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Tania Aguila-Way, Kit Dobson et Nicole Shukin

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Neoliberal Environments: Clearing the Smoke of 2020

Tania Aguila-Way, Kit Dobson, and Nicole Shukin

The image on the cover of this issue of *Studies in Canadian Literature* is of a forest fire in the mountains of western Alberta. Given the times in which we live, however, an image of a fire could evoke any number of places. In 2020, it could have been an image of the fires in Australia, where over three billion nonhuman animals are estimated to have died as a result of out-of-control blazes; or it might have been an image of the fires that swept through California, Oregon, and Washington states, displacing many; or it might have been a fire in the Amazon basin, where the ultra-conservative government of Jair Bolsonaro has moved to rapidly open the forests to what can only euphemistically be termed "development." Many things transpired in 2020. Among those that must be remembered and grieved are the ongoing environmental calamities, emblematized by fires in many global locations.

This specific image is one that we have chosen for particular reasons. The fire that it depicts occurred in 2009 near the intersections of Highways 93 and 11 in the mountains of Alberta. It was a deliberately set, controlled blaze, ignited in order to spur forest regeneration as well as to control the spread of mountain pine beetles. This image reminds us of the ways in which climate change, accelerated by neoliberal policies designed to foster economies of perpetual growth, prompts further human intervention into landscapes. The mountain pine beetle's spread northward as a result of warming winters has resulted in many dead and dying forests in the Rocky Mountains. Humans can set fires in order to get ahead of the beetles, yet many hillsides across Alberta and British Columbia now provide evidence of the reddened, desiccated needles of pine and spruce trees where the insects have killed the forests. The environment and neoliberalism interact in potent, alarming, and often unanticipated ways.

There are other reasons, too, for selecting an image of fire to open this special issue. While we are cautious about metaphorical under-

standings of fire, given the very real challenges and threats posed by conflagrations across the globe, we cannot neglect those additional literary registers. Fire is often used to understand social situations, like the recent use of the term to describe Canadian literature as a "dumpster fire" (Elliott). The dumpster fire is, to work with the metaphor, different from a wildfire. Hopefully contained within the dumpster in which it has started, the end result is likely to be a burnt-out husk, a scorched shell of what was formerly a useful vessel. Yet the vessel itself warrants further interrogation, given that dumpsters are an index of the ways in which, in neoliberal times, all that humans do not wish to encounter — that which is termed "waste" — is transported and then consigned to less visible spaces, often underground. The wildfire, bushfire, or forest fire, in turn, is a different configuration: these are unruly, outdoors, and unbounded; no fantasy of containment is possible. And the results, too, are different. Many coniferous tree species, for instance, require fire in order to germinate their seeds, as their cones will not open until they are heated to a sufficient temperature. The aftermath of a forest fire, in the short term, is a charred environment, but the forest's undergrowth regenerates thereafter. In an era in which, as a recent article in *The Guardian* put it, humankind is seemingly "waging war on" nature (Harvey), and in which global greenhouse gas emissions continue to push temperatures higher — in spite of emissions reductions prompted by the pandemic-induced global shutdown — thinkers, critics, and artists of this time need to be aware both of the short- and longer-term effects of conflagration. This knowledge of the forest ecology's response to fire, for instance, prompts Laura Moss and Brendan McCormack, in a 2017 editorial in *Canadian Literature*, to observe that fireweed regrows quickly after fires. What, they wonder, "is the critical, literary equivalent of fireweed?" (7).

Situating Neoliberalism

Our call for papers went out prior to the ruptures, movements, and momentous events — from apocalyptic forest fires to #ShutDownCanada, #BlackLivesMatter, and Defund the Police; from the spread of COVID-19 to the fabrication of an alternate reality around U.S. election results — that made 2020 feel like an epochal year for many people around the world. When we first hatched this special issue on neoliberal environments, we felt we had a decent understanding of neoliberalism

from our different vantage points in British Columbia, Alberta, and Ontario. At the time, regional differences both seemed to be renewed by the rise of prairie populist and separatist sentiments fueled by pipeline promoters and anti-carbon tax crusaders *and* rendered irrelevant by an underlying neoliberal consensus that "the economy" invariably trumps "the environment" as a national interest. Following Wendy Brown, we understood neoliberalism to be more than simply "a set of economic policies, an ideology, or a resetting of the relation between state and economy" (9). In *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution*, Brown writes:

> In contrast with an understanding of neoliberalism as a set of state policies, a phase of capitalism, or an ideology that set loose the market to restore profitability for a capitalist class, I join Michel Foucault and others in conceiving neoliberalism as an order of normative reason that, when it becomes ascendant, takes shape as a governing rationality extending a specific formulation of economic values, practices, and metrics to every dimension of human life. (30)

With the ascent of neoliberal reason, "all spheres of existence are framed and measured by economic terms and metrics, even when those spheres are not directly monetized" (10). Moreover, in domains governed by neoliberal reason, "we are only and everywhere *homo oeconomicus*" (10). Although Brown's own analysis of neoliberalism tends to proceed as if an exclusively human *demos* is all that's at stake — that is, as if human political and social life can be detached from the more-than-human environments and relations in which it is embedded — we saw her description of a "governing rationality" which establishes a certain type of human as universally normative as important for scholars concerned with anthropocentrism and human exceptionalism in its neoliberal expressions.

If we started out with this understanding, by the close of 2020 neoliberalism had become significantly more opaque as a historical phenomenon and object of critique. At moments last year it appeared that the impossible had a chance of happening: the lock that neoliberal reason ostensibly had on "all spheres of existence" seemed to loosen under the pressure of movements and events that either directly contested or indirectly undermined its workings. The coronavirus wasn't the only historical agent to cause economic and social disruptions that

unsettled neoliberal complacencies. At the beginning of 2020, when hereditary chiefs, elders, and members from the Wet'suwet'en First Nation in northern British Columbia blocked the Coastal GasLink Pipeline project from running through their ancestral territory, they ignited a movement that saw Indigenous and non-Indigenous allies across Turtle Island forming hard and soft blockades in solidarity with the defense of their land and sovereignty. Solidarity actions involving the blocking of "critical infrastructure" (rail lines, bridges, government buildings, and ports) articulated themselves as an anti-capitalist, anti-colonial movement to "Shut Down Canada." Not only was the free market economy directly challenged by an Indigenous-led movement that refused to subordinate the rights of Indigenous people to those of extractive capital and its export markets; neoliberal faith in a self-regulating market that was free of government interference was implicitly weakened by the hypocrisy of free-marketers who cried for intervention by the settler-colonial state, asking it to crack down on protestors and ensure the priority of unfettered capitalism over Indigenous sovereignty. Despite the RCMP's occupation of Wet'suwet'en territory to enforce the pipeline route, it looked as though neoliberalism had bumped up against a significant limit. For one, Indigenous assertions of sovereignty in an era of reconciliation forced the Trudeau government to carefully weigh the symbolic damage caused by the use of illiberal force in the service of oil and gas interests against the political damage caused by failing to do so. More than a complex juggling of national reconciliation, economic power, and Indigenous sovereignty was at issue for neoliberalism, however. The scale and stamina of solidarity movements confronted its norms of possessive individualism and competition with a stunning demonstration of collective *refusal*.

Only shortly thereafter, in the wake of the murder of George Floyd by American police officers in May of 2020, a(nother) police state came out in force to quash the upswelling of Black Lives Matter. Here again, the non-interfering or minimal state idealized by neoliberal pundits was far from the one on display; rather, Black Lives Matter protests revealed the paradox of neoliberalism's disavowal-yet-reliance upon state interference to violently police bodies in the interests of racial capitalism. The messages of those protesting against anti-Black and anti-Asian racism over the course of the year undercut the neoliberal fantasy of individuals equally competing for chances at success within a free market, by raising consciousness about the long histories of colonial and racial capitalism

in which stolen land, labour, and life are the ongoing conditions of capitalist accumulation. If U.S. neoliberalism was challenged from below in 2020, it was simultaneously confangled from above, by the white head of state himself. Many commentators seeking to understand the relationship between neoliberalism and Trump's presidency have asked: did the President's isolationism, attacks on free trade agreements, penchant for imposing tariffs, and distortion of U.S. election results undermine neoliberalism, or deliriously reinvent it?

In Canada, yet another form of government intervened in neoliberal life in 2020. The biopolitical state called forth to manage the coronavirus pandemic also potentially complicates the neoliberal status quo, but for different reasons. As the Canadian government rolled out COVID-19 relief packages to workers and wage subsidy programs for businesses, its emergency assistance again revealed that neoliberal talk of self-regulating markets fails to account for the massive government spending that enables capitalism to reproduce itself socially despite, or rather through, serial crises. Yet while it may be tempting to think that neoliberalism suffered a setback when certain sectors of the economy were shut down by the Trudeau government, the opposite is more likely. Neoliberal reasoning — which seeks to establish the health of the economy as an overriding interest — continued to hold sway during the shutdowns and the "temporary" episode of a caring, social welfare state investing in health and well-being.

Yet even if the Liberal government's reprioritization of aid and compassion over business-as-usual was calculated to serve the goal of economic resumption, COVID-19 opened a potentially radical caesura in the norms of neoliberal life. For one, outpourings of public gratitude for underpaid frontline and essential workers opened affective alternatives to the rule of competitive self-interest. Existential alternatives to socially ordered ways of being and knowing had an opportunity to surface as many workplaces and schools closed, and as people with shelters began sheltering in place. As highways emptied of traffic and skies over large cities cleared of both smog and airplanes due to travel restrictions, a glimpse opened up of a world not dominated by striving *homo oeconomicus*. The seemingly inevitable subordination of time, relationships, bodies, knowledges, land, air, and water to increasingly intensive management as forms of capital was briefly lifted, at least for some.

At the same time, COVID-19 relief was unequally allotted to Black, Indigenous, and communities of colour, the poor, precarious and essen-

tial workers, the elderly, homeless, migrants, and the undocumented, many of whom did not have the luxury to work from home or the ability to refuse shifts, or who could not afford even the "chance to breathe" that COVID-19 relief metaphorically opened for some — while others were literally fighting for breath in police chokeholds, fire-stricken areas, and nursing homes. Many "in the hold" of anti-Black racism (to evoke Christina Sharpe) didn't pause, then, but rather continued assembling in the streets, knowing that the chance to breathe would not be handed to them by the neoliberal or biopolitical state, but would need to be ontologically won for and by themselves through ongoing struggle.

If the pandemic was potentially paradigm-shifting for some while for others it drastically intensified systemic racism or the burden of poverty, the appearance of COVID-19 also tragically intercepted the electrifying momentum of protest movements. The medical rationality articulated by public health officers — particularly when placing limits upon large assemblies — provided governments with a disinterested justification for penalizing public gatherings and shrinking human social circles to the smallest units of the nuclear family or individual. For governments and corporations faced with collective uprisings and sustained movements for Indigenous lands, Black lives, and climate justice, the medical morality and fear of contagion surrounding COVID-19 provided an apolitical means of suppressing physical marches (which isn't to say that tear gas and real or plastic bullets weren't also used). The neoliberal valorization of private, self-interested individuals over social collectives aligns, sadly, with pandemic precautions leading people to stick to their small "bubbles." In other words, the pandemic risks functioning to advance the neoliberal atomization and privatization of life.

Nor has it escaped the notice of scholars working in the environmental humanities and posthumanities that the pandemic has diverted attention away from climate justice movements. A new kind of human exceptionalism — grounded in the biopolitical imperative to immunize humans against a virus that renders them vulnerable — has had the effect of returning *homo sapiens* to the centre of history. Not, however, as a culpable species (unevenly) responsible for ecological risk and ruin on a catastrophic scale, but as a threatened species justified in treating environmental struggles and the survival of other species as secondary to the critical priority of human immunity. This is not to be callous about human sickness, suffering, and death. Rather, it is to note how human health security in the time of COVID-19 gets treated as something

exclusive or separate from the health and well-being of other species, ecosystems, and Earth's biosphere.

The epochal events of 2020 suggest, in short, that neoliberalism is not immune to the fierce opposition mounted against it. At the same time, however, neoliberalism finds new opportunities to capitalize upon crisis and to mutate, not unlike the novel viruses which spring from capitalist natures. The submissions in this issue offer many insights into the shifting, recombinant forms that neoliberalism can take, illustrating Brown's assertion that its plasticity, or "availability to reconfiguration," is perhaps the only universally sure feature of neoliberalism (21).

Reframing Neoliberalism After 2020

In addition to the wild forest fires that raged in Australia and various parts of the United States, as well as the human-made forest fires that have been raging in the Amazon since 2019, another, very different kind of fire recently made headlines here in Canada. On October 17, 2020, a lobster pound belonging to the Sipekne'katik First Nation in Nova Scotia burned to the ground under circumstances that authorities described as "suspicious." The fire punctuated a weeks'-long dispute in which non-Indigenous commercial fishermen retaliated against the Sipekne'katik Nation's launching of a self-regulated lobster fishery by vandalizing their facilities and by threatening violence against community members, including Sipekne'katik Chief Mike Sack. At the heart of the dispute is the Sipekne'katik Nation's ability to fish for a "moderate livelihood" year-round without a commercial license — a treaty right affirmed by the Supreme Court of Canada in 1999. Non-Indigenous commercial fishers have contended that this treaty-protected ability to fish outside of the federally regulated season threatens not only their own livelihoods, but also the health of Nova Scotia's lobster stocks (despite the fact that Sipekne'katik licenses represent only a tiny fraction of the lobster licenses that are currently active in Nova Scotia). Like the conflict over the Coastal GasLink Pipeline discussed earlier, the conflict over the Sipekne'katik fishery reflects a deeply ingrained disavowal of Indigenous land and treaty rights, along with a neoliberal logic that seeks to appropriate Indigenous land and lifeways while promoting the criminalization and surveillance of Indigenous land defenders. By bringing the linkages between capitalist accumulation, treaty and land rights, and settler violence into relief, these events highlight the import-

ance of understanding the role of settler colonialism in shaping the way neoliberalism unfolds and operates in Canada. If, as Brown suggests, neoliberalism is a "globally ubiquitous" yet unstable phenomenon that takes on "differential instantiations across countries . . . in its various intersections with extant cultures and political traditions, and above all, in its convergences and uptakes of other discourses and developments" (20-21), then how has settler-colonial extractionism shaped the neoliberal environments we have inherited as people living in this particular territory, at this particular time?

In thinking about this question, we are reminded of Kathryn Yusoff's insistence, in *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*, that extraction involves more than just removing natural resources from the earth. Extraction, she insists, is a multifaceted mode of relation that "moves across territory, relation, and flesh" in a way that not only "renders matter as property," but also disposes of Black and brown bodies as the inhuman "surplus of mineralogical extraction" (5). Thus, contrary to discourses of the Anthropocene that construct humanity as a homogenous geological force, Yusoff's concept of "Black Anthropocenes" forces us to reckon with the myriad ways in which the brutalization of Black and brown bodies has historically created the conditions of possibility for the settler-colonial society we currently inhabit. Especially illuminating is the way Yusoff puts Black and Indigenous histories into conversation with one another in order to disrupt the "racial blindness" that too often underpins the concept of the Anthropocene (xiii). Refusing this racial forgetting, Yusoff constructs a historicity

> of [I]ndigenous dispossession of land and sovereignty in the invasion of the Americas through to the ongoing petropolitics of settler colonialism; of slavery, "breaking rocks on the chain gang" (as Nina Simone sings it), to the current incarnations of antiblackness in mining black gold; and of the racialized impacts of climate change. (3)

By tracing these often-forgotten genealogies, Yusoff not only disrupts the notion that our present conditions are the natural outcome of (undifferentiated) human activity on the planet, but she also highlights points of interconnection between Black liberation, Indigenous sovereignty, and environmental justice movements, thus invoking the potential for a different kind of futurity outside of the structures of settler colonialism and racial capitalism that we currently inhabit.

The need to recognize settler-colonial extraction as a continuum that includes both ecological and racialized violence has, of course, also been echoed by Indigenous writers and thinkers working across Turtle Island. As literary scholars who are concerned with intersectional forms of environmental justice, we cannot help but think back to Métis playwright Marie Clements's *The Unnatural and Accidental Women* (2005), a documentary play that memorializes the deaths of the Indigenous women who were killed by Gilbert Paul Jordan in Vancouver in the late 1980s. A play rich with multimedia elements, *The Unnatural and Accidental Women* symbolically ties the deaths of Jordan's victims to images and sound recordings of trees being felled by loggers: "Everything here has been falling — a hundred years of trees have fallen from the sky's grace. They laid on their backs trying to catch their breath as the loggers . . . moved them, creating a long muddy path where the ends of trees scraped the ground, whispering their last connection to the earth," says the protagonist in the opening scene of the play (10). This tree-felling imagery, which resurfaces every time Jordan kills a woman in the play, not only highlights what Yusoff aptly describes as "the sociosexual effects of extraction cultures" (xiii), but also works to situate Canada's long history of racialized violence against Indigenous women as a material consequence of a settler-colonial imaginary that has long dehumanized Indigenous peoples in order to legitimate the extraction of their lands and resources. This nexus between settler-colonial extractionism and racialized violence is also at the centre of Métis writer Cherie Dimaline's recent novel *The Marrow Thieves*, which is set in a near future in which the planet has been devastated by global warming and everyone, except for Indigenous peoples, has lost the ability to dream. Assuming that Indigenous peoples' dreams are biogenetically encoded in their blood marrow, the settler state creates an army of "recruiters" tasked with capturing Indigenous peoples and "leach[ing] [their] dreams from where [their] ancestors hid them" (90). Thus, the desire to extract Indigenous knowledge and stories soon gives way to the desire to possess Indigeneity *itself* via the extraction of Indigenous peoples' blood. But the blood quantum thinking that undergirds this extractive regime is overturned when the novel's young protagonists discover that the true key to decoding the dreams they carry lies in the Cree language gifted to them by their elder, Minerva. It is the language — and *not* their blood marrow — that carries both the blood memories and teachings of their ancestors, as well as the promise

of a futurity grounded in the knowledge of "just what we would do for each other, just what we would do for the ebb and pull of the dream, the bigger dream that held us all" (231). Echoing Maria Campbell's assertion that Cree and Michif words carry entire "bundles" of meaning that can never be adequately translated into English (200), Dimaline's novel stresses that the future possibilities embedded within Minerva's words — "words in [a] language that the [recruiters'] conductor couldn't process" — cannot be glimpsed within the entwined structures of neoliberalism and settler colonialism (172).

Regeneration: What is the Critical, Literary Equivalent of Fireweed?

Clements's and Dimaline's portrayals of the violence of settler-colonial extractionism return us to some of the questions posed at the beginning of this introduction surrounding the "figurative" fires that have been raging through our own home discipline of Canadian literary studies in recent years. As the editors of *Refuse: CanLit in Ruins* have noted, while tied to current controversies, the "dumpster fire" that Alicia Elliott (Tuscarora) and other critics have invoked in order to describe the state of CanLit can be tied to "long-standing problems . . . related to racism, colonialism, sexism, the literary star system, and economic privilege" (McGregor, Rak, and Wunker 10). Key among these problems is CanLit's perennial inability to acknowledge the ways in which it has historically relied on the appropriation of Indigenous stories for its own existence. In his essay "Writing as Rupture: A Breakup Note to CanLit," Oji-Cree writer Joshua Whitehead stresses the ways in which CanLit "extracts history from our bones, which is to say our land but empties the land of genealogy and rewrites social progression as a series of vanishing acts" (191). While this extractionist literary impulse has received increasing scrutiny within Canadian literary criticism due to controversies such as those over Joseph Boyden's claims to indigeneity and the recent "Appropriation Prize" debacle, it has received far less attention in the interrelated fields of Canadian ecocriticism and the Canadian environmental humanities and posthumanities. And yet, as some scholars have pointed out, these fields have also historically operated in ways that fail "to acknowledge the prior presence of and the debt to Indigenous materialisms," thereby replicating "the fabricated grounds of colonization: *terra nullius* — a land on which there are no others with prior claim" (Ravenscroft 354-55). How, then, can Canadian ecocriti-

cism begin to address its complicity with the institutionalized extraction and appropriation of Indigenous knowledges? How can it more ethically and fruitfully interact with the knowledges created by BIPOC scholars and communities? To echo the previously cited question by Moss and McCormack, what is the *ecocritical* equivalent of fireweed? In an essay published in 2002, Cree-Métis scholar Deanna Reder proposed that Indigenous "autobiography ought to be seen as fireweed, the textual equivalent of the relentlessly enduring perennial that is first to reappear" after a fire (277). Building on Reder's insight, we want to suggest that the answer to Moss and McCormack's question must involve a deeper engagement with Indigenous and Black materialisms — one that goes beyond the impulse to mine works by Indigenous and Black scholars for novel insights and strives towards active political allyship and solidarity. Another small, but crucial, step towards regeneration must involve challenging the current critical reliance on universalizing discourses about the Anthropocene that disavow not only the role of settler colonialism in producing the material conditions of our present, but also the unequal burdens that such conditions place on Indigenous, Black, and other racialized communities. While we are starting to see this kind of disciplinary shift with the roundtable on "Environmental E(race)sures" that was hosted by ALECC in June 2020 and the forthcoming issue of *The Goose* focusing on this very topic, much work remains to be done to extricate our fields from the logic of settler-colonial extractionism and make them more accountable to the multiple communities that sustain them.

In this Issue

Anne Quéma's article, "Bioarchives of Affect: Erín Moure's *The Unmemntioable*," brings questions of affect to the ecological questions raised by this special issue. Quéma builds on Brian Massumi's conceptualization of affect in order to read Erín Moure's 2012 book as one that constructs an "affective ecology that generates bioarchives of the past in the mode of sensory cognition and that cannot be disentangled from an ethics and politics of responsibility." *The Unmemntioable* moves between landscapes and soundscapes, deploying a wide mix of languages that tie Moure's heteronyms Elisa Sampedrin, E.M., and E.S. to specific landscapes, perhaps most significantly to that of Galicia in contemporary western Ukraine and eastern Poland. Moving restlessly between Galicia,

Montréal, and elsewhere — and between the many languages that animate these and other sites — Moure's poetry, as Quéma reads it, extends Massumi's search for an affective continuum between the human and the animal. Moure's poetry, Quéma contends, "webs together humans, animals, things, and land." It is poetry that enables this webbing, given how it "springs as fabric, affective ecology, and soundscape all at once." "[P]oetry extends hospitality to all," Quéma contends, expanding and upending Lévinas's concept of the face. As Moure retells narrative elements of her family's past — and of her mother's passing — via the "unmemntioable" histories, gaps, losses of the Holodomor, displacements, and re-settlements, the ethical claims of the poetic text come into focus. It becomes, in fact, the very gaps, displacements, and losses that affectively knit bodies into relationship with one another, exerting powerful claims of (re)connection that might undo the relentless colonial forces of neoliberal capitalism, emblematized for Quéma in the bizarre repetitions of advertising strategies used for high-powered internal combustion vehicles. Rather than a humankind seeking the submission of all else, the "ecologies of affect" enacted by Erín Moure posit instead the possibility of webs of relation that foster rather than destroy.

While Quéma discerns an ethics of hospitality in the work of Erín Moure, Sarah Howden reads Adam Dickinson's *Anatomic* as enacting how the poet and poetry can fall prey to forms of "perverse individualism" within neoliberal environments that treat health as a matter of private risk and responsibility. Dickinson's collection, a material memoir based on both the medical science and poetic conceit of self-monitoring his own microbiome for environmental contaminants and impurities, inscribes the paradoxes and predicaments of a neoliberal logic of health. "On the one hand," Howden writes, *Anatomic* enacts "a perverse individualism whereby [Dickinson] strives for bodily purity . . . and [is] defeated by his inability to sweat out the toxins, starve the harmful bacteria, and rid his body of the unwanted chemicals that have invaded it." On the other hand, *Anatomic* "recognizes the collective that comprises the human self and seeks out modes of collective resistance." Although the assemblage of nonhuman others — both symbiotic and parasitic — that Dickinson finds in place of the self-contained individual would seem to resonate with feminist, new materialist, and posthumanist critiques of the (neo)liberal subject, Howden sees *Anatomic* at times relapsing back into the perversely myopic, self-regulatory subjectivity produced within neoliberal environments. This is because Dickinson's

inward-turning look or look inside, even when it shows the private individual to be a teeming, more-than-human assemblage, remains bound in anxiety and fascination by the paralyzing knowledge that the body is molecularly shot through with environmental risks and unknowns. Drawing on Rei Terada's notion of "looking away," Howden offers a remedy for the paralysis that can result from obsessive bio-monitoring and the data it yields, proposing that "a healthy dose of denial might be necessary to resist the perverse neoliberal norms of purity." It is in various fleeting moments in *Anatomic*, when the poet looks away from his risk-riddled microbiome and the dire states of environmental health with which it is continuous, that Howden locates the possibility of a public collective that seeks broader accountability for the "toxic burden" of health.

In "'How Do I Live in a World that Hates Me?': The Emotional Ecology of Neoliberalism in Nikki Reimer's *Downverse*," Heather Milne examines "Reimer's deployment of a performative poetics of failure" in order to witness ways in which contemporary poetics can simultaneously inhabit and push back against the neoliberal "responsibilitization" of individual bodies. Reimer's book, which uses online materials — perhaps most notably the "comments" section of online news articles — dissects the years 2008-2011 from the perspective of the precariously employed in Vancouver, including the poet herself. Milne deploys both readings of affect and critiques of neoliberalism in order to demonstrate the ways in which Reimer's verse responds to a world in which subjectivity is increasingly understood through the lens of economics and individual responsibility. *Downverse*, in Milne's analysis, records and pushes back precisely at the ways in which systemic failures are overlooked and individuals are blamed for the social and economic ills to which they may fall prey. As such, Reimer "develops an affective and documentary poetics of neoliberal precarity." The poems that Milne examines make use of the grimmest elements of internet trolling in order to wonder how one might survive and thrive in a hateful, victim-blaming world. Acting as both a feminist killjoy and affect alien, Reimer mines the back alleys of online discourse in order to embrace "a poetics of failure as a rejection of neoliberal models of success," as Milne poignantly puts it. Reimer thus recuperates the perspectives of those who have been failed by the neoliberal state: the poor, the dispossessed, the ill, Indigenous people, and more. There are no solutions in Nikki Reimer's *Downverse* as Milne reads it, but there is an ample documentation and reflection of

the ways in which today's neoliberal environments reinforce the bleakest elements of humankind.

Morgan Vanek's contribution, in turn, analyzes archives in order to link questions of climate and race to early Canadian settlement. Her article, "Better 'Death in Its Most Awful Shapes' than Life in Nova Scotia: Climate Change and the Nova Scotia Maroons, 1796-1800," examines the brief resettlement of the Trelawny, Jamaica, population of former slaves — known as the Maroons — in Nova Scotia prior to their resettlement in Sierra Leone at the turn of the nineteenth century. Vanek uses this historical case study in order, first, to argue that the models used to understand the climate have narrowed to frame questions of life and livability. She suggests that this case "offers contemporary ecocritics . . . a valuable illustration of how a model of climate that focuses exclusively on what can be measured helps to open land and people to exploitation." Second, Vanek provides a close reading of parliamentary records and of the petitions forwarded by the Maroons themselves. These records "register the values at work on each side" of the debates about how to appropriately manage and resettle the Maroons, and, in particular, shows that the Maroons themselves had an understanding of what it meant to live a meaningful life that contrasted sharply with the understandings of those in power. Deemed an unruly population at risk of revolt in Jamaica, their temporary resettlement in Nova Scotia was considered suitable because they could become a ready supply of labour. The climate of Nova Scotia, however, was also perceived as unfavourable, largely, as Vanek illustrates, due to racist conceptualizations of populations' innate suitability — or a lack thereof — to live in particular environments. Examining classical and contemporary theories of climate, Vanek uncovers ways in which understandings of the climate themselves are by no means neutral. Rather, today's neoliberal forces exert themselves on how we understand the climate via increasingly economic measures, just as political actors between 1796 and 1800 sought to manage the Maroons through their own, similarly limited notions of climate factors; "writing about climate was politicized in this moment," Vanek notes, just as it is in ours.

Pamela Banting brings an oceanic orientation to this special issue in "H_2Ocean: The Wet Ontology and Blue Ethics of Sue Goyette's *Ocean*." Against the "Anthroposcenery" of a "neoliberal age in which the global ocean is suffocating from excess dissolved carbon and languishing from climate change, overheating, overfishing, coral bleaching, and plastic

and other forms of pollution," Banting reads Goyette's serial poem as cultivating the kind of "blue ethics, etiquette, and epistemology" needed for humans to exist in "right relationship with the sea and the shore." The anthropomorphized figure of Ocean in Goyette's poem, a "moody" character of epic proportions, throws the foibles and fallibilities of human "shore dwellers" into stark and often comic relief. Banting notes that in contrast with the epic subjectivity of Ocean, Goyette's human figures appear stick-like or "pictographic" in comparison. It is hard to historically place or date the figures who perform absurd, quasi-archaic shoreline rituals of appeasement before Ocean's maw. As Banting observes, they seem "simultaneously prehistoric and contemporary," suspended in an indeterminate temporality that "scrambl[es] anthropological and historical time frames," punctures presumptions of progress, and "skewers our humanist arrogance." In the process of elaborating *Ocean*'s singular "contribution to the general project of constructing a 'wet ontology' . . . and a blue ethics and etiquette," Banting takes time to trace *Ocean*'s debt to — but also subversion of — the conventions of epic poetry. In the company of scholars such as Stacy Alaimo and Elspeth Probyn, she reminds readers that like biological lifeforms, poetic forms owe much of their material as well as metaphorical conditions of existence to the oceans. Poetry, "the literary genre most directly affiliated with the breath," is underwritten by oxygen-producing plankton and an ocean medium "that float[s] and support[s] not only aquatic but also most terrestrial life." Against the neoliberal monetizing of ocean resources and "amortizing" of their losses, Banting summons poetry as a counterforce capable of cultivating human-Ocean relations.

In "Environmental Discourses in Atwood's *Maddadam* Trilogy; Or, The Neoliberal Prometheus," Alexandre Desbiens-Brassard considers Atwood's work as a literary thought experiment, one that speculatively cultures a future strain of "neoliberal prometheanism" in order to make its virulence visible for readers. Or, as he puts it, the trilogy "sounds a loud and urgent warning about the new myths used by neoliberalism to obfuscate and justify exploitation," new myths of Prometheus in particular. The ultimate target of Atwood's fictional critique, contends Desbiens-Brassard, may best be described as neoliberal iterations of the "promethean discourse" that political scientist John Dryzek sees spawning new, environmental justifications for the human domination of nature. Against critics who read the character of Crake as ecotopian, then, Desbiens-Brassard instead proposes that Atwood fashions Crake

as a "promethean man" in neoliberal pursuit of techno-engineered market solutions to climate change, species extinctions, and other planetary crises. The neoliberal type of "promethean environmentalism" personified by Crake serves to justify not only the genetic manipulation and marketization of animal life (i.e., the infamous ChickieNobs created through the joint exploits of corporate science and capitalism), but ultimately the displacement of first nature by simulacral second natures that become the new "real." Moreover, a secular prometheanism that culminates in neoliberal simulacra is not all that is at stake in the trilogy; Desbiens-Brassard also sees a religious prometheanism at work in the prosperity gospel preached by the Church of PetrOleum. By "dramatizing the Promethean discourse in both its secular and religious forms," he contends, Atwood challenges the mythical and moral resources of neoliberalism.

Marina Klimenko offers a highly topical reading of Larissa Lai's *The Tiger Flu*, invoking U.N. findings on the effects that COVID-19 is having on already heavily gendered burdens of "compulsory care" and heteronormative reproduction. In "Beyond 'The Last Doubler': Reproductive Futurism and the Politics of Care in Larissa Lai's *The Tiger Flu*," Klimenko sets out to show that Lai's novel is deeply concerned with questions of "reproductive justice and coerced care, emphasizing the interplay among race, gender, and sexual orientation in care relations." According to Klimenko, the novel does more than simply contest "neoliberal models of care" and reproductive futurity. Building on Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erickson's work in *Queer Ecologies,* Klimenko argues that the novel imagines queer forms of posthuman, planetary care that break with the reproductive futurism of "well-meaning ecologists" whose environmental work risks being similarly repro-centric and queer-phobic. Set in the simultaneously techno-futurist and flu-ridden environs of Saltwater city, Lai's novel fictionally cultures alternative figures of care, kinship, and futurity in the form of the Grist sisters, "a queer feminist collective of organ-harvesting clones." Queer clones born not out of sexual but parthenogenic reproduction, Klimenko reads the Grist sisters as embodying a model of care that breaks with the norms of gendered, "compelled care" that COVID-19 exacerbates and that neoliberal states exploit. Instead, Lai's queer clones embody an environmental model of agential caregiving that, following Maria Puig de la Bellacasa, entwines "labor/work, affect/affections, [and] ethics/politics." Doing so requires that they break with

ideals of bodily (genetic) purity, the normativity of the nuclear family, and reproductive futurism, which Klimenko parses as the goal of not only producing children but "reproducing units of political and social organization that adhere to the dominant statist ideology." Moreover, a transhumanist force is afoot in the novel that the Grist sisters must also resist, one that promises to upload memories and that is subtended by a Cartesian mind/body dualism. In choosing impure materiality and embodied memory/knowledge over the transhumanist lure of consciousness uploading, the Grist sisters ultimately "model a queer extended family with complex kinship structures that include more-than-human beings," including a Kora tree in the orchard where they undertake environmental carework.

In "Material Frictions: Troubling the Ethics of Experiment in the Ecopoetic Work of Rita Wong and Christian Bök," Ryan Fitzpatrick describes his discomfort at seeing the work of Wong and Bök grouped together under the "sign of ecopoetry," a critical habit that elides the distinct ways in which these two ecopoets imagine and materialize a role for nonhumans within their aesthetic experiments. Reading this divergent understanding of materiality as a site of significant "ethical friction," Fitzpatrick highlights Bök and Wong's "split approaches" to experimentation itself. Whereas "Bök takes on the role of scientific experimenter" in *The Xenotext*, writes Fitzpatrick, "Wong worries in the eco-activist poetry of *forage* and *undercurrent* about how she and others have been experimented on" by a global system of capitalism that subjects interdependent bodies (biological, mineral, aquatic) to the unknowns unleashed by extractive industries and waste streams. Fitzpatrick illuminates the stakes of each approach by drawing on Karen Barad's distinction, in *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, between the analogical and nonanalogical. For Bök, whose *Xenotext* experiment involves genetically encoding lines of verse and implanting them in the DNA of a bacterium, the nonhuman gets variously presented as a material medium, a writing machine, and a "co-author" or collaborator. For Wong, the human and nonhuman exist in a relationship of "immanent dependency." Her poetry strives to materialize "bodies in relation as they are caught up in global chains of extraction and value generation." While Wong begins with material entanglement, Bök presumes that the poet and bacteria are discrete agents prior to the genetic experiment that initiates their lyrical exchange or "call-and-response." As Fitzpatrick suggests, ethical issues surrounding claims by the poet-scientist to col-

laborate with a bacterium or "listen" to its responses thus dog Bök's experiment. Returning to Barad's distinction between analogical and non-analogical moves, Fitzpatrick counterposes a 'pataphysical experiment that licenses a "*technical procedure* on a body" with the contrasting "poetic directness" he finds in Wong's work.

Max Karpinski's article, "Unsettled Solutions: Petropastoral Poetics in Rita Wong's *undercurrent*," extends Ryan Fitzpatrick's analysis of Rita Wong's work. Turning to her *undercurrent*, Karpinski contrasts the neoliberal "common sense" of Stephen Harper-era Canada — and its incessant promotion of Alberta's bitumen as a "solution" to all problems — with Wong's poetic weavings of water and the "solutions" that it may pose, as well as the things that may be in solution in water itself. In order to undertake this analysis, Karpinski constructs for readers a concept of the "petropastoral," which builds on the work of Stephanie LeMenager, Stacy Alaimo, and Elizabeth Povinelli's separate yet linked analyses of anthropogenic climate change. Karpinski's petropastoral not only registers the "simultaneously intimate and far-flung temporal and geographic entanglements" that characterize the neoliberal, but also "intervenes in how the structures of feeling associated with the traditional pastoral mode are harnessed in the service of oil sands development." For Karpinski, this petropastoral is a mode that works against the ways in which oil is routinely held up as a solution to Canada's ills by particular modes of governmentality. Karpinski's project, then, is to read directly against "neoliberal-petrolic common sense," and Rita Wong's work performs such resistance wonderfully. For Wong, "The syntax of water appears as a language shared across organisms"; entering water's sensibilities through poetry allows for a way of pushing back against neoliberal petrocultures, opening to a future that Karpinski reads through the possibility of pastoral gifts as well as through competing possibilities of how the concept of Indigenous treaties may be understood in Wong's work and beyond.

Finally, and in our view very appropriately, the concluding contribution to this special issue is Cheryl Lousley's "After Extraction: Idling in the Ruins in Michael Winter's and Alistair MacLeod's Neoliberal Fictions." This piece brings us back to one of the key inspirations for this issue, the late Herb Wyile's *Anne of Tim Hortons: Globalization and the Reshaping of Atlantic-Canadian Literature*, a text from which Lousley draws directly. Wyile's work investigates the politics of neoliberalism in Atlantic Canadian writing, and it specifically analyzes interconnec-

tions between "modernization, industrialization, and productive work" that are central to Lousley's analysis. Drawing on Michael Winter's *Minister Without Portfolio* and Alistair MacLeod's "The Closing Down of Summer," Lousley argues that the "depictions of idleness" found within these texts "foreground the complex socio-ecological reverberations of extraction economies." Approaching her focal texts with deftness and tact — while also paying attention to additional key Atlantic texts such as Lisa Moore's *February* and Alistair MacLeod's *No Great Mischief* — allows Lousley to advance the argument that while idleness may be created by the conditions of capital, it can also become a "subtle form of resistance" to instrumentalization. The complexities of "tarrying" in grief through idleness forms a key component of her readings and brings this issue to a close.

Conclusion

We complete this introduction as the calendar turns from the epochal year of 2020 to the promise of renewal in 2021. The grief that inaugurates Lousley's article is something that we, too, experience in our own ways as editors. In this present moment of the global pandemic, we remain vociferously determined that any form of neoliberal status quo — or any return to "normal" — is likely to bring about further ruin. While we cannot answer the challenge posed by Moss and McCormack, quoted above, we would like to suggest that the analyses offered by the contributors to this special issue are all proposing new forms of growth in the aftermath of too many conflagrations to count, too many conflagrations to bear. Fireweed, *chamaenerion angustifolium*, has multiple names: in addition to fireweed, it is also called great willowherb, rosebay willowherb, Saint Anthony's laurel, and *ihkapaskwa* in Cree. The names that we may use for whatever comes after this moment, too, will surely vary. It is our hope that we may find ourselves inhabiting a more just time, one that proceeds from neoliberalism's fiery unravelling. These contributions are offered to readers in this spirit.

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