

**THE NATURE OF SOLIDARITY AND NATURE'S
SOLIDARITY: BIOREGIONALISM, SITUATED
KNOWLEDGE, AND UNITY IN DIVERSITY
WITHIN BIOCULTURAL SYSTEMS**

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*¿Qué aprendió el árbol de la tierra
para conversar con el cielo?*

(What did the tree learn from the earth/
to be able to talk with the sky?)

Pablo Neruda – *El libro de las preguntas*

The Canadian Multiculturalism Act purports to promote a distinctly Canadian form of nation building and citizenship by recognizing that “multiculturalism is an inherent part of the history of Canada” (*Multiculturalism* n.p.). By recognizing and working to preserve and enhance diversity within a “bilingual framework” (3), the Canadian government claims to produce the first legislation of its kind that enshrines a commitment to “unity in diversity” (15). But what does this mean? What kind of glue holds together the Canadian mosaic, and who gets to decide where the pieces go? Moreover, how do we understand diversity and citizenship within the homogenizing forces of neoliberal capitalist globalization? The question of how to understand and “manage” diversity is perhaps one of the most important issues of this new century. How can we conceptualize and implement a social structure of unity within diversity that deals with the diverse needs of diverse populations, while also avoiding a relativistic voice from everywhere and nowhere, or the xenophobic parochialism of excessively local politics? When we are dealing with real inter-ethnic violence and animosity, are ideas like hybridity, plurality, tolerance, and integration really enough to give humanity a common ground to stand on?

It is my contention that in its conceptualization of unity within diversity, Canada’s official multiculturalism act has no language for power and thus can only function on a largely symbolic level as

an ideological state apparatus for maintaining national unity. I will examine the various metaphors and arguments surrounding official multiculturalism and situate them within similar debates surrounding the ecological crisis in order to show their interrelatedness and to offer an alternative to official multiculturalism. The notion that multiculturalism is both constitutive, an adjective that describes an already present situation, and latent, in the form of the verb "multiculturalized," meaning that it must be performed and brought into existence through government regulation, reflects similar tensions in wilderness and biodiversity debates. Thus, this essay will explore and seek to re-conceptualize solidarity, with an emphasis on the convergence of natural and cultural diversity. The creation of a pluralistic ethic that does not universalize and conceal a hegemonic position is fraught with the same issues environmentalists face when they try to articulate a biocentric environmental ethic that takes into account that humanity must make its living off the land, yet still respects the often competing needs of other members of the biosphere? Both these scenarios represent the difficulty of mediating disputes that occur in light of competing claims and overlapping subjectivities.

It is thus with sensitivity to the dangers of confusing biological and cultural categories that I proceed cautiously, attempting to account for the way biology and culture meet, but also how they diverge. Questions of silence, privileged, centre-margin, dualistic thinking, and hegemony are all germane to the debate surrounding unity in diversity within both nature and culture. In addition to providing theoretical tools for examining multiculturalism, I will deploy several ecocritical theories in order to examine the metaphors for multiculturalism, especially in terms of the movement between symbolic and literal plurality. The basis for unity must transcend the parochialism of anthropocentric liberal humanism by recognizing (rather than imagining) the literal and profoundly interconnected nature of all life on earth. Both official multiculturalism and reform environmentalism pay lip service to diversity, but never really create a language and politics capable of articulating and addressing the very real material power inequities and asymmetries at the heart of political and environmental exploitation. To move from metaphoric/shallow plurality, to a literal/deep plurality, we must recognize diversity as an ontological, epistemological, and biologic modality of being at the center of all life processes. The self-regulating *vereditas* of ecological systems is more than a metaphor; it is the way life survives, finding power and dynamic stability in plurality. Thus, I will argue that *situated bioregional knowledge* based on a deep understanding of the *literal interconnectedness* of all life provides a better model for unity in diversity,

allowing us to rethink citizenship and nationality in profoundly more egalitarian and ecologically sustainable ways.

Methodology

The metaphors that describe multiculturalism are diverse, but a surprising number revolve around the image of cultivation and gardening. As early as James Woodsworth's *Strangers Within Our Gates*, Canada is conceptualized as a "promising field" where the best and brightest of the world's peoples are transplanted and cultivated (33). The nation as garden invokes many corresponding metaphors, ranging from the categorization of certain people as weeds and the difficulty of transplanting and "taking root again in a strange soil," to the naturalized discourse of blood and soil¹ that fears invasive alien species (Woodsworth 43). Former Prime Minister John Diefenbaker commented that rather than a melting pot, Canadian multiculturalism is "a garden into which have been transplanted the hardiest and brightest flower from many lands, each retaining in its new environment the best of the qualities for which it was loved and prized in its native land" (*Multiculturalism* 9). This Edenic imagery of cooperative harmony conceals a much darker aspect of multiculturalism, namely, the role of the nation-state as a gardener that carefully selects which flowers to plant, which to designate as weeds, and which will get the most sun, soil, and light. Not all flowers are created or tended to equally, and the gardener has control over which ones will be provided with the conditions appropriate to its flourishing. Without addressing the entrenched privileged that certain groups experience within this system, the promise of multiculturalism can only amount to an ideological sleight-of-hand that conceals a convenient political expedient in order to expand the inroads for capitalism to further commodify culture. Because official multiculturalism claims a power-neutral position in defining the Other, especially the visible minority, it cannot produce a functional multicultural society that deals with the very real material inequities of asymmetric power distribution. Instead, it produces a discourse of multiculturalism that nurtures and mystifies the paralytic trinity of territory, nation, and rights.

Eva Mackey points out that "nations are the most universally legitimate, and seemingly natural, political units of our time" (Mackey 4). They are the "authorised marker of the particular" (Mackey 4),

¹ The most extreme example being that of National Socialism, which took the trinity of territory, nation, and rights to a terrifying logic of inclusion and exclusion.

building on categories of geography, genetics, authenticity, and various origin stories in order to legitimate the creation of an “imagined community” that delimits and naturalizes the boundaries between self-other, neighbour-stranger, and us-them (Mackey 2). Drawing on the kind of natural metaphors I mentioned above, I will use the metaphor/example of the *arboreal rhizome* in order to problematize and explore the creation of subjectivity as it relates to the relationship between nature, culture, geography, community, and the nation. Moving from soil, roots, trunk, to canopy, I will use the metaphor of the tree to destabilize the naturalized categories of plurality within Canada’s multicultural policy, and instead, offer up an alternative basis for unity in diversity within the *watershed consciousness* of ecological thinking and situated bioregional knowledge.

While this essay does promote a metaphoric pedagogy that uses the tree to tease out the radical potential of bioregionalism in order to challenge some of the ideological baggage of multicultural citizenship, the tree is much more than a metaphor. It is what Donna Haraway calls a “material-semiotic actor,” existing in the interstices of language, biology, ideology, and the whole apparatus of bodily production (*Simians* 200). Thus the tree is simultaneously an artifact of language, a metaphoric structure that I necessarily anthropomorphize for political ends; however, it also exceeds my attempts to map it, existing as a sign to many different beings, with many different sets of relationships forming in these complicated networks of (mis)communication. It is therefore an implicit assumption of this paper that the metaphor is necessarily exceeded by the materiality of the tree in a way that (hopefully) prevents it from simply becoming another metaphor for unity in diversity that falls short of engaging and taking into account the real actors, human and non-human, involved in the co-production of biocultural communities. As profoundly linguistic creatures, our bodies and reality are always already inscribed by metaphor, which like ecology, is the throwing together of seemingly unlike things in a manner that reveals deeper connections. While there will always be problems in moving between metaphoric and literal conceptions of community, diversity, nature, and culture, it is precisely in the messy and uncouth garden of this paper, that I hope to take the lessons I learned from the tree and learn to speak with the sky.

Soil

A seed falls and lands on the soft earth with a barely audible sound. Soon the radicle will stir and begin to push gently through

the dark soil, insinuating itself into the moist loam with a prescribed lust for water, minerals, and nitrogen. Meanwhile, the xylem works its way towards the sky, translating the rich semiotics of the soil—that miraculous living skin of the earth—with profound eloquence. Roots will enmesh, greeting fungus, bacteria, and other roots with the common language of survival. Without this invisible world, filled with alliances, betrayals, and agreements that rival those of any human community, nothing could grow.

As any gardener knows, the soil determines the quality and type of plant you can cultivate. Soil is an organism in itself, and is the foundation upon which the tree takes root. The kind of soil—whether sandy, clayey, rocky, nitrogen rich, or replete with organic matter—greatly affects the place-based strategies that a tree must employ in order to survive. Metaphorically, the soil is the ideological, ontological, epistemological, and material conditions in which plurality flourishes or is stagnated. The gardener has considerable control over nutrient, pH, and organic matter levels. Unlike true wilderness (although this is problematic), the national garden is bureaucratically regulated, controlled, and legislated in order to create a pleasing, yet structured, simulacrum of natural diversity. Richard Day suggests that “Canadian diversity [is] a technology of governance” (18) that seeks to manage the problem it has created. Like a gardener anxious about the state of his/her garden, multiculturalism is the soil for the governmental gardener to arrange the political and civic flora of Canada, while all the while claiming that it has arranged itself in an authentic, natural order. Echoing Diefenbaker’s claim that Canada’s garden contains the best and brightest flowers transplanted into our inviting soil, the role of the gardener is effaced into the benign and uncritical biological discourse of ecological harmony, obfuscating the considerable role played by economics, immigration rules, bureaucratic systems, and the global flows of human and monetary capital that impels people to move. Moreover, what traits are being selected by this benign gardener? How is diversity being arranged and displayed? Sneja Gunew makes a useful distinction between critical and state multiculturalism, stating that “official multicultural policies often produce restrictive notions of ethnicity that are still fuelled by assimilationist and to some extent racist principles” (Gunew 453). Moreover, “because multiculturalism uses the rhetoric of inclusion it cannot properly address the politics of exclusion” (Gunew 458).

The question thus becomes, what kind of soil is multiculturalism? In the first place, it is a soil artificially augmented for the prosperity of Anglophone and Francophone stock, in an “equal partnership between the two founding races” (*Royal* 3). The arrival of the Europeans

is thus ameliorated into the white-washed picturesque garden, and colonialism is recoded as “inevitably intensif[y]ing cultural diversity” (*Building* 13). The founding races theory makes no mention of Aboriginal land rights or the brutal colonial history of reservations, residential schools, and the ongoing economic and political marginalization of the Native population, which in Canada, like much of the world, remain unaddressed. Much like the devastating introduction of European plant varieties into already stable North American ecosystems, the “founding races” spread through the human flora with equally opportunistic fecundity, establishing a new climax ecosystem/ regime and then claiming to have enhanced the diversity of the ecosystem by assuming an Edenic teleology of the colonizer that has succeeded in “the brining of light to the dark world of inchoate nature” (Merchant 137). The white man’s burden becomes the task of transforming the chaos of wilderness into a manicured garden that produces a simulacrum of Nature’s diversity, and therefore naturalizes the current order of things by appealing to the category of the natural. Thus the government of Canada simultaneously deploys diversity as always already present, a tautological statement about general immigration trends, and also as a threat to the unification of the country under the rubric of a perilous nationalist subjectivity. The perennial problem of Quebec separatism, especially as echoed in the *Bilingualism and Biculturalism Commission*, suggests that while diversity defines us as Canadians, it also threatens to divide us. The solution of multiculturalism within a bicultural and bilingual framework claims to address both similarity and difference. However, this model is highly reductive in its conceptualization of articulate subjectivity because all diversity must be filtered through the two dominant cultures. The centre-margin dialectic is reinforced by using “ethnic Canadians” as “pawns in the old Canadian tug-of-war between Anglophones and Francophones” (Bissoondath 41).

The tension between preservation and enhancement, in the sense that the multicultural gardener sees him/herself as tending and enhancing a diversity that is already there (post colonization of course), allows the government to officially support plurality in the formaldehyde of heritage, exoticizing the other and assuming that “people, coming here from elsewhere, wish to remain what they have been” (Bissoondath 43). By claiming a power neutral position, while nonetheless carefully controlling the Canadian garden, multiculturalism becomes nothing more than a symbolic “difference-studded unity” (Bannerji 95) of a carefully landscaped and exotic garden, and thus has very little ability to address segregation, racism, structural inequities, and conditions of emergence and sustenance that

are unequally applied. The gardener thus prunes, tends, organizes and fertilizes the garden, only to pretend that it is wild. Because “multiculturalism is accepted only insofar as it promises to enhance the cultural capital of the mainstream” (Kamboureli 90), the garden resembles the exotic imperial gardens of Victorian England, a tribute to the colonial spirit, and a scenic facsimile of diversity that cannot account for the material and ideological content of its soil, nor the violence of its taxonomic reductionism.

In a comparable way, officially preserved wilderness works under similar taxonomic divisions between self-other, urban-wilderness, and nature-culture. Like the “construction of visible minorities as a social imaginary” (Bannerji 92) within multiculturalism, national parks quarantine nature from culture by designating the appropriate space for the wilderness experience as separate and distinct from the nature we always already inhabit. In naming the other, segregation is always implied in official policies of plurality, whether cultural or biological. Michael Carr argues that “destruction of natural ecologies is being accomplished by the same system and the same systemic processes that are destroying social ecologies” (Carr 90). By naming nature as out there, a healthy urban and rural diversity is sacrificed for the wilderness fantasies of highly staged and bureaucratically regulated space of touristic consumption. In the search for the “authentic” antithesis of civilization, isolated wilderness preserves become an urban palliative that excuses the unsustainable nature of cities. Rather than giving access to nature, preserved and isolated wilderness promotes and supports the dominant modes of the very consumer culture such marketed experiences purport to escape. As William Cronon states, “the trouble with wilderness is that it quietly expresses and reproduces the very values its devotees seek to reject” (80).

Rather than living in nature, and thus taking responsibility for our presence in the world, much of humanity’s relationship with nature is increasingly that of the tourist. Wilderness is not a place to escape civilization; it is a place to excuse it. We use it to make the urban experience more bearable and to make the whole techno-economic liquidation of nature more palatable. Tellingly, Parks Canada is under the same jurisdiction as the preservation of historical and cultural sites, which indicates the importance of wilderness in the creation of a shared national identity. Moreover, this historic dimension reinforces the status of parks as past tense; they are museums or genetic repositories that leave a small amount of natural capital in the bank account and thus detract from the fact that humanity is vastly overextending the earth’s carrying capacity by fostering the illusion that we have a trust fund we can call upon in times of crisis.

The spectacularized and mummified memory of nature allows real Nature to be destroyed. Much like the policies of multiculturalism, the diversity strategy of national parks allows the *symbolic* importance of wilderness to survive in the collective national imagination, while nature is *literally* decimated. So while Parks Canada purports to be maintaining healthy ecosystems, the competing demands for tourism and access mean that true diversity and the flourishing of populations of non-human nature are threatened by the very structure that is ostensibly preserving them. One needs to look no further than the frequent and deadly interaction between automobiles and wildlife in National Parks to realize that animals are not being preserved so much as being made available to the human gaze. "Natural" landscapes are moulded to fit the dominant modes and expectations surrounding the fetishized wilderness experience, and the viewer is duped into carefully staged authenticity that, rather than providing contact with nature, further sutures nature and culture by spatially and temporally isolating the appropriate site for experiencing "wilderness." When access is the only consideration, the formally wild place becomes the "museum-like diorama to which industrial tourism tends to reduce the world" (Papa Jr. 328).

The typical multicultural festival, with its emphasis on heritage, food, traditional dress and dance, caricatures diversity in the same way, reducing it to a spectacularized facsimile and historically static representation of fetishized difference. The preservationist mentality relies on the very binary it purports to deconstruct, and thus cannot address deep structures of power and ideology that constitute the soil from which domination is nurtured and grows. Without addressing this conceptual soil, the seeds of white privilege, anthropocentrism, and the system of patriarchal colonialist capitalism will continue to act like a weed and colonize the freshly decimated earth. The increasingly homogenous monoculture of capitalism threatens to undermine the structures of diversity within nature and culture that ensure long-term survival. Official policies of plurality promote diversity in ghettoized festivals and parks, while ignoring the issue of how local structures of self-governance can be instituted to truly promote an already present plurality. Smaro Kamboureli makes the claim that official multiculturalism practices a "sedative politics, a politics that attempts to recognize ethnic differences, but only in a contained fashion, in order to manage them" (Kamboureli 82). The Canadian Multiculturalism Act and various national/provincial park policies can only maintain symbolic/capitalistic diversity rather than literal/biocentric diversity, applying a top-down logic that masquerades a particular in the guise of a universal. The official position, a voice from everywhere and no-

where, undermines the very project of plurality because it does not have a language for power or privilege and does not recognize its own situated position—the ideological soil from which it sprung—as having very specific conditions that cannot be applied universally. A cactus and a black spruce cannot grow in the same soil, yet Canadian multiculturalism makes this claim; depending which the gardener chooses, one will flourish at the expense of the other. In the “doctrine of objectivity that promises transcendence” (Haraway, *Simians* 187), the mythical gaze from nowhere “inscribes all the marked bodies” with a sign of their difference (Haraway, *Simians* 188). The unmarked body is thus absolved of the need to justify its position, thereby presenting its power as obvious, inevitable, and natural. Himani Bannerji argues that speaking of “culture without addressing power relations displaces and trivializes deep contradictions. It is a reductionism that hides the social relations of domination that continually create ‘difference’ as inferior and thus signifies continuing relations of antagonism” (Bannerji 97).

Facile difference is thus coded as authentic, relegating both cultural and natural diversity to contained and spectacularized displays of static heritage and wild “authenticity.” In the same way that stereotyped conceptions of folklore become the only claim to “authentic heritage” (Kamboureli 108), the myth of virgin wilderness relies on “the removal of Indians to create an ‘uninhabited wilderness’—uninhabited as never before in the human history of the place—remind[ing] us just how invested, just how constructed, the American wilderness really is (Cronon 79). Like an herbicide clearing the field for the monoculture of capitalism, the syntax of forgetting, integral to the nation-building project, can only provide a commodified and touristic consumption of difference. Both heritage folklore and wilderness preserves rely on static conceptualizations of an idealized past that denies and surreptitiously solidifies the binary modality of us-them, and nature-culture by appealing to categories of authenticity, mass access, and purity.

As an alternative, the ecological model of literal interconnectivity challenges the Enlightenment conception of the autonomous and sovereign individual, and thus has the ability to move from the metaphoric/symbolic mode of diversity, to a literal/popular form. Many environmentalists employ the literal and metaphoric image of the watershed in order to remind us that everyone is downstream from someone else. Moreover, the watershed, “as a defining image of community has the additional advantages of being a quick and easy way of calling attention to the arbitrariness of official borders,” suggests that we are part of a natural community connected by

mutual need and desire (Buell 246). The power of the watershed comes in the ability to move from metaphor to the world and back again. The watershed thus becomes a physical model for natural boundaries and communities, while also providing an ontological basis for understanding the literal interconnectedness of life. It is an “aesthetic-ethical-political-ecological image” (Buell 247) geared towards real change, functioning on a metaphoric and pedagogical level, but also providing an example of the “first kind of community” (248). Multiculturalism can learn from this model of unity in diversity, whereby the movement back and forth between literal and metaphoric performs a kind of ecological pedagogy rooted in situated bioregional knowledge.

The unity of nature does not come in some sort of imagined totality, but rather, in the prolific set of interpenetrating relationships that constitute the web of life. The modern environmental crisis is rooted in the failure to understand that we are always already within and part of nature. The conceptual schism of nature-culture and the self-other binary is the toxic soil in which contemporary western capitalism grows, producing a sterile and monstrous Frankenstein that will inevitably kill its creator. The Canadian government is proud that “Canada’s bilingual and multicultural heritage represents an asset, offering a capacity to relate naturally and with understanding to almost every country in the world. It can be especially valuable in developing trade links” (Multiculturalism 4). The expediency of culture as resource within a global marketplace ends with the creation of what Todd Giltin calls a facile “shopping centre of identity politics” (Gunew 456). The corporate soil is toxic, and it is time to uproot the juggernaut of capitalism.

Roots

Roots bind us to the soil, recalling the nurturing structures of support—whether cultural, environmental, political, social—that constitutes the foundation upon which subjectivity is based. For the tree, roots mirror the canopy, spreading filaments and blurring the boundary between soil and tree, stretching out in search of stability, sustenance, and community. With this extended metaphor, I would like to offer the tree as simultaneously a hierarchical/individualistic structure, and also communistic/rhizomatic, a material-semiotic chain of nodal points that communicates with other trees, fungus, translates abiotic into biotic components (nitrogen fixing from the air, mineral uptake), and even produces vast communal organisms of interconnected trees that share nutrients, carbohydrates, and warn each other

against insect invasions (Suzuki and Grady 45). Trees are connected through their roots in a mutualistic relationship with each other and with fungal mycorrhizal mats that extend the surface area of the roots by up to a factor of one thousand. The fungus cannot synthesize its own food and thus draws on the tree for carbohydrates, and in exchange, it radically extends the nutrient and water absorption capabilities of the tree (Suzuki and Grady 54-55). These are the hidden ties that bind, the “vector[s] of category transformation” that form the interpenetrating “geometries of relationships” that constitute nature’s unity in diversity (Haraway, *Vampire* 322, 336). This is the model and the basis for bioregional democracy and ecological citizenship.

While the tree appears to be an individual, almost the epitome of the singular organism, it is communistic in a very profound way, especially when you look beneath the surface. The language of the earth moves through rhizomatic connections within the entire forest ecosystem. The tree’s relationship with fungus is a perfect example of interconnectivity, mutualism, and a metaphoric and literal model for unity in diversity. Both tree and fungus are separate organisms, yet their level of interdependence is such that they cannot exist without each other, at least not at the same level of size and complexity. This type of mutualism has caused Neil Evernden to challenge conventional conceptions of boundaries between self and other. In this sense, ecological theory is subversive because it undermines Cartesian dualisms, neat divisions, and taxonomic categories that separate the world into independent subjects and objects. It also challenges the assumption that human beings are the sole bearers of value. Neil Evernden uses ecology to undermine the sense of self-bound-by-skin and thus moves into an expanded mode of “fields of self” (Evernden 33). Are the tree and fungus two separate organisms, even though they cannot survive without each other? Are the bacteria in the human digestive tract a part of us, or separate? The literal interconnectedness of all life changes the role of border zones from vulnerable areas in need of patrol and careful surveillance, to areas of mutual interpenetration, cooperation, and survival. Michel Zimmerman proposes:

So long as people conceive of themselves as isolated egos, only externally related to other people and nature, they inevitably tend to see life in terms of scarcity and competition. When people conceive of themselves as internally related to others and to nature, however, they tend to see life in terms of bounty, not scarcity, and in terms of cooperation, not aggressive competition. (Zimmerman 242)

The tree is both bioregion and individual, macro and micro in the sense that the local and the global are always interpenetrated. There are no central points or positions in a rhizome, only multiple loci of potentiality. Although arborescent models of descent and ascent are

usually associated with hierarchies, the tree, like all life, is *positionally rhizomatic*—simultaneously together and apart, translating the language of sun, soil, water, and nutrients into the myriad biophysical and social networks of constitutive interconnectivity upon which all life relies. Even death does not bring separation, for it is upon the dead core that the tree leans for support, and upon the dead tree that the forest springs forth in opportunistic fecundity. Hierarchies are abstractions, isolated simplifications that artificially constitute a subject or object as a coherent and separate totality, rather than acknowledging the infinite play of signifiers and material-semiotic chains that proliferate from the porous nature of ecological interconnectivity. Perpetual cycles, one of nature's vectors of category transformation, are broken by the false dualisms of abstracted arborescent models of descent, like the sham corporate diversity embraced by the model of multiculturalism as resource.

The rhizome is a vector, always moving, incapable of being broken, a reconstitutive space of flows that follows the proliferating transversal edge of category transformation, translation, and perpetual becoming. Official multiculturalism cannot comprehend this model/mode, for it must always seek the glue of bilingual unity that conceals its own positionality in order to naturalize the machinations of white privileged, and provide an ideological state apparatus for nation-building. The visible minority, in its isolation as both problem and solution, must never be integrated into the governmental arborescence that constitutes the white-washed vertical mosaic of official multiculturalism. Like the national park that patrols the border of town and country, rural-urban, and garden-wilds, the presence of the other, especially in the symbolically elevated modality of "difference-blind policy," entrenches the very disunity, structural disjunction, racism, and duality it purports to eliminate (Taylor 107). Situated bioregional knowledge, on the other hand, embraces transformational multiplicities. This is the basis for *ecosocial capital*, a system of exchange that does not conceal the relational nature of all exchange, translation, and vector transformation. Michael Carr describes ecosocial capital as a "vital bonding process" of "synergistic energy" that creates the "horizontal community-building strategies" that diversity must be based upon (Carr 17). Ecosocial capital is the antithesis of atomized, hyper-individualistic *homo economicus*. Both the roots of economics and ecology are based in the Greek word *oikos*, meaning home, suggesting the transactional nature of establishing a dwelling place that is sustainable, balanced, and fair. To create a home means to engage in relations that proliferate rather than stagnate ecosocial capital. This is the basis of healthy, biosocial citizenship.

Somewhat artificially, I have decided to code bioregionalism as part of the tree's trunk, because bioregional situated knowledge is a kind of semiotic highway that translates and mediates between the knowledge of the roots, soil, canopy, and air. The artificial division between the different aspects of the tree, destabilized by the particularities of both the metaphoric structure I have created, and the literal interconnectivity of ecological subjectivity, suggests an ontological and epistemological intervention to state multiculturalism that challenges the segregationism that undergirds the policy as incommensurate with a biocultural rhizomatic structure of deep diversity. The co-creation of a society based on the acceptance and proliferation of diversity, or in other words, the reinsertion of culture within nature, requires a pedagogical strategy of promoting watershed/ecological consciousness that also seeks alternative structures of mediation/governance. This new strategy of unity in diversity cannot be limited to the human agents of nature, but rather, must harbour a deeply felt sense of inter-subjectivity that resists the suturing, hyper-individualistic discourse of neoliberal capitalism. Bioregionalism is the political ecological framework in which to translate the idea of difference into practice; hence, we must realize subjectivity is not bound by skin. The bourgeois monad of Enlightenment rationality, ensconced in the liberal humanistic discourse of freedom, happiness, and free-will performs a violence towards nature that has synergistically culminated in the wholesale liquidation of the environment. While we are only one species among some thirty million, humans use "40% of global net primary production" (Alberti et al. 1169). Shockingly, the United Nations *Millennium Assessment Report*, conducted by 1300 researchers in 95 countries, warns that two thirds of the 24 ecosystems in the world are in major decline and in danger of collapse. It warns that over the next 100 years, 32% of amphibians, 12% per cent of birds, 25% of conifers, and 23% of mammals could become extinct (Millennium 59). Echoing these concerns, Fredric Jameson argues that the techno-bureaucratic system of late global capitalism threatens a "radical eclipse of Nature itself" (Jameson 34). Perhaps 'eclipse' is not a strong enough word: we are entering a phase of history where neoliberal capitalism is systematically liquidating the basic life-support systems of the planet. In order to solve this problem, we need to get to the epistemological, ontological, political, and economic roots of the environmental crisis.

Trunk

The trunk is the infrastructure of the tree, the highway for water and nutrients to ascend towards the canopy, and for sugars and various chemical signals to descend from the leaves. It is also an ecosystem for numerous fungi, birds, insects, rodents and countless species of moss, lichen, and bacteria. The trunk keeps the tree standing against the elements, building upon the dead heart of the wood. It is liminal in a profound way, with only a few centimetres of cambium between the bark and core actually alive, the trunk is the epitome of nature's remarkable ability to generate life from death. Symbolically, I have decided to code the trunk as the infrastructure of the government's entrenched privilege: those mediating discourses of official policy, centralized governmental power, and global capitalism that undergird and undermine any true attempt at moving from a hierarchical arborescence, to a rhizomatic bioregionalism that truly embraces and fosters diversity. For the government, the trunk is pure resource, awaiting the transubstantiation of the cash nexus in order to code diversity as commodity and thus maintain an infinite chain of consumer desire by offering a resource pool of novel distraction and a sense of difference that functions as a kind of Trojan horse for commodified and exchangeable identities. The cyclicity of life from death is thus wrenched into the linearity of consumer capitalism.

Valuing and performing biocultural diversity begins with decentring the human subject as the sole dispenser of value. Likewise, any governmental multiculturalism or biodiversity strategy must also move beyond the entrenched power dynamics of its particular historic moment by decentring the privilege of the cultural dominant. Evolutionarily, diversity is about the ability of a species or culture to draw on numerous survival strategies and thus increase the group's chances of survival. Based on the ecological truism that diversity is good, watershed consciousness becomes a translation matrix of separate, yet inseparable material-semiotic actors that deploy vectors of category translation in order to increase their survival strategies. As a basis for theory, these vectors challenge the Cartesian thorn of anthropocentrism and dualistic thinking that privileges human consciousness and separates subjectivities into neat, preserved, isolated, and independent fragments. Without diversity on the local level, the global scale is radically impoverished. As Aldo Leopold states, "a thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise" (Leopold 262).

To foster true diversity, the trunk must provide an infrastructure that makes room for dwelling, agency, and self-direction, first and

foremost, by denuding the myth of bounded subjectivity and moving to a model of ecological inter-subjectivity. Environmental ethics requires an even deeper intervention in order to reconnect the vocal chords of nature based on an I-thou rather than I-it subject-subject interaction (Evernden 98). Power needs to be addressed rhizomatically along all the axes of the arborescent model. In order to foster diversity, nature (including people) must be allowed to regulate itself. David Harmon points out that “uniformity is often confused with unity” (157). On the figurative level, the rhizomatic arborescent model of unity in diversity suggests a pedagogical intervention that promotes the internalization of an ecological/watershed consciousness based on local, situated knowledge, and a deep understanding of the literal interconnectedness of all life. Beginning with the decentring of the human subject, bioregionalism involves a sensual re-inhabitation of the world based on full immersion and dialogue with place. As Michael Carr notes, “the bioregional movement is inspired by and organized around the concept of healthy and sustainable local communities, completed by broader efforts at social change through regional and interregional networking in both rural and urban environments” (70). Bioregionalism thrives on a kind of democratic asymmetry because it understands true difference as the ability to acknowledge and celebrate the myriad contribution that bodies and knowledges produce within their own contexts. Donna Haraway’s model of situated knowledge productively augments bioregionalism because she argues for “epistemologies of embodied, and therefore accountable, objectivity” (194). Situated knowledge is about accountability, positionality, and dialogue. Since everyone possesses the ability to create truth, but no-one has the monopoly on the process or end result, bioregional situated knowledge facilitates a process of discourse by uncovering the axes of power that undergird all truth claims and communal interactions.

Bioregionalism, as an ethical-political-aesthetic-ontological category, moves between figurative and literal modes in order to articulate an ecological or watershed consciousness that has a language for power capable of politicizing the question of unity in diversity. In other words, bioregionalism is simultaneously an ecological and political discourse, albeit a utopic one for now, that moves between metaphoric and literal modalities in order to produce a paradigm shift rooted in the particular, grass-roots, local environs always already situated within a global system. The lesson of the tree, whereby an individual (arboreal monad) is rhizomatically connected with the entire biosphere, provides a model of unity in diversity based on the ecological fact of interconnectivity. The tragedy of current political

organization is that we have forgotten that interconnectedness is literal, and not just metaphoric. The West is particularly bad in treating Nature as pure resource, acting as if a declining ecosystem will somehow unaffact the continued growth of capitalism.

The tree thus becomes a third space between literal and metaphoric, an example of arboreal rhizomatic communalism based on individuality situated within an immense network of interwoven parts that simultaneously retain their individuality, while also functioning as elements of a much larger whole. Like Haraway's notion of situated knowledge, the tree becomes a "material-semiotic actor" (Haraway, *Simians* 200) that translates knowledge from the earth into the ephemeral, but vital language of water vapour, oxygen, weather—the very language of life itself speaking through the tendrils of profoundly objective and subjective truth. Metaphorically, the tree becomes a model for knowledge production and communalism that negotiates the space between monad and rhizomatic node, a unity in diversity that retains both group and individual identity. Bioregionalism embraces this kind of structure, espousing the need for the "decentralization of power... [and] more self-governing forms of social organization" (Carr 79). By creating a sense of home that is a "nurturing incubator of ecocentric social capital" (Carr 79), communities can live within a more reciprocal relationship with their surroundings, rather than drawing on a dispersed global resource base and thus living beyond the earth's regenerative capacity. Moving from epistemology to ontology, metaphor to literal, the "embedded ecosocial individual" is thus able to negotiate a third space between nature and culture that embraces both the limitations and potentialities of each particular watershed and biocultural environment (Carr 93). Humanity therefore moves from exploiter to eco-citizen in the bio-agora. The bioregional trunk translates between language, ideas and action, drawing from the conceptual soil of ecological thinking to dwell responsibly within the network of biocultural systems. The metaphor/literality of bioregionalism is thus concerned with the production of ecological sustainable bodies capable of proliferating, rather than destroying difference.

Sylvia Bowerbank suggests that we need "a green civility based on bioregional values and knowledges" (Bowerbank no page). She emphasizes that "story-telling is a cultural technology of connectivity and groundedness; stories are told in the flesh, on the ground, by a body in a specific place" (Bowerbank). Stories of reinhabitation develop a rhizomatic network of situated knowledge and thus provide the epistemological and ontological basis for challenging the power structures that obfuscate many attempts at developing alternatives to corporate globalization. By creating "narrative grounded in geog-

raphy” (Cheney 31), we can begin “considering nature not just as the stage upon which the human story is acted out, but as an actor in the drama” (Glotfelty xxi). Moreover, “bioregions provide a way of grounding narrative without essentializing the idea of self, a way of mitigating the need for ‘constant recontextualization’ to undercut the oppressive and distorting overlays of cultural institutions” (Cheney 33). Situated bioregional knowledges provide a way of articulating truths grounded in the particular ecosocial environs of a specific place, and thereby avoiding the dangers of essentialism, parochialism, and the pitfalls of metanarratives. They also acknowledge the need for a contextual identity politics that does not claim transcendence, universalization, or the relativistic voice from everywhere and nowhere of liberalism.

Christopher Manes suggests that “Nature *is* silent in our culture (and in literate societies generally) in the sense that the status of being a speaking subject is jealously guarded as an exclusively human prerogative” (Manes 15). Metaphorically, this silence is akin to cutting the trunk of the tree and severing the material-semiotic highway between the earth and sky. It is a silencing that drowns out the articulate rustle of leaves and thereby positions humanity as the vivisectionist of nature. Manes points out that “to regard nature as alive and articulate has consequences in the realm of social practices” (15). Bioregional situated knowledge can become the locus by which we define ourselves; micronarratives of inhabitation, origins, fragments and contested terrain form the soil of unity in diversity. There is no need to search for some national or international subjectivity, the interconnectivity of ecosystems furnishes us with the perfect model of postmodern subjectivity, a unity based on porous borders, self-regulation, dynamic flux, cyclical rhythms, rhizomatic structures, and situated knowledge and consciousness rooted in the earth. We have to move away from the artificially constituted metanarratives of nation, the bourgeois monad, rationality and capitalism, and learn to listen to the silenced, but ever-present figurative and literal lessons of nature. Perhaps this is what Robert Kroetsch means by “the disunity that becomes our dance of unity” (361).

Ecological agency is co-agency; not an effacement of freedom, but the recognition that the notion of autonomy and sovereignty are dangerous and artificial borders that promote a violent and unsustainable competition. The nature of ecological interconnectivity undercuts the notion that agency can ever be manifest in isolation. Isolation is an ontological category we must radically transform, one that will have positive consequences for human and non-human nature. Culture must re-learn to adapt to nature, rather than assuming nature

will adapt to culture. We must re-insert humanity within the stream of evolution, that insatiable drive towards difference and plurality. Thus, bioregionalism is utopic vision and political intervention, philosophy and practice, ontology and epistemology, and aesthetic and utilitarian. Perhaps completely self-sufficient communities are historically improbable ideals, however, in the act of striving, the artificially sutured culture of Enlightenment rationalism and bureaucratic market capitalism begins to be realigned within the cyclical and regenerative metabolism of nature. In his seminal work *A Sand Country Almanac*, Aldo Leopold makes the case for an ideological shift that changes "the role of Homo Sapiens from conquerors of the land-community to plain members and *citizens* of it" (emphasis mine 240). Rather than a linear industrial model of society, bioregionalism embraces the discursive circularity of nature's material-semiotic chains; it demands that we acknowledge nature's agency as significant in our own, and thereby reflect certain patterns within our relations. It turns us into true citizens of the world.

Canopy

The canopy completes the cycle. Plant life is the basis of most forms of life on earth, translating the otherwise inchoate language of sunlight into the trembling atoms of water that release oxygen and create the sugars the entire food-web is based upon. Without photosynthesis, there would be no terrestrial life, save for some bacteria in the oceans. The tree's canopy is a micro-ecosystem in itself, housing countless species of insects, birds, mammals, rodents, other plants, and providing shade for the forest floor. A tree also provides a vital link between the earth and the sky, transpiring water through the leaves and thus re-hydrating the atmosphere, cleansing it of pollutants, and moderating climactic patterns. Although the canopy is the furthest point from the roots, the leaves will eventually provide the organic matter for the very soil the tree needs to survive. The canopy is the cyclical basis of a tree, shedding every year, bearing fruit, and feeding itself with the translated language of sunlight. It is a system in and of itself, but one that cannot survive without the infrastructure and mediation of the trunk, nor the stability and semiotic translation of the root structure. The tree speaks the secrets of the earth to the sky; it cleanses the air, provides moisture, and splits atoms with its green lifeblood. It completes the material-semiotic chain of life, an unbroken and rhizomatic system of unity in diversity.

With the extended metaphor of the arboreal rhizome, frequently meandering and conflating the issue of biologic and cultural diversity,

nature and culture, wilderness and city, I hope a concept of situated bioregional knowledge and rhizomatic eco-citizenship has emerged as an alternative basis upon which to build a framework for unity and diversity. Although a bioregional society based on largely self-sufficient communities may be impossible during this current historical moment, the utopic vision provides a politics of hope that begins with a pedagogic moment capable of translating between symbolic and literal discourses of diversity. That said, communities around the world are already engaging in bioregional politics by establishing community sponsored agriculture, co-operatives, bioregional councils, neighbourhood alliances, car-sharing programs, and various other grass-roots approaches to community building. The global nature of the current environmental crisis, although tragic, also provides solidarity based on mutual vulnerability. Although poor people tend to be disproportionately affected by pollution, the immanence of anthropogenic environmental destruction transcends individuals, nations, races, gender, and species. As Ulrich Beck argues, while “hunger is hierarchical... nuclear contamination, however, is egalitarian and in that sense, democratic” (Beck 27).

I began this essay with a quotation from Pablo Neruda, and offer it up as a challenge and vision for the kind of category transformation and material-semiotic highways humanity must re-build with nature. What can we learn from the earth to be able to speak with the sky? Our collective survival depends on whether or not we can heed the lessons of the tree and become healthy and productive citizens of the world.

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