

Poetic Place: Knowing a Small British Columbia Community Through the Production of Creative Geographic Knowledge

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The subject of this paper is the production of creatively informed geographic knowledge as a means of understanding place, specifically a small community in northwestern British Columbia. The paper reviews calls by geographers for the creation of artistic geographic knowledge, considers strategies for achieving a synthesis of geographic and creative knowledge, and culminates in a personal narrative meditating on a community situated in northwestern British Columbia. Following D.W. Meinig's (1983) appeal for geographers to become artists and S. Quoniam's (1988) contemplation of how a landscape artist might be a geographer, I argue and demonstrate that literary practices and visual arts are more than sites from which to draw geographic information (Salter and Lloyd, 1977; Bunkse, 1990) but are rather geographic practices unto themselves.

Introduction

It was a fall day in 1982 when my father put on a suit. I remember the moment well. I was eight years old and my father in a suit was a rare sight. My mother helped him knot his tie and there was discussion of him making a flight on time. Phone calls ensued over the next three days, but because I was young, I did not pay much attention to what was being discussed. On the evening of the third day my father returned with the news that he had a job. My mother and father explained to me that we would be moving to the Queen Charlotte Islands.

In an attempt to make sense of the move, my parents showed me a map, pointing out a red dot in the lower left hand corner of British Columbia that represented where our house was then. Slowly my father traced the thin line leading from our red dot towards the top of the page. His finger paused at smaller dots along the way and he mentioned place names I had never heard of. His finger passed lakes and rivers, crossed bridges, and zigzagged through mountain ranges. It never stopped in its climb towards the top of the page. Somewhere near the top his finger began to move towards the left again, this time towards the huge ocean with the word "Pacific" etched onto its surface. His finger stopped for a moment at the edge of the ocean as he explained about the long ferry ride we would take to the islands where his new job was. We would ride in a boat bigger than our house, he explained, and we would move with our dogs and cats and my sister and everything we owned to those islands in the Pacific Ocean. Right here, he said, this is where your new school will be, and his finger circled a space as green as all the other coloured space on those two islands. Where is the red dot? I asked, and he answered that the town we were moving to was not large enough to merit a red dot, nor a dot of any colour for that matter. My eyes fixed on the unmarked spot of a mapped landscape upon which my father's finger rested.

My movement to, and upbringing in, northwestern British Columbia has instilled within me a deep belief that the landscapes (both physical and cultural) of the region are knowable to a great degree through story. As a recounting of both real and imagined events, or as a history of individuals, groups, or institutions, story is not the sole method of understanding place. It is, however, one method of representing and communicating the physical and cultural landscapes to both insiders of, and outsiders to, northwestern British Columbia.

My conviction is that story of place is inextricable from geographic knowledge of place. A narrative, and by this I mean (like story) the recounting and representation in textual format of both real and imagined events (Soja, 1996), constructs an equally relevant depiction and representation of geographic knowledge as, for instance, one of geography's best-known forms of representation (the map). By creating my own narratives about the landscapes in which I have lived and worked, I attempt to engage in the production of geographic knowledge through story, making tangible a belief that narrative practices are a medium from which to not only extract geographic knowledge, but also a medium by which to represent and produce geographic knowledge.

Exploring Creative Geography: Art, Literature and Geographic Knowledge

Geography's deployment of literature and creative material has shifted over time. Initially concerned with artistic or creative material as a source of geographic information useful to augment existing geographic knowledge, the discipline has moved toward an understanding that creatively informed knowledge can be geographic in its own right, communicating, in a different but equally well-founded manner, concepts and information crucial to geographic thought. This shift in part reflects the re-conceptualization of interdisciplinarity from a concept that allows disciplines to borrow from each other to supplement disciplinary constructs, to a practice involving the creation of new knowledge outside pre-existing disciplinary boundaries (Bhabha, 1995; Klein, 2000). Constructing geographic knowledge through creative practice and endeavour is not a new concept (Cosgrove, 1993; Duncan and Ley, 1993; Meinig, 1983; Porteous, 1985; Ryden, 1993; Salter and Lloyd, 1977; Watson, 1983;). Porteous (1985) argued for the use of literature as a valid source of geographical information, Salter and Lloyd (1977) posited that the only way geographers could truly understand place was through interactions with creative interpretations of it, and Watson (1983) (himself a poet) stated the very soul of geography was linked with artistic representation and thought. Laurie Ricou's (2002) *The Arbutus/Madrone Files: Reading the Pacific Northwest* is a compilation of "files" (creatively infused essays) focussing on literary and artistic exploration of landscapes and borderlands and represents a tangible example of creatively produced geographic knowledge. Barnes and Duncan (1992), Cosgrove (1993) and Duncan and Ley (1993) reopened the discussion of representation and landscape, arguing again that geography must avail itself to artistic and creative methods, including creative literary interpretations of place. In *place/culture/representation*, Duncan and Ley write that

[t]he scientific way of knowing is no longer regarded as a privileged discourse linking us to truth but rather one discourse among many, which constructs both the object of its enquiry and the modes of seeing and representing that object. (28)

They go on to write that "[a] map, a picture, a text—all of them are forms of creation, all are in large part a measure of personal expressions" (37). Ways of representing sense of place and personal attachment to landscape grew to include artistic and narrative

endeavours, and geographers took up these methods (Pred 1990, Quoniam 1988, Watson 1983). Kent C. Ryden (1993) not only wrote creatively about his surrounding landscape, but advocated creative methods of representing geographic enquiry, stating that “the nature and quality of a place can sink deep into you, influencing and conditioning the way you think, see, and feel...far down into your very bones by simple virtue of residence and time” (289–290). He stated further that nature and quality of place could perhaps best be captured in narrative form.

D.W. Meinig (1983) eloquently expressed the need for geographers to engage in artistic production, stating

We shall not have a humanistic geography worthy of the claim until we have some of our most talented and sensitive scholars deeply engaged in the creation of the literature of the humanities. Geography will deserve to be called an art only when a substantial number of geographers become artists. (325)

Similarly to Meinig’s call for geographers to become artists, S. Quoniam (1988) questioned how a landscape artist might also be a geographer. Quoniam posed this question of his own work, work which is a combination of illegible text and landscape paintings and representations. The question is at the heart of any investigation concerning the call for geographers to become artists and creative writers, or the call for artists and creative writers to be recognized as geographers. Inherent in Quoniam’s question is a series of themes. First, how does one extrapolate geographic meaning from works of art or literature? Secondly, to what degree is an artist also a geographer (and vice versa), and on what grounds might an artistic text be understood as a geographic text? Finally, is the outcome of artistic geography (or geographic art) a simple combination of two methods of thought working side by side, or is it to be a hybrid of new thought destined perhaps to the margins of both disciplines? If the hybrid outcome of fusing together geography and artistic text is destined to the margins of disciplinary boundaries, it calls into question Meinig’s demand for the discipline of geography to produce artists; after all, if work is to reside on the boundaries, it would suggest that single disciplines cannot contain the work. Thus, the outcome of a truly hybrid relationship between geography and creative writing might only be capable of residing in an interdisciplinary context.

In response to his initial question regarding the ability of an artist to also be a geographer, Quoniam answers:

A first answer would argue that the space of Arizona, like every space, itself creates new imaginings. But in the process of analysis, and explanation about landscape reality, a great variety of approaches are plausible. Painting is one...It is also a difficult, if not hazardous exercise to talk about myself and about my painting because I want to remain on the boundaries between geography and art. (14)

This answer has inherent in it an equal number of complex themes as does the question to which it responds. First, space and place (including textual representation of the two) are themselves constitutive. Second, the consideration of landscape is a multifaceted endeavor in which both artistic and scientific modes of thought and analysis are acceptable. Finally, the outcomes of new geographic analysis and representation reside on the margins and boundaries between (not outside) geographic and artistic methods. The second component of Quoniam's answer is the part that addresses most succinctly Meinig's and other geographers' call for artistic modes of geographic thought, while the first and last components of Quoniam's answer insist that Quoniam, as both a geographer and artist of Arizona, represents the synthesis of two apparently disparate methods of evaluating the landscape. This synthesis results in a new, and ultimately more productive, way of investigating and representing place. Quoniam writes "[t]he artist could not go through [Arizona] without painting and the geographer without describing the feelings of the painter, with each experience informing the other" (4). The outcome of this creative geographic mode of inquiry is, as Quoniam writes, "a kind of parallel but separate geography" (12). Quoniam's final evaluation of his own painting/geographing of the Arizona landscape as being something that resides on the boundary between geography and art suggests on the one hand a method of representation that is outside both disciplines and, on the other, a method of representation that is a combination of the two. His work is thus truly a manner of landscape interpretation and evaluation that is both geographic and artistic in nature, and the outcome depicts a new space, which by the artist/geographer's own evaluation will in turn spark more new imaginings of space. The goal of my narratives mirrors those of Quoniam's in so far as the narratives are neither clear geographic articulations nor are they purely literary descriptions of place. Instead, I attempt to explore literary mapping, an outcome representing the hybridization of traditional geographic and literary methods of representation and knowledge production.

Methods of landscape representation anchored in an interdisciplinary mode of inquiry, particularly one concerned with creative geography, occur in narrative writing endeavours as well as painting practices. Predating Quoniam, and practicing poetry rather than painting, J. Wreford Watson (1983) stated that

Geography without passion is about as alive as a body without blood—ready for the gravediggers. ...We ought to say of landscape not only—this is what it looks like, but, this is how I feel it...[It is] the poet who gets to the real issues [of geography], because [s]he is of them. [S]he voices them as prime experience. (391-392)

Similar then to Quoniam's assertion that the geographer is an artist and the geographer in turn informs the artist, Watson does not separate the poet and the geographer. Instead, he suggests that the poet is a geographer by virtue of the poet's experience of geographic issues, including place. Watson thus implies that creative representations of geographic issues are not only inherent in creative endeavours, but geography is in need of more creative geographic methods of representation. Watson, a practitioner of his own call to passionate and creative geographers, is himself a poet engaged in a writing process concerned with landscape. His poetry, imbedded into the 1983 Presidential Address delivered at the Annual Conference of the Institute of British Geographers, contemplates everything from "a fume-ridden and socially riven mine town at Kirkland Lake in Canada" (390) to the Canadian National Telecommunications Tower in Toronto. Of the latter, he writes that it is

built from rock – but rock
 eyed with vision, crowned with light,
 rock with a thousand voices such as
 lead out of night,
 rock raised to the high and burning noon. (389)

Imbedded in these poetic lines of urban geographic contemplation is the passion Watson argues is necessary to geography. His lines represent a merger, and a mixing, of both geographic and literary narrative methods of inquiry and representation, culminating in a knowledge pertaining to place that is anchored in the languages of both poetry and geography. Watson's theoretical rationale for his geographic poetry does not entirely reflect the cross-disciplinary nature of his work. The concepts behind his narrative embody an understanding of interdisciplinarity that advo-

cates the borrowing from one discipline to strengthen pre-existing disciplinary constructs, and he suggests the “use” of literature for geographic purposes rather than the creation of new and disruptive knowledge formations. Watson embodies the concepts of which he writes, namely that there needs to be

...use of literature in geography. It [cannot be] on the sidelines. It is central—because it draws us back to an earth enriched by the blood and bone of people, an earth of hope and despair, over which [humans] break themselves, or which they overcome. We [must] not sit on the bleachers and watch the earth as a geographical spectacle: we are partnered with the earth, and *geography is the book of that bond*. (397)

Literature’s centrality to geographic endeavours, in conjunction with the willingness to create poetry as a method of geographic representation, are both concepts that inform literary geography and creative narrative mapping. While Watson stops short of calling for the *creation* of literature in geography, his practice of producing poetry infused with geographic content suggests he supports creative production of geographic knowledge. Watson’s work represents a response to calls for geographers to become artists, and his poetry in part suggests that geographers can create art as geographic information.

Geographer–poets and geographer–painters are not the only geographers to advocate creative methods of representing geographic knowledge. Kent C. Ryden (1993), neither a poet nor a painter, engages in narrative representations of place, arguing that

It is in stories—narratives formal or informal, elaborate and detailed or offhand and telegraphic—of what happened to people in a place, of what they have done with the things that they found there, that best reveal the “real geography”: geography, that is, experienced and understood as place. (46)

Ryden argues that to understand the nature of place, and to communicate meaningfully about that place, traditional modes of geographic inquiry (the map for instance) no longer suffice as representational methods. His argument leads him to an investigation into, and a defence of, creative geography. Ryden addresses this understanding in his statement that

In a way I see [my] book not only as a scholarly study of place but as a personal mapping of place, an allusion to my own geographically rooted narratives, and those narratives will remain inextricably joined in my mind with the learning that I have accumulat-

ed in the course of my research—and I have to admit that the stories may will be more vivid and entertaining than the learning. (296)

It is this sense of geographically rooted narratives linked inextricably with personal narratives, and the end result being more vivid, which is the motivating force behind my production of geographic narratives. While Ryden expresses this sense explicitly, he is not alone in an approach to geography that fuses the geographic with the personal and creative.

Place Between Pages: Geographic Knowledge, Authors and Creative Narratives

A natural association exists between geography and literary studies in so far as both disciplines are involved in the reading of texts. John Brinckerhoff Jackson (1984), for instance, writes that landscape can be *read*, stating that

Wherever we go in contemporary landscapes we run across...signs: boundaries, roads, and places of assembly. We read them at once, and we not only read them, we create them ourselves, almost without realizing that without them we could not function as members of society. (46)

Jackson's depiction of the landscape as a readable entity suggests a parallel between it and a text. This parallel is taken up by Trevor Barnes and James Duncan (1992) who, in their introduction to *Writing Worlds: Discourse, Text and Metaphor in the Representation of Landscape*, write "the notions of text, discourse and metaphor have emerged as powerful concepts over the last twenty years. Originally defined in terms of literary criticism, they now have much wider importance..." (12) to disciplines such as geography. According to Barnes and Duncan, this wider importance is particularly relevant to landscape geography, which they write is fundamentally a discipline concerned with texts, stating that the "concept of the text...includes...maps and landscapes, as well as social, economic and political institutions....In short, landscapes are characterized by all those features...definitive of a text" (5-6). The linkages Barnes and Duncan draw between the productions of geographic knowledge and literary studies do not end with an evaluation of landscape as text. In addition to the "reading" parallels between geography and literary studies, Barnes and Duncan state that "writing" is another commonality between geography and literature, writing that "...the very root meaning of the word

'geography' is literally 'earth writing' (from the Greek *geo*, meaning 'earth', and *graph*, meaning 'to write'...the one thing that links all geographers of whatever stripe is that they write" (1). This is further illustrated in a statement made by Duncan and Duncan (1988) in "(Re)reading the landscape" :

Insights from literary theory [can be] applied to the analysis of landscapes....literary theory provides us with ways to examine the text-like quality of landscape, and to see them as transformations of ideologies...[and] it provides us with theories of reading and authorship which we can adapt to explain how landscapes are incorporated into social processes. (117)

Duncan and Duncan's assertion provides an opening through which to enter an exploration of literary studies' contemplation of textual creations and landscape analysis. However, an understanding that literary studies and geography not only have much in common but, in some ways, also mirror each other with regard to their methods and purposes, does not entirely address how literary works or creative narratives can be read not only as sites of geographic knowledge but as geographic knowledge unto themselves. Mike Crang (1998) asks "[i]f anyone were to look around for accounts that really gave the reader a feel for a place, would they look to geography textbooks or to novels?" (44). That "[t]he answer does not need saying" (45) indicates the author's certainty that anyone desirous of understanding the feel of a place would certainly avoid geography texts and would gravitate towards the novel, and suggests that geographic knowledge (sense of place) can indeed be better found in creative narratives. Crang writes that "[l]iterary accounts can...reveal something of how spaces are ordered and how relations to spaces can define social action" (49). Crang's defense of creative narratives as meaningful sites of geographic knowledge is mirrored in his admonishment of the hesitancy found in the discipline of geography to train geographers as creative writers:

Undergraduate geographers receive years of training which seem to remove the ability to write a piece of prose (let alone, say, poetry) that imaginatively engages its reader. Such is a slightly sad state of affairs and leaves geography a more arid, desiccated and poorer discipline. This is especially important if we are trying to describe what landscapes mean to people. (45)

In Crang's statement one might read a continuation of Meinig's 1983 assertion that without a significant number of geographers

becoming artists (here we can also include creative writers), the discipline of geography may remain outside of an arts categorization. Quoting Daniels and Rycott's essay "Mapping the Modern City: Alan Stillitoe's Nottingham Novels," Crang states that "[w]e should not see geography and literature as two different orders of knowledge (one imaginative and one factual) but rather as a field of textual genres, in order to highlight both the worldliness of literary texts and the imaginativeness of geographical texts" (58). Thus, the production of creatively informed and literary geographic knowledge (the objective of my creative geographic narrative) rests not only on the foundations of geographical thought, but rests too with works of literature that embody sense of place and landscape study.

The transmission of geographic knowledge through imaginary or creative practices is, according to Hugh Brody (1983), a well-established technique. Brody's *Maps and Dreams: Indians and the British Columbia Frontier* investigates, in part through autobiographical inquiry, the mapping practices of an Aboriginal people in Northeastern British Columbia, the Beaver People of the Cree Nation. Brody's text is not only an investigation of mapping practices predicated on imagination, story, myth, and an oral tradition, but is also an investigation into the limitations of Euro-western mapping practices as they pertain to First Nations lives and land-use realities (146–177). The text suggests that geographic knowledge is transmittable and reproducible in methods outside the scholarly and accepted practices, or outside what Kent C. Ryden (1993) suggests is the most apparent representation of geographic knowledge, the conventional paper map. The method chosen by Brody to record his year of work with the Beaver people reflects the author's resistance to conventional cartographic methods of representation. The text includes graphical images depicting a merging of Euro-western maps of the region overlaid with the "traditional" maps of the Beaver people.

Maps and Dreams is relatively unusual in its four-way use of standard thematic maps, imaginary maps, ethnographic accounts of field research, and personal anecdotal creative writing (Huggan, 1991). Throughout the text, Brody tends to keep these four methods separate, most notably through chapter delineations. The text in its entirety, though, is very much an innovative representation of landscape and culture, created in part to mirror the complexity of what it addresses. *Maps and Dreams*, the work of an anthropologist, has relevance to geography in part because of its inquiry into people and their interactions with their surroundings, but also because,

with its consistent use of map and landscape imagery, it has a distinctly geographic sense about it. As such, the text provides an important example of the unification of creative writing, mapping, and scientific inquiry leading to a successful text-based evaluation of place and landscape. It is here that *Maps and Dreams* provides me with a foundational reference for my own evaluation and contemplation of northwestern British Columbia from an anecdotal and creative perspective.

Sheila Peters (1998), in *Canyon Creek: a script*, thanks the foundation that made possible the publication of her text for "...knowing how stories remind us of our relationship to the land" (iii). Peters is a northwestern British Columbian writer whose first book, *Canyon Creek*, is an transdisciplinary exercise combining historical account, creative writing, mapping, interviews, and photography. The text is not only concerned with a rural community on Highway 16 (Telkwa) but it also makes use of the interaction between narrative and map. In addition, *Canyon Creek* is explicit in its literary exploration of landscape, both cultural and physical.

Peters' text takes the form of a screenplay script. The story is told by a narrator situated in the position of film director who takes the reader/viewer in hand and points out features of a region's landscape. The area being represented in the text, Canyon Creek, is just outside Telkwa, a tiny community on the outskirts of the town of Smithers. Place is central to the fiction. At the onset of the story, we are asked "[w]here is this place? North and west of the cowboy Cariboo and Chilcotin, way up in the bush. The Bulkley River flows north from here, into the mystic Skeena, and west to the Pacific coast" (8). Peters communicates geographic knowledge throughout her narrative. Her story weaves between the deterritorialization and brutality faced by the Wet'suwet'en people and the accounts of the region's colonizing people. Maps augment the text systematically, as do photographs of the landscape, both of which suggest a concern for the spatial context of the narrative and allow the reader/viewer insight into place. Peter's narrative is distinctly geographic in nature because it conveys information on land use, on settlement formations, on spatial considerations such as direction and relationships between sites, and on people's interaction and impact on the land and their surroundings. She is overt in her concern for the landscape, infusing the narrative with details of settlers and geologist such as

They made...mostly accurate observations of the physical attributes that make up landscape: contour, water, wildlife, vegetation and mineralization. They drew the land, surveying nine town-

ships along the Bulkley Valley Road between Moricetown and Round Lake...In this township twenty-four sections have been surveyed, besides the lines defining the outlines. (38)

This “re-mapping” in words, overlaying of narrative interpretation on map and geomorphologic detail, all through the medium of “factual fiction”, highlights the capabilities of narrative and literature to transmit geographic knowledge. While Peters uses maps in her script, she is quick to infuse the lines of the maps with a new representation of place. She is not content with the concept that a map encompasses all there is to know about a landscape, and is insistent that other methods of conveying geographic knowledge exist, namely the method of story. In *Canyon Creek: a script*, a re-mapping of place (Telkwa) in northwestern British Columbia has occurred, and it has occurred through a transdisciplinary and literary practice. It is precisely this mapping anew and conveyance of geographic knowledge through story that motivates my writing personal essays about communities along the western section of Highway 16 as a method of actively participating in the formation of creative geographic works to convey new stories about the physical and cultural landscape of the region. To borrow author Aritha van Herk’s (1990) term, I am interested in creating “geografictione” about the communities along the western end of Highway 16 in northwestern British Columbia.

While northwestern British Columbia is not the location under consideration in Aritha van Herk’s (1990) narrative, her text *Places Far From Ellesmere: a geografictione, explorations on site*, does engage with the topic of rurality and personal interaction with components of the social and physical landscape. *Places Far From Ellesmere* is a conscious merging of geographic, creative and literary practices, most expressly denoted in the author’s coining of the term “geografictione” and in the topics of her four narratives; Edburg, Edmonton, Calgary, and Ellesmere. Like Sheila Peters’ text, *Places Far From Ellesmere* conveys geographic information within a medium of creative (non)fiction. It contemplates concepts such as home, migration, dispersal of population on land, relationships between hinterland and heartland areas, and people’s relationship to their spatial realities. Van Herk’s text is also infused with geographic language, seen in descriptions like the following:

[S]tare out the window through the Battle River valley and the impossibly fairy-tale dense trees south of Camrose and across the bridge before racketting through the junction and sliding up to Edburg from the northwest.

No town without a train/no train without a town...

The village itself strung along that gravel intersection: the school/houses/Erickson's store/ a blank-faced building? shed?/ the hotel/another dusty storefront with a tabby sleeping in its window/the Co-op store/across the street Nock Radomsky's hardware and the garage/around the corner the coffee shop and the fire hall and the village office and the post office/more houses/more houses. (19)

Van Herk's geographic contemplations are contained within a fiction, within a story.

The narrative sections in *Far From Ellesmere* allow for a fusing of geographic and creatively produced knowledge to emerge. In this way, the text is a clear illustration of the objectives sought in my own project. The text is a reflection on region and social interaction with land and an expression of the self being injected into place and space. The text is also an insistence on the importance of injecting body and person into geography, and descriptions of merging the creative and the geographic, combined with an infusion of self, are found throughout:

Edburg that place where awareness made itself known, not so much memory as consciousness that you took breath and had existence. This disappearing location of appearances: sites of seeing. Escapation: occupation: sites of initiation and marking (the soul's tattoo). (29)

Van Herk is describing models of settlement and the patterns of demise faced by rural agricultural communities. She is also incorporating her experience and memory onto that landscape and by doing so may be understood to be practicing creative literary mapping.

Before Me: The Personal Writings of Two Geographers

Cole Harris (1997) wrote in the introduction to *The Resettlement of British Columbia: Essays on Colonialism and Geographic Change* that "[d]isciplinary boundaries are disappearing, and probably should; I am not even sure there needs to be a distinction between academic and non-academic writing" (xiii). This small but profound statement in part introduces a scholarly inquiry into the historic geography of British Columbia, an inquiry, as Harris states, partly predicated on the author's personal interaction with the province's landscapes (xvii–xxi). His unselfconscious recounting of his child-

hood on a ranch in New Denver BC suggests that Harris not only believes geographic knowledge arises from personal interaction with place, but also that personal narrative is a useful method of conveying geographic information.

By way of directly introducing my own narrative, I believe it worthwhile to explore (briefly) one other writer who has already entered a space wherein place and geography are understood through creative fiction and personal writing.

Wanda Hurren (1998), a geographer with the University of British Columbia, wrote in an article entitled "Living With/in the Lines: poetic possibilities for world writing" that

Poetics can be considered as *an act of writing* and composing (poema, poieein: to make, compose, create), and as *a way of writing* and composing (poetic language). Geography as a poetics of the world—a writing of the world—and possibilities for embodied world writing are notions [that] inform... geo-graphying. (301)

Hurren's liberatory reading of geography (that it is the poetics of the world) establishes for her the space in which to create personal narratives linked to maps. She imagines and writes the details of life occurring "between" the lines of a map, stating that "my map-poems contest the widely accepted bird's eye view of maps and they attempt to bring the corporeal into map reading/writing" (301). Hurren's end product is a merger of map and narrative and culminates in poetry superimposed on maps. Hurren states that "[a]s we read the lines that have already been written on maps, it is possible to live poetically with[in] those lines—to rewrite the line as we read—to impose/compose lines according to our own lived, bodily experiences" (301). This contention of the widely accepted reading/writing of maps suggests geographic knowledge more generally will profit from the establishment of creative works as significant works of geography. My choice to include maps (albeit altered from their original state) in my creative narrative was made in order to highlight not only a fusion between two often disparate disciplines (geography and creative writing), but also to offer a re-reading/writing of traditional methods of representing the communities of northwestern British Columbia. The personal narrative contained in this paper is a re-reading of the mapped lines that have depicted the communities in my northwestern British Columbian life. It is, with acknowledgement to Porteous (1990), a type of "childscape" inclusive of "smellscapes" and "soundscapes" and is thus not only geographic

knowledge, but, (as Hurren advocates for) a process of imposing upon the lines of a map my own lived, bodily experience.

Producing Creative Geographic Knowledge/Personal Narrative: Juskatla 1980–1983

Learning to smoke entailed stealing Sportsmen unfiltered cigarettes from Leaha's dad on Friday nights.

After he'd passed out following a week of choker setting, of course. We could take them directly from his breast pocket; once, pressing the snap closed so hard on his cowboy style shirt the pressure seemed to dent his ribs inward, him not moving an inch, deep breathing unaltered. Friday nights meant men throughout trailer and bunkhouse rooms in Juskatla reaching the same state as Leaha's dad, most of the guys staying drunk until Monday morning, many not yet sober as they pulled on their red strap jeans well before 5:00 a.m., lifting Husquavarna chainsaws onto their shoulders, one saw for each side. They would work a drunk off, booze slipping out of their pores while they made the day's first cuts, deep and perfectly slanted into the sides of Sitka spruce, always hoping like hell not to meet a widow maker, that freak tree which snapped out with all the pressure of hundreds of years, easily shattering a man, breaking life in a single mean moment.

Men like Leaha's dad were men with hands wrecked from bush work and faces that bore scars of being broken open in bar fights and busted down in logging accidents. These were men with skin of monsters, burned from chainsaw diesel spilling behind their collars as they packed saws while walking from crummies into the bush. Leaha's father epitomized the broken body of a Juskatla logging man. By the mid-eighties, he had been logging with Mac and Blow for over twenty years. To show for it he walked with a bent and painful drag, was missing most every one of his teeth and had a gold Cadillac with white leather seats and a double wide trailer balanced on the edge of a gravel road. That Cadillac was his pride and joy, gold flashing against gravel, white leather against scars and breakings.

Every good bender began with a bottle of Canadian Club in one hand, a bucket of turtle wax washing solution in the other. Right after work, even though supper was waiting and a fight always flared up red-hot between him and his wife when he chose the gold Cadillac over her, he would wash the week's grime from that vehicle, inch by inch with the care one might take to administer medication to a deathly ill child. And then the slow logger's

drunk would overtake him, carefully like all logger drunks do, and the man would get gentle and slow, a fleeing from work that ruined him, leaving him with nothing but his own slow escape.

In grade five we stole cigarettes from a man who drove his gold Cadillac fast over back roads, set chokers during the day, and drank himself to oblivion in the evenings. No one seemed to notice when Leaha and I climbed out the side door and slipped down to the mess house and bunk houses and machinist's yards where we crouched in the metal jaws of front end loaders and taught ourselves to inhale. Only seven kids lived in the logging camp of Juskatla, so even when I came to stay with Leaha, we were easy to overlook. And those easy to overlook have a freedom to view as they please, which is just what Leaha and I did.

Smells hard to describe exist in logging camps, smells neither sweet nor acrid, they occupy a place in memory painfully difficult to clearly position or, failing that, to eliminate. The smells shift throughout the day, starting early in the morning with propane as camp stoves are lit, bacon grease, then the piss and filth of loggers waking up and converging in shared bathroom stalls in bunkhouses. By mid-afternoon the scents have slid smoothly into the realm of fabric softener as load after load of Stanfield sweaters and GWG red-strap jeans are washed, into the realm of hot welded metal as in-camp mechanics solder trucks and loaders, and finally, into roasting meat as the camp prepares for its returning men. Then first up in the evening is a thick odour of diesel from returning crummy trucks, then a haze of cedar sawdust scent followed by an indescribable scent of men's sweat mingling with food. Late into the night, a scent cloud of burning wood hangs over the camp, and to this the silent smell of men at rest is added. This smell, the smell of loggers at rest, of hand-rolled cigarettes and damp newspapers, dirty sheets and pots of weak coffee, this greeted Leaha and me when after dinner we snuck through Atco trailer halls of thin brown paneled wood walls, dashing into non-occupied rooms as the floor squeaked warnings of loggers on the move. The scent of ancient Louis L'amour duster novels piled pile upon pile. *Hustler* magazines tossed into bathroom stalls, shards of Irish Spring soap used and forgotten, caught in the tiled corners of bunkhouse bathrooms.

We shared the air with loggers home from falling, from bucking and loading. We breathed in the spaces they forgot to look, watched them doing nothing at all, and this was everything to us.

Scents suggest silence, as if the camp operated in a vapour of smell isolated from any other senses. Nothing could be farther

from the truth. Sound erupted from between every piece of stored machinery, from beside every bunkhouse and mess hall, from the dark insides of every company-owned trailer in Juskatla. Leaha and I knew these sounds, we heard the camp breathing, living, and it was the sounds of being broken that drew us to Davie Junior's trailer on the Thursday night of a long weekend. The sounds, and that he was just one grade ahead of us and already a practiced smoker, drew us across a gravel road flowing with rain and mud. We knew wandering camp with him until the early morning hours would ensure excitement and possibility, and we knew this even as we heard the ripping sounds of air filled with fighting between adult and child. We simply waited outside and listened as his father flew at him and no wall could contain the wails, though no doors opened in camp, Davies's dad being a foreman and all. Years later the twelve-year-old face of Davie would creep into the edges of my memory, a face red and as pulped as a rotting nurse log, no tears though, no tears for a boy who would go on to be a logger.

From wails to the song of a strong break as loggers began an evening of pool, the sound of truck tires revved fast and resolved on gravel driveways, the echoes of men yelling at each other, of dogs barking from unspecified sites. These are logging camp melodies, heard against a sky reflecting clear cuts. Nothing escaped our ears, not the shifting bodies of men as they slept in beds too small, not the midnight wanderings of a man having the last cigarette of his day. To us it seemed the only silence of Juskatla was the silence that accompanied a lack of women. Fewer than twenty families lived in camp, so mostly it was a landscape of men and their sounds. Not a single woman lived in the bunkhouses, their voices unheard in any of the machine shops or mess houses—here it was the sound of loggers, and women didn't log.

Though Leaha's mother rarely left the house, stepping out only twice a month to head into "town", the tiny cluster of Port Clements with its elementary school, one store and no bank, she nonetheless had a formidable impact on Leaha and me. It was Leaha's mother, after all, and not Leaha's father, who caught us returning one night through the side door of the trailer. It was Leaha's mother who had patiently waited with metal spoon in hand until we crept home well past 1:00 a.m. and Leaha's mother who flew at Leaha in a deadly quiet anger so rendered and carefully concentrated that it left Leaha with seventy-seven bruises, blood blisters where the edge of the spoon came close to breaking the skin but proved not quite sharp enough.

Roaming a logging camp, knowing a company-owned town, a community suspended on the edge of being nothing, leaves blisters and boils just beneath the skin's surface. Though dullness saved Leaha's skin from scars, it certainly did not save the community of Juskatla from damage and eventual eradication. By 1986 lethargy had sunk deep into the veins of the logging industry on the Queen Charlotte Islands. Men talked of days gone by, days when the sounds of push sticks on logging booms sitting fat and ripened in the waters of Juskatla Inlet were the sounds of everyday. Days when the numbers etched deep into a scaler's stick were worn thin in no time at all, a scaler had that much work for him. Days when a logger could quit and find work within hours, days past when a logger could have a fight with a foreman and walk back hat in hand to that same job a day later because a need existed for loggers. Days past.

They talked about past days and watched the dismantlement of Juskatla, pot by pot, mattress by mattress, bunkhouse shaving mirror by bunkhouse shaving mirror.

Leaha and I had learned to inhale by then. I think social services had made their first calls to her house; some discussions were circling in the air about foster families. The last night of Juskatla was the last night I ever spent at Leaha's house. Her bruises had long ago healed and my parents were not aware of beatings with metal spoons and somehow this is all welded together in my mind with the night a logging town shut down.

Perhaps it is pain fused with pain, bruise with bruise. The sound of a metal spoon smashing against skin, the sound of an auctioneer. "I have ten, do I hear fifteen, fifteen, do I hear twenty?" This for great slabs of stainless steel counter, a cookhouse piece by stainless steel piece. This for grapple yarding cable, great rust coloured coils of it, thicker than my twelve year old wrist. For chainsaws sold by the dozen, for tools and engines and lanterns and every piece of something and nothing upon which logging camps run, upon which communities build themselves.

This for mattresses indented with the shapes of a sleeping logger's body.

Five days and four nights they auctioned off Juskatla, piece by piece, great spotlights catching the steam of onlooker's breath, inhale, exhale, a way of life sold off. And I remember clearly the look of Leaha's father, Sportsmen Unfiltered cigarette cradled gently between fingers, sitting legs apart, elbows on knees, on the hood of his gold Cadillac. A stunned look of resignation, the same look I had always imagined might flash across a faller's face the instant

he cut into a widow maker, those terrible trees who in such a long split second rip out to take a man down.

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