BETWEEN LONGING AND BELONGING:

ON THE BORDER OF

WOODHAVEN NATURE CONSERVANCY

by

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Abstract

This thesis is a reflection of a performance created in the autumn of 2010 that installed the conditions of an international border: uniformed guards, visa forms, signs and maps on the edge of Woodhaven Nature Conservancy, a 22-acre bird sanctuary in the Upper Mission of Kelowna, British Columbia. Woodhaven Customs & Border Patrol (WCBP) was a collaborative art project developed by me and my partner and fellow MFA candidate, Lara Haworth, as an interactive critique of the separation between wilderness and civilization and an interruption of the experience of recreation in nature.
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Image 1: Agent O. Akinci Patrols the Park
Photo by Lara Haworth
Introduction

A fence separates the park from a suburban neighborhood and marks a boundary to the park. In 1973 when the forest had been slated for residential development this was the boundary in contestation, the front line being negotiated, defended and attacked.

Jim and Joan Burbridge were the sole human residents of the park in 1973 and through their efforts eventually stopped the chainsaws and convinced the government to reserve the site as a nature conservancy. This history of the park along with the echoing border fence allowed us to imagine the nature park as nation state, albeit with non-human citizens. The Burbridges became Woodhaven's founding father and mother and their 1973 battle with the Okanagan Land Development, Ltd. The War of Independence that secured Woodhaven's borders. The humans who entered the park recreationally were the human non-immigrant visitors to Woodhaven. The Woodhaven Customs and Border Patrol became the self-appointed law-enforcement agency responsible for processing human visitors. WCBP invited volunteers to go on uniformed patrol. These enlisted agents carried logbooks to document incursions and excursions into and out of the park, from flora and fauna, human and otherwise. They were tasked with missions of cultural diplomacy, like learning local bird languages. They also patrolled the path traveled by the human visitors, providing a direct challenge to dominant visual representations of nature as a utopian space uninhabited by human beings. The agents processed visitors who signed and obtained visa forms upon entering the park.

The visa form asked their sex, purpose for visit, entry site, countries of birth, citizenship, and residence. It asked a series of yes or no questions about their association with the Okanagan Land Development, Ltd., their relationship to herbicide, and whether they planned to immigrate to the park. Visitors were also asked to divulge their first memory of wilderness and last memory of a border crossing on the form, linking memory and the border and memories of wilderness through the notion of a crossing.
Part One: Crossings

“Gardens are portrayed as serene spaces, but perhaps it is time for the guards to be incorporated into the iconography of gardens” (Solnit 2007, 90)

Lourier, January 2011.

We left Canada covered in snow. We drove south then east then south again. The mountains sprouted forests and the forests gave way to plains all framed in black plastic, blue metal and glass. The road opened endlessly like an asphalt brush stroke. We set out toward my birthplace and stopped only for sleep, food, gas, and to convince an old man we belonged on the other side of the invisible line.

Dwarfed by the snow and wide open, the border sat due Southeast and Northeast of the two homes we pulled taut like a clothesline. The border guard had shut himself in a tiny glass booth. A US post office sat squat down the road where my headlights pointed. The familiar font stared out of the brick, an emerging memory being recovered, coming in waves into focus.
A family of wild turkeys pecked at the highway ahead. *Illegals*, I thought.

My Ford Explorer broke the silence, clicking and pinging out heat against the snow in concert with the guard’s boots crushing the highway grit. He sized us up with a nonchalant poke-around through our boxes of displaced belongings then shut the hatch with a crash. He slid closed the glass door of his booth and sat pecking at a computer. I powered up my window so that two panes of glass now separated us from each other, his and mine, with the icy air between. Wild turkeys squatted and sniffed around the place in the road where one country ended and the other began, tracing and retracing a path in the grit between the two nations.

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The words and lines that together make up the schemata of nationality, the demarcation of territory are enforced through a structured confrontation of bodies, a performance into which individual subjectivities are poured to create infinite variations upon a predefined structure. WCBP emphasizes this notion of citizenship as a performance, drawing from Jane Bennett’s articulation of the embodied nature of political action in her extraordinary book *Vibrant Matter: The Political Ecology of Things*. Bennett writes that “the bodily disciplines through which ethical sensibilities and social relations are formed and reformed are themselves political and constitute a whole (underexplored) field of “micropolitics” without which any principle or policy risks being just a bunch of words. There will be no greening of the economy, no redistribution of wealth, no enforcement or extension of rights without human dispositions, moods, and cultural ensembles hospitable to these effects” (Bennett 2009, x). The enforcement of policies surrounding citizenship is a "bodily discipline" and the border, a participatory performance. As performance itself, this embodied “field of micropolitics” is ripe for critique through performance art. This is the strategy of WCBP, which aligns itself with art experiments that also highlight the performativity of politics.

WCBP is indebted to Santiago Sierra's entry for the Spanish Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2003 titled *Wall Enclosing a Space*, which shares a similar preoccupation with the embodied enforcement of national borders. The installation placed a border guard outside of the Spanish Pavilion entrance and only allowed patrons in possession of a Spanish passport to enter the building and exhibition space. To ‘honor the history’ (Margolles, 2004), Sierra installed the detritus of previous years’ installations in the Spanish Pavilion inside. Speaking the following winter with fellow Spanish artist and activist Teresa
Margolles, Sierra discussed how the impetus to create the piece was embedded in the formal organization of the Biennale. “In the context of the Biennale we are all playing at national pride, and I wanted to reveal that as the principal system of every pavilion…In other situations I can play a bit with themes, but the Biennale piece was already marked: it had to talk about the concept of the nation, of the representation of Spain, about the significance of those pavilions—because you can’t forget that the countries that participate in the Biennale are the most powerful ones in the world. I mean, there’s no pavilion for Ethiopia. So the theme was already a given. People have received it very well, although the Spanish press took it as a provocation, when it was simply a reflection” (Margolles 2004). According to Sierra, an error occurred in the piece when the ambassador of the Biennale, who was not a Spanish passport-holder, was admitted into the Pavilion without papers against Sierra’s explicit instruction. “[The ambassador] had informed the guards that their salaries depended on [him], so contrary to my will and that of the patrons, he got in. In the art world you always work for the powers that be: banks, governments and so on. Who else can pay for an exposition in a museum? You have to be conscious that we all work for a machine” (ibid). This exemplifies Bennett’s notion of the body’s effect to create new political realities. The guards Sierra hired cowed to a new authority when confronted with the ambassador and a new exception to the existing contract was created.

The exceptions made for the powerful were not extended to artist Christian Philipp Müller, during his 1993 performance Green Border, in which “dressed as a hiker” he illegally crossed the international borders of Austria in the forest, “exploring their function as barriers to the former Eastern-bloc countries of the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, and Slovenia as well as to the Western states of Italy, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, and Germany. He crossed national boundaries in the wooded regions of borderlands. While crossing to the Czech Republic, he and his assistant were arrested and prohibited from reentering the country for three years. At each border crossing, Müller sent postcards to friends and art dealers inscribed with a sentence inspired by On Kawara, a New York-based, Japanese conceptual artist whose work was featured at the Venice Biennale in 1976: ‘I crossed the border between X and Y and I AM STILL ALIVE’” (Kaiser 2007: 23). Müller’s arrest for crossing the invisible line in the forest exemplifies Bennett’s notion of the “bodily discipline” of political structure. Like the tree that falls in the forest, Müller’s crossing made no noise until a guard was around to hear it. Like Sierra and Müller WCBP draws attention to the
performativity of national borders, but it also goes further. Like Müller, we are dealing with a type of green border, between a nature park and a subdivision, where green meets grey, undergrowth meets lawn, coyote meets dog.

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Building on the work of Sierra and Müller, WCBP draws attention to the performativity of national borders by focusing on a type of green border. However, WCBP extends Sierra and Müller's critical engagement with nationhood and borders surrounding nation to consider the material borders. We are not simply critiquing nationhood and borders surrounding nation, but the material borders between nature and culture, the definitions of each, the elusions. Donna Haraway famously reworks these borders: “From the beginning and to the present, my interest has been in what gets to count as nature and who gets to inhabit natural categories. And furthermore, what's at stake in maintaining the boundaries between what gets called nature and what gets called culture in our society. And how do the values flip? How does this very important dualism in our cultural history and politics work between nature and society or nature and culture?” (Haraway 1998: 50).

WCBP investigates similar issues through a live interaction with its audience in a performance of a national border on a “natural” border. The visa form we created and which was to be filled out by every visitor to the park was a reinterpretation of the landing card required by United States Customs and Border Protection (USCBP), when entering the United States by airplane. The questions were rephrased only slightly to apply to the park, encouraging an overlap of memories of crossings, that of leaving the suburb for the forest and leaving one country to enter the next.

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The map of Woodhaven Nature Conservancy drawn up and distributed by the Regional District of Central Okanagan takes an aerial view. The border of the park is outlined by a neon green rectangle surrounding an area thick with trees. The tree cover is patchier outside the rectangle, and the green here is not the textured green of the cedar or cottonwood canopy. Small clusters of trees mix with a flat and pale green—a series of lawns attached to individual houses that are also shown from the sky. This thinner, lighter green gives way to the grey of concrete roads, teardrop cul-de-sacs and lighter grey driveways. Each lot is also outlined in red rectangles to demarcate individual property. Red and green rooftops bleached brick or olive and decorated with cross hatch of sloped design or maybe a single crease. On the ridge of the dry interior three of the hilltop homes have blue swimming pools in their backyards. Woodhaven gatekeeper and resident Lori Mairs once told us she came across a patch of wet dirt on the dry interior trail with chlorine fumes hanging in the air and grew livid upon realizing someone on the hill had drained their pool into the park.
We used this map as a template for many of our signs, whiting out the interior of the park and leaving only the human habitat outside the neon green rectangle exposed. Deleting the contents of the park was a way to reframe the audience’s perception of the park away from experiencing it as an ordinary thing, to shift their experience of Woodhaven into something extraordinary, something other than a nature walk, to shift their memory of the place to something else.

Image 4: “Prohibited Items”  
Image by Nicole Cormaci

Individual memories are also made associatively. One experience of nature can influence the next and so forth. While a so-called collective memory of nature drawn from writing, governmental policies, i.e. national park, and a kind of ambiguous but omniscient human culture of and about nature also influences the unique experience of nature. So while walking through Woodhaven one is unlikely to see the details in the landscape that give away the contested nature of the borders of the so-called "natural space". Jane Bennett describes how a recent movement in environmental thought sees the border between nature and culture as “increasingly difficult to police. On the one hand, technology, a human creation, is more and more out of human control; on the other hand, nature is becoming more and more humanized. Artifice
betrays the intentions of its designers, and the given buckles under the weight of the made."

In the construct of WCBP, Bennett’s notion of the made is emphasized in order to encourage this buckling of the given “natural as pristine” as an uncritically museological and utopian, bounded space. Emphasis was given to the border, naturally, to critique the notion of bounded space: first to demonstrate the porousness of the actual border though documentation of the incursions and excursions therein, the lawn that became forest floor, the coyotes that pester the domestic dogs, the ornamental garden plants whose seeds "invade" and repopulate in the inner sanctum of the park. In this critique of the bounded nature of nature, to borrow again from Bennett, we encouraged the given to buckle under the weight of the made by attending to the evidence of the made already in the park, for example, emphasizing the dispute over land-use which we reimagined in our history of the park as well as our sign mapping the Battle Sites of the War of 1973.

Image 5: “Sights Marking the Battle of the War of 1973”. Image by Nicole Cormaci

In our reimagining of the park we wanted to cast Woodhaven as a nation state so this became our formative battle, between Okanagan Land Development Co., whose plans for development of Woodhaven
were renegotiated through the activism of Jim and Joan Burbridge, naturalists and residents of the park. The evidence is still there in this less-than-pristine land. Here are these details in the landscape - the fallen cedar, the survey marker, the beginning of a sewer line - that consist of the made, or the beginnings of the made, the trappings of the embryonic humanization of nature, how it starts, and how it was stopped, and how all of this argument is part of the age-old argument, which Salman Rushdie spoke about in his lecture about borders when he said, "give me a line drawn across the world and I'll give you an argument." (Rushdie)

The argument in this case was over land-use and interpretation, human habitat, or owl habitat, and whether both can be accomplished through a singular vision, which in Woodhaven's case proved impossible.

The argument can also be seen as a fight over memory, the memory of wilderness that we were getting at in our visas, the memory, so attached, like sinews to the creatures, Jane Bennett might say "critters" and in that way draw a fuzzier line between animate and inanimate inhabitants of the space. Changing the meaning of space, carving a suburb out of a forest profoundly alters all future memory of the place. It changes, to borrow Lucy Lippard’s assessment of space as endowed with both place and memory, (Lippard 1998, 9) the place into space again, to be refilled with new memories and create a new place. It might be useful to call it re-placing, as memories recalled through material connection to space are lost, replaced, and this replacement signals a transformation of both space and memory. This process of replacement is one that is promoted and promised in advertisements all over the Okanagan in signs for newly developed and largely unoccupied condos or subdivisions. The mostly white faces that appear in these ads leach out from the sides of mountains as potential memories, yet to be created, as a crowing of the return of place to space, as frontier.

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We picked up a t-shirt a couple days down the road from Lourier at Wall Drug in South Dakota. Wall Drug is the I-90 institution of high-kitsch consumerism advertised relentlessly for hundreds of miles in either direction, so that if you do not stop you will be haunted by not knowing what you missed. My dad had told me once before about the t-shirt we bought. It pictured an alternative Mount Rushmore with four Native leaders replacing the American presidents: Chief Joseph, Sitting Bull, Geronimo, and Red Cloud and read, “The Original Founding Fathers.” The t-shirt co-opts a white institutional structure, that of
“founding fathers” and reclaims it for these chiefs. It chides the presidents carved into the mountain for their claim to paternity and foundation.

We claimed Joan and John Burbridge as the founding mother and father of Woodhaven. These naturalist birders lived in the Raymer family house where Lori Mairs currently resides. We selected Lori as “Head of State” and affixed the two photographs to a beam suspended from the sidewalls at the rear of the booth. At least once a day someone would bash their head on one of the photos of the Burbridges or Mairs and cause one or both to cascade to the increasingly muddy ground.

These photos echoed the presence at the international borders of framed portraits of the leaders of the country. At the US border, Lara and I had to go in the building always to deal with her visa-waiver. George W. Bush was hanging on the wall in the beginning. Then Obama replaced him.

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Rossland, BC, July 2011.

On the long road home from Kelowna for the second time in six months I stayed a night in Rossland and drove to the border the next morning. The border guard was young, with clipped blonde hair and a sharp military cockiness.

Where are you headed?
Sturgis, South Dakota.
What are you doing there?
Staying with my dad at the bike rally.
You know that’s 16 hours away?
I probably won’t make it tonight. Might try to stop in Billings. I have an aunt who lives there.
What were you doing in Canada?
I explained that I had been going to school and that I was finishing up and moving stuff back to the States. I omitted the fact that I had been working. It was legal work, but could only complicate things. These omissions at the border are frequent, split-second and instinctual. The questions, in another context, are friendly ones.
What are you bringing back?

Mostly stuff from the States to begin with, clothes, books, CDs. I have a kitchen table and a desk from Canada.

I knew the routine. As far as alcohol, I said, I have a six-pack of Rickard’s and a bottle of wine. As far as fruit, I lifted the green cardboard basket. Peaches and plums from the Okanagan.

Is that your only fruit?

Yes. It was a lie. I had the last of the late Okanagan cherries rotting in a cooler in the back. It was another instant omission made in attempt to be simpler than I am, to be processed more quickly, and to move more quickly through.

Any houseplants?

No. He asked about the van, which was my dad’s, a white panel van with the words Cormaci Weatherization Services printed in green across the doors. I told him I was studying theatre.

A gunmetal glint lit up his eyes and a wry, slow smile bloomed on his face.

Sing something.

No....

I won’t let you in.

Oh, please?

We were both smiling in the end as he waved me through, without the song. Driving away from Canada I experienced an enormous surge of adrenaline. I was free, back in my country where my status was uncomplicated by visas and permits, and on the road home. I resisted with some difficulty the impulse to floor the gas pedal as blood rushed to my brain. I felt exhilarated, intoxicated by release. I wanted nothing less than to re-cross the border back into Canada. This was an odd turn. I had lingered in BC weeks past my estimated departure date. I had soaked every extra hour I could from this country. I spent hours in Café West, a coffee shop and bookstore in Rossland that very morning, where I drank coffee after coffee in the window and bought a hundred CAD worth of Canadian literature.

A quick trip to the Salvation Army in Trail, BC that afternoon became a rummage so long my parking meter expired. I had been loathing this re-entry to America. I complained at length to Canadian friends. My Canadian-American friend looked at me with a deep sympathy that gave away her relief that
she did not have to go back to our birthplace. It is better here was the consensus that seemed to weigh down my departure and drag it deeper and deeper into the calendar, and helped me to stall an impressive length of time.

Alain de Botton describes clearing the security checkpoint at Heathrow as “a feeling akin to that one may experience on leaving church after confession or synagogue on the Day of Atonement, momentarily absolved and relieved of some of the burden of one’s sins” (de Botton, 2009, 56). I felt such intensely physical relief to have been accepted once again into America that my yearning to remain in Canada disappeared wholeheartedly. What replaced the longing was a stanch and resonating resistance to the idea of turning around, to returning.

In that rush of energy a song did enter me along with the will to sing it out loud, to no one but the afternoon sunlight pouring in through the windshield, the mountains beatific on the horizon and the blue sky. “Oh what a beautiful morning, Oh what a beautiful day. I’ve got a beautiful feeling, everything’s going my way!”

It was a song I have known since age 5 or 6. Curly in Oklahoma! by Rogers & Hammerstein sings it while riding horseback through the cornfield on his way to visit Laurey. Their love story is set amidst the territory becoming officially incorporated into the antebellum Union as the state of Oklahoma. The giddy patriotism this belonging invokes in the white occupants is unsullied by reference to the territory’s original occupants, their forced relocation and genocide as useful as the massacre of the buffalo to the project of America.

“You see, you got your humans and then you got your animals and plants. We construct a social world; they are sunk in a natural one. We exist in the realm of freedom; they in the realm of necessity. Humans are intrinsically valuable subjects; nature is a set of resources, raw material for culture” (Bennett and Chaloupka 1993: viii). The association of “the other” and the animal has proven an effective tactic in genocidal missions. Although the construction of a line separating the animal and human realms may be “convenient and even efficient, it also has proven to be unstable. The human body, for example, poses a problem for this set of definitions. Like a dead animal on the dinner table, the body is a beastly reminder. And so the body's affinity to meat must be disguised, its status as flesh concealed” (ibid). The other, then, is “a beastly reminder”, an unendurable difference, and the nature park is a similar project, an exercise in
concealment and containment. It is as much a ghetto as a haven. Conservationists argue that the creation of enclosures is a necessary project. However, it arrives from a similar impulse to contain nature, remove it and therefore remove its contents, what WCBP considers its citizens, from political participation. Politics is not a human-only endeavor. And citizenship, belonging, doesn't stop with humans. Nature does not simply exist to provide the raw materials for human culture.

The evidence of the border between human and animal is embedded in our language, just as the fluidity between these two categories is often evidenced in indigenous languages. In the Syilx language, for example, stories populated by animals and plants are encoded with political ontology. The four chiefs, pillars of the Okanagan community (literally - the four wooden pillars in the En’owkin Centre are named for them) come from each corner of the plant and animal world: the land, the soil, the water, the sky. These chiefs: Bear, Salmon, Saskatoon Berry and Bitterroot are the elders of the people, predating human occupation, foreshadowing the arrival of people, and accommodating their existence through self-sacrifice. The word Okanagan translates to the people, just as the word “Omaha” means the people of the bluffs, or bluff dwellers. Now the Okanagan refers to the valley itself and not just its human inhabitants. The distinction in the connotations of each expression of this word presents two philosophies of stewardship encoded once again into the language we use to describe our environment. The naming of a thing, of a place, like the naming of one’s child or pet, is a dangerous act of false paternity. The assumption of an ownership over land misjudges the agency and subjectivity of all that is not human in our world. The occupation of land and the recognition of this occupancy and its consequences comes closer to the realization that we are made of and by the land, our elder, and therefore, not for us to name.

At the border of Woodhaven, human animals were treated with a suspicion of their intentional and historical relationship to the park, while non-human animals, except domestic ones, and plants, except non-native, human cultivated ones, were elevated to citizenship status and allowed free-passage. This is of course true at the international borders as well. I have entertained the example of the wild turkeys pecking and loitering at the border in winter. Their status is above even the Nexus pass holder or the diplomat. Their freedom to travel is unquestioned. How much more than a turkey’s intention can a guard gather about mine? There is language in common, often but not always. Even in an era marked by the rapid
globalization of English, every border crosser and border guard do not share a common language that they are willing or able to use.

There is a neighboring in transitioning. I am thinking of the cedar grove, with its cool dark that lazies into cottonwood before arriving on that ridge of the dry interior. I am also thinking of our own experience of neighboring at WCBP, talking through the fence with dog-walkers, exchanging observations of our shared environment with neighbors, producing an in between place out of the stuff we recognize as attributes of human-drawn borders, signs, maps, uniforms. What we experienced in the parking lot was more in line with the ecological conditions of a green border, something like the “entanglements” Karen Barad references when she writes that “phenomena are entanglements of spacetimematter, not in the colloquial sense of a connection or intertwining of individual entities, but rather in the technical sense of ‘quantum entanglements,’ which are the (ontological) inseparability of agentially intra-acting ‘components’ (Barad 2011: 125). Barad's “notion of intra-action (in contrast to the usual “interaction,” which presumes the prior existence of independent entities/relata)” (ibid) reopens the foundational case for bordering space. If phenomena – human, animal, material, are ontologically inseparable components of cohesive fabric of spacetimematter, from lovers’ bodies to a forest canopy to an atom the enforced separation of entangled bodies can provoke violent consequences.

Lara and I are separated once because of our different nationalities, and again by homophobic US federal immigration policy. Romand Coles claims to “seek a democratic ethos that cultivates tension-dwelling as a most promising mode for exercising judgment and engaging in democratic action.” (Coles 2005: xiii). Tension dwelling is an accurate description of border work. Tension is rife, as the stories of our visitors can attest, at the site between nations, ecosystems, cultures, etc., and in the work performed at this site. Coles’s rooting of tension-dwelling as the promise of democracy suggests that the locus of radical democracy might also be found at the border, at this place where tension dwells. Tension, the state of both traveler and guard and a physical relation of the two worlds kept separate by the border, dams the fluid, unchecked transition. I find especially reassuring his evocation of the productive tension of geographical separation. “In the stretching that occurs when we are discrepantly drawn by different considerations, concerns, insights, and bodily locations our receptive capacities can acquire a depth, multidimensionality, and supple mobility” (ibid). Lara and I perhaps “ought to relish certain tensions - difficult though they are -
as a source of democratic ethical and political generatively.” Still, the optimism of locating the productivity of tension works better here than on the ground, alone, without my partner.

Lori Mairs is a long-term artist-in-residence living alone in the small, wooden house that sits just inside the entrance to the park. She is a bone jeweler and sculptor as well as Woodhaven’s gatekeeper, opening and closing the park gates in exchange for rent in one of the most coveted properties in all of Kelowna. While instrumental to the Woodhaven eco-art series, she was equally wary. She played gatekeeper to our project as well, presenting us with another kind of productive tension as we negotiated the potential of her domestic life co-existing alongside our work. We eventually agreed to the terms of our project, and with every visit Lori gradually led us in deeper into the entanglement of her life and the park.

On a trip to Woodhaven in the height of summer Lori led us off the path deep into the cedars. It grew darker fast and denser until it smelled thick with red and damp. We crashed through the underbrush with caution, remembering lessons we had learned through earlier mistakes and near misses. Habitat is everywhere once you stray off the path. Lara and I learned this lesson the hard way during a performance for the Spring Woodhaven Art Opening when our steps spelled early death for the spring moss. Lori had led us off the path another time during mushroom season but cautioned us to watch our feet all around which crops of mushrooms braced for footfall. These lessons trained obedience so that during this trip to the cedars I followed Lori’s footfall exactly. Deep in the cedars Lori’s house disappeared. The paths disappeared. The temperature dropped and cool damp replaced the hot, desert air. We stopped and sat on a fallen log where Lori said she came to think sometimes. We let the forest absorb our sounds then sat in silence and listened to the birdsong and distant cracks of squirrels across branches. With a sharp whisper Lori pointed. “Look at that!” My eyes shot around for the doe we had seen earlier with her fawns, a bear, or an owl—we had spotted Great Horned owls here before. Beyond her stare I finally made out a single dancing leaf shining silver then green then silver again. It danced alone and as I grew convinced of its magic it gave up its trick. I made out the vague, silvery outline of a nearly invisible thread. The leaf was a spider’s marionette dangling from a web’s weft.

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We began the first day as WCBP and each day after before dawn with the boiling of two pots and a kettle full of water on the stove. Denise Kenney, Lara’s thesis supervisor and a professor of performance
in the Creative Studies department at UBCO, had lent us an impressive array of carafes and thermoses from her cache of camping gear and we filled them up with as much hot water for tea and hot coffee as time and space permitted.

On our first day on the job, Lori had asked us to pick up some Creamo on the way into the park. We stopped at Macs and faced the faces for the first time in uniform. Flooded with nerves and bracing for the stares, we stepped out of the car and walked into the florescent-lit convenient store. I was unprepared for the ease with which we were received by the other customers and the clerk. Instead of stares, our uniforms provided us with a cloak of invisibility, a badge of belonging, in this working class shop at this working class hour of the day. It was still before dawn. Men in flannel clutching thermoses trudged down Richter. We drove up to Woodhaven, and idled the truck outside the park. With the light from our headlights glinting off chain-link metal, we opened the gates for the first time.

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16
Part Two: Longing and Belonging

The longing for belonging is a condition of the border. It emerges while waiting in line to be processed, waiting for the summon of the green light or the open lane. It exists in the interim between the last sign for the border and the up or down vote, in the question time and right before. As Elspeth Probyn writes, “The longing in belonging on the outside forces us to think about the role of desire in a fully social sense” (Probyn 1996: 13). On the border, I cannot satisfy the longing independently. Fanon writes that “as soon as I desire I am asking to be considered” (Fanon in Bhabba: 5). Longing’s transformation into belonging is contingent, an example of Bennett’s bodily discipline, enforced through the embodied practice of border crossing, which we internalize and which is experienced as "natural".

It may be worthwhile to notice the juxtaposition of the presence of borders on the frontiers of spaces or conditions considered free. There is a prevailing idea that freedom can be produced by travel, or by simply being in so-called natural spaces. These fantasies of freedom stand in stark contrast to the contingency of detainment in the project of borders. The border butts up against the promise of freedom, whether this freedom is expressed through travel or through a kind of meditation in nature. The idea that we must first prove ourselves worthy of these experiences of freedom, and prove somehow, our innocence in any future plot to destroy or endanger these freedoms, separates us temporarily from the experience of freedom and in doing so somehow also conditions us, to reconsider our desire to belong. That these detainments take place on the freeways of North America, our iconic, chosen, almost self-defining means of travel, is also ironic. A freeway, or free way, is exactly what we long for in the line to cross the border. The border jeopardizes the freeway.

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Our first citizens were city workers, two young men in high-visibility vests who arrived early in a pick up truck to use the toilet. They gaped at us through the window and asked if they needed to stop. The illusory spectacle of our infrastructure had worked. Not a single person would walk past us without engaging us in some kind of conversation.

We handed them two visa forms, and told them they could bring them back the next time they came through the gates. After lunch they drove in with completed applications and broad smiles. After this first
day they became our regulars, flashing their visas stoically from the window of their city truck. We would nod and wave them onward.

These two were not our only city workers. A woman arrived not long after the two in the pickup left for the first time. She needed the bathroom as well.

When you are out all day, you need to know where you can find a good bathroom, she said.

She indicated the blue plastic cube.

This one is the best, she said.

Several of our most devoted citizens never placed a foot into the park itself. For them the parking lot was the destination, a quiet place to park and eat a sandwich with a private and clean outdoor toilet.

Lori made us a lunch later in the morning of spelt with onion and carrots. Nancy Holmes, a poet and UBCO professor came around the house with a big pot of vegan carrot soup from her garden. We had become her neighbors through the project, which she had established and championed. Her proposal to contribute eco-art to this park was the impulse for our project and many others. Later in the afternoon, Lori stopped by the booth and struck up a conversation with Milan through the fence. The chain link fence from his property runs parallel to the Woodhaven fence. Raymer Road separates the two fences. His husky spent every day outside. She was intensely curious about our project.

Milan and Lori were talking coyotes. A pack had come out of the park and attacked Milan’s dog a while back.

Thing sounded like it was on my front steps, he said.

Yeah. Lori sighed. They’ll get a piece of her if they want her. The females will call her out.

My husky? They grabbed her by the ass. Another one tore into her snout.

Lori nodded. They mimicked her bark, she said. They tackle ‘em from both ends, then the dog doesn’t have a chance.

Lori is no stranger to the conflict that can arise when humans meet up with Woodhaven’s citizen species. After weeks of taunting owls her beloved cat, Kitty, disappeared from the back porch. Her remains were never found.

A mother stopped at the border with her son and daughter.

So what is this for?
We explained that we were part of an art project and gave the kids both hummingbird stamps on their hands. Her older son asked us if we had the trading cards, part of an earlier art project that came from one of Nancy Holmes’s creative writing classes.

We don’t have any trading cards. He looked at me like we should have.

You look very official, the mom said. You don’t look very artistic.

She wore huge, tortoise shell sunglasses, a bright aquamarine hoodie, capri leggings and sneakers. Her blonde hair was bunched back in a loose bun. As I continued, she cut me off mid-sentence, scolding her wandering children. Then she cut me off again.

Yeah, we were at the last one.

The Summer Art opening at Woodhaven was “the last one” and also happened to be the one with the trading cards. Each card had a picture of a species of plant or animal on them, along with some facts about it.

Her boy asked again about the cards on the way out. Dude, she said, you gotta let it go.

Another walker came up to the booth. Looking at the stop sign she asked, do we have to stop?

In a similar way, the formal authority of the regional district threatened our border at Woodhaven. Early on in the week Lara and I planned to spend time in the park when we had two guards on duty. We set off into the park with a walkie-talkie after suiting up Kate and Tom, our first volunteers. We arrived back at the booth after 20 minutes where Kate and Tom told us that the Regional District trash collector visited the booth while we were away. He asked them whose authority they had. They mentioned us then Lori and Nancy. Lori is just the caretaker, he said. She has no authority.

He took a photo of our volunteers sitting behind the booth in uniform.

Perhaps, like Sierra’s guards, the trash collector’s paycheck determined his loyalty. Would he have stopped the other artists whose projects sat unmanned in the park? Was it our assumption of the badges of authority: the uniforms and signs, our structure and occupancy of the space that caused him to report us? We were not doing anything against the posted rules. Yet, he was alarmed enough to record evidence of our presence in the park. Unlike Christian Phillip Müller, we were not blending in as visitors but posing as agents.
I left the border and drove to the Pioneer Café to pick up spud-nuts for the Saturday morning agents. It had been raining hard all morning and I left Lara and Lee back at the booth drinking coffee. Lara and I were regulars at the Pioneer Café at this time and the waitress had never seen me in uniform before. Standing in the line I watched her rush around. She stopped nearby to say hello and asked what all is this for, pointing to my uniform.

The Woodhaven Customs and Border Patrol, I say, without a trace of irony.

Oh! Okay! I thought it must be something... You look so official.

City workers flashed their pass (W-W) upon reentry, out of their truck window. Tom returned from patrol outpost. Border is quiet, he said. His only radio transmission while on patrol had been to report: the squirrels are yelling at me.

My thesis supervisor and a professor of performance at UBCO, Virginie Magnat, arrived to the border. I hate borders, she said, while completing the form with a practiced sense of inconvenience that is common to many of the visitors we processed throughout the project. People are very good at filling in these types of forms and check the boxes with flourish. It is impossible that they read the questions thoroughly, trained that “no” is always the correct answer to the tick the box questions. French by birth, with an American partner and a Canadian position teaching at the University of British Columbia, Virginie is perhaps an above average customs declaration form filler. Natalia Hautala, an undergraduate student in the performance department, is on duty and standing a little too close to Virginie, practicing what Natalia has dubbed, “light intimidation.” At 6’2” to Virginie’s 5’5” her quiet crowding of Virginie’s personal space crosses another border. We guard a field around our bodies instinctively with movements and counter-movements. This line is constantly negotiated, set between individuals in a silent, physical contract, a dance.

*
Lakota Reservation, South Dakota

Driving through the Badlands I remember the asphalt of the highway turn from smooth red to cracked grey. This line marked the border between the Badlands National Park and the Lakota Reservation, the transition of materials, two contracts, two stories, two roads meeting.

When I shimmied down from the van I found myself in front of a large wooden sign, white with red letters. *The Massacre of Wounded Knee.* The script that followed had the air of an old mid-century history textbook, stilted, cold, lifeless, practical. Behind the sign across the road from the sunset was a booth where two men chatted to a couple teenagers who hopped into a red pickup and peeled away, trailing dust in the twilight as I approached.

You know much about what happened here, one man asked.

No. I was up at Battle of Little Bighorn a couple days ago.

Yeah, it’s really commercial up there.

Yeah. National Parks Service runs it right?

Yeah. They came here, too. But we figured that the US government had done enough here. They put in that sign there, but when they put it in it said Battle of Wounded Knee. We petitioned them to change it but when they wouldn’t we did it ourselves.

You changed it?

Yes, as a community, we changed it to Massacre at Wounded Knee.

His t-shirt read *Friends Let Friends Buy Dinner.* It was a stark contrast from the NPS ranger hat and badge of little Owl at Bighorn.

He wouldn’t look me in the eye. His teeth were in bad shape.

I fought under the US flag, he said. Served three tours over there. Saw horrible things. You can’t say anything. My commanding officers raping women, abusing people. This is just my personal opinion, but I think Bin Laden was just trying to protect his people, his way of life.

The full moon rose over their booth. A hand painted sign was tacked to the front of the table advertising visitor information. Beaded bracelets and key chains his mother made were for sale. The booth was roofed in thatched pine. They had erected it themselves in the traditional way.
See the moon?

It was bright and set high in the east against the setting sun.

We tell a joke here. You know how they put a man on the moon, put a flag in it and claimed it for America?

Yeah?

Well you know why they went to the moon?

No. Why?

They thought we had land up there, too.

*

Barad writes that “memory—the pattern of sedimented enfoldings of iterative intraactivity—is written into the fabric of the world. The world ‘holds’ the memory of all traces; or rather, the world is its memory (enfolded materialization).” (Barad 2011: 146). At Wounded Knee the historical memory of the US military attacking native people is folded in the landscape. The man I met at Wounded Knee explained that most of the visitors to his booth were either Europeans or motorcyclists. The rest of the Americans presumably stay south on I-90 where speed and monoculture combine into the Great American Anywhere and therefore never encounter this fold and enfold it from the land into personal memory.

*
Gilles Deleuze did not mince words about the line: "it's no more in thought than in things, but it's everywhere thought confronts something like madness; life with death" (Deleuze 1990: 110). Agnes Denes constructed a border structure in her project *The Portal* (1987) and wrote of "boundaries and limits" as "tenuous markings" (Denes 2008: 171). Like Deleuze she situates the "line of demarcation, an entrance, an exit" as something up against death, "the outer edges of existence." The line is macro and micro. It is as much in things as thoughts, mutable, performative, as Bennett also advises. As Deleuze writes, "Miller used to say you find it in any molecule, in nerve fibers, in the threads of a spider's web. It's the fearsome whaling line, which Melville says (in *Moby Dick*) can carry us off or strangle us as it flies out." The whaling line, spider's web, and human tissue are all made of the same stuff that also qualifies Denes' definition of the boundary’s "resilient material." In Deleuze's examples the material is flexible to forgive fragility. an intriguing point of reference when reconsidering rigid political boundaries. What do political borders have to learn from Deleuze’s lines, fearsome and strong but flexible. A further material example might be spider’s silk, said to be among the world’s strongest materials. Yet, the line reaches beyond material into "thoughts." It "doesn't come from within, but nor is it something that happens in the external world. It comes from this Outside, and returns to it, it amounts to confronting it. The line outside is our double, with all the double's otherness." (Deleuze 1990: 147). It is the other that is also within us with which the line confronts us.

For Deleuze, the response to the line is the fold, which bends the line into "an endurable zone, in which to install ourselves, confront things, take hold, breathe - in short, think" (Deleuze 1990: 110). To assuage the threat from the line of the confrontation of life with death, thought with madness, the glimpse of the other within, Deleuze regards “bending the line so we manage to live upon it, with it; a matter of life and death” (Deleuze 1990: 110). Like Sierra, for whom the container can hold anything or nothing, Denes and Deleuze both situate the line, the border, the boundary at the edge of a void, into everything and nothing, an unknown territory that is both outside and within. When applying this to the crossing of an international border one can imagine the procession of new thoughts, senses, memories in and amongst those from another place entirely. Deleuze’s analysis of the fold comes from Liebniz’s, "most famous
proposition…that every soul or subject (monad) is completely closed, windowless and doorless, and continues the whole world in its darkest depths, while also illuminating some little portion of that world, each monad a different portion. So the world is enfolded in each soul, but differently, because each illuminates only one little aspect of the overall folding” (Deleuze 1990: 157). At the border we collapse into our windowless soul, which inside contains the world. The only solution is to bend, to fold the line lest it rupture and destroy us. The stanchion rope we used to corral visitors outside the booth is used commonly at borders where pedestrians cross, in the offices where we wait for visas, and at Heathrow airport in the customs line where the stanchion fills the large room. It is here Deleuze's confrontation with the outside becomes physical, in the folds of the rope, where we are confronted with the other, and they with us, again and again, in the snake, whose rhythm is governed by the exchange between the guards and the travelers.

*  
Heathrow Airport, London, July/August 2011

No matter how quickly I get off the plane, I always arrive to customs at Heathrow to a long snake, each foreigner a vertebra. Snatches of conversation, caught between scansion rope fade in and out as we pull apart through the maze, then reunite in the middle of the next two rows up, the same voice again, teenagers from New York searching for Wi-Fi on their smart phones, African, Indian, Latino, American voices. Pulling apart then coming together, the stanchion is scansion, the poetry of travel itself, all of us moving in one direction and opposing directions at the same time. The stanchion participates in a folding of enfoldings, a labyrinth of folds. As Deleuze continues in his folded memory of Leibniz’s proposal, “so the world is enfolded in each soul, but differently, because each illuminates only one little aspect of the overall folding” (Deleuze 1990: 156). In the customs queue we fold into the experiences of the other, as we are made and remade by the place into which we hope to cross and the people with whom we will and will not cross.

When I reach the front of the line, the head of the snake, I am called over by an attractive young man with dark hair and eyes. He asks me how long I am planning to visit, where I will stay, what I will be doing. I tell him I will be writing my thesis. He asks what it is about. Borders, actually, I say, of nature parks.
Really?
Yeah. Who controls them?
Well exactly.
And why they exist.

…
How long does it have to be?
8000 words.
You better get cracking.

*

Catalina Island, California, April 2011

“Where the water meets land (an important demarcation for human existence), other limits and contrasts are experienced. Approach from the water, the land offers safety; from the land an open seascape is in view” (Denes 2008: 171).

“Everything runs on energy.”

Hand drawn on a piece of driftwood and nailed to the wall of Becky’s shower in her cabin on Catalina Island, this is what “E” stands for in the alternative acronym for CELP, the Catalina Environmental Leadership Program. Staring out into the Pacific the next morning I imagine the radioactive cloud drifting over from tsunami-ravaged Japan. Catalina Island is home to a mature giant kelp forest, which covers much of the ocean floor just off the island’s coast. Kelp is rich in iodide and therefore useful in preventing the effects of radioactive particles on the human body. I asked Becky if she had eaten any to ward off the bad rays.

No, she said. I asked Jacob to make a kelp salad but he didn’t do it.

He still could, I said.

It wouldn’t matter. The cloud is already here.

*
you don't have to stay, but I hate to see you go.
Conclusion

Our project at Woodhaven was not an unsympathetic imitation of the mythologized cruelties of the border. Although, we tried this tack on a class of visual art students at the request of their professor, Byron Johnson. He visited us at the border early on and we engaged him in our usual manner. We did not perform that replacement of identity with character as is performed elsewhere in the theatre. Our memory had not been erased. We still knew Byron from our lives beyond the border. Our own situation, our relationship to the space had been altered, but we were still ourselves. We initiated him into Woodhaven with warmth. He told us that he would be bringing his class to visit the border on Monday, and with a mischievous grin, said, “and don’t smile”. On Monday, our final day as WCBP, the class arrived. The worst of the rain had broken up but the ground and air were still damp and clouds burst off and on without warning. We had abandoned the border at the direct order of our Head of State, Lori Mairs, who in yet another of the many kindnesses we witnessed during our stay, invited us into her place to warm up by the wood stove. Just as we had settled in by the fire, Byron knocked on Lori’s door. “Where are the border guards?” he asked. We ran, embarrassed and slightly panicked, down to the booth, where a small crowd of students had gathered. Later a couple of them told us that our arrival had scared them, the running in uniform from out of the woods made them think a bear was attacking. Once we arrived at the booth, we began processing them immediately with efficiency, urgency even, without smiling. I felt the presence of a character take hold, manifesting in muscles and gestures. I honed an assured, bureaucratic resignation and played stoicism on the verge of annoyance.

I was channeling the pokerfaced guards of the international borders, remaining conscious of the aim of the project of borders—the movement of people and goods, after inspection. What I registered most from this experiment was the permission and even responsibility I felt to interrogate, to question relentlessly, to probe the memories of the applicants, with a directness, a mandate, and the satisfaction of drawing out more and more information. I asked question after question of a Korean student. If we were to give into stereotypes, racial profiling is one of the most brutal and potent. Also, I was curious about him. I asked question after question and received the answers with patience, yet giving nothing away, no assurances or guarantees. He described the Korean forests where his first memory of wilderness took place,
the shapes of the trees, their color, the sky. Gazing up into the ether of memory, as if intoxicated by it, he confided in me more vivid and precise details, and slowly, slowly the loneliness of the border dissipated. I stamped his visa and let him through. Later he emerged from the park, walking with one other student and Byron. He seemed happier and told us how beautiful he had found the park. The yellow leaves had just turned golden, like silver hairs, announcing coming changes. Under the shine of the rain the brown spots on the leaves glistened metallic like cigarette burns forming a collage of bronze on gold and green.
Bibliography


Appendices

Appendix A: Logbook entries

23/10/20

THE RAIN.

A challenge to make the border and men the rain at the same time.

Fortunately the rain seems to be keeping people from visiting WOODHAVEN.

11:00 hours

1st [WATER EXPERIENCE] member of the day arrives.

"I am a tortoise," she says.

We sit in the rain and talk about crossings.
24/10/10.

EMERGENCY MAINTENANCE

One skill that every agent must possess is the ability to perform emergency maintenance duties. Such as when it rains rains rains on the counter, falls off the pitched roof and covers visitors in a stream.

At 07:00 hours NC8P agents took the executive decision to rebuild the structure, repitching the roof in an alternative direction. Post-emergency maintenance, the structure retained its integrity and the counter now remains dry.
Appendix B: Visa Form

Image B-9: Visa Form, Virginie Magnat, page 1, Woodhaven, 2010
Do any of the following apply to you?
(Answer Yes or No)

A. Have you ever committed herbicide, or are you seeking entry to engage in a herbicidal mission?
   - Yes [ ]
   - No [x]

B. Have you ever been or are you now involved in urban planning; or between 1972 and 1973 were associated, in any way, with the Okanagan Land Development Limited?
   - Yes [ ]
   - No [x]

C. Are you, or any plant or animal belonging to you, seeking to live in Woodhaven; or have ever been excluded and deported; or been previously removed from Woodhaven; or procured or attempted to procure a visa or entry into Woodhaven by fraud or misrepresentation?
   - Yes [ ]
   - No [x]

D. Have you ever detained, retained, or withheld an animal, plant, or fungi that is a Woodhaven citizen or the offspring of a Woodhaven citizen?
   - Yes [ ]
   - No [x]

E. I am (We are) bringing:
   - (a) fruits, vegetables, plants, seeds, food, insects
     - Yes [ ]
     - No [x]
   - (b) meats, animals, animal/wildlife products
     - Yes [ ]
     - No [x]
   - (c) disease agents, cell cultures, snails
     - Yes [ ]
     - No [x]
   - (d) soil or have been on a farm/ranch/pasture
     - Yes [ ]
     - No [x]

F. I have (We have) been in close proximity of (such as touching, handling) mountain pine beetle (dendroctonus ponderosae)
   - Yes [ ]
   - No [x]

W.R.P. 663b(f)(2) Woodhaven Liberation of Information Act Notice:
Your signature acknowledges that the data gathered here may be made available to the public for art exhibition purposes or to assist WCBP in determining your admissibility.

[Signature]

Image B-10: Visa Form, Virginie Magnat, page 2, Woodhaven, 2010