What is Here Now:
Assembling Poetry in Canada After the Spatial Turn

by

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Abstract

In my dissertation “What is Here Now: Assembling Poetry in Canada after the Spatial Turn,” I examine how an array of twenty-first century poetry responds to and critiques the ways Canada *assembles* in the *present*, shaped by processes and logics of dispossession, exclusion, and elimination, amidst global and local circulations of capital and labour. Any spatial reading of Canada must begin with a Canada that is not an essentialized geography, but is instead a set of emergent and assembling relations that constantly needs to be maintained, stabilized, and policed. I argue that we must approach poetry’s relationship to (and relationships in) space by conceptualizing poetry as a part of complex and historically shaped processes that emerge from the ground up, from the ways that actors, human and otherwise, engage one another.

Through this assemblage model, I ask three central questions that bridge the difficult material and conceptual leaps between part and whole as they shape one another. First, what are the stakes for individuals and communities as spatial assemblages stabilize and destabilize, as spaces provide (or fail to provide) a stable ground on which to organize? Second, in space as it stabilizes and destabilizes, how do actors engage one another and what concerns, ethical or otherwise, shape those intimate relations? And third, how are individual actors articulated within (or excluded from) the array of relations that compose a space? I answer these three intersecting questions by turning to three major problematics in contemporary Canadian poetry. First, I look at Vancouver poetry about urban redevelopment as it engages with processes of stabilization and destabilization in the work of Wayde Compton, Cecily Nicholson, Lisa Robertson, Mercedes Eng, and Lee Maracle. Second, I look at questions of ethical engagement through ecologically invested poetry (or “ecopoetry”) in the work of Rita Wong, Christian Bök, Stephen Collis, Jordan Scott, Angela Rawlings, Adam Dickinson, and Fred Wah. Third, I look at the processes and codes that articulate potential spatial practices for racialized communities in the work of Roy Miki, Dionne Brand, Phinder Dulai, Erín Moure, Souvankham Thammavongsa, Annharte, and Marvin Francis.

Keywords: Contemporary Poetry in Canada, Space and Geography, Spatial Emergence, Assemblage Theory, Indigeneity, Diaspora

From Millican Ogden to Main Street

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Introduction

In the Thick of Canadian Space

> One never commences; one never has a *tabula rasa*; one slips in, enters in the middle; one takes up or lays down rhythms. (Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy* 123)

> Even the grasses know where they are and they have a perfect right to be. (Maracle, *Memory Serves* 64)

In the call for papers for the May 2017 Mikinaakominis/TransCanadas conference, organizers Smaro Kamboureli and Larissa Lai ask about the resistant potentials of literary production in the face of the colonial project of Canada and Canadian literature. The conference, they tell us, aims to ask how to revise, refashion, or transform literary study in Canada in the twenty-first century by taking into account the groups excluded from that colonial project:

> Literary study in English on that part of Mikinaakominis (Turtle Island) that we call Canada has shifted from a colonial project meant to build a white settler nation to a project that was supposed to include marginalized others, to, more recently, a project that wants to reckon with Indigeneity and the politics of land while retaining acute attention to the cultural and social race politics that engage Black, Asian, Muslim and white subjectivities, bodies, legalities and cultures (as they are produced by hegemonic forces and as they emerge through social struggle) in nonparallel, intersectional and unresolved ways.

The conference frames itself as a continuation of the conversations begun by the previous TransCanadas conferences organized by Kamboureli, Roy Miki, Christl Verduyn, and others between 2005 and 2009 that looked for ways to “trans”-form Canadian literary study in the wake of both shifting institutional and political contexts and ongoing calls for Canada and Canadian literature to “reckon” with politics around Indigeneity and race that threaten to shake the scaffolding of the nation and the institution as interlocked organizations. In practice, the conference highlighted the difficulty of transforming deeply entrenched colonial structures as they continually emerge in newly ameliorative ways that prevent real material decolonization. Calls to address Canadian literature’s antiblackness led by Rinaldo Walcott were not only met with liberal handwringing, but also well meaning acknowledgements that, yes, things

needed to change, but how?[1] There seemed to be a sense across rooms, panel discussions, and drinks that many of the questions and conversations curved back to unresolved problems. Why, for instance, were the same challenges and critiques posed in the wake of the Appropriation Prize scandal – around cultural appropriation, around the lack of non-white voices, etc. – echoes of the ones asked in the late 1980s and early 1990s in and around conferences like The Appropriate Voice, Writing Thru Race, and others? What if literary study in Canada never stopped being a colonial and white supremacist project?

I point to the difficult and recursive conversations of Mikinaakominis/ Transcanadas to assert that this set of problems is not merely discursive, but also relational, material, and *spatial*. How do we read the ways the conversations of TransCanadas work in relation not only to the academic debates of Canadian Literature, but also to the physical and material spaces of Canadian Literature, exemplified by the affective, historical, and spatial pressures of the University of Toronto campus where the conference took place? Walking around during the conference, banners hanging on light posts trumpeted the kinds of future-oriented questions being asked by researchers on their campus, tied together through the hashtaggable word "Boundless." Within a globalized context, boundlessness celebrates the utopian rhetoric of free movement, proposing a spatial metaphor for a never-ending intellectual fix, a constant exploring for new ideas and concepts that can be profited from. But within a colonial context, boundlessness, with its frontier logic of being "at the edge" of things, requires a kind of reckless disregard for existing practices and communities. A 2011 promotional video for the University opens on a shot of Hart House, the site of the conference, overlayed with bold text celebrating "A legacy of excellence and leadership spanning every human endeavour." This tense combination of future-oriented boundlessness and historically grounded architecture cut hard against the careful and ethical positions laid out by many

[1] In their *Walrus* article "The Unbearable Whiteness of CanLit," Paul Barrett, Darcy Ballantyne, Camille Isaacs, and Kris Singh triangulate Walcott's "break-up" with Canadian Literary study at Transcanadas with two other events during the same month – a 20th anniversary celebration of Walcott's book *Black Like Who?* and a panel at 2017's ACCUTE conference on the work of Austin Clarke that had zero attendees. For Barrett, Ballantyne, Isaacs, and Singh, the junction of these three events marked a moment where the invisiblity of black writing in Canadian Literature became starkly visible, responded to with surprise and "the promise that 'things will change.'"

of the conference's presenters, making clear not only the discursive presence of colonial history, but also its suffocating materiality.

In a post on the feminist blog *Hook and Eye*, Jennifer Andrews debriefs on Mikinaakominis/Transcanadas by precisely asking about the role the room played in the conference:

> Its vaulted ceiling and enormous stained glass windows are reminiscent of a church, and symbols of empire and institutional status abound, with the "coats of arms of the Royal Family and degree-granting universities of the British Empire" from the era of its construction located on the south wall. Among the decorative features of space, the north end of the hall displays "shields" representing 74 universities of nations allied with Britain and Canada in 1919" and large portraits of the Hart House wardens, as well as university chancellors and governors are visible throughout the room. In other words, the Great Hall conveys a great deal of White, male, heterosexual authority and privilege by virtue of its history and thus perhaps, could or might have been the perfect place to engage with "Literature, Justice, and Relation," key conference themes, in new and productive ways.

As I sat in the Great Hall of Hart House, its walls festooned with oil portraits of white men and ringed with a Milton passage about the importance of liberty, I couldn't help but recall both Lucia Lorenzi's bracing tweet about the "gilded colonialism"[2] of the room and Susan Rudy's playful poke at Robert Kroetsch, asking in an interview[3] about his parodic relationship to patriarchal discourse, that "maybe that's one structure you haven't felt the need to break out of" (21). Andrews wrings her hands at the pressures of the institution's

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[2] In a pair of threaded tweets from May 25, 2017, Lorenzi writes that "[a]round the perimeter of the Great Hall at Hart House is something written by colonial white dudes and I quote [. . .] 'a gallant bravery and well grounded contempt for their enemies' THIS ROOM IS VIOLENT GILDED COLONIALISM."

[3] This interview of Kroetsch by Butling and Susan Rudy (collected in their book *Poets Talk* [2006]) lays out the tension embedded in Kroetsch's relationship to structure as Butling and Rudy hammer Kroetsch with questions about the structures he *doesn't challenge*, but instead *affirms*. This is particularly visible in an exchange where, seemingly frustrated with Kroetsch's answers about the ways he does and does not challenge dominant gender constructions, Rudy begins to put critical pressure on Kroetsch's position. After Kroetsch begins to recognize that his parodic approach to masculinity doesn't "destroy or change the paradigm" (20), Rudy cuts closely, asking if the patriarchal underpinning of what Kroetsch calls the "quest paradigm" is "one structure you haven't felt the need to break out of?" since "[i]t's not exactly in your interest to get rid of that paradigm, right?" (21).

colonial history (from her position as tenured professor), arguing that "[i]t takes enormous courage and self-reflexivity to break free of—or into—those ivory towers and it is especially hard to do so when a conference is itself framed physically by a building that represents the very essence of empire." She isn't wrong, but it's important – if painfully obvious – to trouble the assumed causality of not only the room, but also the institution and the nation as structures that not only can we "break free of" (or talk our way out of), but also that we aren't actively producing. In their introductory note to Andrews' post, Erin Wunker and Lily Cho propose that "[t]his isn't just about what rooms [we] are in, but also about the kind of room we need to make." In one sense, Wunker and Cho are correct: "we," as settler-colonial academics need to "make room" by finding ways to deterritorialize our own relations in order to not only include previously excluded groups in our spaces and conversations, but also, and more importantly, move out of the way (or, better, return stolen land) so that new and resurgent sets of spatial relations can stabilize. But in dividing the tension between "the room we're in" and "the room we make," Wunker and Cho accidentally stumble into an assumption that the room we're in isn't also the room we make. The room isn't a magic space, interjecting its gilded bad vibes into otherwise bracing conversation, but rather a spatial production. The limits of institution and nation are things that we produce constantly. In other words, it's one thing to talk about breaking into or out of a space as if it's a permanent battlement and quite another to ask about the way we continually come together to make a room (or an institution, city, or nation) in ways that are uneven and unjust

Any spatial reading of Canada must begin with the assertion that Canada is not an essentialized geography, but is instead a set of emergent and assembling relations that constantly need to be maintained, stabilized, and policed – not just the rooms we are in, but the rooms we make, for better or worse. In "What is Here Now: Assembling Canadian Poetry After the Spatial Turn," I ask how an array of twenty-first century poetry responds to and critiques the ways Canada *assembles* in the *present*, shaped by processes and logics of dispossession, exclusion, and elimination, amidst global and local circulations of capital and labour. An increasing amount of recent Canadian literary writing and criticism has argued rightly that we need to rescale and reconceptualize our approaches to literature's role in spatial production, turning to the city and the globe, to the ongoing dispossession of Indigenous territory and the policing of borders as they stretch into everyday life. Instead of taking their cues from some centennial version of

Canadian nationalism where space is a theme to be analyzed or a landscape to be survived, they take their cues from ongoing histories of spatial struggle across Canada and from the variegated theoretical turns that assert that spaces are actively produced rather than static containers. Rather than puzzle through some deep mystery about the connection between "Canadian geography" and "Canadian identity," the poets and critics I discuss respond to Canada as a set of stable relations that constantly reproduce themselves, squeezing out other spatial possibilities by unevenly articulating *how* (or *whether*) individuals can live within spaces like the nation. Running through "What is Here Now" is an argument that we approach poetry's relationship to (and relationships in) space by reading it as a *part* in a thickly relational *whole* – that is, a part of complex and historically shaped processes that emerge out of the ways that actors, human and otherwise, engage one another. As conceptualized through the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, space is an *assemblage* – a continually mutating and emergent mass of spatial actors. As an idea or a model, the assemblage conceptualizes space from the ground up as face-to-face engagements and encounters build into stable forms and processes. It imagines the ways that thick conditions both shape the potential trajectories of individual bodies and how collective actions can reshape spaces.

Deleuze and Guattari's assemblage model provides an overarching theoretical and methodological frame through which I want to look at poetry's place in the complex material and expressive regimes of spatial production. Their model provides a way to view the entangled spatial relationships between larger structural organizations and the spatial intimacies of everyday life. It does this by questioning the relationship between "part" (individual actors) and "whole" (wider spatial organization). Through this assemblage model, I would like to ask three central questions that bridge the difficult material and conceptual leaps between part and whole as they shape one another – leaps between wider organizations and scales like the globe, the nation, and the city and more intimate scales down to the body. First, what are the stakes for individuals and communities as spatial assemblages stabilize and destabilize, as spaces provide (or fail to provide) a stable ground on which to organize? At the abstract conceptual level posed by Deleuze and Guattari, "stability" poses a keyword through which we can ask why and how spaces change and stay the same. A stable space is one where a set of relations remains consistent or continuous over time, shaped by processes that work to hold together and thicken spatial relations even as other processes work to dissolve and

break apart those relations. Stabilization and destabilization act as broad descriptions for more specific processes where spaces and the relations that compose them retain or lose consistency. For example, in my first chapter, I look to the connected processes of colonial dispossession and urban development as they work to eliminate existing relations in Vancouver, such as the Coast Salish peoples living in Snauq (now False Creek) or the low-income residents of the Downtown Eastside neighbourhood, to clear space for another set of relations. The colonial theft of Indigenous territory involves a simultaneous destabilization of Indigenous relations and stabilization of colonial ones. At the same time, the push to rebuild those Indigenous cultural resurgence, as posed by critics like Leanne Simpson and Glen Coulthard, requires a grounded normativity that *restabilizes* Indigenous relationships with and on the land.

My two other questions emerge from this question of how spatial relations hold together and fall apart, turning the frame from space as a whole to the more intimate meetings that compose space. Both questions struggle with the way space unevenly shapes the practices and opportunities available to individuals and groups depending on the ways race, gender, Indigeneity, ability, and sexuality are coded and the ways those codings coax actors to meet one another in specific and often deterministic ways. In a sense, both questions ask how we meet one another and how those meetings add up into thickly stable material conditions that carry a split potential where we can fundamentally change spaces by transforming the ways we engage one another, but might merely reproduce unjust conditions by policing those engagements in distressingly restrictive ways. In the thick of this, my second question asks how actors *engage* one another and what concerns, ethical or otherwise, shape those intimate relations? Similarly, my third question expands this question of engagement into a larger relational field, asking how individual actors are articulated within (or excluded from) the array of relations that compose a space? In a sense, this involves asking not only how the intimate engagements of the everyday assemble into stable spaces, but also how in the process of stabilizing and holding space, the array of relations that make up a space are constantly policing one another, coaxing individuals into specific positions and functions as if people were just cells and organs with determined roles in a body. This is most clear in institutional settings and, in my final chapter, I turn to writers who critique the ways institutions and practices like the border office, the courtroom, and the classroom administrate and police racialized and Indigenous bodies, acting through engagements

that determine how (and whether) those bodies can take on a role in spatial production. At the end of this chapter, I look to black and Indigenous writers who work to build spaces and relations outside the colonial and antiblack structures that compose Canada, while also contending with the often violent actions of the Canadian state that simultaneously work to articulate how they can live.

These three questions direct my three chapters, though their concerns necessarily and usefully overlap, highlighting additional questions around spatial emergence and stability; tensions between the materiality of bodies, objects, and things and the expressive codes of laws and literature; and struggles around the uneven possibilities for individual actors. Though they come out of assemblage theory's flatly material readings of space, these questions open themselves up to necessary interventions from Marxist, feminist, Indigenous and diasporic critics, who critique and trouble the sometimes too easy spatial abstractions of a theory that insists that space is not essential or static, but is instead emergent. If the assemblage model works through a philosophical problem around relation in general, insisting on the ways spatial forms and processes emerge from ongoing relations, the specific conditions that writers contend with in Canada complicate and trouble the seemingly flat organizations of the Deleuzian assemblage. Ongoing issues from the dispossession of Indigenous territory, to the dislocations of black and Asian Canadian diasporas, to the migrations of workers and refugees across borders, to the extraction of non-human resources put pressure on the assemblage model's failure to account for spatial dynamics around difference, particularly around race and Indigeneity. At the same time, the assemblage model's mapping of the ways spaces unevenly emerge from the "bottom-up" rather than the "top-down" provides a framework through which we can conceptualize the potentials for new, resurgent, and more just spatial forms and processes, while also maintaining both the possibility that not all spatial change is positive for everyone and the reality that spatial stability is necessary to anchor spatial relations.

Over the course of this introduction, I would like to do three things. First, I want to contextualize the turn to space and spatial production in Canadian literary criticism – a turn that has seen critics negotiate a tension between Canada as a diverse, inclusive space and Canada as a site of spatial struggle. Reframing Canada as a set of relations rather than a unified geographical territory opens up a third position where questions of inclusion or struggle *within* Canada needs to be considered within a context where

sovereign Indigenous nations and globe spanning diasporic relations that exist *outside* Canada even as they are entangled in the same territory as Canada. Canada *is* a site of spatial struggle and it is certainly *not* a homogenous whole, but it is also not the only spatial game in town, its naturalized unity challenged by Indigenous nations and globe-spanning diasporas that uncomfortably nest with the relational assemblage we call Canada, while also exceeding it. After outlining the ways these tensions play out in Canadian literary criticism, I want to turn to assemblage theory to outline the ways its focus on the relationship between spatial organization and spatial intimacy can help us understand spatial production as relational. The ways interconnected but discrete spaces can exist together – what Audra Simpson calls "nested sovereignties" – can be clarified by the assemblage model's insistence, as outlined by Manuel DeLanda's careful readings of Deleuze and Guattari, that space needs to be approached as both *externalized* and *emergent*. DeLanda argues first that the relations composing the assemblage are *externalized*, meaning that the parts that make up a spatial whole aren't to be thought of as essentialized organs of a rigidly productive system; and, second, that those relations are *emergent*, meaning that spaces constantly produce and reproduce themselves in a way that opens up an immense potential for social change, while insisting that unjust spatial forms and processes like colonialism or white supremacy are not just rigid structures transcendently working from above or historical events that we've moved past, but rather are forms of organization that all of us make in the present. I will pose the way this insistence operates in useful tension with other theoretical approaches and spatial politics, from Marxist, Indigenous, and diasporic critics.

And finally, I want to assert the potentials of poetry as a form of research into the junction of the expressive codes that stabilize space and the material territorializations that shape the ways spaces can be produced, while also acknowledging the limits of the claims we can make for poetry's role in spatial production. Language helps shape our imagination about the kinds of spaces we might collectively produce through discussions of how we plan and build – what Henri Lefebvre calls representations of space. Language circulates through spaces in the form of protocols that diagram the ways we can engage with one another. It sticks to bodies and spaces as forms of representation that stage what those bodies and spaces can do. Because of its attention to the "materiality" of language, poetry is able to intervene into these circulations. But we need to be careful not to confuse the "materiality" of language with the physical materiality of

bodies, objects, and spaces. Assemblage theory points us to this tense, even dialectical entanglement of physical material and expressive codes to ask how they are, to use Karen Barad's word, *indissociable* – necessarily working together to produce space. Poetry can also do this work, puzzling at the intersection of language and materiality to ask how material actors can meet one another and how those meetings are shaped by the expressive codes that circulate in and diagram space.

Conceptualizing Space in Canadian Literary Criticism

On the eve of Canada 150 celebrations on Parliament Hill in Ottawa, the Bawating Water Protectors erected a teepee in what they called a Reoccupation Ceremony. They asserted their actions were not a *protest* (which would assume a set of demands made of the state by its citizens), but was instead a spatial practice that didn't need state legitimation on the grounds that Ottawa is unceded Algonquin territory. The Canadian state made two responses. First, the RCMP immediately worked to prevent the ceremony on the basis that the group didn't have the necessary permit, arresting a number of people in the process, before allowing the ceremony to proceed. Second, during a speech in Prince Edward Island,[4] Prime Minister Justin Trudeau told the crowd euphemistically that "the history of the last 150 years for [I]ndigenous peoples has not been as positive," while appealing to the strength of diversity, particularly the diversity of backgrounds and views, but not necessarily the diversity of spatial practices or forms of relation – at least not practices and forms that fundamentally challenge the Canadian relations made possible by the theft of land.[5] Faced with a spatial challenge based in Ottawa's status as unceded Algonquin territory, the state finds itself both using violence to return the space to order and reframing the Indigenous challenge to the space of

[4] http://ottawacitizen.com/news/local-news/teepee-ceremony-is-peaceful-says-parliament-security-after-issuing-trespass-notices

[5] With their appeal to diversity, Trudeau's comments make great sound bites, but seem to reveal a troubling desire to assimilate Indigenous folks in Canada under the banner of reconciliation, making reconciliation sound sometimes like a form of multiculturalism. He suggests: "Diversity is a strength. But it doesn't just mean diversity of backgrounds, it also means diversity of views. I think it's important that even as Canada, as Canadians, celebrate Canada 150, we reflect upon the experiences and the importance of folding in and hearing the stories and the experiences of [I]ndigenous Canadians" (n. pag.). Even that final rhetorical move, referring to the Bawating Water Protectors as "Indigenous Canadians," ultimately folds Indigenous nations into Canada, posing them as just another hyphenate in the multicultural mosaic.

Parliament Hill into one about identity and discourse rather than land and ongoing occupation. In the face of withering critiques and spatial challenges, Canada soaks up those critiques as added "diversity" framed under the keyword "reconciliation," arguing that Canadians ought to "respect" Indigenous dissent while moving that dissent into the center of the parliament grounds, deflecting the challenge of/to occupation by embracing the ceremonial, thereby leaving Canada's colonial integrity ultimately unchallenged.

In this moment, there are two entangled stances toward space and spatial production. In the first, reading their ceremony as a "protest" poses it as a moment of struggle *within* the nation because of the way it depends on recognition or response from the state. Trudeau's appeals to diversity and "folding in" Indigenous perspectives poses Indigenous spatial practices as something that can be reconciled within Canada. In this combination of internal struggle and recognition, we can see the way Canada holds itself together by preventing another set of spatial practices to take hold, highlighting the ways struggle both plays out through and is papered over by a version of "diversity" or "multiplicity." In *In Flux* (2011), Roy Miki argues that "[t]he violence of appropriation and territorialization that secured [Canada's] ownership of spaces it did not own is mediated in the narrative of the nation as a progressive formation," gaining legitimacy from "a liberal discourse of rights and citizenship based on the overarching notion of property rights with its sacrosanct relationship to the liberal 'I' of its citizens" (122) – a citizenship historically limited "to protect the authority of its ruling group (white male, English and European identified) at the expense of women and those racialized in relation to an ascribed otherness" (125). Miki combines the material realities of colonialism and racism with the expressive narratives and discourses that justify and paper over violences and naturalize a homogeneous spatial consensus. This "consensus" describes a structural *thickness* where colonial ownership and rights discourse combine into a social and spatial regime that privileges a specific ruling group. To assert that Ottawa is Algonquin territory within a larger understanding that *all* of Canada is Indigenous territory is to also assert that the territory we call Canada is not a single homogenous geography.

The second stance doesn't resolve this tension, instead acknowledging the potential for multiple incompatible forms of spatial production on the same territory. In other words, if the first two stances involve forms of spatial struggle and recognition that happen *inside* the nation, this stance poses the potential for spatial formations that are necessarily *outside* the nation even as they share territory. Doing this involves Canada

as it is defined not by a set of long naturalized geopolitical lines, but rather as a set of relations in continual emergence, deeply contested, constantly produced and policed, while intersecting and overlapping not only with global and urban processes, but also with diasporic and Indigenous relations that are simultaneously administered and policed within the nation while finding forms of community and self-determination without. Taking this stance poses struggle differently, making it less a struggle over a pre-defined space itself than over *how* to live in and produce space. In the tension posed by these two stances, "Canada" needs to be read as a set of relations defined by a set of stabilizing logics that play out materially at the scale of everyday encounters and engagements. Canadian relations emerge from a set of settler-colonial "logics" (what Deleuze might call a "diagram" or an "abstract machine") that shape white settler relations to the quote-unquote "others" of Canada. Iyko Day historicizes the ways the settler-Indigenous relationship is driven by two intersecting drives: the dispossession of territory, shaped by a concomitant "logic of elimination," that clears the land of its Indigenous relations to make room for something new, and the exploitation of labour, shaped by a "logic of exclusion" applied in historically different ways to black and Asian diasporas. If the exclusion and elimination of non-white peoples from the nation buttresses what Audra Simpson calls a "settler precariousness," the push for multiculturalism, recognition, and reconciliation propose other ways of managing those populations.

A great deal of literary criticism in Canada gets stuck precisely on the problem of how to approach Canada spatially, conceptualizing Canada as a set of relations while confronting the ways the relations we call Canada reproduce spatial forms and processes that maintain and stabilize the precarious hold those relations have on the territory we call Canada. In particular, I want to turn a spotlight on the ongoing negotiation of the tension between spatial diversity and spatial struggle, that is, between the belief that Canada is big enough to incorporate wildly different spatial forms and practices and the assertion that Canada is shaped through ongoing contestations over how its spaces should be produced.

In the introduction to their 1998 "Writing Canadian Spaces" issue of *Studies in Canadian Literature*, Linda Warley, John Clement Call, and Linda Viau invoke the spatial turn as a response to Northrop Frye's stubborn 1965 question "Where is here?" The theoretical concerns of the "spatial turn" (informed for them by geographers and spatial theorists like Michel Foucault, Henri Lefebvre, Edward Soja, and Doreen Massey)

challenge and critique the long-standing homogeneity of thematically-driven spatial approaches:

> While critics have argued that Canadian writing constructs a "sense of place," those discussions have often circulated around overarching mythic and symbolic images that cannot always account for the huge variety of spaces themselves, the multiple ways in which they are represented, or the diversity of the people who are situated within them. (n. pag.)

Warley, Ball, and Viau mark a move from the legacy of Frye to a set of approaches that better account for the multiplicity and diversity of spatial production in Canada. They suggest that "the resulting assortment reflects not only the methodological variety of research on Canadian literary space, but also the spatial variety of Canada itself" (n. pag.). Their call to spatial *variety* echoes W.H. New's critique of the violent recodings of space through imperial literary classification. Inquiring into the connections between language and land, particularly what he calls the "*language of land*" (8), New asks about the stakes of "reading" the land and, in the process, of imperial classifications that erase local experiences, practices, and landscapes.[6] New reminds us that language isn't the land itself and is, instead, a "medium of the familiar," pointing to writers[7] whose work "resist[s] the local language of the communities and places they seek to describe, and substitute their own (local) British idiom for it" (15).

In the face of imperial classifications and the thematic impulse to pin down spaces with symbolic weight, Warley, Ball, and Viau's notion of spatial "variety" feels like an appropriate response, while also being inadequate to the task. Rather than imagine land and landscape through a system of imperial classification, variety challenges that homogeneity through inclusiveness and diversity. Take Justin D. Edwards and Douglas Ivison's introduction to their collection *Downtown Canada: Writing Canadian Cities* (2005), which follows Warley, Ball, and Viau in the way it calls for the "specificities" and

[6] Thinking through the dangerous collapse of land itself and the colonial "language of land," New argues that "'[r]eality' existed in one form in local experience, in another on the conventional page; hence the imperial discourse led, obliquely perhaps, and over time, to various political, social, and verbal forms of post-colonial resistance, but along the way it gave rise to a number of long-lived and oddly fixed misapprehensions and assumptions about what a Canadian experience of space, place, and land might mean" (12).

[7] Specifically, New compares two British-born authors: the nineteenth century travel journals of Lady Aberdeen and the 1941 novel *Sick Heart River* by Lord Tweedsmuir.

"complexities" of Canadian spatial experiences, using that call to insist on the importance of the urban in Canada and Canadian literature. "Canada is an urban country," they observe, "yet this fact has often been elided from our public discourse, our national mythologies, and critical discussions" – a reality that "not only fails to recognize the lived experiences of the vast majority of Canadians, but also distances Canadian readers from their literature" (6-7). Edwards and Ivison appeal to literature's responsibility to recognize and reflect the diverse experiences of Canadians, experiences they see as largely urban. They also insist, looking to Henri Lefebvre's insistence that spaces are socially produced, on the way literature engages with processes of urbanization, but seem restrained by their contestation of a dominant national imaginary of Canadian space as wilderness. In a certain way, instead of carefully engaging the particular processes of urbanization, this insistence on the city risks reproducing earlier jabs at the dominance of a national spatial imaginary, with the city replacing the local and regional places that get elided or erased.

Instead of just insisting on the importance of spaces and experiences at scales other than the national, it is important to look to the contingent processes affecting those spaces and experiences while insisting on a rubric that accounts for the ways spaces are produced in part through struggle or contestation. As a positive category akin to multiculturalism that threatens to paper over very real spatial violence, the flat language of a diversity (or variety) of spatial experience is constructed in part by a junction of capitalism, colonialism, and white supremacy that unevenly shapes and structures spatial possibilities for different individuals and groups across scales. Rather than turn to diversity, critics like Jeff Derksen and Herb Wyile pose spatial struggle and contestation as alternate lenses to look at the production of space at national, regional, and urban scales. In his essay "National Literatures in the Shadow of Neoliberalism" (2012), Derksen insists on the potential of writers who engage, critique, and contest national projects shaped by the twin forces of neoliberalism and globalization as he looks for "means to locate and understand potential politics and nonconformist knowledges" that challenge the "spaces of flows" model of globalization, "break[ing] the colonial myth of an 'empty land' and bring[ing] in a concept of spatial justice" (39). Derksen turns to Lefebvre's theorization of spatial production and debates around scale to propose "structure and struggle" as dialectical poles through which he troubles readings of the nation as either completely disarticulated from the processes of globalization or merely a

passive target for it. Wyile similarly frames Atlantic Canada as a contested space in his book *Anne of Tim Hortons* (2011), working against earlier essentializing views of region while also theorizing the ways that region can operate as an articulatory scale for global capital.[8] Wyile also turns to Lefebvre to explicitly work through the processes working to produce Atlantic Canada, usefully challenging the "commonplace idea" of Canada as a mosaic of internally-homogeneous regions, suggesting that the "very notion of 'Atlantic Canada' is a novel and contested one, especially because of the difference in the histories of the Maritimes and Newfoundland" (7). Reframing literary debates around Atlantic Canadian literature to think about the clash of economic and cultural forces working in the region, Wyile conceptualizes region not as a "given" but a "construct" – "a kind of imagined and at times strategic sense of cohesion and community, protected usually from without but also from within" (8). He frames Atlantic Canada as a space increasingly neoliberal and deeply affected by the tides of capital – caught between the retreat of the fishing industry and an increased attention to exploiting the maritimes' status as tourist destination.[9]

The keywords introduced by Derksen and Wyile – structure, struggle, construction, production – point to a tension between spaces as they shape spatial practice and the productive labour of individuals as they reshape and fight over those spaces. For Lefebvre, spatial struggle is primarily a form of class struggle, but, of course,

[8] In his 1998 essay "Towards the Ends of Regionalism," Frank Davey takes on regional essentialism, arguing that regionalism ties geography to identity. Davey observes that "geography acts as a metonym of social identification, enabling in Canada the production of Westerners, Maritimers, northerners, or Cape Breton Islanders, as categories that can override other affiliations" (3). Davey critiques the powerful, naturalized relation to geography embedded in region, a status created, in part, by the *terra nullius* effects of the indigenization of regional understandings – ie. the understanding that settlers are the "true" inhabitants of a region. Interested in the ways region and identity reinforce each other, Davey not only calls into question the transmission of social identity from a specific geography, but also points to the way the actual processes of regional production are concealed. Davey's ideological reading of region as not only transmitting an essential identity, but also, somehow, existing as a *terra nullius* container only waiting to be filled *fetishizes* spatial production.

[9] This exploitation of a tourist-friendly "Folk paradigm" of regional construction defines an Atlantic Canada, explicitly tied to an image of the region "as an enclave of unspoiled nature and authentic culture as part of a thoroughly *modern* campaign to diversify economically and generate revenue" (22) – a coding of the region that makes it more attractive to tourist dollars.

capital is not the sole cause of spatial injustice and the tendency of Marxist critics to focus too intently on capital as a totalizing explanation has come under fire for ignoring or reducing differences other than class.[10] Both Derksen and Wyile are careful to account for these different forms of struggle, but Wyile in particular struggles with how to incorporate black and Indigenous writers into his regionalist framework. Though he argues for the way Atlantic-Canada is a contested space, Wyile fails to consider that it is also coexistent with other discrete spatial productions relationally outside the region but still on the same territory – similar to Audra Simpson's sense of the "nested sovereignty" of Indigenous nations within Canada. In his chapter devoted to minority writers, Wyile argues that black and Indigenous writers like George Elliot Clarke and Rita Joe challenge the white settler understandings of a folk paradigm that excludes them:

> Black and Native writers, however, have presented an increasing challenge to this "monochromatic" experience in a number of important ways: by asserting the significance of their pasts in the face of colonialism's distortion or erasure of their histories; by articulating contemporary social, economic, and political concerns, including exploitative treatment by the dominant culture; by consciously critiquing the exclusivity of Folk images of life in the East; and, not least of all, by drawing on cultural and aesthetic traditions beyond those of the dominant culture, and in the process diversifying and reinvigorating Atlantic-Canadian literature. (106-07)

[10] Notably, in the 1990s, feminist critics like Rosalyn Deutsche, Doreen Massey, and Gillian Rose take on masculinist geographies for ignoring the spatial experiences and practices of women to make, in the words of Rose, "powerful claims to know" (5) – claims of scientific objectivity disciplined by the universalizing power of a gaze attempting to see everything. Drawing from Deutsche's essay "Boys Town" (1991) in her book *Feminism and Geography* (1993),[10] Rose ties the critical distance of geography to the male gaze, arguing that the absence of differential subject positions "from which to look" limits understandings of space even as geography as a discipline imagines itself conceptualizing complete and unified readings of space. Deutsche threads this concern over the male voyeuristic position of geography through Harvey's desire for a totality to be conceptualized through a Marxist metatheory. Deutsche acknowledges the ways that Harvey's approach to space "helped make it possible to understand the city as a representation," while also acknowledging that his discourse "is a totalizing representation insofar as it explains human history and society as a whole unified by a single, fundamental antagonism" (224-25). Deutsche critiques the way that Harvey suggests that not only gender, but also other forms of social difference need to be read through the lens of historical materialism. She argues that "[s]ocial struggles, groups, and theories become part of a hierarchically differentiated unity in which, denied autonomy, they are ruled by the privileged realm of political economy" (225).

Here, Wyile acknowledges a rich set of challenges to Folk tradition, but his assertion that these challenges end up "diversifying and reinvigorating" the region still frames those writers *as* Atlantic-Canadian, squeezing them into a particular spatial identity – a moment where struggle slides into diversity because of the way that the space itself is essentially Atlantic-Canada, making any relations inside that space automatically Atlantic-Canadian.

This troubling contradiction in Wyile's project – worrying about global capitalization on Atlantic Canada's Folk tradition, while capturing Black and Indigenous writers *into* Atlantic Canada – exposes a tension around how we read these differing spatial relations. Even as critics struggle to diversify our spatial understanding of the nation, whether by insisting on the importance of the region as Wyile does or the city as Edwards and Ivison do, that move can still enforce exclusions and can work to dictate the terms under which people get to live. A similar tension or *worry* appears as a recurrent trope about the place of Indigenous literature within or alongside or intersecting with Canadian prairie writing. During an analysis of Nakoda poet tj snow's chapbook *I do not know this story* (1998), Jason Wiens expresses a discomfort about comparing snow's work with that of settler poets because of the way it stands as a "piercing reminder of the embarrassment of this particular region-building project" (161). In the introduction to their edited collection *History, Literature, and the Writing of the Canadian Prairies* (2005), Alison Calder and Robert Wardhaugh lament the lack of discussion of Indigenous writers in a prairie context while also acknowledging the complete absence of that discussion in their book. Perhaps most pointedly, Marieke Neuhaus argues, in her article "Reading the Prairies Relationally" (2012), that "blindly" including Indigenous voices in the canon of prairie literature and criticism "will only risk silencing the very voices prairie critics seek to engage" because of the way that "'Prairies' describes a region whose very political, cultural, and social specificities always also imply a colonial project" (n. pag.). If decolonization, as Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang remind us, is not a metaphor, but instead a material and spatial process through which Indigenous communities put back together practices and knowledge assaulted by colonialism, then inclusiveness becomes an issue when it is accompanied, as Neuhaus seems to suggest, by a colonial assumption that diversity is okay, so long as the land remains administered under capitalist property regimes.

Audra Simpson proposes *refusal* as a political alternative to the state politics of

recognition. Refusal rekeys a sense of spatial struggle away from groups fighting over how to organize a totalized space to discrete spatial assemblages as they struggle to exist within the same territory – a distinction that becomes especially important for Indigenous folks for whom pressures to assimilate are tied to pressures to abandon their ties to the land.[11] When Simpson suggests that "[t]here is more than one *political* show in town," she also makes it very clear that there is more than one *spatial* show in town, tying refusal to an Indigenous political sovereignty caught in a system of "nested" sovereignties. She argues that "[i]n situations in which sovereignties are nested and embedded, one proliferates at the other's expense," noting further that "under these conditions, there cannot be two perfectly equal, robust sovereignties" (12). This split sovereignty coincides with a split sense of spatial logics. Arguing for what he calls "grounded normativity," Glen Coulthard stumps for a version of Indigenous struggle organized as "a struggle not only for land in the material sense, but also deeply informed by what the land as system of reciprocal relations and obligations can teach us about living our lives in relation to one another and the natural world in nondominating and nonexploitative terms" (*Red Skin, White Masks* 13). This understanding of land as a system of relations butts hard up against the understanding of land as a system of property and exploitable resources that settler-colonialism is built on.

We need to affirm, as Simpson does, that there is not only more than one spatial show in town, but also that struggle happens both within a unified space and between different spatial productions. Embedded in this is a kind of "inside/outside" problem that poses the ways individuals can struggle to change a space from within while also working to form, maintain, or recover another set of spatial relations that are separate

[11] In a 2017 article about the relationship between the National Parks system and Indigenous history, Robert Jago outlines the ways the varying calls for Indigenous folks to leave their "dying reserves" for better lives in cities are actually calls for assimilation: "Many in Canada dismiss Indigenous peoples' connection to the land as romantic and irrational. They say that we should abandon it to move closer to the urban areas for our own good. In a piece for *Maclean's*, journalist Scott Gilmore wrote that First Nations must 'leave these [remote reserves], forever' or, pending that, be sent 'a backhoe as they keep digging graves.' Former prime minister Jean Chrétien has made similar statements. Indigenous people who don't want to leave their land are simply 'nostalgic about the past when they were going hunting and fishing,' he said in 2016. Even Jonathan Kay, the former editor-in-chief of this magazine, once stated that the abandonment of our homelands was the only way for Indigenous people to 'make a living and exist in dignity.'" (n. pag.).

from (though may overlap or nest within) dominant spatial productions. Struggle carries a doubled orientation visible in the way the actions of the Bawating Water Protectors operate inside (or in relation to) both Canadian and Indigenous spatial organizations. Read inside Canada, their actions can be framed as a protest – an earnest demand for the state to do better, to acknowledge diverse practices, to ameliorate, to *reconcile*. Reconciliation depends on an understanding of Canada as a unified and even totalizing spatial structure. By insisting that their ceremony is not a protest, the Water Protectors reject this spatial frame and instead carry out a different form of nation building, drawing together a kind of Indigenous counterassemblage – a space that is *not Canadian* even as it exists in the same territory as Canada. In other words, what results is not a struggle over how to co-exist or how to live together in space, but is instead a struggle over how to produce space itself in ways that are fundamentally incompatible with the dominant capitalist, racist, settler-colonial relations that produce Canada.

Spatial Production as Assembly

In the face of the multiplicity and unevenness of spatial production in Canada and elsewhere, we need to lean into questions of the ways space is relational and the ways that this relationality is emergent and contingent. Spatial relations can assemble in multiple and often contradictory ways, but are also subject to powerful forces shaping that assembly. At its core, this involves parts and wholes – a dialectic between the actors, human and otherwise, that produce space and those wider spaces themselves as they shape the lives of those actors. My thinking about this starts, somewhat laterally, in a personal place – Millican Ogden, the neighbourhood I grew up in. Millican Ogden is a working class neighbourhood in southeast Calgary that fancies its settler history as a company town housing the employees of the Canadian Pacific Railway repair shop on the eastern edge of the neighbourhood. Named after land developer W.J. Millican and CPR Vice President I.G. Ogden, the neighbourhood is defined by the way this settler fantasy meets industrial reality. Its history is marked by industrial accident – the discovery of degreasing solvent from the CPR Shops in the groundwater near Ogden Road in the early 2000s and the explosion of the CIL explosives plant in 1975 (not to mention the nearby Hub Oil explosion in 1999). Until recently, a message painted on the front of the Power House in the Ogden Repair Shops read, in letters large enough to be seen driving by on Ogden Road, “Even one accident is too many.”

This history of accidents, then, framed the news in 2001 that residents along the neighbourhood's Lynnwood Ridge would need to relocate after lead was found in the soil around their homes. The soil contamination was pinned to the activities of Imperial Oil, who operated a refinery along the ridge from 1922 to 1977 when the area was redeveloped, turned into residential housing. This moment of rapid spatial change, of redevelopment turned literally toxic, opened a set of questions for me that not only had to do with how and why spaces change, but also struggled with the sense that the relations that are supposedly in the past (ie. "just history") still traverse or shape our spaces. As an "accident" that triggers a displacement, the discovery of lead in the soil doesn't so much mark a poetically just "return of the repressed." Instead, it marks the ways the toxic material actors attached to oil production circulate here and elsewhere, even as we cast those toxic parts out of view (like so many circuit boards shipped overseas).[12] Rather than an accident, the crisis of the Lynnwood Ridge is part of a continuity wherein a messy entanglement of colonial and capitalist narratives, logics, and histories around development recirculate in the present. Imperial Oil's bad remediation of the land conflicts with a generalized support of the Albertan petrostate that would forgive the lack of remediation if it happened in the bush, which is colonially assumed to be empty despite protestations from environmentalist and Indigenous critics. The Lynnwood Ridge is a crisis precisely because the relations that compose that space are seen as valuable.[13]

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[12] If the appearance of lead is a "return," it might be because we imagine those environmental crises happening either in the past or in a geographically remote location like Northern Alberta. Or because Alberta hangs its environmental dreams on fantasies of remediation, where the selective #myhiroshima framings of Fort McMurray residents meet the pitched utopian futures of oil executives who imagine futures where families will vacation around the beautified end pit lakes that the tar sands will be remediated into.

[13] Framing spatial change as a crisis or a rupture ignores the way that it is also the result of myriad actors working together to transform something. The residents of the Lynnwood Ridge didn't find their homes suddenly unliveable by accident, but because of the way the industrial waste consigned to the wastebin of history were still present, the lead in the soil a product of and agent in the development history of the space. At the same time, the Lynnwood Ridge gets to be an "accident" because it involved a set of relations that weren't supposed to be disrupted because of their value to a larger colonial and capitalist project, unlike the Indigenous relations disrupted by the extractive practices of the Alberta tarsands or, as I will discuss in Chapter 1, the Indigenous relations of Snauq as they were disrupted in the early twentieth century to make room for Vancouver's False Creek. Spatial change can be caused by a violent rupture from outside – a meteor hurtling toward the ground – but can also be caused by a slow and

Out of this complex milieu of structural pressures and intimate concerns, of circulating narratives and material actors, I began to ask about how and why spaces change, trying to move past the framings of evental crisis folded into the language of "accident." Assemblage theory grounds itself in this conceptualization of spatial change as something that doesn't require a moment of crisis, but can also happen through the ways human and non-human actors communicate and connect to deliberately make and unmake space over time. It asks us to pay attention to the way spaces are produced at the edge of the present by the emergent labour of those living there. Drawn from the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, the assemblage allows us to think through spatial scales, processes, and histories, because of the ways it points us to the contingent relationships composing space and asks how those intimate engagements shape larger processes, and vice versa. Assemblage theory starts its analysis at the intimate scale of bodies as they enter into relation, asking how those relations assemble into wider organizations and structures and how those relations shape and police which spatial practices and forms of life are acceptable within those assemblages. While assemblage theory has been seen as in tension with Marxist geography, Colin McFarlane connects the two through a shared concern with the disjunctures "between the actual and the possible, between how urban inequality is produced and lived and how relations might be assembled otherwise" (210). McFarlane argues that assemblage theory is "expressed through grammars of gathering, networking and composition more broadly" (207), posing the assemblage as a way for social scientists to think about the ways cities change and mutate:

> Assemblage – whether as an idea, an analytic, a descriptive lens or an orientation – is increasingly used in social science research, generally to connote indeterminacy, emergence, becoming, processuality, turbulence and the sociomateriality of phenomena. In short, it is an attempt to describe relationalities of composition – relationalities of near/far and social/material. Rather than focusing on cities as resultant formations, assemblage thinking is interested in emergence and process, and in multiple temporalities and possibilities. (206)

The assemblage poses space as open and emerging, the result of a complex set of relations and connections that work to continually produce and reproduce the world. McFarlane observes, "In its focus on process and emergence, the assemblage approach

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methodical assembly of actors working together to both make and unmake space, for better or worse.

is not to describe a spatial category, output or resultant formation, but a process of doing, practice and events produced through different temporalities and contingencies" (209). Assemblage theory carries a sense of possibility that comes out of the implication that, if we make space by gathering, connecting, and labouring together, we might make space differently through the same mechanisms. The utopian edge of this stance poses that the actors of the world just need to engage one another in new ways and space will follow suit. I find this utopian insistence compelling partly because it acknowledges the agency of even the smallest piece of matter (just look at how lead in the soil uprooted the Lynnwood Ridge), but also because its deeply pessimistic obverse which asks, if everything is emergent, why do we contend with hardened spaces and structures that seem impossible to break out of, like the stubbornly colonial conference rooms of Hart House (and Canadian Literature in general). At the same time as it emphasizes emergence and process, the assemblage model accounts for how repeated practices build up a spatial stability – a consistent and thick organization that emerges according to logics that diagram the ways we engage and connect, logics composed in part by the legal, historical, and cultural texts and beliefs that circulate in spaces and shape the ways we can meet and engage one another.

Deleuze and Guattari turn to the assemblage as a broad model that imagines social and spatial form and process as neither essential nor totalized, neither defined through an essential quality inside of a system nor through an external totalizing command. Instead, assemblages are contingently formed, made stable through the repeated actions of and connections between the components or actors that compose a space. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari propose the assemblage as a topological cosmology focused on the ways groups organize and are organized, caught within territorializing and coding processes that both harden and loosen the connections between individual actors. As a concept, assemblage describes social and spatial organization as productive yet constantly shifting, as some parts of the organization stabilize while other parts destabilize. Manuel DeLanda argues for the simultaneity of stabilization and destabilization processes, suggesting that "[o]ne and the same assemblage can have components working to stabilize its identity as well as components forcing it to change or even transforming into a different assemblage" (*A New Philosophy* 12). At the same time, "stabilization" describes two sets of processes: primary material processes of territorialization, deterritorialization, and reterritorialization

and secondary expressive processes of coding, decoding, and recoding that both work to stabilize and destabilize the assemblage's identity.[14]

[Before diving further, I would like to interrupt myself, taking a cue from Alexander Weheliye, who, in his book *Habeas Viscus*, briefly takes a "methodological breather" in his revision of the assemblage model to briefly acknowledge the limits of Deleuze's project, while also acknowledging the potential inherent in a Deleuzian approach. My methodological approach to space leans on the Deleuzian assemblage model, but does so *unfaithfully*, holding tight to an ethical kernel at the heart of Deleuze's project, while also drawing from work that troubles, critiques, adjusts, and supplements the assemblage model, from other theorizations, from activist work, and from the poetry itself. Weheliye pointedly suggests that "taking on ideas from the toolbox of Deleuze and Guattari runs the risk of a descent into the quagmire of orthodox Deleuzianism" (47). He instead posits the potential of heterodox Deleuzians like Rosi Braidotti, Brian Massumi, Jasbir Puar, Manuel DeLanda, and others who "plunder" Deleuze's (and Guattari's) concepts "in the service of producing new concepts and assemblages" (47). I share Weheliye's heterodox approach which I feel works in the spirit of Deleuze's project, though not always to the letter. If I turn to a Deleuzian model of space, it is in part because I'm drawn to an ethical kernel at the heart of his project, which repeatedly asserts the violence of a certain kind of critical reading exemplified by (but not confined to) Freudian psychoanalysis, which Deleuze and Guattari famously critique in both *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*. This form of reading, wherein a readymade category is applied to a subject, text, situation, space, or set of conditions, marks a failure to listen to or trace out the contingency and materiality of experience – a failure that can have

[14] The assemblage is produced along two dimensions. In the first, each component operates along an axis moving from purely material (physical bodies, objects) to purely expressive (sign systems like language and genetics), typically adopting both material and expressive roles simultaneously. The second dimension involves the variable processes through which components connect, which involves a double articulation of material and expressive processes that stabilize/destabilize the assemblage. DeLanda imagines the expressive processes of coding and decoding as secondary or supplementary to materializing territorializations. "While territorialization provides a first articulation of the components," he suggests, "the *coding* performed by genes or words supplies a second articulation, consolidating the effects of the first and further stabilizing the identity of assemblages" (15). The "identity" of the assemblage depends on the ways these material and expressive components develop together over time, stabilizing historically, *evolutionarily*, suggesting that change within the assemblage is possible, but is slow and involves both material and expressive alterations.

real and often detrimental effects on the everyday lives of affected actors. If insisting on space involves also insisting on the material reality of actors as they assemble in the present, I think that holding onto this ethical imperative to both carefully consider one's position and not misrepresent or overcode others' experiences becomes of methodological importance.

Which doesn't mean that Deleuze's project (or mine, for that matter) is beyond reproach. In earlier work, he famously represents his approach as a sort of "buggery," a disconcerting metaphor for a form of immanent critique wherein he takes a thinker at their word to turn that word against them, a practice he adopts to break out of the stifling and then dominant practice of working through the history of philosophy. I refuse this Deleuze in favour of the one who later recants, in his "Letter to a Harsh Critic," these kinds of coercive power moves "behind the back" of the subject in favour of more positive types of working together "through love rather than subjection" (7). That said, love shouldn't be mistaken with a kind of faithfulness – thought and critique shouldn't need the equivalent of the couple form to be rigorous. A methodology should work to avoid application. Deleuze's project (like any project) needs to be read in relation to both the critiques levied against it and the other approaches running parallel to it – a reality that within the parameters of the PhD dissertation just ends up making things more difficult.[15] In particular, critiques levied by Gayatri Spivak, Christopher Miller, Jodi Byrd, and Alex Trimble Young point to the ways that the abstractions of Deleuze's project make it difficult to see the ways that it is anchored in and actively reproductive of the archive of colonialism, producing an abstract "world without others" whose footnotes and margins are nevertheless filled, to borrow Miller's list, with "'Nègres,' Indians, Chinese, leopard-men, women, and wolves – 'primitives' in their estimation, things they love!" ("We Shouldn't Judge Deleuze and Guattari" 132). In these moments where Deleuze

[15] This is the punchline embedded in Bruno Latour's theorization of Actor-Network-Theory, where, in a bizarre section of *Reassembling the Social*, he stages a dialogue between a grad student looking for an easy methodological fix and a professor who shruggingly denies that impulse, arguing that a theoretical methodology like ANT isn't about applying concepts but instead about tracing associations (meaning that the methodology mutates with the assemblage being traced out). Of course, Latour's professor is brutally unhelpful, answering the student's concerns about institutional expectation – "But that's not what my supervisor wants. He wants a frame in which to put my data" (143) – with silly jokes that make fun of the student's anxious concern, making that concern out to be a kind of rigidity without acknowledging that rigidity to be an effect of the relational pressures that emerge within the spaces of the university.

and Guattari turn to the colonial archive for metaphors and examples, they fail their own best instincts, and act as the anthropological analyst who applies prejudicial and harmful representational frameworks to get to whatever concept they're trying to create.

If I take this knee just as I begin to contextualize my approach, I do so less to defend myself in advance, than to acknowledge that my own theoretical anchor is fraught at best and that my "heterodox" attempts to muddle through that frayed intellectual fabric, particularly through *necessary* interlocutions with Indigenous and diasporic critics, creates moments where I drift to and from the assemblage model, moments where I read against (or away from) the grain of my central theoretical frame to read with the grain of the poets and other critics I look at. All this to say that, while Deleuze and Guattari present us with a handy model through which we can think about space, they also provide us with a model of thought that, at it's most ethical (and most useful), insists upon listening to and accounting for the experiences, histories, relations, and spaces of others, while working to not overcode those lives through the thoughtless application of categories and narratives. It is famously a philosophy about respecting life, though sometimes it fails at this and it is not without a deep and arguably necessary pessimism. In *A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1992), Brian Massumi thinks about interpretation through the figure of the woodworker who must carefully study the surface of the wood before beginning to transform it. "Interpretation is a force," Massumi notes, echoing the caution at the heart of a Deleuzian reading, but also suggesting that an application of force "is the outcome of an endless interplay of processes natural and historical, individual and institutional" (11). Interpretation is a force for better or worse, shaped, often invisibly, by the immanent array of processes, relations, and logics that cut through and produce our shared spaces. The forcefulness of interpretation and critique is necessary, but requires, as reflected in Massumi's analogical woodworker, a careful and considered hesitancy, particularly from my own position as a white, male, settler scholar, easily swayed by the logics and thickly enabling relations that surround me and allow me the leeway to act forcefully.]

I turn to the assemblage model because of the way it triangulates three spatial concepts. First, it approaches space through its part-to-whole relationships – an approach shared with other models from David Harvey's geographical dialectical materialism to Bruno Latour's Actor-Network-Theory. Second, in addition to this part-to-whole orientation, DeLanda insists that *emergence* and *exteriority* are necessary

concepts to define social wholes “that cannot be reduced to the persons that compose them, but that do not totalize them either” (*Assemblage Theory* 10). DeLanda points to Deleuze, who defines the assemblage as “a multiplicity which is made up of many heterogeneous elements and which establishes liasons, relations between them,” arguing that “the assemblage’s only unity is that of a co-functioning” (*Dialogues II* 69, qtd. in DeLanda 1). Pointing to this, DeLanda suggests that “the parts that are fitted together are not uniform either in nature or in origin, and that the assemblage actively links these parts together by establishing relations between them” (2). In other words, within an assemblage model, space is not a totalized or static organization where the parts composing it lock into an essentialized position (like organs in a body), but is instead built upwards from the connections and communications of actors who take up roles in relation to one another, creating contingently stable forms of organization that are hierarchical and uneven, but that can also change from the ground-up.

I want to examine these two concepts – emergence and externality – as a way to define the assemblage. *Emergence* appears as a concept in Canadian literary study in several ways. In her introduction to *Shifting the Ground of Canadian Literary Studies* (2012), Smaro Kamboureli asks about the relationship between emergent *events* and emergent *discourses*, posing an array of examples from conferences to publications that “comprise cases of particular *nodes* within the emergence of diverse discourses that seek to question the self-legitimation of the dominant master narratives about Canadian society and culture” (11). By framing emergence as an event, Kamboureli privileges a reading of emergence as the eruption of the new (or, as she puts it, the “strange”), caused perhaps by some kind of disruptive accident. If we read this alongside Raymond Williams’ sense of emergence, this makes a lot of sense – Williams’ sense of the emergent is tied to the new (“new meanings and values, new practices, new relationships and kinds of relationship” [*Marxism and Literature* 123]). But in another sense drawn from process-based assemblage theory, emergence involves the continual production and reproduction of the world and its relations – an understanding where the evental is not exceptional, but continuous in the way the world is constantly being produced from the ground up even as it is being reproduced, even as its relations remain stable.

In the face of this, imagining Canadian spaces as they emerge from the ground up, from assembling relations as they add up and thicken into larger organizational

structures, requires a certain amount of pessimism. This pessimism echoes a comment that Miki makes to Guy Beauregard in a 2009 interview where Miki, when asked about the "unfinished project" of redress for Japanese Canadians, responds with a worry about the way imagining spaces as they are constantly "reinvented" can paper over injustice:

> In the neoliberal language that we are used to in North America, there is always this assumption that the world is reinvented every day and that the present generation is not accountable for things that occurred in the past. That attitude consistently leads to a covering over of wounded conditions or of groups who have suffered from injustices. (76)

Of course, Miki is right to be skeptical. If we conceptualize emergence as a constant reinvention of the world, then we quickly run sighingly into the question of why, if things are constantly emerging and being reinvented, why is change so difficult? Coming out of assemblage theory, the answer is twofold. First, emergence is not reinvention. Instead, spatial form and process emerge into a diagrammatic "possibility space," a historically determined material and expressive system that shapes the potential for spatial practices and forms of organization. Second, asserting that spaces are emergent drags past injustices into the present, asking not only how those past injustices might be redressed, but also how they are ongoing – a move which forces a different set of questions that move from how we might make up for the past to how we might stop reproducing those injustices in the present.

At the same time, spatial emergence optimistically opens up the potential for alternate or resistant spatial forms, processes, relations, and practices that run counter to dominant exclusionary and eliminatory logics like those of the nation. To provide an example, in *Dancing on our Turtle's Back* (2011), Leanne Simpson frames Indigenous resurgence in terms of a "new emergence" that echoes the language of Western theory, but comes out of Nishnaabeg thought:

> In western science, emergence theory is based on the idea that events are not created on a single structure or rule, but that each component and its surroundings (or relationships) creates a complex chain of processes leading to some order. In Nishnaabeg thought these processes are also mediated through the implicate order or the spirit world, and that "complex" chain of reactions is necessarily non-linear. Nishnaabeg thought comes from the land and therefore, it embodies emergence. Nishnaabeg were adept at viewing and aligning themselves with emergent properties of the natural world – be it mass migration in the

> animal world, behaviour of schooling fish, herds of buffalo, or the patterns of freezing and melting bodies of water. (90-91)

This sense of Indigenous emergence (or resurgence) runs counter to readings of space as either essential or continually reinvented, aligning itself with the emergent properties of the land in an attempt to live and work ethically and reciprocally with other humans and non-humans. Simpson's sense of emergence is not identical to Kamboureli's, largely because Kamboureli focuses on the ways emergent events appear within discourse whereas Simpson's sense of the land comes out of ethical engagements with the material relations of the non-human world. In a sense, for Simpson, resurgence offers a doubled sense of emergence: evental in relation to dominant colonial spaces, producing a "new" (but also reassembled) set of Indigenous relations that propose a different, more reciprocal, kind of engagement with the continually emerging relations of the land.

Out of this, I want to push for two ways that emergence can help conceptualize spatial production. First, the pitfalls and potentials of emergence come out of a tension around readings of space that ground themselves in the relationship between "part" and "whole" – that is, between individual actors as they meet, encounter, and engage one another and the wider organizations that they assemble into. In her book *Relationscapes* (2009), Erin Manning poses a room filled with dancers as a way to think through this part-to-whole relationship, asking how bodies in motion enter into relation with one another as they negotiate between improvising in the moment "before thought" and being pressured into specific paths and steps by choreography and habit. For Manning, dance, in particular tango, is a practice that produces space through collaborative movement, through exchanges that add up into a room that moves with its parts:

> If the room moves with us, we feel as though we are dancing not with one other person, but with a hundred people. In this case, we experience a simultaneity of intervals: many rhythms and durations, one cadence. Repetition is another word for magic. One foot in front of another what we repeat is not the walk as such both the creation of intervals to the refrain of a simultaneous becoming. I move to move with you to move with them to move you moving me. Bodies recompose along new vectors, and the organs disperse. The connected intervals affectively transform our collective relation: the music moves with us, our collective steps sounding like the beating of a marked continuity. (25-26)

Manning's winding prose reflects on the complicated foldings of spatial emergence. She imagines the productive linking of relational movements as individual bodies improvise their way into a room of dancers. Her room filled with magic repetitions and simultaneous intervals is meant to be a utopian site of physical experimentation where dance (or even just walking) opens up new relations in the split second before habit, thought, choreography, and categories take over.

I read Manning's room filled with dancers as both material and deeply analogical. She describes a room filled with bodies caught between the historically shaped movements of the tango and the improvisations that can open up and change the topology of the room as it moves and sways. At the same time, while attending to the materiality of the dance floor, Manning suggests a way to read the exchange between engagements at a micro level and those engagements as they add up into and potentially transform collective relations. Manning's room of dancers demonstrates, on a conceptual level, how the assemblage looks to spaces as they emerge from the ground up, focusing on the part-to-whole relationships between individuals and larger structures, while also insisting on spatial relations as radically external, resisting versions of spatial production where space is a totalized field. The assemblage models space through its relations, setting up a central processual tension between the ways overarching structures emerge out of the arrays of everyday engagements, the ways those engagements are shaped by the relational stability or "thickness" of those structures, and the potential for those engagements to organize or assemble otherwise, generating alternate and hopefully more just possibilities for individuals as they live in, move through, and help produce spaces.

For DeLanda, exteriority dovetails with emergence, allowing him to imagine social and spatial wholes as constantly being produced through the connections between parts, rather than imagining those wholes as static or essential apparatuses that determine the role of each individual part. The thickness or stability of a space, then, involves diagrammatic logics that correspond, in Manning's analogy, to the dancers' choreography. If the tensions around the Great Hall of Hart House teach us anything about Manning's room of dancers, they teach us that choreography and habit, even the choreographies of the academic institution or the nation, restrict the new social and spatial possibilities that could emerge from reimaginings, critiques, improvisations, and transformed engagements. So, to push at the metaphor, while a joyful or trenchantly

critical moment might involve a new set of steps, those new steps have to be carried out in a room where everyone and everything else is dancing the older set of steps.

DeLanda's insistence on relations of exteriority comes out of a knee-jerk rejection of Marxism that I think is worth working through, not only because the tension between internalizing structures and externalized assemblages is useful, but also because Marxism is central to contemporary discussions of space. In insisting on exteriority, DeLanda sets the assemblage model against the Marxist dialectical models that Edward Soja positions at the core of what he's called the "spatial turn" – a shift in social theory over the 20th century from a focus on time to an increased interest in space and spatialization that begins with Lefebvre's work on the production of social space and continues in Marxist critical geography. Both DeLanda's assemblage theory and Soja's spatial turn operate in what we might think of as a long turn to the material – an array of dialectical and non-dialectical turns to space and materiality that respond to the linguistic turn and the subsequent dominance of theoretical approaches based in language and epistemology. The Marxist approaches of the spatial turn, sparked by Henri Lefebvre's work, and the non-dialectical and topological approaches of what Rob Shields calls a "topological turn", drawing on Deleuze and Guattari, share an interest in conceptualizing the dynamic between intimate and massive scales. They turn, in different ways to the co-productive exchanges made between individuals and structures, between the parts that assemble and the wider assemblage itself – to the way that spaces are relational. The assemblage model needs to be read within this theoretical tension, not only because Marxist and Deleuzian positions can help clarify and challenge one another, but because they are not incompatible, sharing an insistence on the social production of space.

Because of this tension, before I return to DeLanda and exteriority, I want to take a brief detour through Marxist geography. In his book *Postmodern Geographies* (1989), Soja points to the way Marxist critical geography developed "around and towards" Lefebvre's dialectical approach. First turning to the influx of Marxism into geography that begins with David Harvey's work in the 1970s, Soja suggests that:

> The Anglophonic contribution to Marxist geography primarily hinged upon the reconnection of spatial form to spatial process, an attempt to explain the empirical outcomes of geographically uneven development (what geographers innocently called 'areal differentiation') through its generative sources in the organizational structures, practices, and relations that constitute social life. (51)

Following Lefebvre's lead in unveiling the fetishized and naturalized relations of space, Soja identifies the ways Marxist geography connects spatial form and process in order to chart the dialectical movements of space as part of capitalist dynamics. As the central figure of Soja's genealogy, Lefebvre proposes in *The Production of Space* (1974) a complex, open-ended spatial dialectic – a *trialectic* – that challenges both mathematical views of space as container and the production of abstract capitalist spaces to assert the ways that that space is *produced* through ongoing processes and struggles. Lefebvre argues that the treatment of space as abstract – as essential, a container waiting to be filled – *fetishizes* spatial production, similar to the way the commodity obscures the labour behind it. "To speak of 'producing space' sounds bizarre," he opines, "so great is the sway still held by the idea that empty space is prior to whatever ends up filling it" (15). Lefebvre stumps for a necessary connection between class antagonism and spatial production in the face of abstract capitalist space that "has something of a dialogue about it, in that it implies a tacit agreement, a non-aggression pact, a contract, as it were, of non-violence" (56). To counter this, Lefebvre triangulates three concepts – spatial practice, representations of space, and representational spaces – that correspond roughly to the perceived, conceived, and lived elements and experiences of space that connect and overlap.

David Harvey outlines a similarly open-ended spatial dialectic in which form and process discipline one another. To a certain degree, Harvey follows Lefebvre, whose spatial dialectics Christian Schmid describes as "three-dimensional." For Lefebvre, argues Schmid, "[s]pace is to be understood in an active sense as an intricate web of relationships that is continuously produced and reproduced" (41). Schmid suggests that Lefebvre critiques Hegel's dialectic on two fronts: first, following Marx, rejecting Hegel's idealism and, second, criticizing the way that "in systematizing philosophy Hegel arrests the flow of time, declares the process of 'becoming' closed, this shattering his own most valuable approach" (32). Harvey echoes this critique, but only follows Lefebvre so far, expressing a problem, according to Schmid, with the way Lefebvre's dialectics might leave things too vague.[16] Like DeLanda, Harvey similarly conceptualizes his spatial

[16] Schmid includes Harvey in a list of spatial theorists who he sees not grasping the radicality of Lefebvre's three-dimensional dialectic: "Even David Harvey, who had creatively appropriated so many of Lefebvre's concepts, had problems with the three-dimensionality of Lefebvre's theory. He concludes his one short excursus on this question [in *The Condition of Postmodernity*] with the following argument: 'But to argue

dialectics as the interactions and connection between part and whole. Attempting to define a dialectical thinking that "emphasizes the understanding of processes, flows, fluxes, and relations over the analysis of elements, things, structures, and organized systems" (49), though with an attention to the ways that those processes congeal into more stable, "permanent" configurations – a dialectics that is not only a practice of inquiry, but an understanding of how things change. Within this understanding of the open-ended nature of spatial production, for Harvey, "[p]arts and wholes are mutually constitutive of each other" (53), disciplining, reinforcing, and altering each other through multiple overlapping processes. Harvey's dialectics insists on change, complexity, and contradiction, working against reductive readings of space and suggesting that "[t]he things that many researchers treat as irreducible and therefore unproblematic are seen in dialectical thought as internally contradictory by virtue of the multiple processes that constitute them" (51).

Much of this openness is a result of the way that Harvey's work in *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference* (1996) responds to feminist and poststructuralist critiques of Marxism as oversimplifying and rigid. Harvey's focus on the ways spatial production happens *inside* of capitalist processes assumes a totalized system organized primarily by market forces, sidelining forms of difference that aren't class based. In his article "Dialectics and Difference: Against Harvey's Dialectical 'Post-Marxism'" (1999), Andrew Jones observes Harvey's attempt to bridge a rift between poststructuralist approaches to human geography and his own dialectical model as ultimately limited by a too rigid adherence to Marxist concepts. Discussing Harvey's failure to truly account for the implications of varying "post-" critiques, Andrew Jones argues that "Harvey's 'post-Marxism' clings unquestioningly to well established inflexible concepts, which are 'rubbed against each other' within a dialectical epistemology" (531). He boils Harvey's argument down to the assertion that "there is some validity and force to 'post-' theory, but that in order to engage in the 'real world', we need to deal still in the 'permanencies' of daily experience" (536), agreeing with Harvey's insistence on dealing with permanencies, but disagreeing fundamentally with his insistence on dialectical materialism.

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that the relations between the experienced, the perceived, and the imagined are dialectically rather than causally determined leaves things much too vague'" (41)

In contrast, Deleuzian approaches to space begin to emerge in the 1990s in work on embodiment (Elizabeth Grosz, Rosi Braidotti), in deeply poststructural (and metaphorical) takes on spatial "folding" (Marcus Doel, Bernard Cache), and in architectural theorizations of what a folded architecture might look like (Greg Lynn, John Rajchman). These approaches excel when thinking through the stakes at intimate scales and in more abstract settings, becoming clearer in Brian Massumi's theorization of embodiment, relation, and affect[17] as threaded through the concept of the virtual – an imperceptible force that runs through the topologies of relation defining the field of potential action. Emerging from this sense of the fold, a diverse set of "topological" approaches conceptualize space as vitally material, radically relational and networked, nontotalized, and constantly deforming, drawing primarily from Deleuze and Guattari, (but also, variously, from Foucault, Bruno Latour, and Alfred North Whitehead). The topological begins with a reconsidered sense of geometry that, like Lefebvre, no longer reads space as a static container, but instead imagines it as a constantly deforming social mass with non-quantifiable, virtual components. This non-Euclidean sense of geometry is central to the assemblage, operating in the virtual interval (or moment before thought) that Manning theorizes through dance. As a concept, topology identifies not only the way that spaces mutate and emerge, but also the way that emergence sits in the tension between space as measured, instrumentalized, and controllable and space as improvisational, emergent, and affective. Or, to put it in more Marxist terms, between structure and self-organization.

DeLanda answers this tension by insisting on exteriority – a framing of space that comes out of his fundamental disagreement with the organic totalities of Hegelian dialectics. For DeLanda, Hegelian dialectics involves an organismic metaphor to explain social ontology that proposes social constructions are organized around relations of interiority. This means that the parts of that construction can only carry meaning as part of the whole and their value is determined by the larger structure. Under these terms,

[17] In his focus on bodies, Massumi argues for a kind of incorporeal materialism – what he calls "the felt reality of relation" (16) – that results from the movement of bodies in relation to one another. He pointedly challenges readings of the body based in "positionality," that is, the way a body is pinned to a subject position on a grid, arguing that "[t]he idea of positionality begins by subtracting movement from the picture," catching the body "in a cultural freeze-frame" (3). Massumi asks what what would happen if, instead of privileging position, we privileged movement in our readings of space – a move that requires a consideration of the ways the body is non-Euclidean.

Marxism is undeservedly dismissed by DeLanda as he misses the more open-ended dialectics of Lefebvre and Harvey. For DeLanda, relations of exteriority involve a situation where bodies in relation don't form organs, but instead enter into a different kind of communicative relation:

> These relations imply, first of all, that a component part of an assemblage may be detached from it and plugged into a different assemblage in which its interactions are different. In other words, the exteriority of relations implies a certain autonomy for the terms they relate, or as Deleuze puts it, it implies that 'a relation may change without the terms changing'. (*A New Philosophy* 10-11)

In the assemblage, DeLanda imagines a world emerging from social and spatial connections and relations (rather than those connections being defined by an internalizing, essential quality). The organismic and assemblage models form a conceptual inversion of one another, with the organismic model proposing relatively fixed ("essential," "logically necessary") relationships between parts and the assemblage model instead proposing *stable* ("contingently obligatory") relations. Where the organismic model turns to the single organism as a metaphor for social organization,[18] the assemblage model turns to different biological illustrations, considering the wasp and the orchid (which connect without a clear functional relation to the whole) rather than the flower (whose interactions have a clear function).[19] Within this, historical stabilization

[18] Here, DeLanda directly channels the Deleuzian distrust of models to classify social structures along the lines of essentialized function, turning away from systems with clearly discernable, internalized organs, and instead preferring the externalizing concept of the body without organs, which defines itself through its interactions with an outside.

[19] In his book *Art and Revolution*, Gerald Raunig works through a similar version of this that centers Deleuze and Guattari's sense of machinic organization. Raunig's breakdown of the machine concept is drawn from two different sources: Marx and Deleuze. Looking at Marx's "Fragment on Machines," Raunig notes the way that, for Marx, the machine as the final stage of the development of labour "not only structuralizes, striates, and stratifies the workers as automaton, as apparatus, as structure, but it is also simultaneously permeated by mechanical and intellectual organs, through which it is successively further developed and renewed" (141). Here, the machine is not a means of labour (like the tool), but instead "encloses the knowledge and skill of workers and scholars as objectified knowledge and skill, opposing the scattered workers as a dominant power" (140). For Raunig, Deleuze and Guattari's rereading of the machine is an attempt to open up Marx's suffocating automatism. Thinking about the machinic as a *process* having to do with the communication between parts, Deleuze and Guattari differentiate between the tool as "communication-less extension or prosthesis" and the machine as "communication factor" (144). Deleuze and Guattari's machine refuses the "conventional figure or the machine's domination over the

takes on an evolutionary quality in lieu of an essential quality, the organization of an assemblage developing as "a historical result of [its parts'] coevolution" (12).

This tension between inside and outside, between the internalizing structuration and the externalizing emergence of a space, marks the difficulty in defining spatial struggle that we can see in Canadian literary study. In it, we can recognize struggles *over* Canada and *with* Canada – a distinction that makes room for alternate forms of spatial production and relation that are separate from Canada (even if on the same territory) or that somehow exceed Canada (as in the "double spatiality" of black and Asian diasporas). When Andrews lauds the courage it takes to break out of or into spaces like the academy, she's not wrong to do so, but the more difficult task is in asking how actors can *come together* to challenge spatial production (from the inside) or to produce space in a different way (creating an "outside"). For DeLanda, assemblages can connect to form larger assemblages, but, following the logic of externalization, they can also *not* connect, creating assemblages outside of the dominant structure (which in turn will have an inside with its own logics that must be negotiated). In turn, calls for Indigenous sovereignty or black fugitivity become as much about building (or rebuilding) resistant and spatially anchored forms of relation as they are about escape or flight from exploitative or eliminatory logics. The Deleuzian insistence on the "line of flight" becomes something different here as the building of spaces outside of power is not a streak of deterritorialization – it's not about taking things apart – but instead a kind of counterterritorialization – a stabilizing assemblage acting as a resistant formation that stages an alternative way of life.

Stability, Engagement, Articulation

Within this model, poetry works as a kind of "expressive" agent. In this sense, poetry as a form of spatial expression shouldn't be confused with poetry as lyric expression. Instead, poetry operates as part of a set of non-material concepts, ideas, laws, and narratives that help structure and diagram – that *code* – social and spatial organization. Following Deleuze and Guattari, Manuel DeLanda argues that expression works as a second articulation of space, further stabilizing material territorializations (or

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human being" and, instead, like the assemblage, is produced through the communication and exchange between various "things" – "animals, tools, other people, statements, signs or wishes" (145).

opening up possibilities for deterritorialization). In other words, poetry acts as an expressive part of a larger assemblage that is composed of interconnected material and expressive parts. Poetry is a part of larger spaces, circulating through classrooms, bookstores, reading spaces, and social media, while also,operating as a tool to help map and rearticulate the ways spaces assemble. We should never believe that a poetic subversion will suffice to save us; but because of its attention to language as media, literature, and poetry in particular, can bend and critique the discourses and histories that stick to and help shape spaces. Conceptualizing this relationship is difficult however. Henri Lefebvre emphasizes the impact and potential of representations of space (space as conceived by scientists, planners, urbanists, etc) and representational spaces (space as lived by not only its inhabitants, but also through the work of its artists, writers, and philosophers). While there are no guarantees to how texts will be mobilized in space and while texts can't knock down a building or alter a border, they can code and recode spaces, stabilizing and destabilizing spatial identities and practices, and shape the ways spatial actors encounter one another.

Poetry emphasizes questions of language and code and, because of this, asking spatial questions of poetry pushes me toward work that either explicitly frames itself as writing about space or place *or* takes formal approaches that are more materially or socially invested, addressing the world "outside" the poem and off the page through cognitive mapping, documentary or archival work, autowriting, and political manifestos. Reading poetry spatially requires a difficult negotiation between the expressive and material components of the world that must, I argue, be accompanied with a certain amount of skepticism about what poetry can actually accomplish. Let me belabour this point with an example. In her essay "Toward a Planetary Poetics: Canadian Poetries after Globalization" (2016), Erin Wunker, argues that "[w]hile Canadian criticism has tended to frame poetic production in terms of nation, region, language, race, and gender, the current moment calls for a retooling of critical approaches so as to recognize these elements at the level of globality" (93). Wunker spies a potential for poetry in the way it can navigate the simultaneity of intimate and global scales, or, as she identifies it in a reading of Nicole Brossard's *Notebook of Roses and Civilization*, "[t]he structure of the book requires the reader engage with the intimate minutiae of the everyday, yet refuses to let the reader forget that she is part of a wider collective" (97). For Wunker, poetry and poetics in Canada "push against or offer alternatives" to global capitalism by working

through a scale-bending "planetarity" – a concept she adopts from Gayatri Spivak[20] to help think political action and the production of subjectivity across scales through transnational affiliative communities and poetic countermappings of global pressures. We need to be careful making claims for poetry's ability to challenge global capitalism – after all, poetry doesn't "require" a reader to do or feel anything. Wunker's argument that poetry can "usefully overwrite" or recode the globe feels over optimistic, requiring a critical mass, upswell, or the slow accretion of circulations that decode and recode the logics that shape potential practices in space.

It also risks ignoring or sidestepping material experiences of space. This is maybe most evident in Wunker's turn to the poetry of Sina Queyras. For Wunker, Queyras responds to global movements across borders by posing a slippery lyric I that works through "experimental modes of connectivity" (103). Specifically Wunker turns to Queyras' *Expressway* (2009), which takes on the ways the abstract spaces of capitalism connect to language and the production of subjectivity. For Queyras, mobility is at once a harbinger of some kind of post-industrial apocalypse, a symbol of alienating and repetitive everyday life, and, somehow, also a necessity of resistant artistic production – a set of tensions brought about through Queyras' explicit metaphorization of urban sprawl. Interested in the metaphorical junction point between the materiality of urban sprawl (embodied in the expressway of her title), the alienated subjectivities produced by those spaces, and the role of language in producing both space and subject, Queyras turns to "the idea of mobility, the end of oil" ("Interview" 316). In an interview with Heather Milne in *Prismatic Publics* (2009), she describes looking out over the "sea of expressways" in Philadelphia, feeling an anxiety related to the decaying architectures of peak oil:

> But I think it's been one long unconscious swoon of mobility, not even thinking about the implications of physically moving around the world, the infrastructures that we've been laying out all over the planet that are now decaying and have led to decay around them. (316)

[20] Drawing from Spivak's book *Death of a Discipline* (2003), Wunker tells us that "Spivak defines 'planetarity' as a means of challenging globalization, but not as an 'anti-globalization' action; she suggests that while 'globalization is the imposition of the same system of exchange everywhere,' planetarity might usefully 'overwrite the globe' in an attempt to recognize the ways in which we inhabit it" (94). In Wunker's reading, Spivak's planetarity becomes a way to challenge immense structures from an embedded position.

In *Expressway*, Queyras' gesture to the shimmering, potential ruins of sprawl, transport, and mobility looks both forward to a speculative dystopia where food is grown on abandoned roads and backward to William and Dorothy Wordsworth's attraction to the pastoral in a historical moment equally obsessed with ruins.[21] Queyras' anxiety over decay accompanies her observations about the repetitive and reproducing rhythms of the road when she imagines a toll-booth worker for whom "*every fourteen cars* [is] *a sonnet*" (13).

For Wunker, this final image "marks a shift in which internal feelings are no longer structured against the external world" and, instead, "the internal, perceptual world is what structures the external" (104-05). Whether this "remaking through perception" belongs to Queyras or Wunker, its appeal to the subjective "internal" risks reducing space, with all of its complex relations, to the individual, to expressive flights of fancy, and, worst of all, to *mere discourse*. The triangle Queyras draws between space, subjectivity, and language emerges from her interest in lyric expression, a interest throughout her work that Wunker identifies in her essay "O Little Expressway: Sina Queyras and the Traffic of Subversive Hope" (2010) as an exploitation of a tension between lyric expression and conceptual procedure to produce a "reorientation of the lyric, where grammar of verse – emblematized by the voracious road – literally moves its own exchange value" (38). Wunker pins her argument to a slippery short-circuit between the materiality of the road system and the grammar of verse as a kind of lyric "express"-way. For example, take the first poem in the short sequence "Three Dreams of the Expressway," where Queyras presents a vision of the expressway being demolished:

> The men build and the women dismantle,
> On this day the women appear one by one,
> Despite our best theories, they drop their
>
> Laptops and iPods, they leave their magazines,
> They step down from elliptical trainers, out of
> The boxing ring, tummies flat and minds sharp
>
> They move out of the domestic sphere, they
> Move away from the office towers, they come
> Down to the expressways with pickaxes, they come

[21] These two different temporal moves appear in *Expressway* as the focus of the sections "Because Every Road is Made with Dynamite" and "Some Moments From a Land Before the Expressway" respectively.

With hammers, they come, suddenly clear,
Suddenly swinging hammers, they say, This
Is a metaphor too unwieldy, they say, This

Is a symbol that has undone us (88)

Here, Queyras collapses a number of things. She presents a group of women rejecting the everyday assemblage that helps to produce their subjectivity (through domestic labour, office work, exercise regimes, media consumption) to become a pickaxe and hammer hoisting demolition crew. Destroying the one assemblage to produce another, the newly assembled feminist work crew turns against the expressway presumably as both physical infrastructure and expressive constraint – the expressway as both road and metaphor.

Queyras' dream is potent, envisioning the possibility that the decks of women's spaces can be shuffled, that the stable organizations of the world can be abandoned for or refashioned into something else. Does Queyras offer us something other than a spatial *dream* though? Wunker, for her part, argues that Queyras draws inspiration from the constantly moving expressway as a kind of nomadic model that "threatens" the striated and sedentary spaces of the state – instability as both a condition of mobility and a creative method against it. Wunker's turn to Deleuze's nomad is problematic here, because of the way that the mobility of the expressway is not typically a line of flight, but is primarily the deeply striated space of transportation logistics, daily commutes, and tourist road trips. There's a materiality to the expressway that Wunker sidesteps in her suggestion that, for Queyras, "[t]he possibility for innovative change may be found in a line break borne not of a beloved but a road" (38). But if, in the sonnet, the beloved is not necessarily reflective of a real person, can we take Queyras' road as real? What if, to counter Wunker, traffic *is* merely metaphoric in Queyras' expressway?

I ask this question not because Queyras' use of the expressway to interrogate lyric forms is somehow *less spatial* than work that is more site-specific or documentary, but to point to the double bind of any poetics invested in space. At once, language and expression are inadequate to change material spatial conditions by themselves *and* are also circulating and stabilizing those conditions as part of DeLanda's double articulation. Meaning that Queyras' poems won't tear down the expressway, but they might be mobilized in ways that challenge dominant organizations from the environmentally destructive sprawl of the suburbs to the intimate encounters of the patriarchy. Over the

course of my dissertation, I work to hold tight to this affirmation that poetry can't directly change space, but can work to recode and refashion how people view, imagine, circulate in, and produce spaces, opening up potential avenues of spatial practice while helping to stabilize spaces for groups and practices that have been squeezed out or eliminated.

Over the course of the following three chapters, I attempt to work through the three overlapping questions I introduced at the beginning of this introduction – what are the stakes of spaces as they stabilize, destabilize, and restabilize; how do actors engage one another ethically within these stabilizing and destabilizing spaces; and how are individuals articulated within the array of relations that compose a space. To get at how poetry addresses these three questions, I couple each question with a complementary problematic within Canadian poetry – urban development, ecological crisis, and racialization, respectively – to provide concrete fields to read the poetry through the lens of the assemblage model, while also teasing out the ways that the poetry troubles and clarifies that model, performing spatial research that points us in different directions. This combination of questions and problematics provides a frame through which I navigate poetry's expressive relationship with the materiality of space.

My first chapter takes up the problem of spatial stability through the intersecting processes of urban development and the dispossession of land. When Patrick Wolfe outlines the eliminatory logic that shapes settler-colonialism, he insists that the primary motive is access to territory. The question of territory and land dominates discussions of both settler-colonialism and urban development. Shaped by logics that demand that, in order for colonial Canada to form, existing relations need to be destroyed or displaced, squeezed out by the junction of state violence and capitalist mechanisms that reshape spaces through systems of ownership and profit. This destruction and displacement involves, I argue, a transformative process where the relations that compose a territory are broken up, dissolved, and deterritorialized in order to clear room for a different set of relations to reterritorialize that space. I take this up from a contemporary Vancouver context in which poets have been extremely active in responding to and critiquing the dramatic transformations of their city, which can be seen from the colonial violence that turns Snauq into False Creek to the uneven development transforming neighbourhoods like the Downtown Eastside or Chinatown into areas for the wealthy. The quartet of poets I read in my chapter – Lisa Robertson, Mercedes Eng, Wayde Compton, and

Cecily Nicholson – respond to the historical trajectories of spatial change as things are destabilized for one group only to stabilize for another.

Thinking about space through competing processes of stabilization and destabilization involves working through space as it is changed over time. While all four of these poets bridge the gap between historical and contemporary accounts of spatial change, I first turn to Nicholson and Compton, whose dives into the archive, oral history, and what Compton calls "retro-speculation," work to remediate "continuities of erasure" (Nicholson's term) as they emerge in the intersections of the historical record and contemporary territorializations of space. Both Nicholson and Compton turn to historical examples in the Lower Mainland that ripple into the present. For Nicholson, the repeatedly redeveloped Poplar Island allows her to track colonialism's history of erasure, while also asking how those forms of erasure echo into the present. For Compton, the demolished Hogan's Alley provides a historical site to think through the seeming absence of a cohesive black community in Vancouver, while also allowing him to try to pull tight the threads of that dispersed community by providing speculative and material spaces for black folks to assemble. This concern over the ways Robertson and Eng very differently respond to a contemporary Vancouver being "dissolved" (to use Robertson's word) by the application of global capital. Robertson and Eng write through these violent street level changes from different positions, generations, and using very different formal means. Taken together, their work proposes a tension between conceptual and material approaches to the destabilization of spaces. Where Robertson, under the guise of the "Office for Soft Architecture," distantly drapes Vancouver in various literary representations of spatial change in other parts of the world, including most notably the Haussmannization of nineteenth century Paris, Eng works from her grounded position as a resident of the Downtown Eastside neighbourhood, mapping, historicizing, and critiquing the spatial intimacies of a space coming apart in order to make room for condos, boutiques, and other markers of an incursionary set of relations.

My second and third chapters leap from this question of stabilization and intimacy to ask how space bends between intimate and wider national and global scales. Chapter Two threads this through what DeLanda identifies as the base-unit of the assemblage: not the individual actor, but the face-to-face meeting between actors. As the evental encounters and deliberate engagements between actors assemble into emergent spaces, it's important to ask how those engagements can and cannot transform those

spaces from the ground up through a transformation of the ways actors relate to one another. To ask this question, I turn to the expanding field of ecological poetry (or "ecopoetry") – a field that has intensified in response to the multiplication of environmental concerns and crises in Canada and across the globe. In the way it interrogates human relationships with and to the nonhuman, ecopoetry poses a difficult set of negotiations between work on and off the page, between reflection, action, and the problematic category of the experimental. In a Canadian context, ecopoetry involves an intersection of multiple (and often overlapping) formal and political approaches to these relationships, from the "material metaphoricity" of the lyric to the conceptual play of the pataphysical to the directness of the activist.

In this turn to ecopoetry and engagement, I intersect two tensions. First, I look at the split sense of value between capitalist and activist approaches to the nonhuman, between treating the nonhuman as a resource to be extracted and exploited and more ethically engaging with nonhuman actors through a rubric of reciprocality and care. Second, I attempt to track how poets frame "action" as a goal within and without their poetry, acknowledging the ways that engaging nonhuman actors pushes poets off the page and into the materiality of those engagements, whether through activist organizing or playful experimentation with human-nonhuman relations. I read a small group of ecopoets grappling with these tensions, including Fred Wah, Adam Dickinson, Stephen Collis, Jordan Scott, and a. rawlings, before jumping into the fraught senses of "experiment" between the activist work of Rita Wong and the conceptual work of Christian Bök. In their approaches to the nonhuman, Wong and Bök have wildly different goals, making it continually surprising that the two poets are continually published side-by-side in the same anthologies. Wong in *Forage* and *Undercurrent* pushes for a careful apprehension of the ways human activity is toxic to nonhuman communities, cycling back to the human through processes like the water cycle. The interconnectedness of human and nonhuman worlds leads her to suggest that she feels like global capitalism has placed her into an experiment she didn't consent to, creating unforeseen consequences for her body. In contrast, Bök's *The Xenotext* performs a very literal experiment on the body of a bacteria for the aesthetic end of writing a poem that will last forever in the bacteria. Both projects frame experimentation in terms of bodies that have somehow been devalued in the pursuit of a kind of profit (whether money or notoriety), but differ in the way they put forward an ethical position. Where Wong frames her entire

project in terms of how she "transcribes" her ethics, paying keen attention to the ways her own actions cascade with those of others to create the world for better or worse, Bök pushes aside the relational assemblies around his project in favour of presenting it as sometimes a collaboration with the bacteria, but often the individual and heroic work of a great talent. In other words, the differences between Wong and Bök describe opposed stances with regard to the ways each individual engagement is caught in a vibrant field of engagements that shape one another.

In my third and final chapter, I examine the ways arrays of engagements articulate the social and spatial possibilities available to individuals. To get to this, turn to the ways a number of poets take up the sites (and sights) of racialization in what Alexander Weheliye calls a "racializing assemblage." Weheliye strains the assemblage through Stuart Hall's notion of articulation to pose the ways black lives are directed through the intersection of law and "flesh" – of expression and materiality as they circulate, disciplining bodies. At the heart of this question of articulation sits the *diagram* – an immanent material logic that shapes and directs the emergence of the spatial field. The classic example of the diagram is Foucault's mobilation of the panopticon – Jeremy Bentham's blueprint for a prison writ large into a system of mass surveillance. But, as Simone Browne suggests when she argues that the panopticon doesn't properly diagram black experience in North America, we need to consider the ways that diagrammatic logics are hierarchical and asymmetrical, opening up possibilities for certain individuals or groups that aren't available to others in ways that aren't overarching transcendent structures, but instead play out unevenly across everyday life.

I begin by looking at the work of Phinder Dulai and Souvankham Thammavongsa (and, to a lesser extent, Erín Moure) who each track a kind of "border logic" that appears through official state regulation and policing of who can enter into Canada as well as the ways those logics shape everyday engagements away from the geopolitical lines dividing national space. In his dive into the archive of the 1914 Komagata Maru incident, where a ship full of Sikh passengers were denied entry into Vancouver despite being British citizens, Dulai asks not only how the archival record reflects and erases such a key moment in Canada's history of exclusion, but also how that history is ongoing, carrying forward into the present, particularly in the form of virulent racism. Thammavongsa's work similarly works through a more personal history – her family's history as Laotian refugees – to pose and refuse the performances expected "at the

border" – not only of refugee claimants, for instance, but also of racialized groups in general.

Performance becomes a keyword in this chapter as it describes the articulatory limits posed to racialized folks, particularly as those limits not only halt the movements, but also direct those movements by shaping the social and spatial possibilities available. In the final section of this chapter, I read the work of Dionne Brand, Marie Annharte Baker, and Marvin Francis, all of whom figure social and spatial performance through a tension between limited possibilities and subversive potential. Where Brand examines the ways the economic and legislative "rhythms" of the city shape and police opportunities for black and other racialized folks, Annharte and Francis pose racialization as a problem of performance – explicitly for Annharte in the legislative/theatrical figure of the "Indian Act." Reading their work together showcases multiple modes of resisting this thick relationality in order to hopefully open up new or resurgent modes of engagement, new social and spatial forms, and reassembled space that provide opportunities and paths that are more just – though they avoid easy utopianism. Through their shared focus on performance, Annharte and Francis use performance to demonstrate the limits of law, education, and economy, posing the potential of subversive role switching that exposes articulatory limits by speculatively crossing them.. In contrast, Brand, as noted by Johanna X.K. Garvey, dramatizes the junction of violent state institutions and fugitive spaces that establish counterstabilities based in "queer (un)belonging" – spaces that are "below deck," so to speak, outside the articulatory rhythms of antiblackness and white supremacy.

Chapter 1

Destabilization and Dispossession in the Dissolving City

> What do we share but the wish to see right relation? It cannot be imposed. In place of the given we seek territory. Masked faces figure an account of who owes who. The grocery bill is taped to the kitchen cupboard. She figures out each share, & is it fair that some would rather eat meat while others drink expensive coffee substitutes? Who will wash the floor next week? (Marlatt, *Our Lives* 26)

> Nothing was local before one could be pulled away from it at any time, for professional or medical reasons, or for vacation. Local is the name of a possibility of sharing, combined with the sharing of a dispossession. (The Invisible Committee, *To Our Friends* 189)

Stō'lo writer Lee Maracle's story "Goodbye Snauq" begins with an acknowledgement of the way that "Raven shaped us; we are built for transformation" (13). Maracle frames transformation and change in two directions – from within and from outside:

> Our stories prepare us for it. Find freedom in the context you inherit; every context is different; discover consequences and change from within, that is the challenge. Still, there is horror in having had change foisted upon you from the outside. (13)

Over the course of her essay, Maracle threads this tension between change motivated within a community and change sparked from outside through the violent colonial transformation of Snauq into False Creek, her reflections triggered by a court case declaring the sale of Snauq between 1913 and 1916 illegal. Maracle draws archival and personal memory into a consideration of the ways that the junction of colonialism and capitalism not only displaced the Squamish for whom Snauq was home, but fundamentally disrupted the relations and physical shape of the space. Sitting where the south end of the Burrard Street Bridge now stands, Snauq was liquidated, its land appropriated in 1913 through an underhanded land deal facilitated by the city, the village burned to the ground. Maracle laments the way that "[t]he shoreline is gone, in its place are industries squatting where the sea once was" (15) – a change that disrupts both

human and non-human relations turning the common "garden" or "supermarket" of Snauq into the garbage dump of False Creek.

False Creek, like many other sites and neighbourhoods in Vancouver and elsewhere, has transformed again and again into the condo developments that dominate both sides of the inlet – part of a larger move to appropriate and reterritorialize space to generate a profit, in the process denaturing the complex relations that compose space. I begin with Maracle's counterhistory of False Creek to pose the ways that spaces and spatial relations hold together and come apart. Spatial change necessitates a change in relations. As Maracle suggests, spatial change occurs both from the bottom up, through the continual emergence of spatial relations on the ground, and from the top down, through the interconnecting processes of colonialism, urbanism, and capitalist development.[22] In the wake of counterhistories like Maracle's, urbanist planning and its tendency to evangelize formal redesign as the road to a better world turns suspect, implicated in the dispossession of land and the destruction of the relations that compose it. In the case of Snauq, the resulting sweep – a deterritorialization of Indigenous relations and spatial practice followed closely by a territorialization of colonial relations in the space opened up – not only makes space for colonial Vancouver, but also enables colonial Vancouver to indigenize itself.[23] The rich relations that composed Snauq are dissolved and, in the deterritorialized vacuum, Vancouver constitutes itself.

In his article "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native" (2006), Patrick Wolfe argues that settler-colonialism operates through a "logic of elimination" motivated by land and territory. Wolfe observes that:

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[22] We can see this tension between top-down and bottom-up approaches to spatial change in debates around modernist urbanism and the way, in the words of Le Corbusier and the International Congress of Modern Architecture (CIAM) in the 1933 *Athens Charter*, "[t]he soul of the city will be brought to life by the clarity of the plan" (n. pag.).

[23] In her article "Erasing Indigenous Indigeneity in Vancouver" (2007), Jean Barman, working through the liquidation and erasure of Snauq argues that the erasure of Indigenous populations cleared room for a different sense of indigeneity. She argues that "[p]ersons who were indigenous to the area, and considered it their home long before the arrival of outsiders, were first removed from the land they called their own and then saw even their memory deliberately lost from view" – a move that allows the colonial city of Vancouver to "assert that sense of rootedness that is at the heart of Indigeneity without its having to be indigenous to Vancouver" (4). In this, one rooted set of relations (the Squamish settlement of Snauq) is dissolved and replaced with another (the colonial settlement of Vancouver).

> Whatever settlers may say – and they generally have a lot to say – the primary motive for elimination is not race (or religion, ethnicity, grade of civilization, etc.) but access to territory. Territoriality is settler colonialism's specific, irreducible element. (388)

Wolfe's insists that this settler-colonial desire to territorialize is not a one-off, isolated *event*, but rather an ongoing structural process. In his book *Red Skin, White Masks* (2014), Glen Sean Coulthard jumps off of Wolfe's reading of colonialism "as a form of structured dispossession" by threading it through Marx's theory of primitive accumulation – a move that acknowledges the intense ways in which colonialism and capitalism are tangled up in one another. Coulthard recounts Marx's argument in *Capital* that "formative acts of violent *dispossession* set the stage for the emergence of capitalist accumulation and the reproduction of capitalist relations of production by tearing Indigenous societies, peasants, and other small-scale, self sufficient agricultural producers from the source of their livelihood – *the land*" (7). For Coulthard, the dispossession of land "has been the dominant background structure shaping the character of the historical relationship between Indigenous peoples and the Canadian state" (13), but land, he argues, is not just a material site, but is a system of relations:

> Stated bluntly, the theory and practice of Indigenous anticolonialism, including Indigenous anticapitalism, is best understood as a struggle primarily inspired by and oriented around *the question of land* – a struggle not only *for* land in the material sense, but also deeply *informed* by what the land *as system of reciprocal relations and obligations* can teach us about living our lives in relation to one another and the natural world in nondominating and nonexploitative terms – and less around our emergent status as 'rightless proletarians.' (13)

Informed by this understanding of land as a system of relations and obligations, we can recognize how Maracle's narrative of the destruction of Snauq describes an event chained in what Cecily Nicholson calls a "continuity of erasure" that unfolds forward into our present in different forms, from the Modernist urban planning that ran a freeway through the Vancouver's only black neighbourhood in the 1970s to the current gentrification cutting through the Downtown Eastside.

These powerful and ongoing moments of violent spatial upheaval underline the importance of material space to the assembly and disassembly of land as a set of relations. In this chapter, I read the poetry of Lisa Robertson, Mercedes Eng, Cecily Nicholson, and Wayde Compton, four Vancouver poets who dramatize, confront, and

critique the capitalist and colonial processes that *stabilize* and *destabilize* the material relations that compose the city. Stability is a strange keyword. On one hand, stability describes the way a space "holds itself together" as it remains the same over time. On the other hand, it also describes people's lives at more intimate scales as their lives *feel* more or less stable depending on the availability of work, housing, and support. As processes, stabilization and destabilization involve both the ways a space is subject to change and the ways that individual actors can be tossed around by (or can affect) those changes. Stabilizations and destabilizations can happen simultaneously as part of the same process – the stabilization of False Creek enabled by the destabilization of Snauq. Robertson, Eng, Nicholson, and Compton all work in this tense milieu, weighing the potentials of language and poetry to intervene into spaces (and the relations that compose them) as they change – stabilizing, destabilizing, and restabilizing – to benefit some while harming others. Central to all these poets' work is a concern over what categories, narratives, and histories stabilize and destabilize sites and neighbourhoods and *who those processes benefit*.

Robertson, Eng, Nicholson, and Compton respond to a 21st century milieu where Vancouver is repeatedly hailed as one of the world's most liveable cities while also being one of the most unaffordable – a city of cranes and scaffolds and tent encampments. Yet Vancouver poetry's engagement with the local has a long history. In his article "A Poetics of Place in the World System: West Coast Modernism and the Integration of Vancouver into the Global Economy" (2016), Stephen Morton traces the differences between two major poetic groups in Vancouver and their relationship to a poetics of place and the local. Emerging in the 1960s, the Tish poets famously draw from the work of the New American Poetry and American modernists like William Carlos Williams, working through place as historically and relationally grounded, supplementing and sometimes challenging the push for a unified "Canadian" identity by writing poetry dedicated to the particularities of the local and strained through their perceptions.[24] Morton refashions Christian Bök's assertion in his essay "Tish and Koot" (2006) that the move from Tish in the 1960s to the Kootenay School of Writing (KSW) in the 1980s involves an aesthetic break from the Tish group's Olsonian poetics of place toward a

[24] Morton points to Warren Tallman's essay "The Wonder Merchants" and Tallman's argument that West Coast Writing in the 1960s was interested in a "personal localism" where the concern is "the place where *you* are" instead of "the *place* where you are" (133).

formal approach inspired by American Language writing. Morton argues that "[t]he differences between the poetics associated with the Tish group and that of KSW cannot be neatly calibrated in terms of a lyric poetry centred on the local (in the case of Tish) versus a metalinguistic, antilyrical poetics of the global (in the case of the poets associated with KSW)" (132). Rather than a generational break between aesthetically defined coteries, the differences between Tish and KSW are the result of changing historical and geographical conditions that spark different formal approaches to mapping and understanding space and place. In Morton's reading, KSW writers like Jeff Derksen, Dan Farrell, Kevin Davies, Dorothy Trujillo Lusk (as well as Robertson, who Morton doesn't discuss) don't *abandon* a poetics of place and the local, but reshape it in the wake of globalization.

Morton argues that "the rethinking of place in the work of writers associated with KSW is a political response to the changing spatial and temporal dynamics of neoliberal globalization in global cities such as Vancouver rather than a straightforward rejection of a poetics of place as an outmoded literary form" (157) – a response to Vancouver's move from a productive industrial economy to one centered around "service, construction, and real estate" (147). Morton suggests that the move from Tish's "anti-imperialist politics of the local," resisting the European literary models that shaped settler understandings of Canadian space, to KSW's investigations of how local spaces are embedded in global economic processes be read in continuity. We could carry Morton's argument a step further, observing a "post-KSW" shift whose writers respond to yet another changed set of conditions, marked by the further acceleration of capital investment in real estate, but where discussions of Indigeneity, race, and dispossession have moved to the forefront. This emergent "post-KSW" poetic sits at the intersection of an activist turn within KSW starting at the turn of the millennium, marked by the work of poets like Reg Johansen, Aaron Vidaver, Roger Farr, Stephen Collis and others, and a similar group of poets who may not align with the KSW, including Eng, Nicholson, Rita Wong, Danielle LaFrance, Anahita Jamali Rad, and others.[25] Poets like Eng, Compton,

[25] The turn that I'm posing here is a slow move from the the investigations of the politics of poetic form of the work coming out of the Kootenay School in the 1980s and 1990s to something that becomes more explicitly activist in the face of capital's intensification over that time. In their introduction to *Writing Class: The Kootenay School of Writing Anthology*, Andrew Klobucar and Michael Barnholden outline the ways the KSW were criticized in the 1980s by Brian Fawcett for "abandoning a more practical and communicative alliance with the labour movement" (**32**). Rather than pursue institutional

and Nicholson work within this continuity, using poetic form to navigate not just the pressures applied to local spaces by global capitalism and settler colonialism, but also the ways those pressures affect Indigenous and racialized communities. Just as the Tish and KSW writers respond to their historical moment through poetic form, so do the four poets I discuss in this chapter, all of whom work to cognitively map spatial processes and redress historical erasures, while locating themselves in the complex spaces they map. They respond to a moment where neighbourhoods face dramatic upheavals, where the texture of the city changes quickly and the relations that compose its spaces are dissolved and deformed. Robertson and Eng each weigh the pressures and potentials of this instability, examining in different ways the relationship between destabilization, the body, and literary intervention. Nicholson and Compton each take a longer historical look at the effects of colonialism and urbanism, pulling from and speculating about how long histories of spatial erasure resonate in the present.

At a conceptual level, what binds these poets together is a concern over the way certain spatial forms, processes, practices, and relations thickly emerge, stabilized in part by expressive codes like law, history, and literature. The stable thickness of space enables certain practices while preventing others – a reality, as in the example of Snauq, where forces can violently clear the ground of one set of spatial relations to make room for another. To help frame these complex issues, I begin by feeling through the theoretical friction between spatial structure and spatial emergence, which provides a sense of some of the ways we might understand spatial stability and change – understandings that, in some ways, resemble Maracle's assertion of the difference between change from inside a community versus change from outside.

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alliances with the labour movement, the KSW, in Klobucar and Barnholden's reading, "focused instead on whether language, in art or writing, could effectively displace a system that works for the few at the expense of so many" (**33**). This doesn't erase the radical class politics of much KSW writing, but it does make aesthetics a, maybe even *the*, primary concern. In what I'm imagining as a small-c claim for a "post-KSW" writing, what I notice in more recent writers is an attention not only to the potentials of poetic form, but also to the potential ways poetics and material action can be worked through together – from Wong's and Collis' combination of environmental activism and poetics to the work done by Eng, Nicholson, Vidaver, and others to write about and in the spaces of the Downtown Eastside.

Stability and Counterstability

Lee Maracle's framing of the dual nature of spatial and social change poses a kind of inside/outside problem as the evolutionary changes from *within* a community stand in tension with violently evental changes triggered from *without*. These two intersecting binaries – internal/external and evolutionary/evental – propose a set of concepts through which we might begin to think through how spaces stabilize, destabilize, and restabilize, how they change and stay the same, and, most importantly, how spaces can be contested both through struggle within an assemblage and through the formation of *counterassemblages* that propose alternative forms of spatial organization. In a common sense way, spatial stability acts as the opposite of spatial change and, in turning to spatial stability, I want to interrogate how we think about the ways things change and stay the same, asking further about how we value and devalue different forms of spatial continuity and discontinuity. I turn to stability as a keyword because of the way it allows us to ask how actors and communities hold space in the face of forces that seek to change it.

Put simply, if we accept that space constantly emerges from the complex labour of everyone and everything working in relation, stability names the fact that our emergent spaces aren't constantly changing in a wild free-for-all, but instead maintain a consistency. So, if stability is a difficult concept to grasp, it might be because of the way it comes out of the process-oriented philosophy of assemblage theory, posed by Manuel DeLanda as an overarching set of processes through which space is produced, reproduced, and transformed. For DeLanda, space assembles from the conflicting and contradictory practices and interrelations of its components, but not seamlessly and not without conflict. As relations remain the same and change, as they congeal and dissolve, spatial assemblages undergo continual processes of stabilization, destabilization, and restabilization. Deeply affected by powerful actors, institutions, and forces, the assemblage's identity alternately hardens and dissolves, depending on the complicated machinations of its parts. When Maracle describes the colonial transformation of Snauq into False Creek, she describes a specific and historically grounded version of this dynamic where Indigenous relations are destabilized, broken apart to clear space for the stabilization of colonial relations in their place. And there are similar, though not necessarily identical dynamics that the poets of this chapter describe, from the slow

colonial transformations Cecily Nicholson researches in New Westminister's Poplar Island, to the dispersal of the black community across the Lower Mainland that Wayde Compton contends with in his work on Hogan's Alley, to the dissolution of urban texture that Lisa Robertson plays with in her work as the "Office for Soft Architecture," to Mercedes Eng's grounded and personal mapping of the struggles against gentrification in the Downtown Eastside neighbourhood.

Stablity describes spaces that are relatively static or "permanent," whose relations "hold together," while also pointing to ongoing processes of stabilization and destabilization wherein spaces are maintained, through material and expressive practices that shape certain relations while restricting others. Stability proposes both an anchor and a limit, pointing to the way certain ways of life are enabled through a shared social space that also restricts other ways of life. Stability connects through its transversal abstraction an array of processes including the violent dispossessions described by Maracle to the ongoing displacements of the low-income residents of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. I pose these particular terms not to replace more specific historical processes, but rather to ask how those process exist in what Cecily Nicholson calls, speaking about her archival poetics, a "continuity of erasure" wherein Indigenous and racialized spatial actors find themselves struggling to hold literal ground, and thereby build forms of community and nationhood that require space to work and live, in the thickly stable spatial relations of colonialism, capitalism, and white supremacy.

In this, we need to be suspicious of arguments for or against both stability and change as automatically good or bad. There is a temptation, when discussing a space's stability, to pose it strictly as a limit or a structure that needs to be broken out of – a static container of the type Henri Lefebvre contests in the opening pages of *The Production of Space*. Counter to this, stability needs to be conceptualized not only through the continuity of spatial form, but also as a set of processes driven by understandings of what constitutes a "good" space. This drives the uneven bourgeois utopianism of urban real estate development, recently emblematized in the "Fight for Beauty" show put on by development corporation Westbank. A pitched tent in the courtyard of Vancouver's Fairmont Pacific Rim hotel over the Fall of 2017, "Fight for Beauty" was a massive scale advertisement for Westbank masquerading as a free public art show. The show was widely promoted across the city on billboards and bus

ads, framing itself as "the fights that build cities and culture." These "fights" revolve around the construction of a number of architectural and development projects in Vancouver, Toronto, Tokyo, and elsewhere and the public art installations attached to those developments, linking cultural production to land development by posing development as just another form of cultural production.[26] These projects were linked through an audio tour narrated by Westbank founder Ian Gillespie where he frames himself as civic crusader and visionary, struggling against governments and existing residents who have difficulty buying into Westbank's bourgeois vision of a good city – a city where beautiful architecture and culture results in civic engagement at the scale of a leisurely selfie. Over and over, Gillespie expresses a saltiness over forces that halt what he sees as improvements to a city that is, in Gillespie's words, a "work in progress."

Embedded in Gillespie and Westbank's fight to make the city more "beautiful" is a potently dangerous argument about spatial change that makes itself clear in the show's manifesto, written by Claudia Cristovao and installed at the entrance of the show in neon:

> When did we say yes to beauty being discarded, deleted and demeaned? Where is the agreement that beauty is optional – not urgent for us to thrive? Since when have we learned the price of everything yet know the value of nothing? How could we have missed that beauty is a strength, not a substance, that makes its way through the cracks to come after our senses in full force to push us forward? Because we, we have not signed up.

The manifesto, with its assumption of a collective "we," poses Westbank's overarching search for beauty as a kind of revolutionary project seeking to overthrow the philistines who would have "us" live in a city we haven't consented to where beauty is absent, price is everything, and something (we're not sure what) is devalued. If we ask what, or *who*, is actually devalued – "discarded, deleted and demeaned" – in both the city as it develops and from Westbank's romanticization of the potential opportunities opened up

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[26] The press kit for the show frames this desire to see development as just another art form when it describes the way "the custom designed pavilion showcases public art, architecture, fashion, music, film and the written word," noting further that "[e]ach come together to demonstrate in a profound way that any craft practiced well is an art form" (n. pag.). In the way Westbank couches their development projects (with Gillespie's analytical account of the site-specific and almost artistic choices that went into them), they invite a kind of slippage wherein buildings become another kind of "beautiful" public artwork for people to stop and take selfies in front of.

by spatial change, we would have to acknowledge the displacement of entire communities by the capital incursion that accompanies the spread of beauty across the city. Very near the beginning of Gillespie's narration, he describes the developer's involvement in the redevelopment of the Woodwards building on the 100 West Hastings block of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. The fights Gillespie describes around the development involve worries about selling the 440 units (he lauds the buyers of those condo units for "accepting the challenge" of city building) and securing provincial funding for the Simon Fraser University campus that anchors the development. The fight conspicuously absent from his account is the long struggle over the site coming from community organizers charging Westbank and other developers with the gentrification of the neighbourhood and the displacement of its residents. If the residents and forces Gillespie names as collaborators operate inside the assembled relations of a Vancouver built for the rich, those residents left unspoken and erased within his rhetoric are also left destabilized by the new relations that stabilize as they move into their new condos, classrooms, or coffee shops. Because of this incursion and stabilization of a new set of relations – composing a new neighbourhood, in fact – the old residents are forced to assimilate into the new neighbourhood, disperse into the wider city, or build other forms of stable relation and solidarity, forms of counterstability that allow for alternative forms of spatial practice and community.

I first heard about "Fight for Beauty" via a large scale ad on the wall in Granville Skytrain Station that sloganeered: "SINCE WHEN DO WE BEGIN TO FEAR CHANGE INSTEAD OF SEEING IT AS AN OPPORTUNITY?" This slogan took me aback as it clearly paints the struggle against large-scale development as a kind of NIMBYism, rather than a desire for a space to be shaped by the people who live there. If we see change as an opportunity, we also need to ask who change is an opportunity for? Who benefits from change? Westbank's slogan articulates in negative the central critical question of this chapter, which asks how we can figure opportunities for community formation and spatial practice when the spaces we're in are changing and when they are unable to change. And not only this, how can opportunities exist for communities if they don't have the room to meet and produce space?

To begin to answer these questions, I want to read DeLanda's sense of stability against the geographical materialism of David Harvey. DeLanda strangely maps out the slow evolutionary changes that can happen within the assemblage, while simultaneously

insisting that the assemblage is composed through relations of exteriority – a move that, in its rejection of Hegel, also rejects Marxist insights into the internal processes of space.[27] Rather than follow DeLanda faithfully, I want to consider Harvey as a useful counterpoint for two reasons. First, Harvey draws up a spatial dialectics that, similar to DeLanda, starts with the relationship of spatial part to whole, but insists that those dynamics operate as part of an open-ended totality – meaning Harvey's version is structural, but not teleological. Second, and maybe more importantly for the purposes of this chapter, Harvey insists on spatial stability as a political necessity, echoing not only Indigenous critics like Coulthard or Leanne Simpson, who insist on anchoring Indigenous resurgence in the relations of the land, but also Compton, Nicholson, and Eng, who, through their poetic investigations of Vancouver's development history, pose the ways that the destabilization of spaces is faced unevenly by racialized, Indigenous, and poor populations. In pairing DeLanda and Harvey, I want to insist that stability/permanence and instability/change are not a simple binary of spatial states. It's not the case that a space is fixed and needs to be destroyed (or vice versa). Instead, stability and instability are ongoing and emergent conditions wherein spatial possibilities are opened up and shut down, often at the same time.

Reacting to a globalizing moment where deterritorialization became a buzzword to describe the dissolving of national borders by international trade, Harvey argues in *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference* (1996) for spatial "permanence"[28] – the quality that distinguishes place from space – as a response to what he sees as the limits of global spatialities reduced to "fluxes and flows" (7). "If everything that is solid is always and instantaneously melting into air," he argues, "then it is very hard to accomplish anything or even set one's mind to do anything" (7). For Harvey, "permanence" grounds

[27] DeLanda views an attack on Marx as part of his project. In a 2005 interview with John Protevi and Torkild Thanem, he describes his work as "a deliberate attempt to liberate the left from the straightjacket in which Marx's thought has kept it for 150 years" (68). More recently in his book *Assemblage Theory*, DeLanda, mounts a critique of Deleuze and Guattari themselves, pinning what he sees as a bad analysis of which cities gave birth to capitalism to their too faithful attachment to Marxism. In particular, he critiques the way the labour theory of value makes it so that cities whose primary role were banking or trade centers could not be considered because they weren't engaged in industrial production.

[28] Throughout his book, Harvey consistently writes "permanence" in quotation marks to indicate the inadequacy of the word to describe a stable condition that ultimately isn't permanent.

any attempt to create new political realities and, for that reason, he argues for a dialectical approach that accounts for the complex and historical creation of places, that is, an approach that focuses on the creation of stable spatial conditions that allows for both entrenched structures and new possibilities. Harvey interestingly draws his concept of "permanence" from Alfred North Whitehead's non-dialectical process philosophy as an example of a philosophical cosmology that considers space and time as "relations derived from processes and events" (256):

> Whitehead's doctrine of "permanences" firms up the idea. A "permanence" arises as a system of 'extensive connection' out of processes. Entities achieve relative stability in their bounding and their internal ordering of processes creating space, for a time. Such permanences come to occupy a piece of a space in an exclusive way (for a time) and thereby define a place – their place – (for a time). The process of place formation is a process of carving out "permanences" from the flow of processes creating spaces. But the "permanences" – no matter how solid they seem – are not eternal: they are always subject to time as "perpetual perishing." They are contingent on the processes that create, sustain and dissolve them. (261)

Imagining space as continually eventful and defined by the relations that produce it, Harvey's interest in Whitehead's process philosophy allows him to conceptualize a dialectic that, as we'll see, is very different than the Hegelian version vilified by DeLanda. Harvey's characterization of "permanence" is not permanent and does not constitute a fixed synthesis. Instead, stable spaces (places) emerge (are "carved") from the process-based flows of less stable spaces. Form emerges from process, which can, in turn, challenge and dissolve stable forms.

For Harvey, producing any "permanence" in space requires power. Turning to the affluent Baltimore suburb of Guilford, Harvey invokes the way that, for its privileged, white, middle-class residents, "[*p*]*lace* had to be secured against the uncontrolled vectors of spatiality" (292). Harvey recounts the strict, isolating striations proposed in the mid-1990s that physically demarcated Guilford from "less affluent and racially different" (292) neighbouring communities as a defense against the supposedly toxic influence of those racialized neighbourhoods. Guilford's *defensibility* against the "uncontrolled vectors of spatiality" reveals the role of power and privilege in maintaining a spatial stability, in maintaining a stable sense of place – a far cry from gentrifying dissolutions in the name of "revitalization." There are echoes of this in Wolfe's analysis of settler-colonialism. Looking at the decisions leading to the forced relocation of the Cherokee

from Georgia in the 1830s as part of the "Trail of Tears," Wolfe poses the question of the Cherokee's success as agriculturalists, asking "if the natives are already agriculturalists, then why not simply incorporate their productivity into the colonial economy?" (396). The answer, he poses, has little to do with the Cherokee's economic fitness, but rather with their permanence on the land:

> The reason why the Cherokee's constitution and their agricultural prowess stood out as such singular provocations to the officials and legislators of the state of Georgia–and this is attested over and over again in their public statements and correspondence—is that the Cherokee's farms, plantations, slaves and written constitution all signified *permanence*. The first thing the rabble did, let us remember, was burn their houses. (396)

Where Harvey identifies a community defending the permanence of their place, Wolfe identifies a permanence that, like the kind found at Snauq, is violently destroyed out of a desire not only for land, but also the right to shape the relations that compose that land. This destruction of spatial *anchors*, to borrow Neal McLeod's sense,[29] operates as part of a deterritorializing process that empties the land for development, making *terra nullius* something that is produced by colonialism rather than discovered. Though they stand at different points in history, Guilford and Georgia are both tangled in a long history informed by capitalist, settler-colonial, and white supremacist logics that provide justification for the theft and fortification of territory. If a stability or "permanence" of territory provides a necessary ground for things to happen, we need to think through the ways power cuts through and shapes how that ground is produced and occupied.

Harvey's open-ended spatial dialectic poses, then, how flux and "permanence" *co-constitute* one another. "Permanence," for Harvey, is the result of reiterative processes[30] – and in that sense, space carries a kind of emergent quality in the sense that discrete and stable forms emerge out of ongoing processes. DeLanda similarly insists that there are forces working simultaneously to stabilize and destabilize spatial

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[29] In *Cree Narrative Memory*, McLeod argues that "Cree collective memory is anchored in places and landscape" (19). He underlines this with an extended discussion of mistasiniyak ("grandfather stones"), which marked important sites for ceremony. Like Wolfe points to the destruction of Cherokee houses, McLeod points to the destruction or dislocation of these stones in an effort to erase Cree memory by eliminating the material anchor of that memory.

[30] Harvey argues that "[r]eifications of free-flowing processes are always occurring to create actual 'permanences' in the social and material world around us" (81).

relations. These forces territorialize, deterritorialize, and reterritorialize a space, They work to define boundaries and borders, making spaces more or less homogeneous by including and excluding different categories of people.[31] Harvey differs from DeLanda by reading the dialectic of form and process as internalized within capitalism. In other words, Harvey's dialectics are non-tautological, but still totalized. Though Harvey and DeLanda complement one another on some levels, they significantly differ in their views of how to conceptualize the internal and external components of spaces and assemblages. To work through this, Harvey peels apart two philosophical versions of the internal: one coming from Leibniz (who Harvey uses to critique Deleuze),[32] and the other from Marx. In explaining the differences between the internal relations of his dialectical approach and the internal relations (the "windowless room") of the Leibnizian monad,[33] Harvey puts under fire the way Leibniz's conception acts as an idealist "inner monologue" completely detached from political commitment. In introducing Leibniz, Harvey notes that "[i]n the *Monadology*, written towards the very end of his life, Leibniz proposes a metaphysics founded on the concept of a monad that internalizes everything there is" (69) and, a page later, argues against the implication that "if I am a monad and I internalize everything there is then all I need to understand the universe is to contemplate my own inner self" (70). Countering the inward looking monad, Harvey suggests that "things look very different if the notion of internal relations is situated not in

[31] DeLanda specifically notes that the abstract sounding processes of territorialization need to be taken literally. and involve the ways spatial boundaries emerge from social relations. The implications for literary study of this grounding of territorialization in material relations are that when writers make claims to "deterritorialize" language, they need to be taken with a grain of salt. Language can help territorialize a space, but only in the sense that language codes the potential forms that our spatial practice can take. Language can open up and shut down possibilities for living, but for those possibilities to be territorial, they need to be performed by actors in material space.

[32] Harvey's critique of Deleuze is at once on point and fitfully ironic. Given the romantic timbre of Deleuze's work and the deterritorializing "nomadic" approaches that follow him, Harvey's distrust is reasonable, particularly in the context of Deleuze's often inscrutable work on Leibniz in *The Fold*. But given that much of Deleuze and Guattari's work emerges from a pointed critique of the ways psychoanalysis (and power in general) overwrites unreadable "internal" spaces in an attempt to control ("understand") them – an extremely political act! – Harvey's critique feels unfair. When Harvey compares the windowless, inaccessibly *asocial* space of the *soul* (Leibniz's focus) and the uncommitted, philosophical, *apolitical* space of the study, it's important to remember, practically (and spatially) speaking, that the soul is not a study.

[33] In Leibniz's words: "The monad, which we shall discuss here, is nothing but a simple substance that enters into composites – simple, that is, without parts" (213).

a world of monadic entities (which appear as 'permanences') but as continuous transformations and internalizations of different 'moments' (events, things, entities) within the overall process of political-economic reproduction" (74). Harvey's move from Leibniz's internalizing monad to his own "overall process,"[34] a move from the inaccessible soul to the Marxist totality, allows him to conceptualize space as both open-ended and framed within a greater process (or set of processes). Between the contingently bounded assemblage and the structural totality of Harvey's dialectic lies a sense that how spaces are bounded is important.

With a similar sense of how the assemblage might be bounded, DeLanda argues for a kind of doubled individuality – a mass of individuals that assemble into another autonomous individual. While he insists on the externality of relations, he also suggests that "[t]he ontological status of any assemblage, inorganic, organic or social, is that of a unique, singular, historically contingent, individual" (40). This reading of the assemblage as a kind of individual seems to suggest an internalization and certainly something akin to the structural pressure of the totality exists in it, but DeLanda is careful to insist that the "individuality" of the assemblage isn't defined by an essence. For DeLanda, "essence" is replaced by the contingent assembly of part-to-whole. The "body" of the assemblage isn't an ordered body, where each part takes a pre-defined role like the organs of the body, but instead the emergent body has a productive capacity generated by the way the parts discipline one another according to an immanent logic. In this, totalizing top-down structure is replaced by the ways the whole *diagrams* the potential actions of its individual parts. Here, we can read the assemblage as contingently internalizing, shaped by a diagram that "structure[s] the space of possibilities associated with the assemblage" (30).[35] In its stability, the assembled whole gains an autonomy and

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[34] Harvey maps his move in the terms of Marx's critique of Hegel, arguing that "[i]n any case, the Leibnizian conceit precisely underlies that form of philosophical idealism which Marx, through his dialogue with Hegel rejected" (72).

[35] Deleuze's conception of the diagram comes out of his reading of Michel Foucault. In his book *Foucault*, Deleuze works through the implications of Foucault's work on the panopticon in *Discipline and Punish*, asking about the conjunctions between two types of form: the kind that "forms or organizes matter" and the kind that "forms or finalizes functions and gives them aims" (33). These forms of material content and forms of expression, respectively, are conjoined in the diagram, an immanent abstract machine operating as "a map, a cartography that is coextensive with the whole social field" – a "spatio-temporal multiplicity" that "makes no distinction between content and expression" (33). In *Spatial Questions,* Rob Shields outlines Deleuze's take on Foucault's

"[t]he autonomy of wholes relative to their parts is guaranteed by the fact that they can causally affect those parts in both a limiting and an enabling way, and by the fact that they can interact with each other in a way not reducible to their parts" (40). So while individual actors aren't reduced to interchangeable organs carrying out rigid roles in a unchanging structure, actors are certainly pressured into certain possibilities, their actions both *limited* and *enabled* by structural effects. The implication of this is that the social space of the assemblage "thickens" and "thins" depending on the way the whole is organized, shaping the possibilities available to individuals within the assemblage.

Certainly, DeLanda and Deleuze do not argue for a withdrawn and windowless internalization and Harvey doesn't argue for a fixed and essentialized organismic model. But, tensely holding Harvey and DeLanda together, how might we think through the relationship between processes internal to the assemblage and the connections external to it? In other words, at what point do we read space as a totalized, but contested or contradictory field, and at what point do we read spatial assemblages as not only contingently bounded by the ways parts connect, but also multiple – able to overlap and interfere with one another? Between structure and assemblage, then, we need to pay attention to two levels of stability, each corresponding to a different sense of the "individual." First, Harvey's assertion that permanence is necessary for anything to happen correctly recognizes the importance of a shared spatial anchor, but DeLanda's contingently bounded "individual" reminds us that a stable organization need not be totalizing, allowing us to conceptualize both multiple simultaneous and nested assemblages *and* the ways one assemblage can assimilate or dissolve another out of a desire for territory. Second, within assemblages as they thicken and thin, as they are territorialized and deterritorialized, each individual actor finds their everyday lives shaped by the relative stability of space – a stability that limits and enables spatial practices, making certain practices more possible than others.

In the pocket of this tension is an understanding of space defined by the relations that compose it rather than by the abstract lines on a map. In this, both the stability of an assemblage and the logic defining who is inside/outside of that assemblage are relative

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conceptualization of the diagram as an immanent logic that shapes the social field – a logic that "traces the contours of a situation but remains within the tissue of the material world" and that reflects "the consistent shape of forces rather than meta-level plans or blueprints" (128), generating, in other words, an organizational *stability* rather than a fixed or essentialized *structure*.

to the ways that actors assemble.Though I'm arguing that stability enables spatial practices in the present, looking at these dynamics requires a long view. Stabilization and destabilization happen over time, which is why we see poets like Nicholson and Compton turning to historical long views of spaces whose relations are broken up. Nicholson, in particular, considers a long timeline of spatial change of Poplar Island in New Westminister that accounts for multiple transformation as the island is appropriated and churned through a series of land uses. This shared interest in the histories and dynamics of spatial change is not only an interest in the effects of those changes across time and at different scales, but it is also an interest in what spatial possibilities can be destroyed and created both in moments of destabilization, when spaces are opened up to new possibilities and experimentation at the cost of the destruction of old relations, and moments of stabilization, where those possibilities are made manifest through the ways actors productively work together even as other possibilities are shut down.

When Audra Simpson theorizes the ways nations can nest within one another, she explicitly frames it as a power struggle between nations where "one proliferates at the other's expense" (12). Here, the space doesn't easily assemble upward like a set of matryoshka. Instead, if one space's stability can be defined through the destabilization (and elimination) of another, the groups, communities, and nations can struggle against this by generating forms of counterstability, producing shared territorial and relational ground through which alternate forms of life can be pursued – the forms of life that the colonial transformation of a space like Snauq or the large-scale developments of Westbank discard and devalue. Counterstability involves a doubleness – a position simultaneously inside and outside dominant forms of spatial production like the nation. For example, in the introduction to the second edition of *Black Like Who?* (2003), Rinaldo Walcott gestures to this doubleness to position himself against the critiques of George Elliott Clarke,[36] who works through what Walcott identifies as a desire for blackness to be recognized by and be given a place within the nation. Walcott positions his own urban-centered diasporic approach as simultaneously "within and against" the

[36] Walcott threads his way through Clarke's "lament for the lost place of blackness in Canada, in the representations of normative Canadian-ness," questioning the ways in which "Clarke attempts to position blackness not as a potential challenge to normative narratives of the nation, but rather as sutured into the normative narrative" (19).

nation – an evocation of Paul Gilroy's conceptualization of double consciousness.[37] The affective regimes of national belonging and unbelonging cut through the ways that diasporic writers approach the "resource" of double consciousness. Walcott argues that "[t]he terms of belonging within a context of diaspora sensibilities are fluid; they continually make and remake themselves within the contexts of specific nations" (22). For Walcott, diaspora sensibilities operate as a tactical approach to the nation:

> Diaspora sensibilities resurrect all that communities and nations destroy, foreclose and prohibit in their dominating narratives of collective belonging. Diaspora sensibilities are methods for overcoming the problem of locating oneself solely within national boundaries. Diaspora conditions work to produce black peoples in the contradictory space of belonging and not. (22)

Here, Walcott sets up a tension between the foreclosing pressure of the nation and the resistant methodologies of what he calls a "diaspora sensibility." Embedded in this tension is the difficulty that diasporic people and groups have in locating themselves in affective regimes of belonging that are spatial, involving not only normative narratives but also material practices and possibilities. Walcott's diasporic sensibility proposes a counterstability – a black "outside" to the nation (that is nevertheless entangled with the nation) – that resists the destruction created through the stabilization of dominant regimes.

Nicholson, Compton, Robertson, and Eng all explicitly face their spaces as they come apart, considering the long colonial and capitalist patterns of material transformation and *erasure* working across the spaces of the Lower Mainland in ways that dissolve and displace Indigenous and racialized communities and individuals. One answer to this comes from Compton, who, facing the assimilation of the black community into Vancouver after the demolition of Hogan's Alley, proposes a combination of archival research and historical speculation to imagine forms of counterstability for the black community. Faced with the loss of dedicated black spaces, Compton proposes that history and the archive might work as expressive anchors to bring the black community together in a city without a direct spatial anchor. In contrast to this, Eng's poetry highlights the difficulty of holding the relations of the Downtown Eastside together

[37] Gilroy's work in *The Black Atlantic* poses black experiences in Britain as caught between a fraught position within the nation and a globally scaled position within a diaspora, shaped by the histories of slavery on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean.

as the dominating spatial relations of real estate development crack apart the DTES and put pressure on individuals to assimilate into the dominant assemblage or disappear. In an interview, Fred Moten asks Eng about her choices after surviving the ongoing destruction of her neighbourhood, posing that she might have improved or "self-gentrified" herself in the process. His point, as I will discuss later, involves the way she is caught between assemblages, making her a potential resident of whatever neighbourhood takes the Downtown Eastside's place. In a sense, Eng's choices – continue to resist the destruction of the Downtown Eastside, assimilate into whatever the new neighbourhood is, or leave altogether – speak to the central tension between Harvey and DeLanda. In the way it stages the difficult positions of the individual in a neighbourhood under siege, Eng's work poses that if stability and counterstability emerge from the ways communities self-organize and durationally maintain a shared spatial practice, generating a counterstability becomes difficult, since there are always powerful relations pressuring individuals into and out of place. Stability or permanence is necessary for spatial practice, but comes out of emergent collective action that takes immense amounts of energy (and agency) distributed across a wide field. To have a role in transforming space and imagining forms of counterstability, poetry needs to contend with the immense difficulty of bringing people together into new formations because of the thick relational inertia of existing spaces.

Contesting Continuities of Erasure

In the introduction to *Bluesprint: Black British Columbian Literature and Orature* (2001), Wayde Compton remarks on the difficulty of collecting the work of Black B.C. writers, a difficulty he ties to the spatial fluctuations of that community. For Compton, B.C.'s black history involves "continued exodus, immigration, settlement, exploration, desertion, miscegenation, communitarianism, integration, segregation, agitation, uprooting and re-rooting and re-routing" (20). Black B.C., for Compton, has been "a population and history always in flux" (20):

> Much of the first black population of the nineteenth century left after being here for seven years; the children of the black immigrants who came here in the 1950s and 1960s often emigrate to Toronto, the United States, Britain, or the Caribbean, craving the succor of life in a large black community; and conversely, blacks arrive here from the U.S., Caribbean, Africa, and other parts of Canada daily. Black B.C. has never been a single monolithic population. It does not locate its roots in an easily

> discernable common origin, nor has it ceased to shift and transform today. (20)

In *Bluesprint*, Compton traces a historical line through this diasporic flux in an attempt to figure out, in his words, "how other writers like myself had responded to this place specifically – these cities, mountains, islands, and streets" (14). At the same time, Compton responds to the demolition of Hogan's Alley, a bulldozed street with a largely black population in Vancouver's Strathcona neighbourhood, and the lost anchor that space provided for black Vancouver.

Compton proposes a complex and messy set of spatial engagements for black folks in British Columbia that connect global diasporic links to local contexts. Importantly, he pairs a desire to anchor his own experiences as black in a historical continuity of black life in B.C. with a series of reflections on the ways the spatial proximity of a neighbourhood can tie a community together, looking for signs of relational stability in a sea of constant flux. Spaces change over time both through the slow evolution of the ways actors assemble and because of violent ruptures that tear up streets, neighbourhoods, and the communities that compose those spaces. In this section, I read the work of Compton and Cecily Nicholson, who both leverage historical narrative to interrogate the continuities and discontinuities of spatial production, drawing from expressive resources like the archive to rearticulate understandings of the local in the present. Taken together, Nicholson and Compton's work demonstrates how historical erasure occurs through a junction of material and expressive means, involving pressures and processes that work on social assemblages both spatially, through dispersal and reassembly, and temporally, through the production of historical continuities and discontinuities.

In order to consider history's stakes in the present, Nicholson's and Compton's work asks what it means to live in areas both under threat of change in the present and that have been violently changed in the past. But rather than examine the colonial narratives that define place through historical continuity, they turn to discontinuities that reveal the ongoing and often disconcerting processes through which space is changed in the intersection between top-down planning and grassroots organizing. These issues meet at the sites Nicholson and Compton investigate – for Nicholson, Poplar Island in the Fraser River near New Westminster, and for Compton, Hogan's Alley. Both sites undergo jarring and violent change enacted by state and capitalist forces, made possible

in part because of racializing codes that mark the spaces as simultaneously empty and toxic. Nicholson and Compton both perform site-specific poetic research on these localized spaces as they are shaped by, to borrow a phrase from Nicholson, a "continuity of erasure" – an assertion that spatial and historical ruptures produce forms of continuity that can be made visible and, in Compton's case, make possible the reassembly of dissolved or dispersed communities. Compton and Nicholson work through the colonial erasures of racialized and Indigenous people from both the archive and from material space – what Katherine McKittrick identifies as "carefully landscaping blackness out of the nation" (*Demonic Grounds* 96). McKittrick identifies the struggle between "white geographic domination" and the surprise, wonder, and ultimate erasure of black geographies from not only *understandings* of Canadian spaces, but also from the spaces themselves seen in examples from the destruction of Africville and Hogan's Alley to the belief that black Canada "is only recent and urban" (96). In both writers' work, these tensions between continuity and discontinuity, between disassembly and reassembly, unevenly affect marginalized communities, particularly racialized and Indigenous communities. But Nicholson and Compton approach their spaces from different vectors. Where Nicholson employs archival research about Poplar Island to trace out and challenge the continuities of erasure produced by appropriation of land and systems of ownership, Compton draws from archival research to speculate around the dispersed continuities created by the localized spatial break at Hogan's Alley, particularly as it connects to the wider-scaled diasporic movements of the Black Atlantic.

This turn to spatial history is not new to Vancouver poetry and has been used by an array of poets to engage with the particularities of the local – a turn that might traditionally thread from Charles Olson's 1960s work in *The Maximus Poems* through to the work of Daphne Marlatt and George Bowering, who couple their poetic examinations of place with local histories. In her essay "The Afterlife of the City" (2006), Maia Joseph connects the more recent work of Meredith Quartermain and Lisa Robertson to this interest in the local through their shared investments in urban walking and *flânerie*. Arguing that Quartermain and Robertson (and others)[38] share a critical interest in "the tradition of the poet who explores the fringe and forgotten spaces of the city, gathering and telling marginalized stories" (152), Joseph sets up a tension in both poets' work

[38] Joseph includes Earle Birney, George Bowering, Daphne Marlatt, Roy Kiyooka, Bud Osborn, and Wayde Compton in her short list.

between the body's role "as a threshold between subject and world" and the ways history is continuous with the present through material and expressive traces found both in the street and in the archive. In Quartermain's *Vancouver Walking*, in which several *dérives* through Vancouver act as opportunities to reflect on the city's history, Joseph notes this connection between daily life and historical continuity:

> Through this process, she created densely textured poems that register her experience of spaces encountered in her daily navigation of the city; the poems foreground her active, ongoing engagement with local history and with contemporary sociopolitical dimensions of life in Vancouver. (165)

For Joseph, Quartermain's project involves a junction of place and history, where the present-tense experience of a space is "enhanced by her research into local history, which allows a briefly noted name to trigger a meditation on its political, social, and historical contexts or those of the site that it names" (166).

Formally, Quartermain's poems loosely track through the colonial history of the city, recounting details sparked by the proper names of streets and buildings while occasionally gesturing in the past tense to the Indigenous place-names supposedly replaced by the colonial reterritorialization of space. Walking up Victoria Drive to Powell Street, Quartermain leaps from the name of the street to the ugly history of Israel Wood Powell, the Superintendent of Indian Affairs from 1871 to 1889, commenting on his involvement in urban development:

> down to Powell Street, Israel "Wood" P . . . –
> arrived 1862
> 1863 elected M.L.A. practiced his medicine
> got into the education biz
> John A. made him Canada's first Superintendent of Indian Affairs
> he stayed for 17 years
> "you know, we really oughtta give them 40 acres
> instead of just 20 for ranching after all, the whites get 320"
> Premier Smithe let him in on the Road coming
> sold land to Crease and others 1883 speculating
> bought some more from Campbell and Heatley 1884
> made a bundle
>
> khupkhahpay'ay, the Squamish called that place
> on the shore of our now Vancouver (26)

When Joseph identifies moments like these as an attempt "to contextualize recent urban development within what she perceives as a lengthy history of appropriation and

oppression" (167), she points to the work Quartermain does in the bulk of this section. In pointing to Powell as an agent of a government administered history of dispossession, Quartermain exposes the false neutrality at the heart of an everyday place-name, echoing recent calls to rename structures and institutions like Ryerson University in Toronto and the Langevin Block in Ottawa because of their namesakes' involvement in the development of Residential Schools. At the same time, Quartermain's use of verb tense, particularly in those last two lines, produces a sad tone set by the understanding that the colonial history naturalized at a site like Powell and Victoria (where local administrator meets the head of Empire) leads to a situation where Squamish knowledge of the land has been entirely erased by the relations of Vancouver – a sentiment that isn't entirely unfair, but that does foreclose on Indigenous relations to the land in the present.

This application of archival evidence to illuminate the historicity of everyday spaces relies on this tension between continuity and discontinuity. Robertson gives us a slightly different version of this in her *Office for Soft Architecture*, particularly the piece "Site Report: New Brighton Park." Similar to Quartermain, she ties the material substrate of the park itself to the expressive substrate of the archive in order to expose the ways that the park is shaped in part by the circulation of objects, narratives, and practices that are supposed to be long disappeared. Looking at the ways Robertson invokes the different spatial forms the site takes (townsite, late nineteenth century "wilderness resort," economically dormant squat, cement tidal pool tied to Vancouver parkland's "first racial exclusion policy," and, presently, reclaimed parkland), Paul Stephens claims the park's changing composition as the result of a general responsiveness to changing conditions:

> The park retains traces of many of the major events of Western Canadian history. The settlement colony becomes an industrial producer and a war economy, and then a highly diversified economy highly reliant on leisure activities. The substitutions imposed on the landscape are not systematic or evolutionary – they are practical and unambitious adaptations to existing conditions. ("The Dystopia of the Obsolete" 28)

Tensely sitting between the dual romances of decay and destruction, Stephens poses the potential of the park in terms of its "uselessness in economic terms" (28), despite Robertson's insistent repetition of the financial exchanges – the land deals – that accompany each major change in the park's composition. Stephens hedges his bets,

suggesting that "[d]epending on one's perspective, New Brighton is a good example of the reclamation of urban space or of gentrification," For Stephens, New Brighton points the way to both a "post-industrial, non-discriminatory Western Canada" *and* "a Western Canada subject to the whims of development" (29) as if a vision of the post-political (post-race, post-feminist) creative city isn't already connected to real-estate development. If Stephens argues that, for Robertson, "[t]o historicize is in some sense to bring back life to the obsolete – that which is no longer useful" (17), what obsolescence does she find suddenly useful in the present? The answer is two-fold. First, Robertson spies a potential in the way the minorness of the site provides space to experiment with relation. Second, and more powerfully, Robertson adorns the space of New Brighton Park it in its own development history to demonstrate how the "uselessness" of the site is not exceptional, but is the result of a longer history of uneven development – a history of spatial changes and clearances that is materially continuous with present conditions.

Like Robertson, Nicholson traces through the history of spatial change on Poplar Island, another surplus space that has found use through its own reinvention. Nicholson's archival mobilization challenges the *naturalization* of Poplar Island's changes by asserting the ways it has been appropriated and produced as a quarantined island, a shipbuilding yard, a lumber anchorage point, and parkland. But if Robertson's reading of New Brighton Park delights in the material traces of the past made visible by the application of the archival record, Nicholson's work bristles at the way those traces have vanished, but also asserts the continuity of the colonial and capitalist projects that would've decided which material was valuable to save. Nicholson highlights historical moments of dispossession and development that belie the current state of the island. In other words, Nicholson's work proposes an inversion of both Quartermain's and Robertson's approach to the continuities of spatial production, swinging the camera to focus less on what's still here (and how that gives us an opportunity to reflect on the natural linear development of a space) than on what has been lost from view. Nicholson turns to the archive to trace the ways the site of Poplar Island has been repeatedly appropriated and transformed, asking not what the space was like before, but how those histories of colonization manifest in the present of not only Poplar Island, but New Westminster as a whole. But how does Nicholson mobilize the archive in her writing? In

a February 11, 2016 talk,[39] Nicholson discusses her approach to the archive as a poetic methodology, particularly the ways archival material reflects dominant understandings of, in her words, "who is deserving" – understandings that reflect the sexist, racist, and classist underpinnings of the historical record. She expresses a glumness over what to do with mediated, archival texts, asking a series of questions that inaugurate, for her, a decolonial archival method:

> What to do with continuity of erasure? How to assert local narratives? How does the archive form the marginalized person and collective bodies? How do we find ourselves there now? What are we replicating?

Like Quartermain and Robertson, Nicholson spent time in the stacks – two years in the library and in city and provincial archives, sifting through the "overwhelming" material substrate only to be halted by the gaps in that substrate. She describes facing the seeming neutral banality of city records – "you know, insurance or the listing of population or ownership" – only to realize that she needed to identify what's missing:

> But the effort to look at this surplus space, this constructed surplus space that seemed to have no meaning attached to it, to attempt to approach it with a methodology that I understood as an aspect of decolonization, to try to think through a history of land, I couldn't get through that door, that history wasn't present. It's not to say that history isn't present, but it wasn't in the archive.

In meeting the archive about Poplar Island as a "surplus" space, Nicholson notes both a "saturation of dominant narratives" – "European settlement, labour histories, the building of the railway, the construction of civic identity" – and the complete absence of narratives outside of this dominant frame, particularly narratives coming from racialized and Indigenous points of view. What does it look like to apply the archive to its material traces when the archive fails to account for all of those traces?

In the book itself, Nicholson leans into this uneven archival presence, explicitly organizing her book though the missing archival thread of dispossession. She leverages the importance of dispossession to histories of New Westminster's development to divine not only the continuity of erasure that organizes local colonial narratives, but also

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[39] Nicholson spoke at a panel titled "Migration or Escape: Journeys to Sanctuary" alongside poet Phinder Dulai, sociologist Renisa Mawani, and SFU archivist Melanie Hardbattle in a discussion of poetics, migration, and the archive. The discussion largely centered on the Komagata Maru, the historical and archival subject of Dulai's book *dream/arteries* (2015).

to imagine, even *speculate about*, the continuities of the erased, of those who *aren't* deserving. In both the specifics of New Westminster and the abstractions of the outpost as secure idyll, "The Colony" stands as an important figure in *From the Poplars*, generating a stability from repeated appropriations of space that change the terms of what a space means, how it can assemble, and who has a right to inhabit it. Nicholson turns her poems around this colonial relationship and the various and repeated appropriations that accompany it. Nicholson acknowledges at the end of her book that "'Poplar Island' is Qayqayt land" (94), drawing attention to the land's original inhabitants, a nation essentially wiped out by a smallpox epidemic in the late nineteenth century (though they have reappeared more recently).[40] She traces through the various and conflicting *uses* of the land from the "types of temporary use // to prove title / seasonal fishing hunting gathering" (13) to industrial and military production like the shipbuilding of the Imperial Munitions Board (34-44) during World War I to a focus on leisure in the construction of the Waterfront Esplanade Boardwalk in the 1980s (31).

From the Poplars extends a poetic project invested in social and spatial justice that Nicholson inaugurates in her first book *Triage* (2011). In his essay "Poetry and Globalized Cities: A Material Poetics of Canadian Urban Space" (2015), Jeff Derksen situates *Triage*, which centers on the Downtown Eastside neighbourhood of Vancouver, inside a larger discussion of the ways globalization and urbanization are interconnected processes. Derksen argues that "while *Triage* moves between the global news of the day and very specific neighbourhood and community issues, the poems locate the ways that community, critique, and a form of social sincerity cohere in domestic and urban spaces" (313).[41] In *From the Poplars,* Nicholson lengthens the temporal frame of her

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[40] In a 2009 article in the *New Westminster Record*, Qayqayt chief Rhonda Larrabee discusses how learning about her own background snowballed into the Qayqayt nation being reclassified as active, though small and without a land base.

[41] For Derksen, Nicholson spatializes social contradictions by working through them not only "thematically and viscerally, but also syntactically," drawing attention to the way "the very linguistic texture of the poems syntax collapses or is compressed so that ideologically competing discourses clash up against each other as if syntax can represent the spatial struggle within the city" (316). In this syntactical *dramatization* of the messy and contradictory languages that circulate in collective spatial practice, Derksen observes the way Nicholson *appropriates* and *recombines* clashing spatial discourses, moving between them to suggest the ways a space like the Downtown Eastside is contested. Looking at the "syntactic collapses" of a poem like "appropriate," Derksen hints at the syntactical blocking of Nicholson's through the way, in her poem, that "[t]he appropriated 'appropriate' language of an administered life (forms, timely

project to expose repeated patterns and shared histories of appropriation and administration – a move which underlines the ways that, even at its most naturalized, spatial change has been effected by powerful capitalist and colonial practices. By way of example, Nicholson clusters together a number of hospitals as a way of responding to the Island's history as a quarantine site for smallpox in 1889. The figure of the isolation hospital or *lazaretto* appears early in the book as Nicholson connects Poplar Island to three other islands known for their hospitals: Kamau Taurua in New Zealand, North Brother Island in New York, and Angel Island in San Francisco:

> Poplar Island pop patri individuated alike
>
> lazaretto
> Kamau Taurua, North Brother,
> Angel our current
>
> worse conditions of confinement
>
> *subjects of capture*
> *property in the strictest sense* (2)

In linking these three islands as "*subjects of capture*," Nicholson draws together two points about them. As the islands themselves are captured and made property, the histories of these islands resonate with Poplar Island's, suggesting the wider global processes wherein Indigenous territory could be recoded as empty or surplus and subsequently adapted to a variety of uses – the obsolescent space's inherent potential made useful. These islands found themselves retooled not only as quarantine hospitals, but also military garrisons, drug rehab centers, state parks, farmland, bird sanctuaries, immigration processing centers, urban exploration destinations.

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applications, etc.) thickens in this poem, but it also hits up against a 'rebel populace' and bodies that do not submit neatly" (316). Derksen draws attention to an important tension between appropriateness (ie. the ways bodies are formally and informally policed within an assemblage) and appropriation (ie. the ways spaces or discourses are taken, stripped of context, and used for a different purpose). Derksen usefully conceptualizes this syntactic play through a slippage between expressive and material components, through the way the language of administration acts upon and meets the resistance of the bodies of the administered, and, in the process, calling attention to the way that poetry can work at this junction point between official language as a site of spatial management and struggles against that language, particularly in the way that *Triage* "makes a claim to the city through notions of social justice, collectivity, and collective action" (316).

The second thing to draw from Nicholson's interest in these islands is the way the confinement conditions of the *lazaretto* links with institutional histories wherein individuals are confined, captured, and made proper[42] within colonial parameters. With this global pattern in mind, but on a smaller scale, Nicholson connects Poplar Island's hospital to two other hospitals in New Westminster: the still present Royal Columbian Hospital and the Woodlands Psychiatric Hospital. Where Nicholson narrates the Royal Columbian Hospital through a description of both how much it cost to build and its lofty institutional goals – "An institution, when inaugurated, to be conducted on liberal principles, open to all deserving patients" (19) – the Woodlands Psychiatric Hospital is narrated through the conversion of its connected cemetery into parkland in the 1970s. When Nicholson observes Woodlands Hospital Cemetery, she does so with a sense that something has been erased:

> place is a while we walk on the bones of all time
>
> Bill Vander Zalm revamped Woodlands Hospital Cemetery
> the desecration of graves gave way to park activity
> thousands distal dismember to old records traces now
>
> The Queen's Park Hospital Society
> holds the surveyed grid showing locations
> where individuals are buried without upkeep to save money
>
> there is a place (built over) at the southern end of Agnes Street
>
> burial grounds (built over) of the present high school
>
> *being broken a constant* (11)

For Nicholson, the "revamping" of the Woodlands Hospital Cemetery into a park next to the newer Queen's Park Hospital amounts to a desecration or a dismemberment – an erasure only made visible through the traces of the archive. Nicholson's focus on burial here connects to her note about the 1889 epidemic where Poplar Island became an isolation hospital, which she ends by noting that "[i]t is believed that many native people from around Vancouver were transported to Poplar Island during the epidemic and many may have been buried there" (18).

[42] Though I'm playing with the linguistic proximity of property and proper here, it's also worth noting that Nicholson is also pointing us to the histories of slavery in North America.

In this triangulation of institutions, Nicholson connects the construction of "the Colony" to the erasure or elimination of marginalized populations – the Indigenous, the disabled and mentally ill, the imprisoned. In other words, Nicholson engages with a question of what and who lay buried underneath the stable machinations of colonial New Westminster. She reproduces rhetoric about the importance of the Royal Columbian Hospital to the Colony – particularly because of "the rapid increase of our population, especially in the mining season" (19) – alongside the importance of convict labour to the building's construction. This is in proximity with moments like the use of Poplar Island by the Imperial Munitions Board to build war ships during World War I. Nicholson draws in archival letters: one from Mary Agnes Vianin from 1912, looking for recompense over the way the state appropriated the land for shipbuilding without consent; another, undated, from John A. Lee, willing to pay Vianin, but also urging Ottawa to "settle all those Indian reserves, including Poplar Island, at once" (49). Where the Royal Columbian Hospital is important to the Colony, Indigenous claims to Poplar Island are merely a problem to be solved.

Despite this use of and reflection on the material of the archive, however, Nicholson spends a great deal of *From the Poplars* writing through, around, and adjacent to the array of documents and quotations she places together. The book doesn't apply the archive to the material world in a straightforward manner – there is no leaping from street names to historical figures – but instead looks for the traces of what has been erased, destroyed, and buried in order to not only bring those erasures to light, but also lay out the stakes of those colonizations as they manifest in the present. Nicholson challenges the ways the material available in the archive acts as a form of coding that stabilizes the kinds of spaces Poplar Island can be. Her poetry slides between displacements not only of the ways spaces are used, but also of the people and relations that can take place in those spaces. Halfway through the book, Nicholson pairs on facing pages the relational push and pull that comes out of valuing space through its ability to transform. On one page, Nicholson excerpts the seventeenth century ballad "The Diggers' Song," which with its invocation to stand up to the gentry pulling down houses resonates with gentrification struggles in contemporary Vancouver.[43] On the

[43] In particular, Nicholson points to this verse from "The Digger's Song": "Your houses they pull down, stand up now, stand up now, / Your houses they pull down, stand up now / Your houses they pull down to fright your men in town / But the gentry must come

facing page, she puts forward a narrative swatch about a family in the 1950s[44] living between cities:

> her father got a job in a paper mill until
> he made enough to move back down
>
> bought a home at 6 mile and Dequindre Road
>
> fella on Cass Ave. kept on like a song
>
> a while then the place called Flame Show Bar
> on John R Street that last show Holiday did in Detroit
> just weeks before. imagine. quality atolls far on (57)

In these two pages, Nicholson connects the push out of a space under transformation to the pull into a space needing labour to stoke its construction. The father in this narrative nugget is caught between the cultural community for black folks in Detroit and the availability of jobs in Canada (presumably New Westminister, but Nicholson leaves this unclear). Juxtaposing these examples to the colonial archive of New Westminister, Nicholson asserts the ways that an archival poetics of the local needs to account for the circulations of bodies, ideas, texts, and capital as they move through and define spaces by following those circulations as they are pushed and pulled out of local spaces. For Nicholson, the colonial archive underwrites the codes that stabilize the ways different actors can live in and produce spaces, defining a site like Poplar Island as "surplus" to make it available for economic activity that simultaneously pushes and pulls, destroying one set of relations even as it congeals another set.

In her February 11, 2016 talk, Nicholson asks of the archive, "[h]ow do we find ourselves there now?" Her question and her larger project in *For The Poplars* connects the erasure of racialized and Indigenous folks from the historical record to their erasure in space. Historical continuity produces a spatial stability for those imagined to have an ongoing connection and right to that space. The relegation, for example, of Indigenous folks to the past or to "wild" spaces outside of cities makes the formation of communities difficult. Nicholson's question speaks to a desire to not only remediate historical understandings, but also to provide an anchor in the present for erased forms of spatial

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down and the poor shall wear the crown / Stand up now diggers all" (qtd. in Garner, 302).

[44] As best I can tell this particular piece must be dated somewhere between the opening of the Flame Show Bar in 1949 and Billie Holiday's death a decade later.

relation – decoding dominant forms of spatial organization to hopefully make room for something else, something new or resurgent, something more just. Compton's work creates a similar tension as he also examines the fraught meeting point between historical narrative, present-day spaces, and the threads of continuity and local narrative that efface the black population in British Columbia. In the push to expand Vancouver's freeway system in the 1960s and 1970s, Hogan's Alley was reduced to a kind of surplus space, simultaneously empty and blighted, to justify the city's desire to redevelop that space.

Compton's work on Hogan's Alley sits in the pocket where the global diaspora produced by the Transatlantic slave trade meets the localized disruptions of Vancouver's ongoing practice of "misconceived urban renewal and civic development" (107). Compton both memorializes and reassembles the neighbourhood set adrift as part of his larger project defining a space for black literature and culture in British Columbia – a province lacking a *sense* of a black community or history, despite the long history he describes in the introduction to *Bluesprint*. Compton comments in a 2002 interview with Myler Wilkinson and David Stouck that *Bluesprint* and his first book of poetry *49th Parallel Psalm* (1999) map a historical and geographical context that helped him in "making a space to write, making a kind of definition" (131). In *Bluesprint*, Compton suggests that "[b]lacks in B.C. have always recognized the need for distinct cultural spaces" (31) and connects this need for cultural spaces with the production of material space, describing the inherent tension between isolation and collectivity that comes with the dispersal of the black community into the wider lower mainland. As part of his historical genealogy of black writing in British Columbia, Compton distinguishes between the sense of community in different historical moments:

> While the pioneer writers were aware of each other's work (which often appeared in local newspapers), and the writers of the 1990s to the present similarly are known to each other, the writers of this "middle period" [publishing in the 1970s] – specifically [Truman] Green, [Christopher] James, and [Fred] Booker – all appear to have produced their work in isolation, neither knowing one another nor involved in an ongoing community of writers. (29-30)

Compton's invocation of the "incipient concept" of a black British Columbia – "with roots at least somewhat recovered by black cultural work" (30) – is something he traces through the ways community-specific publications and artistic spaces produce these

relational formations. Black cultural work, then, connects the actors in a specifically black social assemblage as they navigate everyday life in wider local, regional, and national formations, dealing with not only a *double consciousness*, to borrow Paul Gilroy's term,[45] but also a *double spatiality* – an entangling or nesting of different dominant and marginal assemblages.

Pulling from Compton's notion that blacks in British Columbia are "a lost tribe of a lost tribe," Peter Hudson suggests in "'The Lost Tribe of a Lost Tribe": Black British Columbia and the Poetics of Space" (2007) that the province's geography disperses a tiny black population within its large landmass, altering both the ways blackness is articulated[46] and the potential for forms of black community and solidarity. He suggests that this spatial configuration "has disrupted the reconstruction of black culture on an anthropological axis stressing racial and cultural continuity, preferring instead ideas of rupture, difference, dissimilitude and, in some cases, straight up disavowal, while at the same time embracing cross-cultural and cross-racial lines of alliance and solidarity" (156). In his essay "Seven Routes to Hogan's Alley,"[47] Compton openly speculates about the movements of Vancouver's black population away from Hogan's Alley. The incomplete historical memory of the street forms a focal point for Compton and other activists involved in the Hogan's Alley Memorial Project to remember the area and memorialize it in the present. Compton dwells on not only the historical fate of the street,

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[45] Gilroy uses the notion of a double consciousness in *The Black Atlantic* to account for the tense realities of black subjects caught between conditional belonging in a white dominated nation like Britain and the more global belongings of the black diaspora as it is circulated through culture.

[46] The "regionalism" that George Elliott Clarke recognizes in black writing in Canada produces a situation where blackness is articulated differently in different parts of Canada. To this point, Bertrand Bickersteth argues that "[i]n Western Canada, where the history of slavery and the Middle Passage do not directly inform black presences as readily as they do in other regions of the country and where the black population is seen as inconsequential, black writers have forged their figures partially out of histories and cultural traditions from elsewhere and partially out of those from other parts of Canada (but nonetheless available to Canadians in general)" ("Bordering on African American" 74). So, when Hudson spends a chunk of his article looking at Joe Fortes, the self-styled "caretaker" of English Bay, as a figure understood through minstrel stereotypes because of the lack of local black figures, that stereotype operates as a mode "from elsewhere" through which Fortes is articulated by the white community "as black." At the same time, as Bickersteth argues, Compton's turns to Hip Hop in *Performance Bond* also involve a kind of borrowing from elsewhere to help understand how blackness might be understood in a space where it seems invisible.

[47] Collected in *After Canaan: Essays on Race, Writing, and Region* (2011).

but also the potential effects of considering its absence in the present. In the essay, a recounting and contextualization of a number of linked projects, Compton relays both the history of black settlers in British Columbia and his own creative and critical interventions into the way that the black population often "get[s] minimized out of existence when people comment on the demographics of Vancouver" (105). Because this minimization or erasure of Vancouver's black population is created through a foreclosure on spatial proximity, much of Compton's work looks both to opportunities for black assembly and to explore the ways that black people in Vancouver negotiate a city where the assembly of the black community is reliant on exceptional events, including the social remembering of local black history.

These complicated lines of assembly and affiliation play out in Compton's poetics as he negotiates a desire to bring together the dispersed black community, while teasing out the ways that community finds itself entangled in other communities. Like Nicholson, Compton moves between the archival evidence of the past and the realities of the present. Arguing that the destruction of Hogan's Alley contradicts the assertion that Vancouver largely escaped the sprawling freeways fought against by figures like Jane Jacobs, Compton declares that, despite successful resistance by Strathcona residents against the building of the freeway through their neighbourhood, Hogan's Alley was "shamelessly sacrificed," becoming "a scapegoat of the union between an authoritarian planning ideology and a developer-led civic government" (84). Compton tracks a friction between the residents of Hogan's Alley and a history of city attempts to "rationalize Vancouver's layout" (90) that crescendos in the adoption of Leonard Marsh's *Rebuilding a Neighbourhood* by the city government, in particular the right-wing Non-Partisan Association (NPA). Marsh's book proposes, in Compton's words, a redevelopment of Strathcona based in "top-down city restructuring, with a heavy focus on freeway creation and slum clearance" (93). This top-down restructuring reflected urban renewal strategies in the United States, but instead of the black population moving into housing projects built for them, they dispersed and integrated into the rest of the city.

These top-down restructurings of the city are driven by urbanist practices that imagine themselves forces for good, posing spatial form's utopian potential. They propose new spatial forms as a way to answer the "toxic" spatial conditions produced by the dominant planning regimes of a particular historical moment. The various movements and manifestos of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century – City

Beautiful, Garden City, the Athens Charter – all respond to the toxic density of the industrial city and the New Urbanism, emerging in the mid-1990s but drawing from the earlier critiques of writers like Jane Jacobs, responds to the sprawling suburban cities produced in the wake of those movements. In these instances, urbanism evangelizes formal redesign as the road to a better world. Compton eyes the way Hogan's Alley is figured as both toxic and surplus in service of a revision of the city based around the car. Compton begins "Rune," a long section of *Performance Bond*, with two versions of Hogan's Alley.[48] The first poem in the section, "Blight," presents a series of absences produced by the erasure of words, often pronouns: "When _____ take _____ pictures of _____, there are no people there"; "False / Creek to / _____?"; "when City Hall puts _____ under study" (113). Amidst this, absence itself becomes a kind of resource:

> There are whole languages built out of how _____aren't.
> Whole first. Absences chopped down, hewn into beams, and raised. (113)

The *terra nullius* produced by both colonialism and development, absence and presence stand as concepts important to Compton's Hogan's Alley work, not only in the way the neighbourhood can be read as empty in order to facilitate development, but also in the way the dispersed character of the black community in the present moment generates the illusion that the community doesn't exist. Whole languages, whole forts, whole viaducts: Compton leverages the present absence of Hogan's Alley to challenge the idea that something can be built from nothing, while ironically attempting to build a sense of space from its absence. Compton compliments this absence with a fictionalized newsclipping, whose title – "Community or Hotbed of Criminality? Whither Hogan's Alley? Examination of Blighted District Undertaken by Civic Body" – clearly marks the area as toxic, unstable:

> For the law, however, there is no question that this concentration of ramshackle buildings and tawdry hotels contribute to and exemplify the larger district's criminal caste, with a reach stretching out for blocks in all directions. (115)

Taking both of these into account, Hogan's Alley is either a blight to be erased out of fear it will infect the city around it, somehow *too* present, or an absence to be exploited.

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[48] Compton's representations of Hogan's Alley recall the de-peopled landscape of Stan Douglas' *Every Building on 100 West Hastings*, which I'll discuss in the following section.

In his essay "Hogan's Alley and Retro-Speculative Verse" (2005), Compton discusses a different relationship to absence: a kind of yearning tied to both the destruction of Hogan's Alley and the dispersed black community. Compton compares his own work on Hogan's Alley with the photographs of Melinda Mollineaux, particularly her "Cadboro Bay Photographs." Mollineaux's pinhole photographs capture a Cadboro Bay, a site on Vancouver Island where black communities held Emancipation Day picnics, minus black bodies, leading a viewer, according to Andrea Fatone, to "negotiate the erasure of visual evidence of Blackness from official historical narratives" ("In the Presence of Absence" 230). Compton points to the way Mollineaux's photographs share with his own work both an interest in the present resonance of erased/destroyed spaces – spaces that bear "no contemporary sign of that former presence" (n. pag.) – and a tactical experimentation with "retro-speculative examination" (n. pag.). This retro-speculation manifests through pieces that mimic the archival from photographs of important black spaces that never existed to the oral histories of fictional neighbourhood residents. Compton approaches the archive as a poetic tool in the present tense. Instead of mapping out the structural shape of spatial and archival erasures like Nicholson, he uses the form of the archive to invent continuities that suggests the ways that black spaces might occur under terms other than erasure.

To this end, Compton adopts Daphne Marlatt and Carole Itter's oral history Strathcona, *Opening Doors* (1979), both as a source of historical narrative about Hogan's Alley[49] and as a formal model for his own retro-speculations. Compton's choice of *Opening Doors* is interesting precisely because of the way it refracts the stated goals of Marlatt and Itter's project. Where Compton's interest in *Opening Doors* emerges from the ways it allows a narrative window into a disappeared space tied to the racialized experience of his own body, Marlatt expresses a more general curiosity about the neighbourhood she and Itter found themselves in, asking a pair of questions: "what was the neighbourhood like before we came here? and, because we are both of white Anglo-Saxon protestant backgrounds, what are other experiences of life in this city where we all live together and yet apart?" (1). Marlatt and Itter open and close their book with a concern about the way the city changes, something Marlatt historicizes in her foreword:

[49] Compton includes several of the oral histories from *Opening Doors* in *Bluesprint*.

> Built out of bush, and destroyed by a runaway slash fire right after it was incorporated, built largely of wood-frame structures, it has been the ultimately disposable city, its skyline transformed by steel highrises within the last 20 years. City Hall's plan to "renew" Strathcona, i.e., to raze its homes and build low-income housing projects, was just one more step in the march of progress. After all, the district suffered from "urban blight" – the result of a combination of absentee landlords, a penny-pinching municipality, and a population of immigrants who were by definition powerless. (1)

Opening Doors concludes with a pair of group interviews dedicated to the then recent fight against urban "renewal" in the area, bookending the collection by rooting it in a contemporary concern over the neighbourhood. In inclusively collecting the stories informally defining the neighbourhood, *Opening Doors* grounds its history work in a struggle over the local, defining the neighbourhood as an important site to counter definitions of the area as "blighted."

Compton's retro-speculations take into account the lives of those who live in a neighbourhood, by assuming a world where Hogan's Alley wasn't the exception to Strathcona's successful struggle. In the section "Lost-Found Landmarks of Black Vancouver," Compton both photographically "documents" important (but invented) black landmarks and writes oral histories in the style of *Opening Doors* for fictional residents Madoo Abdul Wahid and Geraldine Diamond. In a 2006 interview with Esi Edugyan and Karina Vernon, Compton frames these speculative histories as a kind of satire on the lack of possibilities of Afrocentrism (particularly in B.C.), coming out of a shared joke about "how absurd it was to be 'fellow travellers' of Afrocentrism (or whatever you'd call what we were in the early nineties) in a province like B.C., among the least fertile regions for black radicalism in the hemisphere" (n. pag.). Compton flags the humour of the two oral histories in particular because of the way the interviewees start as black nationalists who, because of the particularities of B.C. in general and the mixed immigrant community of Strathcona specifically, "were bound to find themselves dealing with more non-black than black people" (n.pag.) and ended up in interracial relationships and families. Compton underlines this in his oral history of Wahid, who starts a Muslim temple for the black community only to see it attended by a largely Asian group. Echoing Compton's appeal to the humour of his speculative history, Leow notes the way that Compton works within a tension between an ironic playfulness emerging from the potential for his speculations to be read as hoax and a genuine feeling of attachment to a neighbourhood, creating, in her words, "something new from an unstable sense of the

old" (n. pag.). Leow's sense of temporality is complicated here and, despite a resemblance, isn't simply the application of the obsolete Stephens reads in Robertson. At once, the "new" thing created is clearly the retro-speculative history (the "new old") invented by Compton and also the new relations that emerge from events like Black History Month. But it is also a response to the way Marlatt and Itter's historical move is already an impossibility for Compton, who is forced to invert Marlatt and Itter's initial question, turning "what was the neighbourhood like before we came here?" into "what would the neighbourhood be like if it was still here?"

This last question is a key one for Compton's work, which it not only challenges the erasures of black life both in the archive and in material space, but also leverages an imagined proximity to insist on forms of relational continuity that aren't speculative and whose relations form a distinctly black spatial assemblage. To frame black spaces as doubled – both entangled with non-black spatial relations while also produced by a dispersed or even diasporic set of black relations – counters spatial framings that would see blackness as dissolved or *assimilated* into the non-black relations of the city. Compton recognizes the difficulty of using forms of culture and representation to work through these fraught material relations. In "Ghetto Fabulous Ozymandias," the poem that closes out *Performance Bond*, Compton tracks "The Narrator" as they photograph the space under the Georgia Viaduct, meeting a character, Reverend Oz, who is visible only as a tag on the concrete overpass unless The Narrator looks through their camera. Compton recognizes a virtuality to the space under the overpass – an overlayed affective space that is nonetheless productive of a real set of relations, not only in the past through the destruction of Hogan's Alley (memorialized in the Viaduct itself), but also in the present through the asynchronous connection of writer and reader through the tag. Through the photograph (or the poem) as a frame through which those absent relations can be negotiated, Compton opens up a potential for that relation to reappear, even if only representationally. At the same time, in referencing Shelley's "Ozymandias," itself a poem that figures around a site of demolition, Compton floods the poem with a deep irony. In a material sense, Rev. Oz is only readable through his tag, a mark on par with the inscription Shelley describes at the base of Ozymandias' statue. Compton makes hay of this comparison. If Shelley's poem suggests the way that even the most powerful can be destroyed by time – the invocation to "[l]ook on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair" curling down into a sad admission of this – Compton instead leans into an

uncertainty produced by the uncomfortable junction of the arrogance critiqued by Shelley and the injustice committed by the city. When Compton's Narrator insists that "[i]t doesn't make sense / to call the targets of this unfairness 'arrogant,' / to put them in Ozymandias's shoes, " Rev. Oz insists that "[i]t is arrogant to disappear" (156). This tension around arrogance doesn't resolve, but it does reflect Compton's struggle to imagine Hogan's Alley, this home place that he feels a connection to despite not having been a resident.

And Tomorrow, I'm Somewhere Else

The displacement and dispersal of the black community after the demolition of Hogan's Alley echoes in the present efforts to gentrify or "revitalize" spaces across the Lower Mainland. When Nicholson and Compton lay out the histories of erasure tied to colonial and urbanist developments that both imagine a kind of frontier waiting for its settlement, they do so in response to the ways those historical narratives carry forward into the present and the future. In his short story collection *The Outer Harbour* (2014), Compton recognizes this in the way he flips the temporal switch on his speculative approach to the future, from archival approaches to something that imagines the continuities of spatial struggle moving forward. One thread in his loosely linked short stories follows the fictional Pauline Johnson Island, a surplus space which, at the beginning of the book, emerges from Burrard Inlet as a result of a volcanic eruption, becoming, like Nicholson's of Poplar Island (and Robertson's New Brighton Park), a site of extreme spatial changes and erasures that can be tracked through history. Echoing the cross-genre work he performs in "Rune," the story "Boom" visually narrates conflict over Pauline Johnson Island between activist and development forces. "Boom" is composed of nine images, three posters advertising demonstrations and events against development on the site followed by six pages of promotional material for "Arrival" ("a 10-storey residential tower built on Vancouver's newest waterfront" [109]). This series of images deliberately stages different circulating discourses, shifting from a poster advertising a rally protesting the police killing of Indigenous activist Fletcher Sylvester (whose story is told in "The Lost Island") to an advertisement that Arrival "blends the pioneer spirit of Canada's heritage with 21st century bravado" (109). With its invocation of "pioneer" life, the flat promotional language of Arrival sits uncomfortably against the appropriation of indigenous land. As *The Outer Harbour* unravels, its title story provides

a glimpse of the island (and its condo developments) as detention center for an unidentifiable migrant race. Moving through a chain of identifiers from scientific site to indigenous land, from condo development to migrant detainment, Pauline Johnson Island operates as a fictional site where Compton can speculate on the temporalities of spatial change, presenting the site in discrete moments of contestation and longer durations involving serial appropriations and displacements.

Compton's speculative future resonates with the material present of a space like Vancouver's Downtown Eastside neighbourhood. In her book *Mercenary English*, Mercedes Eng articulates a critical anger about the way the Downtown Eastside, her home for 20 years, has transformed under her feet into a playground for the rich. In the interview that concludes the second edition of *Mercenary English* (2016), Fred Moten asks Eng about her decision to move out of the Downtown Eastside. "If the neighbourhood is the displaced," he asks, "rather than the scene of their displacement, then how and where does the neighbourhood go, or keep on going?" (124). Thinking through Eng's relocation specifically, he suggests that perhaps she has displaced herself in a way that comes out of "one's own gentrification" – a kind of self-improvement tied to her status as a survivor in a space where many haven't survived. He asks her "[w]hy is it that to remain among the living one has to leave" (126). Eng leans into the word "displacement," posing her move out of the neighbourhood as the result of an affective friction generated by spatial transition:

> Have I displaced myself? Can I? I think of displacement as forced movement though I guess that's thinking narrowly. I feel like I have been forced by the negative psychic energy radiating from entitled people new to the area, by the continued and new violence against poor people. I don't know about self-displacement as modernist or postmodernist technique, only as a necessity: I felt so angry towards the new folks in the DTES and couldn't live like that anymore. (126)

Embedded in Eng's response is a tangled mix of concern resulting from her own position caught between the two assemblages struggling over the DTES – the lower income residents of the neighbourhood and the entitled new condo owners. When Moten asks Eng about where the neighbourhood is displaced to, he distinguishes between the scene of that displacement and the displaced relations that compose the neighbourhood. For Moten, the neighbourhood is not only demarcated by a set of geographic boundaries, defined by the space from one street to another, but also extends to the people living in

the neighbourhood, their daily lives, struggles, and histories composing the Downtown Eastside.

In their conversation, Eng and Moten recognize a tension around the place of the individual in the thinning relations of a neighbourhood under siege, left with the choice to leave or to "self-gentrify" by folding oneself into the "revitalized" relations of the incursive neighbourhood. In this section, I read the work of Eng and Lisa Robertson as they respond to both the scene and relations of a changing Vancouver squeezed by capitalist development, caught up in the ways the appropriation and reappropriation of territory shuffles relations, foreclosing on some spatial practices, while enabling others. Their shared interest in a changing and unstable Vancouver translates into a focus on how those changes operate at the intimate scale of the body as part of an externalized assemblage. For both writers, changes happening at an urban scale affect individuals in their everyday lives, reminding us that, if space and land are a set of relations, the stability and instability of those relations affect the potential lives each person can live.

Published a decade apart and at very different points in their literary careers,[50] Robertson's *Office for Soft Architecture* (2003) and Eng's *Mercenary English* (2013) both ask how poetry might map and intervene into spaces as they change and the way those changes affect and emerge from individual encounters, but do so from different subject positions and different aesthetic approaches. Taken together, Robertson and Eng's work sits at a tension point in contemporary Vancouver writing and art about space, where a longstanding investment in place-based poetics meets political organizing against the developer-led gentrification of the city. But the stakes differ for both writers because of the way that Eng identifies with and within the specific struggles of the DTES, in contrast to Robertson's exploration of spatial change as an abstract problematic. This difference in stakes pushes both Robertson and Eng to take drastically different formal approaches. Where Robertson takes a largely aestheticized "literary" approach, bringing twenty-first century Vancouver in proximity with the changing streets of spaces like nineteenth century Paris, Eng cognitively maps the political and spatial structures of her contemporary moment, aiming for an articulatory realism that critiques the uneven processes that make the city.

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[50] *Mercenary English* is Eng's first book, whereas *Office for Soft Architecture* was published more than a decade after her first chapbook *The Apothecary* (1991).

This tension between material and literary approaches to space is central to Robertson's work, where expressive and material components intersect at the site of the body as it moves through, perceives, and practices in space. Earlier texts like *XEclogue* and *The Weather* consider space through different generic approaches – the pastoral and psychogeographic description respectively. Because of its site specificity, much of the critical discussion around this focuses on Robertson's *Occasional Work and Seven Walks from the Office for Soft Architecture* (2003), making much out of her claim at the beginning of the book that she documents the ways that, in the period from the 1986 World Exposition (or Expo 86) to the 2003 acquisition of the 2010 Olympics, she "watched the city of Vancouver dissolve in the fluid called money" (n. pag.), echoing Marx's famous remark in the *Grundrisse*, that "[w]here money is not itself the community, it must dissolve the community" (224). In his *Companion to Marx's Capital* (2010), Harvey observes the way that, in Marx's formulation, "[w]e may have fantasies of belonging to this or that cultural community, but in practice, Marx argues, our primary community is given by the community of money – the universal circulatory system that puts breakfast on our tables – whether we like it or not" (72-73). Dissolution is materially felt through the movements of money as it interacts with individual bodies and alters neighbourhoods and cities as architectures and populations shift and groups are pushed out through processes of gentrification and colonization – through investment and disinvestment in neighbourhoods (shaped, in part, by racist practices like redlining), the appropriation and dispossession of territory, and the uneven and racially motivated application of police violence.

For Robertson, dissolution also connects the speculative experimentation of the codex (with its potential for experimenting with subjectivity) to a different kind of literary experimentation. In *Occasional Work*, Robertson repeatedly turns to temporary architectures (shacks, scaffolds, tents) to speculate about not only the ways that the city moves and changes, but also about the ways that expressive codes work within those dynamics. As a metaphor, dissolution imagines spatial change as a slow coming apart, where the parts of a social or spatial assemblage disconnect from one another like sugar stirred into a cup of fair trade coffee. As a material process, dissolution suggests nothing less than the breaking apart of the material and social bonds that stabilize space and community. Dissolution also connects to a generalized anxiety over the incursion of *something* (capital investment, new construction, homeless or low income populations)

into a neighbourhood or city, which comes out of the way those incursions are seen to potentially act as a solvent, catalyst, or, worse, a contagion that could change the existing composition of the space.

In a 2001 issue of Calgary's *dANDelion* magazine, Robertson, writing under the conceptual persona of the Office for Soft Architecture, presents a slogan that covers most of the page: "The Willed Recognition of Fragility is Resistance" (vii). Despite not appearing in her book, this slogan acts as an informal thesis statement for the work of her conceptual persona, which both writes out of a Vancouver context while turning the city's "fragility" over and over by examining a series of "soft" architectures (shacks, scaffolds, fountains, tents). At the beginning of "Soft Architecture: A Manifesto," Robertson lays out the piece's origin as a catalogue essay[51] for artists Sharyn Yuen and Josée Bernard – a context that allows her to develop a "theory of cloth, memory, and gods" that somehow pertains to "urban geography, especially to the speed and mutability of Vancouver's built environment" (4). Robertson describes the city's abstract, changing character as the fabrics that adorn it also change – a stance that informs her book's obsessions with furnishings and fashion. Framing Robertson's work within a larger context of an urban, "cosmopolitan" poetics in his essay "On the Outskirts of Form" (2008), Michael Davidson suggests the ways that Robertson's *Office* sees a city "not [as] the glass and steel corporate landscape of Vancouver so much as a state of transience" (749) that offers "a malleable surface to corporate modernism's seeming permanence" (750). Robertson's work, according to Davidson, connects to a larger set of poets across North America whose work *speaks* to a post-NAFTA context and an ongoing tension between those able to move across borders and those policed by them – in his words, "a world in which the illusion of mobility and expanded communication masks the re-consolidation of wealth and the containment of resistance within a totalized surveillance regime" (737). He links Robertson's book to Mexican poet Cristina Rivera-Garza and American poet Mark Nowak through the way they all represent or engage with cities that are "products of finance capital" (744), but *Office for Soft Architecture* sits uncomfortably beside Rivera-Garza and Nowak's projects because of the way that they

[51] Most of the pieces in *Office for Soft Architecture* share this pedigree, written as part of Robertson's ongoing practice of art writing – a practice shared by other former members of the Kootenay School of Writing, because of the social proximity of the poetry and art communities in Vancouver. As such, Robertson's work in *Office for Soft Architecture* carries not only genre elements of architectural writing, but also of the catalogue essay.

address specific marginalized populations – for Rivera-Garza the "third-world" status of migrants in Mexico City and for Nowak the un- and underemployed population of the American rust belt.

In contrast, Robertson's *Office* ambiguously positions (or fails to position) itself on issues of race and class, tacitly adopting an implied whiteness that emerges from the book's persona[52] – the collective "Office for Soft Architecture" – working, as many critics have pointed out, as a literary analogue to Rem Koolhaas' Office for Metropolitan Architecture. In drawing this analogical link between her project and Koolhaas', Robertson places herself, however slant, in relation to both a whole line of bleeding-edge western architects and urbanists and Koolhaas' interest in speculative or "paper" urbanism.[53] By posing as a literary Koolhaas who writes about the potential of temporary or *transient* architectures, her sense of "fragility" takes on a double timbre, because of the way she not only treats fragility as an abstract problem applied to the city as a whole, but also takes upon herself urbanism's fraught history of displacing marginalized populations. The Office, with its institutional "we," positions itself in the imperative,

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[52] Much of the problem of Robertson's book around race in particular emerges from her failure to explicitly confront the racial politics of Vancouver. The content of Robertson's book revolves around a junction of self-consciously bourgeois, colonial, and often European topics (Benjamin and Atget's Paris, Arts and Crafts architecture) with more contemporary architectures such as the corporate fountain and the suburban house. As such, the racial politics of her book assumes an implied whiteness. Despite this, "whiteness" takes on a much different tenor in the Office's essay "How to Colour," which opposes whiteness to both pigment and impurity. Challenging the modernist connection of urban cleanliness and utopia, exemplified in the "White City" of the 1893 Chicago World's Fair, Robertson suggests that "white proposes a disciplinary unity and it always fails. It already submits to pigment and chance" (141). In this critique of the innocent, pure, and amnesiac qualities of whiteness, there also seems to sit a veiled and ambiguous comment on whiteness as a racial category that actively works to erase, but Robertson's failure to make this explicit obscures this critique because of the way whiteness is assumed to be the racial category of those "without race."

[53] Koolhaas' speculative urbanism, collected in a book like *S,M,L,XL* (1995), imagines architecture and urbanism as forms of research. In this form of "paper" urbanism, proposals for architectural or design projects can act as critical interventions into a site even when they aren't used to rebuild that site. A more recent and more obviously political example is described in the book *Architecture After Revolution* (2013) by the Decolonizing Architecture Art Residency, who, looking to challenge colonial violence in Palestine, "mobilize architecture and individual buildings in our vicinity as optical devices and as tactical tools within the unfolding struggle for Palestine" (32). The texts they produce propose projects not with the intent of building anything, but with the intent of critiquing spatial violence.

adopting an authoritative voice that parks itself within the expressive regimes of a white and peculiarly European discourse. Within the auspices of an architectural firm, however conceptual, the project of imagining the seemingly permanent structures of a city as a "state of transience" is quite different than the material effects for those living within changing conditions. In other words, recognizing fragility carries different stakes because of its relativity. Robertson's turn to fragility differs from Nicholson's and Compton's turn to the way transient surplus spaces are produced through the destruction of relational ties to the land, particularly through the dispersal and elimination of Indigenous and racialized communities, in the way that it ignores the ways fragility is distributed unevenly.

Nevertheless, Robertson, like Compton, turns to poetry as a form that allows her to speculate about the different potentials available to individuals as they experiment with cities and spaces. Unlike Compton, who turns to speculative history as a way to provide an expressive anchor for the black community in Vancouver, Robertson's turn to speculation is not tied to a specific community or history, but instead banks itself on a theoretical and philosophical junction of design urbanism, situationist tactics, and a Deleuze styled insistence that subjectivity is produced through the external pressures of the "agencies of matter." Robertson looks for the potential embedded in the instability or fragility of both the individual subject and the abstract city. Speculation, for her, announces the subject and the city as sites of experimentation – an experimental potential that is an effect of Robertson's (and the Office's) relative privilege. Working through Deleuze's *The Fold* (1993), which examines Leibniz's work on the baroque to define the relationship between topological organization and what he calls the virtual, Robertson poses the body and the subject as produced through its externalized relations. With its focus on movement and on the affective relationship between bodies, the virtual exists within non-Euclidean space, affective exchanges between bodies in processes of becoming. Deleuze's work in *The Fold* theorizes the affective, virtual components of the assemblage and speaks to the production of subjectivity in the way that it imagines the internal windowless rooms of the soul – the one Harvey worries about – as infolded and largely inaccessible points in a larger social organization. Rather than emerge from some internal, essential source, then, subjectivity is shaped through the movements of the social. Robertson gestures to this externality of subjectification in

her PhillyTalks discussion with Steve McCaffery when she turns to the problem of subjectivity and space:

> "Souls emanate as folds upon corporeal surfaces provoking dialogues not syntheses" you say, and I say exactly, and it is architecture. It seems that part of the problem of discourses on the subject (psychoanalytic ones at least) is that they too easily function in a social vacuum, as if subjectification were all interiority, no plication, and as if the process were not in constant flux. So to bring in the dailiness, the provisional local textures of becoming subject, poetry needs to become a kind of urbanism, or landscape art. I do agree. Also extending the idea of corporeality to the city itself helps avoid some of the deplorable essentialism that clings to the corpus as merely human. Lets talk about the agencies of matter. (33)

Robertson hazily stages a complex tension here between individual subjectivity and the local textures of the city as parts of the same process. When she poses that a consideration of subjectivity needs "a kind of urbanism," she poses a question about the external pull of "local textures" as they act on the body and shape subjectivity not in a "social vacuum" but in a complex assemblage that, possessing its own material agency, has its own corporeality. In this slippery move, Robertson positions both the individual human and the city under the rubric of the body, making it possible for her to consider experimentation with subjectivity and experimentation with the city as two parts of the same move.

In a similar way to speculative urbanism's alternate and critical stagings of a site, Robertson imagines the book and the codex as another speculative site for the body to experiment with its place in a social field. Maia Joseph argues that Robertson "continually probes this threshold relation between the observing poet and the urban world — the space where, she proposes, ethical inquiry into the questions of how to live and relate to others is cultivated" (160). In Joseph's reading, Robertson describes the city in ways that create a "contemplative temporality" (160) – a duration of time where reader and writer can speculate over new forms of relation:

> Robertson, in other words, responds to her swiftly changing (indeed "dissolving") city by positing a form of heightened spatial awareness that is also an opening in time, a temporal re-orientation of self to world that makes room for contemplation. (160)

In "Time and the Codex," the essay that opens *Nilling* (2012), Robertson turns to *The Fold* to ask about the role of literature as a site for speculative thinking about space and

identity. The instability of the city connects to the instability of the body and of subjectivity. For Robertson, the codex provides a "site" to experiment with this instability, particularly around identity as it is relationally produced. She circles around the effects that the text has on her body through the work of rhythms, specifically the alternate rhythms proposed by the text, rhythms that she adopts and follows in an attempt to "become foreign and unknowable" to herself (13). "Reading," she suggests, "I enter a relational contract with *whatever* material, accepting its fluency and swerve" (15). Robertson stages an encounter with the book to imagine a different field of encounters. The relationship, the *friction*, of the book's time to her own "opens a proposition" (15) that creates an opportunity for the body to feel or think otherwise. For Robertson, the codex stands as a site to experiment with spatial possibility and imagine new types of relation.

Like many of Robertson's critical works,[54] "Time in the Codex" was written to accompany an artist's work, in this case the work of photographer and book artist Marlene MacCallum. In the catalogue *The Architectural Uncanny* (2007), "Time in the Codex" is printed alongside photographs from MacCallum's *Townsite House*, a project that explores the seriality of suburban development by photographing different houses with the same design, highlighting the variations between them. The two versions of the essay are drastically different and altered by context. The *Nilling* version is shortened and changes many of the pronouns, making the text less general in a move away from a generalized "reader" to a seemingly more personal "I." Perhaps most interestingly, the earlier version more explicitly takes up the question of space, looking particularly at the house as a similar site of speculation in a homology between book and house. Gesturing to Le Corbusier's famous statement in *Towards an Architecture* that "[t]he house is a machine for living in" (107), she suggests, speaking of the codex, that "I went into it and lived, as if it were a machine for living" (n. pag.). In this earlier version, the house becomes both a stable site of experimentation and a dangerous site of fixation:

> In heavy and mortal houses I feel a violent dismay. It gets harder and harder to be female in one's life in such houses. One is compelled by the

[54] Tied to the interlinked history of poetic and artistic production in Vancouver in the 1980s and 1990s (particularly around the Kootenay School of Writing), Robertson's writing to accompany artists' work occurs throughout her bibliography as she writes for, about, or alongside not only MacCallum, but also artists like Alyson Clay, Liz Magor, and Elspeth Pratt.

> sentence of the personal. What has commodiousness become in them? Ideally the house lends some security to the body. One returns to the safety and stability of its site to test new affective situations and transformations. But maybe the house has too much symbolic and social value. Maybe it fixes, rather than shelters some of us. (n. pag.)

With its specifically feminist timbre, this split potential of the house also resembles Virginia Woolf's concern in *A Room of One's Own* that women require a financially and materially stable space to complete their work *and also* free access to institutional and public space.[55] But the house also applies a social pressure as it connects women's bodies to the domestic sphere. Though Robertson's spatio-textual homology risks equating text to space, it also remembers the importance of space within literary production and consumption. This becomes important when the revised version of this passage in *Nilling* drops the positive potential of the house by abandoning the house altogether:

> In heavy and worthy houses, I feel a violent dismay. It gets harder and harder to be female in one's life in such a house. What has commodiousness become? I abandon the house for the forbidden book. (15)

Where the first version overlaps codex and house as spaces that both provide a stable enough space for experimentation, Robertson's second version exchanges the house for book – particularly the *forbidden* book, with its potential for transgression.[56] With its turn toward the act of reading, Robertson's revision echoes Harvey's worry about the insular site of the study as apolitical. The earlier version opens up the literary practice Robertson proposes by both grounding and complicating Robertson's framing of the codex as experimental site, as well as providing a material and embodied analogue to

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[55] In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf argues that having a personal space for writing is key to the production of literary work by women. At the same time, Woolf discusses being restricted from certain spaces, like the library at Oxbridge. Despite this lack of access, she wonders whether "it is worse perhaps to be locked in," thinking "of the safety and prosperity of the one sex and the poverty and insecurity of the other and the effect of tradition and of the lack of tradition" (31). Woolf challenges these restricted and restrictive spaces, identifying in them a tension between inside and outside, between private and public, and between the prosperity of men and the poverty of women.

[56] In the version between these two, published in a 2011 special issue of *Open Letter*, Robertson is more explicit about the failure of the house as a speculative site, ending this section in a way that bridges the two versions I've quoted above: "But maybe now the house has too much symbolic and social value. Maybe it sentences, rather than shelters some of us. Maybe the house can no longer be used as a speculative device. I abandon the house for the codex." (15).

the imaginative work of reading. It also makes explicit an important tension between stability and "fixation," between the enabling friction of a structure and the way it disciplines or determines movement. In its turn to the literary – to the book – Robertson's revision drops its interest in *shelter*, reducing the house to its potential for "fixation," and, with it, risks obscuring the material spatial politics at work in her text.

But while she is more interested in the ways the city affects the corporeal folds of individual bodies, her terms here also intersect with Harvey and DeLanda's divided concerns over how to imagine space's relationship to the internalization of system and structure. In "extending the idea of corporeality to the city itself," Robertson doesn't simply suggest that the city is a body with an internalized, metabolic structure, but, rather, she expresses a desire to affirm the agencies of matter in order to examine the relationships between those corporealities (not only human bodies, but also architectural structures) as they produce both human subjectivity and the identity of the city itself. In this, the city becomes an assemblage of bodies that also has an identity that can be changed through the recombinations of matter. With this in mind, Christopher Schmidt picks up on Robertson's claim in her PhillyTalks exchange with Steve McCaffery that she prefers the "dystopia of the obsolete" over the "utopia of the new" (23), in the process working through the fraught temporalities of *Office for Soft Architecture* with its interest in the discarded, the temporary, the archived, and, in her words, the "minor." In his essay "The Utopian Textures and Civic Commons of Lisa Robertson's Soft Architecture" (2014), Schmidt identifies what he sees as Robertson's critique of the essentialized and naturalized readings of space, drawn from an anxiety over it becoming a "global stand-in for the urban" like New York City, that Vancouver will fall prey to a "formulaic urbanity through a cynical combination of relentless development and selective preservation of the attractively 'authentic'" where individual bodies lock into their roles as global consumers – "parts in a vast global eating and wasting machine" (153). To get to this, Schmidt argues that Robertson's form "inscribes the logic of global capital into its cultural production" (150) by fatally adopting the persona of a fictional star architectural firm. It's through this fatal strategy, critiquing capital by obscenely performing it, Robertson repeatedly turns to leisure and consumption as practices throughout her book – she describes the corporate fountains of Vancouver, she and her unnamed walking guide picnic in an unnamed park, she trawls the aisles of the Hastings Street Value Village.

How does this minor leisure or consumption square with the urban anxiety Schmidt assigns to Robertson? Schmidt poses embodiment as a potential answer, turning to Robertson's theorization in "The Value Village Lyric" that the body can change itself at the level of fabric by remobilizing the detritus of past consumption in a practice of recycling identity. Robertson is concerned, according to Schmidt, "with the interplay between the situated and the dispersed, between the actual garment and the global semiotic system in which this garment travels and signifies" (153). In other words, with the way the garment changes the meaning of the body (or, alternately, the way the body changes the garment) depending on the assemblage around it, on how the body is perceived, received, and acted upon by the larger social field. Certainly Robertson's adoption of "The Office for Soft Architecture" operates as a kind of textual refashioning that shapes her approach to the city. However, I'd like to ask a slightly different question that turns the refashioning potential of poetics onto the city itself. How can Robertson's interest in the relation of fashion to the body be rescaled to think about the city in a similar way? Or, to ask a similar Robertsonian question: what does *Office for Soft Architecture adorn* the city of Vancouver in? *Or*, asking in a less metaphorical way, in a book obsessed with research and other texts, what "other texts" does Robertson apply to understandings of Vancouver to recode its identity?

Robertson's work in *Office for Soft Architecture* mobilizes expressive means to recode the not only subjectivity but also the stable identity of space. *Office for Soft Architecture* attempts a double recoding – a double "adornment" – overlaying both literary and artistic representations of other spaces (Thoreau's shack, Atget's apartments) *and* archival representations of Vancouver itself. In the literary sense, Robertson's Vancouver operates through a critical self-fashioning she carries out, needing to be read through the vanished Paris of Walter Benjamin or Eugène Atget – the classic example of a city made unrecognizable by redesign and redevelopment. Draping Vancouver in this version of Paris allows Robertson to frame her own work in the same sad tones – the Office at work describing a city about to dissolve. But at the same time, her mobilization of Thoreau to discuss the shack-making of artist Liz Magor allows her to pose the fashioning of minor spaces like the shack as sites of spatial freedom – "A shack describes the relation of the minimum to freedom" (178) – as if it weren't also sad to imagine the fragile shack as a space of freedom.

At once, then, Robertson's investment in obsolescence and spatial fragility lands at the feet of the body, expected to both refashion itself and its spaces with the leftovers of the world (adopting the role of Benjamin's Parisian ragpicker) *and* to find a kind of hope in the city's instability, an instability tied to the repeated incursions of capital and the state across a space. Perhaps ironically, Robertson valorizes the precarious position of the individual body living in unstable conditions – in a shack, a tent, on a scaffold, in a state of permanent transience. In her treatise on the scaffold, Robertson proclaims that "[a] scaffold sketches a body letting go of proprietary expectation, or habit, in order to be questioned by change," ending by clearly advocating, on behalf of the Office, for the scaffold as an ideal place to inhabit: "As for us, we too want something that's neither inside nor outside, neither a space nor a site. In an inhabitable surface that recognizes us, we'd like to gently sway. Then we would be happy" (141-42). Robertson's happiness pitches itself into the future – *if only we lived on the scaffold…* – as a hopeful affective state contingent on the ability to experiment with the relationship between subjectivity and spatial production in a site not overdetermined by patriarchal, racist, and classist structures like the house. The potential happiness produced by the metaphorical scaffold echoes Robertson's interest in the codex as a site of experimentation, but even as I want to affirm the importance of this kind of experimentation, the *performative hopefulness* of Robertson's text threatens to paper over the political and social realities of the tense exchange of stability and instability.

While Robertson's literary and philosophical approach thinks through the potentials of literature to rearticulate how we understand the city, it struggles to account for the specific conditions of Vancouver as it is dismantled and as many residents live not on a metaphorical scaffold but in a literal tent city. The limits of Robertson's literary approach are illuminated by the way Eng centers her book on the spatial struggles of a single neighbourhood in the present, performing a critical mapping of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside grounded in both the production of space and subjectivity. Eng privileges the material circumstances and experiences of those living in her neighbourhood, reading the gentrification of the DTES alongside the policing of marginalized communities and the disappearance of Indigenous women (locally and at wider scales) to articulate the ways that all of these compose a slow-motion spatial takeover where tents rise and fall as a response to the destruction of both social housing and a community with a history. In her afterword to the second edition of *Mercenary*

English, Eng relates her history living in the area between 1996 and 2016, reflecting on her decision to leave:

> I'm leaving because I'm saddened by what the area's become: an expensive enclave that has displaced some of the city's most vulnerable people. For years, United We Can, the recycling depot, was located across the alley from my building; it was moved, forcing the poor people who do our recycling to travel further to do their work. Last summer the building was demolished – suddenly, surreally, I could see Hastings from my window – and construction began for a new condo tower. (117)

Pointedly, Eng frames this demolition as part of a larger "war on the poor" whose greatest weapon is real estate. In this moment, Eng reads the demolition of the United We Can building in a way that grounds gentrification in the relations it disrupts and enables. United We Can's movement into a warehouse space just east of Main Street moves the work lives of many poor people both out of the neighbourhood and largely out of sight. The replacement of the building with a new condo tower furthers the enclaving of the neighbourhood, reterritorializing the space for the entitled gentry Eng laments in her interview with Moten.

Eng's concretely localized poetics repeatedly considers the competing stabilizing and destabilizing forces that struggle over and change the neighbourhood. I want to start with the third section, "Autocartography," because of the way it provides the most recognizably spatial representation of the struggle between social assemblages in the DTES. At the beginning of the sequence, Eng notes that "cartography is integral to the exercise of colonial and neocolonial power," calling, in response, for "new accurate maps" (78). Eng's book answers her own call, drawing maps that stage the architectural and relational shifts in the neighbourhood. The poems titled "how it is" map out a kind of textual time lapse of the street, providing a diachronic sense of the neighbourhood's slow dissolve from building to building, block to block. An iterated sequence appearing three times (four times in the second edition), "how it is" very simply lists the storefronts along both sides of Hastings Street from Main Street to Cambie Street over the course of four years, documenting the dramatic changes across the face of the neighbourhood as businesses clear out only to be replaced by more upscale boutiques and eateries.

Because of their shared context and interest in flatly representing the front face of Hastings, Eng's "how it is" echoes Stan Douglas' photograph *Every Building on 100 West Hastings* (2001), which panoramically pictures the south side of the titular block at

night and entirely unpeopled. Reid Shier's catalogue essay for the photograph situates it in its social and historical context in a moment where, to use Shier's language, 100 West Hastings had "declined," "deteriorated," and was "disintegrating" (11) – just before the redevelopment of the Woodward's building. In the same catalogue, Jeff Sommers and Nick Blomley trace the *pathologization* of the area as "[t]he pathologization of the poor turned into the pathologization of the entire neighbourhood" (21) – the neighbourhood itself becoming the cause of localized problems that threatened to spread to the rest of the city. Sommers and Blomley place Douglas' synchronic slice into its historical context – a context that reveals a history of property development. Analyzing this history, Sommers and Blomley pose that it is unsurprising that it is the *poverty* of the Downtown Eastside that is seen, in Vancouver media and urban planning, as a spreading social menace rather than "the unfettered consumption and spiraling housing prices that mark the affluent side of the widening gap" (44). Following this, they lay out the logic coding the space:

> Overlaying this is a sense of loss, deepened by mythologized memories of Hastings Street's past as a shared space of commercial vitality. The city has been "taken" from its inhabitants by the poor: as commuters speed down Hastings Street, they are invited to reflect that this is no longer "our" neighbourhood. The only way the valued landscape of the Downtown Eastside can be saved, on this account, is with the removal of what threatens it – the poor – and its replacement by citizens who are better equipped to reclaim its potential, both economically and historically. Property owners, attuned to "heritage" values, are to be encouraged to homestead the wilderness, and recapture this space and its authentic meanings. (49)

Echoing Neil Smith's reading of gentrification as the exploitation of an urban frontier, Sommers and Blomley frame this settler impulse to "recapture" as both a rethreading of spatial continuity (staking a claim based on a past, "truer" version of the space) and an assertion that one group is "better equipped" to produce that space. In his paper "New Globalism, New Urbanism: Gentrification as a Global Urban Strategy" (2002), revised with Jeff Derksen for Shier's catalogue, Smith peels the utopian rhetoric around gentrification from the inequities that rhetoric masks. For Smith, the call for people to return to the city is a call for white middle and upper-class folks to "retake control" of the cities economies and geographies, to demonstrate some civic pride. In this moment, the stated goals of New Urbanist practice thrown up to support a reterritorialization of spaces under the flag of community, but generated by the market. In other words, the

pathologization of one set of spatial practices opens up space for another set to be framed as not only good, but also historically continuous. Just the rightful owners taking back their home.

Taken both in terms of this context and the decade and a half that has passed, Douglas' photograph stands as a time capsule. His panoramic shot of the block differs significantly from the present street, its composition changed by the development of the Woodwards complex and the slow, drastic shift of the photo's empty storefronts to upscale businesses. The 100 West block is a flashpoint for anti-gentrification activists as Woodwards became an anchoring point for gentrification after the 2002 Woodwards Squat – documented by Aaron Vidaver in the Woodsquat issue of *West Coast Line* (2004) – where residents of the Downtown Eastside occupied the then-empty Woodwards building for three months demanding more social housing, resulting in Woodwards becoming a key example circulating in local urbanist rhetoric of the positive potentials of mixed-use, mixed income development, while the larger culture of development within the city has raised rents, reduced affordable and social housing stock, and increased homelessness. Like any historical photograph, part of the punctum of Douglas' streetscape comes out of the recognition that so much has changed. Making explicit the temporality inherent in this change, Eng's diachronic map in "how it is" records the shift over time, making the shift visible not as a sweeping, immediate change but as a piece by piece process determined by relationships to property. Eng's mapping makes visible the destabilizing edge of deterritorialization and the subsequent reterritorializing moves to stabilize the neighbourhood as the lot by lot, block by block movements of gentrification swap out parts over time. For Eng, this material shift connects to similarly shifting relational networks in the neighbourhood as those not "equipped" to produce the good community by colonizing the frontier of gentrification get pushed out.

Rather than work metaphorically, Eng's work in *Mercenary English* reconsiders the local (at the scale of the neighbourhood) caught between stabilizations – a territory struggled over by multiple relational assemblages. In other words, Eng responds to the way she sees her neighbourhood being taken apart, her home dissolved to clear space for something else. But we need to be careful with how we read Eng's mapping in "how it is," because of the way that, like Douglas, her representation of Hastings is largely

depeopled (though with occasional personal interjections).[57] In her afterword, Eng bristles at the way Douglas' photograph excludes the neighbourhood's residents. "I wasn't impressed," she suggests, "[t]here are no people in it, none of the low-income people that populate the area" (119). Eng points to Denise Blake Oleksijchuk's reading of the photograph's absence of people in her essay "Haunted Spaces" (2002). For Oleksijchuk, the photograph provides a site of contemplation:

> The photograph's deep emptiness provides an opening in which to contemplate the fate of Vancouver's missing women. Considering the mounting numbers of missing and murdered sex trade workers is one way to fill the picture's void. From this perspective, the image can be appropriated to suggest that the denial of the missing women can never be complete. Its emptiness can be mobilized to evoke a space haunted by the socially disprized and unloved. (110)

In Oleksijcuk's argument, the photograph becomes a site not just of reflection and contemplation, but also of active critique as the social emptiness of the image can be *appropriated* and *mobilized* to draw attention to missing and murdered women. Eng rejects this by asserting that "[f]or some of us, this erasure is lived, not the subject (object?) of art" (110). By asserting the lived experience of the residents of the Downtown Eastside (herself included), Eng points to a limit of contemplation and speculation, namely that, in a moment like the one Oleksijchuk imagines, there's not only an erasure of women themselves (which the photograph opens space for), but also an erasure of the spatial processes and histories that enabled those women to go missing in the first place. Embedded in the potential of this kind of artistic speculation is a failure to remember and account for structural violence driven in part by other forms of speculation, particularly real estate speculation, which measures the value of a space by its profit potential. After declaring the importance of lived experience, Eng pointedly remarks on the way that "[s]ome of us remember the police denying that a(nother) serial killer was murdering women from the neighbourhood" (119) – a remediation not of a representational or artistic erasure, but a structural one.

Eng ends "February 2010" with a series of questions aimed at Pamela Masik's *The Forgotten*, an exhibit cancelled by the Museum of Anthropology at the University of

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[57] To provide one example, on the north side of Hastings between Main Street and Columbia Street, Eng records an empty building, but adds in parentheses that the building was previously "the Smilin' Buddha where my dad saw Jimi Hendrix" (80) – a personal connection to the street that stretches back decades.

British Columbia in January 2011. As a non-resident, Masik paints large scale portraits of portraits of 69 missing women from the neighbourhood. Laura Moss observes the way that, for Masik, the central goal of *The Forgotten* was pedagogical, rendering "the women as metonymic victims to mobilize social action and to teach her audience about the larger social issues of violence against women" (53). Like Douglas' *Every Building*, Masik's portraits provide a site where viewers can reflect on violence against women *in general*. If Douglas' *Every Building on 100 West Hastings* strips things down to the scene of displacement, *The Forgotten* strips the displaced – *disappeared* – women from that scene, removing them from the relations of the neighbourhood. In her book *Remembering Vancouver's Disappeared Women* (2015), Amber Dean counters Masik's stated goals, arguing that *The Forgotten* "exposes us to the limits of an empathetic, well-intentioned approach to witnessing which aims to raise awareness about violence and suffering primarily through calling upon universalizing frameworks that collapse differences and erase complex histories" (6). At the end of "February 2010," Eng directs a series of critical questions[58] at Masik that zero in on both her reproduction of images from a Vancouver Police Department reward poster and on the way Masik positions herself with regard to the project. Eng calls into question Masik's pedagogically oriented decision to rescale the images so that viewers won't be able to look away:

> For example, you say you've changed the scale of the images in order to disallow viewers to look away, in contradistinction to the reward poster, which presents images of the women in a grid so that it is difficult to view the women as individuals. How do you redirect our gaze while using the same photographs as the basis of your work? (74)

Eng's question asks what exactly is being recirculated in Masik's portraits as they reproduce the same images as the police poster. At the same time, while translating the images from the poster that makes it "difficult to view the women as individuals," Masik also fails to contextualize the women's lives in the space of the neighbourhood, connecting them, as the poster also does, only in terms of the violence done to them.

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[58] Dean notes a similar questioning during the controversy over the exhibit: "Controversy over Masik's portraits erupted at least the summer before her exhibit was cancelled, though, when she spoke on a conference panel at Simon Fraser University's downtown campus. There, Downtown Eastside activists and representatives of Indigenous women's groups raised critical questions about how Masik, a white artist from a nearby but significantly more prosperous neighbourhood, was publically representing herself in relation to the women she painted and in relation to Indigenous women's longstanding organizing and activism in the neighbourhood" (3).

Rather than focus on the depeopled scene or on decontextualized individuals, Eng's "new accurate maps" trace the complex entanglements of the neighbourhood's social field, proposing a form of realism that articulates the processes and structures that bear down on the neighbourhood as a whole and the individuals who live there. Eng maps an array of tense and conflicting structural pressures and assembling potentials as she puts together a cognitive map of the Downtown Eastside. Eng presents the positions different bodies are expected to take within a shifting, power-filled assemblage, grounding that map in her own experience. The realities of missing women and sex work run through *Mercenary English* alongside the politics of community organizing and activism. With the relationship between the body and structural violence in mind, while Eng maps a Downtown Eastside and a Vancouver where one set of spatial relations, practices, and architectures replaces another – one assemblage stabilizing in the space where another dissolves – she also presents subjectivity as fraught and multiplied. In the process, she mobilizes a political anger navigated through the ways her persona is contextually tugged between subject positions from activist to artist to sex worker. Piece after piece in the sequence flips between, using her words, "different frontlines," that is, between different points of struggle, different face-to-face conversations that, through their accumulation and interconnection, provide a glimpse of the larger assemblage Eng is involved in. In "February 2010," amidst constant engagements with police and surveillance, Eng dramatizes a position caught between the linked gazes of cop and man:

> don't worry, you can trust us
>
> I look right into his boyish, handsome face
> and then the other one's and
> I say:
>
> no, I don't think so
>
> he smiles at his buddy, replies
>
> ouch! … stone cold
>
> did the cops just flirt with me? (67)

In this comedic short circuit, Eng pairs two instances of being "checked out." While Eng's speaker reads the cops coming to check out a disturbance, the cops themselves are busy checking her out. Both overlapping instances are predicated on not only a kind of surveillance – one body checking out another – but also of a potential violence, one state-enforced, the other patriarchal. By exposing the overlap of these two gazes – a pairing that repeats throughout her sequence in the positions of the male activist and artist – Eng underlines the violence inherent in both, demonstrating a different timbre of stability and instability applied not only at the scale of the neighbourhood, but at the scale of the body. Eng repeatedly interrogates similar tension points calling out other's discomforts with her relationship to activism and academia particularly. "hey white boy," she throws down, "I didn't realize that / coloured-female-15-grand-a-year-in-wages me doesn't / fit your / anti-capitalist anti-colonialist anti-oppression work" (56). Moments like these, where Eng struggles against the thickness of various networks and institutions, speak to the ways stability restricts and constrains action for certain bodies and subject positions.

Rather than imagine the possibility inherent in instability, for Eng spatial instability (like stability) is precisely produced through this sense of relational network. If the flattened, depeopled street of "how it is" shows an instability rippling through the built environment, the shifting positions of "Vancouver 2010" show how the identity of a neighbourhood, city, and individual body are defined by the historically developed striations that influence the shape of the space and the movements available to different bodies. When Eng describes being policed over and over, there's a sense not of instability but of being reminded where her role is within the spatial relations thickening around her. In a 2011 note on *Lemon Hound*, Clint Burnham observes an "uncertainty about when Eng is sampling an ad and when it's her voice" (n. pag.). This tension between the poem's narrative voice and sampled text simulates the expressive circulations of a space. Burnham notes the way that Eng slides between registers, holding different realities side by side, from a series of kids watching the Olympic torch relay to a police advertisement to direct quotes from military and police leadership to her own observations. Through this register switching, Eng performs a loose (and incomplete) mapping of the expressive network that codes the Downtown Eastside grounded in Eng's strong editorial voice and particular subject position, repeatedly underlining the ways that spatial codes restrict spatial practice.

Extending this, in “knuckle sandwich,” Eng uses quotation to think more concretely about the spatial violence committed against racialized women, repeatedly quoting Yasmin Jiwani’s work on gendered violence to underline a distinction between visible and invisible violence. Jiwani’s article “Mediations of Domination: Gendered Violence Within and Across Borders” articulates the media circulations representing Muslim women, which gives them a kind of “victimhood” to justify the military actions of the Canadian state overseas, alongside those of Indigenous women, who are presented “less as victims deserving rescue than as bodies that simply do not matter” (137). Jiwani, as quoted by Eng, explicitly links the violence done to both Muslim and Indigenous women through an inverse relationship directly related to the border of the colonial state:

> The visibility accorded to one expression or manifestation of violence and the invisibility of the other are interlocked. One supports and depends on the other. (132, qtd. in Eng 41)

This quotation appears three times in Eng’s poem: the first time before an invocation to “please read the charges” (20); the second time accompanied by a description of the “Highway of Heroes” that memorializes 13 soldiers who died in Afghanistan; and the third sandwiched between a note about the resignation of Robyn Gervais, lawyer representing the “interests of aboriginal people” in the 2012 B.C. inquiry into missing and murdered women in the Downtown Eastside, and a note about a class action against the RCMP over the mistreatment of female officers.

Working from Jiwani’s argument about the connected visible and invisible violences against racialized women, Eng notes an interlinked web of violence produced at different scales but landing squarely on the local. For Eng, violence is not limited to specific bodies, but its effects shift depending on which bodies are involved and emerge from ongoing processes of colonial dispossession. In this frame, Eng’s reading of the Downtown Eastside begins to resemble what Mexican journalist Sergio González Rodríguez invents the concept of the “femicide machine” to map the ways the city of Ciudad Juárez (connecting at the American border to El Paso) “normalized barbarism,” specifically a local culture where women were regularly murdered, through the productive force of a “mutated” and “anomalous” urban ecology (7), he illustrates the way these spatial mechanics can produce a terrifying and deadly situation. Eng scales this sense of an anomalous ecology to not only encompass the dangerous conditions for racialized women in the Downtown Eastside, but also to articulate a connection with the

war on terror and colonial appropriation of Indigenous territory. To unwind an example, with her gesture to the Highway of Heroes, Eng expands on Jiwani's linking of the war on terror with ongoing issues around missing and murdered Indigenous women in a number of ways. Over the course of the poem, Eng triangulates three "trails" – the American Trail of Tears that saw the violent relocation of five Indigenous nations from their traditional territory in the 1830s, the Highway of Tears between Prince George and Prince Rupert in British Columbia where a significant number of Indigenous women have vanished over a 40 year period, and the stretch of the Transcanada Highway between Langley and Abbotsford renamed the Highway of Heroes to memorialize 13 soldiers who died in Afghanistan. Eng abuts these three trails, moving from territorial dispossession to bodily disappearance to imperial valour. In her *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States* (2014), historian Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz notes a similar link, suggesting a continuity between the violent colonial wars over Indigenous territory in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the American military's actions overseas, exemplified by ongoing descriptions of those contested territories as "Indian Country" (193). The question becomes not only one of which bodies have value, but also what *kind* of value – which bodies are honoured, which need rescue, which are disposable. Within Eng's poem, the 13 soldiers honoured with the so-called Highway of Heroes stand in stark relief to the over 1200 Missing and Murdered Indigenous women across Canada and the over 500 missing from the DTES.

Mercedes Eng's Vancouver is not Lisa Robertson's Vancouver, despite a shared concern over the way the city is reshaped by capitalist and colonialist forces. Eng's work in the tension point between the territorial specificity of the Downtown Eastside and the complex relational forces and networks that produce and struggle over it both reflects an often literal sense of contestation and stabilizes a sense of the relations dissolved alongside the row of storefronts along Hastings Street. The result is an articulation of the space as *more* than real estate. In her bending of scales and folding of histories into the present, Eng produces a relational map alongside her territorial one, writing a spatial poetics that reads the Downtown Eastside under crisis but not isolated in that crisis, related to colonial wars both outside and inside borders. Eng's work complicates Robertson's appeals to instability or fragility or temporariness as a condition for speculative experiment with potential resistance. Eng's articulatory realism – her "new accurate maps" – propose that fragility is actually a problem for certain bodies (now and

historically). What we end up with is a tension between stability and instability that depends on both the way the assemblage is coded and the subject position of the one navigating it.

Through Thick and Thin

Eng's work on the Downtown Eastside belies the ways that stability and instability manifest in multiple ways, from a stable sense of a place's "identity" to the instability felt by individuals and communities. When Eng is misrecognized by the police, that misrecognition marks a potential for her slide "between neighbourhoods," – namely the demonized "blight" of the old DTES and the supposedly improved developments of the new neighbourhood. This "slide" depends on the way spatial encounters are contingently assembled from possibilities shaped in part by the codes circulating through the space. Eng works through these shifting positions, commenting in the poem on the differences between sex work, activist organizing, and academic study, each one involving different forms of social scrutiny and potential violence. This ability to slide between assemblages exists because of the way Eng is legible within both, afforded a set of possibilities for living by the relations around her.

"There are no individual statements," Deleuze and Guattari suggest, "there never are" (*ATP* 36). Instead, they argue that "[e]very statement is the product of a machinic assemblage, in other words, of collective agents of enunciation" (37). When Eng and the cop engage one another, their words and actions, the whole set of relational possibilities available to them, are articulated by the relations around them, though not, as the slipperiness of the interaction makes clear, in a deterministic way. If the tense, maybe even dialectical relationship between part and whole described by both assemblage theory and Marxist geography constitutes a way to think about the individual caught in their relations, poetry like Eng's constitutes another way. I approach poetry as a form of research into not only the ways space transforms, but also the ways that transformation plays out at more intimate scales. In the two chapters that follow, I want to focus on the ways those part to whole relationships manifest through arrays of part to part relationships – face to face meetings or *engagements* that act both as sites where individuals find themselves *articulated* by the relations around them and as opportunities to experiment with spatial relation, to find alternate ways to live together. Engagements are sites where we can see territories *thicken* and *thin* for the actors in them, enabling

different forms of spatial practice by limiting the range of individual agency.

Space has what Arun Saldanha calls a "viscosity" of relation wherein the fluctuating stabilities of space and spatial practice bear down on individual actors. Thinking about the production of race and space in his book *Psychedelic White* (2007), Saldanha adopts viscosity as a concept to describe the uneven opportunities afforded to individuals and groups hierarchical categories based on visual signs of difference:

> Viscosity enables a rigorous grasping of social spaces by putting the dynamic physicality of human bodies and their interactions at the forefront of analysis. In basic terms, viscosity pertains to two dimensions of a collective of bodies: its sticking together, and its relative impermeability. (5)

Working from a Deleuzian theory of spatial emergence similar to DeLanda, Saldanha poses a tension between "sticking together" and "impermeability." Saldanha is interested in the ways that groups emerge from understandings of racial difference as same sticks to same, even in spaces that pose themselves as radically free or experimental, reproducing social and spatial forms that, in their stability, become impermeable to those not already in the room. The viscosity of the contingently-bounded assemblage not only limits the kinds of encounters that can happen, but also formally and informally exclude actors. Viscosity is a useful concept because of the way it treats space intimately, framing processes of stabilization and destabilization as something that happens on the ground between bodies. The relative viscosity of space enables certain practices while excluding or even eliminating others, meaning that freedom or liberation doesn't involve flying off into a completely frictionless space – like stability is needed to accomplish anything, friction is needed to even move. In putting forward viscosity as a concept, Saldanha acknowledges that there is no individual action. Instead, the dynamic physicality of bodies, not only human but also non-human bodies, creates a stable field wherein things become possible, their actions territorialized by one another and coded by a complex field of expression that includes the historical anchors Nicholson and Compton find in the archive.

I will return to Saldanha in my final chapter, but I bring up his sense of viscosity now to underline the difficult negotiations between material bodies and expressive codes, which entangle to create virtual spaces of possibility – relational meshworks that shape actions at the most intimate scales. This turn to the intimate emerges from the

peculiar combination of the theoretical tools I've chosen to work with and poetry's ability to bend scales together. Because of their grounding in a critique of psychoanalysis, Deleuzian approaches excel when they look at space at the level of the subject produced by its relations, asking how, if we shape each others' spatial possibilities, we might act more reciprocally. At the same time, contemporary poetry in Canada struggles with how to negotiate the entanglement of material and expressive components, though it is shaped in part by place-based traditions that value embodiment and proprioception. In my next chapter, I turn to the practice of ecopoetry, which chases the difficult intimacies of space through both the ways it negotiates human relationships with nonhuman worlds, engagements that are without language (though not necessarily without stories) and the ways it struggles with how to engage those worlds both on and off the page, posing a difficult tension between reflection and action. Central to the questions ecopoetry opens about engagement is a question about how nonhuman actors are valued and devalued, included, excluded, and eliminated from ecological assemblages, and how, in the midst of these spatial pressures, we choose to engage with them, ethically or not.

Chapter 2

Ethical Engagement with and in Ecological Assemblages

> Such a screen of silence on the face of the rock. The stories are there, that's obvious, but they aren't telling. (Wah, *So Far* 75)
>
> Relational movement means moving the relation. (Manning, *Relationscapes* 30)

In his book *The Ecology of Modernism: American Environments and Avant-Garde Poetics* (2015), Joshua Schuster outlines a shift between nineteenth century "organicist" approaches where "nature was assumed to be a continuing plenitude running on a self-perpetuating system" (12) and modernist approaches where ecology is an emergent and evolutionary process. Despite a lack of a "Thoreau figure" among modernist poets, Schuster argues for the ways that modernist poetry tangles with ecology through form as "modernist-American artists began to consider how ecology became a formal and aesthetic question as much as a scientific and ethical one" (xii). For Schuster, poetic form acts as a kind of quadrat – the unit of study innovated by Frederic Clements to objectively observe ecology and ecological change by isolating an arbitrary square of land to subject it to scrutiny – though within a sense that poetic forms and material ecologies co-constitute one another.

The tension, even conflict, Schuster identifies between formal/aesthetic framings and scientific/ethical framings of ecology looms large over this chapter. In Canada, in the first two decades of the twenty-first century, stories about ecological crisis tick across news broadcasts and newsfeeds, from the volatile shifts in the Earth's climate to the devastating and unstable infrastructures of oil production to the poisoning of the water in smaller communities including many Indigenous communities across Canada. Schuster's turn to the quadrat provides a place to start. If we consider the ways that poets draw their frame around a site or a problematic, we also need to consider, as Schuster acknowledges, both the way that framing determines how we understand the non-human actors within the frame and the way that the poet themself is firmly within the

frame. What logics shape our relations with the non-human and how can those logics be challenged in a way that transforms those relations?

The work of framing a section of an ecological assemblage, then, involves an entanglement of representational and material concerns that, as I want to argue over the course of this chapter, has necessitated a move by a number of contemporary poets to engage with non-human actors in a way that straddles the gap between representation and action, between ecologies on and off the page. This move by poets to engage with the non-human as both interact as parts in a larger ecological assemblage responds to the overwhelming reality that human and non-human worlds are not separate, but interconnected and co-productive. How do poets invested in environmental justice confront this array of crises that threaten to destabilize things? In particular, I want to ask how these poets propose that we *meet* the non-human and what roles can poetry play in those engagements? Over the course of this chapter, I look to an array of writers who wrestle with this question. I read the work of Adam Dickinson, Jordan Scott, Stephen Collis, a. rawlings, and others who struggle with how to best define the practices of ecological poetry or ecopoetry. In particular, these poets circle around two questions. First, they ask how poetry might challenge the colonial and capitalist terms under which the non-human is valued and devalued, reflecting on what language does to frame and shape engagements with the non-human. Second, and more difficult, they attempt to navigate a tension between reflection and action, or between their work on the page and their material engagements off of it. With these tensions in mind, I turn to an extended comparison of the work of Rita Wong and Christian Bök, who both turn to the concept of "experimentation" but do so in dramatically opposed ways that point to a gulf in understanding of the ways our ethical and not so ethical engagements with the non-human are shaped by wider assemblages.

The insistence that natural and human worlds are deeply interconnected cuts through a great deal of contemporary criticism as thinkers contest the resilient conceptual and structural separations of nature and culture – acknowledgements by varied thinkers from Neil Smith's Marxist production of nature thesis (and Jason W. Moore's recent co-productive revision) to Bruno Latour's argument for hybrid networks of

human and non-human actors (spatialized by Sarah Whatmore as hybrid geographies)[59] to the resurgence of Indigenous knowledge and philosophy that argues for the centrality of maintaining respectful relationships with the non-human actors whose support humans need to live. The task of framing and engaging the "natural" has centered around questions of how to *value* the non-human. and the terms under which we make these valuations are shaped by a junction of colonial and capitalist logics. In *Uneven Development* (1984), Smith argues against the separation of nature and human culture, instead posing that nature is internalized within and produced by capitalist processes. He argues that "the problems of nature, of space, and of uneven development are tied together by capital itself" and that "[u]neven development is the concrete process and pattern of the production of nature under capitalism" (8). Nature is not independent from human labour, but is instead produced by it under rubrics seeking the greatest profit.[60] Smith's insistence on the production of nature under capitalism reflects the ways that nature is not separate from human activity, exploited in multiple forms from the primitive accumulations of resource extraction to the good vibes of tourism to the more intensive accumulations of genetic modification.

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[59] Latour's Actor-Network Theory argues for "tracing associations" as a methodological approach that marks a turn from what he calls "matters of fact" to "matters of concern." The distinction emerges from a dissatisfaction with poststructuralist critique as a mode of challenging scientific fact. Rather than slap the hands of the fetishizing and gullible, Latour proposes, like DeLanda, that critique turn to a realist position based in processes of assembly and that the role of the critic is to map out the whole theatre of concern. In her book *Hybrid Geographies* (2002), Sarah Whatmore takes up Latour's methodological challenge to better account for the agental roles of animals and plants within assemblages. Whatmore draws from and critiques a series of conversations at the intersection point of geography and science and technology studies to propose her hybrid geographical approach as an ethical and "passionate" mode of inquiry not simply defined "as/by" academic disputes (one of Latour's major concerns), but that instead addresses a set of stakes that are "thoroughly and promiscuously distributed through the messy attachments, skills and intensities of differently embodied lives whose everyday conduct exceeds and perverts the design of parliaments, corporations, and laboratories" (162).

[60] For Smith, uneven development involves a dialectic between geographic differentiation and equalization that emerges from the difficulty of finding an externalized spatial fix – the kind that accompanies processes like primitive accumulation – asking what spatial fixes are *internal* to capitalism. Smith proposes that capital attempts to move between spaces in a *seesaw* pattern "from a developed to an underdeveloped area, then at a later point back to the first area which is by now underdeveloped" (198) in order to take advantage of the profit potential of underdeveloped areas.

In a Canadian context, these spatial productions can't be separated from Indigenous concerns over the appropriation of Indigenous territory and the destruction of the relations that compose the land. As Glen Coulthard argues, colonial dispossession and the exploitation of natural resources are tied up together through the process of primitive accumulation. In her essay, "Colonization: The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly" (2011), Sherene Razack connects the production of wilderness as an idea and as a space to the appropriation of Indigenous territory. Discussing the "emplacement" of white settlers – the legal and spatial processes that produce "*how* settlers gain a sense of who they are and how they come to *feel* that they are owners" (266) – Razack argues that the production of nature is similarly caught up in processes of violent displacements that clear spaces of one set of relations to make room for another. She suggests that:

> the regular and violent eviction of Aboriginal bodies from urban spaces is one important practice of emplacement, a violence that is visible in the numbers of Aboriginal people who die in police custody after being rounded up from city streets. The conceptual and material removal of Aboriginal people from the land, when the land is transformed into something called wilderness, complements these urban strategies of emplacement. (266)

Razack draws the production of wilderness, of nature, as a reterritorialization following the deterritorialization of Indigenous relations, alongside the same dynamics that Lee Maracle describes when she narrates the transformation of Snauq to False Creek.

A opposed sense of value emerges in Maracle's critical work as she attempts to theorize Indigenous sovereignty and land practices in an anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist framework. Discussing the practice of remembering,[61] she argues that memory practices connect to and help produce a larger social field that includes non-humans, asking us to reconsider the concept of value through a rubric of reciprocity rather than profitability. She insists that:

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[61] In *Memory Serves*, Maracle frames the ongoing social practice of memory, of re-membering, as "a process of being fed by the past, not just my past but my ancestral past, the earth's past, and the past of other human beings" – a practice meant to respond to the present and look to the future as she suggests that "[w]e are responsible for pulling the best threads from our past forward to re-weave our lives – together" (14). For Maracle, Salish practices around memory and storytelling work differently than European-style histories that feign objectivity in deigning what's important. The production of memory happens in and responds to the present, carrying major stakes for not only understandings of the spaces we live in, but the relationships that compose them.

> Before we can remember, we need to be able to recognize value. We are taught to recognize fish, see and consider its relationship with bear, and this leads us to the medicine ways of bear. We watch bear fertilize the mountains and the berries and understand bear's value to the earth. We watch mosquitos rise from the swamp and become food for birds and bats, and their waste becomes food for berries, and berries become food for us, so we honour them. We understand that we have a relationship with these mosquitoes, these berries, these fish. They are medicine, and we honour that relationship and continue to learn from it. We recognize the plant beings and their relationship with fish, with birds, with animals, and with water. We honour this relationship and permit these beings to teach us to acquire the necessities of life in the least obtrusive way possible. (25)

Here, Maracle articulates value through a complex set of relationships that are not driven by profit and appropriation, but rather in medicine, pedagogy, and survival as remembering's role as *a process of being fed by the past* becomes quite literal as the process of memory and remembering is tied to material processes of social reproduction that are less instrumental than reciprocal.[62]

To ground this in a poetic example, the tension between instrumental and reciprocal logics cuts through the three Utaniki found in Fred Wah's *So Far* (1991). Wah documents a series of hiking trips in British Columbia and Alberta, working in rotating prose and poetry chunks to performatively stake out claims on the physical earth, leveraging the verisimilitude of the journal form to stage various encounters with non-human actors, particularly the rocks that make up his path. These stagings trouble the gap between poetic form and ecological ethics, between representation and action, by posing Wah's negotiations and engagements within circulating systems of valuation that inform, choreograph, and shape the contingencies of his movements through the bush. Wah's quadrat, if we can read his work through that frame, tracks his body as it engages with others in the field – a mobile frame. Taken up variously by George Bowering, Susan Rudy, and Jeff Derksen as both metaphor and process within Wah's work, the loose accumulation of rocks fanning down a mountain forms a different form of connection, or

[62] Of course, reciprocity is a fraught concept, however, that depends on a transformation of social relations towards forms and processes that are somehow more just. As Glen Coulthard reminds us, the ideal of reciprocity is caught up in a politics of state recognition, which "in its contemporary liberal form promises to reproduce the very configurations of colonialist, racist, patriarchal state power that Indigenous peoples' demands for recognition have historically sought to transcend" (3). In other words, how can we imagine a reciprocal form in a colonial process?

maybe *coll*ection, where an agglomeration of separate bodies pool into something larger that lacks a firm unity. In his introduction to *Scree* (2015), Wah's collected early poems, Derksen identifies the difference between Bowering and Rudy's reading of *scree* in a way that identifies a tension between material and poetic. *Scree* stands as both, in Bowering's version, a "particular image of the interior of British Columbia" and, in Rudy's version, "an apt metaphor for Wah's poetry as a whole" (1). For Wah, *scree* is both a site-specific material landform and a metaphorical description of a poetics that brings together without fixing. At the same time, rocks and earth (alongside trees, flowers, animals, etc.) figure across Wah's collected work as he navigates his way through "wild" spaces, digging his heels into the scree. He resists easy readings of the landscape, shrugging off maps and flower naming books, while also marking the shifting contingencies of his encounters. In "Limestone Lakes Utaniki," Wah relates that "Pauline can't understand why I don't get into the names like 'something poisonous something' (Elegant Poisonous Camus) or Fringe Grass of Parnassus" (68). Instead of this fixed practice of identifying through naming (which Wah says is problematic when it becomes a kind of counting), Wah works through contingent relationships, classifying types of rock through his climbing experiences as he remembers (and worries about) "the little avalanche of boulders that crackle out onto sheets of muddy ice and snow" or "the rotten Rockies rock that crumbles in the middle of a footstep or handhold" (72). Here, an understanding of rocks emerges from a learned knowledge about how to navigate them.

In "Dead in my Tracks: Wildcat Creek Utaniki," the scree provides a different kind of precarious foothold as Wah turns to the rocks around him to puzzle out what they "mean":

> All these rocks. Constant mirror and prescence in my eyes. More rocks than grains of sand in the whole world, I bet someone. Intricate pattern, surface, keeps stopping boot in pitch for eye to zoom. Sometimes I stop and try translating the imago-grammatic surfaces. What do I look for? This I-Chinging the earth for some other Gate of Heavenly Peace, monotoned loudspeaker in the Square signalling "Go home and save your life," old, embedded said-again family bone-names? (82)

Puzzling at the rocks at his feet, his eye zooming in like a camera to capture (and translate) their patterns, Wah asks what he should look for while also chaining back through himself into a "global mode" – a mode that articulates a connection between global events and his immediate surroundings:

> While we set up camp during the afternoon I'm in a global mode, you know, the simultaneity of the world going on right now. Paris. Kyoto. Beijing. The pavement of Tiananmen Square, the hotlines sniffing out the dissidents, CBC bulletin even e-mail media drama of the last two months still in the air, even up here, radioless, only antennae in my bones (our name is bones, and your name is my name). (76)

Wah produces a syntactic echo between the three global cities he mentions here ("Paris. Kyoto. Beijing.") and three mountains sitting on the provincial border ("Ayesha, Baker, Parapet." [76]) – that suggests a friction between the unpoliced provincial border he hikes along and the emergence of a global sense of space, between the seeming fluidity of Wah's recreational movements and the dominant media memory of Tiananmen Square – the famous photograph, taken by journalist Jeff Widener, of an unknown protester stopping a line of tanks in their tracks.

Rather than look for the "truth" of the space (or produce a make-believe truth that thumbs its nose at the materiality of the world), Wah writes through a sense of relation aware of the ways his immediate experiences bend together with this "global mode," to articulate "the simultaneity of the world going on right now." Wah's forwarding of media narratives turns over the tension of borders and limits in the poem, not through an analogy where the wilderness just becomes a locally-scaled metaphor for a global event, but through the way simultaneous events infect one another. Wah stages his encounters with the rocks as part of a field of media circulations – a chain of relations where the expressive tones of the radio news connect to the material relations of his hike. In one moment, left dead in his tracks, Wah faces silent rocks as if he were police:

> Those rocks this morning on the way up appeared full of signs and messages. So I walked around in a meander and kind of grilled each striated spot for information, news of the conglomerate earth. (79)

Wah's mediatized "global mode" seeps into his description as he's left "grilling" stones for information while also worrying about China as "just another scheme for thirst and war / another centered project tunneling earth" (78). Later, he shifts this, suggesting that he "can't keep [his] eyes off the rocks and surfaces surging to not so much arrest myself in all this 'otherness' as greedily scour the dripping quartz for crystal jewels for my daughters" (81). Wah's work here is precise and grounded even as it slides between scales and forms, connecting the slippery effects of incorporeal media to his relationship to the land as he participates in its production, scanning it as a source of information and

value.

If the poets I discuss in the previous chapter examine social space as it stabilizes and destabilizes, this chapter will turn to non-human actors' role in spatial assembly. If Canadian ecopoetry examine the conflicted ways that poetry *engages* non-human actors and worlds, then it does so by working through the rubrics of valuation and ethical concern that shape the ways we both understand and act in relation to the non-human. Wah's engagements with the rocks points us to two aspects of this problematic. First, as he puzzles over, questions, and navigates the rocks, he points us to the materiality of the non-human world – a materiality that cannot always be accessed through language. Second, in scrutinizing the rocks for value, he asks us to consider how, even at the scale of the individual encounter, the valuations of material bodies (human and non-human) occur through logics of colonial and capitalist organization, coded in part through the circulations of different forms of knowledge – the scientific categories of the field guide, the informational circulations of the news media. This intersection of materiality and value – of the matter of a body and how it is made to matter – cuts through questions of how individual actors meet one another and how those engagements both assemble into and are shaped by forms of organization that are often unjust.

From Evental Encounter to Ethical Engagement

When Manuel DeLanda argues that we conceptualize the social assemblage as it assembles from the face-to-face conversation or meeting,[63] he works within a Deleuzian understanding that the individual actor is never alone, but always in relation. I want to propose two valences of the "face-to-face meeting" – the evental encounter and the ethical engagement – to contrast the different ways both concepts imagine ways to change the thick relations of the assemblage at an intimate scale. Where the encounter, as described by Andy Merrifield and Louis Althusser, imagines the way an unseen and unpredictable swerve of elements can spark new relations and social forms, the

[63] DeLanda acknowledges that the individual is not the smallest analytical unit that the assemblage is composed of, but goes on to argue that he is setting a convenient base unit: "It is true that persons emerge from the interaction of subpersonal components, and that some of these components may justifiably be called the smallest social entities. Nothing very important depends on settling this question. All we need is a point of departure for a bottom up ontological model, and the personal scale will provide a convenient one." (47)

engagement, as described by Leanne Simpson and Glen Coulthard, asserts a more active resurgence of Indigenous practices that transform institutional and pedagogical relations with the land. The gulf between the chance-sparked possibility of the encounter and the deliberate reorganizations of engagement involves a gulf between event and action, between the hope that something might create an opening in the thick relations of the present and the work needed to put deterritorialized relations back together.

This question of encounter and engagement pivots around a question of ethics – a question of how actors meet one another in space and the terms or rubrics of value that shape that meeting. Deleuze and Guattari's project in *A Thousand Plateaus* pivots around two meetings. In the first, Deleuze and Guattari replay their critique of Freudian psychoanalysis in miniature, posing the Oedipalizing stupidity of Freud's reading of the Wolf Man's case, poking holes in the psychoanalytic reduction of complex arrays of relation to readymade categories. In the second, they turn to becoming as a way to understand the molecular exchanges between bodies as they affect and transform one another, rather than merely serve a reciprocal function – the wasp and the orchid reterritorializing one another through their emergent relationship. The tension between these two meetings form the ethical core of Deleuze and Guattari's project, arguing against the striating power-play of overcoding categorization while posing the potential for affective reciprocity to create new forms of relation. Deleuze lays out the problematic clearest in a 1973 interview where he poses the meeting with the analyst as a kind of narrative powerplay:

> Here's a case. A woman arrives at a consultation. She explains that she takes tranquilizers. She asks for a glass of water. Then she speaks: "You understand I have a certain amount of culture. I have studied, I love to read, and there you have it. Now I spend all my time crying. I can't bear the subway. And the minute I read something, I start to cry. I watch television; I see images of Vietnam: I can't stand it…." The doctor doesn't say much. The woman continues: "I was in the Resistance … a bit. I was a go-between." The doctor asks her to explain. "Well, yes, don't you understand, doctor? I went to a café and I asked, for example, is there something for René? I would be given a letter to pass on." The doctor hears "René"; he wakes up: "Why do you say 'René'?" It's the first time he asks a question. Up to that point, she was speaking about the metro, Hiroshima, Vietnam, of the effect all that had on her body, the need to cry about it. But the doctor only asks: "Wait, wait, 'René' … what does 'René' mean to you?" René – someone who is reborn [*re-né*]? The renaissance? The Resistance means nothing to the doctor; but renaissance, this fits into a universal schema, the archetype: "You want to be reborn." The

> doctor gets his bearings: at last he's on track. And he gets her to talk about her mother and father. (71)

Here, Deleuze lays out two approaches to the woman's affective situation. While the analyst turns to a recognizable schema to make the woman's experience legible to him, the woman herself lays out an entire field of relationships that she finds herself embedded in and affected by – her encounters caught up in a "global mode," to use Wah's language.

Deleuze stumps for an ethical position based in a reciprocal attentiveness to each other's contingency – "It's enough just to listen to someone who is delirious" (71), he insists. Here, Deleuze points to the power imbalances embedded in engagement, to the ways that the leveraging of categories and organizational striations assign value to individual bodies, locating them in an overarching structure. It's counter to this that Deleuze and Guattari turn to relational forms of becoming, the assemblage of which Erin Manning identifies as "ecological." Approaching ecology as more than just "nature," Manning describes ecological assemblages as emergent organizations of bodies engaging with one another and entering into relation. Her turn to ecology echoes DeLanda's reading of the assemblage in the way, following Deleuze, that the production of both subjectivity and space are the result of a radical externality, of the way a field of relations bears down on the body and the way that bodies in relation can add up their agency to territorialize spaces. Manning conceptualizes the individual body as part of this ecological assemblage, that over the course of her recent writing takes several forms – ecologies of practices, of thought, of experience. For Manning (and for Deleuze), the individual always emerges in relation to someone or something else:

> The question here cannot be limited to the body "itself" as though the body weren't active in co-constituting the ecology at hand. If that ecology tunes to categories such as color or gender, these aspects of the field will continue to be foregrounded. The issue is not to deny this but to ask *how* these ecologies come to co-constitute a body in this way or that way. The point is not that there is no form-taking, no identity. The point is that all form-takings are complexes of a process ecological in nature. A body is the how of its emergence, not the what of its form. (*Always More Than One* 17)

In insisting that the body is the "how of its emergence," Manning argues that the individual body is shaped by relational/ecological processes. The body is shaped by its

relations, in other words – an emergent process that can be just or unjust, even or uneven.

At the same time, the body shapes its relations as Manning's sense of ecological relation displays an "agental realism" in the sense described by Karen Barad and Jane Bennett, where agency is not the purview of the individual actor, but is distributed across the assemblage. Imagining agency as distributed across an assemblage strips the individual human of any romanticized chance of calling their revolutionary (or avant-garde) shot, so to speak, since all the other parts of the assemblage need to be on board. Within this, the stability of the assemblage risks smothering a desire for change, stopped dead by the reality that any meaningful reorganization requires a collective reconfiguration whether through an evental set of cascading encounters or through a conscious mass alteration of the ways humans and non-humans engage one another. *At the same time*, Bennett acknowledges a difference between the "grand" agency of the human and the "small" agency of the non-human, while also marking the difficulty of hierarchizing them. "These various materialities," she argues, "do not exercise exactly the same kind of agency, but neither is it easier to arrange them into a hierarchy, for in some times and places, the 'small agency' of the lowly worm makes more of a difference than the grand agency of humans" (98). Bennett asserts that, despite their lack of human language, non-human actors and actants are *participants* in the political. Whether intentional or not, in Bennett's framing, "an animal, plant, mineral, or artefact can sometimes catalyze a public," often in ways that reveal instrumental ways "to devise more effective (experimental) tactics for enhancing and weakening that public" (107). Within spatial fields composed by the agency shared across the parts of the assemblage, the question of how experimentation at an intimate scale can shape wider spaces becomes a difficult one to answer. What kind of actions can reshape the whole? We can answer this question in two ways. First, we can treat experimentation as a potential catalyst for a rupturing event that opens up new forms of space and relation. Second, we can build an agental field piece by piece, refashioning intimate engagements that will assemble into new or resurgent spaces. These are not mutually exclusive processes and often go hand in hand, but, just as David Harvey insists on permanence or stability as a necessary component of spatial action, I want to insist on deliberate engagement over chance encounter as a stance toward building and rebuilding spaces.

Before turning to engagement, I want to look to spatial encounter as a mode interested in chance, rupture, and the opportunities opened up through spatial destabilization. In *The Minor Gesture*, Manning favours improvisation and experimentation with movement ("minor gestures") to challenge habitual or choreographic forms. For Manning, the minor gesture is "the force that makes the lines tremble that compose the everyday" (7) – a kind of distributive agency or *agencement* that sparks an event. Manning's sense of the minor gesture resonates with what Andy Merrifield calls the encounter, a term he borrows from Louis Althusser's later work. In *The Politics of the Encounter* (2013), Merrifield asks if, instead of calling for the right to the city,[64] we can work through a politics of the encounter. Rather than a cry or demand for a right to the city, Merrifield proposes that urbanization and the urban "confers the reality of the encounter, of the political encounter, and of the possibility for more encounters" (57). Within the "capitalist immanence" of the urban, Merrifield argues that "we encounter an assembly of objects, an assembly of people and activity, a virtual object that creates a real and prospective site for sustained and newer superimposed encounters, for fresh and combining assembly, for a gathering of essential elements of social practice" (58).

Merrifield is interested in the way urban spaces carry the potential for *new* encounters, a potential that grounds itself in processes of destabilization that reshuffle relations and open up spaces of experimentation. To describe the dynamics of change, Merrifield turns to the *clinamen*, a concept he draws from Althusser's later work, to ask how an imperceptible *swerve* can provoke a cascade of encounters that alters how the space of the urban assembles:

> Everything falls, atoms in parallel with one another. They fall, unconnected from one another, blind to one another, restricted from one another. They fall, fall until *they swerve*; something intervenes, something contingent breaks the parallelism, an "infinitesimal swerve," Althusser says, the "*clinamen*," so small that it is hardly noticeable. And yet, it alters the whole course of history, creates time and space, because in an almost negligible way the swerve induces the encounter. One atom of the rain encounters other atoms; vertically falling rain criss-crosses with other

[64] For Merrifield, the right to the city hits a political limit as the discrete city gives way to planetary processes of urbanization, narrating Lefebvre's move in *The Urban Revolution* from the discrete city form to an encompassing urban society, a move that frames the seemingly separate natural world within the urban as something to be exploited or extracted – a tourist spot or raw resource.

> drops of falling rain; they connect and rain into one another, strike one another, encounter one another, pile up with one another. Suddenly, somehow, there's an agglomeration of raindrops, of rain atoms, and a chain reaction is unleashed: the birth of something new, a new interconnection, a new reality due to the swerve. (55-56)

This sense of the *clinamen* and the politics of the encounter roots itself in Althusser's later work, particularly the posthumously published "The Underground Current of the Materialism of the Encounter,"[65] which argues for the emergence of both encounters and social form from an aleatory and contingent materialism that differs from Marx's dialectical materialism. Althusser begins with Epicurus, who imagines a kind of prehistory of social form where atoms fall separate and parallel before being swerved into encounters that add up into social form. Through this, Althusser suggests that the chance movements of the *clinamen* produce encounters that, provided they gain a durational and spatial stability, assemble into the "reality of the world" (169). For this form of materialism, philosophy, according to Althusser, "is no longer a statement of the Reason and Origin of things, but a theory of their contingency and a recognition of fact, of the fact of contingency, the fact of the subordination of necessity to contingency, and the fact of the forms which 'gives form' to the effect of the encounter" (170).

The key problem with this, and one both Althusser and Merrifield recognize, is the way that the emergence of the world from the swerving of unconnected falling atoms is that it begins with the void, with *nothing*. Rather than beginning with the unformed world of parallel atoms, Althusser and Merrifield both imagine the *clinamen* as it works in the middle, producing a void by reshuffling the already connected parts of the world through a newly inaugurated set of encounters. In his turn to Lefebvre's urban, Merrifield rearticulates Althusser's swerve from an impossible originary moment to a hard driving rupture, an *event*, that creates the possibility for new encounters and, in turn, new social forms. Merrifield connects this understanding of the *clinamen* and the encounter to exceptional political moments like Tahrir Square and the various outcroppings of the Occupy movement, situations whose cascading encounters were made possible by something unidentifiable that opens up space for experimentation within existing conditions. Responding to Althusser's assertion that the encounter is a key concept in

[65] Althusser's essay was written in 1982 and is collected, in English, in *Philosophy of the Encounter: Later Writings 1978-87* (2006).

Marx,[66] Merrifield argues for the way, even in the lasting and historically stable continuities of space, new forms can emerge from "particular" moments and situations:

> History takes hold because of encounters between immanent objective forces – resultant of past, contingent encounters that somehow lasted – *and* a subjective reality that is even more uncertain and unpredictable. Actions come without guarantees; potential outcomes can never be seen in advance. It is at particular moments or conjunctures when and where forces connect; when and where they take shape, take hold, take off, transmogrify into something historically and geographically *new*. (55)

"The *clinamen* strikes," he suggests, "rains rain so hard on the old order, on the old city, that the swerve has created a new world urban order, the plane of immanence for new encounters, for a newer aleatory materialism of bodies encountering other bodies in public" (57).

As the event that inaugurates new encounters, relations, and hopefully, forms, the *clinamen*'s aleatory swing challenges the teleological inevitability of the Hegelian totality, producing a spatial dialectic without guarantees. In this sense, Merrifield's encounter differs from Manning's invocation of the relational experimentation of the minor gesture. Where Merrifield grounds his sense of encounter in massive events like Tahrir Square or Occupy Wall Street, Manning's sense of the event is grounded in the everyday. Reading Merrifield and Althusser in the context of documentary photography in a blog post titled "What is Already Going On: The Photograph and the Encounter" (2015), Jeff Derksen suggests that forms of cultural expression do not merely stage or represent encounters, but "within the politics and materiality of the encounter, the photograph is *an element* in the contingent meeting of elements that can lead to an accomplished fact" (n. pag.). Writing about the potential of photography's role in militant protest, Derksen argues that "the conditions through which an image can make militancy resonate are themselves determined by all the forces and intensities that make militancy itself take shape" ("Do Not Think One Has to Be Sad" 17). Indeed, even though photographs are not automatically or essentially militant, they gain a "relational heft" in the right conditions.

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[66] Merrifield points to Althusser's assertion that Marx "explains that the capitalist mode of production arose from the '*encounter*' between 'the owners of money' and 'proletarians stripped of everything but their labor-power'" (197, qtd. in Merrifield 55) – an encounter that lasted historically.

The "relational heft" carried by photographs, stories, poems, or any text isn't limited to its aleatory potential to change the gravity swerving one pool ball into another. Instead, texts carry a relational heft in the way their "gravity" comes out of the way they can script shaping everyday practice. In an Indigenous context, Leanne Simpson discusses the relationship between story and the relational field that story is told in. She argues that a change in how we imagine or script our relations to the non-human must be accompanied by a material change in those relations – an insistence that moves us from the aleatory luck of the encounter to the more deliberate action of engagement. For Simpson, story and relation are tangled together. She works through this in her essay "Land as Pedagogy: Nishnaabeg Intelligence and Rebellious Transformation" (2014), where she outlines conflicting settler-colonial and Indigenous, specifically Nishnaabeg, pedagogical networks. Simpson's essay appears in a special issue of *Decolonization* on Indigenous land-based education edited by Matthew Wildcat, Stephanie Iribacher-Fox, Glen Coulthard, and Mandee McDonald. In their introduction to the issue, the editors begin by asking a series of questions about the relationship between land, knowledge, social relations, and spatial practices:

> What does it mean to think of land as a source of knowledge and understanding? How do our relationships with land inform and order the way humans conduct relationships with each other and other-than-human beings? How do we offer education to people on the land in ways that are grounded in Indigenous knowledge? What does it mean to understand "land" – as a system of reciprocal social relations and ethical practices – as a framework for decolonial critique? (ii)

This set of questions point to education as tied directly to relationships on and with the land. The editors pointedly argue that "[i]f settler colonialism is fundamentally premised on dispossessing Indigenous peoples from their land, one, if not the primary, impact on Indigenous education has been to impede the transmission of knowledge about the forms of governance, ethics and philosophies that arise from relationships on the land" (ii).

In her essay, Simpson lays a critique at the feet of the colonizing factory/banking model of education,[67] telling us, bluntly, that "[i]f you want to learn about something, you

[67] Simpson's critique of the colonial education system echoes Paulo Friere's argument in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* that the teacher-student relationship has a "fundamentally narrative character" (71). In what he identifies as education's "banking model," the teacher is tasked to deposit information into students through a one-way narrative that is

need to take your body onto the land and do it" (17-18). Simpson works on the ground and argues for storytelling as a method to create the kind of spatial and pedagogical relations that Glen Coulthard calls a "grounded normativity." In his book *Red Skin, White Masks* (2014), Coulthard describes grounded normativity as "the modalities of Indigenous land-connected practices and longstanding experiential knowledge that inform and structure our ethical engagements with the world and our relationships with human and nonhuman others over time" (13). It involves understanding land as a "system of reciprocal relations and obligations" (13). In Coulthard's terms, evental *encounter* gives way to ethical *engagement* as both he and Simpson imagine counterpractices that, rather than aim to reterritorialize dominant colonial organizations through an unforeseen, unidentifiable, and unguaranteed swerve, seek to collectively strengthen the continuities of Indigenous practices and knowledges through deliberate reconstruction of relations, using the relational heft of story and culture as a rallying point and anchor. In other words, rather than look for the moments where dominant spatial relations can be broken apart, they seek the moments where relations can be put back together.

Simpson begins with the story of Kwezens, who learns how to tap trees for maple syrup by observing a red squirrel nibbling at the bark of a tree. Drawing from her careful observations, Kwesens works out how to extract the syrup herself with the support of her family network. Simpson asserts that stories like Kwesens' necessarily operate in a relational network and are meant to be reflected on at different points in one's life. "Younger citizens might first understand just the literal meaning," she says, "[a]s they grow, they can put together the conceptual meaning, and with more experience with our knowledge system, the metaphorical meaning" (7). Knowledge comes through experiences with the land shaped through story. The inquiry-based method suggested by Kwezens' story conflicts with Simpson's own experiences within a colonial education system she describes as "one of coping with someone else's agenda, curriculum, and pedagogy, someone who was neither interested in my well being as a kwezens, nor interested in my connection to my homeland, my language or history, nor my

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withdrawn from students through assessment. "Education," he tells us, "is suffering from narration sickness" (71) – a blunt assessment of the ways that learning is reduced to industrial process.

Nishnaabeg intelligence" (6). Simpson outlines the stark differences between these two sets of pedagogical relations, particularly in their relationship to land/aki:

> To re-create the world that compelled Kwezens to learn how to make maple sugar, we should be concerned with re-creating the conditions within which this learning occurred, not merely the content of the practice itself. Setters easily appropriate and reproduce the content of the story every year, within the context of capitalism, when they make commercial maple syrup; but they completely miss the wisdom that underlies the entire process because they deterritorialize the mechanics of maple syrup production from Nishnaabeg intelligence and from aki. They appropriate and recast the process within a hyperindividualism that negates relationality. The radical thinking and action of this story is not so much in the mechanics of reducing maple sap to sugar, it lies in the reproduction of a loving web of Nishnaabeg networks within which learning takes place. (9)

In this distinction, Simpson outlines the way the same content (the reduction process of maple syrup) carries a different lesson as the pedagogical form/process changes – the structure of the spatial relations producing a hidden curriculum[68] that opens up certain potential engagements with the non-human, while foreclosing on others. Simpson's critique of the hidden curriculums of colonial education highlights a disjunction between the remembering of a practice through story and the efficient extractions of the present, a contradictory overlapping of land-as-relationship and land-as-source-of-value. Both the individualizing drive of the settler-colonial education system and the instrumentalizing drive of capitalist industry (here the commercial maple syrup industry) limit potential engagements because they fail to *recreate the conditions* of the original story and instead uncomfortably house the story in a different set of relations, reducing loving web to industrial process. In order for story to act as a spark for both Indigenous resurgence and reciprocal relationships with non-human actors *must* be accompanied by the spatial

[68] In his now classic Marxist critique of education *Ideology and Curriculum*, Michael W. Apple defines the hidden curriculum as the "tacit teaching to students of norms, values, and dispositions that goes on simply by their living in and coping with the institutional expectations and routines of schools day in and day out for a number of years" (13). In this sense, Simpson's descriptions of the disconnect between the modeling of the kwesens story and the battering ram reality of Western schooling precisely describe the ways that the *form* of education instructs as much as the *content*. Apple's blunt assessments of the factory model – that it prepares kids for the institutional realities of capitalism – are echoed by Simpson, who sees Indigenous knowledgesground through the colonial form of western pedagogical systems in ways that position those knowledges as primitive and in the past.

and relational room to mobilize that story. In the same way, just as transplanting Kwesen's story into the colonial classroom alters the potential ways the text can be mobilized, any poetry invested in environmental justice needs to be aware that its social and ecological context matters.

Ecological Dynamics and Poetic Procedures

Ecopoetry and ecopoetics are as much buzzwords as practices in contemporary poetics. In the inaugural 2001 issue of his journal *Ecopoetics*, Jonathan Skinner argues that "in fact, a lot of nature is getting into poems these days—in ways that, furthermore, subvert the endless debates about 'language' vs. lyric, margin vs. mainstream, performed vs. written, innovative vs. academic, or, now, digitized vs. printed approaches to poetry" (6). For Skinner, ecopoetry is a transversal category that cuts across formal concerns and between poetic camps, but it doesn't erase the tensions of poetic form, particularly as they propose different ways to engage non-human actors. In a Canadian literary context, nature and ecology are going concerns that inspire editorial projects, including anthologies and special issues that work to define, or at least corral, different forms of "nature poetry" and "ecological poetry." In this section, I sort through some of these editorial moves to parse through some of the possibilities and limits of language-based approaches to the non-human world. In particular, I want to pay attention to the ways in which many poets engaging the non-human have found it necessary to move off the page – to take their bodies out onto the land – whether through performance, activist organizing, or other forms of poetic research.

These slippery moves on and off the page echo Schuster's problem of the quadrat as it meets Simpson's insistence that ethical engagement involves the potentials of language within an assemblage. To ask how an actor, a work, or an ecology is framed involves asking how those things enter into relation. Ecological poetry, if it is to be ecological in a *relational* sense, treating ecology as more than poetic content or form, needs to take on the messy entanglements of human and non-human worlds. This involves finding ways to focus simultaneously on the materiality of the human/non-human relation *and* the mediating frame of that engagement, on the way that non-human bodies and materials are territorialized upon and the ways that human codes stabilize and destabilize those territorializations. Central to this lies the difficulty of how language can intervene into and change the relations that compose an assemblage, particularly

when not all members of an ecological assemblage share the ability to communicate in that language. Coming out of different traditions and with different goals, the poets collected as part of a Canadian ecopoetry all struggle with how writing can both engage with non-human actors while also intervening in the territorializations and codes that shape those engagements.

Definitions of ecological poetry depend on a distinction from more traditional, representational forms of nature poetry. In the paired introductions to their 2009 anthology *Regreen: New Canadian Ecological Poetry*, Madhur Anand and Adam Dickinson collect a group of contemporary poets for whom, in Dickinson's words, "the environment is not simply a nonhuman wilderness that beckons us toward weekend escapes, but is in fact a composite, plural, interactive space of competing physical, social, and conceptual frames of signification" (12). They admit work with an expanded set of spatial and syntactical concerns, allowing for work that deals with urban settings and that interrogates the scientific and poetic language that code human-non-human engagement. In this sense, Anand and Dickinson propose something different than Nancy Holmes, who, in her anthology *Once Upon a Wilderness: Canadian Nature Poems* (2009), collects poems that treat nature as both Canadian – as both written by Canadians and representing "Canadian" spaces – and primarily "wild" (rather than "domesticated"). Holmes carefully links her selection to Don McKay's introduction, which works through the difficult intersections that compose a *nationalized* wilderness, grounding his argument in Duncan Campbell Scott's 1916 poem "The Height of Land" and imagining the ways the issue threads historically from the Confederation Poets through to the thematic criticism of the 1970s and the postmodern response to it. McKay leverages this historical thread to tease out a number of concerns having to do with the "inappability" of nature, the need for a careful and attentive approach to the different species that compose the natural world, and the relationship of fieldwork and experience to writing about nature. Toward the end of his essay, McKay gestures to place as a central problematic to the project of nature poetry, producing, despite his grounding in a kind of common sense, a slippery understanding of place dependent on both the "perspective of the viewer" and on that viewer's positioning with regard to the human and natural worlds. McKay suggests that "[i]n many of our poetries, it seems to me, the process of engagement results, not in deeper roots . . . but in a deeper, more complex sense of being here" (23) – a complex sense tied to the "elusiveness" of place:

> Place persistently eludes our grasp, so long as a grasp is what it is. So long as we cling to the idea of place as something that belongs to us, removed from its mothering wilderness, we prevent ourselves from truly belonging to it. We remain colonizers and colonials. (23)

McKay sets up a tension between two types of belonging – one keyed to ownership and colonization and the other to a sense of connectedness within a natural ecology, the difference laying in his distinction between being *in* a place (treating space as a metric container) and being *of* a place. Embedded in this is an anxiety over control and imposition, over the risk of defining the natural or non-human according to readymade categories. Despite nature poetry's tendency to set up the human up as an outside observer, embedded in McKay's distinction is a sense of ethics that carries forward into more political ecological work as he affirms a responsibility to both accurately represent the natural world and live within it – an accuracy that emerges from an intimacy with the non-human subject at hand.

Similarly invested in the ethics of engagement, Anand and Dickinson present a formally expanded field that is no longer "nature poetry" but instead "ecological poetry." Dickinson claims a political drive for the work in *Regreen*, drawing from Jonathan Skinner and Juliana Spahr's definitions of ecopoetry to distinguish "ecological poetry" from "nature poetry":

> One way of marking the difference between the idealized environments of classical pastoral "nature poetry" and contemporary "ecological poetry," is to consider Juliana Spahr's distinction that "ecopoets" are concerned with "a poetics full of systematic analysis and critique that questions the divisions between nature and culture while acknowledging that humans use up too much of the world." (11)[69]

Spahr's distinction between idealized nature poetry and ecopoetics as a poetics of critique highlights the ways that an ecologically invested poetics can interrogate the exploitative relationships with non-humans at the level of language. Dickinson argues that he and Anand come to "ecological poetry" as an appropriate term because of the

[69] Dickinson specifically quotes the concluding note from Spahr's chapbook *things of each possible relation hashing against one another* (2003). Spahr presents her book as a response to her suspicion of nature poetry that "even when it got the birds and the plants and the animals right it tended to show the beautiful bird but not so often the bulldozer off to the side that was destroying the bird's habitat" (27) – a response to a realism that fails to account for the complicated histories and geographies that bind humans and non-humans to one another.

way it both draws from conversations around ecopoetry, while also emphasizing both parts of their equation. “If anything,” he suggests, “by emphasizing the two words [‘ecological’ and ‘poetry’], it is our intention to foreground the poetics of ecological dynamics and the ecology of rhetorical and formal poetic procedures” (11).

For Anand and Dickinson, this dialogue between ecology and language drives ecopoetry, not simply through an ethics of representation, but through the argument and affirmation that “ecological dynamics” and “poetic procedures” operate through one another. This conceptualization echoes Schuster’s turn to the quadrat as a metaphor for the way that poetic form can help frame and research ecological movement, but Dickinson’s rhetorical inversion is more suggestive than metaphorical, opening room within his definition for a wide range of work. Anand and Dickinson’s three frames of inclusion – physical, social, and conceptual – form three directions of inquiry within the work they collect, still separating natural landscapes (under the site-specificity of the “physical”) from built environments (which are “social”), but adding a third term (“conceptual”) which interrogates “questions of significance and signification” (15). Though the shape of their anthology chooses to keep these concerns separate, Anand and Dickinson acknowledge a critical potential for poetry because of the way that the material and expressive components of the world are entangled in one another. On one hand, this affirmation is useful because of the way it short-circuits the linguistic division between human and non-human worlds. On the other hand, language, at least as it emerges from our own anthropocentrism, *does* form an unfortunate limit to forming more ethical human spatial practices as we organize and interact with non-humans. Ecopoetry as a category bursts at the seams with a rich formal diversity that can be puzzling, collecting work that shares a generalized concern for the environment and a wish to reimagine human-non-human relations. But, to point forward to two poets I will contrast in the next section, how do Rita Wong and Christian Bök end up in the same anthology, in fact in multiple collections, given their extremely different conceptualizations of what an ethical engagement to the non-human looks like?

I would like to ask, following Dickinson, *how* ecological dynamics and poetic procedures connect. How do material agency and *action* connect with the expressive work of ecopoetry? For Dickinson, poetry becomes a site where the environmental crisis can be challenged in more ways than a realist mode that he views as limited. Dickinson’s critical work provides us with an informally mapped tripartite scheme of

formal poetic approaches to ecology. In his attempts to challenge what he sees as a dominant activist/realist approach, Dickinson, in separate articles, stumps for lyric/metaphorical and scientific/pataphysical approaches. In his article "Lyric Ethics: Ecocriticism, Material Metaphoricity, and the Poetics of Don McKay and Jan Zwicky" (2004), Dickinson asks "[t]o what degree are realism, reference, and assumptions about the nature of materiality (or the materiality of nature) dependent on imaginative, lyrical, metaphorical interventions?" – a question emerging from a recognition that "[t]he burgeoning field of ecocriticism often privileges representations that offer direct reference to environmental crisis, or, more generally, writing with a readily identifiable activist dimension" (34). Dickinson sets up a tension between the realist aesthetic favoured by ecocritics, singling out Laurence Buell, and the metaphorical/lyrical approach of Zwicky and McKay. In picking on Buell, Dickinson directs us to a tension between aesthetics and the complicated materiality that Buell traces back through nineteenth century American environmental nonfiction. In *The Environmental Imagination* (1995), Buell proposes that realism's political potential needs reassessment after being critiqued and cast off in the structuralist and poststructuralist waves of the linguistic turn. Buell expresses a desire for literary work that, without discounting aesthetics, somehow holds itself responsible to the material world outside of the text (93). In his later book *Writing for an Endangered World* (2001), Buell suggests that "acts of writing and reading will likely involve simultaneous processes of environmental awakening—retrievals of physical environment from dormancy to salience—and of distortion, repression, forgetting, inattention" before proposing to "start from the presumption of having to struggle against the limits of habitually foreshortened environmental perception" (18). What gets repressed into a Jamesonian environmental unconscious, Buell asks, and what can writing do to better map materiality with an eye on an "ethics of care."

While seemingly sharing this concern, Dickinson lays into Buell's endorsement of realism as a way to short-circuit a perceptual foreshortening and more faithfully represent material ecologies, questioning whether Buell's stated project isn't better accomplished through a metaphorical approach:

> What Buell is after is a discursive relation that gives shape in language to what is not ultimately reducible to referentiality. His celebration of realism is not consistent with the work he asks of this term. He wants writing that utilizes its referential dimension while doing so in a way that

> acknowledges the incapacity of words to equal things, and that in turn acknowledges the irreducible world outside of language. This sounds less like the realism he celebrates and more like the relational dynamic of metaphoricity. (39-40)

Dickinson is interested in the "material metaphoricity" he spots in the work of McKay and Zwicky as a potential countertactic to this dominant realism, because of the way it plays with relation rather than reference. For Dickinson, metaphoricity "reveals itself as an articulation (that is, a breaking and a joining – a hinge) between presence and absence, or language and non-language, or logic and illogic," creating the potential for "an environmental ethic at work in lyric apprehensions of materiality" (35). Dickinson makes a similar case for pataphysics as a remedy to realism in his article "Poetics of the Semiosphere: Pataphysics, Biosemiotics, and Imaginary Solutions for Water" (2013). As part of a discussion of Lisa Robertson's and Erín Moure's work, he argues for "an alternative conception of the relationship between experimental poetic and theoretical scientific epistemologies in order to argue that pataphysics is central to an emerging postmodern ecocriticism because it complicates and combines both the question of signification and the question of the environment" (441).

The history of pataphysics in Canada, however, makes this move to challenge dominant codings of the non-human a questionable one that struggles to account for material relations. Dickinson argues for the way that Moure and Robertson "deterritorialize" genre, opening up "systematically fixed relations to new forms of organization" (442) by putting realism (or "scientifically sanctioned realism") into question – a focus on breaking apart the dominant rather than building alternate relations. Dickinson compares Erin Mouré's *Sheep's Vigil by a Fervent Person* (2001) and Robertson's *Office for Soft Architecture* to trace the ways their subversions of the pastoral "direct[s] attention to the semiotic surfaces of the city" (446) by misusing natural history approaches in their examinations of water as it moves and is moved. Both Robertson and Moure adopt personas to layer literary and theoretical reference across their imagined surfaces. As I discuss in Chapter 1, Robertson adorns Vancouver in the literary garb of nineteenth century Paris of Benjamin and Atget (already a Paris represented in retrospect). Moure adopts the heteronym (ala Fernando Pessoa) of Eirin Moure to, in Dickinson's words, "translate Toronto's buried river system into an imagined landscape where the flow and function of water in the city become irrepressibly significant" (441).

Dickinson compares Robertson's and Moure's work to an earlier essay by the likely heteronymic "Prof." Kurt Wurstwagen. Wurstwagen's "Piccu Carlu: The Muskoka-Maya Connexion" (1981) is collected in the Canadian "Pataphysics issue of *Open Letter* edited by the Toronto Research Group (bpNichol and Steve McCaffery). Published alongside other papers credited to members of the Institute for Hmmrian Studies, Wurstwagen's essay is a touchstone for the "Millennial" pataphysics forwarded by Darren Wershler and Christian Bök in a 1997 issue of *Open Letter*. Wurstwagen reimagines a water tower in Port Carling, a small town in Muskokan cottage country, as an example of proto-Mayan architecture – at once, a pisstake of academic research *and* a very serious erasure of the very real Indigenous histories of that area.[70] What Robertson and Moure share with Wurstwagen is a belief that invented or transplanted spatial codes can disrupt dominant imaginations of space, sparking defamiliarizing encounters that prompt reflection. They share a kind of game wherein a landscape and its relations are misrepresented or miscoded – like the situationists' walk through Paris using the map of London. There *is* a possibility created in the frictional mismatch of new codes and old territorialities, provided that the text enters into a series of cascading encounters that change how a space is viewed and practiced – no guarantees. There danger in this kind of overcoding, however, that becomes extremely visible in Wurstwagen's essay, which certainly lampoons academic language and the then-dominant nationalist attachment to the Canadian landscape, while also applying an invented Indigenous coding that doubles down on colonial claims to a landscape by misrepresenting the real and present relations that compose Port Carling.

The risk of the division of ecopoetry into formal or aesthetic approaches, then, sits in the way it also seems to enforce a division between poetics oriented toward the material world and another oriented toward language and signification. Dickinson's impulse to expand the formal avenues for ecopoetry is a good one, but as both Derksen and Simpson remind us, the political agency of an image or text depends on how it connects to a larger relational context. The agency of a text both shapes and is shaped by the larger field, in other words. For ecopoetry to have stakes in ecology as a material and relational field, it certainly doesn't need to be representationally realist, but it does need to orient itself to the material world. Rethreading these categories through the concept of engagement requires loosening up the divisions between formal approaches,

[70] More on this in my discussion of Bök's *Xenotext Project* in the next section.

making them tendencies rather than categories, while also asking how poets use these approaches to navigate the friction between poetry and the "real world." Meaning that, in order for poetry to do ecological work, it needs to be aware and honest about *how* it is ecological. Does it attempt to directly engage non-human actors, challenge the codes and territorializations that shape those engagements, or, somehow, straddle both sides of this line?

Like *Regreen*, the 2012 Ecologies special issue of *The Capilano Review* (*TCR*) collects an expanded field of what ecological poetry might include, but even as they choose not to section or categorize the writing collected, they also include threads that *Regreen* fails to account for, in the form of Indigenous and activist poets whose work directly challenges the theft and exploitation of land and for whom poetics needs to be connected in some way to *action*. Poetically, action has primarily been attached to activist work, where poetry itself becomes the action, is meant to inspire others to action, or works to map or document a problematic. Included in *TCR*'s issue is a transcript of a discussion between Joanne Arnott, Michael Blackstock, Peter Culley, Roger Farr, Christine Leclerc, and Rita Wong. Responding to a question from Farr, quoting Skinner, about the way ecopoetics' currency risks it becoming "another form of branding" (83), the poets largely respond with an ambivalence toward the term itself, but push at both the idea of writing ecologically, relationally and with a drive toward environmental justice. Rather than ecopoetry, many of the poets are drawn to another word: action. Wong asks "how does poetics navigate a relationship to action?" (83). Culley worries that the way that ecopoetics has become embedded in structures – "the literary establishment, the university, the 'ecological movement'" – imposes "silent but sure impediments to action" (86). Farr counters Culley's pessimism, asking whether the goal of poetry shouldn't be to persuade or provoke people to action, but to "investigat[e] the world that we're in" (87) – a form of action that echoes Spahr's call, quoted by Dickinson, for a poetics "full of systematic analysis and critique."

As a concept, action orients itself to the material world with an eye to doing something that, hopefully, will change it for the better. In this exchange, "action" involves both sides of an environmental praxis. Action is both *direct* action, through forms of protest and organizing that poetry is often in relation to, and *investigative* action, as a myriad of forms and poetic procedures are used to research, analyze, and critique. Investigative action is the looser of these two terms, encompassing both formal

experiment and critical analysis. Though poetry is often adjacent to direct material action, it can act upon the codes that shape those actions – Dickinson's gambit in resisting Buell's insistence on realism. Dickinson rightly identifies a tension between activist poetics invested in different forms of realism and lyrical and pataphysical poetics invested in language's role in ecology. But this tension is not purely formal. It instead depends on two entangled conceptions of materiality. In the first, materiality involves questions of territoriality – of the material forms that compose bodies and spaces – whereas in the second, the "materiality" of language involves questions of coding. In other words, an ecologically oriented poetic action can orient itself variably to different parts of an engagement between human and non-human actors, acting directly on the language that codes engagement while critiquing the ways that humans materially engage.

Any inquiry into the ways poetry might take "action" needs to negotiate analogical approaches to natural ecologies. Anand and Dickinson's move to include ecopoetic work that prioritizes language forces us to consider how these poets navigate the tense divide between expression and materiality. Is poetry limited to being a reflection on or thought exercise about human relationships with non-human world? Or can poetry act more closely on and with non-human actors? We need to ask how analogy and metaphor form a potential limit to the role of poetry – a role, as Dickinson suggests, that isn't without its strengths, but that halts the ability to think about the non-human world in anything but human terms. At the same time, we need to ask if there are stories being told by the non-human that, like the squirrel teaching Kwesens to tap trees, can help humans act more reciprocally with the non-human world. In order to read poetry ecologically as it proposes and enacts ethical engagements with others in space, we need to ask both what narratives already shape our engagements, like the analyst making the patient legible through the categories of psychoanalytic theory, and what narratives we don't know how to listen to or, in the words of Zoe Todd, the stories we "have forgotten to listen to" (105). What narratives, voices, bodies, and relations are erased? If Deleuze insists that the analyst just needs to listen to their patient, how do we follow his lead to listen to the non-human when the non-human can't even speak our language? In her essay "Decolonial Dreams: Unsettling the Academy Through Namewak" (2015), Todd poses that we ought to listen to the material "stories" being told to us by the bodies of sturgeon/ namewak in the Northern Alberta where she grew up. She responds to what

she sees as a “fish-amnesia” where the fish that swim in Alberta waters are largely absented from the collective imagination with major political and environmental consequences:

> The Fish Body — both the individual body of singular fish (“the corpse” discussed in this collection of writing) and the cumulative body of *all* fish — in inland territories like the one I grew up in is still largely an absent one in the collective imagination. This has allowed the settler-colonial imagination and imperative to pollute and alter watersheds throughout the province without much resistance from the broader public. (107)

For Todd, the political act is not simply and flatly tracing relations, but rather to ask what excluded actors might teach humans about how to more ethically participate in spatial production, working not in the pursuit of cheap nature and the resulting profit, but to work through a sense of reciprocity. Embedded in the context of the dominant “expansionist and resource-hungry narrative” (108) of settler-colonialism in Alberta, a narrative pinned to the appropriative practices of the oil industry, the narrative absence and destruction of Alberta’s fisheries is not, for Todd, a metaphor for the gutting of Indigenous culture, but instead is a connected and concomitant historical process that crosses continents and oceans, that violently reshuffles and renarrates what kinds of spatial organizations and encounters are possible.

Todd poses a short circuit between expressive and material storytelling, insisting that ecological dynamics and poetic procedures are not mutually exclusive. For Todd, the devaluation and conceptual erasure of fish from the watershed is what allows the junction of resource-hungry narratives and extractive regimes to stabilize – an ecological variation on the kinds of dynamics that play out for the writers I discuss in my first chapter. The urge to respond to this doubled crisis of both the material world and the collective imagination has produced an unclear sense of what poetry can work to transform, challenging both understandings and material conditions. The kernel of this difficulty lies not only in a question of how poets can take action, but also upon who or what can they take that action (and to what ends). Take two projects that abut one another in *TCR*’s issue: a. rawlings’ poems from *Echolology* (then titled *Environment Canada*) and Stephen Collis and Jordan Scott’s poetry and photographs from *Decomp*. Both projects work in wildly different ways with the materiality of the page in relation to material ecologies. Both projects also struggle with this relationship, ostensibly engaging with the material landscapes of their writers’ respective geographies – Northern Ontario

for rawlings, British Columbia for Collis and Scott – while also throwing us back into aesthetic problems, particularly through a shared linking of literary and material *erasure*.

rawlings' work in *Ecolology* approaches erasure as a poetic game where the erasure of letters and words forms an analogy for the erasure and extinction of non-human actors. We need to be careful, however, with the kinds of claims we make for this kind of formal approach. In her article "Unsettling the Environment: The Violence of Language in Angela Rawlings' *Wide Slumber for Lepidopterists*" (2013), Sarah Groeneveld wonders about the ways rawlings' first book responds to Canada's colonial history:

> The fact that Rawlings dedicates her poem to Northern Ontario invites a reading that asks what the text has to say about language, bodies, and the environment in the setting of Ontario and Canada as a whole. As the bodies of insects "epilepse" after settling by a lake, the text reveals the nation's fields and lakes as environments caught up in a violent history of settlement and colonialism. (138)

Groeneveld's argument about rawlings' book *feels* necessary in a contemporary moment where good liberal critics are called upon to acknowledge Indigenous issues. While Groeneveld is correct to assert the connection between Canada's "natural" spaces and its ongoing colonial history, *Wide Slumber for Lepidopterists* never explicitly makes this link, neither explicitly nor suggestively. This misassignment of critical terms does an injustice to both rawlings' text and to other writers who write explicitly about ongoing colonial violence. Groeneveld makes clear the ways that *Wide Slumber* connects the practice of lepidoptery to patriarchal violence as the languages of scientific classification and sexual assault intermix, though rawlings' intermixing of registers never explicitly connects to colonization in Northern Ontario., Despite her overreaching assertion, Groeneveld nevertheless opens up a useful question about the role of language in "unsettling" land. On one hand, rawlings works to destabilize scientific language through the invention of terms. Groeneveld suggests that "[r]ather than using science as a means through which to impose order or insist on absolute certainty, Rawlings reveals the fact that scientific knowledge always carries an element of uncertainty: that information is constantly being revised and rewritten" (152). Here, rawlings' gesture specifically challenges the scientific codes that script encounters with the non-human. On the other hand, Groeneweld's reading of *Wide Slumber* performs a short-circuit between the material and expressive components of space, particularly as she makes

the leap to Indigenous issues around land, arguing as if language can directly perform, reflect, or halt the violence committed upon the actors that compose space. "[I]f a land has been settled by means of violent discourse," Groenveld asks, "then how might that same land be unsettled by discourse?" (145).

Of course, discourse *alone* cannot settle or unsettle land. Any answer to Groenveld's question as it relates to rawlings' work has to turn to rawlings second major project *Echolology* (previously titled *Echology*, *Environment Canada*, and *EFHILMNORSTUVWY*), which has been published across a number of journals, anthologies, and small press ephemera between 2007 and the present. *Echolology* intersects ecopoetic concerns and conceptualist methods[71] as rawlings produces an extended homology between language and environment that allows her to examine the relationship between them, in the process exposing the limits and inadequacies of conceptualism in working through space, relation, and ethical engagement. In a 2008 edition of the online journal *How2*, rawlings describes the project as an amalgamation of approaches that treat "text as environment":

> If the page is a landscape and letters the species populating it, how would landscape or soundscape translate in a textual environment? I've embarked on a new textual project, *echology*, exploring questions like this one. *echology* treats text as an environment (as its own ecosystem, microcosm) and considers text in its environment (context). Employing a series of literary constraints, echology reduces (lipograms, economy of language), reuses (cut-up method, repetition), recycles (found text), and sustains (anagrams, homolingual and homophonic translation). (n. pag.)

rawlings frames her text in terms of internal and external machinic connections. At once, the text is a *translation* of the landscapes and soundscapes of Northern Ontario *and* a *part* of a wider contextual assemblage, mirroring mainstream environmental practices.

With its focus on pronouns and largely abstract natural landscape, *Echolology* proposes a critique of the anthropocentrism of language in the way it constructs the abstract "North," paying for that critique with an inability to address the actually-existing relations composing Northern Ontario. Her proposition of a *closed* linguistic ecosystem produces a poem that is purely analogical, making a game of erasure out of the extinction of species. In "The Great Canadian in the Algoma District," one of the poems

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[71] In fact, the work's publication history bears this out, as rawlings has published in a number of special journal issues dealing with science/ecology and conceptualisms

included in *TCR*, rawlings stages one version of this erasure. Even as its title gestures to the Algoma District of Northern Ontario, the body of the poem instead engages with a specifically linguistic field through the scientific language around ecology:

> The Committee on the Status of Endangered Letters in English suggests an increase in habitat degradation as a result of climate change, genetic isolation, and blogging. The historic range of letters covers the field, but range fragmentation has witnessed a steady decline in voiceless velar fricatives. Emotion is still transmitted through vowels. This may finish in nonsense. (6)

The first half of "The Great Canadian in the Algoma District," subtitled "Endangerment Legend," plays out like this paragraph, performing a lightly parodic version of a scientific report. The second half, "Engenderment Log," gives rise to a number of formal rewritings or transformations of the final paragraph of "Endangerment Legend." That final paragraph of "Endangerment Legend" begins:

> This is a lesson. Over and over, he writes, "I will not ruin the environment." (6)

rawlings changes these two sentences in the following ways:

> This is a thing. Over and over, he writes, "I will not ruin the thing." (7)
>
> Ths s lssn. vr nd vr, h wrts, "wll nt rn th nvrnmnt." (7)
>
> i i a eo. Oe a oe, e ie, "I i o ui e eioe." (7)
>
> His his our lesson. Ourselves and yourselves, he writes, "I we'll not ruin he environment." (7)

rawlings performs a diverse set of procedures on the original piece of text, from replacing every noun that isn't a pronoun with "thing" to stripping the words of first their vowels and then their consonants to saturating the text with pronouns. When rawlings suggests that things might end in nonsense, she isn't kidding. Through her array of erasures and obscurements, rawlings scrambles sense in a way shows a concern over the effects of a piece missing from a narrative understanding of the world – a chain of erasures beginning with the erasure of the Algoma District itself from the content of the poem.

The problem with rawlings' poem lies in the sense that it's enough to stage a kind of erasure that finds it easier to suggestively jump to a loss of meaning or to imagine a

kind of poetic end times, than carefully engaging with the real relations of Northern Ontario. In this, ecology is reduced from a field of relations to mere concept. By connecting the specific locations of Northern Ontario to her linguistic staging of a slow extinction, rawlings doesn't *reveal* the material environment under colonialism – there is no final unveiling of the concrete horrors of resource extraction or climate change – but still knowingly works within the larger context of those disappearances. As her poems shift into repeated animal names or fields of human pronouns, rawlings certainly invokes a material homogenization, but, more importantly, also begins to ask how the homogenization of the language available to speak about human/non-human relationships might affect how those relationships play out. But unlike Todd, who explicitly argues that gaps or erasures in circulating language enable practices like resource extraction, rawlings instead leans into the aesthetic ends of her project, exposing the limits of her conceptual practice. When rawlings performs the piece with Maya Jantar, they move through the kinds of erasures found in "The Great Canadian in the Algoma District," eventually closing on a series of pieces where rawlings and Jantar hold notes in harmony with one another. On the one hand, the turn to "pure tones" invokes a dropping out of language and syntax in favour of sound – a beautiful linguistic desert or moonscape emptied out of life. On the other hand, rawlings' aesthetic sightline to the apocalypse obscures the assemblage around her project, perhaps deliberately, pointedly failing to ask what structural changes might be necessary to not ruin the environment, leaving us with the broken record of sustainability repeated by quote-unquote "Great Canadians."

In contrast, Collis and Scott treat erasure as a material process in *Decomp*, leaving multiple copies of Darwin's *The Origin of Species* to rot over the course of a year across five ecosystems in British Columbia and returning later to photograph the ways the text had been "rewritten." The text slides between their photographs of the weather-beaten books and their own multivocal and multivalent reflections on the process. Collis and Scott turn to a material ecology rather than a paper one, but, at the same time, *Decomp* relies on its own kind of analogical gesture as the back cover blurb suggests that what the poets find as they return to the decaying codices is a "repeatedly rewritten Darwin." Assigning "authorship" to an assemblage of non-human actors is problematically anthropomorphic, but there is a destabilizing push and pull between the

material and expressive valences at work in the project that Laura Moss identifies in her review of *Decomp*:

> There is an important contradiction in *Decomp*. On one hand, Collis and Scott have relinquished artistic control to nature as they collaborate with it. On the other hand, this relinquishment is limited by their pronominal presence within the text. Further, glimpses of men I take to be Collis and Scott appear in two of the photos. These briefly populated images echo the manner in which the poets inscribe themselves glancingly throughout the book. We never quite lose sight of the fact that this collection is poetically mediated however much the found "readable" poems suggest the scriptive power of plant-life. Perhaps in asserting their own presence and process, the poets remind us that nature can't actually write and stop us from sentimentalizing or even humanizing the environment, even in its most collaborative form.

Moss looks for a way around the difficult contradiction Collis and Scott propose in their move to "collaborate" with nature rather than represent it, moving the poem from its position adjacent to the "action" of material relations to a position within that materiality. Moss is right to pose the way Collis and Scott "relinquish artistic control" while also centering the way their "poetic mediations" frame the non-human as a contradiction that troubles easy analogies between material and linguistic processes. The poetic game of erasure is not the same as the material processes that "erase" non-human actors and relations, even if one makes us think of the other.

We need to read *Decomp*'s central gesture through two very different types of engagement. In the first, the multiplied "elements of nature" engage with the materiality of the book without regard for anything Darwin has to say. The story being told – or critique being made – by the non-human engagements with the book itself is one of the book's physical materiality as it rots, as pieces are taken by birds for nests, as pages are frayed and water-damaged. The distributed agency of material action upon the book doesn't "rewrite" Darwin's language, so much as the book connects to the processes of the ecological assemblages at each site. The second type of engagement is between Collis and Scott as they negotiate the leftover language of the decaying book – an engagement they record in photographs, in poems, and in journal entries of their experimentation. This ancillary writing both supplements and responds to the photographs, forming an ecology of thought or ideas to accompany the material ecology at the center of the project. In a 2013 interview with Jillian Harkness, Collis and Scott describe the project's approach:

> We started with the images of the decayed books. They presented a strange language of their own, or a language unique to what each ecosystem did to the book left in its midst. We had to learn this language, and begin writing with it. But, in trying to resist simple binaries of "culture" and "nature," we didn't want anything to be "pure"—we wanted to tamper with everything. So we included the process, our conversations about it, notes from other writers, research, etc. We realized that of course we, the people who left the books outside, are complicit in the process, behind which we can't hide. Everything had to keep being drawn back into the process of decomposition, of falling apart.

Here, "culture" and "nature" aren't separate, but become uneasily tangled as soon as language becomes involved. Like two circles touching at a single point, the messy set of intellectual and poetic relations playing out across *Decomp*'s pages seem to run parallel to the material relations that decompose the copies of Darwin.

Collis and Scott's inclination to "tamper" strikes a sour note though, as they deliberately confuse material agency and expressive chance in a sequence of poems that take "readable" chunks from the book in order to "gloss" them. Taken by themselves, Collis and Scott's photographs of the decayed Darwins dare us to make legible and make sense of what's left on the remaining pages as if they form just another erasure poem – a chance-based language game with nature as the dice. Collis and Scott chase this impulse, reflecting on what has been left by chance and attempting to divine, like Wah I-Chinging the rocks, some form of legibility. In the first gloss, they position the swatch of recovered Darwin at the center of the page:

> THE READABLE
>
> certainly the that the anonym *Natural* sion of the evolu rated
> fourteen the work it evisio had to more well as to artic wait (21)

They then place their gloss in the margin:

> GLOSS
>
> Without another
> name we are pinned
> sions of nomenclature saying *Natural* for its errancy, lost appropates who, uncertain, overlook fruited plains or more accurately these dry expanses of sage, seeds, the people who hunterd here, arsoned in dry grass. (21)

Out of the words left "readable" after decomposition, Collis and Scott draw some sense that speaks primarily to their own positions as the men in the photos. Are we to take

them as “lost appropates” – a word that sits somewhere between “appropriate” and “approbate” (with shades, to this ear, of “reprobate”) – between taking without permission, doing what is right given the situation, and formal approval of one’s actions.

Collis and Scott’s glosses are the self-conscious work of a pair of “appropates” – taking sense where they can, their actions underwritten by the codes of artistic experimentation, though not without a sense of guilt. On one hand, in even performing the gloss, Collis and Scott overidentify with a logic that looks to non-human actors to communicate, or at least to be legible or measurable. On the other, they respond to the often non-sensical erasures that appear in the decomposed texts with poetry that resists transparency, to the point that, when they get self-reflexive toward the end of *Decomp*, they admit bluntly that:

> There are no messages, no poetry after decomposition, but a minute ecological process in which we have no part but the donation of raw material for becoming dirt. Small anti-entropic pockets called ‘evolution’ amid the general irresistible lean of entropy. (92)

How do we square this circle, admitting the material story of ecological process at the same time as that ecology operates as a poem-generator? Even as Collis and Scott, in Moss’ words, “remind us that nature can’t even write,” they also can’t escape the imperative comment about the writing that nature does perform. In performing their own inability to not meddle or overcode, Collis and Scott also demonstrate the difficulty of poetry to just listen to the stories told by non-human actors without also making a narrative powerplay. The gap that *Decomp* emphasizes between ecological and poetic processes echoes Deleuze’s story about the analyst who, when faced with the illegible narration of the patient, begins to tamper with that story by applying a readymade set of categories. When Collis and Scott admit that there is no poetry after decomposition, despite pages and pages of attempts to produce that poetry, they admit their failure to listen to the material story being told, instead hauling their copies of Darwin back to their desks and offices to puzzle over and translate.

"I am still amazed that astrocapitalists insist on mining yet another asteroid, when poets on Earth struggle to write about their devotion to remain tied to a single wobbly planet"[72]

If, in the end, Collis and Scott seem *unsure* about their place and the place of their poetic experiment within the ecological procedures of the non-human world, perhaps that unsureness comes out of a friction between the utopian potential for avant-garde experiment to disrupt or unsettle dominant regimes based in a gamble that a text can gain enough relational heft to enable new forms of spatial practice and the reality that the disruptive power of human labour destroys the kinds of relational anchors needed by humans and non-humans to continue to live. With this in mind, I bring Christian Bök's work, specifically his unfinished project *The Xenotext*, into dialogue with Rita Wong's ecoactivist poetry in *Forage* (2007) and *Undercurrent* (2015). Both Bök and Wong conceptualize their work in terms of a kind of experiment – Bök as experimenter and Wong as experimented upon. Where Bök gets swept up by the modernist drive of science despite his claims for pataphysics as a radical critique of that drive, Wong expresses a worry – an *apprehension* – over the entangled operations of science and capitalism as they treat the earth as both dump and experiment. In an interview with Heather Milne, Wong frames experimentation not as something she does, but something she is part of without consent:

> I feel like I've been put into this experiment through genetic engineering and the sale of foods and things that are not labeled. I've been put into an experiment that I didn't choose or give consent to but am still a part of. So what does it mean in terms of how I work through my language? I think it disrupts syntax, and then you repiece things together as they are broken apart. (345-46)

Wong's sense of experiment carries a social dimension – a sense that her language and her body (along with other bodies) are caught up in a larger set of processes that she can't control. Wong inverts a typical stance of an experimental poetics in the way she figures the experiment of global capitalism as it blasts through syntax, a deterritorializing

[72] I borrow this section title from Joseph Schuster's *Jacket2* review of *The Xenotext Book 1*. Here, Schuster détournes a tweet of Christian Bök's where Bök announces, "I am still amazed that poets insist on writing about their divorces, when robots are taking pictures of orange, ethane lakes on Titan…." (Sept 8, 2012)

edge that leaves syntax broken, framing poetry as a response because of the ways it can piece understandings back together.

"Experiment" is a fraught term in the way that it speaks to both scientific and poetic procedures. To talk about experiment is to talk about the way that "something," whether language, relation, or physical matter, is being experimented *on*. As a vague term loosely applied to avant-garde or post-avant poetic procedures and forms, experimental describes a body of work fueled by a spirit of play, of just trying something out. In it, language is something to mess about with, minus the political valences of avant-garde or radical work. When experimentation becomes something done to material bodies, however, it becomes more apparent that it is a kind of engagement shaped by logics of valuation wherein some bodies are more valuable than others. Mel Y. Chen's elaboration of the slipperiness of animacy hierarchies provides a sense of the ways human and non-human actors are valued and devalued. In her book *Animacies* (2012), Chen inquires into both human understandings of the non-human and the materiality of non-human bodies as they enter into relation with the human. Usefully, Chen asks about the ways rhetoric and language around the non-human slide into different human-human and human-non-human engagements, reinforcing uneven and unjust social forms and processes. Chen turns to a complex hierarchy of *things*, running, top to bottom, from humans to animals to "inanimates" (plants, rocks and minerals, objects) to "incorporeals" (a catch-all for things like abstract concepts, natural forces, emotions, events, etc.). Despite this hierarchy, Chen observes the ways bodies can slide up and down the hierarchy as racialized human bodies are treated as animal or object while inanimate objects gain a kind of human agency. Countering this are calls like Lee Maracle's for a sense of value rooted in reciprocity and respect, in learning how to live together with human and non-human actors. Maracle argues that recognizing value involves understanding not only the relationships that humans have with the non-human world, but also the ways that human lives are bound up with the non-human.[73]

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[73] In *Memory Serves*, Maracle ties this valuation to history and memory, asking how story affects and codes practices through the absence of some actors, calling in response for "a sociological imagination that sees all life in its interconnectedness" (56), an imagination that calls into question Western historical practices that actively determine which historical relations are objectively important. Discussing the relative simultaneity of the September 11, 2001 destruction of the World Trade Center and the suicide of nine million sockeye salmon, Maracle wonders why one of those events was

Embedded in both of these formulations is a question about how engagements are shaped. For Wong, experimentation results in both bodies and language being disrupted, in relation being disrupted in favour of something new, but not necessarily better. Caught up in this is a tension between Merrifield's encounter and Simpson's engagement in the sense that the disruptive or "new" can create new possibilities with no guarantees for what those possibilities will be. In contrast, ethical engagement works more deliberately at putting something back together, not disruptive in a broad sense, but decolonial in the way it challenges dominant structures by constructing counter-assemblages – taking story back onto the land in order to rebuild relations destroyed by colonialism. Wong's work recognizes the tension between the assemblage as it both shapes relations and emerges from those same relations – the signs of an unintended experiment sprouting up through the concrete conjunctions of science and capital. This tension connects Bök and Wong's diametrically opposed practices as the experiment emerges as a kind of encounter or engagement that, despite its attempts, can't control all the variables that compose spaces. In her essay "Resuscitations in Rita Wong's *forage*: Globalization, Ecologies and Value Chains" (2009), Christine Kim observes the ways that Wong's "larger political project of decolonizing language and promoting social equality" (166) comes in *Forage* to a sharp focus on diffuse and less visible forms of domination. She argues that "[b]y scrutinizing byproducts of the global economy such as genetically engineered food, overfilled garbage dumps and exploitative labour practices, [Wong's] speaker underscores the need to examine different kinds of violence and complicity" (167). Wong's response, according to Kim, refigures Northrop Frye's "Where is here?" into a question about immediate material pressures:

> By asking the readers of *forage* to rework that familiar Can Lit question and consider "what is here?," the poems demand that we grapple with challenging ethical and political questions about how we inhabit this space and perpetuate ongoing problems of social power. (167)

Kim recognizes in Wong's work both a concern over her embodied, complicit position within conditions that aren't entirely in her control and a poetic invested in mapping the pressures those conditions apply to everyday encounters.

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framed as a massive historical rupture that reshaped international policy and the other was largely ignored, asserting not only that "[t]he suicide of sockeye is an event worthy of record, worthy of memory, and therefore worthy of study," but also that "[b]oth of these events are tied to a single social and economic system that shares the same history of social and physical degradation of human and salmon habitat" (53).

In the belly of this, Wong practices what Roy Miki calls a "poetics of the apprehensive." In his essay "Are You Restless Too? Not to Worry, So is Rita Wong: Towards a Poetics of the Apprehensive" from *In Flux* (2011), Miki turns to the definition of "apprehensive" to frame Wong's work as doubly attentive. For Miki, Wong's apprehensiveness emerges from both an affective, embodied unease and a quickness to apprehend a situation, arguing that this double definition "offers up a binary zone in which the nervous condition arising from insecurities that exceed control and threaten the well-being of the body exists alongside the vital capacity in the human organism to manage its conditions, including those conditions that might otherwise overwhelm its will to exist" (184). To link these, Miki turns to Wah's concept of the hyphen to connect the two parts of Wong's doubled apprehensiveness. For Miki, Wah's hyphen operates as "a graphic sign of division and connection that also signifies the instance of transition in which the one and other interface with each other" (184). In this context, Miki's invocation of Wah's sense of the hyphen seems a little out of joint, but it opens up a number of possibilities because of the ways Wong's poetics articulates a wide range not of voices, but of *bodies* as they connect through the parts they play in larger global networks of resource extraction and commodity production. Because of the way Miki displaces it from Wah's examination of mixed-race experience, the hyphen may be too precise a term for what Wong works through, but I would like to affirm the way Miki's move puts forward not only a reading of Wong's doubled apprehensiveness, but also both the importance of race to Wong's global mappings and the interconnections and encounters she dramatizes in both *Forage* and *Undercurrent* between human and non-human bodies and worlds. The sense of articulation embedded in the hyphen spills out across scales, connecting not only different aspects of an individual body, but different bodies as they meet in relation – hyphen becomes chain.

Wong questions the ways bodies (including the body of the poet herself) are incidental guinea pigs worked upon by the circuits of capitalism. In *Forage*'s "sort by day, burn by night," Wong makes explicit the interconnection of bodies on a global scale by asking about the fate of the metals that make up consumer electronics:

> where do metals come from?
> where do they return?
> bony bodies inhale carcinogenic toner dust,
> burn copper-laden wires,
> peer at old cathay, cathode ray tubes.

what if you don't live in guiyu village?
what if your Pentium got dumped in guiyu village?
your garbage, someone else's cancer?
economy of scale
shrinks us all (46-47)

Wong asks a series of questions that implicate global circuits of consumption in the poisoning of people in Guiyu – a hub for the disposal of electronic waste.[74] In *Undercurrent*, this worry expands to a larger examination of water as both universal solvent and substance composing much of our bodies. In her paper "Waters as Potential Paths to Peace" (2015), Wong turns to a mix of Bennett's vital materialism and ecological thinking to propose, counter to present conceptions of water as just another resource ready for exploitation, water as a kind of "hydrocommons" (216). "From this perspective," she argues, "water is no longer a singular, external object, but rather a material that animates us, and that we in turn animate. In tracing its transformative flows, our conceptions of internal/external, object/subject, singular/plural become complicated because water is no longer just something out there, but is very much the majority of what is in here, perpetually moving in a temporal flux" (216). For Wong, water operates not as a metaphor, but as a material substance through which bodies (human and non-human) are connected. Water courses through bodies and erodes rocks and minerals. It shapes affective landscapes and physical landforms. In the spirit of these circulations and in the same way that she asks of metal where it comes from and where it returns, Wong suggests that she "find[s] it helpful to contemplate where the water I drink comes from, and where it goes" (217).

Undercurrent, then, attempts to map the ways bodies are not only connected by a larger water system, but are also part of that system. The movements dramatized in Wong's fluid style imagine the swerving flow of water as both a vessel for environmental

[74] Wong's turn to the fraught agency of leached metals in a global economy echoes Chen's discussion of toxic metals in *Animacies*. Chen traces the complex assemblage around metals, turning from the "racialized discourses around lead" to mercury toxicity and "the vulnerability of human subjects in the face of ostensibly inanimate particles" (159). Heavy metals like lead give Chen a material point around which to articulate a hybrid position for the inanimate, as lead both materially threatens fragile bodies through its toxicity while also acting as part of a "master toxicity narrative" (164) posing the inherent health risk of Chinese products in a mass media health panic in 2007. As if in response to the same discourses of toxicity Chen outlines, Wong inverts the panic over toxic products from China into a discussion of the ways North American consumerism proves materially toxic to folks living in spaces like Guiyu.

devastation and a hopeful figure of interconnection – a doubled perspective inflected by the intersection of Wong's activist practice and her dialogues with Indigenous communities in both literary and activist settings.[75] Wong slides between registers, moving from polemic to anecdote, from clear sentences to disjunctive run-ons and fragments, formally staging the way "mess amasses" as both positive and negative and proposing through this that if "water has a syntax" (9) it amounts to more than the atomistic billiard balls of the cascading *clinamen* as water, alongside, within, and through the spatial organization of bodies, pools, infiltrates, seeps, erodes, and hardens. In conceptualizing these unpredictable and interlinked relations, capital and nature affecting one another unevenly, Wong makes an extended argument about the disruptive potential of extraction, distinguishing between short-term gains and long-term outcomes, like in this moment from "The Wonders of Being Several":

> thank the great decomposers
> quiet multitudes within
> as unsettlers excavate like there's no tomorrow
> so much short-term gold, long-term arsenic
> short-term bitumen, long-term cancer
> short-term packaging, long-term polyethylene
> for germs to reorganize (13)

Formally within the stanza, Wong situates the deterritorializing interference of the "unsettlers" (extractive industries nevertheless connected to processes of settler colonialism) within a microbiological system of biodegraders (as mentions of them bookend the stanza) while also positioning the microbes as "quiet multitudes within" – within not only their ecosystem and the capitalist production of it, but also within bodies. These unexpected and quiet reorganizations shift ecologies as the dumped waste of capital enters circuits of water and cells, making the body, for Wong, a site of intensive toxic accumulation as that waste burdens and poisons the body – made explicit in her two column poem "Body Burden: A Moving Target":

while body sweats	infiltrated by capital's loud shout
& sweats, porous	consumed while consuming
ongoing experiment	disorientated in proprioceptive profusion
rich in nurdles	seepage from decomposing bottle not just

[75] In her short essay "seeds, streams, see/pages" (2009), Wong argues that "acknowledging the work of [I]ndigenous women poets is central to a feminist poetics, an ethical practice, an imagining of a possible future that spirals backward and forward from filaments of collective memory" (21).

poor in ecological literacy plastic but democracy degrading
atrazine in your armpits? inner monster muscles up
pcbs in your pelvic core? as daily toxins come & go
furans in your feet? a revolving door
dioxins in your diaphragm? head & shoulders (40-41)

Printed on facing pages, Wong's lines read both down the page across the gutter. As it sweats while capital shouts into it, the body becomes an ongoing experiment, revolving door, and toxic sink, collecting material through its porousness – a porousness that connects to the larger water cycle, here dramatized in the seepage of chemicals from decomposing plastic.

Wong's sense of the ways that global forces pressure and perform on the intimate scale of the body gets most intensive in her discussion, her *apprehension*, of genetic engineering. In *Forage*, the poem "the girl who ate rice almost every day" poses a speculative narrative, in one column outlining U.S. agricultural patents relating to transgenics and in the other telling the story of Slow, a girl slowly poisoned by beets genetically crossed with cows. Caught in a transgenic experiment through her need to eat, Slow performs her own experiment, locally growing rice "rouged" by the transgenics-triggered red glow of her own excrement – rice that spreads hopefully like a weed. Through this narrative, Wong presents the ways that the laboratory connects to capital (through the patent system) as well as the body (through the food system). If this experiment within an experiment (taking control of the food system on a local scale) acts as one response, Wong also proposes another more accusatory response. She dedicates the poem "canola queasy" to Saskatchewan farmer Percy Schmeiser, sued by multinational Monsanto when their patented Roundup Ready canola ended up in his fields. Wong openly and loudly worries about the stability of the body (both human and canola) in the face of intensive and exploitative documentation and manipulation:

> how to converse with the willfully profitable stuck in their monetary monologue? head-on collisions create more energy but who gets obliterated? despite misgivings I blurt, don't shoot the messy angels with your cell-arranging blasts, don't document their properties in order to pimp them. the time for business-as-usual died with the first colonial casualty. reclaim the long now. hey bloated monstrosity: transcribe your ethics first or your protein mass shall turn protean mess and be auctioned off in the stacked market and so you can reap endless cussed stunts. (36)

Wong asks how to even speak to the monologuing forces of capitalism except to interrupt, calling them out on their intensive and intensified exploitation of the non-

human. The poem teases at a long and ongoing historical crisis, linking the documentation and genetic manipulation of canola to colonialism as "business-as-unusual" – disruptive and unsettling. In her apprehension, Wong proposes an interesting causality where failing to consider and communicate the ethical responsibilities of a set of experimental practices leads to the destabilization of the physical body – protein mass slipping into protean mess.

With this in mind, how do we approach Bök's *Xenotext*, which, in transcribing a poem into a host bacteria, proposes a very different relationship to the body?. Bök exploits a tension between "imaginary solution" and scientific procedure – the central tension of pataphysics – to enable a turn to the materiality of the body as a medium to solve a largely aesthetic problem. Like Wong, Bök positions the body as it is acted upon by external forces, but where Wong outlines the ethical problems with treating the body as a medium for experimentation, Bök positions himself as experimenter, ethics be damned. With *The Xenotext*, Bök proposes "to address some of the sociological implications of biotechnology by manufacturing a 'xenotext' – a beautiful, anomalous poem, whose 'alien words' might subsist, like a harmless parasite, inside the cell of another life form" (229).[76] He draws inspiration from three thinkers (cybernetic expert Pak Wong, multimedia artist Eduardo Kac, and astronomic expert Paul Davies) who, as he describes in his essay "The Xenotext Experiment" (an early attempt to describe the project's concept), "have all suggested the degree to which the biochemistry of living things has become a potential substrate for inscription" (228).

For Bök, then, biochemical inscription presents a compelling spatial fix for human culture as it stares down extinction – a spacebound golden record scribed onto a living body. As a procedure, it operates as a limit case for Bök's investment in the intersection of science and poetry, standing at the site where poetry doesn't just goof on scientific discourse, but actually enters into the material assemblage of science itself. In his book *'Pataphysics: The Poetics of an Imaginary Science* (2002), Bök traces the historical legacy of Alfred Jarry's 'pataphysics[77] to tease out the ways science and poetry conflict

[76] In a trope found throughout Bök's work, this same language, with some minor revisions, is found in the "Viva Explicata" that closes *The Xenotext Book 1* (2015).

[77] Rather than chase the various conventions regarding the apostrophe attached to the beginning of the word pataphysics (marking difference between international and

and correspond. Science, according to Bök, is "a complex tissue of hybrid tensions" (15), comparable to poetry in certain ways:

> Like poetry, science is a bricolage of figures, an assemblage of devices, none of which fit together perfectly – but unlike poetry, science must nevertheless subject its tropes to a system, whose imperatives of both verity and reality normally forbid any willing suspension of disbelief. (15)

Science's system of "verity and reality" holds for Bök a much different relationship to authorship than poetry does. "Science moves toward anonymity," he suggests, whereas "[p]oetry moves toward eponymity" (15).[78] These conflicting authorial stances serve different interests, according to Bök, as "[t]he absence of the author in science serves an *allotelic* interest (justifying itself for the sake of a finality outside its own language), while the presence of the author in poetry serves an *autotelic* interest (justifying itself for the sake of a finality inside its own language)" (15). In other words, in science, the author recedes into a larger truth-seeking apparatus, serving some end outside of themselves, whereas in poetry, the author serves no end other than the work itself. For Bök, the aesthetic goals of a text supercede whatever social position or effects that text might take part in. In this framing, pataphysics transversally connects scientific and poetic practices through the ways it "valorizes the exception to each rule in order to subvert the procrustean constraints of science" (5), operating as a kind of Deleuze-styled "nomad" science meant to subvert or mutate the rigid dictums of a state or "royal" science. For

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Canadian variations), I'm largely choosing to follow Adam Dickinson's use of the apostropheless version of the word.

[78] This difference in authorship also corresponds to Bök's characterization of the differences between lyric and conceptual poetry in his essay "Two Dots Over a Vowel" (2009) where he argues that conceptual poets "disavow the lyrical mandate of self-conscious self-assertion in order to explore the ready-made potential of uncreative literature" (11). He goes further, close reading Steve McCaffery's poem "William Tell: A Novel" (a concrete poem where a lowercase i is given an extra dot like an apple on its head) to make an analogy about this difference, loosely aligning the lyric poet with Tell, who successfully shoots the apple off his son's head (restoring the letter i to a marker of the self), and the conceptual poet with William Burroughs, who shot his wife in a barroom game of William Tell. Bök argues that Burroughs gains authorship from killing his wife, becoming a kind of antihero who must escape justice. But it's important to remember that Bök's analogy fails when considering that Burroughs doesn't shoot *himself* (thereby eliminating *his* self), but instead shoots the other, a snag that raises ethical issues, particularly in the long shadow of Kenneth Goldsmith's 2015 performance of "The Body of Michael Brown," which controversially reproduced and revised the autopsy of police shooting victim Brown – another example of a writer claiming authorship through someone else's death.

Bök, 'pataphysics produces a contact zone between science and artistic production that opens the possibility of a *clinamen* or swerve of exception, producing a line of flight that reconfigures the field it participates in.

Both Bök and compatriot Darren Wershler (née Wershler-Henry) present the *clinamen* as an important operation within Canadian "Pataphysics – a swerve based in a kind of appropriation or parody of the authority of science and the state. Bök and Wershler imagine a Baudrillardian fatal strategy, becoming more scientific than science in order to oppose it. Bök historicizes the move of Canadian "Pataphysics, exemplified in the work of bpNichol, Steve McCaffery, and Christopher Dewdney, as a critical move against the "mythomania of thematic thinkers" (86) like Northrop Frye and Margaret Atwood. In response, according to Bök, Nichol and McCaffery propose "rational geomancy" as a method of counterreading that works "against the grain" of a nationalist cartography, refracting the geomantic "art of divination" that "interpret[s] the signs of the earth, its telluric rhythms and tectonic stresses" (86) into a textual practice that reverses the thematic approach to myth and memory. Bök argues that "[w]hereas a thematic pedagogue (such as Frye or Atwood) interprets sovereign geography as a metaphysical cipher for a mythic memory (believing such a 'myth' to be true), a rational geomancer interprets memory itself as a 'pataphysical cipher for an imaginary landscape (believing the 'true' to be a myth)" (86). Rational geomancy bucks against the spatializations of a then-dominant nationalism. But, with its drive to destabilize the truth of science and the state and produce a pataphysical smooth space, this reversal risks ignoring (or, worse, exploiting) the material relations that compose space – the risk inherent in Wurstwagen's recoding of Port Carling. When Wershler, in his essay "Canadian Pataphysics: Geognostic Interrogations of a Distant Somewhere" (1994), simultaneously celebrates the work of Wurstwagen while also announcing the potential for pataphysics to become "supplementary to efforts by postcolonial scholars attempting to re-insert the obscured history of indigenous and colonized peoples, by demonstrating the absurdity of the theories and methodologies of the colonizers themselves" (75), he somehow misses the fact that Wurstwagen doesn't remediate the erasure of spaces and spatial histories (like Compton or Nicholson do), but instead further obscures those histories with his proto-Mayan hijinks. If there is a potential for the imaginary solutions of pataphysics, doesn't it need to explicitly address this ethical gap between invention and representation in a way that holds itself responsible to the material relationships that compose the world?

At the centre of *The Xenotext* is two poems that represent, for Bök, a junction of science and poetry. The first, "Orpheus," is a short sonnet translated into a genetic sequence that can be implanted in the DNA of a bacteria – early tests use the common bacteria *E. coli*, with the later goal of implanting it in the indestructible extremophile *D. radiodurans*, which has a better chance to survive for eons in inhospitable conditions. The second poem, "Eurydice," is a similar sonnet "written in response" by the bacteria itself as the genetic code implanted by Bök is transcribed into a protein. At its surface, Bök's project proposes a poetic kind of encounter between lovers, a call-and-response where the bacteria is on equal footing with the poet. In all this, Bök finds himself caught between both literary and scientific assemblages, but when he considers the ethics of his project, he imagines those ethics in cultural terms. He transcribes his sense of ethics in a podcast interview with the *Missouri Review.*[79] Asked to speak to his intimations to immortality, Bök presents human cultural preservation as an ethical imperative:

> Well, my naysayers will say to me that that's an act or hubris – to imagine writing a poem that lasts forever. Who are you to write a poem that might last forever? And I would say I'm just like you. That I think there's an ethical requirement for the only sentient civilization in the universe to actually find ways to preserve its cultural legacy over epochal time. I mean, our presence on the planet is potentially limited and ephemeral. That would be a sad thing if we disappear and there's no testament to our presence here. (31:39 – 32:31)

The Xenotext is Bök's answer to this imperative and to the sad ephemerality of human existence. Unlike Wong, who imagines the "legacy" of human activity as the build up of toxic chemicals in bodies, Bök can only imagine a cultural legacy tied to the end of the world and the extinction of the human species.

Pulled from the twin obsessions of extinction and preservation, Bök's poems reveal a split attention to two scales: the massive movements of the planetary and the intimate, internal expressions of genetics. At the same time, *The Xenotext* proposes a long temporality of crisis that spans eons. In "The Late Heavy Bombardment," Bök lays out a problematic analogy between the destructive geological events of the Hadean Eon and the various scientific, political, *man-made* catastrophes that run through the history

[79] The interview is conducted by Leanna Petronella, Sera Holland, and Carlotta Battelli - http://www.missourireview.com/audiovisual/2016/04/07/a-conversation-with-christian-bok/

of the twentieth century (the holocaust, nuclear testing, revolution). Bök's analogy typically draws a perfect symmetry: where the violent destruction of the Hadean leads to the formation of the Earth and the destructive capacities of man risk mass extinctions and genocide. This conjunction of longer geological time and the more recent environmental destruction within the Anthropocene creates, within the larger terms of *The Xenotext*, a kind of nihilism that provokes Bök's fatal approach, treating, famously at this point, the genetic material of a bacteria as the vessel to preserve his creative genius against a guaranteed extinction – a biological monolith designed for a non-human readership. Reading a doubled fatality in Bök's approach – both his fatalism about the destruction of the Earth and his strategic and potentially ironic pataphysical surrender to science – Robert Majzels poses in his essay "The Xenotext Experiment and the Gift of Death" (2013) that Bök's response to human extinction "compels [Majzels] to reflect on [his] responsibility to that biosphere":

> The Xenotext calls upon us to turn our face away from the heavens and back to the smallest living being on this our planet. What is my responsibility toward that nucleotide, and toward the bacteria which I encode with my message? I am compelled to reflect, not only on the attribution of value to different organisms, based on criteria like size and closeness to my own species, but also on my attitude towards the other in general. (n. pag.)

Majzels' response to Bök's project pivots around a particular inversion of Bök's logic, proposing that, instead of writing outward into the blackness of space to an alien species, Bök instead disrupts the poetic speech of an alien species that exists on Earth – the bacteria itself as the alien species. For Majzels, Bök's Xenotext Project "imagines it is initiating a conversation, when the other has already been speaking" (n. pag.). In turning the microscope around, Majzels' reading points us to the question missing from Bök's own understanding of his project: where is the bacteria in the *Xenotext* and how does Bök valuate it?

In order for Majzels' repositioning of the Xenotext to be useful in a spatial reading, we can't take him literally. Bacteria *speak*, but do so *materially*, creating material effects as they enter into relation with other bodies, telling stories in the same way that Zoe Todd describes the stories of Northern Alberta fish. The bacteria needs to be understood as a material actor with agency, certainly, but only if that agency is part of a distribution across a larger assemblage – for Bök, the intersecting assemblages of

science and literature. Engaging with the assembled spatialities of *The Xenotext* requires challenging two connected tenets of the project: understanding the bacteria's genetic code as inscriptive surface or media and understanding the bacteria as a co-author of its own genetic recombination. In his essay "The Xenotext Experiment, So Far" (2012), Darren Wershler discusses the bacteria as inscriptive surface. Wershler frames Bök's project as a transversal boundary object working in an intermedial zone between the typically mutually exclusive practices of science and poetics by extending and refining a fairly recent practice[80] that treats the bodies and genetic code of different organisms as both archive and collaborator. Wershler frames Bök's experiment as an example of "biomedia" (a concept he draws from Eugene Thacker) that stands as "a project designed to assess the aesthetic potential of genetics in contemporary culture" (47) – a project that, stated dramatically, stands to fundamentally alter everything about poetic production:

> But if a specific instance of biomedia codes a poem according to a digital algorithm, recodes that algorithm into a biological relationship such as the genetic sequence of DNA, and then decodes the results after rNA transcription, the poem may have changed; yet, so has what it means to be a poet, what it means to write poetry, what counts as an act of publishing, and how we think of poetry. (46)

For Wershler, Bök's project proposes a paradigm shift where, thanks to the link made between genetics and poetry, the aesthetic potential of the genetic process can be unlocked. The potential of genetic inscription leads Bök to a speculative moment that echoes his interest in pataphysics. "In the future," he daydreams, "genetics might lend a possible, literary dimension to biology, granting every geneticist the power to become a poet in the medium of life" ("The Xenotext Experiment" 229).

How does this investment in life as medium jive with Bök's different framings of the relationship he enters into with the bacteria? Over the course of the interviews, essays, and talks in which he narrates the project, Bök returns to three figures to conceptualize his relationship to the bacteria – archive, machine, and co-author – which propose slightly different positions with regard to agency and instrumentality. In an

[80] In his paper, Wershler carefully historicizes Bök's project by situating it inside a trajectory of scientists and artists experimenting with "biomedia"

explanation he gives in a 2014 interview with Kaveh Akbar,[81] Bök frames his project as not just an archive for his poem, but also a bit of productive machinery:

> I have written this text in such a way that when it is inserted, as a gene, into the cell, the organism can actually read the poem, interpreting the gene, as a set of instructions for building a protein—one whose string of amino acids are themselves a totally different encipherment of a totally different poem. I am trying, in effect, to engineer a bacterium so that it becomes not only an archive for storing my poem, but also a machine for generating a poem in response. (n. pag.)

In the move from passive archive to active machine, Bök means to shift the bacteria from merely an inscriptive surface to propose the way that the processes of DNA and RNA transcription can be captured to generate a second poem. Designing this machine, Bök's invents a "pataphysical game of "mutual encipherment," where each letter in the alphabet is connected to another letter to form a cipher that mimics genetic transcription processes. In this, Bök inputs one poem into the machinic bacteria and stands outside, tapping his foot, waiting for the output – an output he determines when he designs the cipher that scripts the new poem. But Bök's language doesn't limit itself to instrumentalization, instead moving to give the bacteria a kind of authorship. The move, then, is from passive archive to active but instrumentalized machine to agental author. In a 2013 talk given at Simon Fraser University, Bök describes the call-and-response nature of the poem implanted in the bacteria and its enciphered response:

> Now the text on the left is written by me as a masculinist assertion about the aesthetic creation of life. While the text on the right is written by the microbe, I think, as a kind of feminine refutation about the woebegone absence of life. And the two poems resemble Petrarchan sonnets – abbreviated sonnets in dialogue with each other much like poems in the elegiac pastoral tradition of the herd boy and the nymphette. (28:32-29:02)

Bök's reading of his own poems is interesting for the way it forwards the bacteria's authorial agency, but only in the literary frame of the pastoral, with Bök as "herd boy" and bacteria as "nymphette."

In this frame, if Bök takes the stance of Christopher Marlowe's Passionate Shepherd, pleading "[c]ome live with me and be my love," the bacteria can only refute in the style of Sir Walter Raleigh's nymph, who reminds the shepherd of the fact that a

[81] http://www.divedapper.com/interview/christian-bok/

utopian vision of love (like a poem) cannot last forever because eventually all things must die. This framing of the intimate engagement between Bök and bacteria makes a certain kind of compositional sense, as Bök rewrites well-worn chestnuts from any classics course or first year literary survey (Marlowe/Raleigh, Orpheus/Eurydice), but what limits does this frame put on the way that engagement can happen? In a critical review of *The Xenotext*, Andreae Callanan poses the problematic way this pastoral relation shapes the way that Bök relates to the bacteria. Callanan catalogues the feminine figures of Bök's text – "nursemaids, handmaidens, hamadryads, concubines, courtesans, odalisques, that is, figures of domestic and sexual servitude." For Callanan, "the 'feminine' response [to Bök's poem] is only a success if it tells him what he wants to hear, and what he wants to hear are the words he has written for the female speaker to tell him." If the pre-designed scientific encipherment Bök toys with marks one valence of the kind of response available to the bacteria, Callanan marks another valence of the way the bacteria is doubly articulated – caught in both the material procedures of genetic science and the expressive regimes of poetic history that further harden the bacteria's response.

Is this the way we want to think about the bacteria's agency? Are the bacteria's actions only legible in response to Bök's? Claiming for the bacteria a kind of co-authorship makes a great deal of sense when read alongside Bennett's conceptualization of distributive agency, but introducing distributive agency and assemblage requires one more turn of Bök's relational screw. We need to remember that Bök's *Xenotext* is not an *imaginary solution* to a scientific problem, but is instead a *technical procedure* carried out on a body (however minor) to solve a largely aesthetic problem. The fact that Bök's engagement with the bacteria happens in and is enabled by a larger assemblage requires us to ask how that instrumentalizing assemblage shapes Bök's engagement. "Authorship" becomes a collective enterprise that is not limited to Bök (despite his name on the cover of the book) or Bök and the bacteria (despite Bök's claims of co-authorship), but is the result of a whole assemblage of actors, most of whom are oriented to achieving Bök's aesthetic goal. Within this, Bök's work is limited by the constraining physiology of the bacteria, not only in his mimicking of DNA/RNA replication through the linguistic constraint of mutual encipherment, but also through the bacteria's ability to incorporate new genetic information. There is a ironic grace note in the way Bök's desire for immortality has, to date, been refused by the bacteria/nymph.

But just because Bök can go with the grain of the bacteria's biological processes doesn't mean that he *listens* to the bacteria in the sense that Kwesens (and Simpson) urge us to listen and be attentive to the work of non-human actors on the land. If this sounds silly, it might be because bacteria are routinely worked with in scientific labs and are deep down the animacy hierarchy right above lifeless rocks and minerals. They're just bacteria after all, without much value even as we live in close relation to them and depend on them for our own biological processes. Bacteria have an agency, but not in the authorial sense that Bök insists upon.

In claiming authorship and agency for the bacteria, Bök seeks to absolve his sins without acknowledging that he and the bacteria aren't the only agents in the assemblage, or at least without acknowledging the pressures those agents exert on the shape of his engagment with the bacteria. In the process of producing the poem, every part of the assemblage around it has agency. Every scientist, every theory, every piece of equipment in the laboratory bears down on the body of the bacteria. This shared agency generates a thick logic that diagrams and shapes the paths available to the bacteria. Success, for Bök, involves a single choice that the bacteria must make: encipher. Under the imperative weight of the agental field however, the bacteria is able to respond in ways other than prescripted call-and-response, through its rejection of scientific instrumentalization – the bacteria as superweed. Like Wong imagines herself as subject to an experiment she *did not consent to*, we need to ask how consentual Bök's relationship to the bacteria is. Treating *The Xenotext* as part of a material assemblage (rather than merely as a aesthetic experiment) requires that any failed attempts to bring the bacteria to hand and to heel be read as responses from the bacteria itself as both valid assertions of its own presence and as resistance to Bök's technical procedure. If the bacteria *speaks* to us, it's in the sense related by Todd when she asks what stories sturgeon tell with their bodies and movement, rather than in the language of Virgil and the classical myth of Orpheus and Eurydice. In other words, Todd's understanding of the material embodied stories of the non-human is *not the same* as Bök's heavily enciphered pastoral myth. The bacteria's story is in its reproduction and proliferation. Bök's is in the capture and exploitation of those reproductive processes.

Meeting The Material Halfway

In *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, Karen Barad works through what she calls a "nonanalogical" approach to science studies and quantum physics that accounts for the contingencies of matter across scales from the atomic to the global. She asserts that she is "not interested in drawing analogies between particles and people, the micro and the macro, the scientific and the social, nature and culture" and instead works to understand "the epistemological and ontological issues that quantum physics forces us to confront" (24). Barad's insistence on the nonanalogical poses a set of limits for a poetic project like Bök's, particularly as it imagines the bacteria as a collaborator or a pastoral nymph. To work nonanalogically is to insist on the materiality and material agency of all the actors in a spatial field (while acknowledging that the kinds of analogies Bök appeals to also circulate and shape material territories). While I don't want to foreclose on any poetics that uses analogy or metaphor to think through engagement with the non-human – I share, however skeptically, Dickinson's desire to find value in metaphor – I do want to insist that the materiality of the world does pose a limit to any attempt to stage or perform ethical engagement. If, as Leanne Simpson argues, story and other forms of expression change depending on the way they are grounded in social and spatial relations, then we need to be attentive to the difficult ways aesthetic or formal decisions on the page and material relations off the page connect to and shape one another.

If Rita Wong provides an exemplary case study for thinking about an ecological poetics invested in ethical engagement, it's because she explicitly struggles with this tension between poetic form and material relation. When Wong discusses the importance of water in "Waters as Potential Paths to Peace," she focuses on water's materiality, ending with a call to act ethically and in solidarity with the human and non-human actors that water brings us into relation with:

> It is very late, but not too late, to find a focus for solidarity and peacemaking through the water-based ecology that connects, not just humans, but animals, plants, and life at the micro and macro scales. We inhabit a historical moment where it is increasingly urgent to reconsider the implications of water's materiality; if we adapt our ways of knowing to learn from and respect the fluidity that constitutes us both individually and socially, a humble, joyful, meaningful future-in-commons could still be generated together. (219)

If building these kinds of material solidarities is central Wong's project, how does this shape her formal choices, particularly as they change between *Forage* and *Undercurrent*? Echoing Stephen Morton's argument that the different spatial poetics of the Tish and KSW groups emerges as a result of wildly different sets of conditions locally and generationally, we should ask how Wong's activist approach responds to a contemporary moment and situation that includes resistance to extractivist projects like the Alberta Tar Sands, the array of proposed pipeline projects across the continent, and, recently, resistance to the Site-C Dam in Northern British Columbia.

Like the earlier groups Morton discusses, Wong's focus on materiality and material action pushes her to take a different formal approach, particularly in *Undercurrent*, that openly critiques the unethical engagements at the junction of capitalism and colonialism, while affirming a commitment to the kinds of solidarities she calls for in "Waters as a Potential Path to Peace." For example, in the poem "Declaration of Intent," Wong outlines a sense of how she plans to engage with others through a shared relationship to water:

> i will apprentice myself to creeks and tributaries, groundwater & glaciers
> listen for the salty pulse within, the blood that recognizes marine ancestry
> in its chemical composition & intuitive pull
> i will learn through immersion, flotation & transformation
> as water expands & contracts, i will fit myself to its ever-changing dimensions
> molecular & spectacular, water will return what we give it, be that
> arrogance & poison, reverence & light, ambivalence & respect
> let our societies be revived as watersheds (14)

There's a sense of Barad's nonanalogical thinking, particularly in the way Wong makes it clear that the watershed isn't a metaphor for society, but is instead a set of relations she needs to not only apprentice herself to, but also recognize the way her "salty pulse" is already part of the watershed. Wong's formal approach eschews linguistic play (a key component of *Forage*) in favour of language that privileges directness over ambiguity. This move to directness comes out of Wong's desire to put things back together rather than break things apart, creating solidarities through a poetics of recoding (rather than decoding) that attends to its relationships off the page.

Wong's poetic directness attempts, to paraphrase Barad, to *meet the material halfway*, working as both a form of research and pedagogy into the ways Wong's body and other bodies engage one another in and through the watershed. In this sense,

Undercurrent relays Wong's findings, looking to not provide an ambiguous point where a reader might abstractly reflect upon the issues, but rather to provide an account of her engagements off the page, mapping the material solidarities that Wong and others work toward. Where we need to cast a pessimistic eye on Wong's project, however, is in how it needs to not only act as a record of Wong's thought, but also needs to provoke its readers into action as well – operating as a pedagogical tool not unlike the story Simpson tells us about Kwesens. The cover blurbs of *Undercurrent* belie this sense as Wang Ping and Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm both praise the book for the way it stands both to "jolt us into action" and to "move you to try engaging your fellow beings and the water we share." This hope for work like Wong's to jolt or move its readers isn't misplaced – I share this hope – but it does rely on a kind of rupturing event - an aleatory swerve of the kind Merrifield pins his hopes to. A "jolt" might not be enough to open up conditions where *Undercurrent* (and other texts like it) could guide us to find new ways of living together. In a sense, Wong finds herself caught without guarantees in the face of a thickly stable apparatus.

While Wong works to more ethically engage the non-human world, she does so within a thick set of ecologies that do two things. First, they work to stabilize an instrumentalized and extractive relation to land, leveraging colonial property relations to accumulate profit on the backs of the non-human while destroying Indigenous ways of life. Second, these ecologies pressure individual actors to articulate themselves in ways amenable to that stabilized assemblage, lest they be articulated through violence, excluded or eliminated from that structure. Wong's attempt to make her ethics *legible*, hopefully jolting others into action, crashes hard against the immoveable object of already existing relations. In the face of this, "action" feels like an inadequate term – every one of us is always acting, always doing something that works to stabilize or destabilize the assemblages we're in. It's not that doing nothing is easier than doing something, but rather that the actions we take are enabled by the relations around us, by the possibilities opened up and shut down in our thick ecologies.

My pessimism around action carries forward into my final chapter, which asks how the thick stabilities of space produce race. As a junction of expressive codes and material territorializations that *articulate* the body, racialization emerges as a process within a viscous set of relations. Speaking to this problem in relation to the Black Atlantic diaspora in the wake of slavery, Christina Sharpe turns to the weather as a metaphor or,

better, a kind of *diagram* to describe the pervasiveness of antiblackness in North America. She argues that "the weather is the totality of our environments; the weather is the total climate; and that climate is antiblack" (104). The weather as ecology produces a set of possibilities as well as limits:

> In what I am calling the weather, antiblackness is pervasive as climate. The weather necessitates changeability and improvisation; it is the atmospheric condition of time and place; it produces new ecologies. *Ecology: the branch of biology that deals with the relations of organisms to one another and to their physical surroundings; the political movement that seeks to protect the environment, especially from pollution*. [. . .] The weather transforms Black being. But the shipped, the held, and those in the wake also produce out of the weather their own ecologies. When the only certainty is the weather that produces a pervasive climate of anti-blackness, what must we know in order to move through these environments in which the push is always toward Black death? (106)

Sharpe echoes Manning's appeal to a social and spatial ecology to argue for an emergent climatic struggle between a dominant antiblackness and the ability of black folks to assemble into counterecologies, calms in the weather that look like storms from outside. Weather as ecology involves the assembled relations that not only produce space, but also scrutinize and articulate individual bodies. In what follows, I want to expand the questions about engagement I ask in this chapter. If engagement brings the stakes of spatial production down to the very intimate scale, articulation multiplies that engagement, asking how individual bodies are pushed into a field of potential actions as an array of engagements identifes and polices them. Counter to Merrifield, who, looking for hope in the relational rainstorm, gambles on the aleatory potential of an errant raindrop, I want to ask how those raindrops fall in the first place, before posing the ways they can rearrange themselves into different patterns, different stabilities, different spatial potentials.

Chapter 3

Articulating the Body in Racializing Assemblages

> You will be organized, you will be an organism, you will articulate your body – otherwise you're just depraved. You will be a signifier or signified, interpreter and interpreted – otherwise you're just a deviant. You will be a subject, nailed down as one, a subject of the enunciation recoiled into a subject of the statement – otherwise you're just a tramp. (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 159)

> Surveillance is nothing new to black folks. It is the fact of antiblackness. (Browne, *Dark Matters* 10)

In her book *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (2006), Katherine McKittrick argues that "[t]he production of space is caught up in, but does not guarantee, longstanding geographic frameworks that materially and philosophically arrange the planet according to a seemingly stable white, heterosexual, classed vantage point" and, further, notes that "[p]ractices of domination, sustained by a unitary vantage point, naturalize both identity and place, repetitively spatializing where nondominant groups 'naturally' belong" (xv). The racializing frameworks that McKittrick critiques put nondominant groups "in place," *articulating* their bodies and movements in accordance with naturalizing codes – what Roy Miki pointedly calls "the race codes that bind" (*Broken Entries* 205) - that shape not only the affective regimes of belonging and unbelonging, but also the material processes composing an assemblage, defining and policing not only who lives in a space, but also *how* they live there. This question of "not only who, but also how" acknowledges that assemblages can be both exclusionary, hardening their borders against certain actors and bodies, and articulatory, shaping or even determining the paths and possibilities for different forms of life.

In this chapter, I want to ask how poetry addresses the racializing assemblages that help produce the stable relations of Canada and articulate the kinds of engagements possible at more intimate scales. This question of articulation works at the tension point of spatial stability/instability and ethical/unethical engagement, inquiring into the ways bodies are articulated and spaces are diagrammed, that is, of the codes and territorializations that shape spatial relations and the paths open to different individuals and groups within those relations. These racializing assemblages result from

an entanglement of diagrammatic logics that shape how race is produced spatially, through a wide array of engagements and encounters that locate and dislocate individual bodies within the larger assemblage. First, I will look at the work of Phinder Dulai, Erín Moure, and Souvankham Thammavongsa, each of whom take up the border as both an expressive concept and a set of material procedures. All three work to challenge the way the border as geopolitical line and biopolitical method forms both a limit to inclusion within the nation (or any assemblage) and a point at which the body is articulated and policed. After this, I will look to the work of Dionne Brand, Annharte, and Marvin Francis, all of whom look for ways to resist the articulatory power of the racializing assemblage, from the use of counter performance to the search for forms of relation outside of dominant spatial regimes.

In Canada (as elsewhere), the production of race is tied up with the production of space. In the introduction to her edited collection *Race, Space, and the Law* (2002), Sherene H. Razack suggests that "[t]he story of the land as shared and as developed by enterprising settlers is manifestly a racial story" where European settlers become "bearers of civilization" who are "entitled to the land" and Indigenous peoples are "consigned forever to an earlier space and time," and other people of colour are "scripted as late arrivals" (2-3). Proposing that we "unmap" space, Razack asks a series of questions that tie white supremacy and settler colonialism together through the simultaneous production of race and space:

> Who do white citizens know themselves to be and how much does an identity of dominance rely upon keeping racial others firmly *in place*? How are people kept in their place? And, finally, how does place become race? We ask these questions here in the fervent belief that white settler societies can transcend their bloody beginnings and contemporary inequalities by remembering and confronting the racial hierarchies that structure our lives. (5)

Asking how place becomes race insists on the role of spatial relation in processes of racialization – processes that involve interlocking material and expressive components that inform one another. In the introduction to *In Flux*, Roy Miki speaks about this as a tension between centripetal and centrifugal forces, that is, forces acting to stabilize and destabilize Canada as a relational formation. He describes a shift in the way this tension has been framed, from a centripetal Canadian nationalism's struggles against outside

British and American forces to dominant "Canadianness"'s (Anglo-Saxon and other white European groups) struggles against minority groups within the space of the nation.

Iyko Day also identifies this inside/outside tension as central to North American settler colonialism. In *Alien Capital* (2016) and article "Being or Nothingness: Indigeneity, Antiblackness, and Settler Colonial Critique" (2015), Day historicizes how processes of racialization work through immanent logics and how diasporic and Indigenous concerns are articulated together in settler colonialism. Day recognizes a tension that emerges from the different politics in Canada and the continental U.S., observing that in Canada "colonial dispossession is the paradigmatic signifier of white settler supremacy," whereas "in the continental United States it has been the legacy of slavery and antiblack racism" (103) – a differential focus that does not erase the realities of Native American genocide or slavery in Canada. Instead of a conceptualization that privileges either black or Indigenous suffering, Day argues for a dialectical reading of settler colonialism that positions blackness and Indigeneity as different parts of an exploitative machinery:

> Putting colonial land and enslaved labor at the center of a dialectical analysis, we can see that blackness is neither reducible to Indigenous land nor Indigeneity to enslaved labor. Indigenous peoples and slaves are not reducible to each other because settler colonialism abides by a dual logic that is originally driven to eliminate Native peoples from land and mix the land with enslaved black labor. If land is the basis of settler colonialists' relationship to Indigenous peoples, it is labor that frames that relationship with enslaved peoples. (113)

In *Alien Capital*, Day expands this tension between the appropriation of land and the appropriation of labour, accounting for Asian North American diasporic groups. She challenges the binary that categorizes people based on their relationship to settler colonialism as either settler or Indigenous by adding a third term: alien.

Day asserts that the category of settler flattens out the complex racializations of non-Indigenous groups. Drawing a triangle, Day poses that the settler colonial relationship to the "alien" is tied up in the settler relationship to Indigeneity. If the settler colonial relationship with Indigenous nations involves the theft and appropriation of their land, the settler colonial relationship with alien populations involves the exploitation of their labour in order to work and develop that land – from the use of black slaves in American Agriculture to the use of Chinese labourers to build the railroads. Where settler relations to Indigenous populations are shaped through a logic of elimination, relations to

alien populations are shaped through a logic of exclusion. These logics shift with context and history, however – something she carefully points to in the ways various exclusionary logics affect black and Asian populations in North America:

> In a settler colonial context, these variable, exclusionary logics have resulted in the heterogeneous racialization of the alien: the African American, whose *indisposability* in the settler state requires a heightened form of racialized exclusion as a form of domestic social control, and the Asian North American, whose *disposability* from the settler state produces a less fixed and more volatile racialization by virtue of the exclusionary power of immigration restriction (33)

Day bases her division between indisposability and disposability on the ease of jettisoning or excluding particular bodies from the nation-state – a division rooted in the differing economic requirements fulfilled by slavery and foreign labour. Day identifies a fundamental difference in how black bodies and Asian bodies have been controlled and administrated in North America. Day suggests that "[b]ecause the industrial economy that Asian labor served did not require a permanent, reproducible, exclusive, and violently contained population of alien labor, as was the case under US slavery, the exclusionary tactics that Asians were subjected to never approximated those experienced by black slaves" (32). Where black bodies, wracked by a cultural break inaugurated by the violent practices of the transatlantic slave trade, required a system of exclusionary practices (Jim Crow, mass incarceration, everyday racism) that controlled a population *within* national borders, Day observes that the labour of Asian bodies has historically been leveraged *at* the border through laws that and practices that restrict the movements of those bodies.

The dual logic Day proposes can help us work through contemporary examples because of the ways that the elimination of the relations that compose land and the exclusion of undesirable labouring bodies appear in more contemporary and racially-mixed contexts – in the destruction of Hogan's Alley and the Downtown Eastside or in the settler colonial imagining of Indigenous folks as absent from cities, for instance. As spatial logics or *diagrams*, I want to suggest that we think through elimination and exclusion not only as historically-determined orientations to specific communities, but also as emergent assemblages that can shape racialization in unexpected and multiple ways. Miki provides us with a place to start thinking about this with critical and creative work that critiques Canadian state and processes of racialization by employing scopic

and linguistic formal approaches – a junction that admits the entangled nature of material and expressive components. In his short essay "Can I See Your ID?: Writing in the Race Codes that Bind" (1998), Miki proposes "[a] poetics of migrancy [that] would reject the discourse of 'differences' construed in a normative system of power hierarchies" (215) by resisting and refusing the expressive "race codes that bind." Though he focuses on coding and on language as they relate to the Canadian state, he also underlines how expressive codings work spatially, not only at the scale of the nation, but also at the scale of the body.[82]

In his poetry, Miki examines the expressive codes and material procedures that articulate race by triangulating language, identification, and surveillance. In *Transnational Canadas*, Kit Dobson close reads Miki's poem "fool's scold, 1.4.97," which finds Miki's speaker caught at the border on the anniversary of the lifting of restrictions on movement for Japanese Canadians. For Dobson, the border poses a limit to Miki's desire to resist the race codes that bind as "[t]he unfixed dialogue between multiple voices is challenged by the surrounding space, which pushes the speakers into more and more stable identity formations" (174). Narrating a trip to get a social security number – a "routine procedure" – Miki describes the run-around he needs to make through the immigration and naturalization department and the justice department:

> 48 years since the last restriction lifted on jcs. the USA of it
> all this year. set out with Irvine English department secretary
> pm to get a social security number to legitimate my sojourn
> as a lowly canuck. a routine procedure, i'm told. few minutes
> drive to pick up the card needed for my stay. get there, but
> no, i need to be approved first by immigration and
> naturalization. ok, ok, drive across town. a line up already
> forming, and the sun is bright, the breeze just right, children
> fidgeting. the opaque glass window speaks, then minutes pass

[82] Miki threads these questions through the poetic work of Roy Kiyooka in both *Broken Entries* and *In Flux*. In *In Flux* Miki works through the ways Kiyooka's work marks a historical moment where "the nation was seen to be caught in a moment of transition from an (old) colonial to a (new) national identity" (7). Miki contextualizes Kiyooka in a moment where the Canadian state develops new methods and policies to manage "the dangers posed to the nation by the restlessness and discontent of its incorporated others" (8) – a movement that crescendos with the adoption of multiculturalism as official policy. Miki's juxtaposition of the displacement of racialized bodies (internment) and the request for papers (Miki's question "Can I see your ID?") allows him to ask how the expressive codes around race operate spatially, acting at the scale of the body to reinforce and stabilize a set of spatial and social striations.

> with her supervisor. no, can't do. require to be re-examined
> by justice, section for aliens.
>
> re-examined? when was i examined? that's the problem. the
> voice said, i wasn't, at the vancouver border. new
> regulations. since? today. (*Surrender* 70)

For Dobson, Miki illustrates this most clearly when his speaker is "pushed into the certainties of immigration forms" (175) by an American border guard – a moment where, in attempting to cross a border, "the body is interpolated into a sign system that forces a concretization of the first person voice" (176). Miki performs a stream of answers to questions that are never posed as if he were under the hot lights being interrogated: "no sir / no sir just passing no really i'm not looking for a / home yes this English is genuine the form is no problem / sure i can wait until after lunch" (75).

This "interpolation" carries into Miki's use of photography across his bibliography, but most recently in *Mannequin Rising*,[83] where the body is caught up in a visual economy connecting to a set of material processes. It's not merely a concretization of voice but of Asian Canadian bodies (and racialized bodies more generally) as they are surveilled, identified, and put in place. In her article "Ethics, Intention, and Affect: A Proprioceptive Poetics in Roy Miki's *Mannequin Rising*" (2014), Ranbir Banwait situates *Mannequin Rising* as a critique of the scopic as it dovetails with processes of racialization. She argues that "Miki explores how a biopolitics of life – intent on policing, manipulating, and mining the parameters of human life and human sociality – consumes and melds into the material world" (106). Banwait insists on the ways Miki's critique of globalization and commodity culture is bound up with his engagement with racialization and displacement, connecting both projects through their shared relationship to the scopic.

Miki identifies a complex intersection of language, visual representation, and the material body. Miki's move from the "speechless" archival photos of Japanese

[83] In a 2008 interview, Kirsten Emiko McAllister asks Miki about his more recent work collected in *Mannequin Rising*, focusing on Miki's pairing of poetry with photography and collage work. Miki's use of photographs parallels his shifting critical investments from the history of internment to the present realities of globalization, noticeable in the shift from the archival family photos in *Random Access File* (1995) to the travel snapshots from Calgary, Taipei, and Berlin he folds into the poems in *There* (2006). In contrast, the collage work in *Mannequin Rising* scrambles the visual scenes of Vancouver (specifically Granville Island and Kitsilano) and Tokyo.

Canadians found in his early collection *Random Access File* to the similarly speechless mannequins in *Mannequin Rising* makes a strange kind of sense. By connecting embodied location and economic value, Miki raises the question of who gets to speak, act, or live in a space, as well as how they get to do those things – affected not only by logics of exclusion, but also logics of articulation. Miki's collages remove store mannequins from their windows, placing them in the street and on the beach (however destabilized those settings are) as if to ask what commodities would *do* when relocated into social space. Rather than just speechless (and thereby answerless), the mannequins are also *actionless*, standing stilted and rigid – *posed* – in the frame alongside human actors doing things. In one collage, a mannequin in the foreground faces the viewer while just behind it a quartet of beachgoers play volleyball. In the bottom corner, Miki snaps a picture with his digital camera. The mannequin stands separated from the rest of the scene, sticking out in the landscape, disconnected. The mannequins are both relocated from their expected place in the store window, while still not sticking to their new surroundings. Miki destabilizes the mannequins' relation to the space of Kitsilano's commodity culture, but how do we, as viewers, read their uncanny position outside of their expected place? Where Miki performs an excess of fast talk, flop sweat included, in order to convince the border agent that he belongs, that he's not illegal or alien, the mannequin refuses this positioning through its silence. The poets I look at over the course of this chapter struggle with the ways poetry might confront this tension between performing in ways legible within the immanent logics that shape our spaces and refusing to perform, thereby making oneself illegible and risking detachment from the spatial stability that enables action. Assemblage theory conceptualizes racialization as an articulatory process operating through the relational pressures of the assemblage – through the arrays of scrutinizing eyes and powerplaying narratives that bear down on individual bodies, shaped by immanent logics that cut across space.

Diagram, Articulation, and Racialization

One version of space in Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* hinges on a "Maritime Model" that they use to anchor their explanation of the differences between thickly stable "striated space" and more open or fluid "smooth space." The difference between the two types of space involves a relative difference in the extensive grid laid out over the space, akin to the application of map and bearings to the open water of the

ocean to facilitate maritime travel. Striated space is measured and metric, whereas smooth space requires a different type of navigation, less determined and more contingent. In one version of this, Deleuze and Guattari tie their analysis to movement, suggesting that:

> In striated space, lines or trajectories tend to be subordinated to points: one goes from one point to another. In the smooth, it is the opposite: the points are subordinated to the trajectory. (478)

This exchange between fixed point and moving trajectory names in abstract the ways a body can move in a spatial assemblage. This play of subordinations, where movements are dictated by the shape of the map or else the map continually shifts according to the way actors move, doesn't describe an either/or situation – either striated or smooth – but instead describes the kinds of shifts DeLanda is after when he looks to the ways the assemblages stabilizes and destabilizes. Space constantly moves between striated and smooth. And what is striated for one actor may be smooth for another. What the maritime model begins to theorize, then, is the way individual actors navigate these shifting organizational waters that are sometimes rigid and sometimes supple. But the point is that this exchange of spaces always involves a subordination to a regime of legibility – a set of codes that shape movement.

Imagining a "maritime model" of space as it relates to the body means something different, however, if we move Deleuze and Guattari's abstract considerations into questions of racialization and diaspora. In this exchange between the deterritorialization of the diasporic body forced into motion and contingent diasporic "landings" that "creatively reterritorialize" space,[84] we need to add a third term – the "racializing

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[84] I'm drawing these terms from a call and response between Marlene Goldman and Maia Joseph, who explicitly use Deleuzian processes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization to frame Dionne Brand's complicated relationship to space and geography – a relationship at the embodied meeting place between localized violence and global diaspora. In her article "Wondering into Country: Dionne Brand's *A Map to the Door of No Return*" (2007), Joseph rearticulates an earlier argument made by Goldman. Goldman, in "Mapping the Door of No Return: Deterritorialization and the Work of Dionne Brand" (2004) strains Brand's poetry through the term "drifting," a word that evokes both the dislocations of the diasporic subject and the way Brand dramatizes global mobility at the scale of the body. Joseph counters with the other half of that spatial equation – "landing." Both Goldman and Joseph evoke the movement of a ship from port to port, conceptualizing this metaphorical movement through the processes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization. Goldman suggests that "the notion of drifting

framework" named by McKittrick wherein bodies are not only included or excluded, but are also articulated. The subject is located by its relations, its body influenced, shaped, disciplined, and policed by the relations around it, affording it a set of possibilities to how it can move. An actor's ability to drift or land becomes dependent on the larger relational framework, but, at the same time, new sets of possibilities can be opened up through reterritorializations that result from the formation of new or resurgent sets of relations.

Assemblage theory answers this complicated set of tensions around the "drifting" or dislocated body, the racialized or articulated body, and the landing or "creatively reterritorialized" body with a concept that asks how the body is shaped by its relations: the diagram. Deleuze's conception of the diagram comes out of his reading of Michel Foucault's biopolitics. In *Foucault*, Deleuze works through the implications of Foucault's work on the panopticon in *Discipline and Punish*, asking about the conjunctions between two types of form: the kind that "forms or organizes matter" and the kind that "forms or finalizes functions and gives them aims" (33). These forms of material content and forms of expression, respectively, are conjoined in the diagram, an immanent abstract machine operating as "a map, a cartography that is coextensive with the whole social field" – a "spatio-temporal multiplicity" that "makes no distinction between content and expression" (33). In *Spatial Questions,* Rob Shields outlines Deleuze's take on Foucault's conceptualization of the diagram as an immanent logic that shapes the social field – a logic that "traces the contours of a situation but remains within the tissue of the material world" and that reflects "the consistent shape of forces rather than meta-level plans or blueprints" (128), generating, in other words, an organizational *stability* rather than a fixed or essentialized *structur*e. The diagram isn't a blueprint, but an immanent logic that shapes the form and process of the assemblage, forming what DeLanda calls "*the structure of a possibility space*" (*Assemblage Theory* 122). In other words, the diagram isn't necessarily deterministic, but does operate upon the emergent possibilities of spatial production.

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offers an alternative to the boundedness of home and the nation-state" for Brand, allowing a retheorization of "home as a constellation of multiple sites – a series of somewheres that cannot be captured under any one place name" (14). Joseph extends Goldman's argument with the acknowledgement that no ship can drift forever, since even the purest nomad must stop to sleep. Underlining landing's status as process ("landing" rather than "land"), Joseph frames Brand's "landings" as "creative reterritorializations" that "take place beyond as well as within the boundaries of the nation" (77).

I want to examine the diagram's role as a logic or set of logics that shape the potential engagements of the social and spatial field by paying attention to how spaces emergently striate and social relations bear down on individual bodies through formal and informal systems of surveillance that interconnect with legal and narrative codes. Though the panopticon operates as a key diagram for Foucault and others because it transforms an architectural model of surveillance into an immanent self-directed form of discipline, it is not the only diagram through which we can map the junction of visual surveillance and expressive coding. Surveying the field of surveillance studies as dominated by the panopticon, Simone Browne offers the slave ship, another form of prison, as a revised diagram that shapes the surveillance of black life given how accounts for the black body's historical role as property. Treating the *Brooks* diagram of a slave ship in the same way Foucault treats the panopticon, Browne argues that the slave ship diagrams a mode of surveillance where white gazes and vantage points are given primacy and black "figures" are "made to seem androgynous, interchangeable, and replicable" (*Dark Matters* 49).[85]

Browne's challenge to Foucault is also pertinent to assemblage theory, which, at least in its DeLandian formation, fails to discuss difference except in abstract terms. In throwing the panopticon out of its tidy symmetry, Browne recognizes the hierarchical asymmetry of the social field as it plays out materially in a visual economy, pointing to the policing scrutiny that articulates possibilities for black folks, while also opening up possibilities for both counterscrutiny (what she calls "dark sousveillance") and the potential of counterrelations that can emerge from a shared location "below deck" (and thereby out of view of the dominating white gaze). Turning to the assemblage to think through racialization is a difficult move however, particularly since Deleuze and Guattari largely sidestep questions of race in their work. However, recent theorists like Arun Saldanha and Alexander Weheliye put pressure on the assemblage concept as a way to think through race and racialization as emergent and relational, assembling up from the intimate scale of the engagement into wider spatial fields. In his article "Reontologizing

[85] Browne's position on the visual economies around blackness is a central argument made by other Black Studies scholars including Katherine McKittrick and Saidiya Hartman, who both theorize moments where blackness is put on display (or removed from view) to achieve various ends: to evaluate the body on the auction block, to display the white dominance, and even, in McKittrick's reading of Harriet Jacobs, to gain a sliver of freedom by garretting one's self outside the purview of the white gaze.

Race" (2006), Saldanha argues against Judith Butler's classic take on embodiment and performativity that privileges the role of language:

> Butler's well-known argument is that there is no anatomy or phenotype unless invoked by signification, by discourses of gender and race. It is beyond dispute that no body is untouched by signification. The question is, rather, how signification comes to have any effect at all, if not through the materiality of signs, bodies, and spaces. (12)

Rather than privilege matter over language in the way DeLanda does, Saldanha takes a position closer to Karen Barad, who argues for materiality and discursivity "in their indissociability" (*Meeting the Universe Halfway* 34). In other words, matter and language are co-productive. Saldanha proposes that "[f]ar from being an arbitrary classification system imposed upon bodies, race is a nonnecessary and irreducible effect of the ways those bodies themselves interact with each other and their physical environment" (10).

To think through the relationship between the body and language in racialization, Saldanha works through Frantz Fanon's encounter with a young white child on a train. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon asks about the black body subjected to the white gaze and the resulting "genuine dialectic between [his] body and the world" (91) – a tension built into the intimate meeting between Fanon and the white child as that meeting is caught in the disciplinary power of a racist and colonial diagram as it sharpens between two bodies. As the child interpellates Fanon – "Look! A Negro!" (91) – Fanon feels the larger social pressures embedded in the encounter. "In the train," he says, "it was a question of being aware of my body, no longer in the third person but in triple" (92). He takes up triple the space as the white Other backs away because of physical nausea. He becomes responsible not only for his body, but also his race and his ancestors. Fanon finds himself located in and articulated by the racializing assemblage. Late in his book *Psychedelic White* (2007), Saldanha describes race as *machinic*, arguing that race isn't an essential quality or something inscribed onto bodies through categories or discourse, but something that emerges immanently from social and spatial relations:

> From a machinic perspective, race is not something inscribed upon or referring to bodies, but a particular spatiotemporal disciplining and charging of those bodies themselves. Bodies collectively start behaving like situationally distinct aggregates – racial formations, racial clusters. These clusters emerge *immanently*, without external blueprint, through the corporeal habits and connections with the environment that bodies

> necessarily engage in. Racial formations are much more than discursive categories (190)

Saldanha traces a machine diagrammed not only economically, but also *racially* as bodies are located and enclosed according to phenotype. Embedded in Saldanha's argument is the assertion that race needs to be treated materially and relationally.

Saldanha answers the question of "*what happens* in the train passage" by answering that "[t]here is a differentiation of human bodies" (11). Saldanha argues that "[w]ithin a racialised visual regime, it is the concentration of melanin in Fanon's skin that attracts the attention to the white boy – not his suitcase, or coat, or smell, or even posture" (11). For Saldanha, the colour of Fanon's skin is a part that both operates within and is operated on by a racialization machine. The various expressive components of this machine (histories, narratives, laws, etc.) diagram the available paths for all actors in the assemblage – not only Fanon as he feels the pressures on his body, but also the white child, his mother, the other passengers on the train. This junction point of flesh and law, of the material body and the expressive codes that adjudicate it, forms a significant kind of *racializing assemblage*. Weheliye theorizes the racializing assemblage through this junction of body and law through the concept of *habeas viscus*. He argues that "[t]he conjoining of flesh and habeas corpus in the compound *habeas viscus* brings into view an articulated assemblage of the human (viscus/flesh) borne of political violence, while at the same time not losing sight of the different ways the law pugnaciously adjudicates who is deserving of personhood and who is not (habeas)" (11). Further defining his concept, Weheliye asserts that, "*habeas viscus*, as an idea, networks bodies, forces, velocities, intensities, institutions, interests, ideologies, and desires in racializing assemblages, which are simultaneously territorializing and deterritorializing" (12).

To get to this reading of the assemblage, Weheliye challenges Deleuze and Guattari on their unwillingness to account for notions of "power, ideology, gender, coloniality, identity, and race," which "jinglingly dawdle in the margins" (48) of Deleuze and Guattari's work. To put pressure on the assemblage model, Weheliye turns to Stuart Hall's conceptualization of articulation, observing that articulation and assemblage both emphasize relational connectivity. In a 1986 interview, Hall defines articulation in a way that echoes the contingency of how DeLanda describes the connections within an assemblage:

> The two parts are connected to each other, but through a specific linkage, that can be broken. An articulation is thus the form of the connection that can make a unity of two different elements, under certain conditions. It is a linkage which is not necessary, determined, absolute and essential for all time. You have to ask, under what circumstances can a connection be forged or made? (Hall 141)

For Hall, the theory of articulation "asks how an ideology discovers its subject rather than how the subject thinks the necessary and inevitable thoughts which belong to it" (142). Through this shared openness, Weheliye poses the ways that articulation and assemblage complement one another, suggesting that "a robust fusion of articulation and assemblage accents the productive ingredients of social formations while not silencing questions of power, reinstituting an innocent version of the subject, or neglecting the deterritorializing capabilities of power" (49).

In this, the articulated forces and materials of the assemblage actively racialize bodies – space produces race, in other words. Weheliye doubly articulates a conceptualization of *habeas viscus* as a diagram that includes not only the expressive components of the law, but also the material ways that law operates violently and unevenly on flesh and the body. Simultaneously territorializing and coding, this double articulation squeezes black bodies into place through a *thick* relationality at once formal (though state mechanisms) and informal (through everyday forms of racism). Saldanha multiplies this into an entire social and spatial field characterized by an emergent thickness that cannot be easily escaped (but could be deterritorialized). Because of their Deleuzian backdrop, Weheliye and Saldanha explicitly pose these thick relationalities as emergent and constantly reproduced. In *Psychedelic White*, Saldanha develops a theory of racial *viscosity* produced through embodied and scopic regimes. Saldanha turns to viscosity as a concept to help understand the complicated racial stratifications of the largely white rave scene in Anjuna, a village in the Indian state of Goa. He observes that the attempts of white ravers to experiment their way out of modernity reinscribes it in miniature. Saldanha draws our attention to the population of "Goa freaks" living in Anjuna, white tourists involved in a lengthy history of "psychedelic" experimentation – that is, "the commitment certain whites have to transforming themselves through drugs, music, travel, and spiritualities borrowed from other populations" (12). Through racial experimentation and its desire to escape white modernity, the white bodies that seek to transcend their race only end up retrenching their privileged position as they agglomerate and stick to one another.

Saldanha most pointedly maps this stickiness and viscosity through a mapping of the visual economies of two spaces – the bar and the beach – that shift with the amount of light and the racial composition at a given moment. Turning to Deleuze and Guattari's concept of faciality, he argues that "[f]aces, then, need to be understood as social *functions* that bodies participate in when subjected to the regulatory workings of social machines in modernity" (101). In the abstract faciality machine, an individual body slides into a face that is either easily categorized or that results in a mutation of the categorical grid itself "in order to make the boundary-transgressing body just as recognizable as the rest" (102). Saldanha admits the bleak streak embedded Deleuze and Guattari's model, as every potential combination of facial traits can be accounted for by the mutating and expanding grid. But he also notes the way that a body can escape from the grid (with the inevitability of recapture) or occupy shifting positions (shifting faces) given on context. Saldanha loosely maps the spatial distribution of two bars in Anjuna – Nine Bar and Primrose Bar. Mapping Nine Bar's distribution of bodies against its visual economy, Saldanha notices an emergent and shifting spatial segregation of different populations that illustrates a "tendency toward viscosity":

> The visual economy of Nine Bar divides its space into territories for specific bodies. It is essential to understand how the map of the bar is *not* the representation of a finished state. It indicates the *tendency toward* viscosity in Nine Bar. There is no point in mapping individual bodies as their distribution is nebulous and dynamic. The map gives a necessarily vague sense of what usually happens. (106)

Generalizing, Saldanha observes the ways that the in-crowd of Goa freaks populates the visible elevated space by the bar where the Indians (along with some of the more timid backpackers and tourists) congregate in the less visible space opposite the bar. Almost immediately, he pulls back from this easy sense of segregation, arguing for a shifting sense of how the space maps because of the ways the viscosity of the space changes depending on who occupies it. "First, faciality is about a *territorial* balance of momentums of different bodies," he argues, "that is, it works through the spatial and temporal event that was called viscosity" (106).

If I privilege Saldanha's insistence on the material viscosity of the social field, it's because of this emergent thickness and the sense that cultural experiment doesn't guarantee anything. What is useful, I think, about Saldanha's account is that the immanent logic of the racializing assemblage doesn't just disappear with a change of

setting or from an experimentation with the self, but is reproduced in the way that relations assemble. There is no easy way out of racialization processes thickly determined by an immanent logic – no single moment (or encounter) that can swerve the field. Instead, those single moments and individual actions are swayed by the relations around them, coaxed into place not by a single cop, but a micropolitical framework policed by its own spatial and relational stability – by a common sense and naturalized coding of the way things work. But that said, even within this intensely pessimistic model, the poets in this chapter usefully push back against this thick and seemingly inevitable set of conditions, refusing and critiquing the terms under which they are scrutinized, identified, policed, and expected to perform – a critique that pivots around understandings of the ways their bodies and subject positions are articulated.

Not Only Exclusion, But Also Articulation

In *In Flux*, Miki outlines the historical formations working to racialize subjects in Canada. Like Weheliye, Miki turns to Hall's concept of articulation, which:

> helps to expose Canadian nation-formation and the identity discourses it produces as not 'natural,' that is, as givens that both precede and supersede its individuated subjects, but an articulation of historical trajectories through which its subjects were marked and translated – in certain ways – from the signs of colonial invasion and territorialization into the abstract language of citizenship. (43)

For Miki, observing the "complex weave" of regulations producing the nation, the onus has fallen on minorities to "erase, remake, or otherwise elide their differences in order to gain access to its spaces" (44). This fabric of exclusion plays out for Miki through an array of historical events and policies that have been reshaped by both the external pressures of globalization and internal pressures for the state to become more tolerant of differences through policies of multiculturalism. Historically and in the present, the border operates as a primary site of racial exclusion and articulation – the site, in Miki's words, where "the most intense beams of racialization have shone" (45) – taken up in compelling ways by an array of poets work through the formal and informal frameworks and mechanisms through which bodies are racialized and put in place, their bodies and movements not only excluded but also articulated as border regimes that limit their lives within the nation.

For Harsha Walia, in her book *Undoing Border Imperialism* (2013), and Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Nielson, in their book *Border as Method* (2013), the border as a geopolitical line between nations operates at the site of the body. For Walia, border imperialism involves the "regime of practices, insitutions, discourses, and systems" (38) that define and redefine the border – a regime bearing down not only at the geopolitical lines that separate nations, but also in street level practices like carding in Toronto, stop and frisk in New York, or, in Walia's Vancouver setting, the transit police practice of reporting riders without proper papers to border services. "Border," then, names the production of spaces through the assembling engagements that articulate who or what gets to live in a space, making borders pertinent to all kinds of assemblage. Mezzadra and Neilson argue that there has been both a proliferation and heterogenization of borders. They argue that borders are not only complex social institutions, but also sites of conflict and contestation:

> We are convinced that this constituent moment surfaces with particular intensity today, along specific geopolitical borders and the many other boundaries that cross cities, regions, and continents. Borders, on one hand, are becoming finely tuned instruments for managing, calibrating, and governing global passages of people, money, and things. On the other hand, they are spaces in which the transformations of sovereign power and the ambivalent nexus of politics and violence are never far from view. To observe these dual tendencies is not merely to make the banal but necessary point that borders always have two sides, or that they connect as well as divide. Borders also play a key role in producing the times and spaces of global capitalism. (3-4)

The border, then, is a flexible institution that is both an articulation point between nation-states and a method of capitalist articulation. The border is not a wall – despite politicians' calls to build them. Instead, borrowing from Eyal Weizman's Deleuzian reading of Israeli tactics in occupied Palestinian territory,[86] Mezzadra and Neilson turn the borderline into a *borderscape* marked by an "elasticity of territory" where, quoting Weizman, "[t]he linear border, a cartographic imaginary inherited from the military and political spatiality of the nation state has splintered into a multitude of temporary, transportable, deployable and removable border-synonyms" (Weizman 6). This elasticity

[86] In *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation* (2007), Weizman examines the *elasticity* of borderlines between Israeli and Palestineian territory as it is shifted by struggles over that territory both on the ground in the form of Israeli settlements and Palestinian resistance and at state levels through diplomatic negotiations carried out at a global scale.

opens up a kind of double-cross[87] played out on the dislocated body of the migrant labourer, the political refugee, or the colonized Indigene as Mezzadra and Neilsen argue that "[borders] cross the lives of millions of men and women who are on the move, or, remaining sedentary, have borders cross them" (6).

Border practices, then, involve the simultaneous articulation of the assemblage and the body. In the way that the border articulates the body, it operates through a politics of recognition wherein individuals are included or excluded from a space based on a circulating set of narrative expectations and legal codes. The border includes the kinds of informal spatial separations that Saldanha observes in Goa with the borders in a room informally reproducing the borders between nations or differently racialized groups. At the same time, the border as a conceptual figure juggles these material concerns and engagements with theoretical understandings of what it means to articulate the relationships between bodies and space. The border involves both exclusion and articulation as a space is shaped through its emergent relations at the same time as bodies are located and articulated within those relations. In order to think through the border as poetry engages with it, we need to ask how poets navigate not only border practices, but also border concepts, that is, not only the concrete articulations that compose borders, but also the abstract ways we come to understand what a border is. I want to turn to the work of Phinder Dulai, Erín Moure, and Souvankham Thammavongsa, as they struggle with the border as both articulatory practice and theoretical concept. In all three, there is a palpable tension between the ways that their formal approaches approach the codes that underwrite both the concrete experiences of migrants and refugees as they move across borders, stateless and unrecognized, and the conceptual frames that shape our understandings of those movements. Formally, all three leap from their reading practices – Dulai from the archive around the 1914 Komagata Maru incident, Moure from her readings of continental theory, Thammavongsa from her father's discarded journal – to challenge the "sustained maintenance" of the codes that determine who can cross the border.

[87] I'm drawing this sense of a "double-cross" from the activist slogan "we didn't cross the border, the border crossed us," which features heavily in discussions of the U.S./Mexico border, while also resonating with Indigenous struggles as colonial borders break up Indigenous nations.

In his recent book *dream/arteries*, Dulai leaps from the historical flashpoint of the 1914 Komagata Maru incident to ask how the exclusionary dynamics of that moment carry forward into the present. *dream/arteries* opens with a long poem about the Komagata Maru, a freighter filled with 376 passengers, most from the Indian state of Punjab that was halted in Vancouver's Burrard Inlet for two months, justified on the basis of two federal orders: a requirement that each passenger be carrying $200 and be travelling on a continuous journey directly from India.[88] This despite the fact that, as citizens of the British Empire, the passengers should have been allowed entry. In his book *The Voyage of the Komagata Maru* (2014), Hugh J.M. Johnston ties the Komagata Maru incident to anti-immigrant sentiments in British Columbia, Canada, and across the British Empire. Johnston outlines a fear of competition and of having opportunities stolen echoed in the rhetoric of our own ongoing migration crisis (reflected in increasing nationalist rhetoric in Europe and North America). "In British Columbia," he observes, "the Sikhs were both wanted and respected and unwanted and disparaged, depending on one's point of view" (13) – wanted as labour but rejected by labour organizations and local politicians, who pressed the federal government to pass stronger immigration laws.

The Komagata Maru incident is shaped by a logic of exclusion that Dulai's threads into the present. In a February 11, 2016 talk, Dulai frames his approach to the Komagata Maru as influenced by "archival materialism" – a practice theorized by Wolfgang Ernst to describe effects of the archival form on the ways information is understood. Drawing from Ernst, Dulai represents how the archive changes when moved from analogue to digital media to imagine a different kind of transitioning of the archive into a poetic form, a move with the potential to disrupt and reframe of the colonial shaping of history:

> For me as a writer and as a poet, [the archive] actually has the potential to frame something else and to trans-, I guess, transcend that kind of historicism of the archive into a more living space and that space of unearthing and disrupting colonialism. And kind of breaking it away and then fragmenting the archive and fusing that archive, or the documents of an archive, into things like creative writing or creative text generation.

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[88] In his book *The Voyage of the Komagata Maru* (2014), Hugh J.M. Johnston notes that not only did Wilfrid Laurier's government pass these two executive orders in 1908 to curb Indian immigration, but also "put strong pressure on steamship companies to withdraw their Canada-India services and not to sell through-tickets to Indians from Indian ports" (17).

For Dulai, poetry allows an unorthodox or unfaithful engagement with the historical material of the archive, which helps destabilize the static linearity of colonial history by articulating the ways that, in his words, "what is presented a century ago sustains itself even now." Like the continuity of erasure that Cecily Nicholson examines in *From the Poplars*, Dulai tackles a similar continuity of exclusion – a "sustained maintenance of colonial ideals":

> For me, [archival materialism's] been a powerful space for considering how one relates and how one is relational to an archival space. So, for me, it brings meaning in terms of it not being a continuous single sustained maintenance of colonial ideals. Some of those ideals being the subordination of colonized subjects into very real stigmas and stereotypes that are living in terms of contemporary society.

Dulai ties the Komagata Maru archive to an ongoing system of value that subordinates colonized subjects. He uses poetry to ask how the injustice of the Komagata Maru is not a singular exceptional event, but an ongoing set of conditions that extends into the present.

Dulai couples his archival work bringing the historical event to view with a question of *how* we can look not only at the historical event, but also at the racialized body. In the colonial archive, the race codes that bind interlock with an imperative to watch – a combination that Dulai works through in *dream/arteries*. Throughout "soul-journ to the end of the pacific," the poem that opens *dream/arteries*, Dulai includes a range of archival photographs dominated by the ship and its passengers. The photographs range from the kind of "speechless" posed shots Miki laments to shots that are socially complex, featuring faces looking away from the camera, speaking to one another, laughing. Rather than speak in the voice of the passengers, Dulai approaches archival work by grounding the narrative in his own position as researcher and, more playfully, by adopting the voice of the ship itself to reflect on its global circuits. Over a series of poems, Dulai tracks a short history of the ship's place in the global movement of people. In his focus on the life of the ship, as the S.S. Stubbenhuk through subsequent rechristenings as the S.S. Sicilia and the Komagata Maru, Dulai extends photographic representation. In "diese störrisch haken," the ship describes its role in navigating "water ways thick with human capital" (9):

> the port opens up to me

the wharf and each berth a perfection of design

my body slowly eases into my transient home

my nautical journey just now beginning

those looking for respite will be my friend

i will carry each burden

for tomorrow and the days after (9)

In the opening moments of the S.S. Stubbenhuk, Dulai presents a hopefulness where the ship becomes the "friend" of migrants, offering the promise of carrying their burden. Dulai leverages this *promise* to examine the different experiences for European and South Asian immigrants on the two coasts of North America. In "my name is *sicilia*, you called me saviour once," the ship addresses itself to its friend "ellis," a clear reference to Ellis Island. The ship describes its desperate passengers – "russian and ukranian families swathed in scarves" and "solitary greek and Italian boy-men" (12) – passing through customs with "papers full with fiction and fact" (13). At the end of the poem, Dulai notes the way the immigrant status of many of these passengers becomes washed out, writing that "on arrival at the centre many replied / '…no thnich … no thni city' / … *blank* / gained amnesia / disembarked // into a future" (13).

The "forgetting" of ethnicity at Ellis Island cuts through "soul-journ" as the poem contrasts the European immigrant experience[89] to the very different experience of the passengers of the Komagata Maru, reflected in the ship's change from the S.S. Sicilia, with its European-sounding name, to the Komagata Maru. Dulai's dogged attention to the life and agency of the ship itself draws our attention to the fact that the landing of the Sicilia at Ellis Island and the halted arrival of the Komagata Maru in Vancouver both involve the same ship. The Stubbenhuk and the Sicilia's easy fit into the circuits of human capital doesn't carry over to the Komagata Maru despite the ship's history. Dulai's work written from the point of view of the archival researcher gives a sense of why, focused as it is on fraught definitions of value. Bending the past into the present, Dulai opens *dream/arteries* with a pair of letters, both dated 2014, one addressed to his

[89] Relevant to this, Dulai asserts the desirability of European immigrants in settling the prairies, including in the poem "a secret accord to settle the prairies" a quote from Sir Clifford Sifton, a federal politician responsible for the promotion of immigration in the first decade of the twentieth century.

reader in the present and one addressed to both an "unknown" passenger on the ship and to the ship itself. In the letter addressed to his present day reader, he outlines the ways he responds to both "the well-maintained factual records" of the Komagata Maru's arrival (as well as the gaps in the public record, which do not account for the individual lives of each of the passengers) and to the varying threads of his family's migrations. In the second letter, originally published in the final issue of *Rungh* (billed as "A South Asian Quarterly of Culture, Comment and Criticism" published from 1991-1998), Dulai narrates the events around the Komagata Maru directly to one of the ship's passengers, named Ranjeet in *Rungh* but left unnamed in *dream/arteries*.

The long publication history of Dulai's letter is worth paying attention to, because it speaks to both the split temporality of the letter (dated simultaneously 1914 and 1994, revised to 2014) and the recurrent importance of the Komagata Maru incident as an important historical moment. The editors of *Rungh* take an interest in the Komagata Maru, publishing a special section on South Asian history in Canada in a 1993 special "roots" issue – a section that reprints historical articles to stitch together a narrative of the South Asian community's relationship to the Canadian state. Turning specifically to the Komagata Maru itself, the editors reprint two pieces from 1914: an editorial from the *Hindustanee,* an English-language newspaper based in Vancouver's South Asian community published by the Marxist-leaning United India League; and a news article from the *Vancouver Province*. Placed one after the other, the articles demonstrate markedly different positions on the event, something visible by just reading the titles of the articles. Where the *Hindustanee*'s editorial bids "Welcome to Komagata Maru" (16), the *Province* warns, striking a note of threatening contagion, "Hindu Ship Can Not Show Bill of Health" (17).[90] Billed as fiction, Dulai's letter grounds this gap in rhetoric by imagining the embodied position of his unknown passenger:

> You place your foot up onto the gangplank and look to feel the earth again under your feet. Voices from the shoreline shout out to you. "Keep

[90] The differences between the articles is even more striking when digging into them. The *Province* pushes its contagion angle further by describing the passengers of the ship as "three hundred and seventy-six Hindu excursionists who wish to be forerunners of a horde of a few million into Canada" (17). The *Hindustanee* correctly observes the way this rhetoric is tied up in an anxiety over the influx of an outside labour force that, because of its British citizenship, might not be exploitable in the same way as Chinese or Japanese labourers.

> off the land" or "Drive the beggars back to the Ganges." You comply, seventy years have seeped into your actions, your thoughts – you comply with every demand and order meted out by the British, even here. You step back and take your place amongst the others and await the next move. (4)

Here Dulai dramatizes the hardening of the border, played out not only in the voices shouted from the shoreline, but also in the colonial history of British Imperialism in India. The ship, in Dulai's words becomes "Vancouver's mobile penned zoo," watched by armed guards, its passengers starved, their humanity stripped both through the intersection of state violence and the circulation of media narratives.

But rather than narrate a purely factual account in the past tense, Dulai adopts the 2nd person, estranging a documentary sense of events in its overlap of documentary voiceover, putting us "into the shoes" of those on the ship, and an apostrophe that attempts to map the individual's location in a larger assemblage. As a white reader, I find myself caught between these two positions. At the same time that the archival frame of the book asks me to leer into the penned in zoo of history, Dulai's resistant retroactivity not only describes the systematic relations around the unnamed addressee – an "unwilling participant in an event" (4) who can't know all the things shaping that event – while it also asks the reader of *dream/arteries* how these colonial ideals and dynamics carry into the present. If I hesitantly pose Dulai's use of the halted ship in the harbour as a kind of diagram or description, what does it tell us about the way that a historical logic of exclusion carries forward into contemporary practices? The ship is both within the territory of the nation while simultaneously excluded, its passengers ironically citizens while treated like foreigners, their movement restricted through the legal manipulations of Canadian lawmakers, politicking for the votes of fearful white citizens. Does this historical event model contemporary South Asian concerns similar to how the slave ship does for Black Americans?

Dulai stages a series of contemporary examples that echo the halted movement and intense racial scrutiny of the Komagata Maru incident, though not tidily. In his earlier book *Basmati Brown* (2000), Dulai ties colonial systems of valuation to regimes of scrutiny that operate formally at the border and informally in the workplace. In the poem "canadian, eh! or depends on who you ask!" Dulai juxtaposes the migrant experiences of two British subjects. The first, a working-class English miner, "eas[es] into entry," mutating into a higher class position through his transnational mobility – "once poor and

contemporary / now a country squire" (25). The second, a university-educated Indian migrant, undergoes a greater scrutiny – "who are you, why did you come? / we need to verify your identity!" (27) – pressured down into a lower class position. This scrutiny plays out more harshly in the later poem "basmati brown," which opens with Dulai's speaker declaring his "brownness" and closes with an admission of the social pressure that emerges around his phenotype. He declares to his beloved that "i never knew how brown i was / until I saw it in people's faces" (36) and then switches voice to reflect a racist social milieu circulated through white supremacist mash notes:

> limited corporate mobility
> too good of an employee
> shitty worker, does nothing
> doesn't even speak English
> too smart for his own good
> better keep an eye on that one
> a real r-a-d-i-c-a-l, shit disturber, activist
> shit like brown the way you shit
> stinks of curry
> should put on deodorant
> funny how he doesn't wear a turban, i thought they all did?
> hey how come you don't wear a turban? (37)

Ending on a note of misrecognition of Punjab and Sikh, Dulai moves the language of this passage from a flat skepticism over work to an ugly scrutiny of the brown body – from "shitty worker" to "shit / stinks like curry" – that marks a turn in the poem away from the browns Dulai associates with at the beginning of the poem (coffee, trees, rice, the earth). The stanza revolves around a central scrutiny – "better keep an eye on that one" – that connects the evaluative language of the rest of the stanza to an imperative to watch and police.

In this moment in "basmati brown," Dulai dramatizes a scopic regime operating on racialized bodies in the everyday, the encounters of the assemblage diagrammed by a racist logic. While the frame of *dream/arteries* underlines the 1914 event, it drags into a present address to create a slippery temporality. The initial focus on the hardening of the border bleeds across the book as the material violence embedded in the articulation of the nation at the borderline resonates across the book. In "Wisconsin temple poems," the piece that immediately follows "soul-journ," Dulai gestures to the 2012 shooting in a Sikh Temple in Oak Creek, Wisconsin by White Supremacist Wade Michael Page. Dulai opens the third part of this short sequence with an "investigative erasure" that speaks

not only to the power of language to paper over white supremacy but also to the holes in the archival record of the Komagata Maru:

> ~~200~~
> investigative leads, ~~300~~
> interviews, more than ~~200~~
> pieces of evidence
> the results of its expensive investigation
> no evidence was uncovered
> no evidence to suggest
> ongoing threat
> the sikh community
> ~~the attack was any part of any ongoing threat to the sikh community."~~
> ~~to conclude this attack was … directed or facilitated by any white supremacist group~~
> ~~during the shooting at the temple, page exchanged gunfire with two oak creek police officers seriously wounding one, before being shot by another officer, then turning his weapon on himself.~~ (45)

Dulai dramatizes a kind of misinformation, presenting us with everything while suggesting through the struck out parts of the poem what information is disseminated and what information is not. In an echo of the expected narrative around white shooters, Dulai presents Page through the FBI description of him as someone who who "acted alone" and was "not assisted" (45). Read alongside Dulai's address to the passenger of the Komagata Maru and the way it insists on mapping the field of relations connected to the ship and its passengers, the struck out details of the FBI account insist on a fingers-in-ears disavowal of a larger structural desire to maintain and keep stable social and spatial composition that informs individual acts of white supremacy. He refuses both the understanding that Page's act is an isolated incident and the denial of a larger structural condition that the isolation of the event necessitates. In this moment, however, the logic of exclusion embedded in the Komagata Maru incident slides into a logic of elimination – from "keep off the land" to get off the land.

It's against this split logic that Carrie Dawson turns to Thammavongsa's work to help think through how the Canadian state determines which refugees are deserving of entry into Canada. If Dulai's version of the Komagata Maru diagrams an event where the scrutinizing eyes of white Canada push hard against the entry of Sikhs even as their labour is valued, Dawson's turn to the refugee claims process suggests a logic similarly invested in a selectively open border. Rather than ask about exclusion, Dawson asks about the criteria used by the state to assess which refugee claimants are "worthy" or

"good" candidates. At the same time, instead of critiquing the exclusion itself, Dawson asks how Thammavongsa resists the categorical narrative of who is worthy of inclusion. In her essay "On Thinking Like a State and Reading (About) Refugees" (2011), Dawson reads Thammavongsa's poetry (among other writers like Wayde Compton, Dionne Brand, and Anh Hua) alongside the Canadian state's narrative requirements for those attempting to claim refugee status. Dawson recognizes a tension between instrumentalized expectations for certain kinds of narratives that validate the refugee experience vs. narratives that somehow fail to check the requirements of someone "thinking like the state" when it comes to refugees. Dawson sees a value in these writers who put their readers:

> in the position of an immigration official eager to process the claims made by the book's protagonists and troubled by the complexities of the stories they tell, by imagining them as would-be humanitarians who ask for and receive a story of abandonment and loss but who then "[go] away as if they'd heard nothing" (Brand 2005, 288), or by addressing the reader's appetite for confessional narratives that affirm the innocence of both subject and interlocutor while also reproducing an idealized version of Canadian multiculturalism. (72)

Similar to Miki's turn to the visual to destabilize the ways that codes of racialization meet the body, the writers that Dawson chooses to value propose literature as way to stage and critique the forms of social relation acting not only at the geopolitical border, but also across wider borderscapes in less formal encounters.

Dawson reads Thammavongsa's work against a Canadian state whose border practices represent a rigid mode of "reading" and categorizing bodies. Dawson leaps from Sherene Razack's analysis that storytelling's role in legal processes that determine an individual's refugee status. In her article "The Perils of Storytelling for Refugee Women" (1996), Razack describes the legal process as an uneven encounter situated in the tense meeting place between the objective goals of the system and its agents and the subjective context of the storyteller who must convince the court of the *fact* of their persecution – a moment of scrutiny in an institutional pressure cooker. In her article "The Refugee's Body of Knowledge: Storytelling and Silence in the Work of Francisco-Fernando Granados" (2013), Dawson observes that Canadian procedures for determining the validity of refugee claimants have been based in narrative requirements shaped by international law:

> In those countries that are signatories to the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, an individual must establish her ongoing fear of persecution in order to be granted refugee status. Her ability to do so is very much contingent on the perceived credibility and coherence of the story that she tells. There are, however, many forces that impede a refugee claimant's ability to tell her story in a manner that satisfies the state. These include language barriers, the difficulties of testifying to trauma, cultural and gendered injunctions against speaking about the source of that trauma, the inquisitorial nature of hearings, and the prescriptive nature of the written submission upon which the hearing is based. (57)

Dawson critiques the slow move away from this "call to narrative," asking "what in fact is lost when refugee claimants are denied the opportunity to tell their stories in ways and in forums that are politically expedient and personally meaningful" (56-57). She identifies a double bind where refugees are increasingly not able to tell their stories and, when they are, their stories are expected to conform to an expected and legible form where they narrate their trauma and invite an audience to step into the position of saviour. Analyzing a 2010 story from *The Globe and Mail* about a group of Sri Lankan refugees, Dawson suggests that "[r]ather than questioning the ethics of incarcerating refugees or examining the laws that make it almost impossible for people from poor or war-torn countries to travel here legally and that have the effect of criminalizing refugees, such stories instead focus on the figure of the pitiable and explicitly thankful victim" (59). The fixed expectations of the narrative requirement blocks real critique of the legislative and administrative pressures applied to refugees seeking entry into Canada.

To get at how poetry might do this work, Dawson turns to a reading Lianne Moyes makes of Erín Moure's book *O Cidadán*, drawn to the argument that *O Cidadán* "is of particular interest because it resists the codes that routinely produce the subjects we call 'citizens' and regulate the institutions of citizenship" (112). Dawson is drawn to Moure's interest in citizenship, but also the precise tension described by Moyes between intelligibility and belonging. *Recognition* takes on a particular resonance when considered in terms of the state and the border, particularly in the light of the mechanisms Dawson describes – recognition as *state* recognition. In other words, Dawson sees intelligible narration as key to the state's recognition of refugees because it allows the state to locate specific bodies as refugees within the extant structures of the nation. Both Thammavongsa's and Moure's projects are informed by a politics around the way that subjects are recognized and articulated by the state, resisting those

articulations through excess (for Moure) and through refusal (for Thammavongsa). But where critical attention to Moure's work views the border as a theoretical problem with real world implications, critical attention to Thammavongsa's leans the other way, viewing the border as a real world problem with philosophical implications. This difference in critical approach reflects a tension between abstracting border concepts or metaphors and more material and articulatory methods.

It's worth pausing to reflect on the ways Moure's work attempts to negotiate this line, playing concept against method to work through "borders" as they shape the possibility spaces for her body. Discussion of Moure's work pivots with the release of the interlaced serial poetics of *O Cidadán* (2002), which amplifies Moure's working through of intersubjectivity[91] into a complicated and unresolvable examination of citizenship. *O Cidadán* stages an excessive form of poetic research. Moure's poems take the form of reading notes, excessive and unfinished in the way they slide between multiple languages, formal tactics, addressees, and registers. In this sense, Moure's resistance to recognition results from a privileging of noise over signal, which Shannon Maguire argues in her article "Parasite Poetics: Noise and Queer Hospitality in Erín Moure's *O Cidadán*" (2015). Maguire suggests that Moure's poetic "unbinds the encounter itself from the expectation of recognition by making noise - that shifting, threshold of relation - the subject of attention" (n. pag.). Maguire sees Moure using the page as "an external and liminal space where reader and poet negotiate the roles of host and guest in the event of thinking" (n. pag.). In this, the "noise" of poetry disrupts the "signal" of dominant forms of recognition to open potential for new encounters. For Maguire, framing *O Cidadán* through its interest in queer hospitality destabilizes the language of recognition and produces "a queer orientation to the world based on interference of the dominant

[91] In her article "Erin Mouré and the Spirit of Intersubjectivity" (2000), Marie Carrière threads Moure's work from *Furious* (1988) to *A Frame of the Book* (1999) through the concept of an ethically-motivated feminist and queer *intersubjectivity* that positions her theoretically alongside thinkers like Luce Irigaray and Jacques Derrida and poetically in the context of *écriture féminin* and Québecois feminist writers like Brossard. Moure also frames her work this way in her paper "Speaking the Unspeakable: Responding to Censorship" (1996), presented in Vancouver and responding to the repeated confiscation of "objectionable materials" meant for Little Sister's Bookstore by border services. She argues for a consideration of subjectivity as it is produced relationally, drawing from Spinoza and Deleuze to imagine the body through its "capacity for affecting or being affected by other bodies" (97). "To me," she suggests, "there's a clear marker here for *community* – broadly speaking, all other beings we are in contact with – as an indispensible part of our definition of who we are as individuals" (97).

signal" (n. pag.). This utopian horizon gives us a way to imagine the political potential of poetry, but we can't assume that "interfering" with the thick codes of the dominant structure will be enough to change the thick relations of those same structures. The risk inherent in Maguire's forwarding the potential of Moure's "noisiness" is that it stands to reduce the border to a mere concept rather than a material process.

In contrast, Moure insists on the physical body when she asks "[w]hat of our citizen-body, the real physical body, named and not faceless, different and particular, the body that migrates across these borders, thus shifting all lines into elsewhere not yet mapped or marked?" ("Re-Çiting the Citizen Body" 218). The physical body operates as a conceptual figure and point of inquiry for Moure as she asks how it can "perturb and displace/disgrace fixed national definitions" (218). She gestures to a political horizon where "identity finds its stability in the fluidity of limits" (219). Citizenship is a keyword in Moure scholarship, particularly as Moyes combines relational intersubjectivity with the politics of citizenship in "Acts of Citizenship: Erin Moure's *O Cidadán* and the Limits of Worldliness" (2007), arguing that *O Cidadán* "is of particular interest because it resists the codes that routinely produce the subjects we call 'citizens' and regulate the institutions of citizenship" (112). Moyes poses *O Cidadán* as both "a workbook for diagramming relations" and "a field of conceptual inquiry into the epistemological limits of discourses and practices of citizenship" (112-13). Moyes gestures to the "limits of mobility and connectedness that are the promise of both cosmopolitanism and worldliness" and the ways that Moure "makes legible" the resistant acts of migrants crossing borders in the margins of her text – in the dedications and footnotes. Drawing from the dedication at the beginning of the book to Yaguine Koita and Fodé Tounkara – "two young Africans who tried to call out to Europe" (1) – Moyes recognizes the fact that Moure's work in *O Cidadán* is limited in the positions it can take with regard to migrancy, as Koita and Tounkara only gain a kind of legibility within Europe *through their deaths*. Found in the cargo hold of a Belgian aircraft travelling between Africa and Europe, Koita and Tounkara only enter public consciousness through their tragic deaths, shaming, in the words of *Guardian* reporter Steven Bates,[92] " a Belgium still uncomfortable with its African colonial legacy" (n. pag.) despite the fact that the boys, if found alive, would have

[92] In "African's Last Plea Shames Belgium" *The Guardian* Aug 8, 1999 - https://www.theguardian.com/world/1999/aug/08/stephenbates.theobserver

likely been detained.[93] Moyes argues Moure, through her inability to narrate the boys' experience, that "[t]here is no act of civilian love and no subversive resignification that can make dead boys part of Europe" (127). If there is a limit to Moure's inquiry it is not just the physical body that veers in and out of her poems, but the *racialized* body which cannot easily enter.

Moure is right to insist upon the potential for physical body to "perturb" the limits of a space – the physical body in excess of relational categories – but we need to be aware of the powerful asymmetries at work at the border. Signal and noise need to be more than metaphor or formal tactic, instead describing organization relative to the thickness of relation, to the dominant logic shaping the ways bodies are located and engaged with. Spatially, signal describes the dominant logic coding material possibilities. For Dulai, this relationship between signal and noise plays out in terms of the colonial archive. In describing the way he wants to challenge the sustained maintenance of colonial ideas as they are rooted in the archive, Dulai takes a position with regard to the way the "signal" of colonial history as it shapes present forms of recognition might be challenged by a rearticulation of historical narrative. For Maguire, Moure challenges the signal of this dominant logic by confronting it with a kind of queer excess, scrambling dominant logics to make room for forms of counterrelation,

For Dawson, the "noise" that Maguire finds so potent in Moure's work frames a reaction to the legibility required within systems of state recognition. For Dawson, the scrutinizing apparatus at the border operates as a restricted economy that limits the kinds of narratives legible to a Canadian audience, whether that audience is composed of border agents or literary critics. Dawson turns to Thammavongsa's book *Found*, in which she sees "a refusal of a confessional mode grounded in demonstrable truths and designed to affirm the innocence of its subject and the benevolence of its audience" ("On Thinking Like a State" 71). *Found* negotiates a discarded journal of Thammavongsa's father's written in 1978 during the family's stay in a Lao refugee camp in Thailand. At the center of the book is Thammavongsa's choice to not transparently mediate her father's experiences as a refugee, presumably through the reproduction of his journal, instead

[93] At the end of his article, Bates notes that "[h]ad the boys arrived alive in Brussels, they would almost certainly have been hustled straight into a detention centre, pending deportation and, said a press columnist, 'their letter would have been read only by an immigration official or police officer before being tossed straight in the bin'" (n. pag.).

emphasizing *her* mediation of that text. In an interview with Adèle Barclay, Thammavongsa relates *Found* to her earlier book *Small Arguments*, suggesting that the particularity of *Found*'s subject (her father) potentially made it a more difficult text for readers. She argues that "unlike a fruit or an insect, no one knew who my father was and so they had little material to work with" (n. pag.). Despite this, she acknowledges her father's "powerful story" as something she explicitly sidesteps in favour of an extended engagement with the materiality of her father's discarded journal. The poems dealing with the journal describe lists of measurements, stamps, scraps of writing, mark counting off days.

Found complicates the engagement that Razack identifies as central to the legal process for refugee claimants. In her article "Unmarked, Undocumented and Un-Canadian: Examining Space in Souvankham Thammavongsa's *FOUND*" (2015), Brittany Kraus suggests that Thammavongsa's engagement with the materiality of the journal stands as a refusal of the expectation to narrate a "model refugee" experience:

> Throughout *FOUND*, Thammavongsa refuses to produce (or reproduce) the "proof" of trauma, to proffer the types of "confessed truths [that] are assembled and deployed as 'knowledge' about [a] group" (Brown 92),[94] identity, or experience. Refusing to tell, to confess one's trauma or experience, is not only an aesthetic choice but also a viable and often potent strategy with which to counter the reading and interpretative practices that seek to secure identities and narratives in confinable and definable spaces. (7-8)

In *Found*, Thammavongsa challenges this encounter in two ways. First, as Kraus suggests, she refuses to provide proof of her family's trauma by choosing to not simply reproduce her father's journal, instead providing a poetic negotiation of her own reading of it. Second, in this privileging of her own experience as reader and *as audience*, Thammavongsa takes the place of the judicial system scrutinizing the evidential record of her father's experience. A poem like "What I Can't Read" exemplifies this, beginning by observing the script on the page ("Each letter / wound // around itself") and the way it bends into "an / inner ear // tiny / and landlocked" (26). In this move from direct description to a poetic metaphorization, there's a refusal of recognition that doesn't hew to Maguire's reading of noise and signal in Moure's work. Nor does it echo the lyric and documentary rearticulations of Dulai's work. Instead, Thammavongsa mobilizes a

[94] Kraus quotes Wendy Brown's essay "Freedom's Silences" from her book *States of Injury* (1995).

minimalism that tries to gather an understanding of her father's experience from a *lack* of information, basing her reading practice not in the historical pressures of the archive or the discursive machinations of continental theory, but in the inadequacy of her father's journal to clearly represent his experience.

As such, the physical body enters Thammavongsa's work much differently than either Dulai's or Moure's, negotiating the poles between the physical body under scrutiny and the conceptual figure of the border. Thammavongsa answers the narrative demands of citizenship through a formal and thematic focus on the *minimal*. Her three books *Small Arguments* (2003), *Found* (2007), and *Light* (2013) all share a minimalist aesthetic that belies the poems' political content – an aesthetic that brings to mind not only the formal constraints of haiku, but also, in a Canadian context, the work of poets like Phyllis Webb, Nelson Ball, and Mark Truscott. In her book *The Minor Intimacies of Race* (2016), Christine Kim points to this tension, observing the ways that Thammavongsa's practice cultivates a split textual public between the one cultivated through her openly political work published in the zine *big boots*[95] and the often apolitical dominant publics within Canadian and Toronto literature. Kim observes that "Thammavongsa's written work participates in multiple and somewhat differently configured publics, and consequently queries the nature of aesthetic and political representation from the angles of the decolonization of politics and public circulation" (138). Kim's question of differential publics acknowledges not only the different communities Thammavongsa is a part of, but also the ways her work is legible within those groups. To put it simply, categorizing Thammavongsa as "refugee poet" or "Buddhist poet" or "Toronto poet" or "experimental poet" changes the ways her work is read and circulated.

It also echoes the ways that these kind of categories operate in material ways for refugee claimants – a part of Thammavongsa's poetic that, contrary to Ganz's assertion, can't be bracketed off. Dawson reads Thammavongsa against a Canadian state whose border practices represent a rigid mode of "reading" and categorizing bodies. A

[95] A Toronto anti-racist zine active in the early 2000s. Kim argues that the work collected in spaces like *big boots* help form counterpublics. She argues that "the contributors to big boots perceive themselves as writing for just that kind of community is evident when they note that they, as visible minority women, some migrants, 'come stranded with stories and images. but not alone' (*big boots* 2). Here, readers and writers are brought into sociability to form a counterpublic by the circulation of texts about women of color." (139).

complicated assemblage begins to assemble around both the journal and *Found* itself, composed of Thammavongsa, her family, the state, both books, and finally the hypothetical readers of *Found* who find themselves shuffled between positions, invited to imagine themselves both as border agent scrutinizing evidence and a refugee textually "experiencing" a space of dislocation. If Dawson stumps for the value of the former in the quote I open this section with, Kraus leans to the latter. Reading a section at the end of *Found* where Thammavongsa describes the months of a calendar in the journal, often with just a hand-drawn diagonal slash – a literal marking of time – Kraus argues that "the reader becomes a participant in the refugee's experience of waiting—for a letter, for a visa, for permission to enter" (17). In one sense, this analogy is silly – the experience I have during the minutes I flip through the pages of a poetry book is not the agonizing wait for citizenship. In another, Kraus' collapsing of experiences opens up a path to read Thammavongsa's work as a text just as interested in the conceptual or theoretical as Moure. Earlier in her article, Kraus ponders the way that Thammavongsa works formally, leveraging minimalism to gesture to the "smallness" of refugee experience. Kraus argues that "Thammavongsa's 'small and brief' (13) prose invites the reader to consider the ways in which the lives and bodies of those without status or documentation are relegated to 'small and brief' spaces: refugee camps, detainment centres, dangerous pathways, slim hopes" (3). I want to be careful using Kraus' analogy between the "smallness" of the poems and the "smallness" of refugee spaces and the refugee body sliding through the cracks in policed borders, not only because page and space are not equatable, but also because I think the question we need to ask is twofold. First, instead of reading Thammavongsa's minimalism as a spatial analogy, perhaps we ought to read it along the same lines that Maguire reads Moure within the rubric of noise and signal. If Moure's excessive multivocal, multilinguistic approach aims to scramble the state signal to make room for queer forms of relation, Thammavongsa's minimalism instead approaches that signal through silence – a quiet refusal vs a cacophonous one.

Second, Thammavongsa's approach to "smallness" opens a philosophical question about the value of different forms of life. It's this question, not smallness or silence as metaphors, that begins to spatialize Thammavongsa's work since its here that she more explicitly takes on the codes shaping how we view, categorize, and value different actors. Kraus draws from Dawson and Razack to ask how Canada's immigration policies "evict" racialized "third-world" subjects from the ranks of humanity

"by denying them access to the markers of a First-World identity: citizenship, gainful employment, health care, human rights" (1). Kim makes a similar argument suggesting that Thammavongsa's poems examine the Southeast Asian refugee as a "form of life situated outside the reaches of national citizenship and the law" (125-26), sharing logic with the ways Nazi Germany stripped Jews of citizenship to both enshrine anti-semitism as law and reduce Jews to a status that was less than human. Kim notes that "Thammavongsa's texts suggest that often the process of representation has to do with how one is positioned within categories of citizenship rather than with the content of the story being told" (141) – a positioning determined by the kind of legal documentation (like a birth certificate or a passport) an individual carries. Out of the refusal of the legible confessional narrative and the lack of correct paperwork, Kim describes the ways the poems in *Small Arguments* "work to humanize *zoe* by drawing attention to the social structures that make certain lives as inconsequential as those of insects" (143-44):

> And yet, through their use of metaphoric substitution, the poems also underscore the limits of this form through which human recognition is bestowed. In the act of seeing and recognizing human and insect lives as interchangeable, an implicit question is raised about how demands for human recognition are made and heard; more precisely, the poems query whether the acts of humanizing—to be recognized as human—and human recognition—to be recognized by humans—might not also operate interchangeably at times. (144)

For Kim, Thammavongsa's poems complicate systems of recognition, reversing the downward pushing animalizing rhetoric by raising insect lives to the level of human lives. Thammavongsa responds to the slippery hierarchy of value, where racialized bodies are compared to animals and objects to push them lower down the great chain of being, reversing that metaphorical pull to countermand it and, in the process, insisting on the value of these "small" lives. This move is spatial, but not in the analogical way that Kraus suggests – small poems do not equal small spaces. Instead, this critique of how lives are valued involves an attack on the codes that shape spatial encounters and stabilize racializing assemblages.

The poems in *Small Arguments* play out ethical engagements through the careful employment of pronouns as Thammavongsa sets her speculations about the lives of non-human actors against an unnamed "you" who contends with the liveliness of those actors. In "A COCONUT," Thammavongsa turns accusatory, calling out the violence embedded in scrutiny; "To discover / what it keeps / from you // you take / from the

world, a violence // You do not know / any other way // by which / to come" (30). In naming this violent scrutiny, Thammavongsa decries the kind of interrogation that would literally crack open the body of the coconut. In "When THE BEE," Thammavongsa reverses this relation by positioning the "you" in a dilemma where, after being stung, "you" is left wondering what to do with the dead bees divided body. Thammavongsa asks, "[w]ould it comfort / this creature // if you placed it / by its other half // or would it be better / to leave it in you, / a mark / of how small a choice can be" (49). By forwarding this ethical question with regard to an actor who would typically be treated as disposable or relegated to footnotes, Thammavongsa might not *just* be making a metaphorical substitution wherein insect stands in for human.

If Thammavongsa's focus on the small and the intimate – on the geography closest in – pushes us back into questions of ethics and engagement, it's because it asks questions of legibility and recognition through similar terms of valuation and devaluation. The poems gesture to a revised sense of ethics, one that accounts for forms of narrative violence as they harden into striated spaces, rigid procedures, and forms of social scrutiny that actively devalue life. For Thammavongsa, the border lies precisely in these moments of engagement that articulate what counts as worthy, that counts and enumerates what and how lives matter. In response to this she points to the potential of minor engagement through an address to "you" that suggests a kind of scrutiny interested less in in categorization or hierarchy than in understanding, respect, or reciprocity. If the poems in *Small Arguments* stage a series of ethical encounters with the non-human in order to question categorizations of humanity, the poems that open *Found* stage space differently by starting with the individual body. With "THE HEART," "THE LUNG," and "THE SUN," three poems at the beginning of *Found* that formally echo *Small Arguments*, Thammavongsa announces a different relationship to material that distinguishes the two books. Where "THE HEART" underlines the real materiality of an organ where "nothing / can come / from here / but blood" (17), "THE SUN" sends rays down to harm that can be resiliently repurposed. These poems make two moves that rearticulate the encounters of *Small Arguments*. First, they invert the power relationship of the encounter by moving both inside the body (acknowledging its organization) and outside in a way that underlines the smallness of the human body. And second, they inaugurate a move that carries through the collection to connect individual encounters to

the complex border assemblage around the refugee claimant, whose experience cannot be fully recaptured after the fact.

"A house in this city is a witness box"[96]

The exclusionary and articulatory processes that define the border similarly cut across urban scales as bodies involved in the production of the city find themselves articulated by top-down pressures in formal institutional settings (the courtroom, the classroom) and less formal everyday settings (in the street, in a restaurant). While black and Indigenous people are subject to different histories and historically determined logics, as Iyko Day reminds us, both groups are subject to processes of racialization that shape the possibilities available to them. In this section, I read the work of Dionne Brand, Annharte, and Marvin Francis who stage (and resist staging) the violence done to black and Indigenous bodies in everyday spaces. Taken together, they struggle with a particular tension between a dislocation from an anchoring set of spatial relations, the articulatory pressures of existing white supremacist and colonial relations, and the hopeful production of new or resurgent relations that open up more just ways for people to live together. They identify articulatory points where black and Indigenous bodies are policed or are expected to police themselves through performance, locating themselves (and each other) within racializing assemblages that are coded by a junction of racializing and economic logics, performing in accordance with what Brand identifies as the economic "rhythm" of the city or the junction of legal and cultural dictates that Annharte calls the "Indian Act."

In his article "Indigenous Place and Diaspora Space: Of Literalism and Abstraction" (2016), Daniel Coleman compares Brand's work to that of Okanagan writer Jeanette Armstrong, highlighting the spatial differences between diasporic and Indigenous communities within Canada. Coleman's paper is part of a wider call to put

[96] My section title is a quote from Brand's *Thirsty*, where she identifies the way individual lives are caught up in repeating structural patterns. Opening a poem, she remarks that "[a] house in this city is a witness box / of every kind of human foolishness / and then it all passes, new people inhabit / old occurences are forgotten and / repeated to be forgotten again" (54).

discourses around diaspora and Indigeneity in dialogue with one another,[97] a move that acknowledges shared histories of colonial and imperial violence. Coleman deliberately draws a sharp distinction between his two broad categories in order to work through "what space of engagement might be opened up between Indigeneity and diaspora when their differences are emphasized," seeking to clarify "the limits of each other's claims" (63). Coleman opens with a general sense of this difference:

> The goal for refugees and migrants excluded from national citizenship or from participation in the global economy has often expressed itself in a politics of inclusion – and when the bid for inclusion encounters racism, class oppression, or other forms of rejection, then a politics of unbelonging – whereas the project for Indigenous peoples, engulfed by corporate extraction of resources from traditional lands and by unwanted assimilation into settler colonial systems of governance, has often expressed itself in a politics of separatism and sovereignty. (62)

Coleman sets up the settler-colonial nation as a third term in a dialectic between diasporic and Indigenous approaches, but asserts a desire to hold that third term at bay, focusing on the friction between the first two terms. Out of this friction between diaspora and Indigeneity (and with an admitted tactical essentialism), Coleman poses conflicting understandings of discursive (or "abstract") diasporic space and grounded (or "literal") Indigenous place. Tracing through an argument by Avtar Brah in *Cartographies of Diaspora* (1996), Coleman picks up on the entanglements of dispersal and "staying put," affirming that "[w]ith the deterritorialization of the territory itself, the native becomes, indeed, as much a diasporan as the diasporan is a native, insofar as every migrant worker is a displaced native who displaces another native," while acknowledging that the application of the term "diaspora" in such a broad way "conceives the field of relations within a single overarching paradigm that predetermines the kinds of power relations that can be observed within it" (68).

The abstract process that Coleman hesitantly pulls from Brah's work is interesting (and potentially problematic) for the way it poses "diasporan" and "native" as relative to one another. It's tempting to read "diasporan" and "native" as merely

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[97] Coleman acknowledges a chain of Indigenous and Canadian literary critics who work through aspects of this dialogue, gesturing to articles from Jace Weaver, Gerald Vizenor, Neal McLeod, Renate Eigenbrod, Deena Rhyms, and Sophie McCall. Coleman also mentions *Cultural Grammars of Nation*, which McCall edited with Christine Kim and Melissa Baum Gardner. To this, we could add recent work by Larissa Lai and Rita Wong.

conceptual inversions. What is important, I think, to remind ourselves that these questions of relative displacement are anchored in territory. At the end of his article, Coleman turns to the final "Maps" section of *A Map to the Door of No Return*, where Brand stages an encounter between four individuals who share a connection based in spatial dislocation. Sitting on a Vancouver bus, Brand and a friend witness a Salish woman ask the black driver for directions, a moment that strikes Brand because of the way that the repeated colonial reterritorializations and recodings of Coast Salish territory has made it unrecognizable:

> The road along which the bus travels may have been a path hundreds of years ago. This jutting of land through which this path travels has lost its true name. It is now surrounded by English Bay, False Creek, and Burrard Inlet. And Granville Street, whose sure name has vanished, once was or was not a path through. That woman asking directions might have known these names several hundred years ago. Today when she enters the bus she is lost. She looks into the face of another, a man who must surely be lost, too, but who knows the way newly mapped, superimposed on this piece of land; she asks this man the way and sits down. (219-20)

Coleman argues, if "[t]he very rocks and stones of the Salish traditional lands have been converted into an abstract geometry of streets, blocks, and bus lanes that physically abstract the land and place it under tropic inscription," then "[t]he dependency of the Salish woman upon the superimposed knowledge and technical expertise of the diasporic driver is a product of the abstraction of diasporic space from Indigenous place" (70). There is a step missing here, created by Coleman's tactical decision to bracket off colonial processes. From rocks and stones to streets and blocks, the repeated conversions of Indigenous land into an abstract and *instrumentalized* spatial geometry comes, as Iyko Day reminds us, through the abstract and effaced alien labour of diasporic subjects as it is mobilized by state-sponsored and capitalist settler-colonialism. Brand relates her bus ride to ponder the connection between the Salish woman and the bus driver, both of whom have been dislocated from an "original" place, but where the bus driver connects to a diasporic assemblage shaped by the ongoing traumatic histories of the slave trade, the Salish woman has had that place shifted out from under her as the human and non-human relations that ground Indigenous knowledges and spatial practices were (and continue to be) broken up.

Embedded in this moment of shared everyday disorientation are a number of questions about alliance, coalition, and racialization. First, it opens up the potential for

coalition against a spatially dominant settler-colonial organization that dislocates *both* black and Indigenous subjects, finding forms of relation that have the potential to cut across racial categories. Second, it reminds us of the centrality of land and relation to this dislocation, specifically here in the reality of the ongoing theft of Coast Salish territory (and the concomitant destruction of the relations that compose that territory), but also in the way that the Black Atlantic emerges from the removal of individuals from an "original" set of relations. Brand identifies the way that the structures of racialization are explicitly spatial, where dislocation and disorientation are tied to the contradiction she sites in the bus driver who is simultaneously lost and able to expertly navigate the colonial striations of the gridded city. How do we follow this suggestion of Brand's that there is a connection between black and Indigenous folks in terms of the way they are articulated by the immanent spatial and relational logics of the city? And, corollary to this, how do black and Indigenous residents counter these dominating assemblages that throw bodies in and out of place, that locate and dislocate, that articulate and stand expectant for the kinds of legible and reassuring performances (like those expected at sites like the border)? I want to pose two, perhaps overlapping, tactics that emerge from a reading of Brand, Annharte, and Francis together: the inward looking cultivation of forms of counterrelation that refuse or turn away from the dominant national assemblage, and outward facing engagements that talk back, refusing through confrontation.

For Indigenous folks, this doubled position – being dislocated and located at the same time – is complicated by a cultural understanding that Indigenous people don't even live in the city. In their introduction to their edited collection *Indigenous in the City* (2013), Evelyn Peters and Chris Andersen note the way that "[t]he association of 'authentic' Indigenous identities with non-urban locations positions urban Indigenous cultures and lifeways as inauthentic and less legitimate" (1), particularly problematic because of the significant number of Indigenous people living in urban centers.[98] In a 2001 interview with Rosanna Deerchild and Shayla Elizabeth, Francis suggests that his book *City Treaty* "examine[s] the treaty as literature from an urban perspective" (248). Francis places the question of Indigeneity and treaty directly in this urban context,

[98] Peters, Mary Jane Norris, and Stewart Clatworthy note in their essay from the collection that, according to the 2006 census, "slightly over half of Aboriginal people lived in cities" (29).

asserting the everyday realities of Indigenous peoples in the city. From this urban perspective, he pointedly critiques settler cultural and spatial codes while considering the mixed potential of performance and labour. For Francis, the treaty sits precisely in the consensus generated by shared spatial practices rather than in a written historical document – an assertion that acknowledges the continually emergent but stabilized relations of the settler city and the way those relations locate and administrate Indigenous bodies. In an expanded sense, "treaty" acts as a present tense coding of the kinds of performances expected of Indigenous folks (the "Indian Act" to use Annharte's words) in addition to being a historical agreement relegated to the past.

Perhaps similarly, though with a wildly different context, Brand frames black experience in Canada as a diasporic relationship to the transatlantic slave trade in a way that is not only found in narratives about the past but also emerges in the present – black folks living, to echo Christina Sharpe, "in the wake" of slavery. Similar to the way Francis figures the formation of the Treaties as ongoing rather than a discrete and completed historical event, Sharpe figures Trans-Atlantic Slavery as an ongoing event where black life lives "the afterlife of property" (15).[99] The wake of the ship forms a kind of metaphor that describes the way black life is caught up in turbulent water, still shaped, as Browne reminds us in her mobilization of slave ship as diagram, by the white supremacist belief that black life is only valuable for its labour and is otherwise disposable. At the same time, Sharpe argues that "rather than seeking a resolution to blackness's ongoing and irresolvable abjection, one might approach Black being in the wake as a form of consciousness" (14**).** Paul Barrett asks a similar set of questions around Brand's work, suggesting that "Brand's poetry makes the seemingly inconsequential and disconnected events of black diasporic life resonate with the legacy of diasporic dislocation, the unspeakable traumas of slavery, and the lost origins of the Middle Passage" (26). For Barrett, Brand doesn't fill the absences, fissures, and lacunae created in the wake of the Middle Passage and slavery, but instead depicts them "as part of the very substrate of black diasporic life" (27), producing a dialectic between the dislocations of the Black Atlantic, the violent locating of the black body in the structural

[99] This comparison between Francis' and Sharpe's positions isn't tidy, but I do think there is a case to be made that both black and Indigenous life lives "in the afterlife" of a system or structure that has supposedly ended, for black folks the antebellum regimes that transformed their bodies into property and for Indigenous folks the colonial machines that destroyed their relations to transform their land into property.

wake of slavery, and what Barrett calls “a hopeful expression of life that transcends the haunting traumas of the past” (29).

This dialectic describes a set of intersecting relationships that articulate blackness in Canada. I want to focus on Brand’s 2002 book *Thirsty*, which in the wake of recent police violence against black folks in both the United States and Canada, has taken on a potent charge. *Thirsty* shadows the 1979 shooting of Jamaican immigrant Albert Johnson by Toronto police, an event that not only, according to Barrett, “serves as a worrying reminder of how pre-multicultural Canada coped with increasingly difficult questions of cultural difference and race” (104), but also speaks to the difficulties of ongoing police violence against black men across North America. Barrett’s work on the journalism circulating in the wake of Johnson’s shooting notes “a discursive sliding between black, irrational, immigrant, problematic, deviant, and criminal such that the police violence against Albert Johnson is read as a tragic, yet unavoidable, response to black irrationality” (118). In her abstracted account of Johnson’s shooting, Brand laments the discourse around Alan (who stands in for Johnson), who is reduced to the narrative of his shooting. She asserts the importance of his personal history to this narrative. “It would matter to know him as a child,” she argues, “after all, he’s dead when this begins / and no one so far has said a word about him / that wasn’t somehow immaculate with this disaster” (13). For Brand, Alan’s shooting happens as part of a chain of violence against black bodies that is also an act of discarding those bodies from the “feral amnesia” (24) of the city.

Slipping in and out of narratives about “Alan” (a stand in for Johnson), Chloe (his seamstress mother), and others, Brand stages a Toronto thick with performed economic roles, accumulating objects, often restrictive urban rhythms, shaped by an overwhelming antiblackness. Early in the book, Brand slides between pronouns to describe the city as a “numb symmetry of procedures”:

> That north burnt country ran me down
> to the city, mordant as it is, the whole
> terror of nights with yourself and what
> will happen, animus, loose like that, sweeps
> you to embrace its urban meter,
> the caustic piss of streets,
> you surrender your heart to a numb symmetry
> of procedures, you study the metaphysics of
> corporate instructions and not just,

> besieged by now, the ragged, serrated theories
> of dreams walking by, banked in sleep (5)

In identifying the way the poem's speaker laments being swept up in the city's "urban meter," Brand points directly to the articulatory pressures of the city as her characters find themselves *located* by the movements and relations of the city, pushed to perform in certain ways. Through the character of Chloe, Brand reflects at points about the "seams" of this symmetry. At once, Brand contrasts Chloe's grief over Alan, particularly the way it's tied to a desire to "disappear" into the city's rhythms, to the reality that the city is not frictionless or "seamless."

"Seams" cut through *Thirsty*'s city, underlining the ways that the city is constantly being made and unmade, while also pointing directly to the hidden labour that composes the city. In a poem describing a commute to Toronto's suburbs, Brand explicitly racializes that commute, framing the city as a patchwork – connected, but not made from whole cloth:

> but of course no voyage is seamless. Nothing is a city is discrete.
> A city is all interpolation. The Filipina nurse bathes a body, the
> Vincentian courier delivers a message, the Sikh cab driver navigates a
> corner. What happens? A new road is cut, a sound escapes, a touch lasts (37)

While these racialized, perhaps undocumented[100] workers are dislocated in a national sense of belonging, they are more easily located in the economic rhythms of the city – valued for their labour. As these economic roles play out against the backdrop of Alan's shooting, Brand asks over and over what it means for a racialized person to perform in and help produce the city's rhythm even as the city marks racialized bodies as absent or, worse, disposable, seen in the way Brand draws together images of discarded objects and brutally murdered bodies.

[100] This interest in hidden labour is echoed in Brand's contributions to the documentary short film *Borderless*, directed by Min Sook Lee. The film follows two undocumented migrant workers: Angela, a domestic worker living in Toronto, and Geraldo, a construction worker living in Vancouver. It switches between the two subjects as they relate the difficulties as they are separated from their families, underpaid, without health care or recourse, intercut with a poetic commentary written by Brand and read by dub poet D.bi Young Anitafrika. On the one hand, Geraldo, for example, finds himself under greater risk than his Canadian co-workers since he can't access the health care system as an undocumented worker if he is injured. On the other, the film carefully outlines the economic situations of not only the workers, but of the employers themselves who are able to pay lower wages to undocumented workers, generating greater profits.

Brand carefully navigates between the separations of dislocation from national belonging, economic interconnectedness, and what Johanna X. K. Garvey identifies as "queer (un)belonging." In her paper "Spaces of Violence, Desire, and Queer (Un)belonging: Dionne Brand's Urban Diasporas" (2011), Garvey describes queer (un)belonging as a spatialization that counters dominant structures of belonging, emerging from a "diasporic stance" that seeks out affiliative or coalitional relations that don't draw from an "imaginary homeland frozen in an idyllic moment outside history" (767). In this sense, queer (un)belonging names the kind of spatial work Kit Dobson attributes to Brand's characters in her novel *What We All Long For* as they work to produce space and spatial relations outside of dominant structures of belonging.[101] Rather than look to queerness as only a descriptor for LGTBQ+ communities, Garvey employs a wider definition where queerness works "as what Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley terms a 'praxis of resistance' or 'disruption to the violence of normative order', and also to heteronormativity" (762). Tinsley, in her paper "Black Atlantic, Queer Atlantic" (2008), historicizes the maritime metaphors of Black Atlantic discourse, posing in the process the ways that queer relationships between black people on slave ships emerge as a base unit of struggle. Resisting easy metaphors of fluidity, Tinsley argues that "the emergence of intense shipmate relationships in the water-rocked, no-person's-land of slave holds created a black Atlantic same-sex eroticism: a feeling of, feeling for the kidnapped that asserted the sentience of the bodies that slavers attempted to transform into brute matter" (199). Tinsley's Queer Atlantic adds a wrinkle to Browne's use of the slave ship as a diagrammatic figure for the surveillance of black bodies, imagining a space within the oppressive regime of the hold for forms of black alliance.

[101] For Dobson in *Transnational Canadas*, the four main characters in *What We All Long For* present a younger generation that "feels little belonging to either the Canadian nation or to their ancestral homes," instead finding community as "an urban project, one engaged in the active construction of space, [where] they fracture notions of belonging through a focus upon the component parts of that very word: being and longing" (179). Dobson's extension of Goldman's sense of "drifting" asserts the ways that deterritorialization needs to be a continual project against the systematic recapture of racialized bodies within a racist system. Dobson asserts the tension in Brand's work between the scrutinizing and violent structures that locate and discipline dissenting subjects and the potentials of refashioning the relations that compose space – in particular looking to Brand's younger protagonists because of the ways they reject both nationalism and celebratory globalism in the face of oppression.

Garvey's argument picks up on the tension between violence and the moments in Brand's text that look for forms of relation *not* steeped in a structural antiblackness. For Garvey, Brand's exposure and rejection of the "'underpinnings' or requirements of belonging" is coincident with the speaker's "queer romance with the city" (762) – a rejection of belonging accompanied by the production of counterbelonging – a reterritorialization that must follow a deterritorialization. Garvey suggests that "Brand's 'I' is drawn to the 'border zones' and there finds the greatest opportunity for undoing normative belonging, even though such spaces are also fraught with the violence directed at diasporic bodies" (763). Garvey's sense of the border is both a point of crossing or dilation between two assemblages where there is some porosity or crossover *and* the points of exclusion and articulation Dulai and Thammavongsa find – both site of hopeful new relations and striating forms of violence. As such, Garvey picks up on the doorway Alan is killed in as both site of potential hospitality and a site where a black man is murdered because of a system built on "rote, immediate, and fixed methods of reading and identifying people" (764). The border acting as not only a point of dislocation, as in Brand's oft-mentioned evocation of the Door of No Return, but also a call to order wherein black bodies are asked to align themselves to a legible position within the material and narrative "rhythms" of the city. Between the striations of systematic "fixed methods" of engagement and the more contingent navigations of hospitality sits a version of what Deleuze and Guattari theorize in their maritime model – a tension between the narrative power plays of the structuring grid, playing out both in police violence and self-alignments to the city's rhythm, and contingent moments when black folks find one another to relate in ways counter to those oppressive spatialities.

The thick field of pressures and possibilities Brand works through in *Thirsty* echoes the way Annharte lays out what she calls the "Indian Act." In an interview, Pauline Butling asks Annharte why she jokes about "The Indian Act" – the understanding that "Indians have to act the part, as well as be ruled by the legal Act" (7). Annharte ties this "Indian Act" to the use of humour in her work, underlining the play in the word "Act" as both piece of legislation and invocation to perform – "We were all forced to become actors in some strange way" (7). Annharte critiques similar articulatory pressures to what Audra Simpson identifies at the border in her book *Mohawk Interruptus* (2014). Simpson looks at citizenship and its relationship to the border through a grounded refusal of state

recognition, asking a series of questions about the exigencies of border crossing in a system of nested sovereignties:

> Does an affiliation with the state or lack thereof translate into citizenship? Does geographic positioning translate into a form of citizenship? In other words, if you are born in a place, does that mean you are of that place? What if you refuse this tacit form of citizenship? And, *how* do you refuse it? *Can* you refuse it and still move? What is the role of *the border* in articulating grounded forms of citizenship outside the space of the state? (116)

Simpson answers these questions with a series of anecdotes that represent the multitude of stories about Indigenous "border experience, border trouble, border nonsense, the 'bullshit' we go through when we cross the border" (123). The stories reflect a mess of understandings about what is needed to meet the crossing requirements of the Canada-U.S. border – carrying the correct identification, meeting a particular blood quantum, matching an appropriate appearance, fitting an anticipated narrative. In one story, Simpson's Mohawk citizenship is rejected by a border agent until she can be read as American. In another, her status card is rejected because it doesn't carry the authoritative weight of a tribal letter. Simpson's anecdotal moments where the unstoppable force of Indigenous citizenship meets the immoveable object of the settler colonial border regime stand as discrete examples of the way the full weight of an assemblage bears down on an emergent encounter. In each of them, the burden is placed on Simpson to prove her identity, but to do so in a way legible to the border agent, echoing the focus on paperwork and proof in refugee claims.

Mobilizing a different form of "bullshit," Annharte similarly resists and ridicules the easy slide into recognition and legitimacy that appears with the demand to make oneself legible. In his introduction to *AKA Inendagosekwe* (2013), which collects Annharte's critical writing, Reg Johanson argues that Annharte works largely through a poetics of critique, suggesting that "[a]s an intellectual, Annharte is a critic, not a leader" – "she debunks, 'bitches' (her word), snipes, backtalks or 'backchats,' grumps, and gossips" (ii). In this frame, Annharte's poetics is one of position taking as she appropriates stigmatized positions created within racist, misogynist, and ableist social structures such as the "madwoman," the "crazy bitch," the "squaw," etc. Johanson identifies the way that Annharte conceptualizes identity through performance and struggle:

> For Annharte, "identity is a struggle" because on one hand some sort of "strategic essentialism" is often necessary: "governments will want to take our land because too many of us speak English and are not 'as indian' or culturally pure as we are expected to be" ("Borrowing" [113]). But at a certain point this position becomes untenable because it requires a performance of the Indian that the colonizer can recognize as legitimate, and so stays within the vicious circle of colonization and cultural appropriation. (xvi)

The catch-22 Johanson identifies in Annharte's work a critique of the necessity of performance when under the scrutiny of the state. For Annharte, then, "identity" is tied as much to the pressure cooker regimes of the state and Canadian society (and the performances they demand) as it is to shared histories, narratives, and spatial relations. Annharte's skepticism over acting like a "legitimate indian" and her insistence on adopting poetic personas that buck against legitimacy inform the urban spaces she writes in and about, spaces with uneven stabilities as Indigenous folks find themselves under threat of violence.

Humour, for Annharte, becomes a tool for "deprogramming" the self. In her article "Decolonize or Destroy: New Feminist Poetry in the United States and Canada" (2015), Amy De'Ath picks up on this use of humour, bringing Annharte's work into dialogue with African American poet Dawn Marie Lundy. De'Ath argues that their work produces what she calls "transformative antagonisms" (287) – a dialectic wherein the poets work within the grounded conditions and conflicts of Indigeneity and blackness in North America, while also imagining potential new forms of social relation. In other words, both Annharte and Lundy address their poetry to audiences both "*known* and *imaginable*" (De'Ath 287). De'Ath focuses on the antagonistic grammars of both writers, looking, particularly in the case of Annharte, at the ways the writers reposition themselves and attempt to recast the codes of recognition. This focus on repositioning subjectivity has spatial stakes because a politics of recognition shapes the assembling encounters and engagements wherein black and Indigenous bodies are scrutinized. Annharte's move to talk back to settler codes echoes Simone Browne's conceptualization of "dark sousveillance" as a way to reframe surveillance studies by centering black experience. Dark sousveillance, she argues, "is an analytical frame that takes disruptive staring and talking back as a form of argumentation and reading praxis when it comes to reading surveillance and the study of it" (*Dark Matters* 164). By mobilizing a kind of "back talk" to settler audience, Annharte employs a kind of dark (or red) sousveillance, turning forms of audience

scrutiny back on itself. De'Ath threads this kind of move through Annharte's "fun making," suggesting that:

> Mockery in Annharte's work is thus by no means limited to the function of a rejoinder to settler misconceptions. Rather, it is a powerful rhetorical technique designed to reposition the speaker – and her relation to audience – on her own terms and, as such, affords a degree of self-determination otherwise denied by settler culture. (292)

De'Ath presents this as a rhetorical move on Annharte's part, using humour to not only counter settler-colonial codings of bodies and spaces, but also to reposition the speaker of the poem speaks to a larger interest in the way that Annharte's poetics reimagines the ways that bodies are located and dislocated in space.

De'Ath begins her article by looking briefly at Annharte's poem "Squaw Guide" (from *Indigena Awry*), which "sets out an explicit antagonism between an audience figured as settler and the Indigenous speaker of the poem" (286). Annharte sets up this encounter along at least two valences. On one hand, Annharte sets herself up against a brick wall – an Anishinaabe stand-up comic cracking jokes to a settler audience ("Good Canadians") laughing at their own shitty behaviour. On the other, Annharte stages a movement through a series of institutions, from high school to the university, from politics to film, where her position (as "Indian" and as a woman) applies pressures to either perform or become invisible. She bends these two poles together, making silence an expected part of the performance. She poses her role in the university as an example:

> in the university I go every day
> during classes I transform
> from text book squaw
> who doesn't speak up
> I usually do this
> scary business when not supposed
> to say anything contentious
> silence is reward or reworded
> everyone looks my way
> to check if I am being quiet each day
> I might abuse my feminism
> switch bitch from academic squaw
> to academic sasquatch (14)

Here, Annharte leans into the ambiguity of the phrase "text book squaw" to poke fun at the way that the freedom of the university can only go so far. Moving from "text book" to

"academic" is acceptable, allowing her to speak up, but only in non-contentious ways lest she move from "academic squaw" to "academic sasquatch" – a wild animal (that, ironically, is also impossible to find). Annharte moves from this to a "native production set" – a play on a movie set meant as a sharp barb against reconciliatory Indigenous politics – where she is silenced by Indigenous men playing their own roles ("warrior," "chief"). Her response jokingly echoes critiques within comedy of "political correctness": "it's hard to be a political correct squaw / my secret: don't ever open mouth / or let yawn indicate how boring" (14).

Francis' work similarly examines "textbook" Indigeneity in terms of performance, treaty, and the rigid striations or "edges" that outline possibilities for Indigenous folks. In his essay "Edgework: Indigenous Poetics as Re-placement" (2014), Warren Cariou draws from Francis' *City Treaty*, particularly the poem "Edgewalker," to theorize the ways that Indigenous poets and poetics work to challenge the hardened boundaries that separate different communities. Working from Francis, Cariou poses that this process of "edging," of emerging and hardened social boundaries, "is in a sense what creates slums and Indian reserves, and also what enables the relatively wealthy and privileged to enjoy their place in the nation without being bothered by the horrific inequities that typify colonial reality on this continent" (32).[102] Cariou's edging echoes both colonial fortification and Deleuze and Guattari's definition of spatial striation as practices that organize and rigidify spatial organizations. In Francis' poetry and Indigenous poetry in general, Cariou recognizes the potential to challenge the stabilizing and striated colonial systems that reproduce intersecting racial and economic inequalities. With an eye on this intersection of Indigenous and class politics, Francis' poetry attacks the edges of colonial striation, not only asserting the presence of indigenous communities within a city like Winnipeg, but also cracking the codes that diagram and discipline the ways that city can be lived in. In "How Come These Guns are so Tall" (2006), Cariou performs a more detailed examination of what he identifies as Francis' anti-globalization politics, arguing that *City Treaty* navigates a difficult position between treaty as contract and the deep intersection point between colonialism and global economics. Cariou notes that Francis

[102] Cariou is also interested in the way "edging" also speaks to other kinds of systems of classification like the contemporary aesthetic categories of contemporary poetry. In response to this, he asks where "Indigenous poetry" fits as a category, answering that he "like[s] to think that it infiltrates the colonial aesthetic categories and shows them that there is more to art than drawing distinctions" (31).

zeroes in on contracts as an analogue to treaty production, since both work as mechanisms that produce hardened social edges, social distinctions, and boundaries:

> Thus, Francis asks us to view the treaties as economic contracts negotiated in a context of unequal power; in this book he looks at many other kinds of related contracts, from the "skid row tricks" (14) arranged between johns and prostitutes to the deals brokered by fur traders and art dealers from the seventeenth century to the present day. For Francis, these deals are no different from the treaties, since they are agreements by which Aboriginal heritage and/or labour are converted into capital and then re-sold by non-Native speculators in a global marketplace. (149)

For Cariou, the "city treaties" Francis works through operate in the everyday and are localized within face-to-face exchanges even as they connect to larger national and global pressures. In other words, Francis views the "treaty" as a consensus produced, in part, by the social and cultural pressures of the present. Within this context, where indigenous populations "sign" or co-sign treaties, Francis threads the everyday realities of urban life through the thickly heightened expressive codes that cross indigenous bodies.

Like Annharte, Francis employs performance as a poetic trope to both cut to the heart of "treaty" as a spatial and cultural diagram and to sousveil the colonial relations shaped by that diagram. *City Treaty* opens on the character of Joe TB, a "treaty buster" walking through the streets and logics of Winnipeg, followed by an unnamed clown that is part corporate mascot and part Shakespearean fool. Francis treats the city as kind of theatre. His text pinballs between poetry and drama, staging vignettes that point to the way the city is flooded with and shaped by colonial histories and narratives. Francis bends those narratives out of shape as, in the poem "BNA Actor," Joe TB performs Shakespeare, now Shakey Spear, taking on one of Hamlet's soliloquies as "Omelette." Starting out jokey – "to drink or / not to drink" (34) – Francis deviates from the script and gets critical, imagining a scenario where Christopher Columbus discovers Antarctica instead:

> think about it, man, indian pen
> guins, man, red and white noble penguins, man
> drunken fucken penguins, man, the only good penguin is a
> dead penguin, man
> just think what if columbus had discovered himself instead
> so to drink to drink

there's the rubbie walking down Main
doing that santa maria shuffle (36)

Imagining a self-colonized Columbus as a rummy (or "rubbie") shuffling down Main Street in Winnipeg allows Francis a bit of revenge on the figure who inaugurates the colonization of North America. But, and here's the rub, in grounding his absurdist flight of fancy in the stereotypical image of the "drunk indian," Francis presents us with a paradoxical situation where Columbus "discovers himself" instead of North America while also assuming the role of the drunk indian in the North End of Winnipeg. Francis deliberately blocks Columbus into this stereotypical role to expose the representational limits of the city - the settler-colonial imagination only able to imagine Indigenous people taking certain roles in the city – as absent, as drunk, as dead.

Similarly, Annharte bends her mocking backchat through the structures, encounters, and engagements that shape urban Indigenous experience. In particular, Annharte takes on the language that circulates in those encounters, deploying a black humour that swaps social and spatial positions. In "JJ Bang Bang" from *Exercises in Lip Pointing*, Annharte responds to the 1988 shooting of JJ Harper by Winnipeg police officer Robert Cross – an event that sparked the creation of the Manitoba Aboriginal Justice Inquiry.[103] With Butling, Annharte discusses the way she amplifies Cross' role in the shooting to create "the police person to be like a monster, like a Nazi, to convey what it's like to feel powerless on the street when there's this particular person who has all the power" (20). Rather than represent the historical event to the letter, Annharte strains the shooting through the larger context of anti-Indigenous violence, turning Cross into a figure who, when "[a]ll the violence [inflicted on Native bodies] fuses into one moment, this particular predator may embody all those things at once" (20). Both Cross and larger than Cross, the cop in "JJ Bang Bang" interpellates the title character – "I told you / stop in your tracks / give me your name address & / why you are walking down the street" (44) – asking for an identity, while also simultaneously narrating JJ Bang Bang's identity to him. "[T]rouble with you natives," the cop informs JJ Bang Bang, "you're not good enough / too 'mixed up' blood too damn / white like me not enough me / in your blood

[103] The website for the Inquiry identifies both Harper's shooting and the 1987 trial of the killers of Helen Betty Osbourne as incidents that raised "serious questions as to whether the justice system was failing Aboriginal people" (n. pag.). The inquiry filed a report in 1991, but no action to implement it until 1999.

http://www.ajic.mb.ca/reports/final_ch01.html

like me in your face" (45). The cop's scrutiny is informed by the negative narratives and language circulating around and sticking to Indigenous bodies. Between the ugly encounter and the isolated incident, Annharte identifies the ways Indigenous bodies are articulated within colonial assemblages, something that echoes in the cops own words to JJ Bang Bang when he snaps "I told you stop accusing me / my job is to look after you / but I'm not responsible to you / just for you your damn nation" (45). There is a wide difference in responsibility between being "responsible to," which echoes the kind of ethical engagements and kinship systems described by Leanne Simpson and Lee Maracle, and being "responsible for," which invokes the kind of paternalistic and assimilative structures not only of policing, but also education and social work.

Francis' work ties this paternalistic "responsibility" to economic outcomes, positioning Indigenous folks as they are caught up in a junction of colonial and capitalist processes. Remarking on the slippage between trademark and treaty in one of Francis' poems,[104] Cariou notes a shared maintenance of economic relationships in which "already impoverished people are required to give up even more to the institutions that so severely limit their options" (152). The effect is multiple, not only bending local and global together as the cashed in icons of colonialism are sold back to Indigenous communities, but also as the local is produced in part through a kind of consensus that emerges from these economic pressures, as Indigenous people (among other marginalized groups) are pushed and pulled into spatial practices that reinforce the status quo. Francis makes this short circuit clear in "Court Transcripts," where the circling wagons of settler fortification turn into a game of monopoly:

judge: why did you do it?
clown: they put the wagons in a square circle and I just lost it,
man
me: this little red wagon followed me home when I was a kid
caught me in the park and I was never the same after that
judge: do not pass go
do not collect five dollars per year free parking
no wagons (9)

In this exchange, Francis collapses together multiple pressures: the judicial and prison system; the intersection of colonialism and capitalism; the way all this is informed by the

[104] Cariou notes a slipperiness between these in the poem "mcPemmican," where a ™ is footnoted to mean "treaty manuscript" (6) instead of (but really in addition to) "trademark."

devious cultural codes of the western. Through this exchange, Cariou's edgemaking appears in the way the squared circle of wagons echoes not only the processual grid of the Monopoly board, but also the formal grid of both the correction line and the urban plan, and the way that all of these processes fail to listen to the Joe TB and the clown as they sit witness to the violence of colonialism and capitalism. The judge responds with incarceration – "do not pass go."

In "Who Am I to Judge," Annharte inverts this kind of scene, pulling the courtroom outside of the courthouse to flip roles with a family court judge sitting at a nearby table in a Vietnamese restaurant. Annharte assigns the judge an excessive amount of authority, making him not only judge, but also psychiatric nurse and social worker, in a way that reduces him to his structural position. She laments the lack of engagement between the judge and "a Native woman lately who lost kids" (51). Annharte jokingly puts her own actions under the scrutinizing eye of the judge – "I'm guilty I didn't cook at home / I confess to sweet and sour soup" (52) – but then puts *herself* in the position of judge, imagining the ways she could wedge into and crack open his life:

> I want to enter those conversations
> debate on how he or his wife
> sister sweetheart co-worker buddy adopted
> "papooses" from up north who return
> adult sentencing
> some adoptions are slavery
> in my jurisdiction I'd arrest anyone
> obstructing a mother
>
> I'm aware of how rude it is to mention
> a weak reputation on the part of the judge
> maybe he is an unfit judge
> his record, his resumé, his reference
> wouldn't slip by me without notice (53)

Annharte folds the space of the courtroom into the Vietnamese restaurant in a way that mockingly inverts its relations, claiming an offside jurisdiction that exposes not only the Canadian legal system's interjections into Indigenous life as just as disruptive, but also the way that an everyday space like the restaurant echoes the racist structure of the courtroom. Annharte feigns a politesse here ("I'm aware of how rude it is") that places her above the fray while simultaneously allowing her to hold court on the "fitness" of the judge – an unfit judge rather than an unfit mother. This politesse mirrors both the high

reasonableness of a space like the courtroom (where contempt is an infraction) and the easy rhetoric of multiculturalism. Though the Vietnamese restaurant is the state-sanctioned place to pass judgement, it easily serves as a site for judgement to circulate in ways that are less discrete or definitive ("*maybe* he is an unfit judge"). In addition, by making the courtroom a Vietnamese restaurant, Annharte also side-eyes the ways coalition building between Indigenous and diasporic groups can get snagged on identifications with the Canadian state. Annharte wants us to ask: if the courtroom and the restaurant can be folded into one another, if every house in a city can be a witness box, can't the actors in those spaces similarly slide into the structural positions of the legal system regardless of their background, leaving us with black cops, Asian judges, and Indigenous social workers whose work reproduces structural violence?

Annharte performs a similar speculative inversion in her poetic one-act play "Cannibal Woman Campout" (collected in *AKA Inendagosekwe*), which opens on a young, presumably white[105] man fleeing from Owl Woman, an "older First Nations woman with long hair" who has just assaulted him in the bushes. The assault is played for laughs (rather than the dire violence of "JJ Bang Bang") as Owl Woman bursts forth nude from the bush running lines that treat the young man like a piece of meat:

> OWL WOMAN: Did you notice a naked guy running out of this very bush holding his privates? That was prime Sir Loin but damn, he had to be a vegetarian to run like that. Too damn fast! He was so sinewy. I just want to drool thinking about what I just missed. Yummy yum yum. (80)

Owl Woman's lascivious hunger flips the ugly sexual predation of Indigenous women by white men. In "Gendered Racial Violence and Spatialized Justice: The Murder of Pamela George" (2002), Sherene Razack traces through the 1995 murder of Pamela George by a pair of white university athletes to unpack or unmap the colonial violence embedded in the event. For Razack, part of the problem is the way that violence against Aboriginal women is routine and deeply embedded in the spatial striations of the city:

> Two white men who buy the services of an Aboriginal woman in prostitution, and who then beat her to death, are enacting a quite specific violence perpetrated on Aboriginal bodies throughout Canada's history, a colonial violence that has not only enabled white settlers to secure the

[105] Annharte never identifies the race of the young man, but excessively identifies most of the other characters, some of whom, like "Native Lady Cop" and "Native Woman Journalist" are defined precisely by their position.

> land *but to come to know themselves as entitled to it*. In the men's encounter with Pamela George, these material (theft of the land) and symbolic (who is entitled to it) processes shaped both what brought Pamela George to the Stroll and what white men from middle class homes thought they were doing in a downtown area of prostitution on the night of the murder. These processes also shaped what sense the court made of their activities. (129)

In this frame, not only do the two white men act on a sense of entitlement to both the "Native" part of the city and George's body itself, but also find their actions enabled and excused by a larger, structural settler-colonial entitlement to Indigenous spaces and bodies. Razack ties the lack of an adequate response to George's murder to the striated spatialities that tied George's body not only to a specific location in the city, but also to a specific position as dehumanized sex worker: "[u]ltimately, it was Pamela George's status as a prostitute, hence not as a human being, and her belonging to spaces beyond universal justice, that limited the extent to which the violence done to her body could be recognized and the accused made accountable for it" (150). The authority figures of "Cannibal Woman Campout" echo this sense of striation when, during an interview with "Native Woman Journalist," "Native Lady Cop" analyzes the situation, remarking that "[u]sually the beach is peaceful and men enjoy the company of each other blissfully without anticipation of attacks by women never mind Native women," and also, and here's where Annharte turns the knife, "[s]ince the dawn of time, men have been allowed a rape, a pillage and a sack without undue consequences" (81).

Unfriendly Potentials

Both Annharte and Francis flip consequences in the direction of the white settler, imaginatively refashioning the hardened edges of the settler state. Brand, Annharte, and Francis propose different tactics to counter assemblages that articulate black and Indigenous bodies through junctions of legal and cultural expression and the material policing of those codes – from the racializations of *habeas viscus* to resistant forms of social relation or rearticulated forms of engagement. Both Garvey's and Tinsley's queer (un)belonging, which poses the potential for fugitive alliance outside the view of the dominating eyes of the mastering rhythms of a space, and Browne's dark souveillance, as remade by Annharte and Francis as an out of step (or "bitchy") mode of counterperformance, look to do more than refuse dominant codes, though both begin with refusal. When Audra Simpson asks, "*Can* you refuse it and still move?," she names

the difficult viscosity that Brand, Annharte, and Francis attempt to counter – the seeming impossibility of refusing one's articulated position in an assemblage while also wielding agency within that assemblage. What potential does the assemblage have for non-white and Indigenous folks to help rethink spaces and relations as emergent and therefore filled with potential for alternate forms of relation, provided that there is a critical mass of actors stabilizing those relations?

One hopeful answer might come from theorizations of decolonization and Indigenous resurgence, which insist on the necessity of the grounded normativity of Indigenous relations. As Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang insist, decolonization and resurgence are not metaphors, but are instead material processes incommensurable with settler colonialism. They argue that "decolonization in the settler colonial context must involve the repatriation of land simultaneous to the recognition of how land and relations to land have always already been differently understood and enacted; that is, all of the land, and not just symbolically" ("Decolonization is Not a Metaphor" 7). As metaphors or theoretical concepts, resurgence and decolonization are not something that I get to claim. As material or spatial processes, they involve nothing less than the dissolution of Canada, deterritorializing settler colonial relations in order to make room for resurgent Indigenous relations. If I'm hesitant to turn to resurgence as an optimistic counterpoint to the pessimistic tactics employed by Brand, Annharte, and Francis, decentering whiteness and settler colonialism as the dominating logics organizing things, it likely has to do with my own subject position as white settler – precisely the prairie born shithead Francis takes aim at in his poem "White Settlers" when he exclaims "[f]uck your colonial euro-attitude dudes" (47). In a sense, the cops and border agents (and other "euro-attitude dudes") posed throughout the poems I look at in this chapter offer up representations of the ways my own body is articulated as it struts freely through the streets with a different sense of what consequence or spatial friction entails. The intersecting logics of settler colonialism and white supremacy articulate the spatial possibilities available to me just as much as anyone else, only those possibilities emerge unevenly and asymmetrically in ways that I benefit from. Tuck and Yang argue that attempts from white settler scholars to capture the language of decolonization amount to an attempt to rescue settler colonialism by wrapping it in a cloak of innocence. How does decolonization work for someone like me for whom colonialism is a structure it's not in my best interest to get rid of?

It's difficult (and maybe ill advised) to not be pessimistic about this set of conditions (at least from my position), though I do want to affirm that, in the way it focuses on land and relation as emergent and reciprocal material process, resurgence stands as the answer and utopian horizon line for Indigenous nations, though I also want to avoid dictating the terms of that transformation. And resurgence echoes attempts from other groups to "make space" for marginalized community and for other forms of relation, seen most clearly in Wayde Compton's desire for black spaces in Vancouver – a desire that asks how a remediation of history's erasures can help provide a spatial anchor for a community to assemble around. Reading resurgence alongside and in relation to an assemblage model of space can perhaps underline Tuck and Yang's assertion that decolonization is not symbolic, but instead involves a reformation of material Indigenous relations with the land. For Tuck and Yang and for Compton, assembling spaces for marginalized, erased, excluded communities requires an attentiveness to the potentials for and limits to a community's ability to generate resurgent stabilities that create a new set of possibilities for more ethical engagements with others in space.

Building allyship and coalition stand as one strategy or tactic to work toward this. Larissa Lai identifies coalition building in her book *Slanting I, Imagining We* (2014) as "the building of relation, and the production of narrative, theoretical, or poetic content at the site of relation" (4). For Lai, relational dialogue cuts both ways. She argues that "[i]t occurs sometimes in the service of some measure of social justice, and sometimes in the service of entrenching racism" (4-5). At the same time, she suggests that relation-building between diasporic and Indigenous groups is often effaced on a mainstream level in favour of frameworks privileging a "white versus colour" binary that collapses differences. Informed by the antiracist organizing of the late 1980s and early 1990s, Lai's conceptualization of potential political alliances between diasporic and Indigenous groups speaks to an entangled set of relations with both white settler groups and with each other. These relations are fraught because of the way they can become entrenched or essentialized. Lai (alongside other critics like Miki)[106] insist that categories like Asian Canadian should be unstable, produced not through an essential shared quality, but through the work of building relationships and defining relations. Affiliative

[106] In *In Flux*, Miki suggests that the term Asian Canadian "functions as a limit term that lacks a secure referential base but rather is constituted through the literary and critical acts that are performed under its name" (xiii-xiv).

coalition building becomes one way to perform this work, but state recognition stands to harden categories. This tension between coalition building and state identification emerges from the very different historical and spatial contexts of Indigenous, Asian North American, and black folks as they relate to one another and to white settler colonialism.

What's most striking to me is the way that Lai begins her book by *locating herself* in the complicated relations of this moment. "Of course this is a personal project," she opens, "[h]ow could it be otherwise" (ix). In "Epistemologies of Respect: A Poetics of Asian/Indigenous Relation" (2014), Lai asks what it means for her to live in Canada as both Asian Canadian and Settler, a subject position embedded in a particular set of relationships and histories with both the state. Responding to Daniel Heath Justice's essay "'Go Away, Water!': Kinship Criticism and the Decolonization Imperative" (2008), Lai tries to locate herself given Justice's insistence on kinship and relation when reading Indigenous literatures, arguing that Justice "articulates an Indigenous ontology that is relational in its first instance" (101). Justice traces through the tensions in Indigenous debates around kinship, racialization, and land rights, triangulating them in a way that leans toward kinship as an approach to literary study. Justice's approach involves "attending to the cultural, historical, political, and intellectual contexts from which indigenous texts emerge" (165). Lai asks how to locate Asian Canadian subjects within Justice's attentiveness to relation:

> Insofar as I am 'Asian,' I am not Indigenous to this land; yet insofar as I am affected by the same colonial and neo-colonial forces that also affect Indigenous peoples, certain aspects of Justice's discussion might be applicable to the relations between First Nations peoples and Asian Canadians, and the respect these relations must rely on. (102)

Lai acknowledges the ways that people of colour have suffered at the hand of the Canadian state. She holds major historical moments of racial trauma in Canada – "black slavery in Canada, the *Komagata Maru* incident, the internment of Japanese Canadians, and the Chinese Head Tax" (100) – in tension with the potential for their struggles for recognition to reinforce Indigenous marginalization. In this tension, she observes a split potential, arguing that "[p]ossibilities for alliance thus do exist at the level of anti-racist work, but are fraught at the level of relation to and identification with the state" (100). Lai asserts that Indigenous and diasporic communities are linked through a relationship to settler colonialism, pressured, as Iyko Day reminds us, in interlinked ways by logics of

elimination and exclusion. But Lai is cautious with her coalitional claims, suggesting that alliance needs to be worked for and maintained.

Coda: What Is Here Now

> when H.S around the poets
> he calls himself an activist
> when H.S around the activists
> he calls himself a poet
> Then, goes home to normal jobs
> normal wives, normal routines
> while slow-jamming
> *how the strong will survive*
> *at the end of their gun* (LaFrance, 28)

> The food the names, the geography, the family history – the filiated dendrita of myself displayed before me. I can't escape, and I don't want to, for a moment. Being there, in Lawrence's kitchen, seems one of the surest places I know. But then after we've exchanged our family news and I've eaten a wonderful dish of tofu and vegetables, back outside, on the street, all my ambivalence gets covered over, camouflaged by a safety net of class and colourlessness – the racism within me that makes and consumes that neutral (white) version of myself, that allows me the sad privilege of being, in this white white world, not the target but the gun. (Wah *Diamond Grill*, 138)

Over the course of this dissertation, I have asked how spaces emerge from the ways actors assemble, communicate, and work together, posing that, as critics, we need to read space through its tense, even dialectical, exchanges between larger spatial wholes and more intimate relational engagements. The rooms we live in are the rooms we make through our movements, our actions, our connections, and our conflicts. Those rooms in turn shape the ways we can live, enabling certain spatial practices while restricting others. I want to conclude by briefly comparing two interventions into space to reflect on the ways emergent spatial productions are relationally uneven. Both challenge staid suburban spaces in Ontario and Alberta and attempt to open up space for different forms of spatial practice. They share similarities, but, when read together, reveal different potentials for resistant spatial practice that extend out of the tensions inside and outside the dominant settler colonial assemblage of Canada.

In her short story "Plight," Leanne Simpson writes about a group of Nishnaabeg folks – the "Fourth World Problems Collective" (6) – as they tap sugar maple trees in their neighbourhood in an unnamed city in Mississauga territory. She describes the work they do on two fronts: the physical labour of tapping the trees and the performative labour needed to reduce the colonial danger posed by their white neighbours. Through

this tension, Simpson poses a spatial problematic wherein a group of Indigenous folks needs to negotiate the thick colonial relations of the city in order to live off the land, urban style:

> Now it's March, and we have thirty tin buckets, thirty new spigots, tobacco, a drill with two charged batteries, a three-eighths-of-an-inch drill bit, and thirty fliers. The neighbourhood we're going into mostly votes NDP or Liberal in provincial and federal elections, and they feel relief when they do. They have perennials instead of grass. They get organic, local vegetables delivered to their doors twice weekly, *in addition* to going to the farmers' market on Saturday. They're also trying to make our neighbourhood into an Ontario heritage destination; I think that mostly means you can't do renovations that make your house look like it isn't from the 1800s or rent your extra floors to the lower class. We know how to do this so they'll be into it. Hand out the fliers first. Have a community meeting. Ask permission. Listen to their paternalistic bullshit and feedback. Let them have influence. Let them bask in the plight of the Native people so they can feel self-righteous. Make them feel better, and when reconciliation comes up at the next dinner party, they can hold us up as the solution and brag to their real friends about our plight. I proofread the flyer one more time because everyone knows white people hate typos (*This Accident* 5)

Simpson lays out the demographics of a well-meaning liberal neighbourhood that supports local business and protects its heritage – a set of relations that her characters find themselves negotiating. The flyer they distribute carefully poses their activities as an "adventure" that almost edges into performance art, using language that sands the political edges of what they're doing by making it about fun and not a direct challenge to the dominant spatial regimes of the neighbourhood.

The negotiation Simpson describes exploits a kind of white settler optimism based in a kind of carnivalist challenge to space – that is, the desire for space to be challenged eventally, though not necessarily in any way that lasts. Its appeal to the sedating power of quote-unquote "adventure" reminds me of the Arbour Lake Sghool – a Calgary collective active in the 2000s who leveraged their detached suburban bungalow in the city's northwest to generate a collaborative and relational practice. In a short 2012 article on Calgary's art scene, Ève de Garie-Lamanque describes the Sghool's mandate:

> This is the case for the Arbour Lake Sghool collective, which gradually has taken shape since 2003, when Andrew and John Frosst acquired the chic suburban house of their parents — long-since moved to Edmonton — and transformed it little by little into a rich artistic meeting place and production centre. Asking themselves questions about the modern

> suburbs' existential space and studying the primordial essence of urban behaviour, the collective takes the gloves off when it comes time to express themselves. Their hilarious interventions have seen them appear in court more than once. Over the years, members of the Arbour Lake Sghool have simulated a World War I battlefield on their property — including mustard gas and real trenches — for twenty-four consecutive hours, to the great displeasure of their neighbours; have pulled up their entire lawn and replaced it with barley, which they harvested when autumn came, in order to make beer ("Calgary the Go-Getter" 25)

In her book *Creative Margins* (2013), Alison Bain approaches the Arbour Lake Sghool's projects as confrontations with suburban residents who "cherish predictability, order, and privacy in their suburban dream scape" (224). For Bain, the Sghool's unconventional programming pushed at zoning and land use regulation, "transgressing the realm of property and deliberately rupturing the relationship between expected and unexpected uses to which suburban homes and yards can be put" (224). Most notably, and resonant with Simpson's story is their piece *Harvest*, where, in the summer of 2008, they tore out their front lawn, replacing it with a tiny field of barley that drew the ire of neighbours and bylaw officers – a move that challenges the reactionary defensiveness of their particularly middle-class Calgary suburb by calling into question the way that the land is used, but does so by appealing to a colonial settler imaginary that poses an earlier version of the space (agricultural farmland) as it returns or erupts into the urban present.

It's tempting to align the Arbour Lake Sghool and Simpson's characters because of the way that both identify the defensiveness embedded in their suburban enclaves. There's a thick and sleepy stability that both come against. But we need to pay attention to the very different stances they take with regard to ownership. The Arbour Lake Sghool's hijinks are made possible through their inheritance of the house they use as a site for spatial experimentation. While their practice challenges the way that land is used in suburban spaces, it does so by leveraging their ownership of a piece of land as property – ie. if they own the land, they should be able to do whatever they want with it. In their art-prank exceptionalism, the residents of the Sghool get to play spatial renegade, applauded for failing to ask permission from their neighbours – who call bylaw officers in the same way they would for someone who failed to cut their lawn, pull their dandelions, had too loud a party – while leveraging their *ownership* of the property. In contrast, Simpson and crew don't leverage their ownership to pull an artistic stunt, but instead pose performative "adventure" as a way to carry out certain land-based practices in an urban context without conflict. As part of their tree tapping, Simpson's characters

agonize over their neighbours' permission in a way that the Arbour Lake Sghool does not have to. Her characters don't act out of a faith in the colonial system of property ownership, but because that system of ownership is policed. Where the Arbour Lake Sghool's project was treated as a disagreement between neighbours, handled by bylaw officers wielding fines, Simpson's characters find themselves at a greater level of threat. Cast as trespassers on their own land, they seek permission as a tactical method to avoid potential violence. They work to "side-step suspicion" (6). The flyer they produce to sweet talk their neighbours describes what they're doing as an "urban sugar-making adventure" (6) – a distinction that obscures their Indigeneity under a vaguely rebellious, but playful art-making pose.[107] Simpson's narrator comments directly on this, noting that "[n]o one feels good about hiding the fact that we are Mississaugas and that this is us acting on our land, but no one wants to end up a dinner party conversation either" (6). When she describes the flyer as "the perfect get-out-of-jail free card" (6), the implication is that the liberal suburbanites can use their passive acceptance of the tree tapping as a "way out" of their status as colonizer. But Simpson's phrasing is deliberately ironic, as the posing of their land-based practice as an adventure that edges into a kind of artistic production is what keeps the neighbours from calling the cops.

In the ways that the Arbour Lake Sghool's relational artistic practice is transformed into a bylaw violation and the ways the Fourth World Problems Collective's potential arrest for trespassing (or worse) is transformed into an acceptably adventurous "art practice," we can see that both groups' activities are pressured and changed by the spatial relations they are embedded in. The NIMBY neighbours rubbernecking from cars and peeking from picture windows compose an array of surveilling eyes – a thickly stable assemblage – that collectively determine what is and isn't possible. Both projects face the ways those neighbours operate along racial and colonial lines that generate a sense of caution in Simpson's tree-tappers and a bulletproof abandon in the Arbour Lake Sghool's homeowners. These differences demonstrate how the expressive aspects of space – language, law, narrative, and storytelling – shape the possibilities available to each group. For Simpson especially, the reframing of a group of Mississaugas trying to

[107] Simpson frames the group's activity in terms of performance art, something she sees as easy path to getting the goodwill of their neighbours: "We debated framing this as performance art because white people love that and if it were the fall and this was Nuit Blanche we'd be NDN art heroes. We could probably even get a grant. But it's the spring and we actually don't want an audience; we just want to make syrup in my backyard without it being a goddamn ordeal" (6).

engage with the land as a fun urban adventure is tactical. In reframing their activities, they acknowledge the ways the peering eyes of the neighbourhood block captains can be defanged with the correct narrative, even as that tactical narration only takes advantage of the shape of colonial placemaking. In this sense, what Simpson narrates is a sad correlate of the challenge the Bawating Water Protectors pose to the Canadian space of Parliament Hill when they assert that Parliament Hill is on Algonquin territory. Both the tactical pragmatism of Simpson's characters and the defiant anticolonialism of the Water Protectors work in reaction to the ways Indigenous relations are nested with Canadian ones and highlight the sheer difficulty of putting together moments of resurgent counterstability that make space for self-determined forms of Indigenous spatial practice that do not need acceptance from suburban neighbours or colonial governments in order to exist.

The Fourth World Problems Collective's flyers work at the spatial junction of language and matter, taking advantage of the expressive shape of the space they were negotiating by appropriating the language that circulates through that space in a way that reduces the material risk of their engagements. This move is important because it demonstrates the way that language can be useful in shaping the ways actors engage one another, though it does so by working *with* the grain of the way the suburban space is organized, replacing one narrative around the danger posed by non-white folks who are "out of place" or not where they are supposed to be with another that frames their tree tapping as a positive event. Over the course of this dissertation, I've tried to highlight this tension between working within a dominant spatial assemblage, finding ways to live within and slowly shift its relations, and trying to build and rebuild spaces that are in some way outside that dominant assemblage. I've approached work that negotiates the organizational grain of spaces even as it attempts to work against it, doing more than reducing risk or reproducing the dominant codes around the spatial production of neighbourhoods, of nature, of bodies, and of nations. In Simpson's story, these two spatial problems are entangled. Despite looking to build relations and practices incompatible with Canada, Indigenous resurgence constantly contends with the thick spatial relations of settler colonialism – a set of relations where even the best intentioned settler can return at any moment to the dominant "normal" relations of an everyday life shaped by anti-Indigenous logics. The Arbour Lake Sghool sits firmly in the pocket of these "normal" colonial relations. In transforming their front yard, they ask why

they shouldn't be able to use their property as they wish. In contrast, Simpson proposes ways of living that don't consider the trees property at all.

I end with this complex of examples because of the way it illustrates the uneven and asymmetrical intimacies at the heart of spatial production. As we look at poetics as a part of spatial production, I feel like it is imperative to pay attention to these intimacies, particularly as they add up, shaped by logics that need to be challenged. As I write this conclusion, sitting in this Starbucks at the corner of Cambie Street and 19th Avenue in Vancouver (on unceded Coash Salish territory), I slide between this paragraph and the discussions dominating Twitter about the acquittal of Gerald Stanley, a white Saskatchewan farmer who shot 22 year-old Cree man Colton Boushie at point blank range. Across the country, Indigenous people and allies protest the verdict, organizing marches and making arguments in newspapers and on social media. In a *Globe and Mail* op-ed, Indigenous scholars Gina Starblanket and Dallas Hunt ask how Stanley's defence illustrates a kind of settler defensiveness that emerges from an eliminatory logic against Indigenous life. They point to the opening remarks of Stanley's attorney, Scott Spencer, who argues that "[f]or farm people, your yard is your castle." For Starblanket and Hunt, this gesture to the idea that Stanley was only defending his castle emerges from a whole historically-shaped assemblage of concepts, practices, and narratives around property, masculinity, education, legal and political institutions, the value and absence of Indigenous bodies, the medieval romance of knights, kings, and heroic frontiersmen. Answering the question of why the castle is mobilized as a metaphor by Stanley's attorney, Starblanket and Hunt link the metaphor to the way settler-colonial claims to land need to be protected with violence, even now. Under this metaphorical logic, the colonial reality is that "Indigenous existence itself is understood by settlers as a threat that always already rationalizes the use of violence" (n. pag.). Given this justification, it's easy to see why Simpson's characters would exercise caution in their tree tapping (or even why the Arbour Lake Sghool are able to be so carefree in their suburban play).

What interests me in Starblanket and Hunt's account, however, is the array of intimate engagements that add up to form the colonial structures that produce Boushie's shooting and Stanley's acquittal. Similar to the discussions of the Mikinaakominis/TransCanadas conference I deal with in my intro, Starblanket and Hunt reflect on the courtroom itself to ask what relations structure justice in Canada. In the

hung portrait of Queen Elizabeth and the royal officers stationed outside the courtroom, Starblanket and Hunt see that "[t]he castle and its attendant imagery is alive and well even in the spaces that absolved Gerald Stanley of being responsible for the death of Mr. Boushie, in a site that was supposed to deliver justice" (n. pag.). In this description, the colonialism in that Saskatchewan courtroom is as thick like the gilded rooms of Hart House or the suburban enclaves of Calgary and Toronto, linking together in and through the larger castle building project of Canada. These colonial rooms and spaces produce a thick and often limited set of spatial possibilities for all the actors who productively enter into them. If we want to transform this asymmetrical sense of spatial justice, where justice is only available to some, we need to not only break out of the material structures and logics that shape these spaces, but also produce and stabilize new and resurgent forms of spatial production.

In the face of this, we're left with a mess of questions. How do we transform our intimate engagements and our spatial logics? How do we shift our thinking around land from property to our relations with one another? How do we pay attention to the entanglement of the material and expressive spatial components without reducing our readings to one or the other? How do we change who and what we value and devalue? I have no clear-cut answers to any of these questions, but as I've argued across this dissertation, poetry can prove a valuable tool to map and challenge the codes that cut through these questions, though we need to also be cautious about the claims we can make for it. The transformations that a poem might propose need to become entangled with material relation. Poetry can provide points for individual speculation or reflection, but it can also act as a flashpoint for community. Poetry can identify the tensions, contradictions, and injustices at the heart of contemporary spatial practices. It can chart the way our intimate and everyday lives are part of larger spatial processes and projects, even showing us, maybe, a way to something else. But like the differences between the Fourth World Problems Collective and the Arbour Lake Sghool, so many of these potentials are caught up in the uneven productions of space. In this unevenness, what does allyship look like for a white settler scholar like myself? Like the renegades of the Arbour Lake Sghool, my position is complicit with the actions of Canada, swept up in the agental field of the nation – blameful even as I might claim a kind of innocence, not the target, but the gun. In many ways, hope for coalition or alliance is at best fraught and at worst incommensurable with my position. If I end my dissertation with this difficult

question of allyship, I do so because it stands as the hurdle and horizon for spatial justice. As Saldanha might remind us, the relations of white supremacy and settler colonialism are viscous, thickly articulating actions and practices across a spatial field even when the actors in that field cry experimentation or decolonization. We need to pay attention to what and whose terms allyship is defined. Because of the way that assemblages are nested in Audra Simpson's sense, where an assemblage can proliferate at another's expense, the demand for allyship when coming from the dominant assemblage can act as a mechanism through which an actor is articulated into that dominant structure, playing the part to both become legible and gain agency. Yet, at the same time, because of its attention to relation, allyship carries the possibility of building counterstabilities and of generating potentials that are unfriendly to the unjust ways space is produced and reproduced, to the ways bodies are articulated and the uneven possibilities that open up and shut down as we meet one another in the streets, in the squares, along the hiking trails, in the laboratory and the workplace and the courtroom. As we produce space and each other.

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