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Poetics and Extraction

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Guest Editors: Max Karpinski and Melanie Dennis Unrau

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Poetics and Extraction

Max Karpinski and Melanie Dennis Unrau

Surely in the project of this agenda we call “literature” a person—especially one who is queer and/or BIPOC—can be asked to exchange the body for an economy, to work calorically as a means of currency, to burn the midnight oil so as to continue the project of pipelines that fund the very root of this institution. Here, this abuse I inflict willingly upon myself is a means of bloodletting into a vial, the blood then aged, like a fine wine, until it too becomes fossilized fuel running the larger machines of Canada, intricate cogs pressing through the coagulation of clogs, and I am celebrated for showing the body in its scraped, raped glories—all of this within the voyeurism of a genre we call non-fiction.

—Joshua Whitehead, *Making Love with the Land*

What do literary and cultural scholars talk about when we talk about extraction? What does an attention to resources and/or extraction animate in our analysis of cultural, literary, and poetic responses to so-called Canada? Understanding *Canada* as referring, always problematically, to the land on and with which we live, the settler-colonial nation-state, and an ideological cultural project, in what ways might cultural production and scholarship in the field of “Canadian literature” address the unfolding, intensifying, and deeply entangled environmental and social crises that mark the present moment? As literary scholars attentive to extraction in the context of settler colonialism’s ongoing manifestations, how does our practice shift when the texts we engage are produced by bodies at risk, in conflict, and on the front lines and frontiers of extractive capital?

This set of questions has guided our process for putting together this special issue of *Canadian Literature* on poetics and extraction. The first qualifies, and responds directly to, Imre Szeman and Jennifer Wenzel’s afterword to a recent special issue of *Textual Practice* titled *Writing Extractivism*, edited by Justin Parks. As our vision for this special issue has transformed over the eighteen months since we began discussing it, that collection of essays, particularly the afterword, has continued to exert a powerful influence on our thinking about the possibilities for cultural responses to environmental crisis, the assumptions about culture and

extraction that we make as literary scholars, and the role of literature and art in representing and resisting extractivism in all of its harmful forms, as well as imagining equitable and just modes of relation for our present and future.

Szeman and Wenzel write that “[t]he relations between extraction as a concrete, physical practice, on the one hand, and extractivism as the cultural and ideological rationale that either motivates extraction or is the consequence of it, on the other, are necessarily complex and difficult to untangle” (508). A key element of their afterword is a circumspection about the ascendance of extractivism as theme and topic in literary studies. They emphasize the need to remain grounded in theoretical, geographical, and historical specifics in our discussions of individual extractive sites or projects, and they warn about the dangers of the portability of these terms—that is, the conceptual slippages that occur when we uncritically deploy *extraction*, or identify the ideological work of *extractivism*, in and across material, theoretical, and discursive contexts. Taking seriously these warnings against mistaking literary criticism for activism by “substituting words for politics” (520), we have adopted a different approach to both extraction and extractivism in the development of this special issue.

We are early career, white-settler scholars of ecopoetics, Canadian and Indigenous literatures, energy humanities, and settler-colonial studies living on Indigenous territory—Max on the traditional lands of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, and the Mississaugas of the Credit in Toronto, and Melanie on Anishinaabeg, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dakota, and Dene territory and Métis homeland in Winnipeg. From our embedded and implicated positions in the intersectional convergence of climate change, Indigenous resurgence, and reckoning with systemic racism (following colonial dispossession and enslavement, ecocide, and genocide), we consider the extraction of “natural resources” to be inseparable from the extractive logics and poetics of colonialism and racial capitalism. Beginning from an understanding of our work on oil-worker poetry (in Melanie’s case) and appropriative or extractive experimental poetic form (in Max’s case) as distinct yet related poetics of extraction, we framed our *Poetics and Extraction* call for submissions in ways that we hoped would evoke and welcome a multiplicity of poetics of/with/against extraction from various perspectives positioned

within, near, or in resistance or opposition to the problematic field of Canadian literature.

Where Szeman and Wenzel posit that it may be better to talk about *extractivisms* rather than *extractivism* (510), and about a variety of extractive aesthetics (511), we consider seemingly separate extractivisms to be localized expressions of a universalizing, geontological division between life and non-life that has been used to frame not only so-called inanimate resources such as furs and oil but also Indigenous, Black, and People of Colour as extractible (Povinelli; see also Yusoff). Following Macarena Gómez-Barris, we consider the “submerged perspectives” of localized seeing, grounded in specific human and non-human relations (1), as potential sites of resistance to the “extractive view,” a mode of colonial and “vertical seeing” that creates the “extractive zones” of the dominant geopolitical order (6-7). Despite this specificity, we suggest, the experience of extraction and of life in an extractive zone can be scaled up through analysis of racial capitalism and/or colonialism as generalizable but not universal phenomena (Robinson 2; see also Liboiron 151-56).

Following Métis scholar, scientist, and artist Max Liboiron’s intervention in environmental discourses in *Pollution Is Colonialism*, we consider practices of extraction in Canada to rely on historical and ongoing land theft as the basis for access to Indigenous land as both resource(s) and site(s) of pollution. As Oji-Cree/nêhiyaw writer and scholar Joshua Whitehead demonstrates in the epigraph above, Canadian extractivist logic extends to the realm of literature and the appropriation of queer and Indigenous literatures and body-spirits within CanLit. Following Ryan Cecil Jobson’s essay “Dead Labor,” which intervenes in the energy humanities to show that fossil capital is premised upon a pre-existing regime of racial capital, we understand the violent system of energy extraction, hoarding, and overconsumption, and the attendant environmental racism that exposes racialized communities to its worst effects, to be premised upon an original dehumanizing abstraction of labour through slavery. Our engagement with environmental humanities and energy humanities scholarship in the context of Canadian literature occurs with a view to anticolonial and antiracist practice in these fields, and with acknowledgement that as beneficiaries and inhabitants of colonial and racial-capitalist systems we may misstep or fall short.

In our thinking about our responsibilities as guest editors seeking to make meaningful links across disparate place-based struggles with and against extractivism, we have returned often to Liboiron's articulation of decolonial and anticolonial methodologies that move between specificity and generalization. In the context of recognizing that "[d]ifferent groups have different roles in alterlives, reconciliation, decolonization, indigenization, and anticolonial work," they argue for "specificity as a methodology of nuanced connection and humility" (22). In terms that resonate with Szeman and Wenzel's cautions as ever more humanities scholars take up extractivism and its attendant concepts, Liboiron names a mode of reading and thinking with others that attends critically to different obligations, positions, and onto-epistemological backgrounds (31). In approaching extractive zones and thinking with literary and critical responses to those sites, we must remain cognizant of what we cannot know, of how each of us has come into our knowledge, and of the people, places, and beings to which we are beholden in our work, while also implementing practices to "'study up' toward structures of violence" and to forge solidarity and communities of resistance through "commonality, shared characteristics, and overlap" (88, 152-53).

The articles, statements of poetics, poems, and book reviews collected in this special issue on poetics and extraction speak to the theme from a range of perspectives—positioned, variously, as critical of, observing, opposed to, entangled in, harmed by, mimicking, enacting, subverting, averting, transforming, and finding alternatives to extraction and extractivism. As literary scholars, we are interested in the many ways these works apprehend and critique extractivism as a mode of racial capitalism (Gómez-Barris xvii), as a resource relation (Liboiron 145), and as a poetics; yet we are also interested, cautiously, in attending to what they contribute to envisioning good, non-extractive ways of living and being in relation. This would be to think of the work of literary scholarship in the face of ecological and social injustice as not only "the difficult task of understanding the character of [the] barriers" to materializing livable futures (Szeman and Wenzel 519), but also, with Liboiron again, as orienting ourselves "toward an 'ought' rather than an 'is'" (154). Generalizing and

speculating, we see a secondary theme both in the content of the issue and in our work and learning as editors: an ethics of care and love that emerges, like Whitehead's formulation of "making love with the land," as a poetics running against the current of extraction.

In the texts that follow, you will see instances of radical care, self-care, and love as responses or alternatives to extraction. These take the forms of land and water defence, care for family, harm mitigation, self-protection, refusal, reclamation, revision, manifesto, survival, learning what it means to be beholden to Indigenous law in the places where we live, and more. These submerged and emergent poetics, which must themselves be handled with respect and care, offer clues for how to orient ourselves and our critical and creative work toward new, more just horizons.

The first two articles link extraction with racist and colonial logics. In "*Pro Pelle Cutem: On the Subject(s) of Extraction in Fred Stenson's The Trade*," Rūta Šlapkauskaitė uses the Hudson's Bay Company's motto as a starting point for a reading of the figures of skin, flesh, bones, rum, and the Windigo in Stenson's turn-of-the-millennium novel. Šlapkauskaitė's geontological lens links a colonial distinction between living and non-living matter to the racist, misogynist, and classist power dynamics that underpin the fur trade, the transatlantic slave trade, and the settler-colonial nation-state. In "Quite here you reach': T(h)inking Language, Place, Extraction with Dionne Brand's *Land to Light On*," Louis M. Maraj thinks and tinkers with Brand's foundational Black ecopoetic text in a poetic-essayistic mode that incorporates Trinidadian English. Maraj brings personal reflections, on a return to Trinidad to care for his mother, into conversation with Brand's engagements with language, place, and extraction. Where others have seen ambiguity in Brand's poetics of refusal (of gender and sexuality, of language, of geography and nationality, and of the land affiliations on offer) in *Land to Light On* (1997), Maraj points to a para/ontological poetics of Black meaning-making that animates the fraught terrain of anti-Blackness and its undoing.

In the third article, "Al Moritz's Anti-Extractivist Style: Non-Instrumental Instrumentalism and the Poetics of Materiality," Shane Neilson argues that Al Moritz's visionary and understudied

poetics of abundance resists extractivism in both form and content, especially in the 1994 collection *Mahoning*. Responding to Szeman and Wenzel's call for specificity, material grounding, and a kind of realism in literary scholars' engagements with extraction and extractivism, Neilson argues that poetry in general, and Moritz's Romantic-influenced poetics in particular, face the question of their own meaning and efficacy in the world with a "non-instrumental instrumentalism" that counters extractive logics.

The fourth and fifth articles focus their analyses on petropoetics. In "Stinking as Thinking' in Warren Cariou's 'Tarhands: A Messy Manifesto,'" a study of resource aesthetics that draws on recent work in olfactory ecocriticism and settler atmospherics, Stephanie Oliver offers a close, smell-focused reading of Cariou's 2012 experimental photoessay. In light of Canada's withdrawal from the Kyoto Protocol in 2011, the energy humanities' foundational concern over the question of whether oil is representable or perceptible, and petromodernity's preoccupation with vision, audition, and rationality, Oliver demonstrates that Cariou mobilizes a different, irrational distribution of the sensible. "Making a stink" within the settler-colonial petrostate leads to more intimate and ethical forms of energy, responsibility, and the future. In "Low Class Oil Trash and the Politico-Aesthetics of the Fossilized Proletariat," Jacob McLean studies *Facebook* posts made by Low Class Oil Trash, a pro-oil, working-class clothing company founded by the spouse of an oil-and-gas-industry worker. Comparing the politics and poetics of Low Class Oil Trash to other extractive populist social media groups funded by the oil and gas industry and studied elsewhere, McLean shows that operating independently of the oil lobby allows Low Class Oil Trash to be more extreme—more "vulgar, racist, misogynistic, and violent" than the subsidized groups (100). Yet even this extreme extractive populism is tacitly endorsed by and enfolded into the reactionary pro-oil discourses the industry depends upon—so McLean calls for a rapprochement of studies of fossil capital and the far right.

In addition to the five peer-reviewed articles, we are excited to present a forum titled "Writing with/against/as Extraction in So-Called Canada: Poets on Poetics." The forum includes edited versions of statements first delivered at two invitational, online "Poetics, Energy,

and Extraction” events that we hosted together with Dr. Warren Cariou (Métis) at the University of Manitoba Institute for the Humanities in 2022. We are gratified to present these critical reflections and engagements with intersectional decolonial poetics and hydro justice in Kazim Ali’s *Northern Light*; Madhur Anand’s repurposing or treatment of her own scientific articles as poems, so as to imagine new transits between science and culture; poetry about oil work and the oil industry, including Lesley Battler’s *Endangered Hydrocarbons* and Lindsay Bird’s *Boom Time*; Indigenous poetics and Cariou’s concept of “Indigenous energy intimacy”; Adam Dickinson’s “metabolic poetics” responding to the permeable body’s experience of petrocultures; Cecily Nicholson’s articulations of alternative modes of relation from spaces and sites of extraction; Kelly Shepherd’s embodied writing practice that tracks the exchange between environment, work, and writing subject; the literary care work of Douglas Walbourne-Gough (mixed/adopted Qalipu Mi’kmaq) for Crow Gulch in Corner Brook, Newfoundland; and activist and anti-pipeline poetry and poetics from Jennifer Wickham (Gidimt’en Witsuwit’en) and Rita Wong. We would like to thank all of the contributors to this special issue for their generous, careful, and brilliant work, and for their willingness to share their work with us and with readers.

This issue also includes thoughtful, on-theme selections of poetry and reviews curated by poetry editor Phinder Dulai and book reviews editor Nicholas Bradley. We are so grateful for the opportunity to work with all of the editorial and support staff at *Canadian Literature*, especially Christine Kim and Niamh Harold, who generously guided and helped us through the process of editing a special issue.

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Pro Pelle Cutem: On the Subject(s) of Extraction in Fred Stenson's The Trade

In an early scene in Fred Stenson's historical novel *The Trade* (2000), where the fur traders gather at York Factory in 1822 to celebrate their profits, the visceral charge of human flesh—the bodies' "devil faces grinning," "the skin puckered," "a dead eye look[ing] disinterested in whatever excited the living one," and a nose "slit on one side [with] the flap remain[ing] unjoined" (8)—alerts us to the brutality of the physical and emotional experience of the "working stiff[s]" of the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) on Canada's western plains (5). Foreshadowing the disaster of the Bow River Expedition of 1822 and its tragic consequences for the novel's central characters, the affective imprint of the opening episode delineates the extractive axis along which the HBC organized its colonial activities in relation to Indigenous ecologies as well as white and Indigenous subjects. The figure of the skin highlighted in Stenson's description of the labourers' bodies has important implications for recognizing how the HBC's extractive economy built its wealth by means of the ontological division between living and non-living matter, on the one hand, and the racial division between white and non-white subjectivities, on the other. Congealed in the novel's use of skin as a trope of extraction and economic and affective transactions is the collision, conflation, and confusion of systems of value, through which *The Trade* traces the colonial appropriation of Indigenous ecologies and the rendering of human and non-human bodies into "sacrifice zones" (Miller 19).

The trope of skin has played a pivotal role in organizing the HBC's commercial and ethical imaginaries, as testified in the Company's Latin motto *pro pelle cutem*, which roughly translates as "a pelt for a skin"

("Pro Pelle Cutem"). The conceptual agency of the skin metaphor here mirrors the ambivalence that surrounds the Company's own cultural remit as an agent of commercial and territorial expansion. Charles II's extension of a royal charter to the newly founded HBC in 1670 stirred Britain's commercial instinct to try out capitalist modes of appropriation and accumulation in the contested spaces of North America's colonial economies, to the point that, as Stenson observes in an interview with Herb Wyle, the Company "was the form of government, and the only kind of law and order was whatever it chose to manifest" (*Speaking in the Past Tense* 191). From the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries, the European craze for otter, muskrat, and beaver pelts propelled the HBC into launching new commercial circuits of frontier commodity exchange and mapping new routes of colonial invasion. Keyed to the political rivalry between the British and the French (and later also the Americans), the economic stakes of the fur trade were tethered not only to the diplomatic channels of cross-cultural commerce and the rescaling of priorities in the shift from merchant to industrial capitalism, but also to the material ecosystems at home and abroad, whose mutual entanglements gave the HBC the confidence to treat its colonial outposts as lucrative "frontiers of possibility" (Evans et al.).

The epidermal focus of this axiology, as spelled out in the HBC's motto, literalizes the logic of extraction that continues to destroy certain forms of life for the sake of nourishing others. Figured as "a pelt for a skin," the motto displays the transactional principle that transformed the skins of living creatures into commodities. Yet what the structural tension between the Latin words *cutis* and *pellis*, which refer to living and flayed skin respectively (Connor 11), continues to mask is that this scene of exchange also recalibrates human skin as a bearer of signification, both social, ontological, and ecological. Within this field of "semiotic control" (Goldie 192) over resources and representation, the Company's desire for profits meets up with the settlers' need for identity, which can only be gained through what Terry Goldie calls "indigenization," "the impossible necessity of becoming indigenous" (194). Ultimately, by screening off the acts of mutilation and mutation inflicted on colonial and colonized bodies, the Company realizes skin as a site of what Elizabeth Povinelli has called "geontological power": "a set of discourse, affects, and tactics

used in late liberalism to maintain or shape the coming relationship of the distinction between Life and Nonlife” (4). As a consequence of these extractive and violent logics, skin expands into a *milieu*, Steven Connor’s term for the skin as an ecosystem of transfigurations and affective becomings “where inside and outside meet and meld” (27); this tropology also brings to mind Verónica Gago’s thinking about human entanglement in the environment as *body-territory*, the shared site of more-than-human struggle and expropriation under imperial extractivism (85). Read as a work that centres skin as geontological body-territory, *The Trade* shows us how, throughout the nineteenth century, as the Company expanded its colonial business venture into a settlement-driven enterprise, it gradually depleted the numbers of beaver and otter to the point of extinction at the same time as it dismantled the polities of the Indigenous peoples with whom the HBC traded, denying them their sovereignty, identities, and means of survival. In so doing, as Graham Wynn’s account of fur-trade economics in Canada suggests, the fur trade provided an ecological structure for Canada as an imagined community: “Focused on the beaver of the northern woodlands, channelled through the two great northern entries to the continent, and extending along the rivers that led into them, the fur trade ultimately defined the boundaries of the nation” (232-23).

Significant as it is, Wynn’s historical argument does not shy away from romanticizing the fur trade and leaves open a line of inquiry which would address the conceptual links between Canada’s settler colonialism, as “an integrated program of elimination” (Wolfe 9), and the calculative logic of capitalism underlying what Jason W. Moore calls “world-ecology” (85), a geontological technology of producing world order by “join[ing] the accumulation of capital, the pursuit of power, and the production of nature as an organic whole” (97). Given Stenson’s concern for the ecological scales of colonial memory, in which the HBC features as a metonym of imperial conquest, I examine how *The Trade*’s aesthetic refiguration of colonial commerce brings to light the interlocking appropriations of material, social, and somatic resources as constitutive of colonialism’s extractive project. In this, I heed Glen Sean Coulthard’s call in *Red Skin, White Masks* to rethink “the colonial relation of dispossession as a co-foundational feature of our

understanding of and critical engagement with capitalism. . . [in] a more ecologically attentive critique of colonial-capitalist accumulation” (14). Commensurate with the novel’s historiographic tenor, my reading also draws on Hortense Spillers’ and Kathryn Yusoff’s thinking about racialized bodies in the global geographies of extractivism, calling attention to the ethical drift of *The Trade*’s narrative structures that mediate the asymmetries of power in nineteenth-century frontier politics. Like Spillers and Yusoff, I attend to the significance of “body,” as non-identical with subjectivity, to highlight the material dimension of colonial violence enacted through enslavement and extractivism as well as to call attention to the corporeal sites of resistance and memory, all of which work against the epistemic categories that have denied racialized subjects their agency. Figured through the tension between solid and liquid matter, social processes of exclusion and assimilation in *The Trade* assume the forms of cannibalism and alcoholism, dramatizing the narrative’s concern for the visceral impact of extractivism on colonial ecosystems. The fluidity of capital, highlighted in the tropological links between the hunted animals, the dispossessed Indigenous peoples, and the Black bodies enslaved on the Caribbean plantations, converges in the novel’s figuration of rum, which, by interconnecting disparate geographies of violence, problematizes the racial, spatial, and ontological divisions at the base of the Company’s moral economy. *The Trade*’s use of the Windigo trope, in particular, re-examines the possibilities for Indigenous agency in the conditions of rupture, gesturing towards the need for a more nuanced understanding of colonial trauma and subjectivity and highlighting the elusive labour of the flesh, whose “seared, divided, ripped-apartness” exceeds the contours of the skin as a source of the extraction of meaning (Spillers 206).

Extracting Properties: Solid and Liquid

The Trade’s integration of archival documents, both real and imagined, into its metafictional frame of remembrance has raised important questions about the ethical integrity of the novel’s critical labour, eliciting divergent views on the absences, silences, and elisions that complicate the novel’s commitment to the exposure of the colonial injustices associated with the HBC’s commercial policies throughout the nineteenth century (see

Durnin 76-86; Venema 12-17; Aspenlieder 108-15, 127-29). On the one hand, the novel's intervention into historical discourse aligns with the narrative self-awareness characteristic of "postmodern historiographic metafiction" at the same time as it problematizes the conception of the historical novel "as simply an aestheticizing transformation of historical material into a purely textual entity with no referential relation to the material past" (Hutcheon, *A Poetics* 58 and passim; Wylie, *Speculative Fictions* 22). In this respect, Katherine Durnin's highlighting of how Stenson's use of "letters, ledgers, reports, post journals, novels, history books, and magazine articles" stages a metafictional interplay between the documented past and its imagined possibilities serves an important insight into the textual nature of historical truth and the promise that *The Trade* makes to "suggest an alternative truth-to-meaning for established truth-to-actuality" (73, 86). The ethical commitment to truth-to-meaning, which "accepts a certain opacity in existing historical evidence, as well as a skepticism about what registers as historical evidence in the first place" (Aspenlieder 11), however, poses its own constraints for the formal strategies Stenson employs in his attempts to unsettle the epistemological coherence of the fur trade accounts. This is particularly true of the novel's juxtaposition of the well-documented perspectives of the HBC's officers to those of its labourers, whose silence both in the archive and in *The Trade* has given literary scholars reason to dispute the ethical rigour of Stenson's fiction. While Durnin concedes that the "marginal presences in the novel must remain marginal if the existing record is to be respected" (86), Kathleen Venema argues that by refusing narrative voice to the Company's labourers, the novel "re-entrenches and justifies the brutal hierarchy it ostensibly deplores" (9). Indeed, by showing how it uses the conventions of Gothic fiction to convey the social, gender, and racial hierarchies of the fur trade, Venema's reading demonstrates *The Trade's* obliviousness to its own "pernicious distrust of mixed-blood characters generally and a dangerous misogyny specifically against Aboriginal and mixed-blood women" (6). Framed this way, the novel's revisionary impulse gets replaced in its trade-off with history by a structure of affect that can fulfill neither Stenson's ethical nor his aesthetic agenda.

Yet, given that revisionary work is never complete, *The Trade's* dramatizing of colonial history may also shed light on the entangled structures of cognitive, social, and ecological violence which dismantled

Indigenous ecosystems and gave rise to new social formations and subjectivities under the banner of empire. Refocused through a geontological lens, the novel's internal contradictions regain their moral credit by bringing into relief the interruptions in the traffic of meaning, conceived, in Erin Aspenlieder's terms, as a dialectic of *value* and *worth* in the space of colonial trade (109). *Value* here is understood as the HBC's currency of "made beaver" that regulates the exchange of goods, while *worth* "indicates the perceived quality of the thing or person being traded" (110). At the juncture of these epistemic regimes, as I hope to show, the novel's material tropes work to shift the boundaries of bodies and subjectivities, magnifying the complex fluidity of ethical agencies, human and non-human, which haunt the HBC archives and Canada's cultural memory.

Set in the wake of the HBC's merger with the North West Company and spanning the years of 1822 to 1867, *The Trade* uses the fictionalized letters of the HBC labourer William Gladstone to frame the narrative. In writing the novel's central characters, Stenson has drawn on the real-life figures of the trader Edward Harriott, his Métis wife Margaret Pruden, Chief Factor John Rowand (a.k.a. One Pound One), and Governor George Simpson. Beyond these diegetic boundaries, however, the novel employs two other epigraphic framing devices: a map representing the HBC's fur trade territory in the period of 1822 and 1850 and an extract of a poem by Charles Mair celebrating the Company's glory. While highlighting the link between the empire's cartographic and commercial ambitions saluted in the poem, Stenson's use of the map also calls our attention to its disciplinary power to organize territory and produce subjectivity circumscribed by the political ecologies of settler discourse. In her deft analysis of early English Canadian literary cartographies, Sarah Wylie Krotz reminds us that "[i]n early Canada, places and territories were far from settled constructs" (8), and surveyors drew maps that "carved up land into tracts of property, displacing Indigenous peoples and transforming ecologies as they sought to define settler space in stark opposition to a shrinking wilderness" (9). As both a perceptual tool and epistemological mechanism that "created the lines of colonial occupation" and "gave Canada its shape" (9), the novel's HBC map visualizes what Moore calls the "remaking [of] the world in the image

of capital" (86), where the "appropriation of frontier land and labor" is enacted through the epidermal register of Indigenous ecologies (114). Stenson magnifies this appropriative process in the novel's image of the "brown and water-stained" chart, "minutely covered with spidery rivers, lakeshores and mountains" (12).

Orienting our reading of the characters' movements along the old and new trading routes of the Western frontier, the map presses forward Patrick Wolfe's observation that writing on settler discourse means writing "on landedness, however covert the inscription" (19). Considered in relation to the novel's figuration of trade, the Company's mapping of the land has several important effects. While it performs epistemological labour, registering the conceptual coordinates of trade as settler discourse on Indigenous ecologies and their value as colonial capital, it also redefines the ontological categories through which the Indigenous subjects of the prairies were also recoded as property. Seen through this critical lens, One Pound One's thinking about "min[ing] for gold in California" and the Governor's "[d]reams of a castor El Dorado where dams like mirrored staircases rose up every watery defile, and every beaver lodge crawled inside with life-stuffed skins" are indicative of the imperial desire to consume the natural world in the name of the "[e]conomy without mercy and no exceptions" (Stenson 318, 13, 12). The epidermal premise of the Governor's cartographic fantasy is commensurate with his calculative ethics in the administration of colonial lands: his "ability to cleanse these rivers and forts of their human debris" and his keenness to use the lash to punish "[p]ilferage and waste" make the Governor a political asset in the space marked by enhanced cross-cultural conflict and social precarity (11, 12). But his inexperience and incompetence, to say nothing of anger and ambition, are also metonymic corollaries of the beaver trade as a knowledge enterprise, in whose service the map enlists the living bodies of the HBC traders and Indigenous vendors, rendering long-inhabited and -navigated geographies of pre-contact North America into "blank" spaces, per the Company's cartographic vernacular. As the Governor reflects on his launching of the Bow River Expedition, the narrative emphasizes the economic prerogative of his mission: "Revenue, meaning the supply of beaver, was the Governor's weakness" (12).

Against the Company's extractive ethos, the novel continuously invokes the physical beauty of the natural world to highlight the destruction the traders wreak on the western plains during their quest for beaver skins. In a passage that exemplifies the narrative's ecological thrust, we see "[t]he land beyond the stream [rise] in hills, all naked and tawny and fleshlike, as if an animal of bizarre musculature were swelling the skin from beneath" (32). Stenson's use of similes in the description of the land throws into relief its figuration as living flesh, which pushes against the geontological distinction between life and non-life: "The land ahead looked rich and velvety, the grass like the fur backs of animals, dimpling rhythmically" (30). In contrast to this lively prairie vegetation, the narrative casts the traders' harvesting for animals as an act of extraction, whereby they "cut the prairie open in the shape the fort was to be" by using up timber so that "only a few of the nearby trees were left standing" (21).

A similar sense of loss resonates in the disappearance of the buffalo, which "were long gone except for the odd ancient bull, the hunters having scorched the earth to every horizon of all other hoofed beasts" (74). As Eric Jay Dolin reminds us in *Fur, Fortune, and Empire*, "Each year fur traders, farmers, and settlers killed tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of buffalo for food, sport, or by displacing the buffalo's habitat with crops, livestock, and expanding towns" (302). In Stenson's novel, the traders' harvesting for beaver is likewise conveyed in extractive terms, with the saddlebags of each officer carrying "a vial of castoreum, carefully wrapped" to preserve the "[l]ove juice of the water-loving beaver" while their steel traps leave "the gullies [running] with dust" (30).

For the Company, the loss of animals, as well as the larger environmental devastation, provides a further incentive for commercial expansion, with the Governor voicing the political implications of the colonial trade in Britain's rivalry with the US. In the "longer view" he shares with One Pound One, the HBC is to "take every skin [they] can" and "temporarily ruin the beaver grounds south and west of the Columbia" so as to "injure the future industry of the United States" (112). Though One Pound One has misgivings about the Governor's plan, reckoning that "[e]very principle of husbanding a beaver ground was confounded by what the Governor had just

said" (111), the grotesqueness of this "longer view" extends into the later expeditions investigating "the Lac La Biche route to the Athabasca" and the route to the Pacific along the Fraser and Thompson Rivers (86, 168). However, the Bow River fiasco, which comprised several attempts by the HBC to reach into the South Saskatchewan and Missouri River basins for beaver, remains the central axis of the novel's ethical reappraisal of the legacy of the fur trade.

One way to think about the Bow River Expeditions in *The Trade* is through the lens of what Rosanne Kennedy calls "multidirectional eco-memory," which links "human and nonhuman animals and their histories of harm, suffering and vulnerability in an expanded multispecies frame of remembrance" (268). Contesting the illusion of human cognitive autonomy, multidirectional eco-memory cues the body to a horizon of multispecies enmeshment, where remembering assembles itself from the semiotic work of solid and liquid matter (268). As an instance of such mnemonic entanglement, the Bow River Expeditions in Stenson's novel heave into view the ways in which the human infrastructures of social mobility and political governance are dependent on the material world, laying bare the physical and epistemic violence that belies the Company's narrative of economic triumph. At the figural level, this is made evident in the tropological links between animals and the Indigenous people, as in the episode where during the first Bow River Expedition the Indigenous traders retrieve the bodies of drowned buffalo, "harvesting what they could while the white men looked on stupidly" (Stenson 20). If we accept Arjun Appadurai's observation that "things-in-motion . . . illuminate their human and social context" (5), then the material tracks of beaver pelts gain the capacity to bring to light the extent to which the HBC's operations changed the lives of the Indigenous peoples, exacerbating the existing tribal rivalries and creating new precarities in the form of alcoholism, European diseases, and land dispossession.

In equal measure, too, the Company's commercial transactions expose the fragility of its own existence in the New World. When the prairie catches on fire in the winter of 1828-1829, for example, the perishing of the buffalo weighs heavily on the HBC's metrics. As *One Pound One* reflects, "By the time the snow put out the fires, the

grass was gone. Where there's no grass, there's no buffalo. No buffalo, no Indians. No Indians, no trade" (Stenson 172). When Piegan traders bring "four hundred beaver" to Chesterfield House, they point to "the Fur Mountains and the Missouri" (50), reviving the Company's expectations regarding a new source of furs. However, after the HBC traders return barely alive, with faces "caved in against their teeth" and no progress in the negotiations with their Piegan neighbours (44), the Company assigns Harriott to lead another expedition on foot to entice the Piegan to reveal their sources of beaver stock. Thus the third Bow River Expedition begins.

Stenson's focus on Harriott, the novel's elusive ethical centre, opens the Company's history to a more critical reflection on the workings of the fur trade, giving us access to the internal structures of subjugation and liquidation that applied both to the labourers—trappers, traders, negotiators, translators—and their Indigenous counterparts, in their trade in beaver and their taste for rum. Carrying only "two bags of grease" as food provisions and "tobacco and rum" to trade (53), the expedition is no less than a death sentence imposed on Harriott by vengeful superiors who lack his understanding of the regional Indigenous languages and cultural protocols. The traders' rescue by the Piegan exposes the network of relations which bring Indigenous political ecologies into the orbit of the Company's affairs. The ambivalence of this network resonates in Harriott's assurance that the "Company wishe[s] to continue trading with the Piegan, on whom they relied greatly for buffalo meat, pemmican and beaver pelts" (64), even though Jimmy Jock Bird, a former trader who has chosen to live with the Piegan, has no illusions about the Company's colonial strategy. He warns Harriott: "Remember that the Company tried to kill you. The Piegan let you live. But if you come back here, I'll kill you myself" (69). Linked to the dynamics of settler colonialism and Indigenous resistance, Harriott's decision to keep back "the number of beaver skins he'd seen in tents and stretching on hoops in Jimmy Jock's camp" (79) from his report to the HBC is of a piece with his choosing to mislead the Company about the possible revenues and "give [it] no excuse to try to kill him again" (78).

In ethical terms, Harriott's relationship with Jimmy Jock also problematizes the Company's role in bolstering the racial regimes of property and setting up a new social order on the western plains.

Like many traders, the two men intimate the anxieties inherent in *indigenization* (Goldie 194), i.e., settlers' attempts to legitimize their identity in the New World. While Jimmy Jock, the ex-governor James Bird's Métis son, can choose "to live with the Piegan Indians, where he marrie[s] a Piegan woman and acquire[s] some fame as an interpreter and a warrior" (Stenson 301), Harriott can only claim a comparable degree of cultural legitimacy through his relationship with his Métis cousin and lover Margaret Pruden, who gives him reason to dream that he "could become an Indian [him]self if [he] stayed in the country long enough" (57). One Pound One's thinking about Louise, his Métis country wife, as a metaphor for Canada, betrays a similar impulse to derive identity from the land: "Watching her go, a bulk that filled the door frame and blocked the light, he said to himself, *that's* the kind for this country. Tough as whalebone. No love talk. You put a roof over her, babies inside her. See to it she isn't slack in feeding you. *That's* enough to venture" (97). The figurative basis of One Pound One's tropes is hardly surprising: the weight of the animal simile keeps afloat the conception of marriage as a business transaction, in which the Métis woman validates and reproduces the settler's claim to land and cultural identity. At the opposite end of this attitude stands the Governor's injunction to the HBC's labourers to abandon the Indigenous women with whom they formed local unions known as "country marriages" (Bown 121): "Be a buck to your heart's content but return to the bachelor herd when the breeding's done" (88), lest the "all-too-bounteous crop of Halfbreed spawn" upset the racial hierarchy upon which the Company relies (87). Indeed, the Governor himself gets rid of his "favourite mistress," a Métis woman called Margaret Taylor, "whose children he acknowledged as his own" (88), as soon as he understands that he needs a white wife to move up through the Company's ranks. He tells One Pound One: "If I'm to be Governor of two departments, I must have a wife who can adorn and dignify my court. A *white* wife, you see" (113).

The Governor's order that HBC workers dispense with their Indigenous wives is but one example of how Stenson reanimates the HBC's motto and adds to the skin's tropological weight a geontological dimension, whereby the tension between life and non-life becomes homologous with the dialectic of *value/worth*, articulated across the

ethical threshold of racialized and animal skin as “sacrifice zones” (Miller 19). Even though few of the white labourers “credited Indians with being human” (Stenson 23), at least some of the officers ignore the Governor’s instruction: Harriott marries Margaret Pruden, Colin Robertson wears “all manner of beads” his Métis wife puts in his hair (87), and One Pound One thinks nothing in Canada is “more useless than an English wife” (113). Hugh Munro, who acts as an interpreter during Harriott’s first expedition to the Piegan, not only “[takes] a Blackfoot wife and learn[s] her language”, but also “[wears] his hair in two long braids” and is rumoured to bear on his skin “a two-holed scar in each breast where bone skewers had been inserted” (34). The epidermal register of the body’s signifying power here scales up the material ground of identity, troubling the cultural codes which define Munro’s loyalty and worth in the Company’s eyes. As Aspenlieder astutely observes, “Munro’s body is marked by a confluence of signs: his white skin ensures he will be read by the Company as loyal; the hair, clothing and scars allow his body to be read as a site of negotiated identity” (124). The same may be said about Jimmy Jock, whose white skin prevents the Governor from recognizing how the Métis man disrupts the Company’s operations and how the variations on his name—Jimmy Jock, Jamey Jock, and Jemmy Jock (28)—correlate with other people’s varying perceptions of his identity. Like the skin of all the Métis characters in *The Trade*, Jimmy Jock’s becomes receptive to confusing investments—material, cognitive, and affective—none of which captures the essence of the man or does justice to the ambivalence of his actions.

On the figural plane, this ambivalence partakes of the novel’s motif of solid bodies exposed to the pervasive effects of liquids like rum, which magnify the erosion of the ethical ground of colonial trade. Rum’s Jamaican provenance, which Harriott comments on in conversation with the missionary Robert Rundle (265), inscribes it with a metonymic significance that forges a conceptual link between North America’s Western frontier and the Caribbean slave plantations, from which it originates as a by-product of sugar milling (Tsing 149). As Stephen Bown notes, “although the Company had opposed the indiscriminate sale of hard liquor since 1670, believing it was bad for business, in the 1800s it

too began to peddle its own variation of ‘brandy’ and ‘rum’—gin tinted with iodine or tobacco juice” (289). Given that the Governor used to be “a sugar broker in London” and “brought a sugar broker’s meticulousness” to the HBC (Stenson 11-12), the novel’s troping of rum expands the figural scope of the trade to include also the traffic in enslaved Black people, whose coerced labour on plantations correlates with the Indigenous dispossession on the prairies. Embedded as rum is in material scenes of oppression, it evokes Spillers’ thinking about captive bodies as distinct from the flesh, “that zero degree of social conceptualization” (206), which exceeds the body in its capacity to turn damage into defiance. Shuttling between humans and territories, the novel’s rum, too, crosses the threshold of the skin to amplify the ambivalence of the labour of lacerated flesh as the ontological anchor of subjectivity.

As a medium of trauma in *The Trade*, rum conflates referential contexts, rendering flesh a shared site of both violence and resilience across different terrains of colonial extraction. For Harriott, for example, rum becomes a means to grieve for his wife Margaret, who goes mad after an altercation with the Governor, as well as a way to endure the Governor’s plan to starve him and his men out of business after forbidding them to trade with anyone but the Piegan. Driven to despair, Harriott drinks rum to be able to look at the Company traders’ faces, which grow “gaunt, the cheek flesh sucking in against the jaws and teeth . . . becoming skull-like as they went partway down the road towards death” (219). He gives rum to both white and Indigenous traders: “The rum given to the Indians forestalled the end. The rum taken by his men hastened its arrival” (219). Rum is also the currency that ensures the Piegan choose Harriott’s fort over any of the Americans, as Harriott tells Reverend Rundle, the Company’s Methodist missionary: “These Indians can trade with the Americans or us, as they like. If we stopped the trade in liquor, they’d soon abandon us” (265). At the liquid end of things, rum becomes coeval with blood, exacerbating the ways in which the flesh, both human and animal, is made to bear the ethical brunt of frontier politics. The labour of the flesh and the trade in beaver enfold into the same extractive economy, as epitomized in the Governor’s employment of Peter Skene Ogden, notorious for “a nasty fondness for blood” (111), whose task is to “take the life of every beaver,

male or female, in or out of season, adult or kit” and “to slaughter every other kind of animal he finds” (111).

Framed in terms of “multidirectional eco-memory” (Kennedy 268), the social grammar of extraction and death here illuminates the logic of racialization inherent in the novel’s flows of rum and beaver skins in a way that shares its geontological argument with the novel’s imagery of bones. In an episode where Harriott travels to an Assiniboine camp, two elders bring him “a length of bone the colour of dried blood” found in a cliff on the Red Deer River (Stenson 136). The metonymic links between the fossils and the racialized bodies on the western plains and on the Caribbean plantations, which highlight the shared vulnerability of embodied life, recall Yusoff’s reading of geology as a mode of extracting subjectivity through an ontological rupture in living matter, which enables the “proximity of black and brown bodies to harm in th[eir] intimacy with the inhuman” under the aegis of settler colonialism (xii). In reconceiving geology as a racial formation, Yusoff demonstrates how colonial subjects were cut away from their land and reinstalled “into a category of geology that recoded them as property” in dispossessive economies of extraction (31). Figures of deep time, the fossils in *The Trade* similarly cast into relief the collision of systems of value. Harriott’s suggestion that the large bone may have belonged to “such a big animal, with so much meat on it,” that it may have been hunted to extinction by the ancestors of the Cree or Assiniboine is consistent with the Company’s relentless extraction of capital from human and animal flesh (Stenson 137). Both Harriott’s Assiniboine and Cree hosts find his hypothesis disappointing. Two Cree elders suggest it is a buffalo bone from “a time when all creatures were larger, men and buffalo both” (137), while the Assiniboine onlookers “believe[] that a race of giant animals had lived here once and then moved away. Either they had moved to a place without people, or they had moved so far that the Indians here had never met or heard of the people among whom the animals now lived” (137). The Assiniboine and Cree men reject Harriott’s view of extinction because, contrary to the HBC, they think that “[t]he people would take care not to kill that many of an animal this useful” (137).

Stenson’s tropological association of the Indigenous people with the land and its animals props up the novel’s ethical insight into the

white traders' racialized logic, in which the prairie Indians' imagined fondness for "dismembered bodies, robbed graves, scattered bones, cannibalism" works in tandem with the Governor's view of Métis women as "pretty specimens" and "bit[s] of brown" (260, 113, 188). But *The Trade's* troping of the flesh also calls into question the racialized logic of exclusion, showing us how the Company's predatory assaults on the most decent of its white officers leave them crippled: physically, like the "scarecrow" Robertson (223), who is refused retirement even after having suffered a stroke, or spiritually, like Harriott, who lives (in the narrator's view) like "a certain kind of sea creature," lying "open as if saying, go ahead, stab me to death" (209). Possibly the most ironic instance of extracting flesh in *The Trade* concerns One Pound One, whose anonymous ossified presence haunts the Prologue that precedes the narrative proper. The episode features "[a]n old woman cook[ing] the flesh from the trader's bones for pay" (1). Deprived of skin and preserved in a keg of rum, the bones, which, we only learn later, belong to One Pound One, find their final resting place in Montreal. In a twist of a darkly comic mishap, however, they end up travelling "across to Hudson Bay and over the ocean to England" (341), and only then to their destination in Canada. While offering a haunting metaphor for the Company's toxic legacies, the bones' journey reverses the scales of extractive power, aligning the Chief Factor's remains with the Company's liquid assets. In so doing, the Prologue raises important questions about what Stenson's revisionary ethics suggest about subversive agencies, especially of Métis women, whose contribution to the history of Western Canada refigures the fur trade as a narrative of material and affective interdependencies.

Extracting Personhood: The Windigo and the Indigenous Subject

The spectral quality of the bones, both animal and human, complicates the division between life and non-life in Stenson's reimagining of the HBC's business affairs. Of particular significance here is the novel's use of the Windigo trope to highlight the Company's material and cultural consumption of the Indigenous world, refiguring the etymological ground of *company*—from *cum panis*, "with bread"—into a striking metaphor for colonial extractivism. The alimentary

dimension is central to Basil Johnston's explanation of how the Anishinaabe associate the Windigo with selfishness and excess, which drive the cannibalistic monster's "never-ending hunger" and always imminent starvation (221). Also known as "*Wendigo*, *Whitiko*, Feaster, Boiled Face, Hair Eater or Skin Walker" (Henzi 469), the creature is a recurrent figure in Canadian literature, and particularly in the works of Indigenous authors in Canada, like Drew Hayden Taylor's *The Night Wanderer: A Native Gothic Novel* and Tomson Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, where, as Sarah Henzi points out, the Windigo "puts into question any given assumptions about what divides physical, spiritual, historical, and imaginative worlds" (470).

The structural ambivalence that Henzi attributes to the Windigo ties in with Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's theorizing about monsters as a category slip, reinforcing his point that "[b]ecause of its ontological liminality, the monster notoriously appears at times of crisis as a kind of third term that problematizes the clash of extremes" (6). In Stenson's novel, Harriott's thinking about the trade as "the god that made us" and "the Company feeds on us," (Stenson 203), creature-like, also recalls Marlene Goldman's argument that Windigos "should more properly be understood as disaster narratives that register the impact of imperialism and colonization" (167), with their cannibalism providing a metaphor for the excesses of greed and power. In contemporary Indigenous writing, especially, the Windigo embodies "the trauma that lurks in the homes and in the minds of survivors and their children, of post-traumatic distress, of the cycles of abuse that are reproduced, and of the breakdown of families" (Henzi 477). Unsurprisingly, then, as a metaphor for settler colonialism, cannibalism in *The Trade* runs parallel to the narrative figuration of extraction, setting up structural homologies between the consumption of nature, alcohol, and human beings. In so doing, the violence that the Windigo harbours is shown to be an issue of colonial institutions, rather than "only a 'Native' issue," for as Henzi rightly points out, "[v]iolence both begets and harms indiscriminately" (477).

A key instance of *The Trade*'s rethinking of colonial violence is the Governor's use of Métis women in the extraction of sexual pleasure, at the end of which he pushes the women from his bed, claiming his right

to “be alone afterwards to feel his satisfaction properly” (Stenson 11). His meeting of Margaret Pruden, however, challenges the Governor’s expectations that “the cowardly fathers [will] pimp their daughters to him” (98), even though Margaret’s father does wonder “if it was not better for his girl to be the Governor’s mistress than a poor cousin’s wife” (104). Defying the Governor’s lust, which the narrative figures as a cannibalistic urge, Margaret turns their sexual encounter into a socio-economic transaction, reminding both the Governor and Harriott of her right to self-ownership: “You can’t trade me. But I can trade myself” (127). Margaret’s use of the language of trade recalls Aspenlieder’s observation that trade in the novel figures both “a material system of economic exchange and . . . a symbolic register of how people negotiate for positions of greater authority” (105). This dual function brings to light the interruption in the relation between *value* and *worth* which underpins the Governor’s treatment of the Métis in the novel.

The distinction between *value* and *worth* is useful to our understanding of the ethical ambivalence of Margaret and the Governor’s sexual encounter. While valued by “the colonial representatives” (Aspenlieder 109) as a means of establishing alliances with Indigenous people and gaining trading privileges, Margaret’s worth derives from the Governor’s aesthetic appreciation of her appearance, for the sake of which he delays his trip to England and sends both Harriott’s and Margaret’s families away so he can make an undocumented visit to the fort. The ethical crisis produced by the clash of *value* and *worth* perspectives here recalibrates the agency of the female flesh made manifest through Margaret’s refusal to submit her body to the Governor’s lust. Instead of giving in, she demands to trade herself in exchange for Harriott’s promotion in the Company. Her claim to selfhood is also continuous with similar transactions performed by other Métis women, among them One Pound One’s wife Louise, who saves his life on the road in exchange for his assent to marry her and “never beat her or their children, nor make them work more than was fair” (326). The scene, in which Louise rescues a stranded and injured One Pound One, “bathe[s] the wound and splint[s] him with a stick,” “[gets] him up on his good leg, [hops] him over and [drops] him on the back of her cart” (326), makes

a larger point about the social agency of Indigenous women and their vital role in the HBC economy, to which they contributed as “guides, interpreters, and intermediaries” (Brown, *Strangers in Blood* 64).

In this respect, *The Trade* does not see Margaret only as a victim either. Surprised by her refusal to accept his sexual advances, the Governor finds a “Bay Company dagger . . . pointing up at him, the tip an inch from the tender purple of his cock” (142). The comic measure of this exchange reveals the fragility of the imperial hunger: responding to the threat of a knife, the Governor is barely able to pull up his trousers and run away. Importantly, though, the language of the flesh also exposes the narrowness of Harriott’s view of Margaret’s agency and his own responsibilities. Uncertain about Margaret’s ability to withstand the Governor’s charms, Harriott abandons his traders on the prairies and gallops back to Fort Carlton, ruining in the process his horse, reputation, and any chance of promotion.

Margaret’s trauma of sexual abuse echoes the logic of extraction, whose compound effects *The Trade* gathers into its troping of hunger and cannibalism. In the winter of 1849-1850, we are told, the Indigenous people “starved like dogs and the trade was so bad it went backward. At Carlton, they were eating their own oxen” (318). Margaret’s fear of going Windigo on account of family history and her own beauty (57) complicates Harriott’s own desire to have her “in case it harmed [her]” (58). Predictably, then, in the wake of the Governor’s visit, Margaret stops laughing and speaking, develops a taste for “raw meat and stinking rotten meat” and even “threaten[s] to kill herself, then Harriott” (161, 163). Metonymically, her self-destruction recalls the story of her great-uncle, who was bitten in the face by a rabid wolf while sleeping in a camp and “became a Windigo, and his sole desire was to return to his camp and eat the people he had left there” (134). Like her uncle, who starves himself to death rather than give in to the cannibalistic urge, Margaret withdraws into herself, “harken[ing] elsewhere, to some drama of her own” (161). Ultimately, even giving birth to her and Harriott’s daughter cannot save her: “Something woke Harriott in the night and it turned out to be his baby daughter crying and writhing against his back. Margaret was gone” (190). What remains as a sign of her presence in the wilderness is her “beaded dress hanging in a

tree" (196), completing her narrative arc as "the smiling spectre . . . that never failed to walk with [Harriott] or to shine life-size in his mind" (24).

For Venema, Margaret's disappearance is of a piece with Stenson's Gothic troping of the beautiful Métis woman, who remains "a pawn in both the governor's misogynist system of power and the masculinist twenty-first century account that ostensibly seeks to give her voice" (17). Yet her vanishing may also be read as an act of resilience, whereby Margaret re-enacts her great-uncle's self-exile from the community to strengthen its capacity for healing. The ambiguity regarding the boundaries of selfhood inherent in the Windigo's cannibalistic desire also reminds us that the monster figures the fluidity of the flesh defined through the opposition "between a civilized 'us' and savage 'them'" (Guest 2). If we accept Jennifer Brown's point in *Cannibalism in Literature and Film* that "[c]annibalism creates ambiguity because it both reduces the body to mere meat and elevates it to a highly desirable, symbolic entity" (4), then *The Trade's* figuration of the Windigo obscures the relay of ethical agencies in its conflation of colonial extractivism with the consequences of its trauma. This resonates not only in Margaret's clash with the Governor, but also in the episode where Jimmy Jock saves Harriott and his men from starvation and death, above, as well as where he executes revenge for the murder of a Gros Ventre chief during a parley with white fur traders. The symbolic freight of the tribal name, which translates as "Big Belly" in English, lodges the cannibalistic appetite in the Company's stomach, recasting the growing numbers of Indigenous people dying from smallpox, scarlet fever, and tuberculosis as part of the morphology of extraction that the novel attributes to colonialism's corporate Windigos. With Nancy, One Pound One's Métis daughter and Harriott's second wife, doomed to die from consumption, it is hardly surprising that Harriott wonders why nobody sees "how much death likes [his] company" (200).

Making a point about how the HBC's extractive activities gradually destroyed its own officers and labourers, Stenson's pun pushes against the racial and geontological imaginary underpinning the fur-trading enterprise. The officers fail to acknowledge their complicity in the Company's (self-)destructive work, with One Pound One arguing

that a trader would no more kill an Indian than a farmer would kill “his milk cow” (251), and Harriott insisting that the Indigenous vendors’ addiction to rum is a sign of its value as “medicine” (265), a view that troubles our sense of Indigenous resilience to social and environmental disruption. Yet the voice of the flesh *The Trade* allocates to its Indigenous characters uses the language of violence to insist on the humanity that the Company’s extractive activities have denied. The most graphic episode involves a Cree couple, who bring their dead baby to Harriott’s fort only for the husband to kill his wife with a dagger and then commit suicide with a Company musket (229). The visual horror of this scene casts in relief the material weight of the collective trauma caused by colonial trade, whose attritional logic is both deployed and defeated in the Cree subjects’ fatal measure of the worth of their life. Recalling Margaret Pruden’s use of a Company knife in her confrontation with the Governor, the Cree man’s despair is also shown to be part of the Company’s cannibalistic hunger, yoking the “Indians [who] starved like dogs” to the libidinal passions of the HBC officers and the precarious complicity of its “distracted and weak” white labourers (318, 74), who “all but worshipped [the officers] for half killing them” (74).

The affective register of history, which *The Trade* exposes to the critical pressures of imagination, dovetails with the novel’s refusal to offer closure to the narrative of trauma and capitalist extractivism. Yet in remaining equivocal about the ethical agency of Indigenous people, the figural compressions through which the novel works to probe the conceptual premises of colonial trade run the risk of reinstalling the intellectual ecologies put up in the service of the HBC’s commercial enterprise. Jimmy Jock’s new sobriquet “Jimmy Jug” (342), a subtle reference to the rumour that Jock has joined the newly emerging whisky trade, reloads the narrative’s alimentary tropes with a marked ambivalence about the extent to which the novel’s Indigenous subjectivity emerges through complicity in, rather than opposition to, the structures of colonial assimilation. Yoking the material effects of whisky and rum to the figuration of cannibalism, enslavement, and disease, the impulse of extractivism in *The Trade* ultimately dissolves into a host of avenues of ethical responsibility, submitting the novel’s

own frame of remembrance to further critical reassessment and epistemological revision.

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“Quite here you reach”: T(h)inking Language, Place, Extraction with Dionne Brand’s *Land to Light On*

“You live in Trinidad?”: predawn, the customs lady asking you to deny what you only know true. Ah dead anywhere else. But who re’lly live in Trinidad this hour? Dem either not working, just working, or reachin from work: we claim antithesis of why we here,¹ despite history, industry. Is soucouyant and douen whey about now.

But is not the first time. What does a migrant labourer supposing what they can from de cold all these years say when confronted, “Is here yuh reach back? Fuh what?”

How to make a life defined outside the concept of border,² beyond nationalism, and the politics of “international student,” “foreign worker,” blackened and all but Black ‘cept for a last name nobody in the North could spell or pronounce? Mar-ga, Marag, is a j allyuh fighting up with so? The Anglicized extraction from *maharaja*, cuz what could indentured labour do but appeal to caste to cast somewhe’e they future? What to mek ah road out from but the pitch lake in yuh belly? LaBrea tar when you learn to tell people you from a land of oil and gas and stick

¹ T(h)ink peripheral. T(h)ink note as technology for stringing together re/verb of whatever we want to call body, whatever we want to restrain an say “text”—*oh the weight dey put on dis word*—even genre. With Brand in “All That Has Happened Since: IV viii,” “steal what they have, thief from thief make god laugh / . . . false passports and new / identities” from they flip jargon (*Land* 32).

² T(h)ink inter(con)textually, across/with/through disparate bodies, spaces, places, movement, semiotics, formations of meaning along the deep rhetorical ecologies (Maraj) that constitute and co-constitute what Christina Sharpe calls the “weather” of anti-Blackness (172), the afterlives of transatlantic slavery stifling still. Doh forget the moving rhetorical situations with every utterance, gesture, resonance, but consider the implications of dem and those positioned in spaces of the unthought (Hartman and Wilderson).

yuh head high cuz Trinidad and Tobago ent pedaling banana. “Heads high, killem wit it now,” so the tune go.

Buh all these people gehn take, I think, watching the bag of families from my flight each pointed with their five and six suitcase to pay duty—extract from extracted commodities: this forever loop like circling a room in a re/inscribing fugue—or to scan in order to get charge. “Is jus my mother I come to see. She not well.” Which is not to say she ent already been welled—a woman raisin chirren and grandchirren, brown-skin like she self. Dionne Brand’s woman in “Every Chapter of the World” (re)turns as the figure for whom “the mouth of the world will open / yawn her in, float her like a language on its tongue, // forgetting” (*Land* 94). I ain’t forget what meh mudda do for me, nah. I reach back to dis woman. The swell in meh belly not eating from worry. I ask the university, kindly, to reach home and check she—I doh want to cry bah-bye on *WhatsApp*. But they mek meh beg the Dean, talk bout how she lie down on the bathroom floor for hours crying for somebody—sap story dey like, yea. Is these scene they need—Black suffering per/formed as trope, a disciplining gesture where kindness requires humility,³ humility = subservience, subservience that Brand’s “red truck on a rural road” could (re)turn to proffer: “closing, / no wonder a red truck could surprise me” (*Land* 4, 11), the linger-threat of white modernity.

I consider Brand’s object-trigger-trauma when I board the plane t(h)inkin⁴ bout border—the way some ah dem truckers start blocking for their own order and my colleagues laugh and say “yea, they’re six years late,” joking that white supremacists now reach dey place call “Canada,” as though they never construct the lines, ideas, nation, colony.

³ T(h)ink over how we want this a happy object (Ahmed) in knowledge-making, a home as though some department, trope, or constrained mode of thought might mek we more. Move across and disturb the foundations of every miniature tower built in service of intellectual capture for sale.

⁴ T(h)ink para the usual, verb: meditate, study—as in “you feel is you me have to study?”; sit with and through *tink* as in process by which each stitch becomes undone, unfurled to fray. T(h)ink with apposite *tinker* fiddling to no particular end, often, in Black study as Harney and Moten offer, “Study, a mode of thinking with others separate from the thinking that the institution requires of you” (Halberstam 11), but in the mobilized expression of Trini *study*, which signals a deeper care affected often in bother, a “you studyin’ them still?” “doh study dat, man!” “all that yuh studying? Is tabanca yuh have?”

History will tell yuh that *truck*, verb and noun, and the gerunding space in neither, from calendar of Western memory marked thirteenth to nineteenth century augurs: "To give in exchange *for* something else; to exchange (one thing) *for* another; also, to exchange (a thing) *with* a person"—to truck, to trade, to make money outta things and people and then call it "freedom," to shape metaphor outta ghost and frame it singular ("truck, *v.* (1)"). And as Brand echoes, through that woman caught in "Every Chapter," "in all nouns' masculinities, in rocks cut out in / every single . . ." (*Land* 95).

How far we reach that freedom parlours subjection—but we never leave—explains Saidiya Hartman that anti-Blackness it churns to "make discipline pleasure and vice versa" (*Scenes* 43)? Is Brand's woman in "Every Chapter of the World" at the end of *Land to Light On* that have me capture—between the volatility in but violent construction of language: Brand describes the order of "men, old instruction books on care and discipline / of slaves, not to go too far back, after all not / their fault, no need . . ." (100). My father asks her if Uncle Chris have somebody there with him cuz Tanty Mer leff and go; my mudda say "his niece is there." "She does cook and ting?" "No, she doesn't cook for she self; how she go cook for he?" "Wha' yuh mean? How she does eat then?" This man, asking as though only woman know how to find food, and me in the back seat growing more and more vex 'cause is my same mudda have to cook, "her face . . . hacked in revolutions of the sun and kitchens" (96). *I remember them, blue lights then red for the ambulance asking, as I tuck my shirt into primary school uniform khaki shorts, "wha happen, Mummy?" when Jason father come from behind while she washing dishes and chop he mudda dead until we couldn't play with Jason and dem no more and he aunts lock up inside the house still.* Is the selfsame Black woman who refuse and refuse and refuse but Brand show it have no way out dis politics of extraction: out of the body marked, conscripting murder—we hemmed in dis destruction. She write, "over her palms, knowing nothing, / knowing no one alive inside her after // knowing nothing / nothing more" and all "should have stopped and changed shape" (89), the narrator as narrators go, this one assured, resolved that it have no outside this commodity, dis representation, the breaking apart of language not doing nothing fuh we.

And while nouns gendered masculine in *Land*, verbs not any better at resolving, revolving, bouncing against gerund dat go trap them as something. In “Dialectics XII,” just before “Islands Vanish,” the poet points to them, “acid verbs”: yuh see, it have no escaping through poetics or story, she opens with “Out of them. To where? As if I wasn’t them. / To this I suppose” (69). Consider the *I* mobilized by Brand: the technology, as Denise Ferreira da Silva highlights, only transparent of Western Man. Sit with the *self* as in: “da’s de ting, self!” and “if self we have to go we go reach!” Self, an *it*, a conditional “it is” or “it is indeed,” a reification of ontology speaking in on itself. What first person could then speak demselves free of the burden of modern European philosophy who trap we in the fraught construction of liberal subject? So whe’e this speaker trying to go t(h)inking “The choices fallen into / and unmade. Out of them. Out of shape / and glimmer and into hissing prose” (69)? *Landing*—used in this piece, dis place, to evoke moving possibility—maybe?—from property but still tie to that noun, dat property that everybody want to call upon and say “is my one!” Count it as they own. Word. Indeed, Brand ends—buh doh joke, it have no end!—here on “and / even though you had a mind, well, landing . . . / it doesn’t count on flesh or memory, or any purposes” (69). No telos then or rest, for that prose, those words one might bode escape, but why she di’n’ jus put a *No* in front the title and call that done? It not, though.

No, see, as Brand theorizes, elsewhere in non-fiction, the self: product of augured autobiography (written) “gestures to the world of a reading self” (*An Autobiography* 7). It is but a consequence “made, through colonial pedagogies in the form of texts” (7). Continuing, still, in *An Autobiography of the Autobiography of Reading*, she summons *subject* as somehow ambiguously coincidental to colonial mastery and ellipsing “something other than violence, erasure, and absence” (7). When pressed for the unknown self outside of BBC-consciousness in *A Map to a Door of No Return*, that African self only reproduces that which that selfsame mediated vision manifests: “No amount of denial, however, dislodged this place, this self” (29). Land, then, re/turns to *Land* as Brand understands de way repetition circumnavigates imagination to border resource, extract, transact, to truck. Watch how she trade in/across/beside a cosmology some other than its own, the

woman, steupsing, in "I Have Been Losing Roads: II ii" explains "Is so things is"—a reminder "don't expect / nothing good. Quite here you reach and you forget" (*Land* 10): dat "quite here" the expansive lengths to which the Caribbean soul might go haunted by what they feel better. I jus sit down here and listen to the TV saying "first world countries use this technology" to push they cancer screening. The way we does mek meh sad sometimes. James Clifford suggests diasporas dey self prefigure "a constitutive taboo on return" (304). I t(h)ink of Fanon, re/turning to his Martiniquais brethren and formulating Black "the result of a series of aberrations of affect" (2)—my hand cramping as Mummy grip tight.

I hold my mudda hand hard when we go and walk—she hol'in the stick—but it stingin!—every Monday, Wednesday, Friday, we goin' Eddie Hart Savannah. And every stranger whey pass we say "mornin' mornin'"—is so Trinis like to repeat theyself, I'm told. Cyah tell yuh how much time I hear, "but Louis, is Trinidad, yuh know?" from my brudda mouth, "yuh know yuh in Trinidad, right?" when somebody disappear, ghost yuh and leave yuh waiting in dey trail—is so yuh does remember geography through cultural inscription, like coming up on the jagged shore of ah island—but the edge they usually mark here through absence. Da's why they say #TrinidadIsNotARealPlace. So when Brand in "All That Has Happened Since: IV" understand that repetition, that simulacrum, that mimesis cyah re'lly function cause commodification grasps people and words and place and "Arani, I meet my old friend at Arani. Arani is piece of what / someone carried . . ." (*Land* 21). The poem's speaker gestures "they're all the same, why are you hoping, I say, all the same class" (23), really just "subjects of affectability" (Ferreira da Silva xxxix) at the whims of some brutal, "human" imagination—overrepresented (Wynter, "Unsettling" 287-88) and overwrought. Every time we walk past the man drinking he rum on the one bench, he watch how she shuffle with the stick and stare blatant—"is Trinidad, Trinis does stare, yea," as meh brudda say, but is study dey studying. Same Brand "exhausted at Arani, my eyes reach for something / domestic" (*Land* 23), like how I know on the plane back "home"—which is where again?—I already missing the squeeze Mummy putting on meh hand as we round the lap again and seeing that same drunkard nine o'clock in the morning, finally saying "yes mornin'" the third time before he was staring just to stare.

But watch deep into the working language then, deeper into that particular despair of making a way out of some Fanonian *n'est pas*: "There is no way out of it. Me, nothing but me" (Fanon 165). As though travelling or living some where else or way might replicate us out, Brand's speaker, later, in "All That Has Happened Since: IV xi," out a plane window reflects: "For different reason / all of we, everyone the bridge over . . . fire in we tail, it wasn't enough that all we had was to find a way" (*Land* 37). The compulsion to leave because we always look at England, the States, the great North as some place to ameliorate conditions cane-sweet and sunny and against work for work sake. Once, a friend from New Jersey who come home with me say Trinidadians don't know nothing bout customer service and I agree but who trying to serve what customer and why we mus' wuk with a smile on we face, we like being Marx worker-commodity? She say Trinis so nice when yuh meet them outta work though—and that, once friend, couldn't gather as revolt against capitalism but rather sought logistics she knew safe in some place else, a home.

Is people like them we talk bought just the other day when we reach Andre house to re-create he wake—we always talking bought the dead to bring them with us. Hartman say grief centralized in the "vocabulary of the diaspora" ("Time" 758). And is Andre same face on the bookmark wh'e I reading *Land* with, the dead traversing these poems with him, rest in peace dear cousin, always bringing a cologne from duty free when he coming—oh how travel dictate we always going and coming. But yea, Tanty Mer and Tanty Ros host a li'l small lime and we start talking about "foreign" labour cuz yuh know "Trinis don't like to work, eh," but I say to my cousin and dem "is it that dey don't like to work or they don't like what they working for?" All the while I shuddering how *they* become *dey* and not *we* cuz I have degree so now I divorce, eh. Nobody respond but Anissa and Joey continue along, is the labourers coming from elsewhere and "*no, no, no* they don't want to live here"—Joey say "dey want to *own* here." "Yea it have people work they entire life to come by Maracas and we have it all the time and we jus take it for granted," Anissa forwards. Grant from the Latin *crēdere*, to entrust ("grant, v."), to imbue with responsibility sitting there asking, how might we take care of the bay or ocean proper or what act might bring us closer

to something outside ownership? How *dey* become *we* so fas' dey? "But is the same way we is with snow," she compares—but nobody don't want to own the snow "is to experience it, yuh does want to experience it." Subjects to affect what it have so far to reach up in de cold to get stopped by cops in "Islands Vanish: XIII" as Brand's speaker et al. fall under such: "eyes fixes us / in this unbearable archeology" much like the irritating question "where are you from" (*Land* 73, 75).

As my cousin and dem pinpoint it have something dey, something there we does go looking for "had was to find a way" (37). "had was to" get beat out meh with a stick by Mr. Moore in Standard Four cuz grammar and violence go hand (and) in hand like a cane to the palm. *I remember superlatives and how if yuh get one wrong yuh stand, yuh get two wrong yuh stand on the desk, and the next one he ask was "handsome" and I refuse to say "most handsome" to the effect of a few lash on meh hand turning it julie mango red.* Tense, listen: tense, mechanics, history, none ah dat not up for debate eh. *Who doh hear go feel!* Brand noting "Something there, written as / wilderness, wood, nickel, water, coal, rock, prairie, erased / as Athabasca, Algonquin, Salish, Inuit . . ." (77) The things we went looking for in migration went the way of nouns taken as objects, erasing the names of who was transform / late into history's confines "Are we still moving . . . submerged . . . When will we arrive?" (77) With "when" is "how?" And I listen to another Zoom meeting start with a white woman colleague reading the land acknowledgement canned alongside the curriculum initiatives and the language of progress we so caught up in—ironically situated as outpost in Brand's quote—preceding the above—from Joseph Conrad (77): we only know these lands landing recent, stuck in a relentless present struggle to say "we have learned." But have dey? Why we mus' still be talking about the perils of transaction, of border, of nation as we round the corner to planetary extinction? As Audre Lorde, meditating *From a Land Where Other People Live*, cry "which me will survive / all these liberations" (159).

I want to believe though, and I t(h)ink Brand too, but can't, in a notion not just para- or contained or fugitive fleeing beyond but the hard tears of it all—is jus, is jus, is jus that "what I / really want to say is" at the end of the particular section "Land to Light On" in "V vi," "I don't want no fucking country, here / or there and all the way back" (*Land* 48).

In refusal, in the impulse, ritual, and meditation of saying *haul all allyuh so and so*, “bodies lie still across foolish borders. / I’m going my way” but we trapped (48)! Which part yuh goin? *Is quite here yuh reach to forget it have nowhere to go?* We constrain in individual profit. But I go argue that is not simply an ambiguity Brand suggesting in world-building oppression and the struggle against it, as literary scholar Sophia Forster highlights. For Forster, Brand builds an inventory of essentializing logic in order to resist it, which teases through the complications of identity’s role in both sides of that equation. Pushing against critics who read *Land*’s pessimism as contra ambiguity in order to demonstrate the latter, Forster believes is through such Brand demonstrates a kind of optimism even in paradoxes of words’/poetry’s exhausted limits. Through language, though, yuh think it possible to read instead *Land*’s refusal as fraught, relentless attempts at para/ontological Blackness?

Elsewhere, I relate the possibilities of moving between, across, along, adjacent to, outside, but still with/in the constructs of Black being as ontological zero (following, say, Afropessimist readings of it—see Warren 5-6)—reduced to slaveness in an anti-Black world—and its capacities for fugitivity, of being otherwise in Black sociality—as theorized by Nahum Chandler and Fred Moten. Para/ontology “simultaneously describes concepts conjured in ontological ‘being,’ the ‘paraontological’ (beside, adjacent to, subsidiary to, and beyond being), and, importantly, what flows and moves in between and across those two ideas” (Maraj 6). Brand, to me, in unpacking tensions constructed with/in nation, gender, sexuality, geography, language, et al. animates that slash: de violence marking Blackness in the West and throughout the colonial project, all while engendering possibilities for undoing it in moments, in glimpses, whey language and fraughtness of Black experiences with/in them show somewhe’e dey else—despite being circumscribed, ultimately, in negation of a Southern im/migrant consciousness.

We could see it in the way in “Dialectics: VIII i” the speaker, challenged by her aunts, watch them wining to Kitchener and say “I didn’t know no dance could be so dark / and full of serious desire that frighten me” (Brand, *Land* 58). Here/hear the indulgence unfurling, t(h)inking through that movement, those Black sexualities represented in dey fluid motion shakes the speaker into one of the few restful declarations in *Land*:

"we home, 'Is dance all yuh want to dance'" (58); in a way a question presented in a statement—a movement with/in noun—the aunts ask "is fass allyuh like to be fass?"⁵ Only if—or *even self*—fleeting, the very next poem "VIII ii" begin "that night we wanted to fly in our aunts' skin / we so loved their talk" (59)—coming close to what R. A. Judy might call flight, thinking in disorder, or multiple semiosis at play, offering multiple fluidities in meaning. And although "Dialectics" in "IX i" would reach to acknowledge "how it was not / you, not you but something holding us all . . . how the circumference / of this world grips us to this place" (Brand, *Land* 64), the fluidity across, along, in movement through time even self marked out of time by the essentialism of racism gifts the speaker's para/ontological envy for these aunts' lives they didn't know dey was living (Forster 6; Brand, *Land* 65). Though penned in by the word envy here, Brand is not describing that "native envy" she find in Fanon, of "envy to the participle and / adverb, the way they own being" (38). Instead, the gesture orchestrates/exhibits the "artful craft of de ting" which "lies in being okay with not knowing in order to know," a mashing up of de place and conditions of extractive existence (Maraj xiv).

Intimately demonstrating these para/ontological poetics in *Land*, the poet's play with multiply iterated negation signals throughout a making through Trini language, but not simply a reductive kind of invention toward some notion of freedom a la Brathwaite's "nation language" (5-6). In "I shouldn't say / nothing" in the opening section (Brand, *Land* 5); "I didn't know no dance" and "No I didn't want their life" (*Land* 58, 65) (I jus mention); "No she cannot speak" and "no, no, I did not feel that. It was not // race" in "Every Chapter of the World" (98-99); and the outright refusal concluding "Land to Light On" with "I don't want no fucking country" (*Land* 48), Brand re/orients readers to a phrasing inherent with/in, ideas that some ting

⁵ T(h)ink the phrase "fass and out ah place" and how yuh might throw it for somebody somehow min'in' yuh business, overstepping with they boldface self (Maraj 133). Simone Browne points similarly to the Jamaican "facety," as "obtrusive, audacious, and 'not knowing one's distance'" (72). Browne asks how we could envision it as resisting colonial "lived objectification," as pushing against the imperative toward Black people to stay in they place (72)—dat shelf where white people put yuh and always trying to put yuh back.

like #TrinidadIsNotARealPlace inaugurates. Dis memetic, excoriating government, laughing at quotidian absurdity, joking bout makin' boundry round existence, of de/framing essence, places place in some no place, elsewhere. Against situating expression with/in logics of language and their integral limits, dis shifting, turning, and moving away from discretionary poetics of border, invite readers, disbar them, and affect dem across a spectrum of those and other possibilities of engagement para-extraction. Alongside these moves, it have a playing with subject, with the *me* and the *I* and the object of the speaker, in *Land*, especially as the book opens in "I Have Been Losing Roads." Indeed, the very first poem start "Out here I am like" (3)—a speaker bound to metaphor, to tropes, to the machinations of what Hortense Spillers calls an "American grammar" that positions Black peoples with/in continuously reiterated racisms in the West (68). "All I could do" (Brand, *Land* 7), "I have to think again," "I was / supposed to" (9), etc. all illustrate the ways Brand's speaker understands being bound up in language, its compulsion, and its churning settler-colonial engine: "Yes, is here I reach" (6)—noting that this is whey language take meh. The relation/ships represented in the Queen's English even when made putty by dem who she would never grace still steering the circular trade, the trucking wake of transatlantic slavery linguistic.

And we know gender bear out together, similar in the tether to bodies that never forgive us and the way that system, that particular truth of power—to conjure Sylvia Wynter ("A Black Studies" 7, 9)—confine expression to what there only in Western notions of biology/culture. Every kin'a body discrete—water, religion, individual, "sacredly // stitched, called history and victory and government" (Brand, *Land* 96), call "Every Chapter of the World," call book, map, note, call part of speech or tense or grammar know dey importance in and of it/self. Jus so the speaker look at the woman, seemingly stuck at the end of the anti-Black world, lookin' at a lizard "suspicious, she asks, what gender, as if what / guarantee, if not certainty, how does she hold //" (97). Dat hold, that metaphor Sharpe offer as the belly of the slave ship which part we still stick in slavery's afterlives. Is for dis reason that Brand sets out to disrupt the genre of even book, of even poem, in ways that don't offer some redemptive narrative for Blackness, migrancy,

diaspora, or nation.⁶ That awareness of how construct of body and the very technologies that per/form them align with how scholars could claim Brand might exhibit the book as an anti-Black object (McCoy and Montgomery)—so is every level it permeate from word to grammar to chapter to book, look how these texture communication, aesthetics, poetics, etc.: inventories for making clear the ills of border (Forster).

To get caught in the perils of structure though, seem like an inevitable path for African diasporic English-ruled peoples of the South who grow up hearing bout *Vanity Fair* and Shakespeare and learn identification with they character. Brand in *An Autobiography* explains in dialogue with C. L. R. James these British models of civility, of gender, or personality prophesy what we learn as value, and technologies of capture, like the photograph, like the book re/present them in service of settler-colonial projects (11-23). But is in a recurring question, a reclaiming not delineated through (proprietary) Western logics, where “the ‘claim’ of de ting as a question, a demanding request; the re of de ting represents a turn ‘once more’” (Maraj 138). So when Brand consider “All That Has Happened Since” and ask while masking as declarative “and why I think their lives would not / be just so somewhere else but bless them in other thoughts just / for here” of three Sikh men selling goods (*Land* 28), that “for here” pelt we into disarray, a dis-cohesion of self in other, attempting reiteratively attempting escape from the literal sentence (is) dat hol’ us self. Dis t(h)inking disorder while knowing full well the well of tropes, of territorializing expressive matter from whence we came will leh we glimpse some crack in de frame, some fracture beyond this anti-Black world order manifesting over and over the trucking of gesture.

Some time after Mummy had fall again trying to clean the kitchen when she know she can’t stand up proper and I wipe she face—if you see how she mouth swell—she stop meh and say “yuh know I jus’ needed

⁶ T(h)ink performance through colonial technologies again mediated against those very things, as Cranston-Reimer argue of Brand’s *A Map to the Door of No Return*. Brand know bout undercutting genre, word, and telos, as the critic explains, *Map* “exceeds the norms of auto/biography because of the impossibility of adequately representing, or, perhaps more accurately, containing, the trauma and legacies of colonial history in a narrative” (95).

one person to care bout me to feel better,” I nearly cry cause the betrayal was it was jus so I leave and went abroad to show I didn’t. But as *Land* know we, right dey if I had stay was some version of dat thing woulda forestall meh—is jus a big circle dis anti-Black world and we could say it doh matter how we well up in it—that same circle the woman at the end drawing in she cell (103). We could agree with Kaya Fraser’s assessment—much like Azucena Galettini’s on Brand reminding us how it is forsaken—that “Language functions as a metaphorical ‘land’ for [Brand’s] weary-voiced persona to light on, but it is a very shaky ground indeed, and as the darkly ambiguous end of the book suggests, it may imprison her as much as it frees her” (292). Fraser’s analysis finish by pointing to the sacrifice of a poet to orchestrate how it have “no resistance in language” (307), and we could re’lly see that in that voice saying, “No she cannot speak of this or that massacre, this / or that war like a poet. Someone else will do that. She //” (Brand, *Land* 98). Dat dissolution/refraction of poet, poetry, and character, though, de fractures between self/other/environment summon some ting else here beyond the disavowal of language as immolation. I know that read all too well raise by my mudda who only know how to give up she self, forfeit most chance she have for somebody else, to sweep the kitchen floor even though she prone to fall, hit she head, and easy end up dead for nothing. “Just ask meh nah. I here. What you think I come back Trinidad for?” I beg she.

Dat giving up, though, relenting to the folly of language to demonstrate it useless, to think “these lines will / not matter, your land is a forced march on the bottom / of the Sargasso” and offering dat poetry (44), sacrificing “land to light on” as “only true, it is only / something someone tells you” in the very next poem “V iii” could tell we about some polysemic possible in poesies (45). More than “your planet is your hands” (44), a planet is nothing nobody could give or give up for anybody else resisting the white eco-logics that, rather, is something to take, to be taken and traded as wealth, as futurity. Leh we resist the compulsion to say dis or dat then, or Brand’s *Land* offering we jus ambiguity between two polities of being. Is what there or not in the move across, along, beside, adjacent to, outside, beyond, with/in a “no, no, no, is not that I saying!” in Brand’s verse, how that could mash up de self granular that could leff we without conclusion to tarry.

And while some critics consider Brand's work—particularly *A Map*, in relation to fixity (Goldman; Brydon) and movement proper (Cranston-Reimer)—I want to sit with *Land* and t(h)ink through its mode of t(h)inking it/self an orientation to logics in/consistent with that "place and placelessness in tension" in diaspora, and as Katherine McKittrick highlights, particularly in Canadian context (106), but, at the same time—and outside dem temporal logics—burst forth through inter(con)text here most intimately with the Caribbean and dey linguistic vestiges. T(h)ink how the shape of our genres promote dis/orientation toward some product—quick lemme coin some way of describing what go on here so ah could profit from being quoted and cited and fuel the same foolish academic impulses Brand rail against. I suppose what I not saying is I see people—including me, self—sacrifice their language, place, politics everyday to get close to what we offer in the university, offer they chirren to the folly of progress, jus to end up with the same gravel in they mouth throughout Brand's *Land*—re/turning the same value as invested.

We was liming again by Andre, and 'Nissa husband Joey was laughing how she say something to they daughter. She start explaining how she could never pronounce *r*—in school other chirren tease she bout it, but luckily the daughter didn't inherit that trait which the mother could not escape. 'Nissa turn and say, but what I explainin' to a professor of English bout language?—you know better than me what is the proper way to say these words to pronounce these terms (these expressions by which we do more than communicate, [']cause Black expression in modernity always prefigured as resource, really). How to explain to my family that the progress they invest in, a mother giving up for she chirren for something other mean we continuing the selfsame logics that does lick we up? How to say it have no "proper," no "better," no superlative, no "handsomest" in the violent grammars, structures, and thinking the ground what we walk on? How to t(h)ink without the words and constructs, the tropes, sentences, genres we trade so willingly in in academic books, essays, and disciplines? Is only questions I have positioned *not*, *against*, *no*, up against the forward-moving gravity of Western temporality.

Re/turning to "Dialectics" Brand might know what I mean when I:

could not say a word to you that was not awkward and insulting,
there was really no way to describe you and what I wanted

to say came out stiff and old as if I could not trust you
to understand my new language which after all I made
against you. (*Land* 63)

Is dis feeling I sit with when t(h)inking language/place/extraction, when t(h)inking with Brand about and around the Black im/migrant Southern imaginary, when t(h)inking how my mother would get up in the night if she fall and I back up here in the people and dem university talking, and talking, and talking, bout systemic oppression, and department culture, and final essay, while circumnavigating t(h)inking in the selfsame language/place/extraction I trying to unstitch. It really ent easy to trade in words and then t(h)ink possible how to unmake them, how to disavow the designs of such exchange.

Reading relation/ships between Brand's *No Language Is Neutral* and *Land to Light On*, Leslie C. Sanders points to how the poet reverses course in revisiting the Trinidad/Canada dialectic in the two books of poems, where a home/exile focus in the former moves to considering identification with country in the latter. On that belonging the critic points to how *Land* illuminates its limits and eschews its demands, while committing to refusing it in some ways. I get ketch now trying to do just dat wishing some place to rest dis t(h)inking, dis tussling around with what it have leff but that woman imprisoned to a re-animated death at the end of "Every Chapter of the World" have me still compelled by t(h)inking language to re/turn to "Dialectics" t(h)inking "It was some place you had to hurry to and something / hot and sweet was going on there and waiting for you, / knowledge" (103, 61).

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Al Moritz's Anti-Extractivist Style: Non-Instrumental Instrumentalism and the Poetics of Materiality

Al Moritz was born in Niles, Ohio, in 1947; he moved in 1974 to Canada, where he has lived ever since. After almost twenty-five years of publishing, he was shortlisted for a Governor General's award in 1999 for *Rest on the Flight into Egypt*. From there, his work has appeared on Canadian prize lists with regularity, and yet his work has never been the subject of scholarly analysis,¹ though it has been very well covered by peer critics writing the first draft of history in the form of book reviews. After critically revisiting what is meant by the term *visionary*, a descriptor often applied to Moritz in these reviews, I will rely upon the poet's peers in order to construct what I deem Moritz's anti-extractivist style. In particular, I focus upon *Mahoning* (1994), his fourth book, as it pertains to extractivism. I am particularly interested in its formal—or, more specifically, *stylistic*—elements that, in combination with a theme of environmental destruction, demonstrate to critics how poetry can resist the extractivist ethic in wider society. By introducing the concept of *non-instrumental instrumentalism* as it pertains to poetics, I will show one way how an early mode of ecocriticism, the anti-extractivist visionary poetic of the Romantics, can be applied in contemporary energy humanities discussions.

Visionary Polysemy

Paralleling a discussion of the term *extractivism* later in this article, the word *visionary* has developed a polysemous use in contemporary poetry discourse, becoming an oft-applied label to a wide range of contemporary poets at the risk of losing its meaning. Hyatt H. Waggoner points out in "Visionary Poetry: Learning to See" that "Blake, Wordsworth, Yeats,

Emerson, Whitman, Stevens, and a host of lesser figures are all praised as visionaries, without it becoming clear what they have in common" (228). Confusion about such canonically sanctioned visionaries is one thing, the confusion meeting the huge range of contemporary poets is another, for as Waggoner maintains, a "good many of the best-known contemporary poets produce verse that is quasi-religious in tone and reminiscent of myth in vocabulary, and we like to honour their work too by calling it visionary, though it may express only nostalgia or despair and have little or no reference to any reality outside the poet's mind" (228-29). The definitional crisis Waggoner identifies can be resolved by returning to the religious origins of the term. Quoting Gershom Scholem, Kinereth Meyer offers a heuristic: "'visionary poetry' refers to poems in which the subject seeks, through the poem, to merge with a oneness (variously called God, Nature, the Soul), and to achieve a knowledge which is neither discursive nor logical but related . . . 'to a sphere where speech and expression are excluded'" (4). Meyer offers a definition that could apply to "modern poems," explaining that such works are "nourished by a longing for wordless unity, and, at the same time, for a dwelling in the multiplicity of language" (3). It is exactly this multiplicity—relying as it does in Moritz's case on a meaning-amplifying syntax that yet maintains the end effect of the poem as an entire experience—that will become the core component of what I will soon develop as Moritz's anti-extractivist style.

Moritz's work can be summarized in terms of poetic influences and schools. Surrealism and symbolism are oft-identified progenitors, but for the purposes of analysis here, I focus on English Romanticism. In review after review, his poetry has been linked to, in George Fetherling's observation, the "radical Romantics" (16), especially Wordsworth, Shelley, and Blake (Greene, "A Hidden Treasure" 16; Greene, "A Journey" 23; Bartlett 109; Hancock 769; Cameron, Introduction 2; Lanthier 73; Jennings, "Riddle's Raw" 37; Miller 112; McKay 14). Moritz himself says that it is Wordsworth to whom he is "poetically always very close" (Neilson 32). A small snippet from *Mahoning* suggests the linkage:

Very far now between two cities
wandering, a boy along the slate-grey
waters of the road, driftwood and crushed brown iron.
Ahead in the mirage on asphalt

his childhood tree appears once more
 as on the day when it was cut, and trembles, cries, prays
 to grow tender green again and shelter. (25)

Here, Moritz channels Wordsworth through his intense and visionary depiction of childhood and childishness from the point of view of an observer who either witnesses a child or who is a child. The visionary element is further freighted by the "childhood tree," which has a rebirth, in a sense, in the child's imagination; this tree then has its own consciousness created through actions like crying and desiring to "grow tender green again." The fusion of child and tree creates a unity of these consciousnesses. Another resonance comes with the conceit that the speaker is composing the poem as they walk along a polluted riverbed and ruins. The speaker walks between "two cities" in terrain mediated by prior human action, with a hopeful dream that the despoiled site of these previous actions can be reclaimed. As with Wordsworth's, Moritz's work suggests that cultivating a harmonious relationship with nature corresponds with healthy social relationships in the human world.

Michael Cameron claims that Moritz's poems "remain both philosophically and verbally true to their vision. They take the insufficient materials of the physical world and literally remake them into something numinous" (7). "Bonded firmly to earth," James Garrett adds, Moritz's work "becomes a kind of theology mediating between malleable human fashion and an objective state beyond the immediate physical world" (11). The evidence supporting both critics' observations in *Mahoning* is vast. For example, the book starts in the visionary fashion of Wordsworth, self-reflective and concerned with childhood: "I wake up. And it seems to me I am / in childhood's place again—or still" (11). Another step is taken by representing the natural world:

Now again as at first: I am in an upstairs bedroom,
 skin suffering and hearing blessed
 in the humid dark, and surrounding heads of maple trees
 that bring the river-like voice I seem to know
 screen me away from my river. (11)

This voice is the visionary one Moritz's work channels. In this excerpt, we have a simple scene in which the speaker is in his bedroom in a seemingly timeless unity of self ("now again as at first"), yet while in this

“humid dark” he is somehow connected to the Mahoning River through the intermediary of nature itself, the “surrounding heads of maple trees.” As Cameron points out, this physical world—“humid dark,” “skin suffering,” and “river”—rendered by the poet in plain language, suggests the “somehow insufficient” that will soon be made numinous by Moritz:

It's as if the wall
that the world is were a graceful labyrinth
of leaves and branches, inviting
endless transgression: openings, entrances
everywhere, and numberless winding ways
leading to forkings into other ways, the same.
It's as if a voice gave me the key, saying,
“Walk through the wall,” and I went . . . (11)

Part of Moritz's anti-extractivist style, this recursivity—the passage begins with a wall and ends with this image too, and “winding ways” lead to “other ways” that are “the same”—is organized around a childlike speaker who seeks to transcend current conditions by more profoundly recognizing them.

Extractivism and Poetry

Prominent energy humanities scholars Imre Szeman and Jennifer Wenzel offer a powerful summary of their field to date in a recent extractivism-themed issue of *Textual Practice*. Szeman and Wenzel generate several provocations, one of which concerns the perceived impotence of the field itself: “But just how can literary criticism have an impact on the environment?” (515). The urgency of achieving climate justice and stopping extractivist practices is embodied in the example of Canadian poets like Rita Wong, “sentenced to twenty-eight days in prison” for participating in a pipeline protest (Wong 258), and Stephen Collis, sued by Kinder Morgan for obstructing work on the construction of its Trans Mountain Pipeline (Nilson 82-83). But what about poetry itself? Can anti-extractivist poems or literary criticism concerning such poems do anything? Poets might answer Szeman and Wenzel that poetry's task is not necessarily to be of a crudely instrumental use in the world, but rather to offer an alternative mode for being in the world, to provide the imaginative means of remediation and redress, if not its action plan. I term this function *non-instrumental instrumentalism*.

Nevertheless, many critics have suggested that Moritz offers concrete solutions. For example, David Silverberg writes that Moritz's work "offers a remedy to self-destruction. We have a beautiful planet, Moritz is telling us, but we must hold close the sacred and act, not just react" (27). Though his identification of the "sacred" is apt, I am not so sure that Moritz is offering solutions in poetry that are equivalent to action. Instead, Moritz offers righteous non-solutions of the kind that poetry provides. In *Mahoning*, these non-solutions occur less as actionable items and more so within the visionary poetic I have introduced. Moritz suggests how people might effectively discourage and dismantle extractivist practices through the cultivation of a positive ethic toward the environment. His work also invites energy humanities scholars to reconceive their deployments of poetry.

Before I can isolate Moritz's particular contribution to the field, I will sketch previous work in extractivist poetics. Following Wenzel and Szeman, Max Liboiron, and Adam Dickinson, I argue that there is another way to consider how poetry makes use of materiality, and that this other way is contained in the work of Moritz. Using the lens of visionary poetics, there need be no *a priori* misgivings about perceived real-world inefficacy. Within the epistemology of visionary poetry, what is "real" is what is brought into material being through poetic work—the crystallization of vision into and through words. For the visionary poet, the relationship between self, imagination, and world achieves a unity that doesn't erect rigid separation between these categories.

In their key article, Szeman and Wenzel warn that the "term 'extractivism' has quickly become the name for every process and practice through which value is generated for capitalism," further stating that the term has a "conceptual ubiquity" that compromises useful "analytic function" (505). The authors offer their own definition of extractivism as an "ideology and cultural logic that permeates social imaginaries as well as literary and other discourse" and advocate for a focus "on the materiality of relations and processes dubbed 'extractive'" to reclaim extractivism from the fate of becoming an empty signifier (505). This is a worthy concern, for all powerful ideas—including the visionary—and their terminology risk such slippage. Szeman and Wenzel further crystallize their definition as follows:

“More simply and crudely . . . we might say that *extractivism* names a human instrumentalization of nonhuman nature: the use of nature only as a means toward human ends—or, to be slightly less crudely universalist, a means toward the ends of some subset of humans” (511). In contrast, Max Liboiron in *Pollution Is Colonialism* conceptualizes extractive practices as being part of “different types of colonialism.” Liboiron writes that “[c]olonialism is a way to describe relationships characterized by conquest and genocide” (9). By putting extractivist practices in the frame of colonialism, relations to land and the many commitments thereby entailed are given a primacy over an unfocused environmentalism that leads to the generality of what Szeman and Wenzel deliberately signal as a generic “exploitative badness” (510). Liboiron’s formulation inherently resists this genericity. As they write,

[t]o change colonial land relations and enact other types of Land relations requires specificity. This is so we don’t accidentally think that the opposite of colonialism is environmentalism or, similarly, that we don’t conflate colonialism with other forms of extraction, such as capitalism. Colonialism and capitalism might be happy bedfellows and indeed longtime lovers, but they are not the same thing. (13)

The concerns of Szeman and Wenzel and Liboiron converge (and become interesting from the point of view of poetics) when they, using Szeman and Wenzel’s words, advocate against “conceptual creep, metaphorical inflation, [and] synonomical restatement” (505). All of these listed items—concepts, metaphors, synonyms, repetition—are poetry’s material. The tension created between a non-metaphorical argument for “reality” and reality’s inevitable, unavoidable expression in metaphor is the key idea in this section of my article. I aim to “breathe new life into what may have become dead metaphors” (506)—Szeman and Wenzel’s stated goal—by looking at what extractivism is or might be within poetics while acknowledging that critiques of capitalism and colonialism lie beyond the scope of this article.²

The nature and fate of poetic language are to make connection through the exploration of similarities and differences. Szeman and Wenzel argue for a more exclusive use of the term, but there is a peril

to keep in mind: inherent to any definition is an attempt to make sense of one thing in terms of another. This is the essence of metaphor. The problem with the dilution of extractivism's meaning, then, is not that connections are made by scholars, but that literary studies can recline in easy and imprecise metaphors without seeking purchase beyond the experience of the text in terms of descriptive efficacy and power. The kind of instrumentalism the term might find in literary studies is to create an urgency to counter, arrest, and resist environmental destruction of the sort it denotes through imaginative use of the term itself. A less desirable kind might involve a tendency to use the metaphor of extraction as a poetic tool in which text is marked off as terrain for predetermined meaning claims, in which certain content triggers rote critique. As I will show, it is in the latter sense that Moritz's work particularly resists such instrumentalism.

In his own analysis of ethics, metaphor, and ecocriticism, Adam Dickinson points out that "[m]ore oblique approaches to environmental issues in works that attempt to call language and reference into question are often charged . . . with being overly-theoretical or anthropocentrically self-indulgent" (35). He adds that a prevailing "emphasis on a realist aesthetic is . . . a view of poetry that is opposed to interests in metaphor" and he advocates for "lyrical approaches to the natural world that provide an alternative way of thinking ethics, a way that points to a potential political activism, but not in the terms of any systematic methodology" (35-36). Though Szeman and Wenzel are hardly arguing against the study of poetry in their article, their argument does embody the problem Dickinson identifies—one that has a long history in the field—a hastening toward direct action, a preference for a more material materiality that comes from direct representation.

To what extent, when thinking in terms of poetics, is there an absolute or true incommensurability of material and language? Notwithstanding the validity of warning against conceiving of physical processes in the world as abstractions only, is it too postmodern to point out that politics is constituted of words (abstractions, signifiers) and vice versa? What distinctions can be made between "material realities that attend resource extraction" and the substitution of "words for politics" (Szeman and Wenzel 519, 520)? Is environmental studies divesting itself of too much of

its poetic capital here? If the world we want is yet to be, then how do we arrive at such a world by restricting materiality to matter only?

Instrumentalize the Aesthetic?

Instrumentalization, as Szeman and Wenzel point out, isn't inherently bad, though the kinds of instrumentalism used in the environmental and energy humanities contexts can reinforce that which they seek to oppose. In *Bad Environmentalism*, Nicole Seymour questions "ecocritics' tendency to . . . judge artworks primarily by their functionality: their capacity to educate the public or spark measurable change" (7). Seymour argues for "a less strictly instrumentalist approach [that] allows us to imagine additional, or different, capacities for environmental art" (7). Seymour explicitly advocates for a turn away from straightforward, monovalent, sanctimonious activism toward a more ironical kind whose "power actually lies in challenging binaries" (5). If there was a form that possessed the greatest possible range of freedom with respect to meaning, it is poetry. Poetry can do the work Seymour calls for, resisting the didactic and the instrumental while also somehow contributing to the cause.

In the case of the climate crisis, tools are urgently needed. But what kind? In another context, Wenzel explains that there is a "great paradox of fossil fuel imaginaries: in literature as in life, oil in particular is at once everywhere and nowhere, indispensable yet largely unapprehended, not so much invisible as unseen" (11). Such is true of the metropole, whereas in pertinent metaphorical peripheries, evidence of fossil fuel extraction—such as Alberta's tar sands—can be front and centre. But as Justin Parks explains, "for most of us residing in the global north, imbricated within postindustrial consumer economies, we seldom *see* our extreme dependence upon extractive processes *as such*" ("The Poetics" 355). Hence we need tools to rematerialize the invisible petroeconomy. Speaking instrumentally for a moment, a useful tool in poetics is a consideration of form. In "The Poetics of Extractivism and the Politics of Visibility," Parks advocates for "rendering visible the methods and materialities of extractivism as forces that exercise a shaping effect on literary form" (357). He asks, "What does attention to extractivism in its textual encoding render visible (and legible)? What does our attention to literary

representations of extractivism enable us to perceive about our social ontologies as currently configured?" (357). We need to see extractivism at the level of form in literary texts in order to recognize extractivism better in the real world. If we neglect this task, how would we know our "social ontologies" as we see them in physical form if we have inadequate knowledge to bring to bear to apprehend their materiality? This said, have the tools used thus far been—another irony—too instrumental?

On one hand, the answer is no. Poetry has been considered in many different ways by Canadian scholars who work in the environmental humanities. For example, in "Rig Talk and Disidentification in Peter Christensen's *Rig Talk* and Matthew Henderson's *The Lease*," Melanie Dennis Unrau unpacks how depicted oil workers' vernacular reflects their ambivalent status in the petroeconomy. It is this ambivalence—Unrau shows how the workers' vernacular makes them "complicit, dependent, resistant, and in solidarity" (15)—that is in parallel with my own concept of what poetry can do, affiliating and strangely sliding away from a uniformity of meaning. Another scholar, Jenny Kerber, engages with an archeological metaphor in three prairie poets (Tim Lilburn, Louise Halfe, and Madeline Coopsammy) in the fourth chapter of *Writing in Dust: Reading the Prairie Environmentally* and, like Unrau, also engages with "vernacular language and expression" in poetry (118). Although her aims are broader, one objective of Kerber's study is to reflect on the "kinds of narratives of prairie environment these poets' works confirm and . . . contest" (119). This kind of inquiry understands the polysemy of poetry, as does Kerber's later 2018 article "Romantic Ramblings, Revisited: Eco-logics of Mobility in Sina Queyras's *Expressway*." In this paper, Kerber recalls "a number of early ecocritical texts" that "proposed that Romantic writers like Wordsworth, Shelley, and Coleridge present helpful alternatives to dualistic modes of thinking that promote instrumental economic rationality and short-term solutions to environmental problems" (346). Resisting dualistic modes of thinking—eluding instrumentalization due to its semantic slipperiness, its "multiplicity" (355, 358)—is poetry's singular strength. Kerber summarizes ecocritical Romantic scholarship further by problematizing the offering of a "non-utilitarian" Romantic vision of nature as solution to capitalism (346), and the remainder of her paper

engages with Queyras' "creative response to Dorothy Wordsworth's *Grasmere Journals*" (347).

On the other hand, and especially recently, another kind of investigation of poetic form in the environmental humanities tends toward covering poetry in more concrete ways with less ambiguous affects. For example, Christine Okoth has argued that the elliptical form of Dionne Brand's *Inventory* enacts the disjunctures created by extractivism; Max Karpinski identifies a "poetics of appropriation" in the work of Jordan Abel ("Split" 71), Lesley Battler's *Endangered Hydrocarbons* ("Making Poetry"), and Rita Wong ("Unsettled Solutions"). The motif's basis lies in the poet under consideration's dual use of extractivist subject matter *and* formal deployment of the same, by which—to use Karpinski's analysis of Battler as an example—they "incorporate, reproduce, or manipulate source texts" ("Making Poetry"). A related, metaphorical formulation comes in Dickinson's coinage of *metabolic poetics*, a practice that he defines as "acts of reading and writing, derived from or responding to the expression of energy and energy politics in biological mediums, especially in the context of homeostatic states and homeorhetic trajectories" ("Energy Humanities" 19). Such writing can involve "compositional methods" that "reflect the constraints and procedures" that he experiences "as a being composed of other beings and . . . materials" (20). Though Dickinson's term is slightly different, the overlap with the appropriation motif described earlier is obvious: in his criticism, Dickinson identifies volatile substances and chemicals (such as polychlorinated biphenyls [PCBs]) that both go into his writing and are contained in his body. In other words, his criticism instrumentalizes his poetry as his poetry instrumentalizes itself. Instruments are even used to obtain data that is then fed back into the poetry that uses the instruments and the information they provided.

Recent analyses of non-Canadians' texts also tend toward such metaphorically materialist analyses. For example, Justin Parks considers Muriel Rukeyser's *Book of the Dead* and Mark Nowak's *Coal Mountain Elementary* by theorizing a resource poetics metaphor. Parks focuses on the poems' "material incorporation of textual artefacts" that testify "to their ruinous effects" ("Toward a Resource" 395). With metaphorical reinvention,

what was once collage and found text poetry is now re-sourced as a new poetics. This is not a criticism, for I will soon do the same with a concept of my own, that of anti-extractivist style. A shared objective point of these analyses, national and international, is to expose the formal structures that underwrite extractivist practices. Yet they are much more clearly aligned with the kind of earnest environmentalism and instrumentalist critique Seymour identifies as not yet resulting in a polysemic complication of stance and intention, possibly as likely to contribute to resistance of climate justice as to its urgent uptake.

Perhaps it is time to return once again to the Romantic nature poetic, now that the limits of the new enviropoetics' instrumentalism have been shown. Perhaps the vision of the Romantics, in its non-utilitarian function, was a radical redress that, by its nature as poetry, was never intended to be instrumentalized, but rather non-instrumentalized, as much a useful tension in the world as the critique offered by the energy humanities. In her provocative work, Seymour considers queer and parodic artistic interventions to offer the necessary affective ambiguity required to move people to action—a kind of non-instrumental instrumentalism. In a similar spirit, I now turn to the work of Moritz and its engagement with a productive ambiguity that is the means of poetry itself as conceived within the Romantic tradition.

Moritz's Representations of Extractivism and Anti-Extractivist Style

The prominent critic John Hollander writes of Moritz's "prophetic moral vision" and of a "central visionary trope of life among ruins—of civilizations, communities, institutions, artifacts, even verbal and conceptual constructions" (17). Hollander identifies Blake as a kindred spirit, writing parenthetically that Moritz's concerns "are in the tradition of some of Blake and Goya's etchings" (17). Hollander was more right than he knew: first, like Blake, Moritz validates emotion as aesthetic experience; second, he writes against a technological revolution (for the Romantics, it was the Industrial Revolution); and third, he is focused on the natural world as a source both of experience and ecstasy. With the Romantics, Moritz shares subject matter but also their recognition of spiritual qualities in nature.

We can start establishing Moritz's credentials as ecopoet with the opinion of a peer. Tim Bowling, a decorated ecopoet himself, reviews *Mahoning* as capturing "not only the physical character of the poet's remembered world . . . but also, remarkably, the childlike wonder of it touched at the same time with an adult's poignant sense of its decay" (45). Carol Bruneau writes that *Mahoning* "pays tribute to nature's force in the face of human endeavour, the natural dialectic of flux and change that guarantees the rise and fall of civilization and nature's ability to spring up around the ruins" (32). Neither critic perceives that Moritz offers an actionable politics beyond his description of natural cycles of development, decline, and renewal amongst devastated landscapes, although some critics have pointed to Moritz's concerns about extractivism. For example, In *The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature*, Geoff Hancock describes Moritz's poems as "philosophically dense meditations on visionary states in a nature increasingly threatened by the mechanical world" (769). He adds that, in particular, Moritz's *Mahoning* "seeks out the spirit of nature in a landscape blighted by the steel industry" and that both it and his three subsequent books "continue the theme of seeking a pure natural spirit in a mechanical and industrialized world" (769).

Qua Szeman and Wenzel's recommendation, materiality is a focus for some reviewers. For example, in one of the first pieces of criticism published on Moritz's work in the *Montreal Writers' Forum*, Cameron writes that "[e]lemental objects recur obsessively: stone, destructive rain and moisture, a constantly glutting vegetation" (22). Quoting Moritz himself, Cameron explains that the image loading is designed to "stress how 'everything / falls backward, runs from much to less,'" and that any innocence and vernal freshness is doomed to "the endless caucus / of the threshing floor' and final extinction" (22). When reviewing *Rest on the Flight into Egypt* (1999), Brian Bartlett, another noted ecopoet, writes that "over the past two decades" Moritz has studied "materiality, budding, change" (107). Accordingly, *Mahoning* documents the ruins of a former prosperity, returning to the movement of the river and the pleasures taken by observing trees, the "feathered trees unknown to science" but known in a more integrated, spiritual way by the poet via fusing selfhood with vegetation. With Moritz, observation soon shifts into ontology.

Imagery of environmental devastation recurs frequently in the book, usually linked to industrialization:

We forged
a bowel into you, we were the new, iron bowel
lying within the dark of your leaves and steep ridges.
Our sign: smoke. (14)

and

Rust stained the roots hiding in the ground,
the violet flower that ironweed
held high above the dust, even the breakers
of yarrow seething between
a railroad right-of-way
and a chain-fenced millyard. (26)

Along with the depictions of environmental impact above, the Earth's finitude is conveyed: "From deepest ore the last of metal was disappearing" (35). That local environmental compromise benefits centres of power circa the 1950s-1960s is not lost on Moritz either:

We burnt you to feed
the distant lighted skin, the head and face
that crawled with vacant pleasures—to feed
New York and Washington with iron. (14)

Yet the tone of Moritz's investigation is mournful and altogether self-reflective rather than resentful or angry—embodying, again, the Wordsworthian element in his work. Moritz harmonizes an appreciation of the beauty of the environmental destruction, the surviving natural life in and despite that destruction, as well as the dire economic consequences of extractivism locally via image after image of empty, decrepit buildings. The above passage continues,

And we were happy,
proud to be silent, proud to be no more
than the organ New York floated upon, ashamed,
the power in Washington's false step . . . (14)

There is some confusion in parsing who is ashamed in this excerpt, if it is the *we* or if it is New York; furthermore, the affect of shame seems to contradict the signalled pride and happiness. Part of the confusion

comes from *ashamed* being offset by commas, perhaps a formal manifestation of the “false step” signalled by the poem.

Moritz’s semantic difficulty will be expanded upon in the next section. At any rate, leaving shame aside, the strange equanimity—“happy, / proud”—that the speaker represents in a historical fashion, sketching a collective experience of forty years prior to the time of writing, recurs in “Along the Rails”:

The portion, wandering,
the cruel and useless portion,
we took it for ourselves.
.....

Along the rails between glass plant, brick plant, steel plant
and the dark banks, there grew and flowered the ideas,
science, medicine, song: sombre gold, deep green and flowing water.
.....

The town crept on the earth, dripping
a dripping fire, clouds that sink in darkness, and always
new cars and old drove through its simple designs.

Who needs another thing? We are home—
the food plentiful, the waiting earth
that keeps us busy, that buckles the concrete. (40)

As can be seen, Moritz doesn’t indict the historical practices of extractivism in a simplistic, direct manner. Instead, he depicts the communal experience of consumers as they might have felt at the time—peaceful. He thereby creates an atmosphere of accountability, for, looking back, he uses a *we* and poetically complicates an obliviousness that must also be recognized somehow as, generally speaking, a comfort-giving, sustaining force in people’s lives. That this poem occurs amid other poems that document environmental despoliation results in a productive ambivalence that resists instrumentalization. With Moritz’s representations of extractivism duly substantiated, I now turn to a specific (and new) metaphorical instantiation of poetics, that of *anti-extractivist style*.

As Marcelle C. Dawson, Christopher Rosin, and Navé Wald write in their introduction to *Global Resource Scarcity*, “extractivism is often framed and legitimised through discourses of crisis and scarcity” (11).

I argue that Moritz's anti-extractivist style constitutes a formal expansion at the level of syntax and symbolist/surrealist influence that itself creates a surplus of meaning and inscrutability identified by both Moritz appreciators and detractors; anti-extractivist style in this sense signals a poetic that is semantically expansive, creating a super-multiplicity of meaning that seemingly creates a kind of cognitive waste. Such a style stands in contrast to the logic of scarcity that gainsays resource hoarding and extraction.

Don McKay, Moritz's most perceptive critic and one of Canada's foremost eco-poets, argues during a gloss on Moritz's poem "Music and Exile" that Moritz's "craft . . . involves a sure sense of the tension between the 'sentence' and the fall of the prose line and the irresistible lift of lyric, as though the experiences of exile and music . . . were struggling for control of the poem" (15). Within this balance of prose and poetry lies the anti-extractivist poetics I will attempt to forge, but note for now McKay recognizes that the balance Moritz strikes is not just a struggle to achieve, as it were, but embodies some kind of struggle in itself.

Moritz's detractors have noted that struggle and formed different conclusions, arguing that control is often *not* achieved. David Solway has deemed Moritz a poet who lacks "a discernible subject" and a purveyor of "willed obscurity" (40). John Orange judges Moritz's poems "difficult" and claims they "drop into a void of obscurity" (105, 104). Even ardent appreciators of Moritz like Richard Greene admit that "Moritz is a difficult, often obscure poet, whose works can defy paraphrase" ("A Hidden Treasure" 16). This so-called difficulty arises from Moritz's style, which has been variously characterized over the years. For Greene, Moritz's stylistic obscurity is in part due to his "long-line, incantatory free verse" (16). Similarly, Eric Miller identifies the cause of difficulty as a syntax that, "like the vines he excels at describing, [is] an aptly diverging, flexible fibre to sustain the confounding amalgam" (113). Chris Jennings elaborates on Miller's point by tying syntax's purpose to Moritz's symbolist-surrealist influences: "[t]he logic of a Moritz poem is similarly provisional, and his frequently associative logic, like dream logic, tests the limits of linear syntax to dramatize thinking rather [than] reify a paraphrasable

thought" ("Riddle's Raw" 38). Jennings explains that "when his language is difficult," this difficulty comes from a "classically discursive" poetry that "challenge[s] the ability of grammar and syntax to maintain order and connectedness, sometimes over a pattern of thought characterized by neither order or connectedness . . . [c]onfusion, obscurity, are side effects of a technique that seeks to dramatize the 'act of the mind' accurately" (38). As can be seen, such accounts of Moritz's style show that even sympathizing critics feel obliged to make apologia for what detractors like Solway and Carmine Starnino identify as unintelligibility. What is important to take away from this extensive disagreement is that Moritz's difficulty is tied to the means of his expression, which for a poet is analogous to their materiality.

A consensus opinion, then, is that Moritz's poetry is not easy to understand, and it has something to do with what Ross Leckie calls the poet's "muscular syntax" (121). Jennings is the only one of two critics who have delved into the linguistic nuts and bolts of Moritz's syntax, the nature of which he repeatedly gestures at here:³

some see Moritz as "willfully obscure" and overly (or falsely) intellectual while others praise him for intellectual rigour put to very humane purposes. I suspect this schism has more to do with some basic mechanics of Moritz's writing than with his poetic persona, and perhaps its central element is grammatical. Moritz often writes long sentences, and not just long sentences but long sentences with multiple restrictive elements and subordinations that do not technically require punctuation meaning that, in addition to the line breaks cutting across the semantic groupings of prosaic grammar, readers must also grapple with the poem's voice and sense without commas to provide dramatic pauses and syntactic groupings . . . ("Simplifying" 90-91)

For Jennings, Moritz is a maximalist at the level of meaning due to his peculiar grammatical tendencies. The "very humane purposes" Jennings refers to include Moritz's concern about the destruction of the environment, one of his chief subjects. Thus the depiction of the creation and uncreation of the natural world in Moritz's poetry arrives via a style that derives as many meanings as possible from its material. The goal is the creation of "a religious vision" in which "natural

processes tend towards liberation and so speak to a deeper ordering of reality" (Greene, "A City"). In other words, as Eric Trethewey has said, Moritz's "major theme is the incarnation of spiritual realities in nature and language" (85).

As Starnino has pointed out, Moritz's semantic expansion increased over the years, becoming "elastically discursive" (34). He "significantly extended and aerated his verse line," becoming "much more talkative" (35). Though *Mahoning* is not Moritz's most "elastically discursive" book—perhaps his most garrulous is *The New Measures*—it does demonstrate the quality his critics identify. The conclusion to "On a Screen"—which includes the lines "The million answerers / from a million wells are one answer from a dark / space, a depthless earth"—reads,

You will be different, one day, if you endure.
There's a promise of it even in your nights,
if you consent to know them: blank pleasure,
suffering: you lie down
and are nothing—a television screen,
not even a thought or a seeing, but the unseen
images of this worldwide helpless day
that are flowing in your body, are taking your form. (46)

Starting as a clear grammatical sentence in the first line, the poem slides along without a definite sense-anchor. Though the poem is stabilized in the second person and, as in all Moritz poems, the vocabulary is simple, almost plain, the sense of things shifts back and forth. We begin with "different" in the first line, which is promised in the second, but which seems to recede as chief subject in favour of "nights" in the same line. The content of these nights then becomes the primary subject, but then seemingly only to suggest a concomitant denaturing of the self ("you lie down / and are nothing") that is dropped, after a dash, in exchange for a television screen as it becomes a portal for forces outside the self as well as a strange mirror for the same forces within the body. In the final line, somehow, "different" and "nights" and the world become either reified as the body or doppelgangers of the body; it is hard to say precisely. This difficulty extends from the long line and—recalling Jennings earlier—its "multiple restrictive elements and subordinations." The same process is at work in "Visit Home":

It seemed that Mahoning was preferring its own death,
 that I saw it struggling to forget the other
 that had been brought to it: all the muzzles
 of cattle and the human snouts
 lined up at its veins: titanic herds
 poured out of black steel barns,
 fouling the stream below the sea-green hay,
 there, where three oaks lean out from the bank. (52-53)

With the conclusion of this stanza—all one long sentence—one is left with a deceptively precise location along the river, “where three oaks lean out from the bank.” To get there, the river is personified in the first line; in the second, it not only is seen to be “struggling” (first-order abstraction) but is seen to be struggling “to forget” (second-order abstraction) the “other.” This effort to forget suggests it is the human and animal world which is actually personified in this poem, and not the river. The river remains itself, even under the organizing “I” subject creating the poem. The stanza could not be rendered in grammatically correct shorter sentences or ungrammatical shorter units and have the same syncretic effect, for it is the very length of the construction that maximalizes not only what it might contain, but also what it might mean. Thus anti-extractivist style in this poetic context means more than *maximalist*, for it applies to a text that depicts extractivism using simple vocabulary (e.g., base elements and ores) and yet manages, in its syntactic construction, a surplus of ambiguity. By “draw[ing] a veil across its message” (34), Starnino maintains, Moritz’s work has a waste end-product that mars its reception. The deliberately imprecise syntactical constructions create a mental abundance of disconnected, beautiful images that not only resist concerted mining for meaning (the paraphrase-resisting quality mentioned earlier), they also—in the sheer multiplicity of their resultant partial meanings—offer rhetorical excess, a pluripotency of plenty, that is incompatible with scarcity logics.

Romanticism as Non-Instrumental Tool

In “The Trouble with Wilderness,” a seminal paper in the environmental humanities, William Cronon points out that the relatively ineffectual “modern environmental movement is itself a grandchild of romanticism” (10). I have argued, however, that the visionary

poetic of the Romantics was less a plan for action than a testament to the development of meaningful relationships with the world. These relationships are created partly through a multiplicity of meaning that somehow instantiates a oneness with that world. This meaning-matrix creates the conditions for a “non-instrumental instrumentalism” in which poetry is not used for “stopping the digging” in a direct fashion, but instead for the renovation of relationships between selves and world. Moritz’s particular contribution in this larger Romanticism context is his anti-extractivist style, which amplifies meaning to abundance, even overabundance; this quality resists the logics of scarcity upon which extractivism depends. Moritz’s poetics exemplifies the curious “grandchild of romanticism” that is an anti-extractivist style—a style that could in time lead to the poetic re-visioning our extractivist age requires.

Notes

1. Moritz doesn’t share his unexamined status with other male visionary ecopoets of his generation. For example, Jenny Kerber and Kirsten Alm are two of several scholars who have considered Tim Lilburn’s work; Travis Mason, Alanna Bondar, and Adam Dickinson are but a few of the many scholars who have covered Don McKay; Tammy Armstrong’s dissertation focuses on Don Domanski. Of the three just named, Domanski seems closest to Moritz’s attention deficit, perhaps because, like Moritz, he was not based on the West Coast of Canada, where ecocriticism thrives, though Domanski did have the advantage of not being also-American. Moritz’s anti-extractivist masterpiece, *Mahoning*, memorializes an American setting, which is not as appealing a substrate for Canadian critics. Perhaps the poets share another reason for the lack of attention: the overtly religious element of their work, though this aspect is admittedly more intense in Domanski’s.
2. In this article, I use the term *anti-extractivist* as opposed to *post-extractivist* because, as Aia Newport explains in “Possible Mindsets for Post-Extractive Futures,” post-extractivism is “rooted in decolonial frameworks that take responsibility for the harms caused through extraction. This includes treaties, land back and repatriation of stolen goods, as a start.” *Mahoning* does not centre such matters.
3. Philip Marchand, in his casual book reviews column in the *Toronto Star*, encouraged readers to “[t]hink of the way John Milton used to come up with these incredibly long and complicated sentences, full of independent and dependent clauses, and fit them into his blank verse in *Paradise Lost*” (J10).

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“Stinking as Thinking” in Warren Cariou’s “Tarhands: A Messy Manifesto”

What I remember most about the tar sands is the stink. We stood there with our cameras, trying to capture a record of that obliterated landscape, but I could hardly even see. The fumes were like hammers . . .

—Warren Cariou, “Tarhands: A Messy Manifesto”

Smells are everywhere and so is oil.¹ Olfactory signatures mark our memories and shape our relationships to the world around us, including our relationships to oil production and consumption. In his landmark 1992 essay on petrofiction, Amitav Ghosh attributes the dearth of “Oil Encounter” novels to the fact that, to American audiences, “oil smells bad” (432), as both a substance and a reminder of global interdependence. More recently, writers like Warren Cariou have turned to the language of smell to investigate the tar sands’ environmental impacts. In “Tarhands: A Messy Manifesto” (2012), a text that aims to counteract disinformation about the tar sands spread by corporations and governments and challenge readers’ complacency in the midst of a climate crisis, Cariou plays with smell’s connection to memory and emotion, its emphasis on relationality and transcorporeality, and its link to sense of place and environmental risk to powerful effect. Yet few critics provide an in-depth examination of smell and oil in Cariou’s work. As a white-settler scholar living on Treaty 6 territory in a city less than five hundred kilometres from Fort McMurray, I regularly confront scents that serve as a reminder of my relatively close proximity to the tar sands, particularly when I travel to Edmonton and encounter the powerful odours of Refinery Row. I find Cariou’s literary engagement with smell to be instructive for thinking through questions of resource extraction and proximity in the Canadian petrostate. Rather than perpetuate the marginalization of smell by relegating it to a feature of setting or atmosphere, this essay follows the trail of scents in Cariou’s manifesto and argues for a closer examination of smell’s significance as a

way of knowing and relating to oil. Building on Jennifer Wenzel's notion that "a resource logic is also a resource aesthetic" ("Afterword"), this essay asks: What is unique about the language of smell—and stink in particular—and what does that uniqueness offer Cariou, a Métis writer, scholar, and filmmaker who uses aesthetic experimentation to interrogate the neo-colonial capitalist logic of resource extraction? How does Cariou reimagine the language of scent for his creative, ethical, and political goals? What does his olfactory language offer readers, who have diverse and complex relationships to odours of extraction, oil production and consumption, and environmental risk?

To address these questions, this essay brings studies of resource aesthetics into conversation with recent work on settler atmospherics and olfactory ecocriticism. By pairing photographs of the tar sands with brief narratives and poems that centre stench, Cariou mobilizes smell's association with irrationality to disrupt structures of petromodernity rooted in colonial aesthetic values. In an effort to shift readers' thinking in the hopes of inciting climate action, Cariou attempts to manifest—or make perceptible to the senses—the toxic relations of the petrostate that often remain "hidden" and "silenced." Yet Cariou does not simply expose these toxic relations. Recasting what Jacques Rancière calls "the distribution of the sensible" (12-13), Cariou develops a rich olfactory language to complicate the notion that scents resist representation in English. By disrupting the very foundation of the Western sensory hierarchy, with its emphasis on the so-called higher order senses of vision and audition, Cariou's olfacto-centric manifesto invites readers—whom he positions as liberal subjects steeped in the traditions of Western thought and colonial aesthetics—to attend more closely to smell as a form of embodied knowledge and way of relating. Building on Cheryl Lousley's suggestion that Cariou's manifesto constitutes a "poetic effort in ecological pedagogy" ("Canadian" 75), I argue that by developing an olfactory aesthetic that foregrounds smell as a medium for communicating environmental risk, Cariou sharpens readers' olfactory senses, providing them with a language and conceptual framework for attuning to smell as a way of knowing and relating—an essential step in transforming the material conditions of Canada's toxic settler atmospheres.

Written in response to Canada's decision, in 2011, to pull out of the 1997 Kyoto Protocol on climate change, Cariou's "Tarhands: A Messy Manifesto" invokes the tone and structure of F. T. Marinetti's 1909 "Futurist Manifesto," a text that also emphasizes smell but for different ends.² In his own manifesto, Cariou does not endorse Marinetti's "technologized and hyper-individualistic" vision, but rather "map[s] a way toward a different kind of future" (17). Playing with the manifesto form as a polemical genre that is "proudly unreasonable" (Hannah), Cariou offers what he calls a "collage of disjunctive responses" to the Canadian petrostate, one which "embraces irrationality as the last possible mode of engagement with a contemporary public that will no longer listen to reason" (17). Underscoring the limits of listening to reason as a mode of engaging environmental crises, Cariou's manifesto aims "to make visible the physical reality" of the tar sands (17). Evoking vision and the logic of revelation, he writes that this reality "has been occluded by corporate and government disinformation as well as by citizens' unwillingness to face the consequences of their actions and their inaction" (17). Cariou thus "attempts to reveal some of the psychological structures that prevent Canadians from seeing the dirt . . . on their hands" (17).

Given the massive scale of the tar sands and the challenges of representing oil, it is unsurprising that Cariou initially frames his goals in visual and aural terms. As Ghosh argues, the "slipperiness" of oil and the scale of its extraction make it notoriously difficult to represent (433).³ Many writers and scholars have since grappled with this issue; while multi-sensory approaches to oil certainly exist, visualizing and naming oil have become dominant representational and critical methods.⁴ As Imre Szeman and Dominic Boyer put it, creative writers attempt to capture oil's "curious invisibility . . . while also trying to render fuels nameable, readable, and visible," while critics "account for the ways in which fossil fuels have managed to hide in plain sight/site, evading inclusion in our economic calculations as much as in our literary fictions" (6). At the same time, photographers like Edward Burtynsky have popularized aerial photography as a method for representing the tar sands. According to Isabel Lockhart, such images and films, which attempt to capture the horror and scale of resource extraction from a bird's-eye view, are one

of the only ways that the public can view the tar sands and have become “dominant tar sands forms” (153). The impact of these visuals has been debated by scholars, including Cariou.⁵ In his 2015 essay “Wastewest: A State of Mind,” Cariou contends that because Burtynsky’s images lack geographical context and “can be seen as gorgeous abstracts,” they “can be misinterpreted as validations of industrial processes” (26). In his manifesto, Cariou similarly demonstrates ambivalence about what Lockhart calls “the shock-power of revelation” and questions this approach as a method for effecting change (152). As Wenzel puts it, one does not simply “make the previously invisible visible and thus amenable to change”; oil remains “politically unapprehended,” which results in an “impasse between knowledge and action” (Introduction 11).⁶ By pairing the olfacto-centric sections of his manifesto, which I will call vignettes, with his own decontextualized photographs—many of them aerial images reminiscent of Burtynsky’s—Cariou defamiliarizes how dominant tar sands forms rely on particular sensory frameworks bound up in neo-colonial aesthetic and political values, values that inform the public’s resistance to “listen[ing] to reason” or “seeing the dirt on their hands.”

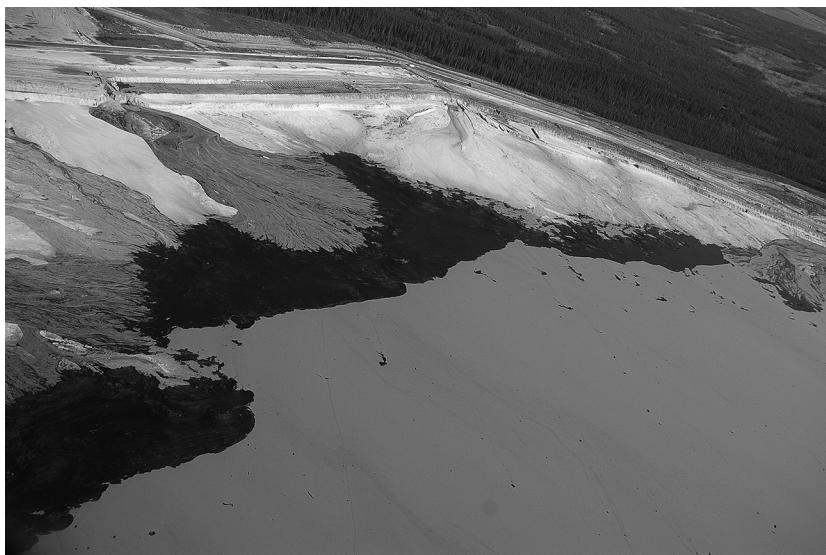


Figure 1. Warren Cariou, from “Tarhands: A Messy Manifesto,” p. 18.
Digital photograph reproduced in greyscale, with permission from Warren Cariou.
(© Warren Cariou 2008)

Tarhands and Energy Intimacy

Scent is notably absent in Cariou's opening vignettes, where he first establishes the representational and critical challenges posed by dominant tar sands forms that privilege vision and audition. The allegorical opening vignette depicts a "hungry" figure, Tarhands, who "[rises] up out of the swamp" evoked by the paired aerial photograph, which shows effluent piping into a large tailings pond in an image reminiscent of an oil spill. Underscoring the nation's complicity in this form of environmental violence, Tarhands is awakened by a personified nation "on his back" whose inhabitants "shovel all kinds of everything at him: trucks, roads, steam, pipes, trains, muskeg, lives, methamphetamines, rivers, *pastahowin*, laws, futures" (18). Yet Tarhands is never satisfied, and in a revision of the King Midas story, he tarnishes everything he touches while "[s]omeone else [gets] all the gold" (18). Tarhands wears "the colourful nation like a cape," but the flag-like presence drags him down, trips him, and at times strangles him (18). In a line that implicates the reader as part of the complacent nation responsible for creating the depicted "swamp," Tarhands concedes, "Guess I'm stuck with you for good," but "[t]he nation [says] nothing, as always" (18). Tarhands is a sympathetic figure who, like Cariou, acknowledges and tries to change the toxic nature of this relationship; however, both are met with silence and inaction. By representing Tarhands as a personification of the monstrous form that bitumen takes within an extractivist framework,⁷ Cariou shifts the discourse of blame away from the tar sands itself, an oft-vilified figure in the national imaginary; instead, he positions the toxic neocolonial relations of capitalism's extractivist logic as the problem, implicating himself and his readers as members of the silent nation in the process.

The nation's abjection of Tarhands recalls Cariou's concept of the *wastewest*, a term for the cultural attitudes and practices that suggest people can separate themselves from their waste. This system not only supports a cultural fantasy—waste, which Cariou describes as "the repressed term of modernity," "always finds its way back"—but also produces divisions in society, creating wealth for some while negatively impacting others by polluting their homes and destroying their communities ("Wastewest" 23-24). Indigenous people are

disproportionately affected by this system, as energy megaprojects like the tar sands displace people from their lands and pose a threat to those who remain (Cariou, "Aboriginal" 17). As Cariou's vignette suggests, the toxic relations of petromodernity reject what he calls "energy intimacy." As Cariou argues in an essay on indigenizing energy practices, the Western corporate logic of extraction removes energy from its context, transforming it into a commodity that gains value in the global economy through its sameness and uniformity; in contrast, in Indigenous cultures "energy is always contextualized, always specific to a particular place with which the energy user must establish an intimately familiar connection" (19). The nation's treatment of Tarhands reflects Cariou's assertion that "[w]hen energy becomes decontextualized and commodified, it no longer seems to be in relationship to us, and therefore we cease to feel responsibilities in regard to it" (19). The fact that the nation thoughtlessly feeds *pastahowin*, a Cree word for "sin against nature," to a monster of its own making suggests that the transgressor—the nation—will be denied further gifts from nature until, as Cariou suggests in his discussion of energy intimacy, they "[r]e-establish an ethical relationship with the natural world" (18-19). Informed by Omushkego Cree Elder Louis Bird's stories about people's ethical obligations to the land and its human and non-human beings, Cariou suggests that "to indigenize energy practices . . . will involve becoming more connected on an intimate bodily level with the sources of our energy—understanding where it comes from and how that source location is affected when the energy is extracted, processed, and delivered to us" (20). By turning to smell—a powerful form of knowledge that emphasizes embodied intimacy with the land and each other—Cariou's manifesto offers different ways of relating to oil.

(Un)common Sense, (Un)common Scents

Cariou's turn to smell grounds his use of irrationality as a method for critiquing Western rationality, the latter inextricably linked to vision and audition. Cariou's second vignette, a brief and informal essay, demonstrates this frustrated turn to irrationality with its opening line: "Okay, I've lost it" (19). Alluding to Martin Luther, the father of the Protestant Reformation, Cariou's speaker claims, "I was going to

nail my 95 theses to the parliament door and all that, stand back and listen to the silence, all reasonable like,” but the nation’s withdrawal from an international climate treaty suggests “nobody listens to reason anymore” (19). The speaker desperately wants “to make things manifest: to open eyes, unclog ears” (19), but he also recognizes that making things manifest involves re-evaluating vision and audition as means of accessing reason, as well as reason itself: “[I]f reason doesn’t work anymore, then I’ll have to try something else. Anything else” (19).

Cariou’s turn to smell—a so-called lower order sense within Western philosophy—in the subsequent vignettes develops an aesthetic strategy that undermines the foundation of post-Enlightenment discourses of reason and rationality, concepts privileged by a Western sensory hierarchy that valorizes vision as the pre-eminent sense of objectivity, classification, and reason, with audition—for its association with the realm of language—not far behind.⁸ As Taylor McHolm argues, Cariou’s strategy of “insensible realism . . . represent[s] material impacts and social structures that are either not immediately sensible, or have become insensible as a result of familiarity and ubiquity”; the manifesto is thus “deliberately insensible or irrational in an effort to break from the dominant logic that has produced the harms these works target” (430). I read Cariou’s turn to smell as a cornerstone of this strategy, as scents operate outside of conventional Western logics. According to Constance Classen and colleagues, the Western tradition has relegated smell to the bottom of the sensory hierarchy “by virtue of its radical interiority [and] its boundary-transgressing propensities,” which threaten abstract, impersonal frameworks that promote surface, distance, and detachment, post-Enlightenment values linked to vision (4-5). Since olfactory phenomena are diffuse, pervasive, and often invisible, their materiality contributes to the perception of odours as polluting threats, as William Ian Miller points out (342). Given olfaction’s deep ties to the subjective realms of memory and emotion, major thinkers from Immanuel Kant to Charles Darwin to Sigmund Freud denigrated smell as a sense associated with the (racialized, gendered, sexually perverse, lower class) body.⁹ While scents may seem visceral and unmediated, Jim Drobnick asserts that olfaction, like other forms of perception, embeds particular cultural values (1-2). Smell’s association with irrationality not only

makes it ripe for aesthetic experimentation, but also underscores its value as a medium for exploring forms of olfactory knowledge and ways of relating that tend to be delegitimated by extractivist logic grounded in neocolonial aesthetics. The late Jon Gordon reads Cariou's call for "an 'irrational response to bitumen extraction,'" or "move to 'uncommon sense,'" as "an attempt to expose the flaws of the 'rational' and 'common sense' logic of capitalism" through which ideology operates (*Unsustainable* 107).¹⁰ Building on Janice Carlisle's suggestion that literary scents convey moral character and reflect ideals of "common sense" (5), I read Cariou's aesthetic strategy as one that mobilizes the link between smell and irrationality to ask: How do uncommon scents become common, and what is the relationship between common scents and common sense in the contemporary petrostate?

To address these questions, Cariou's manifesto explores how smell—particularly the stench of airborne toxins—links porous bodies and environments through shared vulnerability. According to Hsuan L. Hsu, "[s]mell's viscosity and chemical vulnerability make it a powerful tool for communicating about atmospheric toxins" (5). Moreover, scents' ability to facilitate transcorporeal intimacy while extending through space makes olfaction "well adapted to . . . sensing how differentiated atmospheres get into bodies and populations" (21). The West has historically devalued smell for precisely these reasons; indeed, devaluing smell and eradicating certain noxious odours is a central part of the "civilizing process," which "deploy[s] the sensorium in the service of sustaining a *sensus communis*—the shared sensory order that in turn delineates the limits of community" (20). Common scents thus sustain ideologies of common sense, while uncommon scents—like noxious odours—risk disrupting deodorized spaces and pose a threat to the colonial notion of civilization itself. I argue that Cariou embraces what Hsu identifies as the challenges that have led to smell's marginalization in environmental risk assessments—namely, "its resistance to description, recall, isolation, archiving, and objectivity" (22).¹¹ For Hsu, thinking with smell attempts a radical shift in the "distribution of the sensible" by offering a sensory alternative to Western aesthetics, which tend to minimize invisible forms of environmental violence "by framing the atmosphere as an empty space between (ocularcentric) subject and object

rather than apprehending it as a material, biopolitical medium" (20).¹² Cariou recasts the distribution of the sensible by developing "[s]tinking as thinking" as an olfactory aesthetic grounded in the tar sands' odours of extraction ("Tarhands" 21). In doing so, he takes up the challenge that smell purportedly poses for writers: its complex relationship to language. According to Hans Rindisbacher, the West's construction of smell as a "surplus" sense that perceives phenomena unnecessary to encode in socio-semiotic systems contributes to the belief that olfactory perception exceeds linguistic and scientific models of classification in Eurowestern thought (viii, 10).¹³ Yet critics note that writing is paradoxically one of the few ways to record scents (Classen et al. 3), and "experiments in olfactory aesthetics enrich our language for describing and communicating smells while strengthening our capacities of olfactory distinction and recall" (Hsu 18). Cariou's manifesto thus constitutes an important literary archive of the tar sands' seemingly ephemeral byproducts and their significant material impacts.

Fumes Like Hammers: Olfactory Habituation

In a marked turn to stench, it is the smell—not the sight—of the tar sands that overwhelms Cariou's speaker and marks his memory in the third vignette. Foregrounding the interconnectedness of bodies and environments, the speaker describes how the stench overpowers his vision, preventing him from capturing a visual record of the site:

What I remember most about the tar sands is the stink. We stood there with our cameras, trying to capture a record of that obliterated landscape, but I could hardly even see. The fumes were like hammers: sulfur and benzene and diesel and something else—a dead smell, a charnel residue on the back of my tongue. I had a migraine in half a dozen breaths. I breathed into my shirtsleeve, trying not to retch. How could people work in this, day after day? How could the Cree, Métis and Dene people of Fort McKay live in it? (20)¹⁴

With its concrete term, the speaker's hammer simile frames the stench as an assault for readers, many of whom would not live in close proximity to the tar sands. The synesthetic description of "charnel residue" emphasizes how the stench of death registers tangibly on the tongue, refusing the Western sensory hierarchy's separation of the senses. Here is a form of

energy intimacy, albeit one predicated upon toxic relations rather than indigenized energy practices. The unresolved reference to “something else—” gestures toward other deadly chemicals permeating the speaker’s body violently, recalling how companies pollute bodies and environments without consent and underscoring how scents’ resistance to isolation and classification requires creative forms of aesthetic and political engagement that cannot be captured by the West’s discrete terms of molecular classification. Juxtaposing the text with a photograph of a metal fence and signs declaring “No Entry” and “Private Property,” the vignette creates a striking contrast between the fence’s ability to keep extraction sites hidden and its inability to keep noxious odours contained.



Figure 2. Warren Cariou, from “Tarhands: A Messy Manifesto,” p. 20.
Digital photograph reproduced in greyscale, with permission from Warren Cariou.
(© Warren Cariou 2008)

In contrast to the “Futurist Manifesto,” which glorifies industrial odours as visceral traces of the links between technology, war, and petroleum, Cariou mobilizes the language of stench to make manifest the link between petromodernity and what Paiute scholar Kristen Simmons calls “settler atmospherics.” Arguing that air is a site of colonial violence, Simmons defines settler atmospherics as “the

normative and necessary violences found in settlement—accruing, adapting, and constricting indigenous and black life in the U.S. settler state.” Reflecting on atmospheric weapons used by law enforcement against Standing Rock protestors, Simmons contends that these violences enact a “relational severing” that asphyxiates political resistance and enacts “toxic strangulations—social and chemical—” that disproportionately affect Indigenous nations and marginalized communities in ways that “we have been trained not to see.” Drawing on Simmons, Lockhart reads Cariou’s vignette as “warzone reporting from the heart of petromodernity” that underscores how settler colonialism “*is itself total warfare*” (159). By raising the question of how Cree, Métis, and Dene communities live in the stench, the vignette emphasizes the tar sands’ olfactory assault as part of this ongoing war. As Hsu argues, “[a]cross a vast range of Indigenous societies, the perception and manipulation of smells provides embodied modes of environmental knowledge and relationality” (154).¹⁵ Since olfactory perception is deeply tied to memory and sense of place, settler colonialism’s transformation of Indigenous smellscapes contributes to the ongoing displacement of people and decimation of species, and has thus “profoundly affected Indigenous experiences of place, environment, spirituality, and identity” (156). By providing no response to the question of how nearby Indigenous communities bear the tar sands’ odours, Cariou frames their suffering as one of the “accepted consequences of growth” associated with resource development in northern Alberta (Gordon, “Displacing Oil” 11).¹⁶ Like Simmons, who suggests that attending to breath’s “porous relationality” opens people up to new ways of relating by attuning them to the material conditions in which others can or cannot breathe, Cariou’s turn toward smell’s porous relationality emphasizes its potential as a mode of relating that attunes perception to the uneven dynamics of settler atmospherics.

A security guard’s engagement with the speaker in this vignette reflects how settler atmospherics also condition industry workers’ olfactory senses.¹⁷ In addition to creating atmospheric disparities, settler colonialism has historically deployed colonial education to invalidate smell as a way of knowing and relating (Hsu 153–54). The vignette shows how the colonial education of the senses operates in the tar

sands' toxic atmosphere. Conditioned to habituate to the scents—and common sense—in which they are immersed, the guard dismisses the stench as a sign of risk in a response that contrasts sharply with the speaker's: "Oh I used to smell it, too' one security guard laughed, after warning us to stay off Company property. 'But after a week or two you don't notice a thing'" (20). The guard's response reflects what Douglas J. Porteous calls the "habituation effect," a term that describes how an odour's perceived intensity declines the longer one is exposed to it (90). It is unclear whether the guard has actually habituated to the smell or simply denies its impact; the worker could be toeing the rhetorical line of the Company and guarding its common-sense ideology. Yet it is important to note, as Melanie Dennis Unrau does, that oil and gas workers "are not hypocrites, dupes, or too implicated in the system to understand it" (35). The vignette frames habituation as a physiological and psychological process that, while potentially deadly in the long term, is necessary to work in the tar sands. While the speaker's headache may impair his cognitive faculties, the guard's ability to function in the stench underscores how settler atmospherics condition workers' bodies and minds to habituate to resource extraction's sickening effects. Petromodernity is not only predicated on a fantasy of separating the self from its waste; it also requires that workers habituate to odours that betray the tar sands' toxicity. These odours expose how the petrostate's waste cannot be completely contained or eradicated.

According to Hsu, to decolonize smell, writers must "transform our modes of sensing and relating to the atmosphere, and ultimately transform the atmosphere itself" (161).¹⁸ While he contends that Cariou's manifesto documents atmospheric violence rather than transforming it (161), I read this vignette, and the manifesto as a whole, as doing essential work that contributes to the material transformation of settler atmospherics. If, as Hsu argues, "olfactory aesthetics matters not just because it represents how we smell but also because it modulates—and, in many cases, sharpens—our (deodorized) sensitivity to odors and their intoxicating chemical intimacies" (18), then Cariou's development of a distinct olfactory aesthetic may be read as an essential step toward materially transforming the habituation effects of settler atmospherics. By offering a much-needed language for olfactory ways of knowing and relating, which have long

been invalidated by colonial systems of sensory education bound up in common-sense ideologies and resource logics—a process that has involved the marginalization of scent in the English language itself—Cariou's manifesto begins the crucial work of retraining readers' olfactory senses.

The Tarhands Institute: Making a Stink

Cariou's next vignette uses olfactory language to breathe life into oil rhetoric, a realm rife with dead metaphors tied to Enlightenment discourses of discovery.¹⁹ In propaganda for a fictional "Tarhands Institute," the speaker combines the language of smell with parody, irony, allusion, and other playful strategies to defamiliarize the wastewest attitudes and practices that contribute to settler atmospherics. Beneath a photo of a highway full of cars and buses, likely carrying transient workers as they leave a bitumen processing plant, the text describes a "stink-tank" in Waterways, Alberta (21). Located on the Clearwater River south of its confluence with the Athabasca River, Waterways is now part of Fort McMurray but was once a major shipping hub located at the northernmost point of the Northern Alberta Railway. Parodying the enthusiastic tone of oil propaganda, Cariou's speaker celebrates the institute's "chapters, sties and tarpits across this great nation" (21). The tone used to describe the Tarhands Institute, whose website "resides . . . just next door to the national unconscious," is also vaguely threatening: "some day soon we'll move in next to you" (21). Challenging the out of sight, out of mind wastewest mentality, Cariou's stink-tank propaganda plays on smell's emphasis on interconnectedness to assert that northern Alberta's extraction projects are connected to the rest of Canada and the world through transportation networks upon which global capitalism relies.

By developing an ironic language of smell, this vignette not only manifests the gap between corporate and government rhetoric about the tar sands and its environmental impacts; it also trains readers in the art of noticing smell and valuing olfactory knowledge. In a call to action, the speaker evokes common olfactory metaphors and idioms: "What do we do? We make a stink. We disturb the proverbial shit. Because something is already rotten in the petrostate, and NOBODY SEEMS TO NOTICE" (21). Echoing the ominous *Hamlet* line "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark," the speaker raises

questions about the health of the Canadian petrostate and the moral legitimacy of its leaders, comparing them to the corrupt Claudius who manipulates others through his skilful use of language. In Shakespeare’s play, the ghost of Hamlet’s father is a visible manifestation of Claudius’ crime of poisoning the late king for the Danish throne. On a metaphorical level, the speaker invokes the idiom of making a stink, or creating a fuss (“Stink”), to expose the petrostate’s rotten core, a rottenness that manifests not supernaturally, but materially in the noxious odours of the previous vignette.



Figure 3. Warren Cariou, from “Tarhands: A Messy Manifesto,” p. 21.
Digital photograph reproduced in greyscale, with permission from Warren Cariou.
(© Warren Cariou 2008)

How to convey a stench to Cariou’s imagined readers who are privileged enough to live away from the petrostate’s toxic waste, waste to which even workers can become habituated? The speaker addresses this question by playing with figurative language: “How do you point out that the air smells, when everyone’s already used to it? By making more stink” (21). Here Cariou outlines the “credo” of the institute, which might also be said to be the credo of his manifesto: “Mess as manifest. Stinking as thinking” (21). Given the links between vision,

aurality, reason, and rationality, what might stinking as thinking actually entail? In short, punchy sentences reminiscent of the “Futurist Manifesto,” Cariou’s speaker calls upon readers to join the seemingly irrational work of making more stink, making more mess. His framing of the vignette as a “membership drive” suggests that the stink-tank, like the manifesto itself, manifests stinking as thinking through its use of olfactory language (21). Attempting the “nearly unthinkable shift” toward recasting the distribution of the sensible, Cariou’s Tarhands Institute represents the need to not only remake cultural institutions so they focus on materially transforming settler atmospherics through collective action, but also recast dominant ways of knowing and relating embedded in the Western sensory hierarchy.

Olfactory Philosophy: Stinking as Thinking

Many of the vignettes that follow foreground sight and sound rather than stench; however, the strategically irrational olfacto-centric passages that precede them defamiliarize these sensory frameworks, troubling them as modes of knowledge production and ways of relating. Returning to the language of stench in the final vignettes, Cariou further develops his olfactory aesthetic by investigating stinking as thinking as a philosophy with material implications. Beneath a photograph of a lush landscape, divided by dirt roads, with a tailings pond juxtaposed with a large body of water and smaller lakes above, the eleventh vignette takes up Martin Heidegger, the German philosopher famous for his work on phenomenology, hermeneutics, and existentialism in the early twentieth century. Suggesting that Heidegger’s phrase “*Denken ist Danken* . . . thinking is thanking” was “misquoted” (28), the speaker writes: “What I believe he really said was *Denken ist Stinken*” (28). The speaker attempts to make stinking as thinking manifest in this playful vignette, offering interpretations based on what the speaker believes rather than on evidence. This irrational approach underscores how supposedly rational tar sands rhetoric is often based on “corporate and governmental disinformation,” as Cariou suggests in the manifesto’s introduction (17). It also challenges ways of knowing valued by European continental philosophy, a tradition that emerged out of German idealism and a defence of reason inaugurated by philosophers like Kant. Cariou’s

olfactory philosophy attempts to recast the distribution of the sensible embedded in this tradition.

Linking the aesthetic, the philosophical, and the political, the speaker further develops a language of smell to attune readers to the ways in which extractivist logic bridges the metaphorical and the material. Posing a rhetorical question, the speaker questions whether anyone can deny that "some forms of thought create a noxious atmosphere" (28). The stench arises from "people we disagree with" and "ideologies we hate," but "maybe it's even true that most thinking creates a kind of exhaust, a residue that lingers in our air" (28). While these claims may seem irrational, the pun on *exhaust*—a term that alludes to both the noxious outcome of burning of fossil fuels and a feeling of exhaustion or loss of physical energy—invites readers to consider the exhausting material impacts of the ways of thinking Cariou critiques. This residue, he suggests, is tangible and material, recalling the earlier description of the tar sands' "charnel residue." In turn, noxious odours bear the traces of particular ways of thinking, as society's hydrocarbon pollution and industrial waste "can be seen as a kind of thinking" (28). For the speaker, these "[t]hought bubbles" constitute an "[o]lfactory philosophy" that, like smell, is fundamentally irrational and therefore "appropriate to the modern human condition" (28). The vignette plays on smell's metaphorical capaciousness to emphasize the material link between particular ways of thinking and modes of sensory perception. Noxious thinking corresponds with toxic ways of relating which, as other vignettes suggest, have devastating material impacts. Cariou's stinking as thinking constitutes what Brent Bellamy and colleagues describe as a *resource aesthetic* in that it considers "the material requirements of aesthetic production, while at the same time insisting on the aesthetics of resource extraction and the recognition of infrastructure as form." The speaker makes his aesthetic and political goal of recasting the distribution of the sensible explicit in this vignette: "I believe we need to learn a new kind of stinking. We need to think outside the nox. It will be like inventing a new language, a new medium of being" (28). Cariou's experimental language attempts to capture this new medium of being. "Let's go," the speaker writes, evoking Marinetti's same invitational refrain: "follow your nose to somewhere, someone you've never been" (28). The vignette evokes Froot Loops cereal mascot Toucan Sam, whose tagline "follow

your nose” suggests going where one pleases based on instinct rather than a preconceived plan (“Nose”). Ending on an existentialist note that plays on the homophonous link between *nose* and *knows*, Cariou calls for a move beyond the “loopy”—as in cyclical, irrational—system of consumer capitalism in a petrostate that undermines the health of the body politic.

Paradise Lost: Cariou’s Petropoetics

Cariou’s experimentation with olfactory aesthetics extends to his petropoetics. As I have argued elsewhere, poetry is an ideal site for investigating the often unconscious act of breathing in the context of the petrostate’s noxious atmospheres; as an oral form, poetry pays close attention to breath, relying on form to pattern breathing in particular ways (Oliver). The next vignette, entitled “Satan Rouses His Legions on the Shores of the Syncrude Tailings Pond #4,” is a poem reminiscent of Satan’s rousing speech in Book One of *Paradise Lost*. Paired with a landscape photograph of what appears to be a tailings pond in the foreground and a treeline with electrical towers in the background, the lyric poem is written in Satan’s voice, recalling Satan’s speech and the hellish material conditions of Pandemonium in *Paradise Lost*. While John Milton’s anti-hero speaks prior to Earth’s creation, Cariou’s speaker, in an ironic reversal, depicts the apocalyptic hellscape as a product of the petrostate’s noxious olfactory philosophy and its afterlives.²⁰ The three-line stanzas, written in free verse, exceed the tight structure of Milton’s heroic verse and iambic pentameter. To adapt McHolm, the poem’s formal spillage mimics the tar sand’s stench: words spill from line to line, stanza to stanza, without a rigid rhythm or rhyme scheme to contain them. Mixing enjambed and end-stopped lines and sporadic, syntactic caesuras, the poem departs from Milton’s stanzaic form, deploying punctuation and three-line stanzas in a way that encourages deep breathing when stench is evoked. The speaker begins by directly addressing readers: “Inhale, my friends: breathe deep / the bitumen air” (29). The poem then describes a multi-sensory hellscape of oil lakes and billowing smokestacks:

the slick earth itself
turned out, spilled like troubled guts
into the pipeline of need.
The stink that lingers on the back

of your tongues

is the scent of our conjuration. (29)

Recalling the first vignette's image of the nation-laden Tarhands, the poem blends smell, touch, taste, sound, and sight to represent a "sensorial bonanza," to use Kent Jones' phrase (qtd. in LeMenager 98). Yet this cataclysmic scene does not neatly align with the aesthetic properties associated with the gusher, a spectacle that, according to Stephanie LeMenager, symbolizes the "unregulated play" and aliveness of oil as an "excessively embodied figure" in early twentieth-century oil accident reports and literary representations of oil discovery (93). Evoking "oil's primal associations with earth's body" (92), Cariou's simile instead personifies Earth in a painful image of disembowelment. The poem develops a multi-sensory image of the violence that unfolds in the aftermath of oil strikes, whose violence affects land, water, and atmosphere.

As in earlier vignettes, the synaesthetic poem alludes to a toxic stench that registers on the back of the tongue, but with a difference: the use of the second person immerses—and thereby implicates—readers in the description of bitumen air. The break after "tongues" leads readers to linger on this olfactory description. The stench has the power to conjure spirits, just as the sounds of heavy haulers and sump pits summon hordes in visual and aural imagery reminiscent of the "Futurist Manifesto." In an appeal that recalls the Tarhands Institute's propaganda, the speaker asks, "Which among the hordes will follow?" as he "plant[s] his ensign" in the land, recalling the silent nation on Tarhands' back. Evoking the Futurist obsession with speed, the speaker compels readers to hurry and join the legion: "the ground is laid for us / wide open. Sniff and you know: / all of it was made to burn" (29). Echoing the opening stanza's directive to inhale bitumen air, the final stanza captures the petrostate's olfactory philosophy, suggesting that the tar sands' toxic odours carry valuable olfactory knowledge that not only communicates risk, but also indexes the harmful neo-colonial capitalist logic that transforms bitumen into a resource to be extracted. The poem aligns Satan with the manifesto's other speakers, many of whom sound like versions of Cariou in that they echo the frustrations that he voices in the introduction and often use collective pronouns to implicate readers

in their own struggles with complicity. Read within the context of the manifesto as a whole, the foreboding poem suggests that acknowledging one's relationship with the tar sands is a crucial collective process that requires rousing a different legion: one that notices the odours of extraction, perceives these scents as important forms of knowledge that communicate environmental risk, and approaches smell as a relationship with the Earth's human and non-human beings.

Ultimately, Cariou's manifesto moves toward a different future than that of the grim, extractive teleology that Satan and the futurists might celebrate. In the next vignette, the speaker considers the possibility of "a different futurist movement" that "actually cares" about Earth's future generations of human and non-human beings: "The future as life, as what will live on after we're all gone, back to muck and tar, to the mess we were made from" (30). By framing mess as an ancestor, Cariou imagines a future based on a more ethical form of energy intimacy. As Lockhart argues, "Cariou's proximate, grounded aesthetic carries an alternate politics of action that refocuses from representation *of* bitumen to relationships *with* bitumen" (155). Cariou's manifesto suggests that smell, with its emphasis on transcorporeality and radical intimacy, will play a crucial role in creating a different energy future.

Yet the next vignette imagines an apocalyptic future that recalls Satan's earlier poem, suggesting that any number of futures are possible depending on the actions society takes. In "Letter for a time capsule to be opened in 2112," a vignette that rewrites William Carlos Williams' 1934 poem "This Is Just to Say," Cariou's speaker adopts a cavalier attitude that echoes Satan's:

This is just to say
we've burned up all the oil
and poisoned the air
you were probably hoping to breathe. (31)

The "charnel residue" described in the third vignette dominates this world and threatens future life. With a collective *we* that implicates readers, the speaker's opening line minimizes the hellscape that future generations will have to deal with as a result of fossil fuel consumption today. Despite understanding that these actions will negatively impact the future generations to whom the poem is addressed, the speaker

does not care, unabashedly describing the burning as delicious (31). As Wenzel argues in her reading of this “non-apology apology,” “the consummation of intense sensuous pleasure is cited as an implicit justification for expropriation, yet the record of such pleasure would presumably only make the addressee’s loss of anticipated future enjoyment harder to bear” (“Afterword”). Forgiveness is not requested, but rather demanded when it is too late. Through visions of apocalyptic futures that are all too familiar, Cariou’s deadly, poetic smellscapes map the toxic relations of settler atmospherics, offering readers a framework for making sense of the existing smellscapes Cariou seeks to transform.

Conclusion: Join Us

Recalling the Tarhands Institute propaganda, the penultimate vignette combines the visual, the aural, and the olfactory to advocate for an alternative future. Cariou’s speaker writes: “Join us. Together we can make visions that shudder a billion eyes, make a stink to awaken the nostrils of the world!” (32). In this call to collective action, he asserts that numbers, creativity, and community are urgently needed to build a different future (32). Though it may seem like an irrational step to turn toward smell, Cariou suggests that recasting the distribution of the sensible by literally and figuratively “making a stink” is one of the only ways forward. Returning to the pre-eminent sense of vision in a brief final vignette, Cariou invites readers to reflect further on their own relationships to bitumen. Unlike the manifesto’s other photographs, the final image shows the back of a photographer—potentially Cariou—and a tripod-mounted camera near a fence similar to the one depicted in the third vignette. In this image, taken at ground level, the fence seems to disappear into the background of the photo, making the industrial site in the distance—with billowing smokestacks reminiscent of earlier poems—appear to be accessible by foot. Of course, the site would not be accessible to the public, here represented by the photographer. By clearly positioning the photographer in relation to the site, the image evokes the concept of complicity, providing a visual reference point and sense of scale that is difficult to discern from the other aerial photographs. Also suggesting the possibility of trespassing, the photo and final vignette remind readers that dominant tar sands forms engage in a broader

cultural system of sensory perception that embeds particular values and is open to contestation. Evoking the recurring motif of dirty hands, the final lines read: “Tarhands.TM How clean are yours?” (33). The use of the trademark—a form of protection under capitalism that serves to identify the commercial source of products or services—reminds readers that moves toward acknowledging complicity still risk co-optation. As Cariou suggests throughout his manifesto, purity is a fantasy perpetuated by wastewest attitudes and practices; it may not be possible to emerge from this mess with clean hands. This dirt may remain largely hidden and silenced, but new possibilities for detecting and engaging with these messy relationships may arise if we follow our noses.



Figure 4. Warren Cariou, from “Tarhands: A Messy Manifesto,” p. 33.
Digital photograph reproduced in greyscale, with permission from Warren Cariou.
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Notes

1. Thank you to the two anonymous peer reviewers, the editors, and the *Canadian Literature* editorial team for their valuable feedback on this essay.
2. See Caro Verbeek for a discussion of the futurists’ interest in smell.
3. Notably, Cariou published his manifesto in a special issue of an image studies journal devoted to *Sighting Oil*. As Merle Patchett and Andriko Lozowy argue in the same issue, the Athabasca tar sands represent the world’s largest capital oil

project (142). As the world’s largest surface-mined reservoir of crude bitumen, it is also one of the world’s most environmentally destructive projects (142).

4. In addition to Ghosh, scholars like Stephanie LeMenager discuss the multi-sensory dimensions of petroleum aesthetics.
5. For example, some scholars in the *Imaginations* special issue contend that aerial images flatten the landscape and disorient viewers due to the lack of a sense of measurable scale; as a result, these images risk reinscribing a scalar aesthetic that produces “a sense of bewilderment and inertia at the thought of rectifying a problem that exceeds our comprehension,” putting the viewer in a privileged position of “floating free” from the devastation (Patchett and Lozowy 146). Other critics like Imre Szeman and Maria Whiteman critique aerial images for failing to capture the experience of people living and working in close proximity to the tar sands (55-56).
6. For a recent discussion of visibility and resource extraction, see the 2021 special issue of *Textual Practice* on *Writing Extractivism*, especially Justin Parks’ introduction, “The Poetics of Extractivism and the Politics of Visibility.”
7. Cariou expands on this idea in an essay with Jon Gordon on *petrography*, Cariou’s term for images created with bitumen. He approaches the naturally occurring substance “as a kind of medicine” that “requires particular knowledge to use it properly,” and suggests that bitumen becomes harmful “when transformed in the machinery of capitalist modernity” (Cariou and Gordon, “Petrography” 13).
8. See Alain Corbin’s discussion of the perceptual revolution in *The Foul and the Fragrant* (11-135).
9. See, for example, Classen et al., Miller, and Drobnick. Olfaction is physiologically linked to the limbic system, the neurological seat of memory and emotion; as Hsuan L. Hsu argues, “descriptions of unwelcome smells exert immense rhetorical force” (5). I discuss this idea in more detail below.
10. Gordon offers this argument in his analysis of Cariou’s “An Athabasca Story” (2012), a multi-sensory tale that draws on Cree and Métis storytelling to explore similar themes.
11. While Hsu mentions Cariou’s manifesto in his chapter on decolonizing smell, he does not provide a sustained analysis of Cariou’s olfactory aesthetic.
12. Jacques Rancière uses “the distribution of the sensible” to describe “the system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it” (12).
13. While smell adjectives exist (*musty, ripe*), descriptions often rely on figurative language (*it smells like*), attribute scents to sources (*the smell of*), apply subjective labels (*good, bad*), or draw on other senses (*sweet, bright*).
14. My analysis builds on other critics who use this passage to illustrate the multi-sensory dimensions of Cariou’s manifesto. Hsu quotes this paragraph in his brief discussion of the manifesto, while Lousley uses it to suggest that Cariou disrupts the “ecological illusion” of the hermetically sealed body, a fantasy that is “impossible to practice” due to the “seeping, leaking, degrading, expelled elements that become all-too-apparent to our senses” (“Into the Muck”). Lockhart also analyzes this passage, though she does not discuss smell at length.
15. For example, Cariou explores the significance of the smell of sweetgrass and Indigenous ways of knowing in “Sweetgrass Stories: Listening for Animate Land” (2018).
16. Nearby Indigenous communities such as the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation and the Mikisew Cree First Nation continue to deal with the destruction of

- ancestral lands and hunting grounds, high levels of heavy metals in wild game, and high rates of rare cancers and other diseases ("Fort Chipewyan").
17. My use of the word *conditioning* here echoes Hsu's notion of *air conditioning*, which he uses to describe "techniques of atmospheric manipulation across multiple scales (e.g., filter masks, air-conditioned buildings, gas warfare, the offshoring of toxic industries), as well as the profound and little-understood ways in which these manipulated atmospheres condition human being" (7).
 18. Hsu continues, "To decolonize smell is not to position decolonization as a mere metaphor for transforming consciousness, foregoing decolonial activists' emphasis on land, bread, and water in favor of 'decolonizing the mind'; rather, I would suggest adding the increasingly stratified atmosphere to the material stakes of decolonization: land, bread, water, and air" (161).
 19. The term *Enlightenment* itself emphasizes visual illumination. For other examples of dead visual metaphors, see Martin Jay's opening paragraph of *Downcast Eyes*.
 20. I would like to thank Sarah-Nelle Jackson for their insight about the irony of this passage.

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Low Class Oil Trash and the Politico-Aesthetics of the Fossilized Proletariat

Low Class Oil Trash (LCOT) was an Alberta-based clothing and lifestyle company from 2017 to 2020, owned and operated by Caitlin Lindsay, the wife of an oilfield worker. The website is now barren, and prospective customers can no longer purchase T-shirts that say “Wine ‘Em, Dine ‘Em, Pipeline ‘Em” or hoodies that say “Come West Trudeau” and depict a noose hanging from a tree, but the website’s homepage is still up. On it, the words *Take Pride* are superimposed over a picture of a heavily tattooed woman with her back turned to the camera as she looks out at a row of pumpjacks spreading into the horizon. She wears a black tank top and black booty shorts with the company name on them, and she holds a dirty white hard hat in her left hand, with a Trump/Pence sticker prominently placed on its front. Scrolling down, the brand’s mission statement appears:

We believe in the power of oil.

We believe in the oilfield; the adventure, the thrill, the sacrifice and reward.

We believe in the guys busting their asses in one of the most rugged industries still alive.

We believe in supporting local Albertan suppliers.

We believe in the oil trash lifestyle. Big money, big trucks, big dreams.

Most of all, we believe this: fuck the liberals and keep makin’ hole. (*Low Class Oil Trash*)

Introduction

Low Class Oil Trash is best understood as one of many pro-oil and gas groups that have emerged in Canada since 2010 as a reactionary response to Indigenous and environmentalist opposition to fossil capitalism, of which the Alberta tar sands have been a focal point (Kinder 3, 95). In “Our Oil’: Extractive Populism in Canadian Social Media,” Shane Gunster,

Robert Neubauer, John Bermingham, and Alicia Massie use the term *extractive populism* to describe these groups, which frame themselves as “grassroots” despite often being funded directly by oil and gas companies, and which seek to discursively position the oil and gas industry as “under attack from elites” and in need of “popular mobilization to defend” (Gunster et al. 198). While the oil and gas industry has long employed public relations techniques to secure popular consent, or “social licence,” for its activities, extractive populism describes a new phase of stakeholder mobilization in which industry encourages supporters to move from passive to active support by employing social movement protest tactics (Ian Thompson and Robert G. Boutilier qtd. in Carroll, Introduction 20; Gunster et al. 200-03). Scholars have understood the extractive populist groups, therefore, as attempting to manufacture a “subsidized public” by using industry resources to lower the barriers to entry of political advocacy (Wood 76-78).¹ Such scholars prefer the term *subsidized public* over terms like *front group* or *astroturf* because, whereas the latter terms tend to frame the participants in such groups as “shams, dupes, or hired guns,” or even as puppets controlled by “corporate ventriloquism” (Wood 78),² the concept of a subsidized public creates analytical room for exploring the political agency not just of the companies who finance these activities, but also of the citizens who take up the companies’ calls to action (Gunster et al. 199). Using the term *subsidized public* thus prompts scholars to adopt a two-way model of agency, attending to both the top-down and bottom-up facets of the extractive populist movement.

Although it is a relatively marginal group when compared with those studied by other scholars of extractive populism, Low Class Oil Trash is nonetheless an important case study for both quantitative and qualitative reasons. Despite having a small following compared to other extractive populist groups, at its height Low Class Oil Trash nonetheless had a disproportionately large social media reach, rivalling and even surpassing some of the more well-resourced groups.³ Low Class Oil Trash also advances our understanding of the bottom-up or “public” side of extractive populism’s subsidized public. While most of the literature on extractive populism has tended to focus on the top-down side—that is, the discourse of industry-funded social media groups (see, for example, Gunster et al; Neubauer and Graham; Massie

and Jackson)—a case study of Low Class Oil Trash draws our attention to how the extractive populist discourse is interpellated and adapted by “the public.” More plainly put, unlike most other groups studied in the literature, Low Class Oil Trash is not directly funded by industry, and therefore raises novel research questions. For example, are there differences between the discourse of official, top-down extractive populist groups, and unofficial, bottom-up ones like LCOT? Why would segments of the “fossilized proletariat”—a term I adapt from Andreas Malm and the Zetkin Collective and use here to refer to blue-collar workers directly involved in the extraction of fossil fuels—take up the reactionary politics of extractive populism (450-59)? Should the term *subsidized public* apply to groups who do not receive direct financial subsidization? This study seeks to answer these questions through an analysis of Low Class Oil Trash’s social media output.

I utilize *CrowdTangle* data and discourse analysis to employ a quantitative cultural studies method. In the three years that Low Class Oil Trash was active on *Facebook*, they posted a total of 486 times. For this study, all 486 posts were screenshot and then coded in *NVivo* into four types: advertisements, oilfield, memes, and street politics. Advertisements of LCOT products accounted for 33 posts, oilfield photos and videos accounted for 329 posts, original memes—that is, pre-existing memes to which LCOT added an original caption—accounted for 113 posts, and street politics accounted for 11 posts. After this initial round of coding based on type, the next pass of the data involved identifying patterns within each post type. At this stage, I discovered that, while oilfield photos and videos were by far the most common post type, they often had relatively few interactions. Thus, while this post type appeared to be the most analytically important based on recurrence, I determined that, instead of a third and final pass of the entire data set, a closer look at the most popular posts was needed. More specifically, I determined that the focus of the analysis should be on LCOT posts that did particularly well relative to the rest of the extractive populist sample.⁴

To that end, this study narrows its scope to examine what I call LCOT’s *breakthrough posts*—that is, any posts that performed better than the average extractive populist post within the sample time period (see note 3).

A post was considered a breakthrough if one or both of the following conditions were met: if it exceeded 1100 interactions, the average number of interactions per post across the entire sample; or, in the case of videos, if it exceeded 33,400 views, the average views per video across the entire sample. After accounting for duplicates, this method found that LCOT produced a total of 13 breakthrough posts: 8 images and 5 videos. These posts anchor the following analysis. I begin with a treatment of “Gassed Up,” arguably LCOT’s most popular post, and certainly its most creatively ambitious. The remainder of the analysis is divided into sections based on post type, in which a focus on breakthrough posts is supplemented by a broad-strokes summary of patterns found within each type.

Throughout the analysis, I reveal that Low Class Oil Trash’s posts are more consistently extreme than those of other extractive populist groups—more consistently vulgar, racist, misogynistic, and violent—which I attribute to the discursive affordances associated with having autonomy from institutional actors, unlike the other extractive populist groups. Given that I read LCOT posts as authentic working-class cultural production, I search for evidence of “hegemonic community economic identity,” a type of “psychological identification” with industry in which the interests of the community and the oil and gas industry are seen as “indistinguishable” (Eaton and Enoch 311-15). While I find some evidence of resistance to hegemonic identification, I ultimately uncover a stronger pattern of what I call *reactionary hyper-identification* with hegemonic community identity rooted in a willingness to resort to extreme rhetoric to defend fossil capitalism from its perceived enemies. While I argue that LCOT’s content is more extreme than that of the mainstream extractive populist groups, the analysis also reveals several commonalities between them, which leads me to the conclusion that, despite not receiving direct financial support from industry or other elite institutions, LCOT’s extreme, reactionary politico-aesthetics should be understood as having received “permission” from extractive populism’s subsidized public strategy (Perry and Scrivens 11-14).⁵ Thus, the analysis strikes a balance between top-down and bottom-up explanations, positing that Low Class Oil Trash is *both* a subsidized public *and* an authentic expression of the fossilized proletariat’s reactionary hyper-identification with fossil capitalist hegemony and its

hierarchical gender, race, and class relations, which together constitute this class fraction's structural rationale for participating in the politics of extractive populism.

Although I read LCOT as providing a window into the politico-aesthetics of the fossilized proletariat, I should add the caveat that this class fraction is not homogenous, and certainly not entirely represented by either the demographics—white and male—or the reactionary politico-aesthetics foregrounded in LCOT's posts. While there are both Indigenous and other racialized people and women in the industry, however, the sociology of the sector finds that the vast majority of workers are, indeed, white men, and that women and racialized people often face systemic barriers to employment and/or discrimination and harassment on the job (Alook et al. 339-42; O'Shaughnessy and Doğu 287-89).⁶ Furthermore, many racialized people and women tend to be kept out of the high-paying production jobs, and often take up paid and unpaid social *reproduction* instead (O'Shaughnessy and Doğu 264; Dorow and Mandizadza 1242). Thus, the highly paid workers directly involved in fossil fuel extraction tend to be, though are not exclusively, skilled white men—precisely the demographic that Low Class Oil Trash existed to venerate.

It is hardly unusual that LCOT was founded and operated by a working-class woman who, as such, would theoretically stand to benefit from the disruption of hegemonic gender and class relations. Cara Daggett, recalling that a majority of white American women voted for blatant misogynist Donald Trump in 2016, observes that “some [women] may also find security in the *status quo*, and therefore resent threats to fossil fuel systems and/or hegemonic white masculinities” (33). Low Class Oil Trash, then, reveals how some working-class white women “at the ‘coalface’ of extractive practices” actively promote “breadwinner masculinities” and form an important component of extractive populism's subsidized public (Pulé and Hultman 91); after all, they are as dependent on their husbands as their husbands are on resource extraction. Rather than challenge such dependencies, though, LCOT is premised on a reactionary defence of the political and economic structures that reproduce them. Thus, rather than view LCOT primarily as a woman-owned business, which

might imply a liberal feminism that venerates the female entrepreneur, we should instead understand LCOT primarily as a form of social reproduction undertaken in support of the male breadwinner, the white male fossilized proletariat in general, and, indeed, the hierarchical race, gender, and class relations inherent within fossil capitalism as a whole.

“Gassed Up” for Petro-Masculinity

“Gassed Up” was LCOT’s most-viewed video and tenth most interacted-with post, making it one of LCOT’s single biggest breakthroughs. Because of this, and because it was also difficult to decide which post type it belonged to, I treat “Gassed Up” in a separate section. The post also deserves special attention because it is seemingly the only original song and music video to come out of the extractive populist movement, a foray into creative cultural production ripe for petrocultural analysis. Indeed, the form itself advances my argument about the discursive affordances that come with autonomy from the upper echelons of fossil capital; simply put, it is difficult to imagine Canada’s Energy Citizens or Canada Action, two of the largest extractive populist groups, producing a video like this. The video was first posted on December 2, 2017, but it didn’t gain traction until it was reposted on July 13, 2018, with the caption, “It’s the summer re-release of Gassed Up, the song that got the snowflakes in BC real upset. Keep it trashy and enjoy what a senior editor for Vice Canada called ‘the horniest pipeline propaganda on earth’” (Low Class Oil Trash).

It opens with scantily clad women dancing in black LCOT tank tops, cowboy boots, and jean short shorts that say *Low Class Oil Trash* across the buttocks. A white man in an LCOT tank top pulls up in a large blue pickup truck, gets out, and walks past the women, who all turn their heads to watch. The most common shot throughout the video features the man front and centre rapping, while in the background the women dance in front of a pumpjack (see Figure 1). Throughout the video, the women touch each other’s breasts and make sultry faces at the camera, intermittently dancing with the star, who at one point opens a can of beer and sprays it on them. Every shot includes either a pumpjack, a pickup truck, a barrel of oil with the LCOT logo on it, or some combination thereof. In a couple of shots, we see a welder working, with sparks flying.



Figure 1. Still from Low Class Oil Trash, “Gassed Up” (0:27).

The visuals of “Gassed Up” can be situated within the recent history of what Sean Parson and Emily Ray call “sexualizing women to sell oil” (260). As an example of this practice, they analyze the infamous “hot lesbians” post from Canadian Oil Sands Community, the precursor to Oil Sands Action, and argue that, far from being queer-friendly, the post “eroticizes and produces [the women’s] relationship for male consumption” (261). Unlike the Canadian Oil Sands Community, though, Low Class Oil Trash was never forced to apologize for “Gassed Up”; without the institutional connections to fossil capital, LCOT was also without the disciplinary mechanisms associated with fossil capital’s public relations priorities, thus enabling them to take the practice of sexualizing women to sell oil to new heights. As in many rap and other music videos, it seems fairly obvious that the presence of scantily clad women in “Gassed Up” is, following Parson and Ray, “for [heterosexual] male consumption.” The rapper, visually coded as an oil worker by his blue work coveralls, stands in for and creates a symbolic connection with the video’s target audience: blue-collar, heterosexual, male oil and gas workers.

The visual dynamics of the video thus embody what Daggett terms *petro-masculinity*, referring to the ways in which a misogynist, exaggerated masculinity goes hand-in-hand with a climate-denialist, exaggerated love of fossil fuels within contemporary right-wing populist

politics (28). “Gassed Up” visually reproduces petro-masculinity by combining a celebration of oil with a misogynist view of women as merely present for the veneration and sexual pleasure of the fossilized proletariat’s men, thereby echoing one of the pillars of LCOT’s philosophy: “We believe in the *guys* busting their asses in one of the most rugged industries still alive” (my emphasis). In this way, the dancing women of “Gassed Up” combine the two archetypal representations of frontier women: the *helpmates*, defined by “their ability to fulfill their duties which enable their men to succeed” (Stoeltje 32),⁷ and the *bad women*, who are “portrayed as whores or racialized ‘others’ who fulfilled the exotic sexual fantasies of frontier men” (O’Shaughnessy and Doğu 270). While subversive insofar as these two roles are usually considered antitheses (O’Shaughnessy and Doğu 270), “Gassed Up” nevertheless reduces the dancing women to being no more than hyper-sexualized cheerleaders for roughnecks, rooting for their “rugged” oil men to prevail against their enemies.

Before describing these “enemies,” though, the lyrics of the song begin with a sympathy-inducing depiction of the rapper’s struggles with work-life balance, which serves to establish his belonging in the political category of the “good, innocent, and hard-working” people at the core of populism (Wodak 28): “I’ve been gone too long / Just missed my girl’s birthday / Family is the reason / that I’m here in the first place” (Low Class Oil Trash 00:11-17). He’s been working long shifts in the oilfield and has missed an important family moment, caught in a sort of paradox: he works so hard because he wishes to provide for his family, and yet, in doing so, he is kept apart from them, subject to fossil capital’s gruelling demands on a worker’s time.

These opening lyrics are therefore an expression of what Dorow and Mandizadza call “mobile masculine care,” which they describe as being “imagined and enacted through material provision for family” as part of the “[e]motional endurance” strategies oil workers adopt when away at work camps on long rotations that can last up to three weeks (1249). Indeed, these workers have been shown to have worse mental health and stress levels than the general population, largely attributable to “distance and time away from home and family” (Dorow et al. 14). Thus, the opening lines of “Gassed Up” give expression to the fossilized proletariat’s alienating work conditions.

These opening lines, then, could perhaps be read as expressing frustration with the working conditions in the oil and gas industry, and therefore as signs of possibility for building resistance to hegemonic community economic identity. Certainly, as Sara Dorow et al. suggest, immediate changes in the industry *are* required, and it is imaginable that the narrator of “Gassed Up” could get behind their recommendations for fairer scheduling and improvements to camp life, such as better food, more privacy, and additional mental health supports (8). However, the ambivalence of these opening lines fades away as the song continues, making it clear that such depictions of hard work are, in fact, *hyper-identifications* with fossil capitalist extractivism as a way of life.

Having established his belonging to the category of the hard-working people, the narrator moves on to conjure an enemy “Other,” a necessary third category for right-wing populism, in addition to “the people” and “the elite” (Albertazzi and McDonnell 3). He raps,

Fuck, fight, trip pipe
 You couldn't last in this life

 Little guys criticize
 Protest and pick a side
 Then they fill their cars with gas
 Let the middle finger fly. (Low Class Oil Trash 00:17-29)

The anti-environmentalist message is driven home in the chorus:

So step it back, step it back
 Before you shit on my name
 And don't be acting like a bitch
 Cos you ain't getting your way
 Yeah I'm gassed up [x 4]
 Some view me as a hero
 But to others I'm trash
 So shout out to the people
 Truly busting their ass
 Yeah I'm gassed up [x 4]. (00:50-01:13)

While Gunster and colleagues find that attacks on opponents, and especially environmentalists, are a central component of the discourse employed by mainstream extractive populist groups (217), Low Class

Oil Trash reveals how such a frame resonates with and is adapted by the fossilized proletariat. The working-class narrator of “Gassed Up” is not just alienated from the environmental movement, though there are many valid reasons for him to be (Bell 73-138; Huber 109-75); he has moved past the alienation stage and into performing a symbolic, reactionary violence against it. While elite extractive populists certainly stir up such resentment, they stop short of calling environmentalists “bitches” in their public-facing media, and rarely if ever “let the middle finger fly”; this more extreme and aggressive response is a unique feature of LCOT, whose music video “Gassed Up” reveals a reactionary hyper-identification with petro-masculinist subjectivity that works to establish a right-wing populist division between the masculine, hard-working people and the lazy, feminized environmentalist Other.

Fossilized Whiteness in LCOT’s Advertisements

The first post type to be analyzed is the product advertisement. LCOT sold T-shirts, hoodies, sweatpants, truck decals, hard hat stickers, and sunglasses. The most common design for this merchandise features the LCOT logo, a barrel of oil with a crown on top. Other products include a sweater that says “Alberta loyalty,” with a picture of an oil derrick and the Rocky Mountains, or shirts that say “fuck, fight, trip pipe” or “fuck, fight, weld pipe,” describing a hyper-masculine lifestyle of sexual conquest, physical violence, and hard, manual labour in the oil patch. In one post, a man in the aforementioned “Wine ‘Em, Dine ‘Em, Pipeline ‘Em” hoodie turns his back to the camera and holds a large gun on his shoulder, displaying a blend of pro-gun and pro-oil politics echoed in several other posts.

The most memorable posts of this type show LCOT products being modelled by oil and gas workers themselves. In one, a crew of workers showcases their custom shirts and hoodies, which include their rig number, position, and company name. In several others, workers model LCOT products while on the job. For example, in one, a white man in an LCOT hoodie welds one-handed while sticking out his tongue and raising his middle finger. In another, a white man in a hard hat and coveralls shows off his LCOT truck decal while making the *okay* sign with his crude-covered hand.

Although there were no breakthrough posts of this type, this hand gesture is worth contemplating further, because it reappears in another LCOT advertisement, this time with a model advertising the aforementioned “Come West Trudeau” hoodie while making the *okay* hand gesture with both hands. While “the design of the hoodie stems from a hat worn by some angry Albertans in the early 1980s, when then-Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau created the National Energy Program” (MacVicar), today, death threats directed at Justin Trudeau are a staple of the Canadian far right (Blanchfield and Alhmidi). It seems likely that the hand gesture, too, can be considered evidence of far-right sympathies.

In a 2018 article for the Southern Poverty Law Center, David Neiwert observes that the gesture’s original meaning—roughly, “all is well”—is still the most common usage, but that it is increasingly being used in one of two controversial ways associated with the far right, either as “an ironic attempt to troll liberals with a symbol chosen to ‘trigger’ their inner ‘SJWs’ [social justice warriors]” or as “a surreptitious way of signaling your presence to other white supremacists.” Given the hand gesture’s recurrence in the data set, as well as the wider virality of this hand gesture in 2018, and, furthermore, given Low Class Oil Trash’s stated philosophy, which, as shown above, has “fuck the liberals and keep makin’ hole” as its highest principle, it seems unlikely that LCOT’s worker-models are using the hand gesture for its original, innocuous meaning. Based on LCOT’s obsession with “triggering libs,” it seems most likely that the second, trolling use of the gesture is being employed in the merch shots. At best, as Neiwert argues, the second meaning is a “wink-and-nudge interaction with the racist right” that serves to normalize it. At worst, as Neiwert further elaborates, the ironic, trolling subculture behind the second meaning can be a gateway to a full embrace of far-right politics. After all, there is a thin line between the anti-antiracist politics of the trolls and simple, straight-ahead racism.

Ultimately, the image of a crude-covered white hand is a powerful symbol of what Malm and the Zetkin Collective call *fossilized whiteness*, a term they use to describe the ways in which white supremacy is and has historically been linked to the combustion of fossil fuels (322). While the scholarship on extractive populism is clear that it is a

reactionary movement intended to combat environmentalist and Indigenous opposition to fossil fuel extractivism, less attention has been paid to the white supremacist undertones of extractive populism, which, in the hands of Low Class Oil Trash's worker-models, become explicit.

(Counter-)Hegemonic Community Economic Identity in LCOT's Oilfield Posts and Memes

For a chance to win free products, followers of Low Class Oil Trash were frequently encouraged to direct-message pictures and videos of the oilfield to LCOT on *Facebook*, with LCOT then posting these media to their main feed. While not original content, these posts were the most numerous and provide further insight into the politico-aesthetics of the fossilized proletariat. In this section, I analyze both oilfield posts and LCOT's original memes. I argue that LCOT's oilfield posts and memes both challenge and reinforce hegemonic community economic identity in ways that stylistically and substantively differ from the content of mainstream extractive populist groups.

In addition to repeating the theme of hard work, which I discuss above as an example of hyper-identification in "Gassed Up," many oilfield posts and memes evince class resentment towards occupations that require higher education. In a corollary to LCOT's veneration of blue-collar workers, many memes demonstrate a strong dislike or distrust of white-collar workers such as engineers, geologists, consultants, and safety inspectors. A couple of posts take aim at drillers, who sit atop the oil rig hierarchy, showing class resentment can occur even within the blue-collar segment of the industry, while several others take aim at management and company executives. One post even expresses support for collective bargaining, invoking the labour slogan "United we bargain, divided we beg." While these posts had very few interactions and only one breakthrough (a post making fun of safety inspectors), class resentment was nonetheless a distinctive pattern in LCOT's oilfield posts and memes. Whereas hegemonic economic identities tend to flatten class differences within oil and gas communities and depict them as sharing a homogenous set of interests perfectly aligned with those of industry (Eaton and Enoch 314-15), LCOT's oilfield posts and memes embody a variety of class resentments that,

based on the existing literature on extractive populism, are seemingly absent within mainstream extractive populist groups.

LCOT's oilfield posts and memes also depict a *work hard, play hard* lifestyle that, once again, is seemingly absent from mainstream extractive populist groups. There are many such posts, including two breakthroughs. The first depicts a pair of hands covered in crude oil with the caption "My hands look like this," underneath which is a picture of a stripper with bills in her underwear and the caption "so her G-string can look like this" (Low Class Oil Trash). This picks up on the well-known though empirically under-studied connections between extractive work and sex work, by which sex workers "follow the money" and solicit resource-worker clientele (Landry 102). It also rounds out our picture of the "low class" lifestyle as encompassing the patronage of strip clubs, which is made reference to in many other memes, along with cocaine use, excessive alcohol consumption, and a love of expensive trucks.

The *work hard, play hard* pattern is further captured by LCOT's most interacted-with meme, which depicts far-right conspiracist Alex Jones from *Info Wars* with a vacant, confused look on his face. The caption reads: "When someone asks how you make 100k a year and are always broke." The subtitle on the Jones screencap reads, as implicit reply, "I'm gonna be honest, I'm kind of retarded" (Low Class Oil Trash). The presentation of a far-right conspiracy theorist on LCOT social media is not surprising—indeed, several other far-right figures appear in LCOT memes, including Trump and Jordan Peterson—nor is the lack of political correctness. What makes this post interesting, along with the broader *work hard, play hard* pattern, is its subversion of the conservative ideal of a responsible, rational economic actor who, according to neoclassical economic theory, should sacrifice present reward for future gain, ideally in order to save enough money to become a small capitalist.

Part of what makes LCOT unique among the extractive populist groups is precisely this ostensibly low-class, playful rejection of bourgeois aspirations and a humorous celebration of spendthriftiness. Rather than merely a picture of oil workers struggling to manage the vicissitudes of a boom-and-bust industry, toiling selflessly for their families and country, LCOT depicts a lifestyle that is largely incompatible with the

“traditional family values” that capitalists typically inculcate as a means to stabilize the lives of workers and thereby secure a more stable labour force (O’Shaughnessy and Doğu 271-74). In LCOT’s depiction, one that is largely unimaginable coming from mainstream extractive populist groups, oil workers revel in the consumption of alcohol, expensive diesel trucks, cocaine, guns, and women’s bodies. Though there is something refreshingly subversive and un-bourgeois about this celebration of the “oil trash” lifestyle, which strikes back at a predominantly middle-class environmental movement based on “carbon guilt” and a critique of capitalist consumerism as opposed to capitalist production (Huber 143-48), it should be clear by now that LCOT is resolutely committed to both the *consumption* patterns associated with work under fossil capitalism, and the *fossil capitalist mode of production itself*. That is, while the above patterns serve to disrupt hegemonic community economic identity and subvert bourgeois morality, LCOT’s breakthrough oilfield posts and memes move in the opposite direction, offering instead a reactionary hyper-identification with fossil capitalist hegemony.

By far the most popular oilfield post, and LCOT’s most interacted-with post ever, demonstrates that LCOT’s class resentment is misdirected away from the Albertan bourgeoisie. The post went up on November 26, 2018, and it shows three oil and gas workers—one in regular clothes, two in full work gear—posing outside an oil facility and giving the camera the middle finger. It is captioned, “Drilling our last well thanks to the Liberal voters & of course last & always last in our books Mr. Trudeau . . . For that we salute you” (Low Class Oil Trash). It would seem that these workers are about to get laid off and attribute this directly to Liberal voters and to Trudeau himself. Several other posts of this type echo this sentiment. For example, the words *Fuck Trudeau* appear in several posts, a sort of prelude to the same, ubiquitous slogan of the 2022 Freedom Convoy.

Despite their well-documented support for the oil and gas industry (Potkins; Chase et al.), Trudeau’s Liberals are nevertheless loathed by many Albertans for not being pro-oil enough, a view at once informed by and exacerbating the Liberals’ historically low electoral appeal in the province. The middle fingers raised by these workers are directed at Trudeau, but also Liberal voters and, by extension, the 68.09% of Canadians who in 2015 voted for parties with more robust environmental platforms than the

implicit preference of these workers, the Conservative Party of Canada. These workers blame non-Conservative voters for their economic woes, never mind that the booms and busts of the Albertan oil and gas industry are largely attributable to fluctuations in the global price of oil, which in November 2018 was falling. The image therefore taps into a sense of Western alienation, a long-standing political sentiment in Western Canada, especially Alberta, that has grown to new heights in the era of Justin Trudeau and has come to be synonymous with a right-wing populist, fossil-fuel boosterism that blames the federal Liberals for anything that goes wrong in the oilpatch (see Finkel). The above post makes it clear that Western alienation serves to deflect criticism away from the Albertan bourgeoisie and towards external, Eastern-based enemies in Québec and Ontario, thus serving as a powerful tool in the construction and maintenance of a hegemonic Albertan community economic identity.

LCOT's Subsidized Street Politics

The final post type depicts LCOT's owner, Caitlin Lindsay, engaging in street-based politics, translating her online brand of pro-pipeline rhetoric into direct action. On April 10, 2018, for example, Lindsay attended a pro-oil and gas rally in Calgary organized by Rally 4 Resources and Canada Action, a direct response to Kinder Morgan having just pulled out of the Trans Mountain Pipeline project as a result of BC's legal challenges (Hudes). LCOT's breakthrough post from the event shows Lindsay standing in front of a partially visible Canada Action banner that reads, "I love Canadian pipelines" (Low Class Oil Trash). She wears an LCOT hoodie and has two signs: one at her feet and one held above her head. The former reads, "Hey BC NDP, lay back and take the pipeline," and the latter, "suck my drill pipe Horgan," further demonstrating the practice of sexualizing fossil fuel infrastructure, and happily framing the laying of pipeline as a form of sexual violence.

Apparently energized by this action, on April 23, 2018, Lindsay drove to Kamloops, BC, to deliver drinks, snacks, and LCOT swag to Trans Mountain Pipeline workers; she carried a sign saying, "Ignore the hippies we support you" (Low Class Oil Trash, "Showed some gratitude"). She then travelled on to visit Camp Cloud, a long-standing protest occupation outside the Kinder Morgan tank farm in Burnaby,

BC, where activists opposed to the Trans Mountain Pipeline camped for over nine months from late 2017 to August 2018, when they were removed by police (Ghoussoub). There she recorded a breakthrough video in which she identifies petroleum products being used by the activists, like tents and porta-potties, as a way of underlining their supposed hypocrisy (Low Class Oil Trash, “Visited the pipeline”). Gunster and colleagues call this the “energy lifeworld” argument, which holds that fossil fuels are a necessary and ubiquitous part of everyday life, and that it is therefore irrational to oppose them (219). The energy lifeworld framing, pioneered by mainstream extractive populist groups, had clearly been adopted by LCOT, suggesting a direct influence.

In an original meme, LCOT took further aim at Camp Cloud with a fake Kim Jong-un tweet: “Lmao got my first intercontinental ballistic missile working, where should I send my first nuke?” The image shows a poll, with the respective options being the US, Japan, Camp Cloud, or Pyongyang. Camp Cloud wins with sixty-eight per cent. The threat of physical violence against environmental protesters at Camp Cloud was not just rhetoric. A separate group, the Citizens Committee to Evict Camp Cloud, based in Calgary, vowed to travel to Burnaby in buses—an eleven-hour drive—to intimidate and confront the environmental activists, and to cover their protest signs and graffiti with white paint. One of the committee’s organizers said, “[I]f there’s 50 roughnecks painting barriers, they [the campers] might scream and shout, but I would hope they wouldn’t be foolish enough to get in the way”: an obvious threat that these roughnecks—i.e., oil workers and their supporters—would be willing to use physical violence (Doherty). The police eventually evicted Camp Cloud, making the vigilante threats redundant, but the formation of such a group demonstrates the growing street-level force of the extractive populist movement and the willingness of some fossilized proletarians to participate in it.

Barbara Perry and Ryan Scrivens, experts on the Canadian far right, document the ways in which mainstream conservative politics provide a “permission to hate,” which filters down through society and, in the wrong hands, results in violence against various “Others” (89-119). From the above analysis, it is clear that Low Class Oil Trash’s street politics were subsidized by the mainstream extractive populist groups, though not financially. Rather, they were subsidized

organizationally, by coordinating several of the protests and rallies that LCOT's Caitlin Lindsay attended, and *discursively*, by providing Lindsay with pro-oil and gas talking points and fomenting the image of environmentalists as an "enemy of the people," which structured her motivation and rhetorical approach in confronting Camp Cloud activists. Combining these two concepts, I argue that the mainstream extractive populist groups create a *subsidized public* whom they give *permission to hate*. That is, the traditional industry elites who run the mainstream extractive populist groups provide a permission structure for reactionaries within the fossilized proletariat to engage in extreme forms of discourse and behaviour against their perceived enemies, especially environmentalists. All the while, though, the traditional elites maintain enough distance from the militant wing of the movement so as to be able to deny collaboration.

Conclusion: The Fossilized Proletariat as a Reactionary Class Fraction?

Throughout this analysis, I have read Low Class Oil Trash's *Facebook* posts as authentic working-class cultural production, and while I have found moments of class resentment that push against the hegemonic economic identity associated with oil and gas communities, as well as an at-times refreshing subversion of bourgeois morality, these are all outweighed by my analysis' primary finding that LCOT offers a more extreme version of extractive populism that is more consistently and unapologetically misogynistic, racist, and violent than what is offered by the mainstream groups, and which ultimately evinces a reactionary hyper-identification with fossil capitalist hegemonic identities. Death threats directed at the Prime Minister; alt-right hand gestures; the grotesque sexualization of resource extraction; and an aggressive, violent hostility to environmental activists and perceived opponents of the oil and gas industry: these are the stock-in-trade of LCOT, a qualitatively different approach than that of mainstream extractive populist groups, whose institutional connections to fossil capital make such extreme discourse more reputationally risky and therefore uncommon, if not altogether absent.

While mainstream extractive populist groups engage in top-down “meme labour” designed to popularize elite sources of information, like reports from right-wing think tanks and business councils (Gunster et al. 207; see also Neubauer and Graham), LCOT, on the other hand, engages in a horizontal meme labour, not by reframing elite information, but by mixing a wide variety of pop cultural references, from TV shows to viral memes, which are pulled from the discursive environment of and targeted at its own class fraction. While LCOT’s institutional autonomy from fossil capital provides it discursive affordances that permit genuine expressions of class resentment not typically found in the other groups, its autonomy is also precisely what allows for its more extreme approach to extractive populism and enables it to push the discourse even further right, blurring the lines between extractive populism and what some scholars have called “fossil fascism.”⁸

As I argue in a forthcoming chapter, if something so ominous as fossil fascism is to develop, it will require the participation of other class fractions besides the bourgeoisie, and I name small fossil capital, or what could also be called the *fossilized petite bourgeoisie*, as a likely suspect (McLean). My analysis of Low Class Oil Trash suggests that the fossilized proletariat may be another likely source of fossil fascist militants. Indeed, the majority of the fossilized proletariat would appear to fit into what Simon Bornschier and Hanspeter Kriesi call the “core clientele” of the contemporary far right: white, male, non-unionized,⁹ non-university educated, skilled, and employed in traditionally masculine labour (12, 24). Further research on the Canadian fossilized proletariat should include: more empirical inquiries into the class composition of extractive populism’s street-based wing; more research into the class composition of right-wing populist parties’ electorate and activists, including those behind the rise of Danielle Smith; and further investigations into the relationship between top-down and bottom-up extractive populisms. More generally, scholars of extractive populism and Canadian fossil capitalism should come together with scholars of the Canadian far right to further interrogate the many overlaps between rising temperatures and the rising right, a global phenomenon whose Canadian dimensions have only just begun to be unravelled.

Notes

1. The term *subsidized public* was coined by sociologist Edward T. Walker in his book *Grassroots for Hire: Public Affairs Consultants in American Democracy* to describe how public relations professionals foment public participation in corporate-backed political campaigns.
2. *Corporate ventriloquism* was coined by Jen Schneider and colleagues in their book *Under Pressure: Coal Industry Rhetoric and Neoliberalism* to describe how coal companies “transmit messages through other entities” in order to advance their interests (53).
3. Analyzing data collected from *CrowdTangle*—a social media monitoring tool owned by Meta—reveals that, for an eight-month period from April 1 to November 26, 2018, when LCOT was at its height in terms of post interactions and video views, it actually outperformed several other extractive populist groups. For example, despite being out-posted four-to-one by Resource Works, LCOT’s posts accrued more total interactions. Furthermore, LCOT had more average interactions per post than did Oil Respect, which is particularly impressive given that Oil Respect had three times as many followers and the institutional backing of the Canadian Association of Oilwell Drilling Contractors. LCOT’s average number of interactions per post (437) was not far off even from Canada Action’s (571), a group that also receives direct funding from fossil capital (Linnitt).
4. The groups that comprised my sample, against which I compared the performance of LCOT, were taken from the literature on extractive populism: Oil Sands Action, Canada’s Energy Citizens, Oil Sands Strong, Canada Action, Oil Respect, and Resource Works. I excluded the oil companies studied by Gunster and colleagues, and the multi-issue conservative group, Canada Proud, studied by Neubauer and Graham, because I wanted to focus specifically on groups concerned mainly with oil and gas, but who present themselves as grassroots and at least make some effort to cloak their corporate origins.
5. I use the term “politico-aesthetics” to refer to the political content of artistic and/or cultural production.
6. The most recent data available for Alberta shows that, in 2020, women made up 45.9% of the provincial labour force and men made up 54.1%, but within the oil and gas sector these figures were 23.8% and 76.2%, respectively (*Alberta Mining and Oil* 9). Similar data is not available for race, but the sociology suggests the majority are white.
7. Indeed, the entire project of LCOT, run as it is by Caitlin Lindsay, the wife of an oilfield worker, can be seen as the fulfilment of this “helpmate” archetype, and as an execution of Lindsay’s “duties which enable [her man] to succeed.”
8. The term “fossil fascism” was coined by Cara Daggett to describe the contemporary far right’s climate denialist love of fossil fuels, perhaps best embodied by the Trump-led Republican Party (27). The term has been taken up as a theoretical framework for understanding global far right politics in Malm and the Zetkin Collective’s *White Skin, Black Fuel: On the Dangers of Fossil Fascism*.
9. The Albertan oil and gas industry has a very low union density: in 2020, only 10.6% of oil and gas workers were unionized, compared to the provincial average of 25.7% (*Alberta Mining and Oil* 6).

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Ross Belot

In the Company of Good and Evil in the Land of Narrative Drift

The noise of the trees is
butter today, I am
at my dream

desk, crude oil
dripping
from the office
ceiling. The Chairman:

“we have too much of everything except profit”

slash the coffee and doughnut
budgets,
a banging on the office
wall beside—

“The billionth barrel of oil from our Cold Lake flowed today!”

Fist bumps all around, a celebration
of greenhouse gas and bonuses. Better
and better at doing it massive steam injected
bitumen producing sites we’ve appropriatedly sanctified:

Maskwa Cree for “Bear”
Mahihkan Cree for “Wolf”
Mahkeses Cree for “Fox”

Nabiye, our new expansion project (yay!), is Dene for “Otter”
Our sacred right of dominion— our sacred rite of extraction

They drill horizontally then hydraulically fracture the Eagle
Ford shale in Texas and extract the naphtha from
the natural gas, dump it into caverns, then pump it up 2,000
miles of pipelines, mix it with bitumen in
Alberta...

“This is how we do it.”

...and then send it back to Texas where they process it into all
manner of products for combustion to CO₂,
like petroleum coke sent to Turkey and Japan as a worse-than-
coal substitute

“It feels so good.”

The Chairman, his favourite: Kearl Lake (the project not the
former body of water):

“Why is Fisheries having an environmental review, we’ve
already de-watered the lake?”

“National GHG from this project is only going up by 0.5%.”
(1 out of every 200 tonnes emitted for the entire nation,
percentages sounds so much better)

“Why are they so worried when we’re not?”
Let’s celebrate!

There are cheerleaders,
there are zip lines in the canopy of the trees!

Kristian Enright

Extraction Poem #3

Upon a multicoloured band-aid
that is a like a magic carpet, we claim
the wound below is just an inferior landscape.

Still, in daily life, miners disappear into it.

There are an endless series of examples of failures to be wombs:

There is the anomaly of Plato's cave
newly buttressed states of callousedness
and your teenage room where your apathy fed vicariously
on posters of music stars. You were a relative foetus.

If you were to bury your head in any real holes
and you were not a miner, it seems that hiding is not just
ostrich conformity, but is it a time for personal exploration?

There is a metallic mosquito that the military will mitigate
as a spy plane. It sees an implicit Braille and understatement
on the earth below. It's blurry at times, as if we were cruising up
progress road to get to that illusory suburban utopia:

How the guerrilla battle with nature appears on the ground. . .

Yet, if there is nothing beyond material nature, to take
fossil fuels is like taking the soul, as if an old concept
that links us to time so beyond ourselves:
a magic trick of the things we do with smoke. . .

The mystic comes through its curtains seeking
a wishing well. . . Something etymological was to happen
there, like a benediction.

Yet, a vagueness sent smoke like exhausted poltergeist
soldiers. . . Instead, there is a place of extraction like Richard
the Third's shadow if he were to work in the corporate world
and its towers were to have their by-product
of such glitter of winking windows.

Propaganda's sponge brain might absorb
a "natural green" as if the metallic mosquito
were able to test by prodding parts of the brain.
And it would seem we could blame nature
and that the itch is what would explain
our treatment of these eradicated plains:

How distantly to say: scientific
curiosity scratches the surfaces. . .

Monuments of themselves: un-honoured places,
abandoned, these extraction sites. —Narratives of sci-fi
suggest of our space ship leaving the planet (in a passive
construction) that it seemed as if we were throwing
it away, avoiding our blames. A garbage of itself
is all these 'monuments' are,

But consequence, you will find history and
history knows this cannot be an age of naivety:
propaganda so diverse it accumulates hugely,
in this simulacra world: but may we bury
nihilism in a once oil-drowned ceremony of innocence?

Nedjo Rogers

Elemental

What is copper?
Is it skin caressed
by ten thousand summers?
Is it the bark of arbutus,
scaling to reveal new green?
Can you stretch copper thin as oil on water,
thin as blood?

What is silver?
Is it the hair of grandmothers
drawn into ribbon braids?
Is it trout arcing upstream?
Is it dust streaking the sky
with its journey?

What is gold?
Is it maize that rises from fields
in names that stroke the tongue:
 choclo, elote, mazorca?
Is it sunlight flashing
off corrugated roofs
into courtyards where roosters
flaunt their primeval hues?
Is it lemon trees heavy with fruit
nursed by streams that remember the ice
of secret mountains?
Can you hold it in your hand
lock it in vaults, or is gold
a creature of glint
living only in memory?

K. B. Thors

Get a Load of the River

32 states of local emergency were declared over
solstice 2013 when unprecedented rainfall flooded
the Bow River, the Elbow River, the Highwood River

the Red Deer River, the Sheep River, the Little Bow
and South Saskatchewan Rivers plus tributaries
galore. After a couple days Calgary waterway

flows swole by factors up to 10. 5 people died
in what the Insurance Bureau of Canada called
the costliest disaster in Canadian history

til the fire at Fort Mac. We'll want bigger buckets
next bailout, the Flames need a new arena

and 8 rows of seats were submerged that means
hockey players walking through the tunnel would
be underwater. Saddledome's not built for that

but memorabilia was rescued before Event Level
drowned, an old captain's signed contract saved
for posterity. Evacuation orders mean immediate

threat to life, failure to comply criminal
for some. We have the biggest water pumps
in North America on standby, waiting for the water

to recede. Just a little recession and we'll drop
'em like pucks. That way fans will pay for it.

The author of Vulgar Mechanics (Coach House), K. B. Thors is from Treaty 7 land in rural Alberta.

Catherine Greenwood

Tusk Hunters

Tuskers mining the hoard
tunnel blindly through cold
Siberian soil, mud-men
moiling for a strange old gold.

In the sap-sweet scrubland,
at the edge of the forest
where the witch resides, dogs
on the scent of unseen quarry
whine and claw at crumbling dirt,
summoned to the riverbank
by the smell of old meat thawing.

At dawn pump-generators sputter,
cough then roar—scattering birdsong,
shattering the mute sleep of spruce.

Men in helmets and hip-boots
point the petrol-sheened river
through hoses heavy as elephant trunks,
drilling a determined plume
of sluice into the secret-keeping soil,
interrogating stones and the tense,
clasped roots of trees.

They can feel it, *Luck*,
tingling in their own numbed
extremities. The wet soil reeks
of minerals and decay like a fresh dug
garden or grave. Iron, old blood.

Catherine Greenwood's permafrost unburial poetry is from a work-in-progress called Siberian Spring.

Erin Soros

No Help But Laughter

*when I hold a book, my dad said, I think about where this paper
came from, the mill, the men who worked in the mill, the men
who logged the paper, what kind—the smell of cedar, Doug fir,
familiar nickname, scraps not good enough for a house but
mulched into pulp—and I know, my dad said, that's not what you
are supposed to be thinking when you read*

tangle of jumper cables in the trunk, positive, negative,
the power he connects

sound when I was alone, *dee, chickadee*, slowness at the slim
limbs of a child so different from the frantic *chickadee dee dee dee*
dee dee dee dee when my dad's strength sauntered with me

their call is now outside his range

can you hear that, Dad

no words, just an old man shaking his head

my teacher didn't know where I came from, visiting my home
that existed *without a single book*

*if my neighbour doesn't have medical care, my dad said, I am
less wealthy*

I used the word *soffit*—you know it, the overhang of a roof,
protection you take for granted without a worry for its name

my professor circled it, in red ink

this is not a word in the dictionary

he asked me if English was my second language, I knew that
was a bad thing

well, it's a word alright, my dad said

*if you drive past someone who has stopped by the side of the
road, and you don't help, my dad said, where I grew up, let's say
somewhere between logging camp B and camp C, you could be
sentencing them to death*

nights in the backseat, back before seatbelts, when my driving
dad had sideburns and the pinwheel of street lights slipped
across faces, slide of my slack body round the corners dark, as
good as asleep, hum of car under me, rumble of engine stalling
at the curb and a sigh I release when my dad holds the fake,
innocent as a girl, awkward under stars, through the metal door
to the wooden home, bundle of child, one arm slipping free, but
he braced all of her up each stair like he never knew how to do
if I was awake

afternoons at the daycare beside my old parents, the young
parents arrive to pick up children, easy lift of that wrangling
toddler into air, burden almost weightless, a father off work and
made new, big hands a love shape more than a word as a child
lets small legs bob, releasing any morning *no no no no* to gaze at
this world from a man's height

my father cannot hear them, sweet soft high-pitched voices of a
two-year-old, three-year-old, too much for the beige antennae at
his ear

his mask keeps catching his hearing when he doesn't notice,
pulls a buzzing aid off, and I drive with him in pulsing rain to
Save-On where he gives me credit like never before, saved by
some stranger who found a tiny tool and handed the clerk what
my dad needs, vulnerable cough drop of sound, slick concrete

the frame for valuable, passersby chatter over unbroken under
clatter of cart and crying child, what did it hear

you, my dad says to me, are good luck

he used to tear the teacher's comment off some essay I wrote,
red words of praise he showed to every man rigging a stage for
some actress who said the lines of someone else

stomping upstairs while my dad stepped down, yellow shag
carpet an embarrassment, brown tracks to the bathroom and
bedrooms certain as curves of a flow-chart, *yeah*, I said,
contempt digging my voice, passing my dad, *read a book*

it's a painful part of my life, my dad said at the wheel of the car
when I asked him to tell me the steering of his young adulthood
away from anything that could be bound, *I don't want to talk
about it*

why don't you read a book why don't you

I don't remind him about the time he thought *nite* and *lite* were
the American spellings, neon spilling Seattle commerce into
black rain, words as efficient as the absence inside colour and his
discomfort at discovering his mistake

now he tells it as a joke

isn't that funny

my mom and I repeat the mishearing his hearing aids make, no help but
laughter

can't remember a single example but trust me, funny

like the time my nana died—my mom and dad they drove to
the university, stood on the wound-down carpet of my dorm
room the plum shade of a *B* movie and their faces, still young
and he could still hear

I gasped the news

give me your professors' names

this is what happens when your grandmother dies at exam time
so it could all be a fake to avoid being tested and still you have
to go tell your professors your grandmother died at exam time
who will believe anything you say

my dad will do the work of phoning professors, it is true, the
funeral, his voice, the event

my nana slept on the top bunk, closer than any parent who
comes to turn out the light

meanwhile are we lying

why should she not be with us, perhaps not standing but resting
her energy to instruct the whole family on what was right

could my professors believe my dad

has this man ever called a professor

we might be making this up, I don't have to write an exam, in
which case she hasn't died

I am alone in a dorm room beside my lamp phantom to spell
check an assignment for six hours because what else is there to
do

this night I have a dry piece of rye toast

but before even that is possible, I give my dad explicit
instructions on the names

Quarterbrain he repeats as I say the professor's name and we are
in a bad poem on the scribble pad my dad brought to my dorm
for this purpose

nothing wrong with his hearing but my dad distorts meaning
like a cassette tape at the warped end where words don't work

no, main, I say, like the street

Quarterstreet

between my mom and me something horrible is laughing at the
confusion of my professor's name in my dad's mouth and my
nana should be alive to hear it

nite lite, aren't those words how it should be if they are there,
those letters square bright glowing in the sky more real than
black characters inert on pale retreating as you age

can you read this

he lost his hearing at the mill, not right away but waiting in
a play, the old plot, loaded

I am lucky enough never to work anywhere near a screeching
saw, a shrill-pitched mill, a falling tree making the insides of
this thing I could drop without hurting anyone

chokerman, chaser, rigging slinger, high rigger, this is all the
poetry he was

were you ever a hook tender

*no, no, that I wasn't, and you know we just said hooker, not like
in the books*

alphabet of logging camps scripted the ragged coast

can a letter grip
can you sing the touch of land
where was this paper pulped

have you ever ripped a piece and let it drop

l

e

a

v

e

s

again his hearing aid escapes, slips out of an old ear to plant
itself like a seed, dirty the pages of fresh life, and he scratches for
it and finds twigs, that matchbox car my brother buried, not one
useful thing until my dad isn't looking and *there it is*

he taught me how to tie a Molly Hogan Eye

can you tell that story

*take a look at this stump, you know how to read the rings of
this tree you can measure them against your finger nail, see, the
wide rings tell you when growing was good, lots of rain, not too
cold, and that black narrow line, there, that's fire, forest fire big
enough to become history, all that destruction, and yet this tree
lived another good forty years, I remember that fire, I was a boy
then, we could count forward and find the year you were born*

he paid for the hearing aid with the workers' comp he organized
for the men he knew, the way he can tuck the aid inside the
canal

can you hear him shout—over the crowd, into the crowd, eyes
rising to rights

what does your paper smell like now

the mills of my father's adolescence contained two boys who fell
into the pulper

what happened to them

they fell into the pulper, what do you think happened to them

yeah, well, read a book

skyline, eye splice, cunt splice

slack the line

tight the line

*what's got you so worried, doesn't sound to me like those
people know anything about logging*

sometimes as I pedal back to my apartment, wicker basketful of
books, I imagine shifting my adult body into neutral, no force
of my own, no line to find alone but the rocking block of myself
carried

school marm

nurse stump

his gruff booming voice on our family's answering machine
greeting for us in our place, symmetry he knew to find, how
we matched, how we rhymed, *you've reached the home of the
palindrome*

you weren't expecting that, were you

widow maker

whistle punk his first job, *beep beep*, a pause, then *beep beep
beep beep beep* means slack the haul back, *beep beep beep* then
beep means go ahead on the straw line, *beep beep beep beep
beep beep beep beep beep beep beep beep beep beep beep
beep beep beep beep beep beep beep beep beep* means man dead

when I visit a class, a student corrects one of my stories, *a logger
wouldn't know the word reciprocal*

two men on either side of a Swedish fiddle, misery whip, a long
two-handed saw, their staggered legs perched on spring boards,
rain bouncing sweat as bodies become rhythm of cutting,
aching sway of Douglas fir that could kill them both

it's not just what you've accomplished, a professor once told me,
our hands to those straps that keep us from tumbling in a bus,
cotton stretch of armpits visible in that packed swaying away
from the rock walls of university, *but how far you've come*

my dad balance e d on the neighbour's r oof to string a set
of colour red lights with such care, tendering the mouths of for
gotten k nots to r each straight as a ray, no matter how you
spell what his hands held

Writing with/against/as Extraction in So-Called Canada: Poets on Poetics

Introduction

Melanie Dennis Unrau and Max Karpinski

To complement, trouble, question, and expand the content of the special issue on poetics and extraction, this forum collects statements of poetics by poets in so-called Canada who engage with extraction, or resist extraction, as subject matter, poetic technique, and political or decolonial praxis. We are delighted and so grateful to present this collection of statements by Kazim Ali, Madhur Anand, Lesley Battler, Lindsay Bird, Warren Cariou, Adam Dickinson, Cecily Nicholson, Kelly Shepherd, Douglas Walbourne-Gough, Jennifer Wickham, and Rita Wong.

Many of the statements in this forum were first prepared for oral delivery at two online events that we hosted, together with Warren Cariou, at the University of Manitoba Institute for the Humanities (UMIH) in 2022. Using the call for submissions for this special issue as a prompt, we invited poets whose work we recognized as resonating in some way with extraction to participate in the events. We asked each poet to read some of their creative work and to offer a statement about their writing practice in relation to extraction. In organizing these events, we were mindful of drawing together poets, writers, and activists who write and organize on, with, and from a range of regions, territories, and embodied perspectives across Canada. We are grateful to present statements that speak to poetics and extraction in the context of anti-pipeline mobilization and land and water defence in British Columbia, labour in the tar sands of Alberta, hydro justice in Manitoba, extractive literary and social histories of Newfoundland, colonial and scientific extractions in India and Ontario, CanLit

itself as extractive, and more. We would like to thank Dr. Cariou and the UMIH for their support. One presenter whose statement is not part of this forum, Nduka Otiono, spoke and read poetry about his experience of petrocultures in the Niger Delta and Alberta, and about the importance of ecopoetics and ecocriticism; we wish to acknowledge Dr. Otiono's contributions to this conversation. We would also like to thank *Canadian Literature* for their generous provision of a venue for these short-form, hybrid, and self-reflexive statements on poetics in relation to extraction. And we would especially like to thank the forum contributors for their insightful, powerful, challenging, and generative sharing on this theme.

Writing *Northern Light*

Kazim Ali

I live on the traditional lands of the Kumeyaay people, which are currently crossed by the US-Mexico border outside San Diego, California, but when I was young I lived on Treaty 5 land in northern Manitoba, on the traditional lands of the Pimicikamak people, a.k.a. the Cross Lake First Nation. I grew up in “Jenpeg, Manitoba,” about forty kilometres or so from Cross Lake, Manitoba—a little clearing in the forest with a set of trailers built by Manitoba Hydro to house workers and their families and to construct a dam, Manitoba Hydro's Jenpeg Generating Station. My father was the lead engineer on the project and the designer of the electrical system. We lived in Jenpeg for a few years while the dam was being built, but at a certain point my father wasn't needed anymore, and our family moved to Buffalo, New York. About a year later, the dam was completed, the trailers were taken off the land, and the site began to go back to forest.

Decades later, I decided to write a book about my weird transnational childhood. I wanted to write about living in that strange town of five streets in the middle of the forest—which was a fairy tale to me. What was that place? Was it even real? And so, I started to research. The first thing I learned about was the environmental

destruction wrought by the dam, and the second thing was that at that time, in 2014 or 2015, there was a suicide epidemic among the youth in Cross Lake that was being covered in the Canadian national media. I wrote to the Nation, and Chief Cathy Merrick wrote back and invited me to Cross Lake. So, I went to visit, and I ended up writing a book that I did not expect to write. Rather than the book about Asian, Brown immigrants coming to Canada and trying to make our way in a new society, *Northern Light: Power, Land, and Memory of Water* (2021) ended up being about Cross Lake, the people there, the treaty, and the dam.

I found myself writing a story I hadn't even known before about the collision between the immigrant and the Indigenous. I had no idea that my own Brown immigrant family still had more access to political agency and wealth from the dam than the Indigenous people upon whose land it was built. And so, the book became a book that I was not prepared to write and did not have training to write—part memoir, part essay, part reportage journalism, and part history. I came to realize that most people in Canada don't know the histories of Indigenous peoples and colonization. What does it mean to live in territory covered by a numbered treaty? What are the differences between the earlier numbered treaties and the later, northern ones? What was the Sixties Scoop? What happened in the residential schools? For example, when the mass graves were discovered recently, there was a wave of indignation in Canada, but they are things that have been known and talked about for decades. I heard all about it when I was in Cross Lake. In 2017, Anne Lindsay was doing research on oral histories of residential school survivors in Brandon, Manitoba, and she found a mass grave by following a diagram that someone had drawn on a bar napkin. This is what I'm talking about: the open secrets in Canadian history—known but often not known—that the residential schools were places of death, and that Canadian energy systems and ways of life are built on the dispossession of Indigenous people.

What I want to say about my poetics in relation to this book is to challenge immigrant writers and immigrant writers of colour: being Brown doesn't make you less of a settler. Being the victim of racism and discrimination doesn't make you less of a colonizer. And that's what I had to confront in the writing of this book—returning, as it

were, to the scene of the crime, and trying to reconcile my memories and experiences with the experiences of the Indigenous people who were impacted by the dam. Writing this book, I struggled with the fact that I was telling the story of an Indigenous community. Tactically, my friends in Cross Lake recognized that I, as a non-Indigenous Canadian person, had more access to tell their story, and they were comfortable with that—but we all knew that was part of the problem. The next book about the Jenpeg Generating Station and/or Cross Lake should be written by somebody from Cross Lake, and there are things that I can do as a writer and as a human and as an educator to try to help make that happen. The ethical responsibilities and the way one handles oneself as a researcher in an Indigenous community are things that I, as a poet, was unprepared for, and I had to learn it as I went along. I don't think I'm done contending with this.

Kazim Ali was born in the United Kingdom and has lived transnationally in the United States, Canada, India, France, and the Middle East. A prolific author of poetry, novels, and cross-genre texts, he is currently a Professor of Literature at the University of California, San Diego. His newest books are a volume of three long poems entitled The Voice of Sheila Chandra; a memoir of his Canadian childhood, Northern Light; and the YA choose-your-own-adventure novel The Citadel of Whispers.

A Preparation Containing the Active Ingredient of a Substance in Concentrated Form

Madhur Anand

In my first collection of poems, *A New Index for Predicting Catastrophes* (2015), I confront head-on many scientific topics, including my own ecological research on the impact of metal mining in the Sudbury area and the impact of fossil fuel extraction (in the form of climate change). I explore extractive scientific processes by mining the language and culture of science. The most extreme examples of poetic extraction in this book are the found poems I made using the text of my own scientific articles. I skimmed my articles and created lists of words from which poems started to emerge. The severe constraint

of using only words occurring in the scientific articles creates a sense of endangerment in language. It exposes narratives or energies that remain when the lexicons of science prove to be insufficient to address environmental crisis, or when language itself becomes a stripped ecosystem. Here is an example:

Alienation (The Transferring of Title or of Interest)

Accounts were ignition sources
from within their own perimeter,
but in recent months, climate
without change reduced
the spread of public attention

A media agent increased persistence
but there were no linkages
between abatement and refugia

Personal communication
and park status dropped
below natural levels

The lawsuit may have referred to
the next largest remnant, properties
sorted by size, scattered matrices,
the formation of a complex,
as well as the countless gaps

Criterion A: the wood turtle
taken on a voluntary basis

Criterion B: the two-lined salamander
plotted as two single bars (60)

I found/extracted this poem from "The Scientific Value of the Largest Remaining Old-Growth Red Pine Forests in North America," a study I undertook with a number of colleagues to establish the Wolf Lake Forest Reserve as an endangered ecosystem. This forest is the largest remaining old-growth red pine forest, but it is prevented from becoming a permanently protected area because of active mining leases. In a case like this, the Ministry for Northern Development and Mines owns

and manages everything below ground while the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry manages everything above ground, and these two arms of government can be at complete odds with each other. We undertook the first scientific study to scale up Endangered Species Act criteria to the level of an ecosystem. Whether this scientific work was able to effect change is an open question, but it was cited by many groups hoping to protect this ecosystem. The poem emerged as an alternative narrative, holding the potential to “speak” between the cultures of science and society—an intervention.

Parasitic Oscillations (2022), my second collection of poems, builds towards a body of work to balance the various aspects of living and practising as both a poet and a scientist studying global ecological change in the Anthropocene, a time of unravelling. It takes a focused approach to interrogate (rather than try to extinguish) the inevitability of undesired cyclic variation (the so-called parasitic oscillations from signal processing) caused by feedback (noise) in the amplifying devices of both poetry and science, fields that are still disparate in our world. A new question emerges with my examination of oscillations in birdsong in “Portrait 1”: “How might we utilize these oscillations caused by feedback to bring our multiple understandings of the world closer together, to talk to one another while embracing the inevitability of noise?” (4).

To ground and inform this work, I made an interdisciplinary, modern, yet meditative poetic reading of A. O. Hume’s *The Nests and Eggs of Indian Birds* (1889), a strange text I came across a few years ago. Birds are ubiquitous symbols in English poetry, but mainly as fauna of North America and Europe (as evidenced in the 2009 Viking anthology *The Poetry of Birds*, edited by Simon Armitage and Tim Dee). Thus, my project brings new species and their songs to new audiences. Contemporary scientific knowledge of Indian ornithology is, in fact, still largely due to the work of Hume, a British civil servant who was also a passionate naturalist. With a vast network of collaborators, he collected—extracted, if you will—thousands of Indian bird eggs, skins, and nests during his time in India; these now sit, mostly, in the Natural History Museum of London. Hume’s *The Nests and Eggs of Indian Birds* is a field guide to birds that consists only of very precise descriptions of the nests and the eggs, with no real mention of the birds. This resonates

with my examination of the text in a time of unprecedented ecological collapse, when, as I write in "Portrait 2," "Birds are often no longer direct subjects of metaphor, but rather remain strange, sometimes silent, a kind of menacing and stray capacitance (which can cause parasitic oscillations), but still harbingers of discovery and hope" (6).

Parasitic Oscillations examines intergenerational, colonial, intertextual, feminist, and diasporic relationships in light of climate change and species loss. Extraction is both a method—in found poems and photos of preserved bird eggs and bodies from Hume's collection—and a theme. For example, in "Partition 1," "the Natural History Museum of Delhi / goes up in flames," as it did in 2016, and bystanders and researchers mourn the loss of precious artifacts and exhibits, including a graduate student's "planned future / exhibit. Climate Change: Effects and Adaptation." Encompassing but not mentioning the loss of bird eggs and taxidermied birds, and revealing the museum as a site of layer upon layer of extraction, the poem ends with the couplet: "By that time, in the western hemisphere, the present / tense of verbs is erased by an invisible hand" (14). This poem lifts the veil of objectivity and neutrality that often surrounds scientific study, or at least scientific language and culture. It insists on a co-consideration of personhood and the environment, something that traditional scientific practices do not typically allow (there is no *I* in the scientific paper, only a passive voice). It forces the self not to be separate, not to be extracted from the world.

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Madhur Anand is the author of the experimental memoir This Red Line Goes Straight to Your Heart, which won the 2020 Governor General's Literary Award for non-fiction, and the poetry collections A New Index for Predicting Catastrophes and Parasitic Oscillations. She is a Professor of Ecology and Sustainability at the University of Guelph, where she was appointed the inaugural Director of the Guelph Institute for Environmental Research.

Interventions

Lesley Battler

Here in Alberta the road descends through layers of rock, which are all subdivided into formations, each classified according to age, rock type, fossil assemblage, oil or gas traps, and production value. A battalion of trucks rumbles by: Exalta Transport, Acropolis Steel, Spartan Controls. Pipes, cables, boreholes, pumps. All manner of devices measuring Earth's pulse in BPU (bitumen per unit). When the wind lets up, I can hear an incessant *ksshk-ksshk*. Pumpjacks at worship.

All around me, the sounds and symbols of industry and power. I wanted to find a voice for this, something beyond the usual economic, political, and public relations framing; more a disruptive intervention to the violent intervention done to the land. Bring in a linguistic backhoe the way colonist-settlers physically, mentally, spiritually backhoed the land and its Indigenous peoples.

I worked for a long time at a multinational oil company and felt compelled to tackle the intertwined subjects of environmental devastation, loss of individual agency and the relentless capitalism that fuels Big Industry from an insider position. This urge developed into my own kind of poetics of extraction.

I'm also attracted to working with found texts, as my writing is usually tied to some kind of inquiry. What would happen if I placed words or phrases from one discourse with those from a seemingly opposing or unrelated discourse? This makes me feel like I'm working in a laboratory, mixing chemicals. It also brings me into the text, a way of also implicating myself, my hands coated in the bitumen of language.

These experiments became a book, *Endangered Hydrocarbons*, published by BookThug (now Book*hug) Press in 2015. All of the poems in this project are derived from texts generated by a multinational oil company, spliced with a variety of found material including video games, home decor magazines, histories of the Roman Empire and French Revolution, National Energy Board hearings. I chose texts for their strange, unexpected connections. For example, there

is something about the spheres and terminals of liquefied natural gas that led me to Carl Jung. I treated these texts like crude oil; excavating, drilling, mixing them to emulate processes used by the industry.

As a new hire in the oil and gas industry, I faced a steep learning curve, and I read a lot of trade journals. Something that struck me was the tone of the editorials. They all follow the same aggrieved narrative: Big Oil persecuted by marauding environmental activists and their entourage of media stooges. This through-the-looking-glass rhetoric is also the normative language of government at all levels surrounding the oil industry, and the same *us versus them* mindset informs decisions at all levels. It only made sense to co-opt Foucault to legitimize the construct of a downtrodden oil-igarchy.

I also felt bombarded by a language both deeply invasive and archetypal; a strange brew of pornography, cryptogeology, pataphysics, and the purely speculative masked as science. Then there's the dissociation between the "facts" presented in schematics, seismic logs, data runs and the physical reality they distort. But this language also evokes mythology and archetypes. It can't help but do so. After all, its purpose is to core the underworld.

Industry texts fascinated me, especially geotechnical wellbooks and lithology logs. These logs are graphic representations of a well from surface to bottom hole. They are driven, single-minded, blatant in their purpose, but they're also full of names, symbols, colours, patterns and the language can be beautiful, startling, absurd. Olivine phenocrysts, coastal, fluvial, aeolian. Sometimes even sounding like Shakespearean insults. You, sir, are a vuggy dolomite.

In the capitalist cosmology of an oil company, disciplines such as geology, geophysics, or chemistry are stripped of their power and experimental play. Instead, purpose-driven numbers are sent off to meet targets and serve their shareholders.

My aim is to deflect these targets by using linguistic processes to critique real-world industrial extraction. The idea is to leave a sense of upheaval, an awareness that when it comes to corporate capitalism there is no cultural high ground, Arctic wilderness, or religious sanctuary that can't be exploited. Cultural references become artifacts, skulls and bone fragments turned up in a wellsite. And even as hydrocarbon extraction threatens Earth itself, the hydrocarbons are also threatened.

But after participating in the Forum on Poetics, Energy, and Extraction (University of Manitoba, March 2022), I realized I also need to listen to other voices, especially those that question my ethical foundations. Does the relentlessness of my own inquiry really critique the violence of industrial extraction, or am I merely perpetuating violence and theft on a linguistic level? Am I strip-mining without providing a sense of regeneration or renewal? On the other hand, shouldn't I be tackling these issues using the tools and languages available to me?

What I hope to do is twist and invert the rhetoric, while keeping my poetics a territory open to questioning and critique, and add my voice to all those preparing the groundwork for another way of seeing—and being in—the world. Impose the underworld, the ancient seabed, the fragile coasts of the Mackenzie Delta on the languages of capitalism and industrial science. Jam the algorithms, deflect language from its 4Q targets, strip it of its colonial-capitalist ideology and its exalted position in society. Send it back to wilderness, play, and mystery.

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*Lesley Battler's debut book of poetry, Endangered Hydrocarbons, was published by Book*hug in 2015. Her work has most recently appeared in the anthology Poetics for the More-Than-Human-World (Spuyten Duyvil) in 2021. She has worked as a telecommunications librarian, corporate writer, information manager, and archivist in Toronto, Montreal, and Calgary. She currently lives in Edmonton.*

Wild and Careless: The Work Camp Life

Lindsay Bird

My poetry collection *Boom Time* (2019) is itself an extraction: an experience of the oil sands transformed into its own commodity. But it's also poetry that talks a lot about extraction, and the different extractions at play in the oil sands during a very specific era of recent Canadian history.

I went to Fort McMurray for the same reason everyone does: to get something out of it. It seemed, heading in, a clear calculation. I could live rent-free in the work camps and funnel my paycheques towards my student loans. My friend had an in—she had been there a year, she knew an HR person, I could send along my résumé and cross my fingers. At that point, I was living with my parents and balancing an unpaid publishing internship with shifts as a waiter at a Toronto airport hotel, stirring eggs in chafing dishes to keep them from going green.

So I went, to get something.

That was 2006. I stayed for nearly two years.

I got things: my student loans paid off, a 1999 Toyota Tercel with no air conditioning, tuition for my future journalism degree, a six-week trip to Europe. I didn't realize at the time I was taking part in an oil sands boom, a period of breakneck expansion and massive inter-provincial migration that would get a reality check with the economic crash in 2008. In my time there, camp life was raging. Some estimates pegged ten thousand of the area's eighty thousand residents as living in the camps that were strewn around Fort Mac in an orbit of muskeg.

Things felt wild and careless in the camps. We talked about money all the time: what things cost, what we'd buy. The one thing all of us seemed to share, beyond homesickness and isolation, was counting down to payday. Bowing to the dollar, for whatever the reason—practicing a trade, getting ahead, or getting by—is one element of extraction in *Boom Time*, particularly in the poem "Bitumen":

Bitumen

It's got that raw disco
glitter, sparkling like
a girl just asked to dance

wearing all the mascara
ever made, batting
oozy eyes and dreaming

in sticky whispers
of the cars she'll drive someday:
Maseratis, Ferraris,
an eggplant purple Porsche. (30)

Aside from the cash, it's obviously impossible to ignore the environmental cost that goes along with getting that bitumen from ground to gas tank. Making peace with that, I think, was elusive for most people there. In my interactions, no worker was rejoicing about the destruction around us; the tailings ponds steaming in the depths of winter, the tracts of Jack pines set alight to make way for strip mines. Even attempts to soften the edges of ecological disaster could feel absurd. Quite close to the city limits itself, Syncrude brought in wood buffalo in the early nineties to reestablish the species in the area. You can drive out to see them. A coworker took me out one day to watch them graze before a backdrop of flare stacks. That sight became the poem "Wood Buffalo":

Wood Buffalo

Below a squid-inked sky
calve the last of their kind

at the edge of the pen
cave to a metallic wind

wading through the mud
where a river should have been (65)

Boom Time was published eleven years after I left Fort Mac. Not long after I left, I felt compelled to write poems about it. I wanted to capture small details about the excess, and the environment, but mostly how the entire experience—the monotony, the grind, the isolation—peeled strips of humanity from the workers. A certain sense of myself was cleaved off, through a process that mostly happened without my consent. Perhaps it was naïveté at its finest, but I hadn't expected a human cost to being in the work camps, nor how this would be exacerbated simply by being female. The sexism was omnipresent, and it was unquestioned that my place was to suck it up and even to enjoy having my body discussed openly before me. My response was impossible and impractical: I attempted to lie low in my armour of baggy hoodies and ride it out. And while my collection isn't a memoir (if you're looking for one, do read Kate Beaton's beyond-excellent

graphic memoir *Ducks*), many of the poems in *Boom Time* work through these sensations of human extraction and accepted sexism in the small ways they seeped into daily life.

While several of the poems give men specific names and histories, no woman—even the narrator of much of the collection—is allowed the same. We are rendered unknowable, both by the men who participate in the harassment and by our own survival techniques. This is perhaps most obvious in the poem “Other Women”:

Other Women

are out here,
in sweaters plain
as prairie grass.
We don't know
each other's names,
faces dim like
frosted glass. (34)

The harassment was isolating. In the camps, I didn't talk much to other people about it—it was just part of the daily routine. On days off, I wanted to forget about it. But a funny thing has happened since publishing *Boom Time*. After readings, women often come up to me to relate similar experiences, across a number of professions: from offshore oil workers, to miners, to scientists working in field camps. In one sense, that's a depressing experience to share. But I've made gratifying connections through chatting with these other women. We swap names, anecdotes, reclaim our pasts, and build something new.

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Lindsay Bird is a poet and documentary producer. Her first poetry collection, Boom Time (Gaspereau Press, 2019), was shortlisted for the Newfoundland Book Awards and the ReLit Award. Her poetry has appeared in many Canadian literary journals, including The Fiddlehead, Riddle Fence, and Event. She lives in Corner Brook, Newfoundland, with her family.

Petrography and Bitumen Poetics

Warren Cariou

In recent years, my thinking about energy poetics has become deeply influenced by my art practice as a photographer, in which I utilize bitumen from the Athabasca tar sands to make photographs. In this work that I call *petrography*, I use the same material that oil companies process into gasoline and other petrochemicals, but I divert it into a different path, enabling it to become a medium of representation. Part of the petrography method involves gathering bitumen in its naturally occurring sites along the Athabasca River and then working with it in an intimate way—getting it on my hands, smelling its pungent aroma, experiencing headaches and delirium if I inhale it for too long. Working in such close proximity to the bitumen, and collaborating with it to create images, has given me a different sense of my relationship to petroleum more generally. I think of my hand-gathered bitumen as a source of creative potential and even beauty, but at the same time I can never forget that it is dangerous, that it needs to be treated with great respect if I am to avoid serious damage. Experiencing this duality of bitumen in my photographic work has influenced my poetry and critical writings as well.

In my scholarly and community-based work, I have studied Indigenous philosophies and land-based practices of energy, focusing on what I call *Indigenous energy intimacy*—a form of relationship in which Indigenous people gather energy from the land through intimate knowledge of the environment and through an ethic of kinship and exchange that understands energy sources as gifts to be reciprocated, rather than resources to be extracted. The Indigenous teachings, stories, writings, and artworks I've learned from have taught me to think of energy as a mode of relationship to the land, one that is governed by the laws and ethical imperatives that apply to all forms of kinship, human and non-human. These ideas have resonated for me in my ongoing relationship with the bitumen I utilize in my petrography. If I consider this bitumen as a gift from the land itself, how do I reciprocate that gift?

What are the ethics of engaging with a form of energy that comes from a living world that I am in a kin relation with? Should I consider the bitumen itself as a relative?

These questions came into sharp focus for me when I first read Métis scholar Zoe Todd's article "Fish, Kin and Hope: Tending to Water Violations in *amiskwaciwâskahikan* and Treaty Six Territory," where she describes fossil fuel as "a paradoxical kind of kin" which has become "weaponise[d]" through decades of misuse and abuse within colonial corporate modernity (104). Todd asks how we can begin to repair that relationship with our fossil kin, and she spells out the critical necessity of doing so in our contemporary moment. She also points towards art and dreaming as the most promising means of accomplishing this goal, asking, "[w]hat other worlds can we dream for the remnants of the long-gone dinosaurs, of the flora and fauna that existed millions of years ago?" (107). One way we can explore these other worlds and other futures, I believe, is by re-opening ourselves to the possibility of intimate relationships with the material sources of our energy—and this is where the world-making potential of *poesis* comes into its own. Poetry lends itself well to the work of intimate sensory connection as well as to the conceptual dynamism of dreaming, and it also enables an elasticity of thinking that can elude the delimiting and atomizing structures of colonial modernity. In the poems "Tar Benediction" and "Tar Curse," below, I reflect on the gifts that bitumen has given me, and also the damage that the commercial use of this material has inflicted upon the environment. For me these poems are a beginning point in my attempts to think through—and to dream—the ethical and spiritual dimensions of my intimate relationship to petroleum.

Tar Benediction

Praise fossils, may they rest in place forever.
 Praise pedestrians.
 Praise lavender and its kin the bees.
 Praise the tar, it clings with love to my hands.
 Praise water protectors.
 Praise the living drum inside our chests.
 Praise medicine gatherers.
 Praise the Athabasca, may it flow as long as grass grows.

Praise the seeps where the tar offers itself.
 Praise the poor.
 Praise the outliers, the off-grid, the eccentrics.
 Praise the sweetgrass that grows above pipelines.
 Praise glaciers.
 Praise the polluted, the tainted, the mutated.
 Praise the stones who mimic us.
 Praise bodies on the line.
 Praise the elders, kinanâskomitinâwâw.
 Praise each breath.
 Praise always to the sun.
 Praise the fireflies, the mayflies, the stoneflies.
 Praise the young.
 Praise the lens and the river of light.
 Praise our tongues.
 Praise the thin slip of air we indwell.
 Praise zooplankton.
 Praise those who listen to rocks.
 Praise all my relations.
 Praise the extinct.
 Praise the worriers, the carers, the fighters.
 Praise all we endanger.
 Praise mirrors.

Tar Curse

lost ceremonies trapline barricades endocrine futurity
 jet stream wandering carcinoma bloom mercury muskrats
 acid rain bile duct anomaly empty money spongy
 pickerel words gone missing fire weather untouchable
 blueberries over/burden full-bellied hunger cellular
 legacies entangled mallards

empty bloom full-bellied mercury entangled futurity
 trapline carcinoma wandering legacies word barricades
 endocrine burden lost mallards cellular ceremonies acid
 blueberries jet stream hunger pickerel anomaly fire
 money spongy bile duct over/weather untouchable rain
 muskrats gone missing

entangled words cellular fire carcinoma ceremonies acid
 bloom untouchable money muskrat hunger lost futurity

trapline burden full-bellied anomaly pickerel gone missing
 barricade weather spongy blueberries over/legacies bile
 duct jet stream mercury wandering empty mallards
 endocrine rain

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Warren Cariou is a writer, photographer, and professor based in Winnipeg, Manitoba. His work focuses on the environmental philosophies and oral traditions of Indigenous peoples in Western Canada, especially in connection to his Métis heritage. He has published works of memoir, fiction, poetry, and film, and his bitumen photographs have been exhibited and published nationally. He has also edited numerous books of Indigenous literature and storytelling. He teaches in the Department of English, Theatre, Film, and Media at the University of Manitoba.

Metabolic Poetics: An Immersive, Interoceptive Approach

Adam Dickinson

After the implementation of the 1989 Canada-US Free Trade agreement, a curious experiment began to unfold in Canada. The food on grocery store shelves suddenly started to change. Tariff barriers fell and increased investment and exports in Canada's food and beverage sector from US companies led to a measurable increase in the daily caloric intake of Canadians, adding about 170 kilocalories per capita (Barlow et al. 637). This was enough to cause an estimated "average weight gain of between 1.8 kilograms and 12.2 kilograms in the Canadian population, depending on sex and physical activity levels" (637). An international trade deal changed the circulation of capital and processed foods, introducing metabolic rifts that concentrated profits in the bank accounts of multinational companies and calories in the waistlines of Canadians.

As the 1989 agreement demonstrates, the circulation of global capital and energy are metabolic forces intimately connected to the metabolism of human and non-human bodies. We have altered or “written” our environment through the pollution of extraction and accumulation, but our environment is also writing us through the porous membranes of our skin, lungs, and digestive tract, altering our hormones, microbiomes, and immune systems. How can poetry make this metabolic writing urgently legible? How can poetry innovate new forms of writing as modes of cultural critique, or as reimagined forms of kinship? I see my work as part of the literary and artistic manifestation of a larger “metabolic turn” across the social and ecological sciences, extending in different ways Marx’s concept of the metabolic rift and its subsequent exploration by John Bellamy Foster, McKenzie Wark, Matthew Gandy, Hannah Landecker, and many others. My ongoing projects could be described as poetic experiments in staging what Landecker and Chris Kelty refer to as “metabolic events,” where environments matter ethically and materially (64).

What I call *metabolic poetics* is an attentiveness through art and criticism to the complex entanglement between local and global metabolisms. It presupposes a concern for reimagining what it means to read and write these interconnections by approaching biological and social metabolic processes as forms of media revealing the molecular intimacy between humans, non-humans, anthropogenic pollution, and the circulation of energy and capital.¹ Metabolic poetics is concerned with the biological consequences of globalization at contrasting scales—whether it is the role of “transportation technologies and human movements” on “the evolution and transmission of infectious diseases” (Harper 11), or how the history of writing itself is implicated in the metabolic processes of power and accumulation through, as Kyle Harper notes, the mercantile necessity for written contracts, accounts, and records (164).

From a metabolic perspective, I am interested not only in the work of *art*, but also the *work* of art—that is, the body and bodily processes from which the work emerges. Consequently, my poetic practice is increasingly situated in the laboratory and involves my body as a research specimen. *Anatomic* (2018), for example, incorporates and responds to the results of chemical and microbial testing on my blood, urine, skin, and feces. I have more recently focused my laboratory

work on a deepening exploration of the interoceptive communicative activities within the body's interior as a way of revealing and responding to how the "outside" writes the "inside." *Interoception* is a term that refers to "the afferent signalling, central processing, and neural and mental representation of internal bodily signals" (Critchley and Garfinkel 7). It is one way of thinking about a "gut sense" or the way in which our moods, self-awareness, and general health are influenced by visceral and other physiological mechanisms (including the digestive and endocrine systems) that are in turn influenced by conscious and unconscious experiences of external sensory environments. Diet, temperature, light, and sound pollution, for example, can alter the metabolism of a body and its interoceptive responses to internal signalling. Engaging with these entanglements, I have conducted experiments involving heat stress in response to climate change, elevating my internal temperature through active and passive means to invite the effects of heat and associated data into writing. I have also worked with a microbiologist, using a series of bioreactors (that mimic the human colon) inoculated with my own gut microbes, to explore the effects of antibiotics, microplastics, and artificial foods on my microbiome.

The "experiment" and the "laboratory" occupy more than figurative or thematic concerns in my work. They are fundamental to my artistic process. The laboratory becomes a site of conceptual experimentation and collaboration. I like to think of its potential for a social poetics, in Mark Nowak's terms, constituting a kind of workshop open to collaboration, resurgence, and innovation with human and non-human kin. Amidst ongoing institutional and governmental deference to science and technology, I like to think that I take a productively disruptive approach to the laboratory by displacing it from its traditional hierarchies and methods to reimagine it as a site of contingent artistic practice, one that makes legible the interoceptive biological and cultural consequences of environmental crises precipitated by metabolic rifts in ecological and social systems. While my experiments are rigorously planned with controls and clear research questions (I had to convince the scientists to collaborate with me in the first place), my work with scientists is ultimately open ended and exploratory.

My experimental practice counters a poetics of extraction by pursuing an explicitly immersive approach to anthropogenic

disruptions in shared sensory environments as well as within our larger microbial and atmospheric commons. By focusing on specific permeable surfaces and sites of circulation where the interoceptive interior of my body is exposed to the exterior world, where the products and influences of late capitalism, with its shifting emphasis on flow, distribution, and exchange, are legible, my experiments serve to scrutinize a nature-writing *I* and its molecular entanglements with local and global metabolic forces. Obviously, I am one body, a body marked with distinct demographic privilege. Are there ways, however, in which any chemically and microbially inflected body, self-consciously situated, might be seen as an opportunity to write about and against the prevailing political pressures that have generated such metabolic interventions at larger scales? It is my hope that my immersive, interoceptive approach to metabolic poetics might offer unique ways to read the writing of the Anthropocene and initiate generative forms of writing, thinking, and collaboration in response.

Note

1. Elsewhere I have defined *metabolic poetics* as “an artistic practice concerned with the potential of expanded modes of reading and writing to shift the frames and scales of conventional forms of signification in order to bring into focus the often inscrutable biological and cultural writing intrinsic to the Anthropocene” (241). See my chapter in *Pataphysics Unrolled*.

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Adam Dickinson is the author of four books of poetry. His latest book, Anatomic (with Coach House Books), involves the results of chemical and microbial testing on his body. His work has been nominated for awards, including the Governor General's Award for Poetry. He teaches at Brock University.

Through Extraction

Cecily Nicholson

*like a tonne per operated hour operating / the main thing is to keep
the main thing the main thing*

—*Triage*

Thank you for this invitation. I begin by reading the piece that opens my first book, *Triage*, published in 2011. I don't return to this book often save for the sequence called "Service," parts of which seem like prayer to me, and help me remember people and experiences from that time. *Triage* warranted a second printing recently, so I've had occasion to return to the work a decade after its first printing. It seemed a good place to start addressing the question of extraction.

The opening poem draws in part from notes I wrote furiously after visiting a copper and molybdenum mine. (This was not my first time in a mine, but I had not experienced anything of this scale before.) I wrote (I thought) practically, recalling signage, transcribing pamphlets, sifting through, and looking up vocabulary, recollecting snippets of dialogue.

Standing on the edge and staring into the maw of one of the largest open-pit copper mines on this continent, a mine noted for having the largest copper reserves in the United States, and for being the site of the world's first commercial scale concentrate leach facility, I learned about "heap leaching."

I learn about its origins in the sixteenth century, when it was developed to use chemical processes more efficient and affordable than conventional processing methods such as flotation, agitation, and vat leaching. Standing with my friend—a worker there, who lived in the company town nearby—looking out over the face onto epic benches that descended from the ground surface into a pit so large as to fit the entire company town. The entire small town, and its limestone quarries I grew up on a farm near, could fit in this pit. I am astonished to realize what human beings can do, and what we choose to do with that capacity. I had never seen so deeply into the ground.

As I stood with my friend and their expectant wife, my eyes followed the pipes. They heaved an unexpected colour of sludge into what was once a valley. I could not come to terms with the former valley that now was a flat plane of tailings. Not a tailings pond, a tailings valley. I was taken aback thinking about what people were able to engineer, manufacture, and operate to extract resources to support dominant ways of consuming and living.

These kinds of thoughts have struck me at points throughout my life. Recognizing the height of industry, the dominance of machinery and its terrifying capacity to suck, reap, leach, and extract, I think of the first time I drove into the south end of Chicago one very hot summer. I remember once seeing a muster of tall ships anchor at Goderich. I recall a tugboat turning around a tanker in an inlet. As a small child, I experienced the horror of a combine, drill rig, and wood splitter. During that visit to that copper mine, not far from where the Sonoran and Mojave Deserts meet, poetry was necessary for me to grasp at the meaning of the place and my efficacy. I processed my notes about volume and extraction, considering how technology and social engineering were scaled in Peru, the Democratic Republic of Congo, China, and Chile.

I worked on the poem I began with one evening break, back in the basement of the Downtown Eastside Women's Centre where I worked in the problematic "social service" industry. Upstairs was an intensive hub of evening programs: "Grief and Loss," "Power of Women," and community sharing a hot meal at suppertime, with participants from the prairies, from the south, and from "strategic gateways" like Kitimat and Fort St. John. At the time, the heart of the city was bracing for the impact of an Olympics, which turned out to be brutal.

Situated within histories of racialized and gendered labour, like *Triage* (2011), a new book is an opportunity to study and to regenerate memory, relations, care, and even soil, for example, in my recent work. In *From the Poplars* (2014), an undercurrent to the study was my effort to situate on land and to learn especially from land dominated by industry since colonial invasion. It considers archives of industry, logging, deforestation, and shipbuilding in the name of coal or war. *From the Poplars* fixes on the genocidal foundation of government in this province. It tries to witness the (literal) decimation of Indigenous people who habited the area where I temporarily reside, as well as those who were shipped here, who were tried and hung here, as plunder dispersed up the watershed in the 1800s.

I situate myself within a history of racialized labour in *Wayside Sang* (2017), as I acknowledge patrilineage and deepen my contemplation of African ancestry as it traversed the Great Lakes. Common cargoes on the Great Lakes include taconite, limestone, grain, salt, coal, cement, gypsum, sand, slag, and potash. Much of the cargo supplies the steel mills of the auto industry, centred around the Lakes because of the ease of transport. It was more accessible for me to study and speak through analogies of roadways and concordant industry than it was to speak to the lack of family and archive in the context of nation-states occupying the americas.

In the context of Canadian literature, I am wary of reductive thought that may be brought with queries of identity. Sharing experiences of trauma, survival, and the projection of being from elsewhere could drive the consumption of my work. I struggle with notions of “literary citizenship” that contrast with other community-based practices of mutual aid, education, and sharing material in modes that are lateral, reparatory, conciliatory, and humble. Rich in writing community undetermined by an ownership class and institutions, as I participate in Canadian literature, it is helpful to study and dismantle extractive discourse while resisting the reproduction of its tendencies. Once again, I appreciate this invitation.

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Cecily Nicholson is the author of four books and past recipient of the Dorothy Livesay Poetry Prize, and the Governor General's Literary Award for poetry. She has been the Ellen and Warren Tallman Writer-in-Residence at Simon Fraser University, and was Writer-in-Residence at the University of Windsor. She teaches at Emily Carr University of Art and Design and collaborates with community impacted by carcerality and food insecurity.

Pocket Notebook Poetics

Kelly Shepherd

I'd like to talk about the relationship between work poetry and ecopoetry.

But first I should come clean and admit that I don't have a lot of interest, or confidence, in labels.

American poet Juliana Spahr writes in *Well Then There Now* about a tendency of nature poetry "to show the beautiful bird but not so often the bulldozer off to the side that [is] destroying the bird's habitat" (69). Ecopoetry, in contrast, is political: "a poetics full of systemic analysis that questions the divisions between nature and culture" (71).

I'd dismiss all this as arbitrary labelling, except that I think Spahr's distinction accomplishes more than was originally intended. The bird-habitat-bulldozer image not only distinguishes ecopoetry from nature poetry but also, perhaps more significantly, connects ecopoetry to work poetry. The inclusion of the bulldozer implicates human labour and industry in ecopoetry.

What's the bulldozer doing there? Who's operating it? And who's paying them?

This can be taken a step further: perhaps work poetry and ecopoetry are not separate categories at all, but rather two expressions of the same approach. I think they might reasonably be seen as two faces of the same impulse: a Janus-poetics.

Just as work cannot be separated from its environmental impacts, these genres should also not be compartmentalized. They're two

separate things, but they're inextricably joined: How do we live on the land without also working there? And how do we work on the land without also affecting (often, damaging) it? How can we talk about one without talking about the other?

Spahr's example invokes connectedness between categories; I think an embodied approach to writing can bridge the gap between theory and our own real, lived experience of these things. I'll try to explain.

One of my first poetic interests was haiku. With its seasonal and bioregional references, haiku is definitely nature poetry. Classical Japanese poets (like Basho, Issa) were writing before and outside of our present-day understandings of "the environment," much less environmental activism. But haiku is also ecopoetry, I would argue, not because it's political—it isn't—but because of the emphasis it places on relationships. Despite its brevity, a haiku poem is not simply about objects. It's always about interconnectedness.

Haiku's ecopoetic qualities have been discussed by various writers—Buddhist philosopher Jason Wirth, Irish-language poet Gabriel Rosenstock—but I'm not aware of any links between haiku and work poetry. (Although I'm sure Gary Snyder has written about it, somewhere.)

There is at least one connection between them, which I've observed in my own personal writing practice.

For over twenty years, I've written in pocket-sized notebooks. I carry them with me everywhere. They're low-tech, no batteries required, which appeals to my Luddite sensibilities.

Small pages make for haiku-sized poems. But even when I'm not writing haiku, I try to be mindful of relationships: between the things being written about, and between the writer and the act of writing. My poems about working in Alberta's tar sands, for example, which were published in *Fort McMurray Tricksters* (2014), bear little resemblance to haiku, but they all started on haiku-sized paper. And they all retain an underlying haiku-ecological concept of interconnectedness.

This writing practice calls for bodily engagement: the notebook rests in the palm of one hand, which resists the slight but steady pressure applied by the other hand as I write. This sounds obvious, but many writers don't do anything without a keyboard. And unlike the experience of a digital screen, when you compose this way, you can physically feel every word that you write.

It's a deliberately slowed-down process, meditative perhaps, and for me, following Charlotte Du Cann (of The Dark Mountain Project), it's an act of "cultural divestment." It's a way to distance one's poetry, and oneself, from digital technology.

Bodily also means *rhythmic*. I often write while I'm walking, so there are all kinds of rhythmic elements involved. One is the heartbeat, which quickens as you walk faster, or as a path grows steeper. When you consciously focus your attention onto your writing hands, you can feel the pulse in your fingertips.

When you write while walking, your choice of footwear influences your poetry.

There is the rhythm of footsteps on the ground or sidewalk, and of breathing when you stop to rest. Haiku have been called *one-breath poems* because they can be recited in one go, without pausing to take a breath. They can be composed that way, too.

I use these pocket-sized notebooks for everything, not just poetry: I jot down bits of conversation I overhear in the hallways at work; I keep a notebook on my bedside table, where I try to capture whatever I can remember from dreams.

The poems in *Insomnia Bird: Edmonton Poems* (2018) were constructed from lines and fragments I wrote in notebooks on public transit, copying text from road signs and books, recording observations about the city. For these poems, I tried to imagine the lines of found text were like the twigs and sticks magpies use to build their nests.

But what, you might be wondering, does this have to do with work poetry, let alone Canada's extraction industries?

I admit this writing practice has no unique relationship to labour or industry. Its connection to work is that you can take it to work. You can't carry a laptop on shift at a cement plant; smartphones aren't allowed on construction sites. But you can always carry notebooks.

I had them in my pockets when I was in the bush in northern BC, in the Arctic doing environmental cleanup, and while labouring in Fort McMurray. The poems were written in the moment, on the job, in steel-toed boots.

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Kelly Shepherd's second poetry collection, Insomnia Bird, won the 2019 Robert Kroetsch City of Edmonton Book Prize and was shortlisted for the 2019 Stephan G. Stephansson Award for Poetry. Kelly has written eight chapbooks, and he is a poetry editor for the environmental philosophy journal The Trumpeter. He has a Creative Writing MFA from UBC Okanagan and an MA in Religious Studies from the University of Alberta. Originally from Smithers, BC, Kelly lives and teaches in Edmonton.

It Fills My Heart to Burst: Writing *Crow Gulch* as an Act of Care and Community

Douglas Walbourne-Gough

My father's family come from Crow Gulch, a now-abandoned community legally ushered off its land by the city of Corner Brook during the late seventies and early eighties. Until fairly recently, Crow Gulch was an area people didn't want to be from: the physical and psychic place within Corner Brook where parents threatened they'd leave you if you misbehaved. With no running water, postal codes, or electricity (power did eventually come, but only to half of the community), and many community members being Mi'kmaq, it was an easy target for a small-minded Newfoundland industrial town. Newfoundland authors Percy Janes and Tom Finn exemplify this in their frankly cruel depictions of Crow Gulch. In the face of their carelessness, I want to talk about the power of care and how that care eventually led to *Crow Gulch*. Specifically, I'm interested in writing care back into the social history and perceptions of the community. Most importantly, I'm gratified to see how that care has rippled outward, touched people in my community, and moved them to reciprocate care for the community of Crow Gulch.

Percy Janes writes disparagingly about the community in his 1970 novel *House of Hate* and 1981 short story collection *Newfoundlanders*, while Tom Finn does so in his 2010 short story collection *Westsidiers*. Janes, Finn, and I all grew up in Corner Brook, and, as mentioned above,

my father's family comes from Crow Gulch. I know intimately both the Corner Brook and the Crow Gulch they write about. I'm heartbroken and angry when I read their defamatory depictions of my father's, grandmother's, and great-grandmother's community as nothing more than a foil to Corner Brook's perceived civility. The carelessness displayed by Finn and Janes creates and distributes misperception and harm towards a community already suffering the stigma of class and race. To better understand my initial reaction, and the subsequent need to respond with care, Janes' and Finn's work needs to be examined directly.

In one of the near-dozen insults to Crow Gulch in *House of Hate*, Janes refers to the community as "the dumping ground for bums, bootleggers, and other less-mentionable outcasts" (33). Meanwhile, his short story "Springfoot" names it the "hangout of whores, bootleggers and other outcasts" (*Newfoundlanders* 11). The story's main character, Moses Spurrell, who makes his home in Crow Gulch, is described by the story's narrator as "less ambitious and less respectable" and that, "with his skin as dark as stained leather and his gaunt features, it was also said that he might have a drop or two of Indian or Jaq'o'tar blood in his veins" (11). Janes carelessly and harmfully presents the Mi'kmaq of Crow Gulch as social refuse, associating them with laziness and criminality. My dismay with the representation of Crow Gulch in Janes' work is compounded by the cultural prominence and critical reception of his writing; *House of Hate* is a seminal Newfoundland novel, complete with an introduction from then-CanLit dignitary Margaret Laurence, originally published by McClelland & Stewart in 1970 with a subsequent reprint by Breakwater Books in 1992. These national and then provincial literary broadcasts spoke loudly, in print, that the place and people of Crow Gulch were less-than, were an inferior foil to Corner Brook.

Finn's version of Crow Gulch further illustrates the once-held social attitude towards both the community and Mi'kmaq people within Corner Brook. *Westiders* was published in 2010, with a subsequent new edition published since, marking over forty years of Crow Gulch serving as inferior foil to Corner Brook within Newfoundland literature. This quote from Finn's story "Quigley's Luck" is a continuation of the same cruelty seen from Janes:

We were cruel as children, and I remember we used to pee into that spring pool and laugh about what the jackytars down the hill would be drinking in their tea for supper. A jackytar, if any of you aren't familiar with the term, was the lowest caste of person in Newfoundland at the time . . . We used to be kept in line with threats of having the jackytars being put after us, or being sent down to live in Crow Gulch and no matter how badly off you might be, there was always the consolation of thinking: *At least I'm not a jackytar, thank God, and have to live in Crow Gulch!* (134)

While Finn's book was not published with a major publisher, it is available from the Newfoundland and Labrador public library and is for sale at local retailers specializing in Newfoundland and Labrador books. Again, I was angry, tempted to write reactively about Janes and Finn, but knew my energy was better used by writing with care for the community of Crow Gulch to end the four decades of public misinformation.

Since the publication of *Crow Gulch*, fellow Mi'kmaq artists Emily Critch and Marcus Gosse have created artworks about their familial ties to the community of Crow Gulch. Just last summer, Gosse and Mi'kmaq artist Jordan Bennett worked with the City of Corner Brook to create a public mural celebrating Crow Gulch. A few weeks later, Corner Brook high school teacher Nancy Jacobsen stopped me in the street and told me she was bringing her high school English class to the mural to better inform their knowledge of local history. Most recently, I collaborated on an audio/video project with Mi'kmaq former Crow Gulch resident Margie Benoit-Wheeler, weaving her recollections of growing up in Crow Gulch with my poems. Most important, though, are the messages where people tell me of a relative who, decades later, finally talks about being from Crow Gulch. Or the simple expressions of gratitude for helping them finally feel seen outside of a stigmatic light in their own hometown.

I don't tell you these things to take credit for them, as no one writes a book or makes art without some sort of community. I tell you because these instances allow Crow Gulch to re-emerge in the larger Corner Brook community as a site of acknowledgement, love, and healing—a far cry from prior careless and harmful literary depictions. Even though it wasn't always clear to me during the near decade it

took to research and write *Crow Gulch*, care has been the drive behind the work. This care has resonated within the larger Corner Brook community and is being returned to the place and the people of Crow Gulch. This fills my heart to burst. Wela'lin.

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Douglas Walbourne-Gough is a poet and mixed/adopted member of the Qalipu Mi'kmaq First Nation from Corner Brook, Newfoundland. His first collection, Crow Gulch, was published with Goose Lane Editions in 2019, has been nominated for several awards, and won the 2021 E.J. Pratt Poetry Award. His second collection, Island, is currently being considered for publication. Douglas' current research interests centre around the Newfoundland Mi'kmaq experience in the wake of the Qalipu enrolment process. He holds an MFA in Creative Writing (UBC Okanagan) and is a PhD candidate in English and Creative Writing (UNB Fredericton).

Reclaiming Matrilineal Roles in the Face of Colonial Violence

Jennifer Wickham, Cas Yikh (Grizzly Bear House), Gidimt'en Clan of the Witsuwit'en Nation

The truth is that the colonizers have always had the same intention: to steal our land. And we have always done what is in our laws to do: protect it. We have never asked for more than what is ours. Something we have taken to the highest courts in so-called Canada and won. We have never lost our rights and title. I think about everything from residential schools and the extraction of children from our homes and the territory. And the government's mandate to kill the Indian in the child. The extraction of our Indigeness and, of course, everything on our territories, from the trees and animals and minerals, to hydroelectricity dams and my grandfather's community that was completely burned down and flooded out to power the Alcan aluminum

but we are STILL HERE

What if I told you that canada wants to kill us

Not just our 'indigenouness'
our ceremonies and languages
our stories, laws and songs

they want us in the ground

because our spirits are too strong
and they've been trying to steal our land for too long
we've had ENOUGH

and when we stand up, rise up, war cry with our fuckin fists up
it's time to throw down with the crown

they send the army in
because that's the only way they *think* they can win

and what if I told you they moved in
not knowing that my 3-year-old niece had been moved out
because they don't care about our children
Skiy ze' Ye' toh yez
our future matriarch
one more Witsuwit'en bottoming out their bottom line

she is unbreakable

just like her mother, and her mother and her mother
her bloodline is the mountains, rivers, and trees

what if I told you
that we are ALL the answer to our ancestors' prayers
and what if you believed me?

Knowing that TC Energy, the parent company of Coastal GasLink, the RCMP, as well as the Ministry of Children and Families were all working together in order to remove my sister, and they showed up with sniper rifles, attack dogs, lethal force. They keep trying to steal our children and our land. As my sister said during that raid, "Nothing has changed in 150 years." And it's true even today.

This final poem is something that is on my mind often. It's not a current fight, but it definitely informs, and contributes to, my passion for what we're doing currently.

My Soft Heart Herds

My ancestors ate caribou
and yet there is no one in my family to tell me what they taste like
Alcan drowned what was left after the CN railway cut them off

I mourn them often
full chest heaving painful sobs like I'm being crushed by the loss
but when I talk about them my words just dissipate

Maybe it's too painful
like admitting that we have lost something so sacred makes it real
and we all turn to elk and moose to fill our plate, in silence

I feel it all
and it's a joke that I cry about everything but I can't hold it
anymore
the pain of the land and the water is too loud to ignore

They're in my bones
and the strength in my DNA fed from millennia of these beautiful
beasts
and the land that sustained them fuels my resistance

I wear their memory as a shield
protecting whatever it is we have left and shaking the rest of you
awake
I'll show you every day even when you hate me

Our survival depends on it.

As we approached the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Delgamuukw-Gisday'wa Supreme Court decision on December 11, 2022, I was reminded of how long our ancestors have been fighting to protect our territories. Every generation of Witsuwit'en has done their part in their time to fight back. It's not just our rights that we are enacting, it is our responsibilities. We will not allow industry and government to continue their colonial tactics to divide and conquer, manipulate and oppress us

into despair. We have a duty to our grandchildren and all those yet to be born. That includes to all of you.

Awetza.

Jennifer Wickham is a member of Cas Yikh (Grizzly Bear House) in the Gidimt'en (Bear/Wolf) Clan of the Witsuwit'en people. She fell in love with Wedzin Kwa in 2012 and moved home to defend her against the multiple pipelines proposed through her traditional territories. Jennifer has been the Media Coordinator for Gidimt'en Checkpoint since 2018 and is currently co-producing/co-directing the documentary film Yintah about the Witsuwit'en fight for sovereignty.

Water Teaches Love and Law

Rita Wong

I speak to you from unceded Squamish, Musqueam, and Tsleil-Waututh territories today, but I've been honoured to go up and visit Wet'suwet'en territories a number of times over the years. I was born on Treaty 7 territory, also known as Calgary. Because of where I grew up, I feel like I have a responsibility to address the effects of oil on the land, and the water, and the air. The Wedzin Kwa—it is one of only two rivers in my whole life that I've ever been able to drink straight out of. This water is incredibly clean, it is precious, and the land and water protectors and people up in the Wet'suwet'en Yintah are so inspiring. I want to begin by acknowledging that, and all the folks who are doing incredible work in terms of standing up against police violence and corporate violence.

As you may know, the Unist'ot'en built a Healing Centre blocking a dozen or so different pipeline proposals, and they stopped many of those pipelines from going through. This latest effort by Coastal GasLink is the only one that has gotten as far as it has. I want to acknowledge how much incredible work has been done over the years; I want to acknowledge that the work being done in Wet'suwet'en involves simultaneous healing and blocking further damage. I want to think about our responsibilities and also acknowledge how the work has brought people up to Wet'suwet'en territories from around the world.

When the Gidimt'en checkpoint came up, it was in solidarity with Unist'ot'en, it was in response to RCMP intrusion on Wet'suwet'en land, and it was a very courageous and bold move for Gidimt'en to step up. And when people go up and visit, the land up there is just incredibly beautiful, the water is still drinkable; it is an abomination and an unacceptable act of state violence that BC and Canada would allow drilling under this river when the salmon are spawning. It really raises a question about the gap between Canada's rhetoric and what it's actually doing on the ground in terms of financing and enforcing this destruction.

The afterword to my recent book, *Current, Climate* (2021), starts with two epigraphs. The first is a quote from Chief Dan George, who's from the Tsleil-Waututh nation: "You and I need the strength that comes from knowing that we are loved. With it we are creative. With it we march tirelessly. With it, and with it alone, we are able to sacrifice ourselves for others" (George 40). The kind of sacrifice I've been seeing up there definitely comes from a place of love. There's no other way you could continue that resistance without that depth of love. And then the second quote is by a 1970s Aboriginal activist group in Queensland, Australia: "If you have come here to help me you are wasting your time, but if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together" (Watson). As both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, we all have a stake in the health of the environment.

An older poem of mine, "night gift," which was written years before I spent time in jail for all of this stuff, speaks also to these concerns with community, resistance, and liberation. The poem concludes:

as rivers & oceans fill with carcinogenic wastes from the
petroleum-plastic supply chain, the political systems follow,
stuffed full of suncorpse & tired old neocolonial ego that
refuses to stop growing until it reaches the limits of the
planet's patience. who knows what alliances & monkey
wrenches will be enough to stop the greed of the greasy
machine? what I do know is the humble migrants who've
travelled the ocean have felt its wisdom more deeply than
an arrogant elite that doesn't heed the world's necessary
stories. jail the stories & the storytellers, but they will keep
speaking the night, until empire expires, with or without the
multitudes alive. in this race may we be ready to move fast,

yet steady enough to encompass musicians & lake gatherings, forests & guerrilla gardens, fuelled by a love more immense than the injustices we've inherited. we need to live the world that is possible even while we struggle through war. respect living coasts & fluid watersheds, not murderous Imperial borders. in grief & in celebration, in fear & in courage, in anger & in compassion, the night replenishes us so that we may continue to embody her songs. (23)

To close, thinking about the modes of kinship I write towards in my poetry, I want to address the question of law, because Wet'suwet'en, Coast Salish, and other Indigenous laws predate so-called Canada. We're beholden to these laws first and foremost, if we're here. As Lee Maracle taught me so many years ago, if you're on this land, you're beholden to these responsibilities and these laws; even if you weren't taught them, you're still responsible. I think about that, in terms of a rule of law based in love and based in care, based in a long-term vision for one's community, versus a rule of law under colonial governments that's based in fear, based in hierarchy, based in intimidation, that is not about kin-making but about alienating people from the land. We have before us two ways of thinking about kinship and law, and Indigenous law—wherever we are, according to the Indigenous communities there—is something that we need to remind people of and educate ourselves about.

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Rita Wong lives, writes, and works in unceded Coast Salish territories (Vancouver) and teaches at Emily Carr University of Art and Design. Her books of poetry such as undercurrent, beholden: a poem as long as the river (with Fred Wah and the Columbia River), and perpetual (with artist Cindy Mochizuki) are dedicated to questions of water, ecosystem, and climate justice within commitments to decolonial, Indigenous-led relational ethics.

Climate and Imagination

Kathryn Mockler, ed.

Watch Your Head: Writers and Artists Respond to the Climate Crisis. Coach House \$23.95

Reviewed by Paul Huebener (Athabasca University)

The problem of representing the climate crisis in literature and art is a famously vexing one, and there has been much wringing of hands about whether literary texts are capable of adequately reflecting the realities of climate change, let alone of provoking people into doing something about it. Among the most notable recent commentary on the supposed failure of literature in this regard is Amitav Ghosh's *The Great Derangement*, in which Ghosh declares that because the English tradition of literary novels has always been centred on the notion of the individual protagonist, the novel form is poorly suited to represent the large-scale problems of climate change and the Anthropocene. This failure of the dominant literary imagination, Ghosh says, "will have to be counted as an aspect of the broader imaginative and cultural failure that lies at the heart of the climate crisis" (8).

Ghosh's complaint has turned out to be useful largely because it is so irritating; it calls out for rebuttals. One way to respond to his critique is to step around it by remembering that the novel is not the only game in town. If a key problem with climate change is that certain voices are being silenced, certain experiences disregarded, then what better way to address the issue than with an anthology comprised of works in multiple forms and genres from a strikingly diverse set of contributors? *Watch Your Head: Writers and Artists Respond to the Climate Crisis* takes up this challenge.

Poet and writing professor Kathryn Mockler, who organized a live reading event in 2019 that inspired the larger *Watch Your Head* project, is named as the primary editor of the volume, alongside an additional fourteen co-editors. At my count, the volume includes selected work from a whopping eighty-two contributors. These selections include fiction, non-fiction, poetry, photography, and visual art, from contributors who are variously Indigenous, Black, People of Colour, immigrants, and settlers—most, but not all, of whom are living in Canada. The introduction by Stephen Collis, Madhur Anand, and Kathryn Mockler notes that the book and its companion website emerge from an ethic of climate change protest; the title *Watch Your Head* "comes from the language of caution signs" (9), reflecting the aim of taking action to avoid catastrophe. In an interview with the CBC, Mockler elaborates that the phrase "watch your head" also asks readers to rethink their own mentalities, inviting a "critique of self-interest" ("Western").

Watch Your Head prioritizes the matter of climate justice, through which the climate crisis is understood to be inextricably linked to colonization, racism, and other forms of oppression. Collis, Anand, and Mockler write that the contributors to the volume

give voice to widely shared fears and the enveloping sense of the uncanniness of our times; they attempt to imagine the unimaginable; they remind us what we can and must attend to, and what we are unavoidably attached to; they explore the limits and possibilities of language in the face of catastrophe, loss, and grief; and, of course, they name names and take numbers, looking for payback. (13)

As a result of this diversity of genre, form, approach, and perspective, the volume rebukes the all-too-common universalizing environmentalist rhetoric that glosses over climate injustice by speaking of “our shared future.” Likewise, the ethic of the book is largely compatible with Kathryn Yusoff’s important volume *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*, in which she argues that the notion of the Anthropocene must be challenged in its universalizing function and must be understood in the context of racism, colonization, and slavery. While Yusoff painstakingly worries at the Anthropocene, *Watch Your Head* challenges the notion largely through the canny tactic of pointedly avoiding it.

Poetry is a central feature of *Watch Your Head*, and the poetic contributions reflect a variety of forms and intentions. While the publisher pitches the book as “a call to climate-justice action,” this is a reductive account, and some of the best poetry prompts a more nuanced engagement with specific forms of experience, witnessing, and reshaping. Chris Bailey, a poet and commercial fisherman from Prince Edward Island, notes that the “good oak” (73) suitable for repairing lobster traps has instead been used to build homes for part-time residents. The wood is “gone for the floors of large houses that sit / empty three quarters of the year,” while the part-timers raise a fuss about the island’s tax policies and the “windmills that churn // Island air their lungs seldom breathe” (73). Jane Shi’s poetry expands the geographical perspective of the volume; reflecting on the phrase *jia you*, a Chinese expression that means “add oil” but is used in social situations to mean “good luck,” Shi connects the persistence of oil within this phrase to the drive to build pipelines from Russia to China and across Turtle Island. Her audience will see their taro bubble tea differently after reading: “drink oil-flavoured bbt with the thick straw of a gun barrel. / brush your teeth with bitumen paste” (241). Certain poems take on a more direct activist stance, as with Săkhitowin Awāsis’ “to cope”:

this is natural law renaissance
embodying ancestors’ excellence
bringing land back
on ready when RCMP attack (198)

Some of the strongest writing in the volume comes in the form of personal essays. Waubgeshig Rice, known for his apocalyptic novel *Moon of the Crusted Snow*, writes memorably about how Canadian authorities had erased his great-great-grandfather’s surname, *Menominee*—an Anishinaabe term for wild rice—and forced him to adopt the anglophone name *Rice*, so that “[o]ur wild-rice heritage was thus erased in name, and would only be passed down in story” (57). The poignancy of this is heightened because the English name *Rice* is still attached to Waubgeshig himself, and the full power of the essay, in its embodiment of value through narrative, takes form through the decision of Waubgeshig and his wife Sarah to give their son the last name *Manoominii*, a contemporary spelling of the term for wild rice that serves as a reclamation of identity.

Another highlight is Carleigh Baker’s story “Grey Water,” whose narrator describes staying alone at a house on one of BC’s Gulf Islands whose owner has allowed her only a three-minute shower four times a week to conserve water, but has also, infuriatingly, asked her to keep the dahlias in the garden properly watered. “Don’t worry about yourself,” the narrator grumbles, “but make sure a bunch of decorative plants in the front yard look their best. . . . *The dahlias are more important than you*” (86). As the narrator decides, scandalously, to take a bath, the story is coloured by terrible guilt over the wasted water as well as fury at the indignity of having to care so much about the miserly use of toilets and showers. I won’t spoil the ending, but it astonishes.

There is too much I can't get into here: the photography, the paintings, Sarah Pereux's disturbing sketch of an impossibly broken Canada goose. Kazim Ali writes of returning to his childhood home in a forgotten company town built for the construction of the Jenpeg Generating Station in Manitoba, where the dam has devastated the shorelines, the Pimicikamak community is overrun with suicide, and "[t]he lake is an adversary now" (114). In her "Lessons from Prison," Rita Wong describes being arrested in 2018 for sitting and praying in front of the Trans Mountain Pipeline terminal in Burnaby. Wong observes that despite the hardship of being sentenced to twenty-eight days in prison, she was more prepared for prison than she is for the climate crisis.

With so many contributions, there is plenty of opportunity for a generous-reader approach: linger on the selections that speak to you, and you won't have to worry overmuch about the pieces that don't. Some readers might have preferred for the editors to include fewer, more rigorously vetted contributions, but the overflowing nature of this anthology is part of the point. Cultural visions of climate change have been hampered by universalizing narratives, and to the extent that Ghosh is right about the imaginative failure driving the climate crisis, literature needs to go further in reflecting the large, complex, diverse conditions of the present age of ecological trouble. This makes *Watch Your Head* bigger than the sum of its parts. By assembling so many voices, the book shows what an ethic of climate justice needs to look like: a place where multiple perspectives are bound together and share some common needs, but raise distinct concerns that will not be reduced to a singular vision.

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Then, Mars

Donna Kane

Orrery. Harbour \$18.95

M. Travis Lane

Keeping Count. Gordon Hill \$20

Dani Spinosa

00: Typewriter Poems. Invisible \$21.95

Reviewed by Clayton Longstaff (Author, Poet)

On February 18, 2021, NASA's *Perseverance* rover, endearingly nicknamed "Percy," landed on Mars, sending back to Earth the first videos and high-resolution colour photographs of the red planet. Meanwhile on Earth, deaths attributable to the COVID-19 pandemic well surpassed two million and nearly half of the total population of Texas was catapulted into a Dark Ages-like state of no heat, no electricity, no running water, and, for some, no food, amid a record-breaking cold snap that held a large portion of North America in its grip. I watched the landing

live on my computer while I lay in bed listening to The Beatles with these three books—Donna Kane's *Orrery*, M. Travis Lane's *Keeping Count*, and Dani Spinosa's *00: Typewriter Poems*—scattered where I could reach them if the visuals on my computer screen got too dizzying. Which they did, immediately. It was like what you see when you stick your head out of the window on the freeway and pry your eyelids back, but the car is going over thirty thousand kilometres an hour and the freeway is a literal expanse of nothing. Then, Mars.

My bed has become an epicentre for global news, world cinema, natural history, and a myriad of curiosities that pass for thought these days. The interstice, in this case the Google Search portal, is relentless in its effort to bridge the space between the world and me, answering every question I jam into it, from "How old is the world?" to "What colour of shoes should I buy?" When I initially searched the poet Dani Spinosa's surname, the initial letter S first offered the end of a leash to "SpaceX"—a search term from when my partner's mom's partner said she saw a string of lights in the sky that might have been a UFO but was actually the hideous face of one of our own, orbiting the night while most of us slept. Next, Google suggested "spice or herb," from which I realized that I couldn't define the difference between the two. *D* came up as "Do sharp-tailed snakes lay eggs?" When an etymology website told me that the word *world* was a compound of the Old English words *wer* (man) and *eld* (age), meaning roughly "age of man," I wondered if the headlines that I was reading and rereading as typos were in fact true: that *Perseverance* was the largest, most advanced rover NASA had ever sent to another world. That planets besides our own were becoming worlds. And that the only chance we had at saving our own, the original world, would indeed require some kind of un-worlding.

The aesthetic experience of being immersed in the presence of art may offer a version of un-worlding. A song, for example, that, for the few minutes it plays, carries you not away but deeper into your own realm of subjectivity. A sculpture, whose contours in the particular moment of viewing, appear to trace the ridges and gullies of some dark, meandering, cavernous interiority of your own. The world and your experience of it are momentarily one. An act of love, I imagine. This love, this deep connection with the physical world, this prioritization of what is here, what is underfoot, is what lights fireworks from within the poetry of M. Travis Lane:

a lover's knot redone, redoing,
yes —

but pull a thread:
music turns (75)

Lane's *Keeping Count* lets the thread unravel, revealing a world that is constantly spinning into life inside our own. But maybe *world* isn't the right word.

The book begins and, for the most part, remains in the tight, condensed, lyrical style for which Lane has been heralded since her debut collection was published back in 1969. The subjects that carry the poems in her latest collection are the rocks, birds, rivers, and seasons of her Fredericton home. However, each of these sites becomes a locus of transformation and renewal, surprising the reader as a mirror slides in between the page and the reader's eyes. An example of this pivoting occurs in a poem titled "The Satellite," in which the lonely, impertinent "star" "stares / as if it were significant / but not, like stars, reliable" (9). Uncertainty, as a fundamental

characteristic of life, and the desire to control uncertainty being the impetus behind so much of humankind's most damning activities, works in these poems to suspend the reader from leaning on fixity as a crutch.

Uncertainty is celebrated in these pages as an open invitation to imagine, wonder at, the magic that constantly surrounds us. A poem called "The Comfort That We Knew" catches the spirit of beauty in the face of uncertainty—the willfulness of enduring life and love when one is certain in its transience and the other undefinable:

Without intention, joy, or grief,
we crumble like a faded leaf:
to dust to rock to starry plain —
a different life starts up again —

not mine, not yours, but new
and, like our own, is transient.
And love and love?
is still our home.

Be patient. (56)

In an endnote to the book, Lane gives a brief prosaic account of what she calls "Deep Listening." "Had I as a child ever heard silence?" she asks herself (75). As her hearing declines she finds herself listening even closer, though now it appears memory has become inextricable from her sense perception: "whispering poets have merged for me into the sounds of water on stone or wind on trees" (75). Despite Lane being a poet of exquisite observation, her subjects of study never fail to reflect the gaze back at the viewer.

Like the satellite in M. Travis Lane's poem, which the speaker acknowledges may not be there tomorrow but elsewhere, "still blind, still ignorant, / [staring] at someone else's night" (9), Donna Kane's latest collection of poetry takes a spacecraft for its subject. However, unlike M. Travis Lane, Kane doesn't let the spacecraft leave her sight. NASA's *Pioneer 10*, a space probe launched in 1972 to study Jupiter's moons, is the centripetal force that holds *Orrery* in the human orbit, exploring consciousness, materiality, temporality, and what it means to be both literally and metaphorically a body caught in space.

Despite light years of meaningless meandering, the human image is a reflection that *Pioneer 10* simply cannot escape. Having retired in 2003 when NASA stopped sending signals to it, *Pioneer 10* continues to roam deep space without intent or purpose—a perfect symbol of both capitalistic refuse and the existential problem that consciousness carries with it. Brought into existence only to be abandoned when its utilization becomes obsolete, forever thereafter condemned to wander without ever wondering why—but is this secretly the real mission? This ability to escape the question why? Is this the metaphor that will carry consciousness through the brain's padded walls, past its gravitational boundaries to where the world really is—not the "age of man," but where things exist outside of ourselves? "The world that impenetrable, / the lake so cold and clear if you leapt, / you know you would disappear" (58).

Even though much of *Orrery* takes place in a land far far away, in thinking about space travel Donna Kane uncovers truths about humankind that make living on Earth appear just as dazzling, wondrous, and nebulous as a trip through the cosmos. "For years, I tried to picture the Earth's orbit" (29), begins her poem "On the Material World." The speaker's husband enters the scene with an egg, an orange, and

a flashlight. However, when trying to recount the astronomy lesson later, all that she remembers is her husband's figure, her bodily reaction to it:

I tried again to imagine the Earth's spin and tilt
in the eye of my mind, but couldn't detach
from my bodied weight, the place where thought
took shape and mattered. (29)

Notions of materiality and the embodiment of thought emerge poignant and luminous as the speaker's gaze turns upwards and the imagination extends out. Still, this directionality of *up* and *out* is contested when the speaker of "Ascension" points brilliantly to the sun: "how it rises each morning, / how our bodies shine with its light" (33). The speaker's church is the church of light, which glows in everybody under the sun. It's here, it's there, it's everywhere.

Dani Spinosa's latest book of poetry is conceptually radical, formally daring, and stylistically wonderful—as smart and imaginative as anything one should by now expect of Spinosa. The poems in *00: Typewriter Poems* are mostly appropriations of major (male) figures in the tradition of visual poetics, forging a conversation with masculinist ideals in a fashion that is by some way of enchantment able to simultaneously critique, challenge, pay tribute, and honour.

The word *conversation* is critical to Dani Spinosa's vision of not only poetry, but literature in general. This is a vision of literature that is "built on writing as an act of sharing, of becoming stronger and more beautiful in the ways that our writing reads back over the writing that came before it, and leaves itself open and unfinished for the writing that comes after" (1). It isn't a rejection, per se, of the masculine principle that views writing as a solitary act, a one-man show (the word *author* itself comes from the Old French *autor*, meaning "father," "creator"), but instead anatomizes that idea and rearranges its parts to create something new. This is the true spirit of the vanguardist tradition. Still, by refusing to reject what came before her, Spinosa lands in a unique position of innovation and tradition—a contradictory seat in which this writer appears quite comfortable, though it might infuriate those whose salaries are made by carving leaded lines of clear distinction. "[W]omen borrow," Kate Siklosi suggests in a conversation with Spinosa in the afterword included in the book. "We borrow all the time. We borrow stories from each other to protect ourselves. We borrow each other's clothes. We borrow things from each other because for us it's an exchange" (67). This idea of borrowing as a feminist act speaks to the glosa form and what Spinosa's adaptation of it means in the context of her project. These poems never feel as if they were made judgmentally, or out of a place of hate. These are not attacks. Spinosa herself even goes as far as calling the book "a collection of love poems" (1), which is a sentiment with reverberations all throughout.

It's her remarkable balance as she walks the line to hypocrisy that makes Spinosa singular as a feminist, a poet, and a scholar: "What's at stake really for me in this moment to say: I really hate the machismo persona that's a part of this thing I love, but I also just, like, love that thing and love what it is? And maybe I even love the writing with your dick part. Maybe there's something nice about that" (73). In *00: Typewriter Poems*, Spinosa communicates with love that contradiction is inherent to the typeface.

Learning from the Canoe

Bruce Erickson and Sarah Wylie Krotz, eds.

The Politics of the Canoe. U of Manitoba P \$27.95

Reviewed by Misao Dean (University of Victoria)

In the latter part of the twentieth century, research on canoes and canoeing was mainly carried out by scholars in fields like leisure and sports, with a sprinkling of museum curators. Outliers like *The Canoe and Whitewater*, by constitutional scholar C. E. S. Franks, or *The Legend of John Hornby*, by Coleridge specialist George Whalley, were shelved alongside how-to manuals and summer camp memoirs, despite their literary and historical riches. Canoe history was to a large extent an arena for popularizers and promoters of a particular vision of the nation that offered canoeing uncritically as a means to mature individuation and a felt and material patriotism, and was dominated by a tone of personal enthusiasm, if not outright sentimentalism.

Thus the grouping of recent critical books on canoes and canoeing by Canadian historians, ecologists, and literary scholars—Bruce Erikson's *Canoe Nation* (2013), Jessica Dunkin's *Canoe and Canvas* (2019), and my own *Inheriting a Canoe Paddle* (2013), as well as *The Politics of the Canoe*, under review here—might seem like a strange blip in scholarly publishing. But this blip was prepared for by the work of scholars like Alan Lawson, Terry Goldie, and Stephen Slemon on the narration of the settler subject, and the underlying contradiction of settler nationalism. Because canoes figure in Canadian narratives of nationhood as well as Indigenous histories and knowledges, they are a fruitful focus for exploring the central anxiety of settler culture, the anxiety caused by the realization that what is “ours” is also potentially, or even always already, “theirs.” The use of the canoe to symbolize the nation takes advantage of the seemingly transparent materiality of the canoe and canoeing practices to disguise these contradictions, and with them the historical constructedness of the nation itself.

Roland Barthes, in his book *Mythologies*, provides a model for how the investigation of the meanings attributed to common material objects and practices can provide insight into culture. Douglas Coupland invites such investigations into Canadian culture with his *Souvenir of Canada* project, populated with objects like Oopikis, table hockey, KD boxes, and stubby beer bottles, all evocative of the version of Canada he grew up with. But rather than simply providing a hit of nostalgia, current canoe scholarship links personal experience to political critique in its emphasis on undercutting naturalized narratives of Canadian “belonging” and insisting on prior and proportionate Indigenous ownership of the narrative and the nation.

The articles collected in *The Politics of the Canoe* begin where previous books left off, by describing efforts to mobilize the cultural significance of the canoe and the practice of paddling in current practices of decolonization. The introduction begins by describing the haunting stop-motion animation “How to Steal a Canoe” by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, in which a young Nishnaabeg woman, Kwe, rescues an Indigenous canoe from the “canoe jail” of museum shelves and restores it to the water (qtd. 1). This discussion sets up the book's approach of centring Indigenous paddlers and collaborators, and using storytelling, reportage, historical research, and appeals to feeling to engage readers with the uses of the canoe in narratives of decolonization.

The first section consists of three articles co-authored by respected Indigenous elders and paddlers who have been central to the mobilization of the canoe in Indigenous resurgence movements. Frank Brown (Heiltsuk) and his co-authors provide a solid

anchor for the collection in their account of the central role of the Heiltsuk Nation in the founding of Tribal Canoe Journeys among the canoe nations of the West Coast. The authors of the second article provide a more personal account of the participation of their “canoe family” in Tribal Canoe Journeys and the overall significance of the canoe to the Chinook Nation (which is currently not recognized as a nation by the US government).

The third article, by Tłıchǫ Elder John B. Zoe and Jessica Dunkin, is particularly memorable: it recounts the founding of a yearly canoe journey “Whaèhdǫ ǫ Etǫ K’e (The Trails of Our Ancestors)” (73)—across Tłıchǫ territory and the significance of this journey in treaty negotiation and in the resurgence of traditional culture among young people. Whaèhdǫ ǫ Etǫ K’e emphasizes the links between stories, culture, language, and land in Tłıchǫ culture. The article explains how the resumption of treaty negotiations in the early 1990s inspired Tłıchǫ elders to focus on reacquainting young people with their land and its traditions through canoe travel, and how the canoe program helped build community consensus toward a successful treaty. The article includes photographs of important landmarks, such as Dedats’eetsaa, a split boulder that was traditionally a place where belongings were stored for later retrieval, a fitting metaphor for the recovery of traditional stories associated with specific places on Tłıchǫ land. As Zoe emphasizes in the contributors’ notes, “[t]he stories are really in the landscape, and the pages turn with dips of the paddle” (247).

The second section highlights the building of birchbark canoes. It includes an essay co-written by Chuck Commanda (grandson of the famous canoe builders William and Mary Commanda) on the cultural and political significance of canoe construction in Algonquin communities. Commanda and his co-authors emphasize the teaching of canoe building. “When we use our hands, bodies, minds, and spirits to harvest materials and build a canoe,” they write, “we are connecting the pieces together that represent our relationships with the natural world, the spirits, and other people” (122). An article by anthropologist Jonathan Goldner on trying to find and harvest birchbark for a canoe reiterates the way that canoe building vitally links the builder to culture and politics. Details like the time of year to harvest, the kind of forest setting, and the size of tree link to resource management practices, histories of possession and dispossession, climate change, and the problems of preserving traditional Indigenous knowledge.

Chris Ling Chapman’s article on the use of Tappan Adney’s archive as a source for Indigenous knowledge provides useful methodological insight. Adney is perhaps less well known than he might be. A settler illustrator and writer for *Outing* magazine at the turn of the century, he became obsessed with recording and learning the Maliseet language. He also built an astonishing collection of scale models of Indigenous watercraft, prepared meticulously in collaboration with Indigenous canoe makers. His work is part of the “salvage” paradigm, created on the assumption that Indigenous peoples and their cultures would inevitably disappear, and his archive was thus determined by settler priorities. Despite his colonialist assumptions, Adney’s meticulous and respectful record keeping has made his work an important source for Indigenous linguistic researchers and historians, and an ongoing demonstration of the way that archives can exceed their makers’ intentions, and speak with many voices.

The third section of *The Politics of the Canoe* is the most diverse. Albert Braz’s article on Don Starkell’s epic canoe journey from Winnipeg to Brazil is one of the strongest in the book in both scholarship and readability. His topic, he correctly points out, has been neglected by previous scholars, partly because Starkell resists

the nationalist narrative of the canoe, and partly because of his abrasive insistence on framing his canoeing in terms of masculine competition and accomplishment, in contrast to the experiential and phenomenological turn of much canoe literature. Peter Wood's article on Louis-Armand de Lom d'Arce de Lahontan's *New Voyages to North America* (1703) argues that the marginal illustrations of canoes on Lahontan's hand-drawn maps provide important information about his route and the Indigenous peoples he encountered. Wood argues convincingly that the canoe illustrations identify Lahontan's "Rivière Longue," often considered merely fictional, as the Missouri River. Cameron Baldassarra's article explores the politics of the canoe more directly in the mobilization of whitewater enthusiasts to fight a proposed dam on the Petawawa River, a contemporary local struggle that brought the canoe community together with the town and the local First Nation. Baldassarra's story also references canoe activism in the "Paddle for the Peace" in 2018 against the Site C Dam in British Columbia, and the "Paddle in Seattle" in 2015 against a Shell oil rig.

Danielle Gendron's article "Unpacking and Repacking the Canoe" provides an opportunity for reflection at the end of the book. It tells the story of Gendron's canoe trip with her father along the Trent-Severn Waterway, undertaken as part of her PhD research into her own Métis history. Gendron aspires to understand the roles of canoe travel in the lives of her ancestors, and to explore the representation of Indigenous histories along the waterway. Gendron concludes that she travels a "colonialscape" that shares little with the experience of her ancestors beyond "[t]he way that our bodies move in order to propel the canoe through water" (236).

The Politics of the Canoe is a wonderful collaboration between Indigenous knowledge keepers and academics, and full of interesting, inspiring, and entertaining information. I inhaled it over two days of non-stop reading and took away much that will be useful in my research and my life. The thoughtful conclusion to Jonathan Goldner's article strikes me as a message that all settlers can stand to hear:

Reconciliation doesn't just call for massive social and political changes in Indigenous-settler relations; it also calls for creative encounters that can effect change on the micro-political, individual, and local level. The compelling politics of canoe building is that it has always been a site of social gathering where the construction of canoes responds to the projected needs of the not-so-distant future. As such, it has the potential to create a powerful space that draws people from all nations into productive collaborations based on our shared and disparate experiences. (151)

A Wild, Aggregate Mind

John Steffler

Forty-One Pages: On Poetry, Language, and Wilderness. U of Regina P \$21.95

Reviewed by Brian Bartlett (Author, Poet)

"The potentiality of the page, the expectancy it sets up is related in my mind to . . . birth, hatching, sprouting" (2), writes poet John Steffler in this diamond-bright book of meditative prose. "The page can be experienced as an offering of food, as offering or receiving a gift" (2). Such metaphors hardly exhaust Steffler's ways of

thinking about our valuing of words. In his search for accuracy, he likens a page to a “room,” “axis point,” “passageway” (3), “performance space” (2), and “clearing in time” (3), each comparison suggesting different qualities in language. In saying that “the page is much older than paper or clay tablets” (3), Steffler also offers a view of contained, containing language that inhabits spheres beyond tactile materials.

Saying that a book seems several times longer than it is can be an act of praise. *Forty-One Pages* is compact and concentrated, yet also multi-faceted and densely lit (the diamond metaphor comes back to mind). The book’s title includes several curiosities. *Forty-One Pages* heads a book 119 pages long but built of 41 parts, which range from cultural commentary and philosophical reflections to poetry discussions and autobiographical bits. The subtitle, *On Poetry, Language, and Wilderness* (reminiscent of *Field Notes on Poetry and Wilderness*, the subtitle of Don McKay’s influential 2001 prose book, *Vis à Vis*), lists three of the book’s key themes, but it might also have included *writing, culture, technology, Indigeneity, or silence*. Steffler’s statement that “my own practice is largely a non-theoretical groping” is matched by his book’s structure (21), one less of procedural argumentation than of changeability and collage. Eight of the sections are new Steffler poems, their thick diction and excited rhythms boding well for the poet’s next collection.

Doubleness is a key characteristic of Steffler’s thinking. Of his own poetry-writing, he tells us: “I pursue whims, make commitments and betray them, contradict myself, hammer away stupidly at something” (21). He sees contradiction as inevitable, even desirable, as long as we don’t ignore either side of a duality. A two-directional approach is evident, for instance, when he writes: “Wilderness is what I want to leave alone *and* what I want to explore” (22). Other kinds of doubleness Steffler honours include those between thought and instinct; between the desire for closeness to one’s environment and awareness of “people whose ancestors have lived in this landscape for thousands of years” (69); between language as “still far and away humanity’s defining technology” and as “a kind of brainwashing it is good to question” (46, 14); and between seriousness and lightness. (A voice asks, “Is flippancy sometimes a way to sneak up on meaningful ideas?” and a second voice answers, “Well, in heavy boots you can’t walk as far” [51-52].)

At times Steffler’s approach is appealingly personal, with touches of autobiography. He deals with giant matters, but authenticates his writing with reminders that an *I* is involved in creating all his pages. He speaks as one who grew up in English with Pennsylvania Dutch as a marginal language in his home life, both his paternal and maternal lines rooted in Germany of the early to mid-nineteenth century. “I have loved Europe,” he states, “and I still do” (81). On a few occasions he writes somewhat reductively of the so-called Old World, as when he claims: “There’s a name, a story, some enveloping lore to cover *every* peril and mystery” of the natural world (64; emphasis mine): “In Europe even the wild animals, along with the landscape, have been *fully* incorporated into human culture, into custom and myth” (63; emphasis mine). When Steffler refers to “polished cultural amber in the European style” (73), he could be writing as a North American distant from the lived experiences of Swedish, Scottish, or German hiker-naturalists who experience a sense of wilderness that provides an authentic breakaway—in the context of *their* lives—from urban noise and overdetermined routine. Also, it’s worth noting that in Indigenous customs and myths, animal-human figures such as Raven, Bear, and Coyote are very blended in with human culture. (Steffler’s book also compelled me

to pencil a question mark in the margin when it says that “in the Judeo-Christian tradition God is distinctly masculine: the Punishing Father” (86)—which excludes images of God the Shepherd, the Vine, the Sacrificing Father, the Light of the World.)

One of Steffler’s most brilliantly argued convictions is that the sources of thinking and language aren’t confined to what goes on inside human skulls. At one point he employs the useful word *transpersonal*. To merely say that language is culturally shaped, Steffler shows, hardly goes far enough: “we appeal for words to come to us from a source outside our immediate control: from deep in the self, from the unconscious, from a legacy both human and nonhuman, from the depths of the sea” (30). The mind is often imagined as a concentrating agent, but Steffler also sees it as spread out, abroad, and absorbent, achieving “a basic wide-focussed awareness” and “a relaxed focus to the point of feeling diffused in the world” (88). It’s in this context that Steffler, skilled as an epigrammatist, comes up with the valuable phrase “a wild, aggregate mind” (93).

Forty-One Pages sees poetry as a means to fight back against linguistic tameness and anemia: “poetry wants to restore [words’] animal energy, appreciate the evolutionary legacy they carry with them” (29). As for Tim Lilburn in many passages of his poetry and prose, for Steffler one way of making language more visceral is to retreat from it and try to experience the world in its non-linguistic fullness; but as with Lilburn, repeated treks into silence, listening, and instinct must be followed by repeated returns. “[O]ne of the powers of the poet,” writes Steffler, “might be the ability to dispense with language—to spacewalk outside culture—to go about the world clear-eyed, intact and mute, and then to re-enter language as a voice, as a kind of body” (20). Elsewhere Steffler speaks of becoming “a kind of dissolved witness participating in the world—and then coming back to language with relief to be re-entering this articulate medium like my proper body” (21).

Language, then—however crucial are expeditions into speechless wilderness—remains a home, a body we belong in. It also makes possible this book, which is chock full of complex intelligence and fine artistry from one of our most significant poets.

Here, Now, Unfolding

Colin Browne

Here. Talonbooks \$19.95

Reviewed by Kyle Kinaschuk (University of Toronto)

Colin Browne’s most recent poetry collection *Here* is a work of improvisatory and durational folds. The fold is the serial poem’s animating image. Browne commences *Here* with an undulating movement that folds time, place, and memory upon and through itself:

folding and folding
upon itself
inner outer inner
one thing
boundless
turning, turning

This immanent movement enunciates one of the poem's formal and compositional modes at its outset, a commitment to what we might call a poetics of sedimentation. Browne, a settler with forebears from the British Isles, compounds familial, autobiographical, and historical memory in cinematic fashion to reimagine the geographies of settler colonialism in the present. "Where might one expect," Browne asks, "to find justice today?" (*Here* 135).

As an accomplished poet, visual artist, filmmaker, film historian, and teacher, Browne has spent decades reimagining the geographies and histories of this place called Canada through several mediums. In *Strathyre*, his first film from 1979, Browne documents the process of locating the ranch his grandfather homesteaded near Tk'emlúps (Kamloops) in 1912. Discussing the film in a 1979 interview conducted by Penelope Connell, Browne offers an early sketch of the concerns that will come to preoccupy his artistic practices for close to the next half-century. "I'd become sick of public history because it's a vast fiction anyway and it's not a fiction that you can do anything with," says Browne, "So I realized that the only way that I could ever deal with anything historical in a way that was satisfactory to me was to talk about personal history. And that's tied in with public history too, it's not separate" ("Interview" 8).

Here is the latest iteration of Browne's long-standing commitment to refining an artistic practice of imagining from a place where personal and public histories are necessarily entangled. *Here*, in the words of rob mclennan, joins an "interconnected sequence of book-length serial poems on history and geography, setting a groundwork for personal history in the context of colonialism" ("Colin Browne, *Here*"). While Browne's first volume of poetry, *Abraham*, appeared with Brick Books in 1987, Talonbooks has released all four of his subsequent poetry titles: *Ground Water* (2002), *The Shovel* (2007), *The Properties* (2012), and *The Hatch: Poems and Conversations* (2015). *Here* enters the fray and marks a near twenty-year relationship with Talonbooks, where Browne has been refracting the personal and the public—each time anew—to reimagine the complex and overlapping temporalities that unfold across the Northwest Coast. *Here* demands that the spatial deixis of its title be heard with the temporal deixis of the "now." Browne generates a sequence of montages that simultaneously hold together and apart the multiple temporalities—the irreducible and dissonant "nows"—that accrue on and with each "here."

Here spans 163 pages with an additional 27 pages of notes. Given the allusive and multilingual density of the poems, which are rife with fragments and quotations, the explanatory notes illuminate without overdetermining the poetry. To name but a few of the citational relations operative in *Here*: Browne refers to Frantz Fanon, Sa7plek, Gertrude Stein, the *Annual Report of the Board of the Regents of the Smithsonian Institute*, Robert Burton, Régis Debray, Da.a xiigang, Aimé Césaire, Charles Olson, Hannah Arendt, and Curly, a fisherman. On a given page, Browne might provide a gloss on how the term "Unangax" replaces "Aleut" (182), or detail how he met Walt Kelly of Pogo fame at a bar in Montreal (180). In another note, Browne provides an account of galaga snaanga, the Fungus Man, and his appearance in Haida Oral Histories (178), a reference to his extended essay, *Entering Time: The Fungus Man Platters of Charles Edenshaw*, which Talonbooks published in 2017. These deeply generous and generative notes direct readers elsewhere, turning the lines of the poem outward without a sense of didacticism or completion. Browne's meticulous citational practices not only illuminate and invite readers to continue to imagine in other contexts, but they also acknowledge the deep webs of communal relation that underwrite all acts of poetic creation.

Here is structured according to seven movements: “Diorama,” “The Azure Notebook,” “Vancouver in Translation,” “Traveller,” “Improvisations 1-12,” “Petal,” and “Envoi.” The first line of “Diorama” extends the opening image of the fold to ask a litany of enjambed questions that announce the crisis that is the settler imagination: “is it not unfolding as we imagined, are these not / the brass mackerels we welcomed home, is that” (3). A voice continues,

i lived in barracks, my father lived in barracks
 my uncles lived in barracks, my grandfathers
 lived in barracks, my great-grandfathers
 lived in barracks, our Irish ancestor lived in barracks
 to subdue *les Indiens*
 and *les Canadiens*
 in British North America
 and was fed (3)

When one turns the page, one confronts the words “grand fodder” (4), which Browne isolates, centres, and gives its own page. This catastrophe of the colonial imagination, the grand fodder of the settlement and the barracks, reaches its apex in the third movement of *Here*, “Vancouver in Translation,” where Browne translates poems by Guillaume Apollinaire, Blaise Cendrars, and Marcel Thiry. “You’ve yet to gaze upon great green parrots / Indigo rivers, or Natives” (*Here* 82), writes Thiry. Initially published in *The Capilano Review*, these translations when read together make concrete the fetishizing gaze of three poets—each situated in France—who wrote about Vancouver from afar during the early decades of the twentieth century. As Browne comments, “[t]he young city clearly appealed to the modernist imagination for its exotic location and its proximity to Indigenous cultures” (*Here* 78). These translations reverse the colonial gaze and its projections of Indigeneity to instead make the colonial imagination at this particular juncture intelligible as an object of critique.

Still, *Here* accomplishes much more than reassembling colonial imaginaries, a project that taken alone risks reprising violence. In “The Azure Notebook,” the longest of the movements, Browne’s poems unfold space to hold time within them as if every line, always improvised, is on the verge of exploding linear time through the accumulated abrasions of sedimented memory, which cannot be held in place despite always being in and of place. Browne writes,

in Enid Stuckey’s snapshot
 Nora Guernsey hangs up the laundry
 on seized land south of Tk’emlúps
I’ll do it all again, she tells me in 1975
 the hillside where she was happy in 1914
 is now trenched by gaping, seeping
 ditches for a tailing pond (39)

Elsewhere, in “Improvisations 1-12,” a movement of luminous and sprawling prose, Browne indicts the settler state and civil society. “Dispossession, incarceration, slavery, extermination: the foundations,” he writes, “of civil society” (135). In proximity to this indictment of anti-Blackness and settler-colonial violence, a Whitmanian voice, just a few pages later, surfaces that clinches Browne’s expansive poetic mode. “I is multiple,” Browne affirms, “*sans fin*” (142). With this, to what extent does this porous and

multitudinous subjectivity itself, like civil society, also depend upon dispossession, incarceration, slavery, and extermination? Put otherwise, what *Here* makes audible is how a poetic subjectivity grounded in and through whiteness—marked or unmarked—must tarry with the unfinished violence that also makes it possible.

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Reimagining the Himalayas

Julie Rak

False Summit: Gender in Mountaineering Nonfiction. McGill-Queen's UP \$34.95

Reviewed by Peter L. Bayers (Fairfield University)

In the introduction to *False Summit*, Julie Rak makes the bold claim that "[s]ince the eighteenth century, the act of climbing the highest mountains has played a central role in the way that much of the world has imagined conquest, human achievement, and the place of wilderness in social life," an ethos that has been, and still is, defined by a "narrow version of masculinity" predicated on an individualistic mastery of self and the environment (5). Traversing a wide-ranging archive of expedition narratives, *False Summit* makes an important and valuable contribution to the study of mountaineering literature, gender studies, and environmental studies in its nuanced, complex, insightful critique of the way the cultural formation of mountaineering on three iconic Himalayan peaks—Annapurna, K2, and Everest—has been historically (mis)shaped by cis, white, male writers in a corrosive, exclusionary, imperial, masculinist literary tradition. Though counter-narratives have emerged in mountaineering non-fiction that imagine alternatives, Rak maintains that the dominant master narrative persistently overrides these "false summits."

In chapter 1, Rak focuses on expedition literature about Annapurna, beginning with one of the best-known memoirs in mountaineering history: *Annapurna* (1951), Maurice Herzog's highly influential, romanticized account of the French expedition of 1950. Rak convincingly argues that the siege-style nationalist narrative reads as "a kind of grammar of masculinity" in its portrayal of men "as heroic and selfless, as if they were soldiers" (45), with Herzog as a "leader of *men*" (49; emphasis added) who, at the same time, leverages tired orientalist tropes to contrast "modern" Western mountaineers with supposedly unmanly Sherpas (51). In addition, Rak offers a well-argued reading of Arlene Blum's celebrated feminist memoir of the all-Western-women expedition to Annapurna, *Annapurna: A Woman's Place* (1980), which Rak maintains "has the most sustained discussion of gender politics that can be found in any expedition account" (64)—a discussion that offers a counter-narrative to the "machismo culture" of mountaineering. Rak does not by any means romanticize Blum's book, arguing that it

illustrates “the possibilities and the limits of feminist ideals when second-wave feminism was at its height” (65). Rak is particularly critical of Blum’s blind spots about Sherpa gender politics, as well as her siege-style leadership tactics, which reflect “the masculine heroic ideal” of hierarchical “militaristic style” (75). Rak’s chapter concludes with a critique of the sexist backlash to Blum’s expedition by well-known male and female climbers alike, a depressing testament to how climbers of the era were deeply tethered to the dominant masculinist narrative.

Rak shapes chapter 2 around the literature about K2, which she argues has been defined by the idealized metaphor of “the brotherhood of the rope” (88). “All climbs on K2,” Rak writes, “before and since [the] 1953 [American] expedition, have been measured by this idea of brotherhood . . . to remind people of the loss of a certain kind of masculine ideal of heroism and selflessness. It is an ideal which is meant to be unattainable” (89). Regrettably, “this phrase has contributed to the effect of rendering unthinkable the participation of other kinds of climbers, such as women, working-class men, or Indigenous people in this ideal realm” (89). As Rak makes clear, even when women were included in expeditions to K2, as with the 1978 American expedition, they were considered by male climbers as a threat to their masculinity, leading to the “dissolution of this team because of its gender politics” (119), a sexism reinforced in 1986 by male disparagement of the elite Polish climber Wanda Rutkiewicz and the British climber Julie Tullis. At the same time, Rak offers a fascinating reading of Tullis’ climbing partnership with Kurt Diemberger, which she argues challenged masculinist ideology, as male climbers were puzzled by what Rak calls their “ungendered” brotherhood of the rope, which “exceed[ed] the limits that the discourse se[t] for them” (134).

Chapters 3 and 4 centre on Everest, with chapter 3 tracing the contours of gender dynamics from the British expeditions of the 1920s to the present, and chapter 4 focusing on Jon Krakauer’s recounting of the disastrous 1996 season in his bestselling *Into Thin Air* (1997). I found Rak’s perceptive analysis of the staying power of the romantic mythology surrounding George Mallory as the exemplar of heroic masculinity compelling, particularly her reading of the macabre discovery of his body in 1999 and its symbolic import for the climbers who found it. Rak argues that “Mallory’s body itself became the most substantial sign for the climbers who found it of climbing authenticity grounded in the perfection of the [white] male climbing body” (156). This is an exclusionary Everest narrative, despite the reality of existing counter-narratives such as those of the Japanese climber Junko Tabei and the Sherpa Tenzing Norgay. In chapter 4, Rak illustrates how the “argument” of *Into Thin Air*, in keeping with the dominant literary tradition,

rests on Krakauer’s portrayal of climbing authenticity as counter-cultural, masculinist, and Western, based on ideas of sacrifice connected to the figure of George Mallory or Sir Edmund Hillary, and not to anyone (but particularly women and Sherpas) who does not fit that mold. (199)

I think *False Summit* is a strong, well-argued book. My only criticism is that much of the terrain Rak covers in regard to Everest and gender politics—whether regarding the British expeditions in the 1920s and the symbolic import of Mallory’s body; the 1953 British expedition; Tenzing Norgay and Sherpa culture; or Krakauer’s *Into Thin Air*—relates to or parallels threads of argument in my own book *Imperial*

Ascent: Masculinity, Mountaineering, and Empire (2003). Yet surprisingly Rak never acknowledges, critiques, or distinguishes how her insights depart from this previous work, something that, to my mind, could have been easily addressed. That said, *False Summit* is a welcome addition to the scholarship on mountaineering, gender, and environmental studies, and given its accessible prose and Rak's storytelling skills, I would highly recommend it to the climbing community and lay reader as well.

Healing, Truth Telling, and World Making

Suzanne Kepttwo

We All Go Back to the Land: The Who, Why, and How of Land Acknowledgements. Brush Education \$24.95

Leanne Betasamosake Simpson

A Short History of the Blockade: Giant Beavers, Diplomacy, and Regeneration in Nishnaabewin. U of Alberta P \$12.99

Reviewed by Alicia Fahey (University of British Columbia)

In her introduction to *We All Go Back to the Land: The Who, Why, and How of Land Acknowledgements*, Métis artist and professional educator Suzanne Kepttwo leads with her thesis: "I firmly state that the belief systems and ethics of the Original peoples were far superior to European belief and value systems because they were based on an inherent understanding and Respect for the Earth and its interconnection to the well-being of the human species" (1). The purpose of Kepttwo's book, as signalled by the title, is not only to explain how to compose and deliver a land acknowledgement, but also to identify *why* this should be done. The nearly four-hundred-page book draws on both traditional Indigenous knowledge and Kepttwo's experiences as a consultant, resulting in an encyclopedic tome that is organized into eight chapters that weave together storytelling, written and oral history, current events, personal anecdotes, and conversations with Knowledge Keepers. Each chapter is broken down into smaller sections identified by subheadings that are designed "to help bring readers back on track" should they get lost in the cyclical narrative structure (2). A repeated refrain that unifies the breadth of material is "Ginawaydaganuc: We Are All Connected" (4).

Beginning with a history of "Original Land, Original People," Kepttwo explains how European contact caused the Great Disruption by violating the Original Agreement between Indigenous peoples and the Land. Chapters 2 and 3 consider "The Land Acknowledgement: An Educational Opportunity" and "as Cultural Opportunity," while chapter 4 beseeches readers to "Invest in the Land Acknowledgement" through meaningful consultation, which includes researching self-introduction protocols and resisting the pressure to make token hires or extend token invitations to Elders. Chapter 5, "Identity Politics," explores the complexities of language, lineage, record keeping, missionary influence, and "Mixed-Up Identities."

I find chapter 6, "Examples of Problematic Land Acknowledgements," especially illuminating because it provides specific examples from geographic regions across Canada. Kepttwo rightly refuses to provide a template for a land acknowledgement, but rather provides readers with the tools to compose their own acknowledgement in a meaningful and context-specific way. In the penultimate chapter, Kepttwo proposes that artists hold the key to meaningful land acknowledgements because of their penchant for truth telling. Under the

rubric of art, she includes theatre, rap, storytelling, song, dance, music, movement, spoken word, and artistic installation and proposes that these art forms help “to get colonial-influenced peoples out of their heads and into their hearts by way of the body in order to inspire spiritual growth” (356). The book culminates in an invitation to

all Canadians, new or well-settled, all First Nation, Inuit, and Métis peoples within this nation-state of Canada to join the traditionally minded, the traditionally driven, the traditionally governed, alongside the Water Protectors and Land Protectors and environmentalists, advocates, allies, friends, and activists to enter into the Original Agreement. (391-92)

Entering into this agreement, Keptwo claims, would be the “ultimate act of Reconciliation” (392). *We All Go Back to the Land* prompted me—as a settler on the traditional, ancestral, and stolen lands of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and Səlilwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) peoples in what is presently referred to as North Vancouver—to learn more about the Indigenous peoples’ current relationship to their land. I was particularly inspired by the Tsleil-Waututh nation’s Sacred Trust initiative, which aims to halt the expansion of the Trans Mountain Pipeline. The *Sacred Trust* website offers an abundance of educational materials, as well as information on how to donate or get involved.

Pipelines also figure prominently in Leanne Simpson’s *A Short History of the Blockade: Giant Beavers, Diplomacy, and Regeneration in Nishnaabewin*. Jordan Abel begins his introduction to Simpson’s book, which is part of the Canadian Literature Centre Kreisel Lecture Series, with a territorial acknowledgement that the University of Alberta is located on Treaty 6 land. He proceeds to describe the different ways in which he has encountered Leanne Simpson and her work: as a star-struck fan of her academic prowess, as an academic-artistic colleague, and as an out-of-place poet at a music event where Simpson was performing as a “rock star” (xvi). In other words, Abel goes to great lengths to show how his relationship with Simpson has evolved through various contexts. Simpson, like Amik (the protagonist of her book), embodies a diversity of meanings. These ideas of relationality and multiplicity resonate with Simpson’s broader message: to shift the thinking about blockades from a colonial mindset to a Nishnaabeg way. Purposeful repetition resounds throughout the book and mirrors Nishnaabeg epistemology: “Self-determination, consent, kindness, and freedom practiced daily in all our relations. *Practices replicated over and over*” (5; emphasis added). Recurring notions of “living as a creative act” (4, 10) and that “Nishnaabeg life is a persistent world-building process” (4) ground the many forms and functions of Amikwag (the plural form of *beaver* in Anishinaabemowin) that emerge from the stories in the book. As Simpson so aptly puts it, “the practice of telling stories is the practice of generating a diversity of meanings. It is a practice of deep relationality, not a looking at, but a looking with or a looking through or a *thinking through together*” (6).

Building on the work of Mohawk scholar Audra Simpson, who encourages readers to view blockades through the lens of refusal, Leanne Simpson asserts, “[B]lockades are rich sites of Indigenous life, of a radical resurgence” (11). At the heart of understanding the blockade through a Nishnaabeg lens is a closer look at Simpson’s relative, the beaver. Whereas the colonial adoption of the beaver as a national symbol is entrenched in the economic benefits of the fur trade, Simpson situates the beaver in the oral literature passed down intergenerationally through the Seven Ancestor teachings, each of which is “represented by an animal relation who best embodies those practices . . . [T]he animal

nations carry a body of stories that deepen our understandings of these concepts and how to live them" (13). After listing the myriad "cool features of the beaver" (including waterproof fur and ever-growing teeth), Simpson brings together her message of relationality and generative storytelling with the following fact: "Amikwag build dams." These dams contribute to the broader ecological functions of the land and the animals who inhabit the land, whether by providing winter habitats for fish relatives or making wetlands for land animals. Based on the many reciprocal benefits of dams, Simpson concludes, "Amik is a world builder" (15).

The world that Simpson has built in her book is organized into four chapters, which are framed by Abel's introduction and Simpson's "Final Words." Each chapter tells a story about Amik and begins with an epigraph from an activist, scholar, artist, poet, or musician. These epigraphs provide material for Simpson to riff on, but collectively they also form an ecosystem of social justice warriors whose voices reveal the world-building power of generative resistance. The first of the beaver stories is a creation story about the first beaver dam, set in a time when beavers were giants. Chapter 2 recounts the story of "The Woman Who Married a Beaver" and interprets this story for a non-Indigenous audience. Chapter 3's beaver story is called "AnabLog," the title of which alludes to the 2006 *anaBlog* creative digital installation project by Steve Daniels, "an electronic artist and past director of new media . . . at Ryerson University" (35). The fourth and final story, "Amikode, Beaver Heart," describes a "beaver resurgence of sorts happening on Turtle Island," in which youth engage in their own acts of creative world making (50). Each of the stories is connected by Amik, who works in conjunction with a community to build a better world. Each of the stories is about the generative potential of intervention and acts of reciprocity. Each of the stories situates blockades as "both a refusal and an affirmation" (56). Each of the stories imagines other worlds—past, present, and future.

As I write this review, the "Freedom Convoy" has recently dispersed in Ottawa. For almost three weeks, the protests ensued with minimal and belated intervention from the state despite community harassment, racial slurs, destruction of property, acts of violence, and the appropriation of Indigenous drumming and pipe ceremony. It's impossible not to contrast the leniency afforded the Freedom Convoy to the use of state force in response to peaceful blockades and protests set up by the Wet'suwet'en Nation in opposition to the Coastal GasLink project, which spans sovereign Indigenous territory. Where is the public outrage at RCMP punitive action against Wet'suwet'en land defenders? I can't help but think of one of Simpson's earlier works, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance*, in which she states that issues facing Indigenous peoples cannot be resolved within the framework of settler colonialism because "settler colonialism will always define the issues with a solution that reentrenches its own power" (178). If you don't already know why an Indigenous politics of refusal is at odds with the colonial system, *A Short History of the Blockade* will help you better understand.

Works Cited

- Simpson, Leanne Betasamosake. *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance*. U of Minnesota P, 2017.
- Tsleil-Waututh Nation. "TWN Stewardship Work in the Territory." *Sacred Trust: Protecting Tsleil-Waututh Territory*, twnsacredtrust.ca/tsleil-waututh-nation-stewardship-work-in-the-territory/.

Checking Out

Evan J

Ripping Down Half the Trees. McGill-Queen's UP \$17.95

Sarah Tolmie

Check. McGill-Queen's UP \$17.95

Reviewed by Dani Spinosa (York University)

To begin, I have to admit that these are two quite different collections that come from two radically different speaking voices. It almost doesn't seem fair to read them against each other because they're working at such cross-purposes. However, given that both collections are published by McGill-Queen's University Press in the Hugh MacLennan Poetry Series, there is sufficient reason to read them beside each other, and to consider how their similarities and differences reflect the current moment in Canadian poetry.

From Evan J, a Manitoba transplant currently living in Sioux Lookout, Ontario, comes *Ripping Down Half the Trees* (2021). It's an introspective and socially conscious book that persuasively demonstrates how one trait indeed requires the other. The gaze throughout the collection keeps moving back and forth—like the rapt faces of tennis-match spectators—from a careful evaluation of the speaking voice to a strongly positioned argument for social services, environmental care, and decolonial thinking. In the blurb on the back, Greg Santos argues that the book shows that the author “confronts and questions his privilege,” and this confrontation and questioning are very clear in the pages themselves.

Evan J's reflection is achieved through some cute confessional moments and in other more effective moments of poignant metaphor. One of my favourites appears at the end of “Of Course You Do Find Spicy Bits,” when Evan J concludes, “I've learned / if you can break a carrot // or fraternity, you too can break / the pointer” (18). And indeed throughout the book, there is a clear conceit of cutting down, cutting back, and paring down larger concepts (filiation, nation, settler colonialism, selfhood, environment, care) to the core principles that should guide us (care, care, care, and once more for those in the back, care). The whole book is a call to declutter, to see the trees rather than getting bogged down by the vastness of forestness. Consider the collection's title, and titles of poems like “All It Takes Is an Artist and a Knife.” This book is an effort to cut to the bones of our world.

In a lot of ways, that situates it squarely in the contemporary tradition of political-lyrical poetry. That does make it less surprising or exciting than I might prefer. But it's important to remember that this collection is less a call to witness than a self-reflexive meditation on what it means to be called to witness, to write a book that is an “exhale, for all my friends, / into a pencil,” as Evan J writes at the end of “Pottery, an Impossibility” (87). And because the speaker does indeed have “all [their] friends” in mind, the collection is a bit uneven. In its expression of the discomfort of speaking for and about trauma and suffering, it chafes a bit against itself, and formally there's not too much unique or interesting going on. (“Colonialism for Dummies” is one standout.) But the honesty in these pages is worth the read, even if more attention could have been paid to form.

Sarah Tolmie's *Check* (2020), on the other hand, is a collection playing close and unique attention to form, but lacking almost entirely the introspection and thoughtfulness of *Ripping Down Half the Trees*. This reviewer is a contingent faculty

member in an English department, so I'm primed exactly to understand most of Tolmie's references. For example, as a precarious professor who doesn't drive (I spent nearly four hours on public transit getting to and from a class yesterday), I nearly howled at this pithy poem (unnamed as all of the poems in *Check* are): "Professors worry about intersections / because they all drive" (18). A jab at the avant-garde's "old dada attitude" (46) gave me a good chuckle too. But as a whole, *Check* feels very insular and didn't open up to me at all while I read through it. Indeed, I wonder if anyone outside our little circle of English department faculty would really have any interest in this collection.

I'm a city dweller with a suburban family who's never lived more than forty minutes from the bustling downtown, and an upper-middle-class woman who's never been involved in the kind of social services Evan J describes, but I still felt invited and introduced to this world thoughtfully by Evan J's writing. A mini-glossary at the back of the collection helped a little, but the invitational tone did more. Evan J's goal is certainly to invite the reader to witness, to pay attention to, some important larger issues. Tolmie's collection, on the other hand, can't seem to decide if it rejoices in its insular target audience or if the speaker bemoans the small size of their audience. At one point, for example, Tolmie quips, "I have to admit I'm a coterie poet. / Three dozen readers certainly know it" (27). But on the very next page, a poem pokes fun at InstaPoets for putting their "words in a big marketplace" while asserting that the poet doesn't "need [their] poetry giving good face" (28). The sentiments are incongruous at worst, and unclear at best. As a reader, I wasn't sure what to think.

If Evan J's collection feels perhaps a bit *too* on the pulse at times, Tolmie's feels a bit outdated. Tolmie herself invites—or better, claims—a comparison to satirical poetry behemoth Dorothy Parker (57). The comparison is clear. But that just makes the collection feel a bit older and more insular, and the poems are often without Parker's characteristic charm. Whereas Parker is acerbic but frank, this collection reads like a speaker who knows everything—that uncle at Thanksgiving who butts in to each conversation to tell you what's wrong with *everyone else* these days. The collection lacks introspection already, but that missing piece is even more glaring when it's read against Evan J's collection, the very purpose of which is to turn that gaze inwards.

Balancing on the Tip of Hope

Norah Bowman

Breath, Like Water: An Anticolonial Romance. Caitlin \$18.00

Stephen Collis

A History of the Theories of Rain. Talonbooks \$16.95

Joanne Epp

Cattail Skyline. Turnstone \$17.00

Matt Rader

Ghosthawk. Nightwood \$18.95

Reviewed by Emily Wall (University of Alaska)

These four eco-poets are writing about the natural world, and coming at it from places of wonder, shame, grief, and holiness. Taken together, these poems place the reader on the fulcrum—we tip toward ecological disaster, colonization, disease . . . and

then we tip toward pure wonder and gratitude. Norah Bowman loves uneasily, in full awareness that as a settler-colonizer her ancestors are responsible for this changed and harmed landscape. Stephen Collis' book is a meditation and mind-wander exploration of climate change and the ways we grieve the destruction of our home. Joanne Epp juxtaposes stark and destructive progress against a world where it's still possible to find natural treasures everywhere we look—for now. And Matt Rader's poems, haiku-like jewels, give us the breath we need to stand on that tipping point, loving the Earth, loving our bodies, and witnessing all the ways we are failing both.

Norah Bowman's book *Breath, Like Water*, opens with a bang: "Women who leave the doors unlocked, dishes dirty, men unsoothed" (8). After this first breath of fresh air, the poems continue to surprise and challenge the reader. These poems are a complex braid of personal history, deep awareness of misogyny and colonialism, and passion for the natural world. Bowman explores how we damaged souls got to where we live now and how we live in this place. Each poem feels like it's balancing on a fulcrum with the *I* at the centre. The speaker is living deeply and beautifully in a place she should never have been. She fully embraces an awareness that she's a settler-colonizer living on Indigenous land. And she calls out those who actively made the decisions that brought her to this place: a great-grandfather who punished his pregnant daughter with banishment to Canada, a priest who colonized and destroyed, developers who continue to build crushing roads and neighbourhoods through wilderness. This poet has no fear. She calls it exactly as she sees it, fully embracing her own culpability in the situation. She balances that shame and grief with a deep love of the mountain she lives under. One of her strongest image motifs is her praise of moss and lichen. We see this throughout the poems, and it echoes the larger theme of the book: *look down*. What are you crushing with your hiking boots? And how fragile, precious, and resilient are these beings? Her eco-feminist, decolonized language and vision are powerful and reverent: "Look, I come from a line of angry women. // I am not in love with mountains, or rivers, or poetry. // I am in love with Mountain" (9). This book will challenge you and stay with you. This is a book everyone in North America should be reading.

In *A History of the Theories of Rain*, Stephen Collis writes songs of lament for the planet. The book isn't easy to read, but it's also written with care and intention. Collis uses a fragmented, prosy style to mirror interior mind wanderings. This symbolic syntax puts the reader on edge—literally, symbolically—and reinforces the point he's trying to make. Collis intentionally shows us the anxiety of a mind fearful for the planet's future: "I think this is logic. Even if *p* is a restabilized climate and *q* is runaway warming. A time series in which there are alternate possible immediate futures but only one ultimate future is what I fear. Or long for / I don't know. This is logic. I am an animal fretting. I think / gore is what we wend toward" (7). There are moments where we break through the fabric of this meditative structure and Collis hands us a striking metaphor: "I found [possible pasts] by the dumpster out back beside a thrown-away planet a bit flat or even concave like a crushed and stained mattress" (6). Collis has metaphors throughout the book that hook a reader—that land right in soft flesh and stay. His ability to take anxiety and connect it with image is impressive. These do, however, make us hungry for more. While we admire the syntactical play and experimentation, readers also may wish for a more present speaker and more vivid images to remind us what we're fighting for. Rain itself becomes a construct in the book—not actual rain. It's an interesting approach to a long, poetic argument,

but also one that may not convince—or even hold—all readers. In the end, however, his anxiety, anger, and fear about our planet shine honestly out of every poem: “from stillness when / you put the book down / and light that cocktail / cock arm / about to throw” (15).

Joanne Epp loves berries. Throughout her book *Cattail Skyline*, we come upon these small, jewelled poems as we do berries in the woods—suddenly a bright spot, a moment of deep taste: “These will burst their sacs / of juice when they pass from lips to tongue, / release sharp sweetness in the mouth” (“Raspberries”). The poems trace the writer’s wandering through small patches of wild (wilder in childhood than now) as she seeks out small bodies of water, wild grasses, “a lynx’s tufted ears” (“Halfway Up”)—images that take us into the heart of our natural world. These poems are a lament in the face of development: “A nondescript retail block extends / its parking lot, held up by concrete pilings / over the creek” (“Constraint”). But they are also a continued treasure hunt for the places (and berries!) that remain. She notes the losses as we meander across landscapes, across a continent, and even across an ocean with her, but these poems stubbornly focus on hope: “Behind me, a plastic lid flotilla, chip bags, a Slurpee cup . . . I keep my eyes on the birds” (“Lanigan Creek Revisited”).

The first poem in Matt Rader’s collection *Ghosthawk* catches you by delighted surprise:

two gopher snakes
fucking
in a shallow pit
.....
and us
dead-stopped
witness. (8)

This opening poem sets the story and shape of the book: we stop dead and see something strange and beautiful, with us merely as witnesses. In these poems, Rader reaches toward the larger and mysterious, but never sinks into pure meditation or philosophy, instead staying centred in the observation itself:

Once, a rattlesnake
the color of Yakima
earth lifted the ancient,
holy light of her rattle
toward me. (21-22)

His small, bright poems also juxtapose the light and the dark:

The dark
steel girder bridging
the river,

its spray-painted
swastika and names. (23)

Nearly all of the poems are written in three-line stanzas with vertical white space between each line and stanza, creating haiku-like moments over and over. This intense use of white space encourages the reader to breathe through and with his meditations

on the natural world. Although Rader appears as a voice and persona, the poems are almost never focused on the *I*. He places himself in witness, but never in the centre: “I was nothing, once. / I was so happy” (100).

These four poets bring their unique visions and witness to the question of how we live in a world we are both loving and destroying. The poems are painfully beautiful, and yet also offer moments of pure hope to the reader, who sits alongside them, balanced, in this moment of ecological history.

Prince George: “A State of Mind”

Robert Boschman

White Coal City: A Memoir of Place and Family. U of Regina P \$21.95

Reviewed by Robert Zacharias (York University)

Robert Boschman’s new memoir, *White Coal City*, reads as part family exposé, part academic treatise, and part study notes for a future true crime podcast. As its subtitle suggests, however, Boschman is concerned not only with his own tumultuous upbringing, but also with the ways that his family history is intertwined with the settler-colonial violence of Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, the hard-knocks town where he grew up. In the early twentieth century, the city adopted the nickname “White Coal City” to reflect its ambitions for a massive hydroelectric dam on the nearby North Saskatchewan River, a project that was abandoned half finished. Boschman’s title takes the irony of Prince Albert’s forgotten moniker as a symbol for the unfulfilled promise of both his family and the place itself.

The memoir begins with a collection of meaningful paratexts that serve well as an introduction to its concerns and its structure. This introductory material includes a pair of evocative epigraphs from well-known academic studies; a “kinship chart” that proves to be a streamlined family tree; a selection from a transcript of a 1940 coroner’s inquest into the death of a woman in an automobile accident; and a two-page prologue that reveals the woman to have been the author’s pregnant grandmother, whose death was witnessed by her horrified husband. Boschman closes the prologue with a remarkable claim: “This entire story was born in that instant” (xvi). In retrospect, “I’ve seen this ancestral history unfold and reveal itself again and again . . . without my even knowing a thing about it for the longest time.” It is a claim that the remainder of the memoir sets out to prove.

The remainder of the lengthy memoir is separated into ninety-two numbered chapters, the majority of which are fewer than five pages in length and leap sharply between events, places, times, and people. An early chapter recounting the survey and settlement of Saskatchewan, for example, is followed by a chapter offering a methodical description of what happens when a body is impacted by a moving vehicle, which is followed by a brief history of Prince Albert, and so on. A few chapters later, a discussion about Boschman’s Mennonite ancestors is followed by a chapter about a line of discontinued Plymouth automobiles. Boschman makes little effort to link these chapters into a coherent narrative, choosing instead to allow the difficult histories of his life and broader socio-historical forces—colonization, endemic poverty, sudden death, residential schools, religious fundamentalism, toxic masculinity—to shuffle into an archive of a most complicated present. The most

prominent through line of the memoir is Boschman's wry, self-deprecating humour, which aims to keep the book's many staccato chapters in charged juxtaposition. "I wasn't just scrawny; I was cross-eyed too," begins one chapter (13); "In my first memory I am shitting my pants," begins another (26).

The strongest sections of the memoir reflect Boschman's painstaking efforts to rebuild the events surrounding his grandmother's violent death. Here, the memoir's fragmented structure reflects the ad hoc nature by which Boschman came to learn that his paternal grandmother was in fact his grandfather's second wife; that his biological grandmother, Margaret, had been struck and killed decades earlier by a car driven by a travelling salesman from Toronto; and that her death had nearly driven his grandfather, John, mad with grief. Rather than summarize his research, Boschman quotes at length from the coroner's inquest, from family letters and diaries, and from interviews and newspapers clippings. He tracks down the last living witness of the accident for an interview and reprints a photograph he finds of his grandmother's open coffin at the funeral. Allowing the reader to encounter these voices and materials directly and with minimal commentary is highly effective, positioning the reader as a participant in Boschman's efforts and offering a deeply intimate portrait of the trauma's impact across generations.

At other times, however, the memoir's structure results in an uneven reading experience and risks some questionable equivalences. The memoir's two epigraphs, for example—from the trauma theorist Cathy Caruth and the anthropologist Tim Ingold—are effective as gestures to the memoir's concerns, but I find the turn to academic rhetoric within the book to be considerably less successful, where it strains against the frank prose of a memoir otherwise committed to exploring rather than explaining. As someone who could offer a lengthy Mennonite "kinship chart" of my own, I think Boschman is surely right to link his ancestors' active role as settler colonizers to the legacies of Indigenous displacement and cultural genocide—and I admire his open effort to wrestle with his family's participation in the Sixties Scoop. Yet I am left with questions about his attempt to bring together what he presents as the intergenerational trauma of his grandmother's violent death with the larger traumas of Canada's colonial past, as well as some of the solutions implied by the closing sections—including that his loss of Low German, the language of his ancestors, can be "easily remedied" by eager assimilation into the country he otherwise interrogates throughout (267). But Boschman is thoroughly and strategically uninterested in assuaging readerly anxieties, and the episodic, fragmented text of the memoir suggests his efforts are very much an ongoing project.

How do the pains of our ancestral pasts inform, complicate, and compound our individual and collective presents? What will it mean for settlers to wrestle with their own historical traumas, not simply as individuals or family members but as Canadian citizens complicit in colonial violence? These are pressing questions, and *White Coal City* is well worth reading—both for the urgency with which Boschman asks such questions and for the openness with which he chases after answers.

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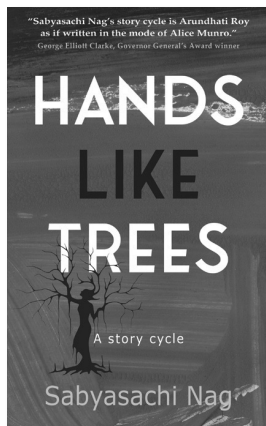
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