The Eco Art Incubator and the Ethics of Belonging

Denise Kenney

In 2007 I moved to the Okanagan valley (Okanagan or Syilix traditional territory)[1] in the interior of British Columbia, Canada, to help establish an interdisciplinary performance program at the University of British Columbia. The Okanagan valley is a fragile dryland region undergoing radical urban and agricultural development. It is a landscape of lakes, sagebrush, saskatoon berries, and suburbia crowding out ponderosa pines. I moved to the Okanagan from the pacific coast. On the coast I had the feeling that if I stood long enough in one place, the flora would grow up over me and I would simply become a damp log or mossy knoll. The Okanagan isn't like that. Although there are orchards and vineyards all around, it is essentially a desert, and my sense is that I am ON this place rather than IN it. Scars on this landscape take a long time to heal and that makes me feel both clumsy and detached. I don't belong here yet. Like all bioregions, the Okanagan is both a 'geographical terrain and a terrain of consciousness.'[2] As a body-based performance artist concerned with ecological issues, I also consider the body itself as a kind of geographical terrain. For me, ecological art situates itself at the intersection of human activity (the sensory body) and the environment within which that activity takes place. I position the sensory body more specifically as the site of ecological practice and belonging.

My practice incorporates various modes of expression: my camera, my body, and dialogical projects that explore sociopolitical relationships. When I look back on the various works contained within these seemingly disparate forms, I recognize that in some way they all examine the theme of belonging. It seems that all I have ever been doing as an artist is exploring how to belong. My recent work in Eco Art has brought this theme to the forefront for it seems to me that if my home (and my art) can be conceived of and developed as inextricably linked to place from an aesthetic and eco-systemic point of view, perhaps the displacement and aching for belonging that I feel will be quieted. Perhaps the same might be true for my audience/community and perhaps this artistic practice can help to stimulate a more sustainable (and meaningful) way of life.

In Canada there is a long history of visual and literary artists responding to their wild and natural surroundings. First Nations rituals and cultural practices such as dance and storytelling are also clear embodiments of the more-than-human community. 'We think of our language as the language of the land,' explains Jeannette Armstrong of the Okanagan Nation.

> This means that the land has taught us our language. The way we survive is by speaking the language that the land offered us as its teaching. To know all the plants, animals, seasons, and geography is to construct language for them.[3]

These practices are not the case with the colonizers' theater in Canada. Theater as a European-derived art form in Canada, both past and present, has been mostly an urban endeavor. Training programs for performers and professional theater companies are located in urban centers. I grew up in northern British Columbia, just below the Alaskan panhandle, and yet my most formative education as an artist took place in the heart of Paris, France at the physical theater school of Jacques Lecoq. All my professional experience in the performing arts has been urban. This resulting nature/culture divide between where I come from and where I learn and practice my art, is significant. Most performing arts centers are situated, like fortresses of culture, within urban cultural districts. Their seasons highlight contemporary performance artists and a canon of old and new plays, but rarely reflect the realities of the neighborhoods and ecosystems within which they are housed. For those companies working in applied theater outside the traditional theater framework, their practice usually addresses issues related to the human community. Even the Caravan Farm Theater, a renowned Okanagan outdoor theater company located on 80 acres of land, use their natural environment more as an elaborate backdrop for their season of plays than as an opportunity for real integration of culture and nature. Ironically, eco-art practice in North America is also mostly urban. In a research report commissioned by the Canadian Commission for UNESCO, Beth Carruthers lists several eco-art projects in Western Canada, most of them in British Columbia, but only one is located outside the urban lower mainland.[4] Eco-art often involves re-establishing environmental values in post-industrial urban settings in which nature is often positioned as the 'other.' Our work in performance and even within the realm of Eco Art is consequently often framed within the binary conceptual framework of nature as separate from culture. As Sacha Kagan suggests, this must change.

> Among the cultural categories that need revision, is our modern, Western understanding of 'nature.' Instead of a

> nature/culture dichotomy, global (environ)mental change induces us to think in terms of a dynamic NatureCulture complex.[5]

I have, of course, been pondering this NatureCulture complex more deeply since I now find myself practicing and teaching performance in a more rural place. The University of British Columbia Okanagan campus is new; we continue to have few performing arts facilities. Rather than seek out cultural spaces in which my students could commune with their community, I wondered about using the natural environment as a cultural space. It was in this more rural place that I began to wonder how I, and my students/audience, could re-indigenate ourselves to the place where we live. I began to wonder how I, and my students/audience, could engage with the more-than-human community through our physical and sensorial selves.

My training with Jacques Lecoq predisposed me to these inquiries as it was predicated on the notion that the performer can embody every aspect of the physical world. Training included the embodiment of plants, animals, minerals, as well as manufactured objects and materials. My research and teaching is also anchored in processes of creative devising. Devising is a form of creation in which the script originates not from an independent writer, but from collaborative, usually improvisatory work by the artists themselves. Unlike many forms of theater or digital media that draw from already existing material, this kind of practice is uniquely positioned to create work in direct response to one's surroundings. The work is often created with our bodies in this place by the physical materials generated from, or found in, this place.

In response to these questions, and drawing on the idea of technology or business incubators, colleague and nature poet Nancy Holmes and I set up the Eco Art Incubator. The project was funded through a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council grant. The goal of the Eco Art Incubator is to become a creative incubator prototype focused on a particular kind of interventionist, socially-conscious, community and place-based art. It re-configures our desire for an urban context and directs us towards a consideration of our own place, this landscape, and this community. The mandate of the Eco Art Incubator is to engender a multi-disciplinary permanent eco-art culture in this valley that will bring artistic ways of knowing into the discussion around development and conservation. We are keenly aware of the increasingly subdivided nature of ecological research occurring in other disciplines.

> For example, as marine biology grows in aggregate complexity, individual marine biologists become expert in smaller and smaller areas of ocean ecology. This larger ecological totality always exists as a frame around their individual endeavors, but it can be difficult for them to 'come up for air,' so to speak, and to analyze the interactions between their area of specialization and that of the dozens or hundreds of other investigators in a given field. Arts, arguably, have the ability to comprehend and synthesize these broader interrelations because they are not limited by the technical expertise required by each specific area and can thus more easily view them as interrelated parts of a larger whole. Such knowledge is less so concerned with the internal operations of an individual discipline than with the topographic ability to assess interconnections among various disciplines at a given time.[6]

It is not so much that we positioned ourselves as artist remediators above the ecological fray, but more that we saw an opportunity to use this structure or process to explore other ways of understanding, and to embrace the complexities and unknowns associated with our relationship to our environment, our home. Indigenous scholar Jack Forbes, in examining why the terms 'nature' and 'culture' are problematic concepts for North American Aboriginal people, suggests that 'culture' and 'society' are more verbs than nouns, and that we should replace the words with the concepts 'together-living,' 'together-doing.'[7] Essentially, we wanted to begin 'doing' more with those people who live together in this place we call home.

We also wanted the processes by which we do our research to be published so that they might be applied elsewhere. We decided this publication would take the form of a website. The website 'Recyclopedia,' is an open source digital archive of eco-art projects that can be shared, recycled, and re-used for future projects. Ultimately, our goal is to not simply generate a series of works of art, but to create case studies and models that can be repurposed for future groups and art-makers.

We got the idea for the Eco Art Incubator from a year-long art project designed to revitalize the Woodhaven Nature Conservancy in Kelowna, B.C. In 2010, Holmes coordinated an eight-month long eco-art project in Kelowna's Woodhaven Nature Conservancy, a 22-acre park containing four different biogeoclimatic zones and several endangered species, including the Western Screech Owl. Community artists and professors and their students were invited to create work in and for the park in order to raise awareness of its existence and of its ecologically significant features. Because the park had been closed for some years due to tree hazards, and because it is a relatively small piece of land on the edge of urban development, people who lived nearby barely knew it existed and at times it was abused. Evidence at the back of the park indicated that a neighbor on a cliff side above had been emptying a chlorinated swimming pool into the park.

During the eight-month eco-art project, hundreds of people attended the events. Sixty-one works of art were created, including live performance, audio guides, community poetry, sculptural installations, three films, and interventions of various kinds. At the end of the project thirty-six works were in the park and a large website archived most of the others. The Regional District of the Central Okanagan, which was a partner in the project, assessed the success of the project as phenomenal. The eco-art project was instrumental in increasing visits to the park fourfold and the neighborhood's sense of stewardship has also increased substantially due to a greater sense of pride in the park's special qualities.

The Woodhaven Project became important for our own work and for that of our students. Over forty undergraduate students in three separate courses, six graduate students, several faculty members and several local artists not affiliated with the university were involved. Two graduate students radically altered their collaborative thesis to make the Woodhaven Project central to their work — a performance-based intervention relevant to any nature preserve defined by borders.

Kenney 1
(Woodhaven Eco Art Project: Chainsaw Ballet, 2011)

From the Woodhaven experience we learned that by providing funding, site-specific expertise, and a fertile umbrella structure within which to work, artists were able to focus productively on their creative practice. We had become 'context providers rather than content providers.'[8] Artists were surprised to discover that Kelowna, a place many considered a cultural backwater, was an ideal place for them to do exploratory fine arts research and practice.

The following is a description of some of the Eco Art Incubator projects that have occurred over the past two years. Some are our own works and initiatives, other projects we have supported administratively, financially, or conceptually. Some of them are still under way. As artists and teachers, we test our research questions through our interaction with the public; it is in the form and act of communication that our theories are assessed and our craft evolves. I begin with the projects most directly related to the concept of settling or belonging. My own restlessness regarding settling in my new home is not unique. North America has had an uneasy relationship to this notion of settlement. 'One of the peculiarities of the white race's presence in America is how little intention has been applied to it. As a people, wherever we have been, we have never really intended to be.'[9]

Dig Your Neighborhood (2013)
Creator: Nancy Holmes

Dig Your Neighborhood seeks to create belonging within the very specific conditions of a single neighborhood and to turn the attention of neighbors in on themselves and their neighborhood, rather than out into the world. The project challenges the idea that 'entire neighborhoods are more accessible to the world than their neighbors are to one another.'[10] *Dig Your Neighborhood* is a project that designs creative local engagement packages for neighborhoods to be distributed by the Welcome Wagon. Since the 1930s The Welcome Wagon, supported by realtors and local businesses, has been visiting new homeowners with a bag of brochures, coupons, and information about the neighborhood and city. It is a peculiar North American commercial enterprise, usually run and managed by local women in order to promote local businesses to new homeowners. The information is often business driven, however, and may make no reference to any local features beyond the constructed environment. *Dig Your Neighborhood* is essentially 'hitching its wagon' to this already existing organization so that The Welcome Wagon distributes our packages along with theirs. The *Dig Your Neighborhood* packages include artistic and playful

artworks that explore, obliquely, local water issues, wildlife, birds, insects, trees, soil and landscape, plants, parks, history, stories and myths, bike routes, land scarring, erosion, noise and light pollution, walks, gardening and seasonal cycles.

Senior Creative Studies students at the University of British Columbia-Okanagan created the pilot version of *Dig Your Neighborhood* in 2013 for a neighborhood in the north end of Kelowna. Close to downtown, this neighborhood is nestled in between a sawmill, industrial properties, a mountain park, and the lake. Students walked the streets and consulted with residents of all ages, local naturalists, scientists, engineers, and archivists to create materials for the package. The resulting package includes a special calendar with site-specific seasonal color palettes, postcards, a DVD, a CD of originally composed soundscapes and music, a children's activity book, a board game, graphic fiction, strange alternate histories and futures of the place, a poetic guide to the trees of the area, quirky mini-plays, and a writer's journal. The *Dig Your Neighborhood* package was uniquely designed for that particular neighborhood. By lavishing the neighborhood with loving and playful attention, residents are encouraged to see their home as truly special. While the content may change, we hope to create a model that can be used for other neighborhoods throughout the province or even country. To provide funding for future incarnations of this project, we will approach Realtor Associations or Neighborhood Associations. In this way, other educational institutions or community-funded artists can contribute content to create their own distinctive *Dig Your Neighborhood* packages.

Kenney 2 (Dig Your Neighborhood Packages, 2013)

Currently the product of *Dig Your Neighborhood* is essentially physical objects — the Welcome-Wagon-type packages. While there are many suggested embodied and participatory activities contained within the content of these packages, the obvious next stage of this project would be to facilitate these activities more directly, to find ways for the material to be generated by the neighborhood itself. Here I would like to acknowledge the great work being done by Cathy Stubbington in Enderby, in the Secwepemc traditional territory north of Kelowna. In her neighborhood, on a small farm in a small community, Stubbington has been initiating community arts projects for over fourteen years. Her work specifically explores her relationship to all residents of her neighborhood

— human as well as more-than-human. She has created a local calendar that depicts the passage of time in terms of the sequence and correlation of events in nature, rather than numerical dates. She has created a cycle of bird imitation workshops and a Bird of the Week series of bird posters to invite residents to spot new birds each week of the year. Just as most posters in town advertise events in the human community, the Bird of the Week heralds events in the natural world. Through this process Stubbington describes how she has begun to appreciate not only the presence of a particular species, but of a particular bird or toad making its home in her neighborhood.

> It is impolite not to greet my human neighbors. Through the shifting of my relationship with this place, I am beginning to sense that it is disrespectful not to know the birds, the plants and other beings that are around.[11]

Stubbington's place-specific work stretches across decades, while our Eco Incubator work has just begun. With the kind of work Stubbington is doing, the degree to which the model can be replicated elsewhere becomes more problematic. To create something that is truly place-based with a view to disseminating beyond that place may be paradoxical. It is our hope, however, that templates and models may be applied elsewhere as vessels, of sorts, for new and place-specific content.

Social Potluck (2012)
Creator: Gabriel Newman

The Eco Art Incubator was interested in *Social Potluck* for its emphasis on local food production and place-based storytelling. *Social Potluck* brings people in a community together to tell stories about their home. It combines theater, storytelling, community-building, community art and community food action in one performance project. Gabriel Newman created *Social Potluck* as part of his Masters' thesis project at the University of British Columbia — Okanagan. In North America, the term 'potluck' refers to a dinner created by each guest bringing a dish of food to be shared among the group. Since guests don't know what others will bring, there is an element of 'luck' regarding the resulting meal. *Social Potluck* similarly brings people together to create unpredictable storytelling exchanges. The Social Potluck project began with

the basic premise that the most important performance venue we have as a society is at the dinner table. The dinner table is where we perform ourselves.

> As a performer I view all communal eating activities, such as dinner parties, family gatherings (formal or informal), romantic dinners, picnics, campfire cookouts or church potlucks to name a few, as improvised community theater where everyone is both a performer and a spectator. This is live, embodied performance that is immediately relevant. I wanted my work to feel as directly relevant to the spectator.[12]

The structure itself is quite simple. First, a series of small dinner parties are hosted by the performer(s) for no more than six people at a time. Local food producers provide food for the hosted dinners and the dinners are prepared by the artists and held at a local location that has a kitchen (community group kitchen, church, showroom in a housing development, etc.). There is no financial cost to attend. Instead, guests pay by providing a story and sharing it at the dinner. Participants are both audience members and performers. They ingest the stories along with their dinner, and perform their stories, along with the other guests. While many participants come with a story in mind, they are often inspired to tell another story while at the table because one person's story often influences the next. In this way, the collected stories might become thematically linked and even interactive.

In the second half of the project, after all the dinner events have occurred, the artist(s) review the collected stories and create a final performance (menu) of those stories for all the participants and their guests at a large gathering. There may be appetizer stories, palate cleansers, pasta, main course, and dessert and coffee stories. The audience for this performance is often seated in a circle or a thrust configuration. By making audience members visible to each other within the space, a kind of 'entreveillance' occurs, a dynamic in which there is 'observation from between or within the audience during the performance.'[13] Because the stories come from the community itself, the audience is greatly invested in them. People delight in watching an audience member watch their own story being told. Thus the performers are catalysts for a poignant community experience of shared history and belonging.

The fee to attend the final performance is a dish of food to share during this collective meal-time.

Social Potluck is an ephemeral place-based performance project. The stories are not told beyond the community that generated them. The structure itself is easily replicable and can be adapted to different situations, communities, and social groups. The project can be realized over a period of months or within ten days. The ten-day structure creates a heightened sense of tension, drama, and energy as the community knows that performers have very few days to create a cohesive performance out of the assortment of stories. One facilitator/performer can realize the project, but it is best executed with two or three. Depending on the respective skills of the facilitator/performers, dance, music and digital media can be integrated into the final performance or 're-telling' of the community stories. One method for sharing stories has been to have the audience collectively pass a ribbon of text and read it in silence. Those who receive the story ribbon first respond to what they are reading and become, in a way, performers for those anticipating what they are about to receive. Another method has been to literally cook a 'soup of stories' in the center of the space, attaching story details to each individual ingredient added to the pot. While Newman's structure did not prescribe place-based storytelling, the Eco Art Incubator developed this parameter for the project, necessitating a focus and interest in local knowledge. This resulted in an increase in stories related to the immediate environment. In 2012 Newman and myself produced the project in Port Townsend, Washington. Port Townsend is a small old Victorian boat-building and tourism community just outside of Seattle on the Olympic Peninsula. The town also includes a paper mill and has a view of a naval base just off shore. The stories from Port Townsend ranged from gay marriage rights, ocean life, Victorian history, military intimidation and seasonal harvests, to relationships with raccoons and dealing with death. Interestingly, all the stories grappled with the notion of belonging. The project is being commissioned by CATCH (Community Action Toward Children's Health) for the fall of 2013. In this case *Social Potluck* will narrow its focus even further and hold dinners in smaller neighborhoods to tell stories from or about those neighborhoods.

Kenney 3 (Passing of a story at Port Townsend Social Potluck, 2012. Photo by Peter Wiant)

Turf the Turf
Creator: Maggie Shirley

Like *Dig Your Neighborhood* and the future version of *Social Potluck, Turf the Turf* is another project designed to bring attention to our neighborhoods, but more specifically to our built environments and their relationship to nature (our yards). With matching funds and project management from the Eco Art Incubator, the City of Kelowna commissioned sound artist Maggie Shirley to develop a public bike tour of creative front yards. MP3 sound files featuring gardener and homeowner interviews, music, soundscapes, and engaging questions and clues can be played at each stop on the route. The tour functions both as one-off facilitated group tours and as a permanent tour, documented through a brochure with a map of the route, information and downloadable sound files. The city's Water Smart Program encourages the reduction of our water consumption in Kelowna. One way to reduce or shift the use of water is to create alternatives to grass lawns such as xeriscaping, food gardens or art installations. *Turf the Turf* fosters pride and enthusiasm in homeowners and participants and nurtures a network for alternative yard creators in the city. Front yards are zones that are both public and private. By encouraging individuals to use these spaces in new ways, it promotes a culture that values front yard gardens as a progressive solution for food production and public engagement.

Toads Are Us

I just read this:
'The planet's health can be measured
by the state of its amphibians.'

So, I am proud of the toad in my garden.
My grass and dew are clean.
My shade is certified organic.
The dandelions in the lawn
sing like canaries
in their light green cages.

But toad,
I watch you cling to the lip
Of my flowerpot,

And feel a little worried.

You are
trembling and
you look like a piece of my lung
torn out.[14]

Bee Line (2013)
Creator: Denise Kenney

I ride my bicycle through orchards on my way to work every day and throughout the year I see the clouds of blossoms give way to the weight of fruit. During my commute, I began to wonder about bees. I realized that I relied on bees for my food supply, but that I knew very little about them beyond two opposing impressions. On the one hand I associated bees with all kinds of children's clothing and toys and even dressed my daughter up in a bee costume for Halloween when she was three months old. On the other hand I saw documentaries depicting bees as industrial slaves contained within stackable square white boxes and transported thousands of miles year-round to pollinate mono-crops throughout North America. I decided to attend a local bee-keeping workshop to flesh out my understanding of honeybees. The complex and dramatic world of bees opened up to me. I marveled at the mystery and the order of their existence and at the thousands of years we have been living symbiotically with this insect. I decided to make a film that was a poetic ode to the honeybee – a film more about wonder than about information. Colony collapse disorder is a serious threat to the honeybee, but my intention with this particular work was not to provide ecological information, but rather to 'stop the audience in its tracks and engender what James Joyce labeled "aesthetic arrest".'[15]

The short digital film *Bee Line* takes a loving look at this busy pollinator as an important entity within the miraculously interdependent world we live in. Women and girls (worker bees are only female) of all ages were invited to learn about the process by which bees dance 'maps' to locate nectar, pollen, water and tree resin. They were given a description of the round dance, the c-shape dance, and the waggle dance of the honeybee. They were then invited to embody or represent the bee dance in a performance of some kind. Those that responded to the invitation also chose their location and their costume. I, as the filmmaker, simply

recorded the performance. The community engagement during the creation of the film was as much the product of the work as the resulting film itself. It was an invitation to return to our ancient practice of mimesis. Another group of women were invited to perform a poem and two graduate students worked on sound design and animation for the film. In all, twenty-four women participated in its making. Shot entirely in the Okanagan Valley (known for its fruit and wine production), this film combined quirky dances, bee and bee-keeping images, sounds, and texts with disturbing facts about their demise, all set within a banquet of luscious agricultural landscapes.

Kenney 4 (Natalia Hautala dancing a bee dance in a pumpkin patch, 2013)

Vivarium 1: Scar Sites
Facilitators: Denise Kenney, Nancy Holmes

Vivarium 1: Scar Sites was a small project designed to influence the kind of public art projects being proposed by local artists and commissioned by the City of Kelowna. A four-day workshop was created to generate public art proposals for Knox Mountain, a beloved (and contested) iconic site in the city of Kelowna. The City of Kelowna, interested in hearing proposals for the site, co-sponsored the event and fifteen local artists were selected to take part in the workshop. The artists participated in the four-day practicum with eco-art curator and theorist, Beth Carruthers, culminating in an afternoon of presenting on-site project proposals on Kelowna's Knox Mountain park/recreation area. For the purposes of the workshop, we chose to focus on the theme of scar sites. This highlighted the conflict around recreational uses of Knox Mountain. Knox Mountain is a park surrounded by suburban sprawl. Contentious ideas about recreational pursuits have dominated its history: hikers are sometimes pitted against mountain bikers; beach users and water/shoreline environmentalists bemoan high-speed motorboats, houseboats and jet-skis; dog walkers and other park users can be in conflict with wildlife. These various 'uses' of the land have left scars. The project was intended, more than anything, to use art as a method for stimulating discussion amongst these various stakeholders and to generate project proposals that the city might want to commission. As critic Stephen Wright notes, problems 'are the fuel of meaningful public life... formulating questions is less about eliciting responses than an act of calling a participatory public into existence.'[16]

Prior to *Vivarium*, participants were given a package of selected readings, including a short historical timeline and some photographs from the Kelowna archives, an excerpt on indigenous history, and sections of the City of Kelowna Knox Mountain Park Management Plan 2011. During the workshop participants occupied the park and toured the land with three local experts, a Syilx woman, a geologist, and a biologist. We also hosted a community event inviting all Knox Mountain stakeholders to meet with the artists. The workshop culminated in five project proposals. Some of these proposals contained physical manifestations of the work while others remained conceptual. I will resist going into detail regarding the actual proposals because my emphasis here is on how the Eco Art Incubator intervened in the commissioning process for art in the city. The workshop directed artists away from authorship of a work derived from their body of work and toward a more sensitive response to the various dimensions of the public land for which the work was intended. Again, this included the 'geographical terrain as well as the terrain of consciousness.'[17] The resulting dialogue and the way this dialogue became generative, non-partisan, nuanced, and ambiguous as a consequence of its location in 'art' was the performative aspect of this project. In this way, the dialogue became a creative act or 'work in itself. As one participant wrote:

> Scars on the Land is really resonating with me right now. Perhaps because I have been thinking of my own body and its scars. I like that it isn't so polarized because it has the potential to open up into real conversation and problem solving that the other issues (given socio-economic/class aspects) may not lend themselves to as easily. There is something mythic about the body and scars. There is great narrative potential – all scars have a story – what happened, how did you get this scar? So I think this scarring topic has the potential for reframing the way we (stakeholders) perceive the land. The body of the land is such a clear metaphor... Scars are also not just cosmetic. The visible scar is often the least of it; scar tissue extends around the scar and below the surface and this scar tissue can create compensations and muscle

> imbalances that affect the entire body. What do the scars tell us about the deeper issues around land use and our perception of land and our relationship to the place we live and play? I have this picture in my mind of mountain bikers, fitness buffs, sitting on the chosen sites and raising their shirts, pant legs, parting their hair to show their scars. It could be the beginning of a really interesting conversation about the particularly delicate skin and body of this land.[18]

New Monaco: Developing Place — Placing Development (work in progress)
Creator: Denise Kenney

New Monaco: Developing Place — Placing Development is a documentary film that acts as a witness to the five-year transformation of 125 acres of rural Okanagan land into an innovative mixed-use community. The pie-shaped property is located high above the small town of Peachland and lake Okanagan and is bordered on two long sides by busy highways. Contained within these noisy borders are untouched forests and grasslands, creeks, orchards, and two old homesteads that are collapsing into their surroundings. Historically, the Okanagan has been colonized by imported aesthetics such as Tudor- and Spanish Mission-themed architecture not rooted in the experience and nature of the Okanagan itself. The developers of *New Monaco* plan to use green building principles to preserve Peachland's aesthetic value, heritage and lifestyle while also preserving habitat for native plants and riparian areas and employing water conservation strategies and renewable energy technology.[19] Their website reads:

> New Monaco is envisioned as a 'complete' community built on principles of sustainability and focused around a neighborhood center anchored by health and wellness technology employers. The community (is designed to offer) a series of housing clusters and a variety of housing types built into the landscape and connected to the village center by pedestrian and cycling trails that cross the spectacular natural hillside.[20]

My intention for this project is to have artists occupy the *New Monaco* site for long periods of time so that they may interpret its transformation from agricultural and wild terrain to a fully developed community. Various artists will serve as witnesses to this transformation and interpret the process through digital images, time-lapse photography, audio recordings and responses, poetry, interviews, and the long-term archiving of events. 2013 is devoted to the witnessing of the land for four complete seasons before developers break ground so that its 'natural' rhythms and aesthetics may be experienced in relationship to the development.

The process has only just begun and already I find my artistic practice challenged. I have become less clear about the parameters of the land I am witnessing and my ability to witness it. While filming aerial shots of the property with a model helicopter I suddenly began to wonder where the land actually ends. Does it end at its surface or ten to a hundred feet above ground? Do the *New Monaco* developers now own the air above the ground? I began to wonder about the birds occupying that space. I decided to accompany a natural resource biologist on an early morning bird listening expedition to assess the environmental impact of the *New Monaco* development. It was strange to film someone simply listening. I watched him listen. His job was to listen. It became clear almost immediately that I was in a different place than he was. I felt as though I was deaf. While I heard one or two birds, he heard layers upon layers of birds and bird stories. Like an anatomy book with the plastic pages that fold down to illustrate another layer of the body system, he saw all the pages layered one upon the other. I only saw the skin. I wondered how well I could witness something that I wasn't hearing or seeing very well. Another challenge I am encountering is the challenge of time. None of my projects have spanned five or six years and none have required that I slow down to the extent that I must in order to bear witness to the more-than-human world. Our rhythms and relationship to time are different. My ego just seems too big and too busy. Perhaps that is why I am a performer. I will continue to attend to these challenges and in the meantime, I enjoy wild asparagus, crunchy and juicy like fresh peas. I enjoy the Arrow Leaf Balsam Root in full bloom and moving in all directions along with the grass that I suspect has ticks clinging to every tip, ready to hijack my legs as I pass.

> Cut Off

> A poet said the old names of this place
> and, like I had a stroke, I lost my language.
> The golden slopes had slipped their leash, escaped
> from rootless English, bearing true names which,
> wordless, I could no more speak nor read
> than clouds' rippling script across the grass.
> I live on ancient land, foreign instead
> of home.[21]

With *New Monaco: Developing Place-Placing Development* I build partnerships outside of the art world and the nature conservancy world and take my art-making skills into the world that may have the deepest influence on our sense of belonging and relationship to place – real estate development. The primary partnership is between the *New Monaco* developers and myself as artist and professor. This partnership is of mutual benefit to both parties. I am able to (or will try to) witness, interpret and represent a development project through its various stages of production, and *New Monaco* is provided with digital documentation of their operations throughout this process.

Is *New Monaco* an utopist vision? Perhaps. Can community be constructed in this pre-meditated way? I am skeptical. I am also skeptical of *New Monaco*'s ability to bring this vision to fruition given the financial and logistical challenges of a development project of this scale. When these financial and logistical challenges demand compromises be made, will these compromises betray the original goal? I don't know. For me, the name *New Monaco* betrays conflicting understandings of this new community's relationship to this place and this history. But despite all of these questions, *New Monaco* remains a project that is attempting to work with community to build 'home' in the Okanagan in a more meaningful and sustainable way. I don't subscribe to dialectical thinking, nor am I seeking to define forces of opposition. If there is a tension in this story, that tension may be between our dreams and our ability to bring those dreams to fruition, but I believe that any attempt to do so in a tangible way is a noble pursuit. I plan to witness this pursuit from, as much as possible, the point of view of my physical self on the material land.

Both *New Monaco* and *Bee Line* involve the translation from my sensorial experience of this place to its representation in digital media. I have not yet resolved the many issues I have

regarding the interface of digital media and eco-art. I can't help but feel narcissistic in my re-presentation of the natural world via digital media, yet it is one of my chosen means of expression. My digital work becomes a commodity, my own construction, while live performance is, by its very nature, a rejection of 'the commodity status of art in favor of a symbolic activity which takes place between real people, in the real world, over time, necessitating a move away from the isolated art object.'[22] The vehicle for live performance is flesh and blood. The vehicle for digital media is binary code. How can my work bridge nature and culture through binary code? And yet I believe there is a burgeoning of interventionist, site-specific, and community arts practices partially due to the parallel practice of disseminating aspects of this work via social media. The archiving of local, ephemeral and site specific works creates new and autonomous work (albeit isolated art objects) that may resonate beyond the source projects themselves and perhaps contribute to the discourse surrounding this practice.

Despite finding myself straddling these two worlds of electronically mediated communication and live performance, I can't help but feel that live performance is somehow more vital. John Burnside, in a chapter entitled 'A Science of Belonging: Poetry as Ecology,' describes a human body exposed, moving, or standing in the open as essentially an ecological act. By simply walking, he suggests,

> we become ecologists because, walking, we have the potential to see the world as it is, not in virtual glimpses through a VCR or a car windscreen, but as the here and now, the immediate, the intimate ground of our being.[23]

Like walking, live performance is also an ecological act. Perhaps my greatest contribution to the work we are doing within the Eco Art Incubator lies in my research in sensorial body-based ways of engaging with (and belonging to) self, place, and our current predicament. This is the focus of most of my studio classes in our Interdisciplinary Performance program here at UBC-Okanagan.

Three Sheets to the Wind
Creators: Jeannette Angel, David Kadish, Julia Prudhomme

The interactive installation *Three Sheets to the Wind* was the product of a graduate level studio course in interdisciplinary practice designed to give graduate students an opportunity to work collaboratively to create hybrid work drawing on the group's collective strengths. The course emphasized collaboration and the creative translation and integration of disparate inspirational sources. While students may have developed their research methodologies and approaches to praxis as it applies to their own work, this course requires that their learning be applied to a collaborative and interdisciplinary process rooted in body-based research and inspired by the body-based pedagogy of Jacques Lecoq.

Three students participated in this class: Jeannette Angel, a PhD candidate in Interdisciplinary Performance; Julia Prudhomme, a Master's of Fine Art candidate in Visual Arts; and David Kadish, a Master's candidate in Engineering. The challenge presented to them was to work together so that no collaborator felt that they compromised their identity or their own work in service to the collective creation. Guy Cools, a visiting artist at the time, assisted in the facilitation of this process. The result of their collaboration was *Three Sheets to the Wind*, a hammock installation that

> invites participants to share what it means to be connected in an oscillating ecosystem. In order to find balance, the participating public must find mutually dependent yet individual body experiences that mediate self-governing but wholly accepted rules of play.[24]

Specifically, three hammocks are suspended from trees using an interconnected pulley system. All hammocks must be occupied simultaneously in order for any hammock to function. The trees themselves become participants in this interdependent triangle as they have a role in the system of support and opposing tension. As Kadish describes,

> The aesthetic of *Three Sheets to the Wind* creates a moment of simplicity for the participants. The 'jungle gym'-ness of the installation brings the audience to a time of childhood and play that is often remembered nostalgically as 'simpler.' That frame is broken when a participant realizes the level of cooperation required to actually enjoy the hammock. The exercise shifts from one of simple pleasures to a trilateral negotiation. 'Everyone sit in unison.' 'One person wants to leave; let's all get up.' 'Are we all about the same weight? Will the hammocks be balanced?' The complexities of adult life come bubbling to the surface.[25]

He also discusses the significance of threes:

> The importance of threes is in the way in which the third element causes attention to be divided. In a binary system, participants are able to focus on the singular other. This may allow for an in-depth contemplation of one's own position relative to the outside, but it does so with a narrow point of view. There is but a single line of sight to the person or thing opposite one's own position. The third element causes the participant to constantly shift focus. The third element enables an empathetic stance by continually reminding the participant that there are multiple, equally important perspectives.[26]

Kenney 5
(Three Sheets to the Wind: Creators Angel, Kadish and Prudhomme, 2012)

The Eco Art Incubator has commissioned Three Sheets to the Wind for one national conference and one community event at a local Bird Sanctuary. It was a simple yet complex design that engaged the public sensorially, playfully, and intellectually.

The process and resulting project exemplified the richness of translation possible through authentic (and body-based) conversation with each other and with nature.

Local artist Cathy Stubbington emphasizes this notion of 'conversation' in her work. In discussing a performance project she was working on about water, she describes how they attempted to make the event a conversation between the people and the water, rather than a performance about water. To do this, they decided to make it a 'Thank You' event.

> Learning the distinction between Theatrical Performance and Thank You became my personal goal in the water project. I believe this is a point of shift between

> worldviews. In the former perspective we can express appreciation for the environment, describing and celebrating its elements. In the latter, we are part of our environment and in conversation with its elements; cultural practice is the enacting of this connection. In the former, audience and performance, performance and environment, are separate, however harmonious. In the latter, art and life are inseparable.[27]

There is something about the importance of the act of conversing as a process by which we situate ourselves in a place. A conversation implies that we must listen as well as speak. A conversation necessitates a relationship. There can be multiple contributors, but never one alone. While the Eco Art Incubator projects described cannot be characterized as Thank You projects in the way Stubbington describes, they can be defined as dialogical. Whether we are conversing with each other, the neighborhood, the land, the animals, or artistic representations, it is perhaps through the act of conversation that we locate belonging.

While I have taught physical theater for several years, I have only recently begun to take my students' 'bodies' out of the studio to train them in conversation with their environment. In performance we often train ourselves to be sensitive to each other and to an imaginary space and to converse with each other and that imaginary space. Rarely do we develop these skills outside of a constructed performance setting. Gary Snyder quotes Buddhist philosopher D gen as saying, 'When you find your place where you are, practice occurs.'[28] More and more I find myself trying to teach and practice an opening of awareness to the more-than-human world and a nurturing of a presence of being beyond the confines of the studio. This process is just beginning. My instinct tells me to return to the ancient practice of embodiment. Lecoq believed that 'to mime is literally to embody and therefore to understand better.'[29] He believed this miming becomes a form of knowledge. For Lecoq, 'You can immerse your life in a drop of water and see the whole world!'[30] One example of Lecoq's pedagogy adapted to my purposes is the use of neutral mask in performer training. The neutral mask enables one

> to experience the *state of neutrality* prior to action, a state of receptiveness to everything around us, with no inner conflict ... When a student has experienced this neutral starting point his body will be freed, like a blank page on which drama can be inscribed.[31]

The neutral mask essentially allows us to be 'colonized.' The performer, while wearing the neutral mask, frees herself from her ego and becomes the conduit through which any aspect of the world may be embodied. Through this embodiment, our bodies somehow extend beyond our skin. This experience moves far beyond the notion of site-specific performance. The aim is poetry. The essence of an element such as water, for example, might be represented in a way that far surpasses its objective dynamics or characteristics.

Neutral Mask is but one of many training methods I am exploring in relationship to this theme of belonging. My research has just begun and cold winter months present different physical challenges that I have yet to resolve. It is my hope, however, that by combining this training with more dialogical performance practices that take place outside of sanctioned cultural spaces, we might be able to expand our notion of home and community and celebrate live performance's greatest gift: the communion of body and place.

In Canada that communion is always troubled by historical forces, particularly how our difficult relationship to place is compounded by a colonial past. At a recent conference I was asked how I practice my research without being a colonizing presence. To be clear, I am not seeking to emulate indigenous ways of belonging to this place, but rather look at the act of re-indigenizing as a very personal and individual journey. My relationship to the Balsamroot does not become more authentic, for example, because I appropriate the indigenous name for it. I need to find my own relationship. As for the larger and more abstract question of colonization, I believe we are, by our very presence, inevitably colonizing this place. Feeling guilty about power is somehow also asserting power – such a privileged emotion. Our presence in the Okanagan is undeniably colonial, but my aim is to live IN this world, not ON it. As Don McKay points out, I must find a way to allow this place to colonize me:

> It might seem that home is the moment of passage from ontological to epistemological dwelling, the place

> where knowledge as power begins. But this needs to be balanced with our intuitive sense that home is also the site of our appreciation of the material world, where we lavish attention on its details, where we collaborate with it. In fact, it often seems that home, far from being just a concretization of self, is the place where it pours itself out into the world, interiority opening itself to material expression. To make a home is to establish identity with a primordial grasp, yes; but it is also, in some measure, to give it away with an extended palm. We might try to sum up the paradox of home-making by saying that inner life takes place; it both claims place and acts to become a place among others. It turns wilderness into an interior and presents interiority to the wilderness.[32]

Antelope-Brush, Sagebrush, Mock Orange, Green Lacewings, Western Painted Turtles and sometimes cougars and bears surround my body. My work with the Eco Art Incubator seeks to acknowledge this. This is a challenge for me. As a performance artist I have been primarily occupied with conversations limited to the human social sphere. I know that I need to learn a new language or at the very least, improve my hearing. Perhaps I need to walk more. Perhaps I need to stand still. I am not sure yet. I am beginning a new conversation, one that tries to internalize this embodied reality and re-present my experience within this context. I hope that through this process and through our various projects, we can find a better way to belong.

Notes

1 Okanagan Nation Alliance Page, accessed July 15, 2013, www.syilx.org/governance-okanagannationterritory.php. Traditionally, Okanagans occuped an area which extended over approximately 69 000 square kilometers. The northern area of this territory was close to the area of Mica Creek, just north of modern day Revelstoke, BC, and the eastern boundary was between Kaslo and Kootenay Lakes. The southern boundary extended to the vicinity of Wilbur, Washington and the western border extended into the Nicola Valley. Today, the Okanagan Nation in Canada is made up of seven bands: the Okanagan Indian Band, Upper Nicola Indian Band, Westbank First Nation, Penticton Indian Band, Lower Similkameen Indian Band, Upper Similkameen Indian Band and Osoyoos Indian Band, and the bands in modern day Washington State are administered by the tribal government of the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation.
2 Berg and Dasmann as qtd in Buell, 2005, p. 83.
3 Armstrong, 2006, p. 37.
4 Caruthers, 2006, pp. 9-17.
5 Kagan, 2012, p. 10.
6 Kester, 2004, p. 66.
7 Forbes, 2001, p. 117.
8 Kester, 2004, p. 1.
9 Berry, 2002, p. 35.
10 Jackson, 1994, p. 89.
11 Stubbington, 2013, p. 27.
12 Newman, 2012, p. 11.
13 O'Donnel, 2006, p. 61.
14 Holmes, 2012, p. 37.
15 Bogart, 2004, p. 63.
16 Wright, 2004.
17 Buell, 2005, p. 83.
18 Lorna Tureski, e-mail message to project committee, March 18, 2012.
19 www.newmonaco.ca/energy, accessedJune 21, 2013.
20 www.newmonaco.ca., accessed June 21, 2013,
21 Holmes, 2012, p. 66.
22 Kenning, 2008.
23 Burnside, 2006.
24 Prudhomme, 2012, p.1.
25 Kadish, 2012, p. 3.
26 Ibid., p. 6.
27 Stubbington, 2013, p. 17.28 Snyder, 1990, p. 27.
29 Lecoq, 2002, p. 22.
30 Ibid., p. 23.
31 Ibid., p. 36.
32 McKay, 2001, p. 23.

Bibliography

— Armstrong, Jeannette (2006). 'Community: Sharing One Skin.' In Paradigm Wards: Indigenous Peoples' Resistance to Globalization, eds. Jerry Mander and Victoria Tauli-Corpuz. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books.

— Berry, Wendell (2002). 'The Unsettling of America.' In The Art of the Commonplace: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry, pp. 35-46. Washington, DC: Shoemaker & Hoard.

— Bogart, Anne (2004). A Director Prepares: Seven Essays on Art and Theatre. New York: Routledge.

— Buell, Lawrence (2005). The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination. Maldon, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

— Burnside, John (2006). 'A Science of Belonging: Poetry as Ecology.' In Contemporary Poetry and Contemporary Science, ed. Robert Crawford, pp. 91-106. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

— Caruthers, Beth (2006). Mapping the Terrain of Contemporary Eco-ART Practice and Collaboration. A Report Commissioned by Canadian Commission for UNESCO. Presented at 'Art in Ecology: A Think Tank of Arts and Sustainability.' Vancouver, April 27.

— Forbes, Jack D. (2001). 'Nature and Culture: Problematic Concepts for Native Americans.' In Indigenous Traditions and Ecology: The Interbeing of Cosmology and Community, ed. John A. Grim, pp. 103-24. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

— Holmes, Nancy (2012). The Flicker Tree: Okanagan Poems. Vancouver: Ronsdale Press.

— Jackson, Wes (1994). Becoming Native to this Place. New York, NY: Counterpoint.

— Kadish, David (2012). 'Three Sheets to the Wind: Complexity, Empathy and Knowledge.' IGS Course 520D Project Reflection, University of British Columbia — Okanagan.

— Kagan, Sacha (2012). Toward Global (Environ)Mental Change: Transformative Art and Cultures of Sustainability. Berlin: Heinrich Böll Stiftung.

— Kenning, Dean (2008), 'Eco Art: Dean Kenning on Art Energy in an Age of Ecology.' Art Monthly 313, pp. 1-4.

— Kester, Grant H. (2004). Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art. Berkeley: University of California.

— Lecoq, Jacques (2002). The Moving Body. New York: Routledge