study notes, the effects of integrating arts into learning extend to these artistic expressions as well. Performance of material, for example, activates "motor encoding in addition to verbal encoding" (92). A part of what may make arts-based research and integrated teaching methods so effective in

engaging the mind is its defamiliarizing process of "enact[ing] information" (Rinne et al. 92).[37]

Learning how other-than-human urbanites inhabit cities, in its own way a defamiliarizing process for many people, may teach humans something about themselves as municipal, national, and global citizens that will enable them to reassess their thinking and behaviours and create better, sustainable living practices. The illustrative investigation, an urban tale that materializes in this chapter has had earlier incarnations, its first in 2003 as a project for Laurie Ricou's "Habitat Studies" seminar that focused on invasive species of the Pacific Northwest. In this present iteration, I move away from a rat-specific project and widen my focus to investigate the city of Vancouver, British Columbia, as a vital, animated entity comprised of material and cultural processes that shapes how my development as an ecological subject in an urban environment unfolds in relation to the specific and the global. Influencing this work are my subsequent investigations into new materialism and ecophenomenology, departures from my ecocritical studies with Ricou at UBC, and part of the new routes I have opened up while attending the University of Alberta. Excluded here, because of the scope of writing it would entail, are the many urban and suburban other-than-humans that I have interacted with since childhood who have played a part in shaping my relations with the biophysical world. Included here are cameos of my interaction with my

[37] In a recent experiment between Stanford University neurobiologists, humanities scholars, and radiologists, students underwent magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) of their brains while reading Jane Austen. Test subjects first read the literature for pleasure and then critically. Blood flow increased in both cases, but to different parts of the brain, suggesting ""paying attention to literary texts requires the coordination of multiple complex cognitive functions"" (Natallie Phillips qtd. in Goldman n. pag.). Further Goldman notes, "[i]f the ongoing analysis continues to support the initial theory, Phillips said, teaching close reading (i.e., attention to literary form) "could serve – quite literally – as a kind of cognitive training, teaching us to modulate our concentration and use new brain regions as we move flexibly between modes of focus"" (Phillips qtd. in Goldman n. pag.). And, perhaps, similar "close readings" or attending to literary bioregionalisms could enact similar effects.

new bioregion: Edmonton and its (in)conspicuous resident the white-tailed jackrabbit, a species much like the Norway rat in that its range follows and expands with human sub/urban city development. I include Edmonton and the hare as evidence that literary bioregionalism is transportable, and that arts based research promotes ongoing progression as an ecological subject of the cosmos, not just of a bioregion.

In making sense out of place through the other-than-human inhabitants, I learn much about a city from their presence, their absence and their hauntings. This project traces, in its autobiographical narrative interludes, the processes by which I came to see myself as a bioregional citizen, and how my production of and relation to the Norway rat is as important as my research on the species itself. The ecological principles that I explore through this process are not new; however, they have provided me with a novel creative method and vocabulary for articulating convictions about my relationship with the biophysical world, relationships that I have cultivated and acted upon all my life. In this respect, I was very much like Harry Thurston—a child and youth who spent large amounts of time immersed in the outdoors, observant of patterns of bird migrations, berry seasons, and intertidal inhabitants but who had no vocabulary in which to frame them. "Habitat Studies" initiated many trips to the sciences library, which led to the novelty of ecocriticism: reading literature, to borrow Richard Kerridge's words, in an "ecological context" (536). But, much in the spirit of Sidney Dobrin and Christian Weisser's advocacy for an advanced ecocomposition pedagogy, I also moved beyond textual analysis. I was encouraged to think on the practice of writing and my role as a writer of the other-than-human as the subject itself. The focus allowed for what Ricou always stressed as a "writing as thinking" model that did not separate the two critical endeavours of analysis and compositional theorization and practice. Rather, the method allows for both interpretation of texts and culture *and* an evaluation of my "own

discursive acts as being inherently ecological […] to see communication, writing, and the production of knowledge as ecological endeavours" (Dobrin and Weisser 116) so that I became interconnected with wider discursive practices.

My shift toward an arts based research pedagogical practice finds its influence in Ricou's "Habitat Studies" because of its non-linear approach to learning acquisition. Fundamental to my approach is Ricou's repeatedly stressed dictum that in a study of habitat, it is no longer enough as scholars of literature to draw from a literary store. We must make forays into other disciplines, particularly the sciences, but with the understanding that they are each one of many epistemologies for accessing a bioregion. We do not have to import and apply scientific principles to our reading, but if we do, he stresses "you *get the science right*" ("Out" 3). Getting it right, he tells us, means reading the scientific literature alongside the poem, finding the ways that the two writings inform and interact to enhance its meaning. "Getting it right" involves cross-referencing science dictionaries with the *Oxford English Dictionary*, negotiating field guides and literary guides, wading into scientific journals and lexicons, navigating the Latin taxonomies and scientific jargon. Then when we begin to feel we have somewhat of a handle on the language, we let loose the literary sensibility, trace the words to their etymologies, play with the words' stems and roots, look for the narratives, the tropes. *Play* is the key, because as I noted in Chapter One, surprise is one of literary ecology's pedagogical characteristics. Discover where languages settle, dig in, stabilize, erode, and entangle with other languages and matter.

In simple terms, Ricou's "Habitat Studies" is a method for listening to—a practice of *attending to*—home. As that latter phrase implies, Ricou invites us to not only listen but also to be present to the habitat. In being present, we learn "to wait" and "to heed" ("Out" 349). Inherent in listening (not hearing) is respect for the other, and an expectation "to be

differently informed" ("Out" 347). As *habitat* implies, other is not necessarily always human. Listening, thus, begins with the particular, a focused detail of a bioregion. The student begins with a single species (either native or invasive), and moves outward horizontally to map a bioregion comprised of a myriad of interconnections. The horizontal enquiry aims to resist and to decentralize dominating narratives that construct region as monocultural or set up binaries. Ricou, however, is resistant to using the moniker "bioregionalism studies." He claims "Habitat Studies" is less ideological. Habitat, as he proposes, conveys more readily than bioregionalism the sense of "dwelling and livability—and invites the reimagining implied by rein*habitation*" (362). To an extent, I agree with Ricou; *habitat* is homely and does not reek of the dogma present in any *ism*. *Habitat* evokes an immediacy that calls up the biophysical environment and echoes the everyday living practices of a *habit*. However, as the phrase *rooted in place*, *reinhabitation* comes with a set of complex relations that hint at colonizing tendencies, that seeds *isms*—another form of re-rooting, so to speak. I prefer my *isms* up front. Ricou's "Habitat Studies" stresses foremost reciprocity and respect, which serves for me as foundational guiding principles for a pedagogical/political practice in a culturally and materially diverse bioregion. Good relations that emerge from reciprocity begin from a point of mutual respect. In an era when Aboriginal peoples in Canada initiate movements such as Idle No More, it becomes even more imperative that as allies, non-Indigenous Canadians cultivate a decolonizing lexicon that implicates their complicity in colonialism and demonstrates willingness for change. And, so in this context, bioregionalism, despite its dogmatic implications, has a mapped history that records a wrangling with it earlier uncritical appropriation of Native American ecologies and belief systems and enacts a critical reappraisal and respectful understanding of Indigenous beliefs and cultural practices as part of, but laden with cultural and historical

concerns that set them apart from non-Indigenous preoccupations. Reconfiguring bioregionalism to reassert settler/settling, in/un-settling/re-settling, as I do, attends to and keeps prominent the politics, reformulates place in de-colonizing terms.

Learning about another species or habitat is as much about learning about one's self in relation to others, human and other-than-human. Ecopedagogy promotes self-reflection. Though cultural and natural histories play a role in my urban tale, I draw on self-reflexivity as a deliberate anthropocentric strategy. As Don McKay notes, anthropocentricism is unavoidable, as humans' reliance on language for communication reveals the limitations of human expression, particularly when translating the "voices" of the other-than-human. Language as a material expression enables an unavoidable "restructuring of the world" (McKay 29). Anthropocentricism thus keeps present human limitations. As such, humans have a responsibility to use language "thoughtfully" (McKay 29). I situate my interaction with material agency as an encounter of my biotic self-expression and that of the other-than-human as reading vital histories together. Self-reflexivity in relation to the biome decentralizes the human, while situating the human as one of many interactors in a bioregion. As a method of storytelling, the relation of the self to the biophysical environment becomes a means of analysis and synthesis of experience and knowledge through creative expression. Further, I begin to perceive an agential materialist thinking in which the biophysical environment as a myriad of interacting life processes interrupts the routines and influences of an urban ecological subject identity formation. In this manner, I take a risk: I follow the rabbit and the rat into unfamiliar terrain. I surprise myself. And, I realize that, unlike Alice, it is not so important that I find my way back home again because I am living in and on it, a planet; home is always emerging underfoot.

An Illustrated Investigation: Adventures in Habitat: An Urban Tale

Follow the project far enough to surprise yourself. Then go back to it. Be patient and relentless. Dream. Surprise yourself again.

—Laurie Ricou, "Out of the Field Guide: Teaching Habitat Studies"

A black shape leaps, plummets twelve storeys, ripples down windows, spirals and wavers, pulls up short, flies back to the top of the building and leaps again. No one notices. No one sees the body-head bop before the dive, no one hears the guttural call among Vancouver's urban corridors—how the sound scrapes through the traffic and construction on Davie Street. No one sees the murder of Northwest crows that appears and chases the bird down Hornby Street, headed toward the answering call of another raven. Their ears plugged into, eyes and thumbs locked onto smartphones, iPods, and mp3 players, pedestrians pass me by, shoulder check me; their bags knock my hips. No one notices.

When people think of cities, they commonly think of concrete, theatres, high-rises, sidewalks, nightclubs, shopping malls, vacant-eyed and fast paced pedestrians, cars and buses clogging narrow streets. In such built habitats, Neil Evernden's claim resonates: "genuine attachment to place for humans [is] very difficult" ("Beyond" 101). If we continue framing his proposal in relation to cities, his point offers a useful way of thinking

[38] Rat silhouette and city silhouette figures (here and at the end of this piece) are clip art sourced under the Creative Commons licensing www.clipartbest.com.

about our relationship with the nonhuman world. He claims that humans are "nicheless" species; their way of living excludes them from participating in an ecosystem's natural processes. What he means by nicheless is that, as a species, we have fallen out of our ecological and evolutionary contexts. Instead, with the aid of technologies, we shape these contexts to meet our needs. We are "capable of material existence," but we lack the capacity to commit to "an organic community" (*The Natural* 110) as co-extensive and coevolving. With this disassociation, we lose our capacity to understand and live within a place's regenerative limits (carrying capacity) (*The Natural* 109). Cities thus framed maintain an illusion of separation from local sustaining biophysical processes. Evernden proposes that if we attend to how other organisms function in and sensorily engage with a territory, we create potential to understand what it means to be *human* and find more sustainable ways of reinhabitation. As we are creatures who tend to be omnivorous, and to live in excess of our habitat's carrying capacity, he suggests we may realize our embodied limits through comparison with another creature's inhabitation of our shared environment. Yet, in a city under a constant influx of noise and disruption, where our senses diminish and nature seems invisible or nonexistent, such a task seems nearly impossible, some may argue futile. What organisms would we study? Pigeons, starlings, raccoons, jackrabbits, dandelions? And, how would studying rock pigeons in Vancouver, or jackrabbits in Edmonton, for instance, open interconnections between individuals, communities, and urban living? What if those nonhuman city dwellers, like many of us in Canada, are invasive or introduced species, living and shaping the environment through similar opportunistic strategies? These questions, I realize, have no singular answer, as each encounter with the nonhuman predicates a different response based on its species: some residents endorse empathetic co-habitation, while others incite zeal reminiscent of mobs

with pitchforks and torches. Very few turn those questions back on themselves. Though, I have no singular answer, I adapt my critical enquiry to correspond to the cultural and material diversities of cities. In this particular urban tale, my narrative structure becomes an exploration of complementary modes of reception and expression of this diversity; it shifts between the collective, cultural, personal, and scholarly. At times these shifts seem abrupt. But, as with moving through a city, these paths of enquiry force unexpected turns that often lead to unanticipated connections.

A pluralistic approach is fundamental to ecological urban living as it enables an apprehension not just of a city's ecology as a whole, but also of an individual's interaction as part of an urban collective that includes the nonhuman. Without learning to grasp the ways in which urbanites and the biophysical world interact within these spaces, we will always struggle to see cities as anything but environments shaped by humans. Of course, this claim is a well-rooted and flourishing sentiment in the environmental humanities. But, that is my point: it seems this growth has little reach beyond environmental criticism. And so, while the notion that we ought to pay closer attention to the human and nonhuman interactions of place remains a truism among ecocritics, the crux is that it persists as a novelty or does not register at all to a wider population who are marginally or not invested in environmental issues.

Our inability to recognize the biodiversity, may be as David Suzuki suggests, because cities are "human-created habitat[s] that [are] severely diminished in biological diversity. Our surroundings are dominated by one species—us—and the few plants and animals that we decide to share space with or cannot quite eliminate. In such an environment, it becomes easy to think that our creativity has enabled us to escape the constraints of our biological nature" (13). Yet, I wonder if Suzuki, caught up in the

movement of the city crowd, lost sight of his surroundings. If he walked by the lots overrun with Himalayan blackberry and Morning Glory. And, if he glimpsed these spaces, he dismissed them as enclaves of weeds and invasive species. If he did not see the varied thrush and finches foraging among the plants. Or perhaps, if he stopped for a moment, when a "vacant" lot popped out, alive with orange California poppies, the midnight work of urban guerrilla gardeners. As with most human built environments, for millennia, cities have created niches for other species (exotic and native). Bridge girders and house attics have become nesting sites for birds and bats; sewers and basements take the place of field warrens; green belts, golf courses, and alleyways become wildlife corridors. In many cases, "we" do not "decide" and often cannot eliminate them, particularly those urban cohabitants that we deem pests or trash animals, such as racoons or Norway rats.

What we need is a relational representational form of transgressive ecological literacy that collapses boundaries between genres, cultural differences, disciplines, partisan politics, and regions. An important step in creating such a literacy is to apprehend how another creature fits into, shares, and reshapes a world constructed by and for humans. For this endeavour, we need to turn to artistic forms that embody the complex interplay between the biographical (of human, nonhuman, place), the autobiographical (the personal) and material (biogeochemical) processes. Forms that cross the thresholds of common assumptions prompt thinking the unthinkable: that the species that inhabit urban green-spaces (orderly and disorderly) co-constitute urban environments through their own creative agencies and material interactions. Such a focus on (or return to) material and nonhuman processes enables an organic approach to cities. By focusing on the processes of local cultural and material interactions that decentre human (self) for a shared *bios* (human and nonhuman life) in urban environments, ecological literacy offers that possibility. The

insights of aesthetic and cultural narratives can help to shift assumptions and behaviours about what it means to be human and how we interact with the biophysical world. We can "intuit a connection" (Ricou, *Salal* 118) to engage and deepen perceptions of what constitutes the construction of place. We learn through creative endeavours, as Laurie Ricou advocates, by attending to "imagined habitat, a thicket of words, within which you read yourself into place" (*Salal* 118). In these habitats, we see what it means to dwell ecologically, to find our niche. If we follow Ricou's suggestion, then creativity is not a constraint, but a method to work through the paradox of learning to live within our limits and push past our limitations. In order to see ourselves in relation to the nonhuman world, we need to keep ourselves simultaneously in and out of sight.

It is 2010, and I am three years into my PhD program. As Laurie Ricou, my MA supervisor, encouraged me to move to another city to do my final degree, I chose Edmonton. I grapple with this place, so different from Vancouver. The big sky, the muted browns, the short seasonal burst of greens, the dryness. The first thing I noticed driving into Edmonton, in 2007, was how the suburbs sprawl unchecked, abut oil refineries and industrial lots. Since then, I have made many returns to the West coast. I tell Christine, another relocated Vancouverite who also frequently escapes west, that it's all the salmon we ate growing up. They've altered our genes, filled our cells with a coastal homing urge.

But, this evening in 2010, I am not in Vancouver; I am in Edmonton. I stand in the Telus Theatre's lobby, a glass atrium that overlooks a corner of University of Alberta's north campus. I retrieve the letter from my satchel. I turn the sealed envelope over in my hand, read the sender's address again. Though I am curious to know what Laurie has sent

me, for now, I resist opening the letter. I move closer to and look out the window. It is early March and snow still falls. I look past my reflection, and peer out into the night, watch the students and faculty pass by. Something catches my attention, not a movement, but rather a practised stillness that contrasts with the other snow-covered clumps of bush that line the sidewalk. I lean closer to the glass, push my reflection further away: a white-tailed jackrabbit (*Lepus townsendii*), wearing its winter white hunches between two shrubs.

As the seasons change, so does their coat from grey to tan to white. These hares always take me by surprise. When I notice pedestrians pass within inches without reaction or downward glances, I smile. I nearly trip on their frozen forms in both winter and summer. When I startle them, they do not so much hop away as run like squat, miniature deer weaving through parked cars and dumpsters, galloping down the middle of residential streets. The previous summer, while walking downtown, I stumbled across two huddled on the edge of a parking lot adjacent to City Centre Mall at 102 Street and 103 Avenue. Blocked in by office towers and 104 Avenue's six lanes, I wondered how they managed to end up here. And then, a week later, three blocks east on 106 Street, I disturbed one grazing on a narrow strip of grass. It bolted to a parking lot across the street, stopped against a white-stuccoed building, and pushed its body against the one, chipped spot of exposed concrete.

To understand the complex interplay of human and nonhuman relations, enquiry "has to start somewhere, it has to start with a specific" (Ricou, *Salal* 108). For Ricou, specificity begins with a local species or cultural artefact. So I began my journey through the local under the mentorship of a singular species that inhabited the Pacific Northwest. Through Ricou's ongoing teachings, I soon realized that local ecological investigation

moved naturally into the realm of global concerns. Ecology was not just a study of local biogeochemical interactions; it was a globalized way of thinking. Though born and raised in British Columbia's lower mainland, I was shocked by how little I knew and had been educated about local histories, both cultural and natural. By reading the species' ecologies against wider human cultural and personal events, my perceptions of individual and collective local identities and affiliations have shifted. But, that shift also occurred through negotiating the interdisciplinary approach that Ricou advocated. For as I learned, *his* method was a loosely structured process of enquiry—with only a seeming hint of madness. The more forays I made into other disciplines, the more I felt my own disciplinary constraints loosening their fast hold; I became more open in my search, and eventually a method did emerge, one oddly compatible with my own patterns of thinking. As I listened to my species, my species began to guide me to the interconnections. Admittedly, it often made me feel frustrated, like I was running along the same pathways repeatedly, dropping down black holes, coming at things obliquely or with a disciplinary short sightedness. Despite these frustrations, though, the species led me always to surprising places.

I began to hear a diversity and expression of agencies; I began to hear myself—"ourselves"—in the voices of others, human and nonhuman. I began to imagine what another species sees in our form, hears in our voices, smells on our bodies, tastes on our breath, feels in our movements through its/our territories. And, then, while thinking these questions, the unexpected: I found a poem by Margaret Atwood, "Rat Song."

"Rat Song" is one of ten poems in Margaret Atwood's series "Songs of the Transformed" (see Appendix B.3). Animals sing their plight, their bitter insights, and their rage. They are fabulist turnings of human and animal that blur distinction between species, emphasizing clearly humanist constraints (and animal complaints). This poem is not a song

in the classical sense; there is no exaltation of the subject, no high praise. Instead, Atwood writes a visceral song of otherness— an irregular ode to human bestiality and bittersweet celebration of rat intelligence. She sings in a vernacular: vulgarity, violence, and insult. She sings in chords of "crystal hatreds": discord.

The repeated patterns in "Rat Song" show how human obsession manifests as habituated ways of thinking and behaviour that sediments identity as "natural." Atwood's poem is not a song about a rat; it is a preoccupation of human self-interest. Sung from a rat's perspective, however, the poem invites us to contemplate this obsession from our own animality. As the rat repeatedly voices "you" and "I," she upsets the formal distance and distinction between subjects. This collapse of distance, coupled with the pronouns as indexical references, creates both bound and unbound contexts and meaning. At first, "You" refers specifically to human/reader and "I" to rat/speaker. The title and action of the opening verse paragraph determines the distinction. However, the repetition—the obsessive and dizzyingly iteration—of "you" and "I" throughout the poem, subsumed and spoken by the reader's own voice and joined with the rat's litany of accusations undermines a clear division between the two species.

Then at the centre of the poem, hinges a flip-mirrored vision of human and rat: "humanist. See if you can," sings the rat. This line, bookended by the poem's first line, "When you hear me singing," and the poem's last line, "I can hear him singing," divides the poem into action, accusation, thought, and subjunctives. The first half reveals how the human behaves and thinks; the second half illustrates how the rat acts and what she sees and desires. The word "humanist" drops down off an enjambment as both a declaration and pejorative that exclaims, "All I want is love, you stupid." The blank space at the line-end causes pause, yet "stupid" finds not only a skin-crawling phonic echo in the repeated esses,

but also an assonant emphasis (and echo of "you") in the internal repetition of the "u" in "humanist." The pause is further emphasized by its abrupt halt at a midline end-stop. The period trips up the rhythm, jumps a beat straight into another sibilant, the rat- hissed imperative and challenge "See if you can." Intensified by the second end-stop in the line and its repetition of "you" and the vowel's phonetic echoes in "stupid / humanist," the rat's contempt astounds. It is familiar in its resemblance to the loathing humans reserve for rats, and seems outrageous because it is directed at us. The effect of such recognition along with the poem's formal constraints temporarily immobilizes the reader. The line's two end-stops punctuate the anthropocentricism and speciesism that inevitably will prevent the "humanist" from rising to the rat's challenge, for as the term "humanist" maintains, human condition and values are the central concerns.

Though rat and human do not share similar physical attributes, the pronoun references unmoored from their antecedents amplify a merging of rat and human that evokes revulsion for both parties ("and you think I'm ugly too"—the inconceivable made plausible: "you" "too" are ugly to a rat). Human disgust and terror manifest in the various methods employed to exterminate the rat: gunshot, poison, and drowning. These methods intimate a level of barbarism that seems, for the size of the animal, out of proportion, inhumane, and further speaks to an escalating level of frustration. And from the rat's cunning and ability to evade death, this is an almost absurd and futile human pursuit. A frustration the rat mocks in her declaration: "I don't stick around to be slaughtered." If read in the context of the abundance of historical and current rat narratives, through the line's compounding of the present active voice to the infinitive, we hear in her song a promise of continued conflict between us and them. The dare to you, I, to love her, "a parasite" that survives "off your / leavings, gristle and rancid fat" seems a deliberate sabotage to

undermine any human attempt to rise to her challenge. Yet, the possibility of human affection perhaps never really was a possibility to begin with, only an imagining on our and her part: a performance of rat, of human. As readers, we sing aloud the rat's words, and in doing so make them our words, our voices declaring, "I take without asking." So no surprise, then, when the rat recognizes her mate's song "trapped in your throat" drowned by "your greasy person voice," she wants "your throat." The forward slash that separates "he is hiding / between your syllables" offers a visual (and violent) cue and space for improvisation of the multiple (imagined and implied) meanings. We wonder where the rat hides: in human breath that creates the gaps that give form to words, make the rat intelligible, and thus evade capture. Or, in the pauses, the hesitations and limitations of "your" language, where she hears a rat. The slash, thus, becomes a humanist snare, a literal typographical snap-trap that forces "you" and "I" (human and rat) to sing together, hear the song, listen to the words, to be held in judgment by the other, to deem who and what is the beast.

I wonder if the rabbit looks back at me. It is too dark to see its eyes. I step back from the atrium's window; the rabbit disappears into my reflection. The Telus Theatre's foyer has filled near capacity. Eden Robinson is the Kreisel Lecture speaker tonight. I walk up the stairs, then stop halfway. I flip the envelope over and tear open the flap. There is no accompanying note or letter, only a photocopy of a *Harper's Magazine* essay: Charles Bowden's "The Wisdom of Rats." I frown. Nearly eight years have passed since I wrote my Habitat Studies piece for Laurie's class. This unexpected essay without note of explanation seems abrupt. Randomly sent my way. Of course, I think, this has no ulterior motive. It is one more rat thing sent to me by a friend. I read the first line, "As a child I could not color

within the lines" (13). My frown turns into a pinch. I feel a tap on my shoulder, turn: Dianne and Kate stand behind me. I stuff the essay and envelope back into my satchel, and continue to walk up the stairs. My brow relaxes. I smile, tap my bag.

My first encounter with Laurie was in his Canadian Long Poem undergraduate course at the University of British Columbia. After the first class, his gruff demeanour made me retreat from the front to the back row, and then to my advisor, Judy Brown, to ask why she had recommended I take his course. I explained how he walked in carrying a hard-shell briefcase, a grim set to his mouth. His first words to our class: "This is a course on poetry. We will be studying poems. So if you think studying poems is not for you, I suggest you leave." A few students did. After his impatience with my answers, I wondered why I too hadn't left. Judy only laughed and encouraged I drop by his office. So, I did. And, as we discussed radish seeds, gardening, and Robert Kroetsch's long poem *Seed Catalogue* for thirty minutes, he taught me a new way of reading (I discovered, too, when he made me look up the meaning of *radish*, that his briefcase contained only the *Canadian Oxford English Dictionary*). The next term, I enrolled in his English Majors Seminar on invasive species, a new direction in his Habitat Studies course, which normally focused on native Pacific Northwest flora and fauna.

His syllabus mentioned no required books, only a course description, expectations, a rough outline of the term, and a listing of species. Early on in the term, we left the classroom, and walked to a grassy area north of the UBC Anthropology Museum. We stopped under a Western red cedar, next to a tangle of Himalayan blackberry, the Salish Sea below us. Laurie rocked on his heels, scratched the top of his head, and held out a baseball cap filled with crumpled paper scraps. We'd been waiting for this moment: our

"four month obsession." *English ivy. English ivy, please. English ivy. Please.* I unfurl my paper. I turn to the young woman beside me, and I see the scrawl of *ivy*… "No swapping species," Laurie calls out, looking at no one in particular.

Sweet Jesus.

Rattus norvegicus, also known as the Norway rat, brown rat, wharf rat, house rat, barn rat, common rat, grey rat, water-rat, sewer rat, Hanoverian rat (believed to have accompanied George I from Germany to England in 1714), the Friesen *ierdat* (earth rat), and *Wanderatte* (roving rat), is a commensal animal who essentially dines at the human table without contributing anything to the meal. Like most humans, the opportunistic rodent is omnivorous, which "gives these species a considerable edge when foraging" in major settlements (Garber 184). It thrives in the Northern Hemisphere. Habitats range from sewers, urban lakes, toxic land sites, landfills, alleys and lanes, university campuses, city parks, plazas, cellars, subways, rail yards, grain elevators, barns, haystacks, grain and corn fields, marshes, markets, demolition sites, under single-dwelling houses, apartments, derelict and condemned buildings, wharves, and shorelines. As its various names and its habitats suggest, the Norway rat is cosmopolitan and highly adaptive.

Much literature over the centuries has depicted Norway rats as war-hungry creatures that descend in hordes, scourging and colonizing new territories. For instance, Hans Zinsser in his work *Rats, Lice, and History* compares the Norway rat's introduction to Europe: "just as established civilizations of Northern Europe were swept aside by the mass invasions of barbarians from the East, so the established hegemony of the black rat was eventually wiped out . . . [by] the ferocious, short-nosed, and short-tailed Asiatic" (199-200). A more probable and non-racist explanation, however, is found in the growing density and

expansion of urban development. Wood shingles replaced thatch roofs, streets became common garbage tips, and underground sewers, water mains, and cellars opened up new harbourage sites for Norway rats, while black rats (roof and attic dwellers) saw their habitats shrinking.

The urge to read animals in humans and humans in animals, of course, is nothing new. Animals have been our fabulist mirrors for thousands of years: they are the flesh for many of our stories. In Canada, there are stories where the Norway rat and human relationship defies this generic category. In the coalmines of Nova Scotia, the miners regularly fed the Norway rats. The coal-blackened corner of bread where the miner pinched his sandwich was a standard meal for the pit rats. The miners' treated them with deference, and in some instances introduced them to the mines because their presence—or rather their absence—could save their lives. If the rats were absent from or seen exiting the mine, the miners knew to stay out or to follow; it meant that a bump or collapse was about to occur.[39]

For the most part, however, our stories dismiss rats as abominations. Too often, we focus on their consumption behaviours and overlook our own. As Gavan Watson contends, "we project our own neuroses about urban living onto [trash animals] that share the landscape with us. [They] come to represent the results of our contested urban living arrangements. What we find problematic with these [species], we should find problematic about our own city existence" (36). Watson's observation emphasizes how the way we focus on these species' colonizing tendencies reflects back onto our own colonizing attitudes and behaviours. Is Edmonton's suburban sprawl east-, north-, west-, and

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[39] I encountered the stories of pit rats on my tours of Spring Hill Mine and Glace Bay Mines in Nova Scotia.

southward any less invasive than the Norway rat's spread across Vancouver's cityscape? Whose habitats do we disrupt?

As urban sprawl and density grow, biota leave or die, stay or return and carve out a niche. Cities have their own natural habitats: eutrophic lakes, ponds, landfills, bogs, forests, parks, alleys, lanes, railway corridors, shorelines, abandoned factories and warehouses, empty lots, backyards, front yards, sidewalks, golf courses. Native and introduced species cohabitate in these spaces, some more dominantly than others. The disorderly or unconventional niches we categorize as eyesores. Often, though we do not necessarily welcome them, we come to accept them as inevitable characteristics of city landscapes, and so become inured to their presence. Eventually, as DJ Renegade haiku-raps, we rarely notice

Beside the dumpster
a rat drinking rainwater
from an eggshell

And then when we don't see them, but their presence still encounters us: musk, scat, paw print, bones, feather, song. Despite their tenacity, their determination to share this environment with us, we remain, for the most part, determined to minimize their inhabitation. Sometimes this is for good reason, such as their potential for transmitting diseases and their potential threat to human well-being and property.

Yet, as Ricou persists, "Maybe we need to listen for another tongue, open to the possibility of the creature naming *us*" ("Out" 349). Though we may only ever imagine their songs of us, an ecological literacy that enables us that imaginative capacity helps us to recognize o*ur* cultural practices. They have the power to translate the matter(s) hidden from us, to invite us underground, to burrow and emerge in startling places, to surprise us.

White Rock beach, British Columbia, summer, it is the early or mid-1970s. There is a mixed smell of raw sewage, brine, and sun-baked creosote. A dike keeps the BNR tracks above sea level and stops the tides from flooding Marine Drive. It's covered in basalt ballast, and shored up on the seaward side with granite boulders. Himalayan blackberries wend through the boulders. Culverts protrude from the dikes at random intervals, extending out to the foreshore. My brothers and I spend most of our summer days here, exploring the eight-kilometre stretch of sand and water that connects West and East beaches. Our mother, always well-stocked with cigarettes, magazines, and pulp novels, has her regular tanning spot on West beach. It is understood we are to wander off and play. A Coleman cooler filled with soggy tuna sandwiches, Old Dutch chips, and Pop Shoppe sodas ensures our return.

Most days, I would wander on my own, explore the tidal pools, pick blackberries, walk the underside of the pier, or make my way to East beach to where Little Campbell River emerged from the Semiahmoo First Nations Reserve. At high tide, I scrambled over the boulders. I was small and underdeveloped for my age, but fast and agile. I would leap from rock to rock without pause, a mountain goat, bare feet slapping granite. On this particular day, I hesitate: a flicker of a tail. I hurry to where it has disappeared, only to see it re-emerge a few feet away, then, its brown flank a blur, drop down another hole. I follow. I let my body slip head first down among the boulders, use my hands to pull me forward. The further I descend, the more space opens up. I see a movement ahead; a face turns toward me, a backward glance. We make eye contact. Then it continues onward, but at a slower pace. I follow, pulling and turning sideways through narrow tunnels. The rat's tail, a string

in my sight, guides me, and leads me eventually to daylight. I emerge a short distance from my entry-point, squirm out of the opening, blink, and startle a sunbather.

Subterranean dwellers, brown rats live in a network of tunnels with one or more nesting and feeding chambers, and multiple entryways. In British Columbia's Lower Mainland, they largely inhabit the waterfronts, but also reside in any building that provides accessible harbourage, regardless of the neighbourhood's demographic. The Norway rat arrived in North America around the time of the War of Independence in 1775. In the early-nineteenth century, the brown rat followed human settlement, spread rapidly across the continent, up into British North America (BNA), and rapidly pushed out the black rat (Twigg 24). The lack of Old World parasites and diseases coupled with ideal living conditions, an omnivorous palate, and fecundity allowed populations to explode and expand from Florida to Newfoundland, from California to Alaska. In its movements across BNA/ Canada, the Norway rat acquired a renowned history. As British colonists and migrant workers moved westward, they set up camps and built farming communities and grain silos adjacent to the trans-Canadian railway. These communities presented optimal commensal arrangements for the Norway rat. The Rocky Mountains would have been a natural deterrent for the rats, but in the 1950s, Albertans halted the brown rat's progress. Through an extensive rat control program, which involved public education and a heavy hand with shovels, guns, and Warfarin, they halted the westward migration of the Norway rat. Today, a small but dedicated rat program continues and ensures that rat infestations in Alberta remain few.

Not all Norway rats arrived in Canada by the East coast, though. By the 1850s, Norway rats had found their way into British Columbia by ships. According to an early-

twentieth-century local naturalist, Allen Brooks, in 1887, the wharf rat was a common sight in Vancouver, New Westminster, and Victoria: [they] "swarmed at the three large seaports and along the coast" (68). However, though they were sighted as far as Chilliwack in 1894, near the east end of the Fraser Valley, the brown rats were and remain absent or scarce in the province's interior (BC Ministry of Environment n. pag.). In 1918, Strathcona, one of Vancouver's first residential and industrial areas, abutted the False Creek mudflats that extended from English Bay to present day Clark Drive. At very high tides, its waters flooded into Burrard Inlet. Flowing down into the mudflats were 120 kilometres of salmon and cutthroat trout streams. From the 1880s to the 1950s, Vancouver's False Creek was the terminus for the CPR and the CNR. Sawmills and other industries occupied the land. Over this period, the city gradually filled in the Flats, forced streams underground, and built more industry. After World War I, however, Vancouver's temperate climate and the lure of potential work attracted a large influx of unemployed men. By the 1930s, a "hobo jungle" of tents and flimsily constructed shacks developed on the Flats, which housed approximately one thousand homeless men, many who were Great War veterans (Atkin 62). Vancouver's dump, near China Creek, was adjacent to this shanty town. Raw sewage outfalls from the residential neighbourhoods and toxic pollutants from sawmills and industry also flowed into False Creek Flats. Despite the mixed semi-diurnal tides and the outflow from freshwater streams, the flats became "unsanitary, rat infested wastes" (Burkinshaw 4041). This is not surprising, as *Rattus norvegicus* "has a tendency to dominate garbage dumps," and inhibit the "establishment of potential colonizers"; its presence "sometimes become[s] considerable in those dumps where pest control is inadequate" (Darlington 93). Indicative of general sentiment and significant in Burkinshaw's observation is his coupling of rats as a negative modifier of "wastes": an

oversight that does not distinguish how waste, in this context, as a product of human consumption creates the physical environment for rats to develop their niche.

John Crossetti, a resident of Vancouver's Strathcona neighbourhood, recalls how, as kids, he and his friends used to go to this dump, a place "infested with rats . . . and try to kill [them] but . . . never got them" (qtd. in Marlatt and Itter 56). Yun Ho Chang, another resident, similarly relates, "I would stop for a few minutes and watch because these rats were all running around, dragging each other along by the tail. Some of them were as big as cats. Lots of other people watched too, it was a sort of rat theatre" (n. pag.). By the 1970s, the degraded state of the Flats initiated a clean-up of False Creek. Industries were pushed out, squatters removed, and Granville Island Market place was constructed. Nevertheless, because of the city's failure over the decades to manage and control waste on Vancouver's waterfronts, pest control proved inadequate. The Norway rats remained and thrived. In False Creek, Yun Ho Chang's rat theatre continues today.

Taking time out to watch this rat performance, Ricou would propose, is a way-finding through getting lost in the ecological processes of your own backyard. "To listen," he writes, "is to *wait*—patiently—for a sound to be absorbed, maybe to become a message. Perhaps to *heed*. Perhaps to listen *in* on" ("Out" 348-49). The next time you visit Granville Island, never mind the Arts Club Theatre. Purchase a coffee. Find a bench with a view of the boulders that line the shore, let your gaze roam randomly over the rocks, and eventually you will see a skittering flick, a scaly tail, popping heads, and a chase or boxing match. Their bodies "spines pulled in an inflexible / French curve, all haunch to keep their mouths / at the earth, licking dust" (Degen 28).

Anna Jorgensen claims that there is no clear distinction between "regulated and wild urban places: rather there is a continuum ranging from 'wilderness' to apparently

ordered spaces, with different levels of wildness existing at multiple different scales at each locality. In this sense, wildscape can be seen as an idea, a way of thinking about urban space, rather than a closed category that can be spatially located" (2). The rat's capacity to inhabit various urban harbourage sites, regardless of the economic location of the area, disrupts dichotomous assumptions of what constitutes a wild urban space. Is the space wild because an unpredictable, undomesticated species resides there? Is a rat colony in Vancouver's affluent Kerrisdale neighbourhood or UBC's campus less a wilderness site than a hotel in the city's Downtown Eastside? Or rather than thinking in terms of *wild* and *wilderness*, perhaps we should follow Laurie's suggestion and refer to them as habitats. A niche refers to *how* a species lives in relation to its habitat, which is the physical environment that a species inhabits (Callenbach 78). Habitat, thus, as Laurie proposes in a footnote, "has an amplitude that allows for all forms of living-in, including the cultural (that is, human) and imagined" ("Out" 363). As it attends to ecological interdependencies, habitat forces us to think relationally. We define *wild* and *wilderness* divisively, by what they are not: civilized, domesticated. Habitat's focus accentuates the complex interplay of movements that transgress and transform strict demarcations of boundaries.

In 2011, in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, developer Marc Williams had the Pantages Theatre, an old vaudeville heritage site demolished to make space for Sequel 138, a condominium development. After the demolition he did not clear the site, but left it as a holding ground for the debris and garbage; consequently, over the course of a year, it became an optimal habitat for Norway rats. Vancouver's *Global News* quotes one resident, Ben Smith, "If you're sitting at my window, and looking out, the ground moves. There are so many rats, the ground actually looks like it's moving" (McArthur and Meiszner n. pag.).

Williams is part of a controversial push by Vancouver developers to gentrify the Downtown Eastside, one of Canada's poorest urban communities. Williams' plans for Sequel 138 include art and commercial space on the main floor, urban agriculture on the second level roof garden, 79 one-bedroom condos priced from $227,000 and 18 social housing units (Werb n. pag.). In a public effort to shame both the city into issuing a clean-up order and Williams into taking responsibility for his waste, Downtown Eastside residents conducted a rat count on his lot, a parody of naturalists' backyard bird counts. Shortly after, the city intervened, and the site was cleaned up. The rats remained. The removal of the debris cleared the surface, but did not address the problem beneath.

The rat count is a form of ecological literacy: recognition of the interconnections between a seeming inescapable poverty, disregard of land use or maintenance, and degraded environmental and human health. Whether intentionally or not, by disregarding requests to clean the site and leaving the lot in such condition, Williams imposed the inescapable ecologies, which Linda Nash claims throughout her book *Inescapable Ecologies,* traps the disenfranchised in not just material locations but also in seemingly "naturalized" social categorizations. As Nash repeatedly illustrates, poor communities become local dumping grounds and locations for toxic industries and classist and racist policies. And, the rats, I add, become implicated too, caught in a circular logic: where there is poverty, there will be rats, where there are rats, there will be poverty. We recognize them as vectors of harmful disease and see this characteristic as inseparable from their habitats: waste lands, which tend to be located in economically supressed areas. We fail to see the corresponding constructed cultural waste land. We forget that we built these habitats through our neglect. The rat count made evident how out of neglect we produce, to borrow Kathleen Wallace's observation, a "strange" practice of attaching dehumanizing *isms* with

urban “environmental degradation [and] that are so pervasive that they seem natural” (72). An affluent developer cleared away his trash and debris (finally, after a year) in a Downtown Eastside neighbourhood; the rats remained.

Ecological literacy is about understanding the interrelations of *communities* as a complex interplay of human and nonhuman interactions. Investigating an animal’s niche alongside human ecologies opens up the complex material and cultural relations humans construct with other organisms within urban habitats. The rat tale is one I return to often. Their stories are ubiquitous; we like to write, read, and talk rats, cover the same ground repeatedly. I am no exception. But as Laurie insists, there are moments of surprise in these returns: I hear something new. Like Cape Breton pit rats. Or the rat count. Once the old Pantages Theatre lot became clear of Williams’ trash the site temporarily transformed into something unexpected: a raptor’s hunting ground (see Smith). Its presence makes me recall the ravens on Hornby Street and the jackrabbits by Edmonton’s City Centre Mall: their presence so *unnatural* among office towers because I clung to the wild. Their urban tales, often glimpsed only as shadows on concrete or flickers in glass, disrupt and challenge our limitations, entice us to take out the ear-buds, power off the cellphones, look away from our mirrored reflections, and seek them out. They make us attend to a rat theatre.

Conclusion: Initiating Change through Pedagogy

Ecocomposition is as much about affecting personal as well as collective political change. The Norway rat is but one route to tease out the local as globally routed, not rooted. An arts based research practice that takes up Ricou's methods of "Habitat Studies," offers a way to write oneself into environments in more tangible terms. As an ecopedagogical practice it invites students to take risks and attempt writing that guides them (I see as integral to ecocomposition) to becoming agents of social, political, and environmental change. By writing themselves into their work, giving them the courage to incorporate the "I" in relation to the topic they are writing about, they learn to acquire a personal and reflective responsibility for that issue. This said, however, does not mean anything goes. As Doerr explains, "You are achieving an understanding of yourself and your relationship with space that is both intellectual and emotional. [...] Record these changes that this whole process has brought about in your thinking about yourself. What have you discovered about yourself that surprises you?" (30). Doerr's question echoes Ricou's exhortation in the illustrative investigation, and which also appears on his syllabus: "Follow the project far enough to surprise yourself. Then go back to it. Be patient and relentless. Dream. Surprise yourself again" ("Out" 352). As the students work through and reflect on environmental problems in relation to their own emotional struggles with the issues, the surprise emerges in the realization of self-empowerment through the growing recognition of their limitations and working within those perimeters. Now placed within immediately sensed contexts, the problems previously too huge (i.e., climate change) seem approachable. A push for students' self-reflection in relation to environmental issues becomes a liberating educative practice. The problems, though not always solved, become

emotionally manageable.[40] Students by being "patient and relentless" with themselves, gain methods for simplifying and localizing "some of these dilemmas and give the students a jumping-off point in working through these ecological issues" (Doerr 136). It creates a personalized mapping toward ecoliteracy.

Yet, in the ongoing debate of literary criticism's capacity for initiating change, there is a need to widen the definitional boundaries of what constitutes activist practice. Nicholas Bradley observes, "Interdisciplinarity presumes the existence of disciplines; one disciplinary strength of literary studies is attention to figurative and otherwise aesthetic uses of language and to the range of meanings that emerge. The task of the critic, on this view, is to read closely and deeply, attending to texts and to the panoply of contexts to which they belong. The environmental capacity of criticism thus lies not primarily in action but in careful attention" (n.p.). Yet, bioregionalism is at its core a political movement that demands active participation of its local inhabitants. It is a de-centralist politics that advocates for local control over resources and governance while at the same time intimately immerses the individual in globalized geopolitics. Thus, an ecocompositional or

[40] In 2005, as a teaching assistant for the Foundation Program's environmental humanities component at the University of British Columbia, our team assigned a year-long project for the 150 students inspired by Ricou's *The Arbutus/Madrone Files*. In my section I had thirty students, twice a week for two hour tutorials, which were further divided into two sections of fifteen, one in the morning and the other in the afternoon. Over the course of the year, they were also reading works by Descartes, Rousseau, Daniel Quinn, Rachel Carson, David Orr, Gary Paul Nabhan, and many other environmentally-based works. Their main complaint was the overwhelming sense of futility they felt when reading about environmental crises, and their response was, more often than not, apathetic. Initially, the students struggled with the assignment, but then I decided to model my group's interaction upon Ricou's "Habitat Studies" methodology: every week students had to present a brief finding on their chosen local species according to different disciplines (history, science, literature, film, etc.). Yet, an interesting shift occurred not because of these readings and their accompanying lectures, but because of the pro-active tasks I had set for them regarding their species. I provide a lengthier description of this class in my Master's thesis *Wildwood Notes: Nature Writing, Music, and Newspapers* (UBC Library repository). I took them on nature walks and visits to campus museums, and as their files grew, the more invested—dare, I say obsessed—they became in their subject, and their attitude and language changed. Metaphors, familial stories, personal pronouns started to pervade their texts. Moreover, their apathy was replaced by a growing confidence that their actions did and could have consequence.

ecopedagogical project that engages regional identity issues with the development of self-identity can rarely escape politics. Likewise, when introducing environmental issues into a classroom or one's writing, politics cannot be sidelined. But as is true with all of these, as human subjects immersed in, affected by and affecting in turn the biophysical environment, the personal is also political.

There is then a further need to expand Bradley's definition and note that perhaps we have also to limit our projected range of how far criticism or arts based research initiatives can reach and influence political change. Perhaps, as educators, we need to accept the range of activism as local—as affecting ourselves, students, and peers—but which holds global reach in its capacity to travel with ourselves and those students and peers to other parts, to cross over to other disciplines. Discursive practices are enactments of world views: they are specific modes for meaning-making and disseminating that knowledge (Dobin and Weisser *Natural* 110) and they draw attention to the constraints that limit cross- and inter-cultural communication. My urban tale, by example, reveals through intersecting and braiding together disciplines what an ecopedagogical compositional practice has the potential to do: to create affiliation. Ecoliteracy is the main pursuit, but as Dobrin and Weisser point out, explored through ecocomposition it creates a "discursive ecology," which allows students to see the interconnections between seemingly disparate disciplines and how each composes its own telling of the environment. Dobrin and Weiss, for instance, offer the example of the ecologists' language as self-evident in contrast to legislators passing environmental laws (111). Thus, in this practice, compositional studies does not become just a series of lessons on disciplinary techniques and strategies of persuasion and logic, but become guides to cross-disciplinary and -cultural discursive interaction. In this context, we

learn to recognize not only competing (Dobrin and Weisser 112) but also allied discourses that can benefit collective change.

Taking risks, getting lost in other disciplines, is very much an activity that potentially exposes one's weaknesses, and thus makes apparent aspects of vulnerability, personal and professional. For always present is the fear of failure. Yet, if we have from the beginning *attended to* our subject, allowed ourselves to cross thresholds, to step out of the comfort of our domesticated spaces (much like Thurston), our efforts can never really be called a failure, even if the project does not entirely succeed as a literary critical practice. For as Travis Mason notes, risk-taking (or being vulnerable) has taught us "the value of paying attention to habitat—and all it entails" (vii). The field 'tripping' involved in the arts based pedagogy is an exercise in ecological thinking. In its serious intent to learn from others, become an interactive, interrelational engagement with bioregional literacy it demonstrates, to borrow Mason's words, a will "to step out" (210) and "[attempt] the world" (209). Bioregional literacy walks this interdisciplinary terrain not as an exercise in navel-gazing, but as self-reflective questioning of our embeddedness in and interrelations with the external world: a development of situated thinking at the edges of our limits and limitations. In this regard, Lorraine Code writes:

> Once inquiry locates itself down on the ground, ecologically, in the midst of and answerable to the specific integrity of people's cognitive practices and places, it faces imperatives extending as far beyond the walls of the laboratory as beyond those of the philosopher's study. These are about responsible inquiry, about being "true to" the experiential-material situatedness of everyday knowings. (160)

An apt statement for the rat, our laboratory companion species, which has taught us much about our genetic predispositions (and much about our dehumanizing tendencies), but whose

feral existence has much to teach us about our kinaesthetic, subjective and humanist existence. As Code iterates, we cannot make meaningful inquiries about being human in isolated contexts, i.e., in the realm of the mind or the controlled realm of objective science. These are discourses that promote a social imaginary of human mastery over the biophysical environment. Effectively, they perpetuate a dismissal of "*situated* contenders from recognition as knowers" (Code 172). Thus, the rat testimonies of Yun Ho Chang and Benjamin Smith are deemed incidental, anecdotal, supplemental rather than crucial to development of an urban ecological sensibility. Codes' point is that a reliance on these objectivist methodological approaches also endorses a type of paternalistic reception of knowledge about place rather than interactively generated and experientially engaged local ways of knowing. Because these alternative ways of knowing use different or mixed modalities of expression, such as first-person accounts or sensory descriptions, they are not seen as reliable (or as Code would argue, not measurable (174)). To simplify Code's reasoning, to divorce ecological inquiry from how we identify ourselves in our lived contexts is to separate ourselves from our stories. The Norway rat, over these past eleven years for instance, as my ecological "companion" species has become part of my self-locating story, my own testimony of my bioregional literacy, and by extension global consciousness. Our stories are multiple and comprised of the entangled complexities between culture, gender, class, race, language, other-than-human interactors, and biophysical environment, to name a few. In this respect, Code's words recall Ingold's point that regions are processes because they are ever unfolding histories: "places do not have locations but histories" (219). Places are co-constitutive of humans and a/biotic other-than-humans. Self-locating requires a pedagogy that can synthesize and convey responsible engagement with and creation of these stories as material, experiential situated knowing and being, particularly with an awareness

as habituated practices. In a similar manner, an ecological identity is never a complete subject (finished *bios*) because it is always in a state of unfolding and responding to its environment and co-inhabitants.

CONCLUSION: Earth 'Critters'[41]

There are political consequences to denying literary criticism's relevance in *actively* contending with environmental crises such as the insistence of climate change denial, for instance.[42] In *Going Local in the Global: A Canadian Literary Bioregional Turn*, as an environmental humanities study for formulating a critical literary bioregional pedagogy, my main aim is to open up discussion on how critics are an integral exponent in interpreting co-constitutive emergent ecological and social complexities. If bioregional literature is, as I posit, a representation of complex interrelations between local and global evolving social and biophysical structures and processes and requires a corresponding complexity of approaches, one may ask whether it would not then be too cumbersome to teach. I have attempted to demonstrate that ecocritics, through their specific disciplinary training and their attention to the interplay between detail (close reading) and the larger picture (thematic and structural analysis), are well suited to deconstruct and teach the nuances of local and global environmental discourses, particularly as they play out in literary bioregionalism. It is not enough to let bioregional writers work on these issues alone; as literary critics we have a 'response-ability' to help develop the ecopedagogy that these

[41] I borrow this term from and in honour of Travis V. Mason and his *Ornithologies of Desire: Ecocritical Essays, Avian Poetics, and Don McKay* (WLUP, 2013) as a point of solidarity and also admiration for his risk-taking into the field of ecocriticism at a time when "the difficulty ecocriticism has faced establishing itself as a bona fide subdiscipline attests to an undercurrent of disdain for the "jejune chatter" of such poets as Don McKay and the critics who devote a lot of space to "the flitting of birds" instead of to the fluttering of words…[who] refer disparagingly to ecocritics, or critics interested in the health of the earth, as Earth Critters. Perhaps in the spirit of the birder-poet's humility, ecocritics should claim this label. What are we, after all, if not critters of the earth?" (75).

[42] Some may assert that climate change is the crisis—understandably because this is the common articulation in public discourse (news media, environmental writings) prompted by a practice to focus on the event rather than the root of the problem. My emphasis is to point out that climate change by way of an example is a result of a greater crisis, which is the human persistence in not altering behaviour which initiates, perpetuates, and exacerbates the conditions that result in environmental disasters.

works initiate. What we do matters. We have the skills for reading and teaching reading and writing as forms of ongoing critical thinking. My illustration in Chapter Four, as well as my readings in the other chapters, reveals how in the messy complexity of art, artists do not separate these components, but synthesize them in poetic language to create a sense of a whole biospheric world view. Critics have the skills to break down and translate complexities as pedagogy because of how criticism is a practice of decomposition through reflective composition.

Because it stimulates unconventional, non-linear methods of engagement with humans and other-than-humans, literary bioregionalism is fundamental to producing and educating ecoliteracies that direct readers how to respond to environmental crisis. *Crisis*, as Richard Kahn reminds us, denotes calamity, but its secondary meaning is *to decide* (4; *Oxford Canadian Dictionary*). Thus, with the knowledge that ecosystem ecologies are dynamic, and perturbation is a constant, bioregional literature offers narratives as guidance to differentiate between harmful and healthy disruption. As it involves a continuous re-orienting and ability to decide which thresholds correspond between and sustain biophysical and social environments' healthy resiliency, bioregional literature creates pauses for the necessary self-reflection to negotiate the overwhelming abundance of environmental crisis news. Ecoliteracy depends, thus, on reading ability, which relies greatly on the capacity to listen.[43] The pauses are where the ecocritic steps in and offers

[43] Richard Kahn claims environmental education has always been "a form of nonformal popular education" reliant on writers and activists to inform the public of environmental issues (5). In Canadian universities, despite the boom in environmentally-based literature (from tweets to newspapers to trade paperbacks to scholarly articles), first-year foundational environmental core courses in literary studies remain rare, and too often randomly appear as the initiative of one or two faculty members whose research is in the field of environmental humanities. York University's *Environmental Studies Programme* is one of the few that offers an interdisciplinary Bachelor in Environmental Studies, as does Acadia University. Though their core courses

guidance on how to listen. We tend to think of ecosystem function as biophysical energy flows and recycling of matter and not situate human expressions and representations of energy or matter as part of sustaining or impeding that function. Restorative processes of ecosystems require social, not just biophysical, transformation. Ecopedagogy is one process that enables social transformation. Though self-evident as this may be for some, it remains under-developed in responses to environmental crises, which we know are a direct result of anthropogenic causes (waste management of plastics is one such example).

Yet, as ecosystems transect multiple cultures and require different sets of responses, a universal set of environmental education guidelines may seem impossible. The international Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), which focuses on economic, environmental, and educational development, however, defines literacy as "a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and wider society" (n. pag.). If we apply such a definition of literacy as an ongoing process of enabling that relies on pluralistic approaches to attain an environmental literacy, rather than imposing a series of 'thou shalt and shalt nots,' pedagogy has space to adapt to changing conditions and circumstances. It allows room for response to perturbation, to crisis. Here, dynamic ecological principles play a key role in differentiating that solutions emerge from altering human behaviour and not on an over-reliance of 'techno-fix-it' adaptations of the environment. The former approach acknowledges human relations with the biophysical environment as participatory, whereas the latter perpetuates the mechanistic, exploitative

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have them reading canonical environmental texts (i.e., Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*), each does not offer a mandatory environmentally-based first-year literary studies course.

association with the other-than-human. Altering the environment to address the mess caused by human mis-behaviour perpetuates the mis-apprehension of unlimited economic growth. Whereas changing behaviour to adapt to and prevent further environmental degradation acknowledges we live on a planet of finite resources and must start creating new accounts under 'nature's budget.'[44] Ecocritics as educators in environmental literacy have a capacity to work in tandem with the artists who work with the other-than-human to disseminate alternative 'budgetary' ecological accounts. Ecopedagogy, however, is not predicated on a harmonious cosmology that attempts a universalistic approach to all environmental problems. Nor does it set out with the assumption that the learner is eco-illiterate. Because ecoliteracy development is viewed as a continuum, it is anticipated that individuals will come with varying levels of environmental awareness. The key strategy is that ecopedagogy be interactive, that it always remains perturbing—unsettling. Culture, gender, biophysical environments, religion, and class, to name just a few contributors, draw out the inequities that demand diverse forms of orientation and negotiation with one another. As I noted in Chapter Four, interactive environmental education can take multiple forms, and it is the ecocritic's decision to implement a model that fits well within the institutional contexts in which s/he works. I have endeavoured to show that methodologies of *settling* and emergence is most effective for understanding human connection to habitat because it promotes an active immersion in place that leaves open the possibility of unsettling and transformative politics. How to live in that space of uncertainty, as I have explained, is how exemplary bioregional literature because of its responsiveness to complexity calls for a critical pause that encourages listening at thresholds before deciding

[44] Nature's budget refers to the planet's capacity for production of natural resources, to regenerate natural resources and recycle and integrate waste.

a course of (inter)action. And, so, contrary to Rebecca Solnit's claim that terms such as "nomad, decentered, marginalize, deterritorialized, border, migrant, and exile" (*Wanderlust* 28) are "abstractions [that] dematerializ[e] places" (29), bioregionalism demonstrates how they actually are "attached to specific places and people" (28). It is in the flux, the unsettling of settling and the settling of unsettling, a key characteristic of a bioregional composition, that mobility and location materialize in place. They are part of the regional histories that create place.

A relational approach emerging out of a reading of difference opens up space for other stories to account for how a local space becomes colonized. Though we can read delocalizing and re-localizing processes as a product of cause and effect in bioregionalism, we need to go further and interrogate how local and global processes are relational and co-constitutive. Otherwise, there is a tendency to interpret globalization, as Timothy Brennan points out, as "the world […] being reconstituted as a single social space" (123), as a singular story. When Ricou visits Kew Gardens in England, during one of his overseas tracings of salal, for instance, he expresses bemusement at the abundance of dried and pressed salal specimens: "What to make of this? The exactness of the visual evidence only bewilders and here I yearn for the understanding of a good poem" (*Salal* 83). Here is the literary critic in unfamiliar ground, yet faced with a familiar plant going local in the global. He amazes at the quantity of folders and queries the botanist's organization of the natural world, but he also wishes for a poem that can communicate to him so much more at this moment than a collection of botanical folders. Whereas the salal folders seem to communicate a world order that only botanists comprehend, it also signals a wider world view of control and containment. Ricou's appeal to poetry indicates his belief that literature can help to orient him in the moment, translate and 'language' a space between matter

("actual plant samplings—crumbling" (83)), location ("labyrinthine" Botanical Library (81; 83)), and science that will cohere. The collection he admits has "an apparent indiscriminate recklessness […] because the plant comes from many places in many times" (83). But rather than look for a corresponding ordering structure from his own disciplinary resources, he instead longs for a literary mode that for many is an equally, if not more, esoteric form, which entails a particular interpretive practice. His turn to the messy terrain of the arts, the world of creative imagination, opens up dialogue between the two disciplines to see what connections unfold "to find the stories" (83) that science obstructs. No poem on hand, he creates his own. He re-assembles the words on the files as a found poem, "Write on Kew," so that we *can* read these folders in a cohering way, of sorts, and see that though this is a plant that "plays a minor role" (84) in the wider global scheme, it remains a "richly connected one" (84) (see Appendix B.4).

Ricou lists in poetic scansion descriptions gleaned from the folders, which evoke the Pacific Northwest, and walks readers from specificity—salal's material presence through its colours, textures, characteristics and its geographical attributes ("along rocky shoreline," "in dense shade," "on exposed rock outcrop," "in muskeg")—to its generalities—its mundaneness (repetition of "common"). He then moves to its discovery, removal, and transportation conveyed through abbreviated descriptors, and returning to specificity, but this time cultural: coastal First Nations' names that pinpoint locale ("Semiahmoo," "Ketchikan"), and the last line, vague in its location, but specific in it historical resonance: "Taken in old Indian Cemetery" (85). With text extracted from these folders floating free of local cultural contexts, in his found poem Ricou manages to conjure through salal a bioregional history entangled with global imperialism. As a found poem it is appropriate in capturing a discipline that relies on organizing the world by lists. But, as

Ricou intimates, the list poem endeavours further to show a particularity of human thinking and behaviour that is really a "trace of our living, of our knowing" (86), an epistemological mapping of Kew as representative of a specific Western colonizing world view.

Yet, even more so, Ricou's demonstration delivers the ecocritic at work as pedagogue. A critic as pedagogue, to borrow Lyons' phrasing, is a "teacher of literacy, a cultural worker [who] helps students imagine themselves anew: as products of place, as creative workers in the world, and as seekers of visions" (213). In this way, the ecocritic guides individuals toward responding to and creating "the conditions for the emergence of a responsible culture" (213). For instance, as Ricou marvels, "How odd we would cut a single stem, detach it from soil, sun, thrush, and sea-air, press it flat and brown, and then rely on it as a realistic representation of a living thing. Here I wonder about the wisdom of fieldwork" (83). Here is one critical method for reading the local in the global. To read a poem of salal detached from its ecological companions and processes that make 'salal' salal would be to render the poem flat and muddy, and in that context or lack of context, the poem struggles to be "a living thing." Fieldwork becomes a pun, of sorts, one that extends not only to the scientist, but to the literary critic as well trying to orient and navigate his way in this unfamiliar terrain. For, the best pedagogues recognize they too are students. Thus, in some ways, Ricou's puzzlement at fieldwork is self-admonishment at neglecting his most effective disciplinary tools (which elicited the desire ('right on cue') for an interpretive poem in the first place): the imaginative and revelatory power of language. As Ricou concludes, "The colours transform into sepia but the colour of language remains. In an old Indian Cemetery" (87). In the act of examining the parts and then reconstructing a story, he re-composes the matter that recounts a global colonial history. Salal stands in for the colonial and scientific processes articulated in abbreviated labelling (naming and filing)

and remnants of salal, dried and pressed fragmented stalks and leaves. In these collections the disembodied powers of European expansion are reduced to bodiless hands who "coll" and "recd" (85) these specimens. These are hands that institute the grasp without reciprocal return.

Within a biosphere, where the world is a collective of interconnecting ecosystems that comprise a living planet upon which all species depend, we conceive the world's health built upon and functioning on relations of difference. No ecosystem is the same. The constant is change. In this ongoing flux, differences are vital to sustaining Earth's health; hearing, reading, and listening to these differences are where the challenges emerge: *attending to*. How then do we make diversity visible in a dominant neoliberal capitalist system that thrives on uniformity? Bioregional literature has the potential to maintain a global connectivity that inspires a collective counter-resilience to keep the planet healthy for present and future generations. We need stories that map the world not as a single unified territory, one mapped on the vague outlines of "sustainable development" that bases social health on *economic* prosperity. We need the stories that *recount* other forms of prosperity; the wealth of which emerges from the interactive diversity of human and other-than-human cultures. The wealth amasses when we read difference as a practice of tolerance and respect and of reciprocity.

Difference reveals division, but it also reveals how the planet connects by multiple "local" sites, multiple social and material spaces, interconnecting and intersecting across the globe. Multiple ecological footprints, Andrew Dobson points out, do not set up the idea of the planet "as a single social space" as Timothy Brennan suggests (Brennan 123); rather, they set up a larger mapping of different responses to shared colonial or imperial exploitative effects performed by corporations, private interests and governments (600). If

Dobson's claim holds weight, then it helps to think of local stories as also imprinting the globe with footprints, writing and cultivating the paths for transbioregional readings. Ecoliteracy helps to recognize the common injustices shared globally and at home. It questions how, when, and why we address these inequities elsewhere, we refuse to notice the local diversities of home and ignore the social and environmental injustices that originate in our own backyards.

Global and transbioregional movements—species, material, and information—do not always invite harmonious mixing. We cannot read transbioregional movements as necessarily always generating beneficial outcomes. Stories travel, are consumed outside of their place of origin, and are mis-read. This is when regional specific texts do not travel or settle well, and at times provoke or promote myopic or xenophobic responses, both within and without its borders. Mitchell Thomashow claims, "such movement doesn't necessarily entail […] emergence of a cosmopolitan mentality, a person who flourishes on the vitality of difference" (188). The emphasis or problem, then is not so much the stories themselves, but the readers and the readings. Finding common ground among difference offers one method. Industrial land uses and extractive practices, for instance, determine particular standardized cultural understandings of how the world should be ordered (Thomashow 188): hierarchical, linear, and binary. Exploitation of specific cultures, gender, and environments are built into this order. The ones to feel the greatest brunt of this exploitation are commonly Indigenous peoples and impoverished populations. Too often they are trapped geographically, psychologically, and socially in inescapable ecologies set up by more affluent and privileged populations. Dislocation, toxic dumping, and resource extraction are just a small fraction of living in these polluted and managed ecologies. These perceptions often manifest as regional rural/urban, big business/small business, and

corporate/cooperative divides and seem to resist Brennan's assertion that globalization also "holds out hope for the creation of new communities and unforeseen solidarities" (122). When generic strip-malls, box-stores, and gated communities supplant small businesses and agribusiness strip away the bio-diverse populations that rely on grass- and wetlands, the living entity called the local becomes an endangered global species. These de-localized places begin to alter regions as anywhere spaces. Residents' consumption habits shift to adapt to and to sustain an equally generic monocultural landscape that reconfigures a world dependent on the lack of (or the appearance of assimilated) differences, a neocolonialist model of the local. Difference is tolerated as long as it doesn't attempt to transgress the constraints put in place by the dominant culture. In the 21st century, that dominant culture is predominantly a neoliberal capitalist economy. Thus, these new global communities and solidarities that Brennan envisions are actually foreseen; they are alliances that emerge out of resilience, resistance, and continuance of some form of localism that has a globally shared response, if not solutions, to neoliberal global practices.

Bioregionalism with its attendant ecological thinking regards transbioregional reinhabitation (migrations and out-migrations) as material and cultural aspects that defy the local as culturally, politically, socially, and environmentally stable. Local literatures are the wayfinders through which to become aware of a continuance, to understand the world as something outside of us and a part of us. Though the globe is not one continuous social or cultural space, if we attend to the interconnections, we see that the footprints that mark this planet are local, are contiguous, leave tracks as plain as an Interstate, rail line, jet stream, or tanker's wake. Though in the presence of globalization the world feels a small space, it is a large place, and the local shares this simultaneity. Bioregional literature exposes both the limitations and the openness of the co-constitutive relationship between local and global

cultural and material processes. It is in this characteristic protean nature that bioregionalism is able to elude and illuminate the local practices that allow for the uniformity imposed by neoliberal capitalist practices. As environmental criticism becomes more globalized in scope, we do not have to see the "multivocal, contentious, and fraught [c]ompeting models [that] proliferate" (Buell 90) as a threat. This outcome, as Buell's emphasis intimates, is not necessarily a negative or counter-active development to bioregional thinking. Rather, the complexity that evolves from competing models opens opportunities for thinking through compatibilities and building alliances to thwart environmental crises. The multi-vocality affords greater need for the importance of listening. The trick is in helping residents to engage and see their way through this complex morass. Bioregional narratives as ecological local wayfinders are a form of representation that beckon and make transparent those relationships, and thus initiate a place and a moment from which to begin solving global environmental and social crises. Stepping off the path, attending to encounters, and being surprised: these are all part of local discoveries. But once we head down these paths, it remains not so much that we must stick to one path, but rather we must on occasion step off of the well-worn paths and attend to and cultivate a politics representative of the unpredictabilities of ecological dynamism.

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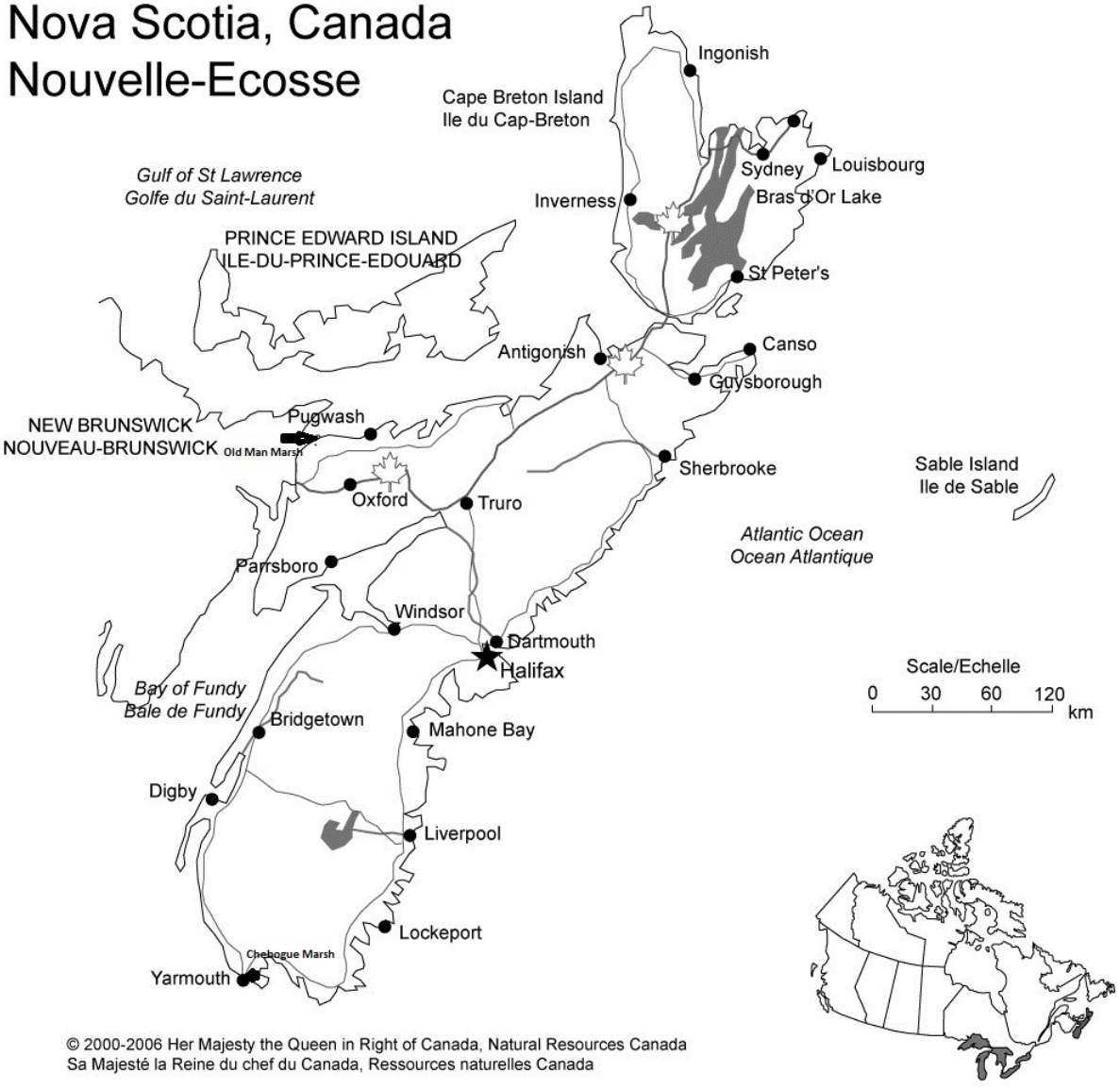
Appendix A: Maps

Map 1: Pacific Northwest Bioregion is shaded in grey.

Map 2



Appendix B

B. 1

Water Drinker

The music in trees

is water. The only way

of learning that still counts:

I learned this summer

how a tree is a reflection

of a river or a stream.

A tree is like ancient love:

the love my parents gave me

came from a long ways away,

was divided over and over.

The oldest river

will have the most branches.

it is the only thing

that remains uncomplicated,

grows outward and remains

uncomplicated.

How do you know these things?

The man, sick of the story and of his life, says:

I spent twelve years with the same river

measuring everything to learn

measuring is irrelevant.

There is only time

and looking.

After twelve years you can finally imagine

how a river grows old

and how the trees around it grow old.

They grow outward and remain uncomplicated.

I sat by a fishless stream for days

this summer, the place I fished

when I was small

as I remember being.

I felt in the heat the hope in me

being washed over and diluted.

I felt this way without knowing

the fish had all disappeared –

I'd imagined them all summer
swaying lazily in the dark,
murky water at the bottom of the stream
and the flash of their white bellies
as they twisted into the terrible light,
fighting at one end
of a handline.

Here - I bring you to the place
of maples, where on this steep hill
there is only one arbutus, the way [45]
the blood from a fish looks
resting in the stones.

You can feel the stream
on that hill like a small animal
shaking in your hand. Its rhythm
comes up through the ground
just where the water is
about to roll over the edge.

Imagine what the Old People thought

when they saw one small red tree

growing between the grey-

white bodies of the maples.

imagine what their thought

when they realized

every stream has its own song

from the shape made by the trees around it,

the sound of the water

turning in the hollow,

returning to them from the leaves.

How long did they sit here

on this perfect flat rock beside

this single arbutus

to finally see

the trees around it were dying

because they weren't as deeply rooted?

When I tell you the word

is still old, I say that

because the first time

a man said KÓ, KÓ, IŁĆ,

said, *water drinker*,

it was because the generations

before him had sat on the rock

and looked at the tree.

They sat in name of the tree,

as in a song too familiar

to hear, and finally

recognized it. And when

I say the word now, KÓ, KÓ, IŁĆ,

It is the same word,

but said in an alien light.

(Paul 20-23)

B. 2

In which alice visits pacific rim national park

She does not know how to read this untended garden.
Her hands fondle fern, salal, driftwood,
seeking some texture reminiscent of parchment;
hoping for roses, her nose finds only ocean.
There is too much sand
& too few people, only an agelessness
more ancient than the oldest buildings
at home. She resents the algaed stones
which make her slip, soil her pinafore.
This is not the sort of water in which one could meander
in a storied boat. She thinks
if this place has any stories they would not be spoken
in her tongue.

In Tofino she sheds tears at breakfast,
the marmalade has too little peel

& the potatoes too many spices.
At least here there are buildings, a post office
from which she might write letters home, except
she cannot remember what words she used there,
her only speech now a fluttering of hands
like gulls' wings.

She finds small comfort only in the road
that twists its sinuous way, sometimes within view of water.
It moves like a familiar river,
the rowing-place of stories back in Oxford.
Motor vehicles pass, rippling
the wind as fishes stir water. Voices sometimes shout greeting
but they're gone too quick, she cannot catch
a whiff of perfume, cannot assess
Sunday finery & parasols.
Though there is still too much green
for her liking, even that fear is familiar—
once she dreamt of falling
from the rowboat, drowning in the mess of green,
muddled reflections,
& never being found as the don's story flowed on.

Instead of a ramshackle shelter of driftwood on the beach
she empties her velvet purse for a room
beside that river of a road,
where the owner speaks kind words
in a familiar lilt, accepts
payment in £.s.d. In her own small room
she strokes the orange walls,
pulls drapes against green. Then turns a knob on a box
with a dusty screen, and hears regal notes, sees for an
instant
the distinction of an old white parliament;
the image mirrored, sky blue as that river,
home, the blessed word
spelled out before her, now
melting on her tongue: THAMES.

(Bolster n. pag.)

B. 3

Rat Song

When you hear me singing
you get the rifle down
and the flashlight, aiming for my brain,
but you always miss

and when you set out the poison
I piss on it
to warn the others.

You think: *That one's too clever,*
she's dangerous, because
I don't stick around to be slaughtered
and you think I'm ugly too
despite my fur and pretty teeth
and my six nipples and snake tail.
All I want is love, you stupid humanist.
See if you can.

Right, I'm a parasite, I live off your
leavings, gristle and rancid fat,
I take without asking

and make nests in your cupboards

out of your suits and underwear.

You'd do the same if you could,

if you could afford to share

my crystal hatreds.

It's your throat I want, my mate

trapped in your throat.

Though you try to drown him

with your greasy person voice,

he is hiding / between your syllables

I can hear him singing.

(Atwood 32)

B. 4

Write on Kew

(*a found poem*)

bluish

reddish

color waxy white

black berry

mature fruit purple-black

common on cliffs

along rocky shoreline

in a dense shade

very common in woods

soil dry and rocky

altitude sea level

on exposed rock outcrop

in muskeg

seashore

common over a vast extent of country

coll

recd

ab

ex

herb

hab

HMS

NW America

Tlell

Clallam

Tacoma

Semiahmoo

Ketchikan

Chilakwe yuk

Taken in old Indian Cemetery

(Ricou 85)