

PARADOXES FOR THE SETTLER SOUL:
THE ASCETICAL PHILOSOPHY OF TIM LILBURN

by

Tyler Eliot Stuart

B.A., Mount Allison University, 2017

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department of English

© Tyler Eliot Stuart, 2023

University of Victoria

All rights reserved. This thesis may not be reproduced in whole or in part, by photocopy or other means, without the permission of the author.

We acknowledge and respect the lək̓wəjən peoples on whose traditional territory the university stands and the Songhees, Esquimalt and W̱SÁNEĆ peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

PARADOXES FOR THE SETTLER SOUL:
THE ASCETICAL PHILOSOPHY OF TIM LILBURN

by

Tyler Eliot Stuart
B.A., Mount Allison University, 2017

Supervisory Committee

Dr. Nicole Shukin, Supervisor

Department of English (CSPT)

Dr. Nicholas Bradley, Supervisor

Department of English

Abstract

This thesis will explore the prose of Tim Lilburn, particularly his trilogy of essay collections: *Living In The World As If It Were Home*, *Going Home*, and *The Larger Conversation*. These books are a record of Lilburn's project of autochthonicity — an attempt to live undivided from the places he lives — and the challenges of such a journey as a European settler on stolen Indigenous land. Lilburn's approach to this endeavour, which he considers a process of decolonization, resuscitates European contemplative thought to remedy the sapiential poverty of white settler culture and identity. Throughout this thesis, I examine the epistemological significance of Lilburn's retrieval of these European traditions into North American colonial modernity — attending to what they reveal about the interior dispositions of white settler subjectivity and the cultural trappings of late capitalism. By engaging with the paradoxes coursing through Lilburn's body of work — a linguistic form famous for defying logic — I make a case for the importance of epistemic impasse, or *aporia*. That is, I argue that the peculiarity of Lilburn's paradoxical thought, or the difficulty of grasping it, can, if one lets it, alert one to one's own epistemic allegiances. And these allegiances, I will argue, have had devastating consequences not only for Indigenous peoples, but also for European settlers themselves. Ultimately, I argue that the paradoxical shape of Lilburn's thought gestures toward the need for an ascetical, and therefore countercultural, knowledge.

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|-----|
| Supervisory Committee | ii |
| Abstract | iii |
| Table of Contents..... | iv |
| Acknowledgments..... | vi |
| Dedication..... | vii |
| Introduction: <i>Settler Poverty</i> | 1 |
| <i>Pleonexia</i> : The Settler Cannot Settle..... | 9 |
| 1.1 Polysemy: Settle..... | 11 |
| 1.2 Floating Hunger..... | 13 |
| 1.3 Turning the Soul Around | 17 |
| 1.4 Polysemy: Rigor..... | 24 |
| 1.5 Reading Philosophy..... | 30 |
| 1.6 Polysemy: Pleasure..... | 38 |
| 1.7 Floating Hunger..... | 38 |
| <i>Anachoresis</i> : Leaving the World to Enter It | 41 |
| 2.1 Anachoresis..... | 43 |
| 2.2 Polysemy: Exile | 44 |
| 2.3 Turning Away | 47 |
| 2.4 Limitlessness | 51 |
| 2.5 Attention and Will | 53 |
| 2.6 Two Forms of Looking, Two Forms of Withdrawal..... | 58 |
| 2.7 Polysemy: World | 68 |
| 2.8 The Life That Is Hidden | 68 |
| 2.9 Shimmer and Distraction | 71 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| 2.10 Polysemy: Withdrawal | 74 |
| 2.11 Monasticism and Modernity..... | 75 |
| 2.12 Bowing | 79 |
| <i>Epektasis</i> : Homelessness as Home..... | 81 |
| 3.1 Home and Homelessness..... | 85 |
| 3.2 Two Impositions..... | 90 |
| 3.3 Politics and Virtue..... | 93 |
| 3.4 Fictitious Singularity..... | 97 |
| 3.5 Loss..... | 103 |
| 3.6 Epektasis..... | 108 |
| Conclusion: <i>Worthy Enormities</i> | 112 |
| Bibliography..... | 116 |

Acknowledgements

I want to acknowledge the land on which I live, land that has been stewarded by the *lək^wəŋən* and *WSÁNEĆ* peoples since time immemorial. I want to acknowledge that this place has fed me for years, not just physically, despite my trespassing here.

I have many human people to thank: Mom — for your willingness to inquire. Dad — for your steadfastness. Ian Stuart — for your vulnerability and courage. Sage Birley — for pointing out the ticksters I don't see. Garrett Jones — for offering the ear of your heart. Sylvan Hamburger — for the depth of your love and attention. Claire Henderson Hamilton — for the nourishment of your friendship. Tessa Carriere — for your care and tenderness. Moriah Stuart — for your exuberance and loyalty. Emily Bishop — for your bounty of questions. Luke Lavender — for your philosophical fellowship. Aaron Friend Lettner — for refusing to refuse the paradox.

I also want to acknowledge those who helped more directly with my thesis: my supervisors, Nick Bradley and Nicole Shukin — for your patience and helpful feedback; and Nina Belmonte — for the extra eyes. Roger John — for your deep listening and understanding, and for helping me, while I burrowed into my European settler identity, to honour my Saponi ancestors and my own indigeneity — *Pi:la'huk*. The meadows just up the coast from Sitchanalth, whose proper name I do not know — for your abiding flux — *HÍSWƷE*. Alana Friend Lettner — for our endless and ongoing conversation; for reading my work so carefully; for your commitment to presence and honesty; for breathing into my life — thank you. And finally, Tim Lilburn — for your generosity; for numerous interior corrections; and for being ‘a source of anamnesis for anyone who cares to look.’

for Alana

Introduction: *Settler Poverty*

A few months ago, I was walking through the University of Victoria campus on a beautiful autumn day when I saw something that troubled me. It was convocation week, and everywhere students were taking photos in their caps and gowns — posing for selfies in front of sunlit trees. I didn't think much of this spectacle until I walked past the First Peoples House. There, I saw Indigenous students entering into ceremony. I watched them make their way into the building, their caps and gowns adorned in cultural dress, arms locked with friends and family. Inside, a group of elders were sitting in a circle, greeting them as they entered. Looking back at the students in the quad — most of them, like me, European settlers — I was overcome with a kind of longing. There was something so sad about how we held ourselves in this place, I thought, something thin and lonely. How, after centuries of colonization, having survived genocide and land theft, were Indigenous people at UVic able to inhabit, through ceremony and community, a world of such meaning? And how, after benefitting from centuries of colonization, of acquiring wealth through plunder, was *this* how white settlers choose to celebrate?

As I recount this story now, I'm struck by the difficulty of conveying its meaning. Part of this, I suspect, has to do with the psychic and cultural depth of the problem it's pointing to. But another reason is that there is almost no language to describe it within white settler society. Despite the increasing awareness among white settlers in Canada of the ongoing reality of settler colonialism, there is little talk about how this reality speaks to the spiritual condition of European settlers themselves — a condition I will call settler poverty.

§

For more than thirty years, though, Tim Lilburn — a poet and philosopher now living on ɫəkʷəŋən and W̱SÁNEĆ territories — has wandered this inner terrain. Lilburn traces the spiritual poverty of the European settler to two sources. The first is the abandonment of Europe's

contemplative traditions — from Platonic mystical theology to Christian monastic contemplation — finalized by the rise of Enlightenment epistemologies. In fact, Lilburn claims this abandonment, which deprived Europeans of a capacity for attentiveness, was a possibility condition for colonization itself. Which is related to the second source of this poverty: the European settler’s psychic estrangement from the land. For Lilburn, the violence of colonial and technological conquest is a wound not only to the land and its First Peoples, but also to those who inflicted it. It has resulted in what Lilburn calls “homelessness” — a psychic separation from the places we call home.

I suspect these ideas, to most European settlers, would likely appear strange. Indeed, they have seldom been thought, let alone written about. And with a few notable exceptions, serious scholarly engagement with this condition is scant.¹ For this reason alone, I think, Lilburn’s work is significant, and it’s why I’ve made his thought the focal point of my thesis. Lilburn attends to a strata of experience, a depth of identity, that has been so neglected as to be unnameable. In doing so, I believe his work offers a way to think — ourselves and the world — differently.

By “ourselves,” I mean settlers of European descent; and throughout my thesis, I use plural pronouns like “we,” “us,” “ours,” to refer to people, like myself, inhabiting this subject position. In this sense, my thesis is addressed *to* European settlers. The notion that white settlers haven’t escaped the violence of colonialism — that we bear a unique poverty worthy of attention — can be uncomfortable to consider. Such preoccupations, it could be argued, risk re-centering white settler experience rather than advancing decolonial scholarship. I’d like to address these concerns at the outset by gesturing toward the work of Fred Moten and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson. In an interview titled “The General Antagonism,” Moten — a poet and social critic in the black radical tradition — says:

¹ Perhaps most notably, Paulette Regan’s “Unsettling the Settler Within” insists on the need for settlers to examine their own postures and positions within settler colonialism. But more attentive to the spiritual labour of this journey is Denise M. Nadeau’s recent book “Unsettling Spirit: A Journey Into Decolonization.”

I ain't so concerned, necessarily, about the travails of the settler. The horrible difficulties that the settler imposes upon himself are not my first concern, though in the end they are a real thing. ... The ones who happily claim to embrace their own sense of themselves as privileged ain't my primary concern. I don't worry about them first. But, I would love it if they got to the point where they had the capacity to worry about themselves. Because then maybe we could talk.²

Simpson — a Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg poet, activist, and scholar — makes a similar point in an interview titled “White Supremacy in the Bush.”

[W]e do not need the help of Canadians. We need Canadians to help themselves, to learn to struggle and to understand that their great country of Canada has been and is a death dance for Indigenous peoples. They must learn to stop themselves from plundering the land and the climate and using Indigenous peoples' bodies to fuel their economy, and to find a way of living in the world that is not based on violence and exploitation.³

In many ways, my thesis takes its cues from these entreaties. And I think they resonate with Lilburn's insistence that the spiritual labour of tending to our poverty should be an ethical and political priority for European settlers. Not to ignore the violence from which European settlers benefit, but to examine the negative depth of our privilege — to see how deep its attendant poverty goes. Indeed, as Paulette Regan insists in her book *Unsettling the Settler Within*, such an undertaking is not mutually exclusive with solidarity, but it may even be necessary for it.

In a similar way, the citational practice I take up in this thesis might raise questions of Indigenous erasure and the problematic of centering white settler knowledge. I don't cite any Indigenous scholars in the three chapters that follow. This is, admittedly, a questionable approach to a thesis dedicated to decolonization. But because what I'm trying to grapple with is the spiritual poverty of the European settler, I believe there is a great risk of assimilation in plucking

² Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study* (Wivenhoe: Minor Compositions, 2013), 140-141.

³ Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, “White Supremacy in the Bush,” Geist, April 8, 2019, <https://www.geist.com/findings/prose/white-supremacy-in-the-bush/>.

Indigenous wisdom from its cultural context. Lilburn insists on another approach — one in which European settlers are able to offer something of their own — and I’ve attempted to follow in kind:

Landscapes have demanding apprenticeships; these admit no shortcuts, such as the use of Aboriginal stories as if they were one's own paradigmatic accounts. European descendants in North America must find their own way of being where they are, something in their past that will show them a path to their idiosyncratic way of residence, a route back for them, a path home. There is, of course, much that seems cataclysmic, place-erasing, in this past – an arrogant, anthropocentric Christian mapping of being, a Baconian, privateering union of experimental science, technology, and human enrichment. But it is from this past, some part of it, that we have to come: this, after all, is home as well.⁴

But how do we help ourselves? And what kind of help do we need? My thesis approaches these questions by attending to various paradoxes operating throughout Lilburn’s corpus. Although Lilburn explores these themes in his twelve books of poetry, my thesis focuses on his philosophical prose — specifically his three books of essays: *Living In The World As If It Were Home*, *Going Home*, and *The Larger Conversation*. Lilburn describes these books as a trilogy, each deepening his philosophical endeavour of autochthonicity — an attempt to live undivided from the earth. And the division that makes this work necessary, for Lilburn, is epistemological. His work attempts to find a way into the places he lives by attending to interior dispositions and allegiances — ways of thinking and being in the world — that produce this estrangement from place.

§

It’s for this reason that the titles of my chapters all refer to interior phenomena: *pleonexia* refers to a misaligned form of desire that manifests as rapacious greed; *anachoresis* refers to the withdrawal of attention from multiplicity and distraction; and *epektasis* refers to the limitlessness of fundamental eros.

My first chapter, *Pleonexia*, attends to Lilburn’s paradoxical insistence that the settler cannot

⁴Tim Lilburn, *Going Home* (Toronto: Anansi, 2008), 13.

settle. I use this formulation, and the tensions it generates, to explore how Lilburn understands settler colonialism as a crisis of interiority. I begin by discussing Lilburn's reading of George Grant regarding the settler's deracination from her intellectual lineage and from the places where she lives. Then I examine the ways in which this deracination is related to eros and what we mistake for eros — which I illustrate throughout the chapter with the metaphor of hunger. The bulk of the essay, though, is a reading of Lilburn's essay "Turning the Soul Around," in which I attempt to demonstrate the importance of interior discernment to an erotic understanding of settler colonialism. His essay, I argue, reveals its understanding of Plato's *Republic* by formally enacting, rather than systematically analyzing, its therapeutic philosophy. I conclude this chapter by reflecting on how Lilburn's essay gestures toward an erotic poverty at the heart of North American society.

My second chapter, *Anachoresis*, attends to a paradoxical interior movement within the Christian monastic tradition: withdrawing from the world in order to enter it. I reflect on the ways in which Lilburn's prose, as well as his life, enacts a retrieval of this ancient pattern of withdrawal by introducing it to colonial modernity. My argument in this chapter — which departs from Lilburn's own claims — is that Lilburn's withdrawal from the epistemologies of colonial modernity and the trappings of its commercial culture reveal, paradoxically, the ways in which technocracy and colonization have themselves withdrawn from the world. I attend to these two forms of withdrawal by tracing the interior tensions between attention and will, desire and distraction, humility and hubris. I also attempt to show this distinction — between contemplative withdrawal and colonial withdrawal — through Lilburn's descriptions of different forms of looking. Throughout the chapter, I place Lilburn into dialogue with a host of thinkers in the Christian monastic tradition, most notably the Cistercian monks Thomas Merton and Evan Bednarz. By placing these thinkers in conversation with Lilburn, I hope to clarify what it means to withdraw from the world — which means asking, in part, what the world is.

My final chapter, *Epektasis*, explores Lilburn's understanding of eros as a form of

homelessness, which he sees, paradoxically, as the only way home for European settlers. But what does it mean to “come home” as a white settler? Can you ever really settle in a place your ancestors stole? To grapple with these questions, I place Lilburn’s paradox of home and homelessness into dialogue with Fred Moten, who also uses these terms to explore diasporic life in settler society. And through this dialogue, I try to challenge and stretch Lilburn’s thought by considering its relevance to Moten’s more socioeconomic concerns — examining the relationship between interior and exterior homelessness. I grapple with Lilburn’s claim that the refusal of the paradox of *epektasis* — erotic homelessness as the way home — is the source of “any pursuit of firm control.” What happens within us when we refuse the paradox? Is the denial of the reality of indeterminacy a denial of reality itself? In doing so, I advance the argument that Lilburn’s embrace of erotic homelessness addresses the epistemic roots of colonial homelessness: whiteness.

§

Throughout this thesis, I explore two qualities of Lilburn’s language and thought — paradox and polysemy — which often overlap. While paradox can be defined as a statement that conveys a truth through apparent contradiction, polysemy is a linguistic device that employs the same word to convey divergent meanings. The epistemic tensions these linguistic forms produce, I believe, offer a glimpse at a different way of knowing. And so by attending to them, I hope to engage with Lilburn’s erotic thought and its implications without distorting, as much as possible, its meaning.

Much has been written on the epistemological function of paradox in writing. My thesis does not aspire to contribute to this conversation, though it is indebted to it. The capacity of paradox to thwart the mind’s ambition for a firm grip on the world has long been known and employed by a range of wisdom traditions. And I believe one can read Lilburn’s paradoxes as aligned with and emerging from this history.⁵ By engaging with the paradoxes coursing through

⁵ Indeed, of the West’s erotic traditions, paradox is perhaps most prominent in the intellectual lineage Lilburn is a student of — namely, Neoplatonism and the *via negativa* of Christian contemplation.

Lilburn's body of work, I make a case for the importance of epistemic impasse, or *aporia*, in the return to erotic philosophy. That is, I argue that the peculiarity of Lilburn's paradoxical thought, the difficulty of grasping it in colonial modernity, can, if we let it, alert us to our own epistemic allegiances and the ethical imperative to shift them. Ultimately, I argue that the paradoxical shape of Lilburn's thought gestures toward the need for an ascetical, and therefore countercultural, knowledge.

As for methodology, I admit my approach has been rather unsystematic. Much of what follows is simply my attempt to understand what Lilburn is saying, to allow its meaning to inform my life and understanding of the world. There are notable limitations to this approach: by filtering Lilburn's thought through three of his paradoxes, there is a risk of distorting certain elements of his philosophical project and of under-representing others. And so while I've tried to offer a faithful representation of his thought, my thesis should not be read as a comprehensive review of his work. A more systematic approach, no doubt, would have offered a better understanding of how Lilburn's work relates to contemporary discourse on decolonization and ecopoetics, and I hope that someone takes up that work. My thesis has been an attempt to offer a different kind of understanding. As Jan Zwicky, writing about Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, puts it:

Dealers in fine musical instruments almost never play instruments they appraise. Their assessments are based on externally measurable proportions, antique value, the visual appearance of the varnish, the reputation of the luthier, and so on. An understanding of the *Tractatus*'s arguments might be compared to a violin's market value; an understanding of its thought, to a musician's appreciation of the instrument's sound.⁶

I think this distinction — between understanding the argument of a work and understanding its thought — is not unlike the distinction between knowledge and wisdom. I'm no musician, but I've tried, nonetheless, to understand Lilburn's thought by appreciating its sound.

§

⁶ Jan Zwicky, *Lyric Philosophy*, Gaspereau Press, (Kentville, NS): §40.

To conclude, I'd like to offer a way into these paradoxes. What continues to draw me to Lilburn's prose is not merely the shape of his thought, but also how it *moves*. Learning to read his paradoxes in this way — to savour their impossible turns, their impossible reaches — is often unnerving. They are peculiar, counterintuitive, and yet, somehow, familiar — because their motion, I've come to believe, is ours.

Pleonexia: The Settler Cannot Settle

In the Halq'eméylem language the word for people of European descent is Xwelítem. Stó:lō Elders explain that Xwelítem translates as 'hungry people' or 'starving people'. No one remembers exactly when the Stó:lō adopted this term to describe the immigrants who came to their land, but Elder Dan Milo was of the opinion that it dates back at least as far as the 1858 gold rush when thousands of poorly provisioned miners arrived in Stó:lō territory.¹

– Keith Thor Carlson

No matter how we spend our days, no matter what sentences we form at work, what acts we fashion, this is where we truly live; this floating hunger holds the names that are our names beneath our public names.²

– Tim Lilburn

In the Afterword to *Living In The World As If It Were Home*, Tim Lilburn recalls his discovery, in his early forties, that he couldn't locate "any forms of knowing and being that would give his life the depth he hoped it might have."³ This realization was preceded by an experience on the steps of the Regina Public Library, in which he sensed that the buildings surrounding him "were not *here* but seemed slightly dislodged and hovering, leaning elsewhere, their loyalties elsewhere, caught in a momentum of nostalgia for, obeisance to, distant centres of settler power."⁴ The city, in other words, was not autochthonous — not *of* the place where it stood — and neither was he.⁵

This awareness, of a problem he didn't know he had, plunged him into a desperate attempt to come home. He found himself burrowing back into the West's intellectual traditions; he found himself looking at the land with longing. The ways of being in the world he had inherited — dogmatic Christianity, Enlightenment reason, twentieth-century psychologies and epistemologies —

¹ Keith Thor Carlson, *You Are Asked To Witness: The Stó:lō in Canada's Pacific Coast History* (Chilliwack, B.C.: Stó:lō Heritage Trust, 2000), 57.

² Tim Lilburn, *The Larger Conversation: Contemplation and Place* (Edmonton, Alberta: The University of Alberta Press, 2017), 215.

³ Tim Lilburn, *Living In The World As If It Were Home* (Scotland: Xylem Books, 2019), 87.

⁴ Tim Lilburn, *Going Home* (Toronto: Anansi, 2008), 4.

⁵ *Ibid*, 5.

could not, he claims, “even recognize what troubled me, this feeling of floating where I was.”⁶

Lilburn’s awareness of an unsettledness within descendants of European settlers might strike some as counterintuitive. After all, settler colonialism has been distinguished from other forms of colonization in that, as Patrick Wolfe famously puts it, “settler colonizers come to stay.”⁷ Unlike the agents of franchise colonialism, who function as imperial outposts in a foreign colony, settlers, as Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang note, “come with the intention of making a new home on the land, a homemaking that insists on settler sovereignty over all things in their new domain.”⁸ Settler colonialism, then, is not a sojourn, but a homemaking project — a structure, not an event.⁹ Drawing on this understanding, many attempts to challenge this structure, theoretically or practically, use the word “unsettling” to gesture toward the discomfort and upheaval necessary to reckoning with one’s position within it.¹⁰¹¹¹² This language employs different shades of meaning: settling is not only a structure of colonial violence, it is also an ongoing act of complicity. We are settled not only on stolen land, but also in our *ways* — habituated to a reality of expropriation, extraction, and expansion. And it’s important to note that, as scholars like Amy Fung have pointed out, this labour of “unsettling” can also involve a deconstruction of the subject position of “settler” itself — which is often assumed to be white.¹³ Settler colonialism, she points out, relies on racialized settlers from various diasporic communities that both benefit from, and are exploited by, its socioeconomic structure. (Without wanting to elide these complexities, I will say at the outset that they fall beyond

⁶ Ibid, 4.

⁷ Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): pp. 387-409, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623520601056240>, 388.

⁸ Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, “Decolonization Is Not A Metaphor,” *Tabula Rasa* 38 (2021): pp. 61-111, 5.

⁹ Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” *Journal of Genocide Research*, 388.

¹⁰ Morgan Brigg, Sarah Maddison, and Jon Altman, *Unsettling the Settler State: Creativity and Resistance in Indigenous Settler-State Governance* (Sydney, NSW: Federation Press, 2011).

¹¹ Karl Hardy, “Unsettling Hope: Settler Colonialism and Utopianism,” *Spaces of Utopia: An Electronic Journal* 2, no. 1 (2012).

¹² Paulette Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within: Indian Residential Schools, Truth Telling, and Reconciliation in Canada*, ed. Taiaiake Alfred (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014).

¹³ Amy Fung, “Is Settler Colonialism Just Another Study of Whiteness?,” *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 53, no. 2 (2021): pp. 115-131, <https://doi.org/10.1353/ces.2021.0011>.

the scope of this thesis. In what follows, my primary concern is the psychic condition of European settlers.)¹⁴ In all of these approaches, “unsettling” is employed as a remedial step toward the possibility of decolonization: settlers must become unsettled.

But Lilburn’s language inverts this formulation, and so offers, I suspect, a different understanding of what the process of decolonization, on the side of the European settler, might require. Years after his realization in Regina, and the attempt to come home that ensued, he says: “I can still taste the incomprehension of that man, the man I was then, wandering those empty hills, trying to find a way to settle.”¹⁵

§ Polysemy: Settle

The settler cannot settle — this is a strange formulation. On a semantic level, it seems to defy logic: *Hasn't the settler already, by definition, settled?* Given the ambiguity of Lilburn’s language, this question is understandable. It points to a linguistic problem, if not an epistemological one: What’s the point of claiming the settler cannot settle? Is this not just word play? The short answer to this question is that it *is* word play, but not *just* word play. (The long answer is the rest of this essay).

Throughout Lilburn’s philosophical essays, his prose seems to curl in on itself, imbricate. This is perhaps most evident when he uses the same word to convey divergent meanings: as when he suggests that the settler must try to settle. This linguistic maneuver is known as polysemy, and it can create the sense, at times, of ambiguity or even contradiction. (We already encountered polysemy in the use of “settling” as a form of complicity). Because of the simplicity of Lilburn’s reversal, it’s easy to overlook its significance. But the meanings of these uses of the word “settle” are not only divergent, they are antithetical. Lilburn is pointing to a tension between what we take settlement to be and a dimension of settlement that somehow evades articulation. This linguistic tension creates a kind of epistemic impasse: a paradox. And paradoxes are, famously, unresolvable — in the same way

¹⁴ In some places, for stylistic purposes, I refer to “settlers” without specifying *which*, but I want to be clear at no point in this thesis does the term refer to settlers of racialized diasporic communities.

¹⁵ Tim Lilburn, *Living In The World As If It Were Home*, “Afterword,” 87.

that jokes don't like to be explained. But if we embrace Lilburn's linguistic play, we might intuit a second sense of "settle" as something like *easefulness*. That is, to settle down, to become settled, to settle in. I think this is a good place to start, because it opens up a host of questions through the tension it creates. What if the act of settler colonization, the ways in which Europeans uproot Indigenous worlds, reveals, paradoxically, a kind of fretfulness? And what if the very capacity to settle in such a fashion originates in this disease? From this vantage point, we might be able to observe the ways in which the structure of settlement, far from being a static imposition, is both roving and tumultuous. It has required, from the beginning, a relentless movement to the next best thing.

Wendell Berry captures this disposition in the opening lines of *The Unsettling of America*, where he notes that the presence of white settlers in North America, their movements in relation to place, seem to be marked by a lack of intention:

The earliest explorers were looking for gold, which was, after an early streak of luck in Mexico, always somewhere farther on. Conquests and foundings were incidental to this search—which did not, and could not, end until the continent was finally laid open in an orgy of goldseeking in the middle of the 19th century. Once the unknown of geography was mapped, the industrial marketplace became the new frontier, and we continued, with largely the same motives and with increasing haste and anxiety, to displace ourselves—no longer with unity of direction, like a migrant flock, but like the refugees from a broken ant hill.¹⁶

Notice that in the title of Berry's book, *The Unsettling of America*, his use of "unsettling" is consonant with Lilburn's polysemy. Something uneasy, fretful, lies beneath the physical process of settlement. But where did this "haste and anxiety," a disposition responsible for so much of modernity's displacement, come from? For Lilburn, this way of life, full of dispossessions "incidental" to its motives, originated long before colonial contact. Those who colonized the land that would become North America, who fled Europe, were unable to flee their *own* dispossession — from land and

¹⁶ Wendell Berry, *The Unsettling of America: Culture & Agriculture* (Sierra Club Books, 1986), 5.

culture. And so if we follow the meaning of “settled” as easefulness further — that is, if we consider the ways in which settlers cannot settle — we might say that foundational to the identity of the European settler is an identity crisis. What makes us who we are is that we don’t know who, or where, we are.

§ Floating Hunger

The notion that settler colonialism is a homemaking project relies on a particular conception of home. For Tuck and Yang, two features of the settler’s new home appear to be permanent residency and dominion. Its logic manifests as expropriation, extraction, and expansion. But what kind of a home is this? If “sovereignty over all things,” is, as they claim, foundational to its structure, then home for the European settler would seem to be defined, in part, by exile.¹⁷ Home as a dominion over the world, not a belonging to it. What does this say about the state of the settler soul?

Lilburn’s reflection on George Grant’s essay “In Defence of North America” might help us sense the epistemological depth of these questions. According to Lilburn, Grant claimed that

descendants of European settlers never would be able to hold the gods of the New World as their own, so never would be “autochthonous” where they are, no matter how long the history of their stay on the continent might be. This rootlessness was ours, Grant explained, because of “what we are and what we did.” What we are: detached long ago, while still in Europe, from that part of the Western intellectual tradition that would have taught us the suitability of “living undivided from one’s earth,” we cannot value what we most need, indeed cannot name it. What we did: we met the new land as conquerors and subjugated it. We moved too quickly over the ground, omnivorous, self-uprooting on principle, marked by the inevitably anarchic character of capitalism, to be shaped by where our bodies were. This homelessness of ours has proved disastrous both for human souls and for the colonized land.¹⁸

¹⁷ Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, “Decolonization Is Not A Metaphor,” 5.

¹⁸ Tim Lilburn, *Going Home*, 4.

By splitting open Grant’s phrase, Lilburn traces this homelessness through at least two forms of deprivation — each inseparable from the identity of European settlers: what we are and what we did. What we are is unmoored, a people drifting away from its wisdom lineages — among them mystical Christianity and Platonic philosophy. These traditions, for Lilburn and Grant, were the source in the West of a “capacity for the practice of attentiveness,” the basis of a nourishing relationship to place.¹⁹ What we did, instead of attending, was colonize — human souls and land — with a speed, appetite, and fervour that prevented the possibility of an encounter with land as foundational to identity. We made ourselves impermeable to the sustenance of what we most need, so much so that we “cannot name it.”²⁰

These forms of deprivation, for Lilburn, are sites of deep psychic injury, or poverty, which shape us at a depth modern psychology cannot reach. Lilburn describes this poverty as a “floating hunger.”²¹ This phrase, I think, contains both of the deprivations we’ve been discussing: what we are and what we did. Our hunger is the deprivation of a proper understanding of eros — that “boarded up tradition in the West” — which enables a capacity for attentiveness; our floating is the deprivation, in large part self-inflicted, of a place in the world.²² And although we have not yet, culturally, even begun to acknowledge this floating hunger, this aimless desire for home, it is nonetheless responsible for the homelessness we’ve created.

Beyond the phrase “floating hunger,” Lilburn’s descriptions of the European settler’s poverty often rely on metaphors involving movement and appetite. He writes that the detached settler “float[s] in an intellectual tradition that offers no chthonic or sapiential mooring.”²³ Under this condition, that of an unmoored vessel, “[a]nxiety, fret, drifting are to be expected.”²⁴ And, as

¹⁹ Ibid, 2.

²⁰ Ibid, 4.

²¹ Tim Lilburn, *The Larger Conversation: Contemplation and Place* (Edmonton, Alberta: The University of Alberta Press, 2017), “Mostly on Prayer,” 60.

²² Mark Dickinson, *Canadian Primal: Poets, Places, and the Music of Meaning* (Montreal; Kingston; London; Chicago: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2021), 200.

²³ Tim Lilburn, *The Larger Conversation*, “Introduction,” XI.

²⁴ Ibid.

we've already observed, this drift is not entirely passive. Rather, it is a turning away, a neglect of cultural and intellectual inheritance. For instance, Lilburn claims the way modern European settlers have "bolted" into Eastern religions and creative animism "fits with the prevailing imperial spirit of perpetual movement and protean self-service."²⁵ That is, on the other side of the flight from Europe's sapiential traditions is a rapacious appropriation of other worlds. And this movement, for Lilburn, while interior, can also be observed in the physical world: it includes the ways in which the European settler "moved too quickly" over the land.²⁶ For Lilburn, the European settler's interior disposition is "omnivorous" — suggesting, among other things, a form of hunger with genocidal consequences. And what enables the violence of omnivorousness, as we shall see, is its characteristic a lack of interior discernment.

Lilburn believes that unless we can address these deprivals at their psychic depth, the "floating hunger" of the European settler will only fester, leaving little hope for justice. It's important to note these observations cut against the grain of much contemporary discourse on political privilege — which tends to emphasize its benefit. That Lilburn characterizes white settler identity primarily in terms of *poverty* gestures toward his preoccupation with something other than sociopolitical power.²⁷ Instead, his work attends to "interior phenomena" — to the self-inflicted loss of ways of being and knowing subtending settler identity.²⁸ And so while one reason the settler's poverty remains hidden is its depth, another, I think, is its coincidence with her privilege. For Grant, North America's prosperity was made possible precisely because of the settler's abandonment of cultural sustenance and her conquest of the land. And for Lilburn, modernity itself is unthinkable

²⁵ Ibid, "Faith and Land," 215.

²⁶ Tim Lilburn, *Going Home*, "Introduction," 1.

²⁷ Although I am not aware of such critiques levelled at Lilburn's work, I am conscientious of how his approach could be read as centring whiteness and its emotional experience in the ongoing colonial reality of North America. I am conscientious, too, that my own work could be subject to these critiques. However, I do not read Lilburn's consternation, guilt, desperation as a movement toward absolution or innocence. I read it as a *refusal* to offload this responsibility.

²⁸ Tim Lilburn, *The Larger Conversation: Contemplation and Place*, "Mostly on Prayer," 60.

without this disinheritance. Thus one way to approach the paradox of the unsettled settler is to consider how his poverty is disguised as wealth.

Lilburn recognizes that “being deeply in place requires some psychic labour, a work in the soul” that he claims, like Grant, is impossible.²⁹ But this impossibility, for Lilburn, is no reason not to undertake it. If autochthonicity, “a living undivided from one’s earth,” is what European settlers have deprived themselves of, Lilburn’s work assumes responsibility for this uprootedness by trying to find a way home, no matter the likelihood of arrival.³⁰ His work does not critique structures of power, promote political insurgency, or supplant ontological models. Instead, it attempts to decolonize European settler identity — “what we are and what we did” — at the root of its poverty.³¹

§

Lilburn’s prose is an attempt to address these deprivals simultaneously. On one hand, it is an attempt to retrieve jettisoned traditions — from Plato’s dialogues to Christian contemplative prayer — in order to resuscitate the contemplative core of the West’s intellectual inheritance. On the other, it is an attempt to return to the places where we are, to correct the “omnivorous, self-uprooting” tendency that has shaped and been shaped by colonization.³²

Coursing through all of this work, this labour of retrieval and return, is eros. Following the Platonic and Christian monastic traditions, Lilburn understands desire to be at the heart of contemplative and philosophical life. And for Lilburn, eros is the only way home. Not only because retrieving it requires returning to those traditions to which European settlers belong, but also because the interior capacity they offer, a way of being in the world that is attentive and permeable, would enable us to be taken in by where we are.

²⁹ Ibid, “Faith and Land,” 215.

³⁰ Tim Lilburn, *Going Home*, “Introduction,” 1.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

But eros, as we shall see, has many counterfeits — counterfeits that are foundational to the settler colonial society we inhabit. A desire for more than one needs, for instance, can pose as desire, but is, for Lilburn, a malformed eros. And so while desire, for Lilburn, offers a remedy to the interior crisis of settler colonialism, its stunted expressions are at the root of the problem. Lilburn calls these counterfeits erotic misalignments, and they require interior correction. But there is a problem: if Lilburn’s way home is through desire, and if stunted expressions of desire are at the root of our homelessness, then how will we be able to recognize eros when we encounter it? This, I think, is where we must begin. As Lilburn puts it: “I think a lot of things our culture regards as erotic are anti-erotic. I think our culture is interested in the denigration of eros.”³³ Lilburn’s work suggests that just being able to discern between eros and its counterfeits — in a culture so governed by its counterfeits — is itself a work in the soul.

§ Turning The Soul Around

Lilburn’s essay “Turning The Soul Around” is about Plato’s *Republic* — a monumental text in the history of Western philosophy — and a tendency among some commentators to misread it. But as we shall see, Lilburn does not understand his attempt to correct these misreadings merely as a scholarly pursuit. Rather, correcting them is an attempt to correct an erotic misalignment, the significance of which become clear as the essay unfolds.

The *Republic*, Plato’s most famous and widely read work, is an expansive dialogue that occurs, in the early books, primarily between Socrates and Glaucon. It is preoccupied with the nature of justice, and it circles around the question of whether the just person is happier than the unjust person. These central questions have led to much scholarly debate as to whether or not the *Republic* is principally concerned with ethics, politics, or both. Lilburn’s essay sides with neither of these readings. However, he does argue that some interpretations of the *Republic* — which suggest it

³³ Tim Lilburn, “Listening With Courtesy: A Conversation with Tim Lilburn,” ed. Darryl Whetter, *Studies In Canadian Literature* 22, no. 1 (1997): pp. 135-144, https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/scl22_1int02.

reveals Plato's authoritarian inclinations, his animosity toward poetry, and his fear of human passion — misunderstand its philosophical intention.

Lilburn claims that this confusion surrounds the images Socrates' employs throughout the dialogue. These images include the divided line, the feverish city, and the allegory of the cave. Contrary to how they are often interpreted, Lilburn insists these images "are not intended as segments of a system replicating the nature of being and the structure of human knowledge, though they may appear to be exactly this."³⁴ That is, the confusion Lilburn attempts to correct arises not just because of mistaken interpretations of the images themselves, but of *how* they are being used. (Curiously, though, Lilburn admits that these images may appear to be exactly what they are *not*.) Plato's view of philosophy, for Lilburn, is not systematic, but therapeutic: Socrates is not interested in constructing an image of reality; instead, he uses images to help his interlocutor turn toward philosophy. His images are not intended to accurately illustrate reality, but to change someone's life.

For Lilburn, the distinction between these interpretations of the dialogue — systematic versus therapeutic — has more consequence than arriving at an accurate reading of Plato.

Philosophy as transformational process has priority over philosophy as a source of pronouncements on reality, the latter an undertaking that Socrates appears to see as a lesser form of intellectual endeavour, not truly philosophy at all (Theaetetus 174a-b), but often in fact a place to retreat from the rigors of authentic philosophy.³⁵

Lilburn's interpretation of Plato's philosophy-as-therapy seems to align with that of Socrates himself. Both not only make the distinction (though not with the same language) between systematic and therapeutic philosophy, but they suggest that the former is a "retreat" from the latter — "not truly philosophy at all."³⁶ And so what's at stake in Lilburn's essay is not merely discerning whose interpretations of Plato are more reliable, but rather the purpose and nature of philosophy itself.

³⁴ Tim Lilburn, *The Larger Conversation*, "Turning the Soul Around," 126-127.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 126.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

And, as we shall see, Lilburn re-enacts Plato's disinterest in "philosophy as a source of pronouncements on reality" through his own disinterest in making such pronouncements on Plato. Indeed, were this his intention — to merely refute the claims, for instance, that Plato's politics are authoritarian — he would be trading one systematic reading for another. Instead, Lilburn suggests that this understanding of Plato simply misses the point. Moreover, it places one among the ranks of Socratic interlocutors who refuse "the rigors of authentic philosophy."³⁷ (It's worth noting that Lilburn does not directly engage with the misreadings he critiques, a decision I take to be intentional.) In order to come to a more faithful understanding of what the *Republic* means, Lilburn's essay challenges this "lesser form of intellectual endeavour" — but not on its own terms. Instead, I will argue, "Turning the Soul Around" demonstrates an understanding of Plato's therapeutic philosophy by enacting it.

§

In the *Republic*, Glaucon embodies this retreat from authentic philosophy, which manifests as a desire for honour and a proclivity for calculative thinking. In what follows, my aim is to show how Lilburn's essay teases out the significance of Glaucon's disposition by attending to one of Socrates' misinterpreted images: the feverish city.

Tracking the interior movement of the *Republic*, Lilburn claims that Glaucon "has no awareness of himself as limited."³⁸ This lack of awareness appears early in the dialogue when Glaucon attempts to imitate Socrates' method of dialectic without the necessary "sharp site and prudence."³⁹ In so doing, he reveals himself to be a caricature, not a double, of Socrates. In other words, he would rather pose as a philosopher than do the work of philosophy. This posture is of fundamental importance for Lilburn and for our discussion of his work: it alerts us to something that resembles *eros*, but turns out to be a counterfeit. Glaucon's parody of *eros* is reinforced, Lilburn

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid, 130.

³⁹ Ibid, 131, citing *Republic*, 368d.

notes, when Glaucon tells a story of a shepherd's descent beneath the earth which resembles, though dispositionally departs from, Odysseus' initiation in Calypso's cave. In these moments, what is preventing Glaucon from entering the philosophical life is the belief that he is already a philosopher. For this reason, Socrates, though he would prefer "to respond to Glaucon's request to disclose the nature of justice by locating his search for it in the soul, ... recognizes that such an investigation is beyond the present capacity of his interlocutor."⁴⁰ And so he proposes, instead, "to seek justice in the city where what is in the soul is written large."⁴¹

This image — the city as an allegory for the soul — has been the basis of the ongoing discussion about the ethical or political nature of the *Republic*, as well as the source of much confusion regarding Plato's political inclinations. But Lilburn draws our attention to something else: how Socrates "relents" to investigate in this way *because* of Glaucon's aptitude. And not only is the image of the city a response to Glaucon's interior disposition, but it is also, Lilburn claims, psychogogic. That is, it is intended to facilitate an interior shift in the life of Glaucon. As Lilburn notes, this form of discussion "is easily within Glaucon's range; it builds on his political preoccupations; indeed it flushes out the political exaggerations of his malformed erotic ambitions."⁴² If we read Plato's dialogues as therapeutic, Lilburn claims, we begin to see the ways in which they are structured, tailored, for Socrates' interlocutor. It is because of this that any attempt to read the images or concepts offered by Socrates as evidence of Plato's philosophical or political system is bound to fail: they must be read in reference to the philosophical confusion of Socrates' partner and his attempt to help him out. And throughout Plato's dialogues, the confusion Socrates sees most clearly in his interlocutors is erotic. As Lilburn says, "Those outside philosophy desire in such a way that their inner lives are malformed; the proper quest of longing is thus undermined in them.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

They must be persuaded to undertake an ascetical journey.”⁴³ This is how Lilburn insists that a faithful reading of the *Republic* ought to approach the text. Glaucon suffers from an erotic misalignment called pleonexia, and Socrates is trying to turn his soul around.

In Book II, Glaucon argues that if the unjust and the just person were granted impunity, they would act in the same way. Why? Because pleonexia — or, as he describes it, “the desire to outdo others and get more and more” — is “what everyone’s nature naturally pursues as good” (359c).⁴⁴ The just person, he suggests, is simply someone who lacks the power to act as he pleases. From the Greek pleonektein — pleiōn ‘more’ + ekhein ‘have’ — pleonexia is often translated as greediness, a covetous form of desire.⁴⁵ But its insatiability, more precisely, “does not just want to maximize the good for itself, but to do so at others’ expense.”⁴⁶ Taking this form of desire to be natural, Glaucon claims that “nature is forced by law into the perversion of treating fairness with respect” (359c).⁴⁷ Justice, in other words, is anathema to human desire. And so desire must be constrained, perverted, in order to respect any notion of “fairness.” But from where does such a desire arise? And how does it manifest?

After beginning to imagine and find justice within the city, Socrates and Adeimantus are interrupted by Glaucon, who, Lilburn notes, “complains that the two have made ‘a city of sows,’ yet one ‘without relishes’ (372c-d).”⁴⁸ This demand, to construct a city with relishes, is a reflection of Glaucon’s erotic appetite.⁴⁹ As Socrates says:

⁴³ Ibid, 126.

⁴⁴ Karen Margrethe Nielsen, “The Tyrant’s Vice: Pleonexia and Lawlessness in Plato’s Republic,” Wiley Online Library, 150.

⁴⁵ “Pleonexia Definition & Meaning,” Merriam-Webster (Merriam-Webster), accessed December 4, 2022.

⁴⁶ Karen Margrethe Nielsen, “The Tyrant’s Vice: Pleonexia and Lawlessness in Plato’s Republic,” 150.

⁴⁷ Tim Lilburn, *The Larger Conversation*, “Turning the Soul Around,” 129.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 131.

⁴⁹ This moment in the dialogue, Shannon Zander notes, tends to be overlooked by commentators on Plato. Those who address it directly argue that the “city of sows” is either a false start to the dialogue, unimportant to its meaning, or simply impossible. But Zander, much like Lilburn, insists on the pedagogical function of the image, and furthermore insists that Socrates’ willingness to indulge Glaucon’s protest is not license to discredit it. Unlike some commentators, who take Socrates’ approval of the city of sows to be ironic, Zander reads them as sincere. Moreover, she claims that these scholars “follow Glaucon’s lead in dismissing the city instead of taking Socrates’ praise as a cue that there is more to the city than what is on the surface.”

It isn't merely the origin of a city that we're considering, it seems, but the origin of a *luxurious* city. And that may not be a bad idea, for examining it, we might very well see how justice and injustice grow up in cities. Yet the true city, in my opinion, is the one we've described, the healthy one, as it were. But let's study a city with a fever, if that's what you want.⁵⁰

Socrates indulges Glaucon's demand, but not because he shares Glaucon's disposition. Rather, he does so for the same reason he forgoes his preference to locate justice in the soul. This is another psychogogic turn in the dialogue, and Socrates takes it as an opportunity to examine injustice in the city. Socrates says that Glaucon's luxurious city has a fever, claims it will be "gorged with a bulky mass of things" (372e-373b).⁵¹ He warns, Lilburn notes, that it "will require more doctors because of its excess and an army to take land from its neighbours in its appetite for more."⁵² And so even in the early imaginings of the feverish city, we see the consequences of Glaucon's pleonexia on both its engorged citizens and its soon-to-be-displaced neighbours. Glaucon, Lilburn notes, does not appear to be troubled by these consequences.⁵³

But Socrates has a large role in imagining this feverish city, and this has been taken, by the commentators with whom Lilburn disagrees, as evidence of Plato's authoritarian politics. He recommends holding women in common (424a); he insists on the need for a guardian class, philosopher-kings, who will rule over the city; and he proposes a warrior class to defend the city and enlarge its territory.⁵⁴ But Lilburn argues that the image Socrates constructs shouldn't be read as his (or Plato's) political vision, but rather as an attempt to provoke shame in Glaucon.

Even when Socrates asserts that the vigor of the city requires selective breeding among the guardians, in which the most fit are to be rewarded with 'abundant intercourse' (460b), whose offspring will be raised in 'pens' by selected nurses, Glaucon does not recognize the barbarity his unexamined desire has initiated.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Plato, Chris Emlyn-Jones, and William Preddy, *Republic* (Cambridge, Mass, etc. : Harvard University Press, 2013), II, 372e-373a.

⁵¹ Tim Lilburn, *The Larger Conversation*, "Turning the Soul Around," 131.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 134.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

For Lilburn, it is Glaucon, not Socrates, who is responsible for the character of the feverish city. His “appetite for more” has led to a city reliant on eugenics and militarism.⁵⁶ Rejecting the notion that these features are the sincere political postures of Socrates, Lilburn insists that their severity and absurdity be read in relation to Glaucon’s malformed eros. Socrates is goading Glaucon; he wants Glaucon to catch a glimpse of himself in the city, to experience the shame of that. Lilburn notes the importance of shame in Plato’s dialogues — perhaps most notably in the *Symposium*, where Alcibiades confesses he’s been transfixed and humiliated by Socrates’ speeches. For Alcibiades and others, this experience of shame is “the disassembling of false self-esteem and the prelude of philosophy.”⁵⁷ And this, according to Lilburn, allows for “the breaking of old erotic postures and the resetting of the soul so that it loves what it is fit to love.”⁵⁸ But Glaucon, repeatedly, seems impervious to this experience, and “in his immunity to shame, Glaucon ... comes to a refusal of philosophy.”⁵⁹

Philosophy, thus defined, is always erotic and ascetical. But because the dialogue’s intention is seldom understood as therapeutic, Lilburn claims, commentators have mistaken Socrates’ psychogogic images for Plato’s political beliefs.

Socrates does not hold the more outrageous political views about Glaucon’s city that have made some commentators see Plato as a totalitarian, but Glaucon certainly is capable of holding them; indeed they lie latent in the fundamental pleonexic desire that shapes his character.⁶⁰

If Lilburn is right, then the commentators he alludes to have not only mistaken Glaucon’s political views for Plato’s, but have failed to recognize what philosophy, for Plato, *is*. Lilburn suggests that these misreadings are inevitable so long as Plato is understood as an architect of philosophical systems. One way this understanding manifests, Lilburn suggests, is the so-called “mouthpiece

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 134.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 134-135.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 135.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

theories” about Plato, which take Socrates’ arguments to represent Plato’s position. This hermeneutic approach overlooks the theatrical nature of the dialogues, taking its form as inconsequential to its meaning.⁶¹ It also ignores the fact that Socrates, despite being Plato’s historical teacher, is also the protagonist in his dialogues, and so must be read as a character in them.

§ Polysemy: Rigor

But even if we resist the impulse to read Socrates as a representative of Plato’s views, we might still suppose that what Socrates says represents *his own* views. Lilburn warns against such reading at the beginning of the essay:

Socrates notoriously advances no positions: his interlocutors complain that he says nothing of his own views while quizzing them repeatedly about theirs (Republic 337a); he admits he is ‘incapable of giving birth’ to ideas (Theaetetus 149b); he states he is incompetent to speak on the nature of things (Republic 337a).⁶²

In other words, Lilburn’s essay begins with Socrates *himself* refuting the interpretations laid upon him centuries later. Reading his images as though they were pieces of an epistemological, metaphysical or political system, according to Lilburn, will always create more confusion than it resolves: “The commentator is left with the task of accounting for the apparent philosophical incompetence of Socrates; he contradicts himself; he is vague; he lacks rigor.”⁶³ Lilburn’s use of “rigor” here is curious, especially when we recall that Socrates, for Lilburn, considers systematic philosophy to be “a retreat from the rigors of authentic philosophy.”⁶⁴ Just as we are invited to discern between Glaucon’s pleonexia and the eros of Socrates, here we are presented with two seemingly antithetical definitions of philosophical rigor. What should we make of this polysemy? It suggests that these two philosophical approaches — therapeutic and systematic — perceive in *each other* a lack of rigor. This points to a profound rift in their understanding of what noetic faculties philosophy ought to

⁶¹ Frank, Jill, *Poetic Justice: Rereading Plato's Republic*. Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2018.

⁶² Tim Lilburn, *The Larger Conversation*, “Turning the Soul Around,” 125.

⁶³ Ibid, 135.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 126.

engage. And we are asked, I believe, to discern between the two. For commentators in search of meaning through systematic analysis, Socrates' images and arguments appear shoddy, "awkwardly rendered doctrines on the nature of reality or the structure of innerness."⁶⁵ For Lilburn, who says these images "need to be suggestive, resonant and true, without being precise," any attempt to understand them systematically is an evasion of what they evoke in the imagination — and of what they might demand of you.⁶⁶

§

Here we turn to another aspect of the dialogue, which, I suspect, implicitly connects to its misreadings: Glaucon's propensity for calculative thinking. Lilburn writes that when Socrates, in Book VII, describes the education of the guardians, "Glaucon is most keen to hear of the applications of calculation, geometry and astronomy to generalship and the conduct of battle (522c–e; 525b; 526c–d; 527d)."⁶⁷ In such moments, this form of calculation reveals, for Lilburn, a disposition "more or less untouched by moral consideration."⁶⁸ Glaucon would rather tinker with the means by which injustice operates than reckon with its interior and exterior violence. Reminiscent of this posture is the kind of thinking Carol Cohn witnessed while working at a think tank on nuclear warfare — how the men who worked there developed a language that sanitized the ethical reality of their work.⁶⁹ Likewise, Glaucon has confused calculation for philosophy, a conviction that "leads him to dream of a polis that sacrifices human beings and human attachment to towering, meta-human ideals."⁷⁰ This is yet another example, for Lilburn, of how Glaucon retreats from authentic philosophy. "One block to erotic unfolding," he claims, "is the conviction that philosophy is the erection of abstract systems and their application in human affairs. This conviction, it appears, is the

⁶⁵ Ibid, 136.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 137.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 131.

⁶⁸ Tim Lilburn, *The Larger Conversation*, "Introduction," XI.

⁶⁹ Carol Cohn, "Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 12, no. 4 (1987): pp. 687-718, <https://doi.org/10.1086/494362>.

⁷⁰ Tim Lilburn, *The Larger Conversation*, "Turning the Soul Around," 125.

paramount obstacle standing between Glaucon and the philosophical life.”⁷¹ Once again, Lilburn draws attention to the presence of something that masquerades as philosophy, but is ultimately a barrier to it. And clearly this mistake — conflating “the erection of abstract systems and their application to human affairs” with erotic philosophy — has profound moral and ethical consequences. Give yourself over too completely to this counterfeit philosophy, and you may find yourself playing Empire, referring to mass murder as ‘collateral damage.’

Lilburn sets up a parallel between Glaucon’s pleonexia and his calculation: both of these postures are mistaken for, and opposed to, genuine philosophy. Glaucon’s pleonexia, which inhibits his awareness of his own limits, allows him to imagine himself as a philosopher. And his habit of calculative thinking is mistaken for the work of philosophy. But what is the relationship between Glaucon’s pleonexia and his calculation? To answer this, we must return briefly to the relationship between pleonexia and eros. There is a curious homology, which we have yet to examine, between these two forms of desire. Despite his insistence on their differences, Lilburn describes both pleonexia and eros in terms of excess and pleasure. Glaucon, Lilburn notes, ridicules the “apparent excess of genuine philosophical eros — its insatiability, its hyperbolic nature.”⁷² Socrates himself describes eros as “insatiable,” and the “source of ‘the truest pleasures’ (586d), indeed the *only* true pleasure (587c).”⁷³ How exactly does this form of desire, eros, differ from Glaucon’s pleonexia? After all, pleonexia is *defined* by excess, an “appetite for more,” which has clearly led to the construction of a “luxurious city.”⁷⁴ And likewise, his avarice, and the absurdities it sets into motion, seem to resemble the “hyperbolic nature” he derides in philosophical eros. What, amongst all these resemblances, distinguishes eros from pleonexia?

⁷¹ Ibid, 127.

⁷² Ibid, 127-128.

⁷³ Ibid, 142.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 131.

But before I try to answer this question, I want to point out what opens up in Lilburn's essay when one truly *asks* it. The apparent similarities between pleonexia and eros — both excessive and hyperbolic, both aimed at pleasure — demand a capacity to discern between them. The importance of discernment to philosophy is a central theme in Lilburn's essay. And we've been tracing this capacity, or lack thereof, in the character of Glaucon. But what opens up here, I think, is the possibility of an interior shift for Lilburn's reader: do *I* know the difference between eros and its counterfeits?

Lilburn offers a subtle, but fundamental, distinction: "Glaucon is so far from ruling his pleasures that it is difficult for him to even imagine a good beyond pleasure's gratification."⁷⁵ Lilburn implies that Glaucon is ruled by his pleasures, and that something about this prevents him from encountering eros. And for Socrates, who was famously celibate, the source of the truest pleasure is a good that lies *beyond* pleasure's gratification. This notion appears strange and paradoxical even to Socrates' potential lovers, who "complain of his unerotic nature."⁷⁶ And certainly it may appear strange to us, modern people in North America, that the asceticism of Socrates, which includes his sexual abstinence, is a genuine expression of the erotic. So what kind of pleasure lies beyond pleasure's gratification? I think it is precisely this *beyond* — which might appear, externally, as prudish — which makes philosophical eros "insatiable." We've already encountered an example of this paradox in Glaucon's perception of Socrates' healthy city. Although Socrates claims it is "good," Glaucon calls it a "city of sows." And because he wishes to see a city with "relishes," this might lead us to think of Glaucon's disposition as *excessively* erotic. Indeed, he lacks the ascetical moderation of Socrates. But Lilburn's reading of Plato rejects this understanding, and instead reveals another side to the paradox.

⁷⁵Ibid, 140.

⁷⁶Tim Lilburn, *Going Home*, "Where Desire Goes," 45.

Desire, for Plato, is constitutive of lack: you can't want something that you already have. Because of this — according to Lilburn's reading of Plato — the most erotic posture is perpetually empty. In the dialogues, especially the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*, Socrates is described as the embodiment of eros. His desire leads him to let go of what he loves in order to love it. He takes up a posture of "attentive, phronetic passivity."⁷⁷ For Lilburn, then, the philosophical eros of Socrates is not self-inflating, but kenotic. He is not, like Glaucon's feverish city, "gorged with a bulky mass of things" (372e-373b), but rather emptied, delivered to "perpetual absence."⁷⁸ And yet this absence, an absence *beyond* pleasure's gratification, is itself an "erotic ekstasis."⁷⁹ The self empties because the philosopher goes out of herself toward a beauty that draws her.⁸⁰ In this erotic abandonment, reverence and delight build.

It is with this understanding of eros that we must approach Lilburn's apparently paradoxical view of Glaucon's pleonexia. He writes: "Glaucon's complaint is not that he is too erotic, as some have argued, but that he is not sufficiently erotic, that he is not genuinely erotic."⁸¹ Far from being an excessive form of desire, Glaucon's pleonexia, for Lilburn, has pulled up short. Although his appetite for more exceeds his own vital needs, the insatiability of eros remains "repugnant" to him because "it brings no honour."⁸² Indeed, eros would leave him with less, not more. Notice how the shape of this misunderstanding, between two forms of desire, resembles that of our discussion on philosophical rigor: Socrates perceives in Glaucon a lack of sufficient desire; and Glaucon perceives in Socrates the same. Externally, Socrates is celibate, his city is modest and simple; Glaucon, meanwhile, is omnivorous, his city full of luxury, and this would seem to imply that his desire is insatiable. But by attending to their interior dispositions, Lilburn discerns between the two:

"Glaucon wants to keep what he has; he prefers his satiety; he wishes to make himself sufficiently

⁷⁷ Tim Lilburn, *The Larger Conversation*, "Turning the Soul Around," 129.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 140.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid, 142.

⁸² Ibid.

esteemed, and he believes he can do this through calculation in politics and war.”⁸³ In this bold reading, Lilburn inverts the notion that pleonexia is fundamentally concerned with “having more,” while acknowledging that behaviour arising from it may appear to be just that. This characterization contradicts, on the surface, descriptions of Glaucon’s expansionist city. We see, instead, that the courage and bravado for which Glaucon is known belies something like fear. His pleonexia, Lilburn insists, is about satiety, not insatiability; he is trying to secure honour for himself, and so is unwilling to undergo the risk of eros. Elsewhere, Lilburn describes the contemplative stance as “a giving up that is an expression of a desire for everything.”⁸⁴ This is the risk, and riddle, of eros. And it is easy to conflate the hyperbole of this paradox with Glaucon’s extravagance. But his feverish city is not an expression of a desire for everything, but rather a desire for *anything* that will gratify. Rather than pursuing what he most needs, Glaucon shies away from it. And he shies away from what he most needs by chasing after what he doesn’t.

This returns us to calculation. Both calculation and pleonexia, according to Lilburn, are retreats from genuine desire. Glaucon’s proclivity for calculation is an attempt “to make himself sufficiently esteemed,” a pre-philosophical eros that reveals, simultaneously, what he most fears and what he most needs: absence.⁸⁵ As Lilburn puts it, “Glaucon fears the bite of loss; what he has he wishes to hold or add on to; his city is rigorous to the point of triumphalism, a garrison against loss.”⁸⁶ Glaucon’s “appetite for more” is in fact a fear of having nothing. Likewise, his calculation — the erection of abstract systems he mistakes for philosophy — is an attempt to prevent loss. Epistemologically, it endeavours to render the world stable, manipulable. Its desire to know the world is not genuine because it merely aims to secure the world for the self. The rigors of this systematic philosophy — its retreat from the world, its refusal of loss — could not be further from

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Tim Lilburn, *Living In The World As If It Were Home*, “How To Be Here?” 18.

⁸⁵ Tim Lilburn, *The Larger Conversation*, “Turning the Soul Around,” 142.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 140.

erotic rigor. And so Glaucon's fear of loss, we might say, *is* his fear of desire. For this reason, Lilburn claims that "Glaucon's calculation is an ersatz philosophy; his pleonexia is an ersatz—'bastard'—eros."⁸⁷

§ Reading Philosophy

Throughout the essay, Lilburn points out the various ways that the *Republic* gestures back toward Homer's *Odyssey*. These include, for instance, its references to descent — how Socrates' and Glaucon's cave allegories both recall Odysseus's initiation in Calypso's cave. This retrieval is related to Lilburn's claim, which he returns to near the end of the essay, that the therapeutic philosophy of the *Republic* should also be read as Socrates's attempt to correct Glaucon's reading of Homer. Glaucon's desire for honour, Lilburn argues, is partially the result of his appropriation of the *Iliad*.⁸⁸ Glaucon understands his thirst for honour as an extension of Achilles's political idealism, and he finds theological justification for his pleonexia in Homer's "depictions of the gods as preoccupied by sex and quick gain."⁸⁹ (As Anne Simpson's reading of the *Iliad* observes, the epic poem is psychogogically instructive insofar as it presents a host of ways *not* to live. It illustrates, in particular, how the heroism of Achilles is fraught with dispositions that inevitably lead to his demise).⁹⁰ And so, building on Simpson's reading, we might say that Glaucon's admiration for Achilles is an indication that he's missed the point of the story.

Socrates, Lilburn argues, attempts to steer Glaucon away from this incomplete reading by exposing him to "the ecstatic, the philosophical, courage of Odysseus."⁹¹ This attempt to correct Glaucon's reading of Homer, then, is also an erotic correction: it nudges Glaucon toward a form of courage he cannot claim to possess. Glaucon's reading of the *Iliad*, Lilburn claims, has not grasped

⁸⁷ Ibid, 142.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 138.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 141.

⁹⁰ Anne Simpson, *Experiments in Distant Influence: Notes & Poems* (Kentville, Nova Scotia: Gaspereau Press, Printers & Publishers, 2020).

⁹¹ Tim Lilburn, *The Larger Conversation*, "Turning the Soul Around," 139.

the erotic nature and shamanic pattern of Homeric myth.⁹² He “has missed the heroic structure of loss, disorientation and painful return home.”⁹³ Once again, we encounter Glaucon’s aversion to loss, his incomprehension of desire — two inseparable maladies. His misreading of the *Iliad* is his Achilles’ heel: he risks repeating the story with his own life.

At this point — just when our discussion might appear the most digressive — we are drawn to a symmetry. As we have seen, Lilburn’s essay repeatedly attempts to correct commentators’ readings of Plato. He insists that their contemporary approaches, which attempt to parse out what they interpret to be systematic claims, are misguided. He notes how the political vision they attribute to Plato is, in fact, indicative of Glaucon’s interior disposition. And now we are invited, after all these exegetical corrections, to consider the dialogue an attempt to correct *Glaucon’s* reading of Homer. What are we to make of this symmetry?

We might approach it by enumerating the ways in which Plato’s commentators resemble Glaucon, or how Plato resembles Homer. For instance, note that Glaucon has conflated Homer’s disposition for that of Achilles, a character within his work. In much the same way, the commentators — those who subscribe to the “mouthpiece theories” — have confused Plato’s political opinions with Glaucon’s (while thinking, of course, that they belong to Socrates). Both readings, in this sense, have failed because they overlook the relationship between the *form* of ancient texts and their therapeutic intention. To read the image of the feverish city as aligned with Plato’s political vision, one must be oblivious to what Plato, through dialogue, is *doing*. Much like Glaucon, the commentators are unable to grasp the psychogogic intention of the feverish city. Much like the commentators’ readings of the *Republic*, Glaucon has read the *Iliad* as a celebration of the very thing it warns against. Both, in other words, have applied a systematic or calculative mode of thought to therapeutic philosophical texts, which formally resist system and calculation. Neither are able to

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid, 141.

conceive of philosophy as ascetical practice. And if we recall that Socrates himself understands this mode of thought to be a “retreat” from genuine philosophy — a retreat with disastrous moral and political consequences — we are invited, I think, to consider how Lilburn’s attempt to correct the commentator’s reading of Plato is itself an erotic correction.

But if we follow this symmetry far enough — and if we go about it in a systematic way — we might run into trouble. Indeed, we might even imagine Lilburn to be casting himself as Socrates. And why not? If we imagine this symmetry to have revealed a hidden architectonic within the essay (Socrates correcting Glaucon’s reading of Homer; Lilburn correcting the commentators’ readings of Plato), then Lilburn does, indeed, fall into place as the analogue of Socrates. But Lilburn himself is critical of such philosophical writing: “A systematic analysis of the soul that does not efface itself breeds a bogus sufficiency, inattention.”⁹⁴ And such a systematic analysis, as we have seen, involves reading just as much as it does writing. In other words, indulging the temptation to read Lilburn’s essay as a “systematic analysis of the soul” (no less one that would seem anything *but* self-effacing) runs the great risk of interpreting Lilburn’s essay in the same manner he warns us *not* to interpret Plato’s dialogue.⁹⁵ This is only a risk, of course, if one understands Lilburn’s essay itself to be erotic. And perhaps the symmetry we’ve encountered suggests to us this much: that the significance of misreading is not only exegetical, it is also ascetical. That is, because Lilburn’s essay does not critique the commentators on their own terms, perhaps it can’t be understood on those terms, either.

And so I would like to ask another question. This symmetry alerts us, among other things, to the significance of reading in the philosophical life. In Glaucon, we see a relationship between how he reads Homer and his interior acuity. And in the commentators — some of whom read Plato’s *Republic* as “a cautionary tale against eros itself”⁹⁶ — we see a similar inability to discern eros from

⁹⁴ Tim Lilburn, *Going Home*, “Philosophical Apokatastasis: On Writing And Return,” 42.

⁹⁵ (Ironically, this posture — from which we could imagine Lilburn refusing any resemblance between himself and Socrates — *does* resemble Socrates’ insistence that he does not advance a position.)

⁹⁶ Tim Lilburn, *The Larger Conversation*, “Turning the Soul Around,” 141.

its counterfeits. Rather than asking what Lilburn's essay means, I would like to ask instead: How should we read it? In a sense, this is an easy question to answer, for Lilburn's essay is itself about how and how not to read philosophy. It repeatedly insists that systematic analysis and calculation are retreats from philosophical eros, and also provides examples of how psychogogic practices and the imagination can turn the soul around. In another sense, though, the answer to this question is very difficult to approach. A certain kind of courage is required.⁹⁷ Why? Because Lilburn's essay, I suspect, is not just about psychogogic reading, but can be read psychogogically.

To see *why* courage is required in approaching his text this way is itself an example of *diaeresis*, interior discernment. It is to see the difference, despite their resemblances, between pleonexia and eros, calculation and philosophy. It is to see these refusals of "authentic philosophy" *as* refusals. It is to see how those who interpret Plato as a systematic philosopher enact, unknowingly, a kind fear. It is to see how that fear — of loss, of esteem, of certainty — resembles Glaucon's. Ultimately, I believe, it is to recognize that same fear in oneself. What, after all, does any of this have to do with the state of the settler soul?

§

Lilburn does not mention settler colonialism in his essay, nor does he draw attention to the symmetry we've been discussing. If his work is allegorical, then it relies on the reader to perceive it *as* allegorical. But is it any coincidence that this parallel is most palpable in Lilburn's discussion of the feverish city? As Socrates constructs this allegory for Glaucon — the city as an image of his own soul — everything depends on Glaucon's willingness to see the image psychogogically. Similarly, as Lilburn attends to the images in the *Republic*, it's up to his readers to make the connections. In other words, to see Lilburn's essay as a psychogogic image is to encounter the form of philosophy, in

⁹⁷ To elaborate, when Socrates imagines the feverish city, he does so to help Glaucon discern, within himself, between goods that are worthy of pursuing and those that are not. If Glaucon were able to grasp the image of the city *as* psychogogic — as a therapeutic device created specifically for him — he might have encountered a soul-turning compunction. But he does not have the courage to make this discernment. In much the same way, I believe it takes courage to read Lilburn's essay — the images it retrieves and the postures it rejects — psychogogically.

oneself, that Lilburn is enacting. What happens if we read Lilburn's retrieval of the feverish city as an image of settler society? No longer a mere artifact of Plato's imagination, we see in it an expression of our own excess and injustice. We see the cities we call home as "gorged with a bulky mass of things," requiring "an army to take land from its neighbours in its appetite for more."⁹⁸ But perhaps, more importantly, we see its relishes for what they truly are: things we chase to forget that we're running away.

Of course, the luxurious city does not perfectly resemble North American settler colonialism. Nor is Glaucon's disposition identical to that of the European settler. There are important distinctions to make. For example, despite the fascistic resurgences in North America, its genocidal foundations, its destructive and delusional self-image, we do not live in a society run by a guardian class, selectively bred in pens. And while the unnerving willingness Glaucon exhibits to identify with Achilles may be evident in some areas of the culture — those who would justify their own greed simply on the basis of their political power — it is a posture seldom so explicitly held. Many of us, I suspect, are more confused than Glaucon: we might consider his brazenness off-putting, even "un-Canadian," all the while living a life of hitherto unfathomable luxury on stolen Indigenous land. In a sense, this posture is less honest, and potentially more dangerous, than Glaucon's. Our violence is bigger and less tangible; we may feel less responsible for it.

Do these distinctions undermine a reading of Lilburn's essay as psychogogic? I don't think so. As Lilburn himself points out, psychogogic images are never meant to be precise, "only sufficiently plausible to beckon desire."⁹⁹ This is why attempting to trace the allegory systematically — to parse out how features of the feverish city correlate, or do not correlate, to the settler colonial state — risks being yet another refusal philosophy. And yet our epistemological allegiances, as European settlers, are so thoroughly non-erotic that it will likely appear far greater an intellectual risk

⁹⁸ Tim Lilburn, *The Larger Conversation*, "Turning the Soul Around," 131.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 127.

to approach colonialism therapeutically. And there *are* certainly epistemic limitations to Lilburn's approach. He's not, for instance, providing a Foucauldian genealogy of the Ancient Greek thought he's retrieving into North American modernity, and thus he tends to emphasize the ascetical relevance, rather than the historical discontinuities, of Plato's thought. In much the same way, he's not preoccupied with the discursive construction of the "West," and doesn't interrogate the role Roman Catholicism played in colonizing much of Europe. Nor does Lilburn grapple with the roots of colonization as would a political theorist: his erotic approach to philosophy, for instance, doesn't attend to the material and economic processes that enabled the emergence of racial capitalism. And yet I don't think his work, although stridently non-systematic, aims to supplant these understandings. But I think it's important, as well, to consider the predominance of non-erotic thought within the North American academy. Lilburn is providing us with an unfamiliar way of knowing. And he's suggesting that our incomprehension of it may be related intimately to the project of settler colonialism itself. That is, it may be an indication of our sapiential poverty. And so without dismissing these concerns, I want to reiterate the ways in which their approach might refuse the demands of a psychogogic reading. As Lilburn points out, an erotic work must be read "with the tentative, expectant, playful mind you would bring to metaphor."¹⁰⁰ In other words, attempting to map out the numerous implications of comparing "the feverish city" to North American settler society would likely produce an understanding *other than* the one such an allegory aims to provoke. That is, if one approaches Lilburn's allegory with calculation, one will likely end up, like Glaucon, unable to receive its erotic meaning. As Lilburn puts it, "To refuse the playfulness, the tall taleness, the gestural nature, of such a reading [is] like not getting the joke, not seeing the joke as a joke and thus not receiving the jolt of it."¹⁰¹ Of course, the joke Lilburn is telling isn't meant to be funny, but

¹⁰⁰ Tim Lilburn, *The Larger Conversation*, "Thinking The *Rule* of Benedict Within Modernity," 166.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

it is meant to be understood.¹⁰² And such understanding requires the imagination's leap; we may have to forfeit, if only for a moment, our attempts to prove or explain it. Just like Lilburn's experience on the steps of the Regina Public Library — when he saw himself, like the city, floating — the truth of a metaphor, the humour of a joke, the spiritual poverty of a culture, may not be verifiable.¹⁰³ Does this mean they're not real?

Let me approach this differently: If we are capable of recognizing the violence of settler colonialism — both toward Indigenous peoples and their lands we trespass on — then why would our approach to understanding it not prioritize healing? Lilburn's therapeutic philosophy suggests one possible answer: we cannot truly perceive the residue of this violence in ourselves. Why would anyone attempt to heal a wound they don't know they have? Not everyone, of course, will welcome the notion of settler poverty, of a psychic wound at the foundation of the culture. As Michael Lista protests in a review of Lilburn's poetry: "Like a prescription drug commercial, Tim Lilburn's *Assiniboia* gloats about its triumph in treating the disease we should assume we have."¹⁰⁴ Referencing this review in "A Poetics of Decolonization," Lilburn notes that Lista seems to view his fixation on such a disease as a form of hypochondria — "that the feeling of disconnection or unease or unfinished business, which I, and I think others, feel, is just made up or imagined."¹⁰⁵ So the gap, it would seem, between Lilburn's experience of unsettledness and the psychic condition of settler culture, is contested.¹⁰⁶ And just like an allegory, there may be no way of determining its truth apart from grasping it yourself.

¹⁰² The irony here, of course, is that while I'm trying to defend this form of reading, I'm treading *very* close to explaining the joke myself.

¹⁰³ Seeing settler poverty is, in many ways, like seeing a ghost: where, after all, are our elders? Where are our stories?

¹⁰⁴ Michael Lista, "Assiniboia, by Tim Lilburn," *On Poetry* (The National Post, April 27, 2012), <https://nationalpost.com/afterword/michael-lista-on-poetry-assiniboia-by-tim-lilburn>.

¹⁰⁵ Tim Lilburn, *The Larger Conversation*, "A Poetics of Decolonization," 191-192.

¹⁰⁶ It's worth noting that Lilburn himself, in the face of the marginality of his concerns, admits to wondering if this is not the case. In his essay "Mostly on Prayer" he writes: "I have found no sure way around the fear that what I complain of may be hypochondria, and my treatments, right up to the kitchen table self-administered surgeries on the self-in-the-world may be monstrous follies of self-dramatization. I have no pressing sense this is the case, but can't deny that these are plausible doubts" (*The Larger Conversation*, 58).

Indeed, it's one thing to see how the feverish city — with its expansionism, its opulence, its ravenousness — mirrors the injustice of settler colonialism; quite another to realize that you yourself have a fever. But what happens if we allow ourselves to read Lilburn in this way? We may see Glaucon's interior dispositions in our own desire for more, which is in fact a preference for satiety and comfort. We may see his pleonexia as our own fear of loss, our frantic retreat from the good life. And we may see that Lilburn's essay as an image includes our modern commentary and confusion, our inability to recognize our mistakes *as* mistakes. The extent to which we misread Plato, Lilburn's essay seems to suggest, reveals the extent to which we're in need erotic correction. Misreading as malformation.

Lilburn's assessment of the poverty of the settler soul in "Turning the Soul Around" is oblique, but elsewhere he addresses directly the connection between erotic misalignment and the settler's inability to settle. In the introduction to *Going Home*, for instance, he claims that "the European mind, the shape of this longing ... has not settled in North America during the extended period of colonial occupation, nor can it ever, unless an unimaginable amount of interior or philosophical work is done."¹⁰⁷ Yet the oblique approach of "Turning the Soul Around" is, I think, an attempt to enact that work. It is an essay that simultaneously retrieves erotic philosophy and offers erotic correction through its psychogogic reading. *Look what happens to a culture*, it seems to say without saying, *that cannot understand its own foundational texts*.¹⁰⁸ And as we've seen through the example of Glaucon and Plato's commentators, such incomprehension — which is an expression of our poverty — inhibits our capacity to begin this interior work. Why? Because we don't recognize the need for it. Thus the difficulty of this comes, in part, from an inability to discern between longing's many shapes. If our understanding of desire, like Glaucon's, cannot "imagine a good

¹⁰⁷ Tim Lilburn, *The Larger Conversation*, "Mostly on Prayer," 59-60.

¹⁰⁸ It's worth acknowledging here, of course, that Lilburn's reliance on "the West" could be critiqued as carrying its own colonial residue. Why should we consider the ancient Greeks, one might ask, the cultural forebears to Europeans of, say, Northern European dissent?

beyond pleasure's gratification,"¹⁰⁹ if the only shapes of desire we know are in fact erotic misalignments, then how are we to recognize the shape of desire we most need? This is why Lilburn claims that a "rejuvenated comprehension of longing ... is the only way home for us."¹¹⁰ Because the home our unexamined desires have constructed is no home at all. It is a febrile exile — of ourselves and others — from what human beings most need.

§ Polysemy: Pleasure

Discernment is the pleasure of polysemy. What appears identical must be sensed, interiorly, as distinct. Rigor as distinct from rigor; courage from courage.

In her dissertation on Plato's *Republic*, Hannah Hintze writes that "pleonexia *means* the failure of any distinction between necessary and unnecessary goods and pleasures."¹¹¹ Homogeneity, we might say, is produced by omnivorousness — a shape of desire that lacks discernment. When distinct things appear to us as identical, the problem is not exterior, but interior. The problem is erotic. But how then do we know if things *are* distinct? Indeed, the omnivorousness of pleonexia is itself a counterfeit, a "bastard" eros. Perhaps it is where discernment, for us, must begin.

The pleasure of *diaeresis* is not a relish, but rather a good "beyond pleasure's gratification."¹¹² And this pleasure, however painful, allows discernment to deepen. Philosophy becomes distinct from philosophy; settling, from settling.

§ Floating Hunger

Lilburn's approach to the condition of the European settler attends to a different psychic layer of than most scholars of settler colonialism. Theorists like Patrick Wolfe, who claim that the homemaking project of settler colonialism always expresses a "logic of elimination" — the need for the erasure and expropriation of Indigenous people and land — do so by attending to historical and

¹⁰⁹ Tim Lilburn, *The Larger Conversation*, "Turning the Soul Around," 140.

¹¹⁰ Tim Lilburn, *Going Home*, "Introduction," 3.

¹¹¹ Hannah Hintze (The University of Chicago ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2009), 106.

¹¹² Tim Lilburn, *The Larger Conversation*, "Turning the Soul Around," 140.

political structures and processes of power.¹¹³ This work, however vital, is not able to answer the question of *why* this logic of elimination is inherent to settler colonialism. And because Lilburn's erotic prose does not offer the kind of answer we tend to look for — that is, a form understanding that keeps its implications at arms-length — it allows for a shift in our understanding of ourselves and where we live. By refusing a form of philosophy to which we've grown accustomed, Lilburn opens the possibility for European settlers to encounter our poverty, our floating hunger, at the depth it resides.

Beneath the smoothness, the relative fine running of late capitalism, I imagine a disturbingly vast inchoate hunger, unpleasantly savourable, attendable. I imagine we are all floating, moaning with loss, pining, without being able to name this telos, for self-completing beauty and home. No matter how we spend our days, no matter what sentences we form at work, what acts we fashion, this is where we truly live; this floating hunger holds the names that are our names beneath our public names. (Think of decades of German nights crowded with Holocaust dreams, often unremembered at daybreak.) We are floating in the places where we live, as we work the thin living that comes with squatter rights on the crust of global commercial culture.¹¹⁴

Lilburn claims that this floating hunger — which lies beneath the “smoothness” of the placelessness we call home — however vast and unnamable, is nonetheless attendable. But how to approach an unremembered nightmare? How to find your way home when you don't know what to look for? These are good questions, and I think Lilburn's essay offers, by example, a possible answer. But if we are looking for a technical solution, or indeed a technological solution, our asking may not be genuine. We might still not recognize the problem we're trying to solve. And ours is a poverty only deepened by our obsession with a quick fix. But to *attend* to this hunger, to savour it, however unpleasant, is different than acting it out. It allows us to see the game we've been playing, the things we've been chasing, for what they are. To see the poverty of our privilege.

¹¹³ Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006), 387.

¹¹⁴ Tim Lilburn, *The Larger Conversation*, “Mostly on Prayer,” 60.

§

What does it mean that the settler cannot settle?

The polysemy speaks to the difficulty, and importance, of discernment. How can we tell eros from pleonexia, philosophy from calculation, desire from fear? And what are the consequences of our inability to do so? It also points to a fretfulness, or disease, beneath our claims to be at home. Not knowing who or where we are, we endlessly displace ourselves and others.

And the paradox, it turns out, is nothing other than the riddle of desire. It tells us that our appetite for more is in fact a fear of loss, and that those who pursue honour and luxury are not erotic enough. It tells us, conversely, that the insatiability of eros looks, from the outside, like modesty,¹¹⁵ and that true fulfillment lies not in gorging ourselves, but in “perpetual absence.”¹¹⁶

§

That summer afternoon in Regina, Lilburn saw himself in the city, his soul written large, floating. It was a moment that turned his soul around, an insight that Socrates tries, in the *Republic*, to provoke in Glaucon — which he does not have the courage to face. If he could see beneath the resplendence, convenience, and wealth of the feverish city, if he could truly see himself, he’d know that the living is thin.

Perhaps it's our inability to see ourselves in Glaucon that makes us most like him. As he defends his omnivorousness, his fear of loss disguised as prowess, he erodes his capacity for discernment. The sameness this produces, a retreat from philosophy and the world itself, is a violence beyond comprehension. It is an old story — one we seem, like Glaucon, to have drastically misread. Lilburn's essay insists that without a corrected reading, a turn toward eros, the settler's hunger will wander endlessly. So much depends upon this return, not just our *sense* of being settled. Because starving people, they say, mistake many a thing that is not for food.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 127-128.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 140.

Anachoresis: Leaving The World To Enter It

An Elder said: The reason why we do not get anywhere is that we do not know our limits, and we are not patient in carrying on the work we have begun.¹

– *The Wisdom of the Desert*

Withdrawal from the world means two things: the withering away of our obsessions and the revelation of the life that is hidden in Christ.²

– St. Theodorous

My monastery ... is a place in which I disappear from the world as an object of interest in order to be everywhere in it by hiddenness and compassion.³

– Thomas Merton

In the first chapter, I examined Glaucon’s willingness to live as though life were a game of *Settlers of Catan*. Although his disposition looks rapacious from the outside, untroubled by the thought of plundering the land of others, it arises from a fear of loss. Far from being an expression of eros, his adoration of the limitless will is a *retreat* from desire. And, as I will argue in this chapter, it is also a retreat from the world.

It may seem counterintuitive, then, that Lilburn proposes to address this colonizing retreat from the world with another kind of retreat. And much like the distinction between pleonexia and eros, the task of discerning between these two forms of retreat can be difficult. Indeed, the retreat Lilburn proposes, called anachoresis, refers to the early Christian monastics who withdrew from the world and into the desert. Isn’t withdrawing from the world, we might ask, precisely the problem? But as we will see, anachoresis, what Lilburn calls the gift of withdrawal, is not a retreat from eros, but rather from its counterfeits. He calls it a “retraction of the ego with its stickiness, its credulity and omnivorous appetite.”⁴ In other words, anachoresis is an ascetical retreat, a gesture capable of correcting, among other things, omnivorousness.

¹ Thomas Merton, *The Wisdom of the Desert: Sayings from the Desert Fathers of the Fourth Century*. (New York: New Directions, 1970), 24.

² Quoted in Martin S. Laird, *A Sunlit Absence: Silence, Awareness, and Contemplation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

³ Thomas Merton, Preface to Japanese Edition of the Seven Story Mountain (Trappist, Ky: Abbey of Gethsemani, n.d.).

⁴ Tim Lilburn, *The Larger Conversation*, “Faith and Land,” 215.

Lilburn describes withdrawal as an interior labour. And he places it alongside two other forms of soul work necessary to the task of “living deeply in place.”⁵ He writes: “A hard, almost unimaginable labour of retrieval, withdrawal and unmodern attention awaits anyone who wishes to stay within the Western tradition and settle truly where she is.”⁶ Upon reading this claim — even if we accept Lilburn’s insistence that the European settler must try to “settle truly where she is” — we might be left with a question: how, exactly, is “retrieval, withdrawal and unmodern attention” involved in the act of settling? Indeed, it’s almost impossible to place these maneuvers within contemporary political discourse concerning decolonization. His approach to “settling” is not primarily concerned with land repatriation or anti-colonial political struggle. Instead, Lilburn is approaching decolonization at what he calls the “orphic band” of settler experience: the site where the soul meets its own cultural inheritance and its separation from the land.⁷ The ideas Lilburn puts forward here are atavistic; they live somewhere in the margins, or the forgotten past, of the culture. These esoteric qualities, in Lilburn’s later work especially, have been lamented by some critics. Emory Shaw, for instance, claims that Lilburn’s thought and prose in *The Larger Conversation* “obscure the decolonizing premise of the book.”⁸ Abigail Klassen, on the other hand, suggests that the difficulties of grappling with these ideas speak to the depth of the epistemological project itself.⁹ Lilburn takes it even further: “These are, I admit, peculiar ideas in our particular cultural context. This is a good sign for the ideas. The strangeness indicates the philosophical standing of the ideas.”¹⁰ Here Lilburn suggests that the difficulty of understanding these ideas, of imagining the labours we must take up, announces a promising unlikeness to the culture we inhabit. Indeed, they may indicate the degree to which his thought has withdrawn from its values. If Lilburn is right, then it is of utmost

⁵ Ibid, 214.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid, “The Ethical Significance of the Human Relationship to Place,” 13.

⁸ Emory Shaw, “The Larger Conversation: Contemplation and Place by Tim Lilburn,” *The Goose* 17, no. 1 (2018), <https://scholars.wlu.ca/thegoose/vol17/iss1/22>: p. 2-3.

⁹ Abigail Klassen, “The Larger Conversation: Contemplation and Place,” *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies* 38 (2018): p. 223.

¹⁰ Lilburn, Tim, *The Larger Conversation*, “Faith and Land,” 216.

importance, if we want to understand his work, that we attend to the ways in which we don't.

Because such incomprehension may dwell in the very place our healing must begin.

But ultimately it is the *necessity* of this interior labour, not its strangeness, that will compel us to take it up. And here Lilburn anticipates a more fundamental question:

Why would anyone want to pick up this deep work? Why not just head for the world of continental and global trading and consuming systems, where everything is carefully straightforward and encouragingly, universally the same, and nothing requires a penetrating gaze? Everything there, in fact, shuffles off such a look, gives it back with a kind of unintended honesty; there is nothing within the objects in that context or their arrangement that can hold the full weight of our affections, and so the things, with a sort of eerie truthfulness, shake off our complete love, leaving us interiorly unhoused, exactly nowhere.¹¹

The alternative to the labour of withdrawal, Lilburn suggests, is simply life in the world as we know it. But it's important to emphasize that Lilburn is not simply offering a critique of global capitalism. Instead, he's giving language to something seldom perceived, let alone discussed, among European settlers: the sapiential poverty of the culture. In this world, the world of global commercial culture, the specificity of things blurs together. And with their disappearance, the "full weight of our affections" evaporates, too. In this warm confusion, this floating cathedral, our looking becomes thin.¹² The resulting malaise, modernity's crisis of meaning, is fundamentally a crisis of soul. And just like Glaucon, we may prefer this life to the one Lilburn is proposing, even after seeing its consequences. We may choose satiety, the wealth of self-direction and distraction, over erotic poverty.

But there is an enormous difference, which we have yet to examine, between Glaucon's predicament and that of the European settler. While his feverish city is a projection of his soul, ours, we might say, is real. The buildings we inhabit, the flows of information and capital we relay,

¹¹ Ibid, 215.

¹² The phrases "warm confusion" and "floating cathedral" are borrowed from lyrics by the musical group Timber Timbre. They come from the songs "Grand Canyon" and "Floating Cathedral," respectively.

the images we consume (or that consume us), are not merely interior phenomena. They comprise the world we live in. And so the conundrum I would like to address in this chapter is this: if we awaken to a desire to come home to the land, we do so from within a culture that was built on its destruction and neglect. How to be where one is within a culture that places us “exactly nowhere”? What must we leave behind? In response to this dilemma, Lilburn insists that any movement into another world requires a labor of extrication, of withdrawal.

§ Anachoresis

In the 4th century, just as Christianity became the official religion of the Roman empire, thousands of men and women withdrew from its cities and into the deserts of the Eastern Mediterranean. Once there, these eremites — people of the desert — took up an interior journey, both solitary and communal, that would become the tradition of Christian monasticism. They understood the world they left behind as filled with distraction, restlessness, and pleasure. And so their journey into the desert — an ascetical life that stripped the monks of their “worldly” dispositions — involved the cultivation of attention and desire.

This life they took up, its interior movement, informs Lilburn’s proposed retreat from technocratic modernity. Once again, Lilburn’s reliance on ancient ascetical knowledge to address a modern condition might appear strange to us. And just as with his reading of the *Republic*, it’s important to consider the historical gulf between the world of these early Christian monks and that of colonial modernity. But it is prudent, too, to consider some similarities. As Douglas E. Christie has observed,

The ancient monks had a sober and honest understanding of how extensively the fabric of their world had become torn and frayed. The harshness of the late Roman empire had reduced entire communities to fragmented, impoverished

places and this apocalyptic reality profoundly shaped the monks' understanding of their contemplative vocation.¹³

Like the desert monks, part of the psychic labour Lilburn proposes involves withdrawing from a fragmented, apocalyptic world. But the peculiarity of such a posture will draw a host of questions: Won't withdrawing from the world simply add to the fragmentation? How can you retreat from the world without neglecting your responsibility to it? And where in the world would you go?

This essay is an attempt to sharpen the distinctions, through Lilburn's paradox, between two forms of withdrawal: that of the Christian ascetical tradition from the world, and that of North American settler society from the world it both relies on and ignores. Throughout, I play with and stretch Lilburn's paradox, placing it in conversation with a variety of thinkers within the Christian contemplative tradition. Although the concept of withdrawal is not central to Lilburn's work, I use it to draw out various elements of his thought in relationship to land and technocracy. Anachoresis, then, takes on a host of meanings: an interior withdrawal from distraction, a retreat from technocratic rationality, and an estrangement from settler culture. By engaging Lilburn's work in this way, there is a risk of distorting his own emphasis on withdrawal — which does not explicitly trace the concept through the connections I make here. But I suspect that through these different inflections of Lilburn's paradox, we can start to better perceive the contours of the crisis we inhabit as well as the shape of the work we need to make it through.

§ Polysemy: Exile

In the last chapter, I claimed that the home our unexamined desires has fashioned is in fact a state of exile. And I think Lilburn's use of "exile" is a helpful illustration of the paradoxes I examine in this chapter and the next. In the Afterword to *Desire Never Leaves*, Lilburn uses "exile" twice. The first time concerns the estrangement of European settlers from the land they live on, and the

¹³ Christie E., Douglas, *The Blue Sapphire of the Mind*, "Immersion in a Larger Whole: Notes Toward a Contemplative Ecology," 14-15.

possibility of “returning from the exile they themselves shaped.”¹⁴ Then, just two paragraphs later, Lilburn claims that poetry can be an act of “homesteading” because “it constantly edges toward ekstasis, a bewildering, somewhat destabilizing, yet vivifying exile from oneself.”¹⁵ These uses of the word exile are clearly divergent — one referring to an estrangement from land, the other an erotic flight from oneself — but their meanings also converge. Indeed, the latter form of exile, brought about through poetry and contemplation, appears to be Lilburn’s remedy to the former.¹⁶

Another example of Lilburn’s use of “exile” will help bring into focus the paradox of withdrawal. Reflecting on his relationship to the Moosewood Sandhills, Lilburn writes:

The strangeness of the place, its marginality, bareness, taught me slowly that the manner in which I previously had thought and looked had placed me in a state of exile in the world. I wanted an escape from this condition, wanted some way into the long grass, poplar stands and low hills where I live.¹⁷

The shape of the thought in this passage, strange as the land it describes, is an image of the paradox of withdrawal. The remoteness of the Moosewood Sandhills alerts Lilburn to a distance he was unaware of — so easy to overlook or collapse — between himself and the world. He describes this as a state of exile — a sense of his own incapacity to think and see the land in such a way that would afford him citizenry in it. But in the final sentence, the movement of the thought makes two sharp twists: “I wanted an escape from this condition, wanted some way into the long grass, poplar stands and low hills where I live.”¹⁸ Lilburn frames his desire to be where he lives as an “escape” from a condition of exile. But this escape — although requiring a form of withdrawal — is not a retreat from the land itself; somehow, it is a way *into* it.

So anachoresis is paradoxical because it has a positive polarity: one withdraws from the world in order to enter it. In his most explicit rendering of this paradox, Lilburn writes:

¹⁴ Tim Lilburn, *Desire Never Leaves: The Poetry of Tim Lilburn*, ed. Alison C. Calder (Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2007), 46.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 47.

¹⁶ I examine this paradox at greater length in the next chapter on home and homelessness.

¹⁷ Tim Lilburn, *Living In The World As If It Were Home*, “Afterword,” 88.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Autochthonous ascesis is convivial practice, which includes the non-human. Such pandemic conviviality constitutes unusual behaviour, a heterodoxy of praxis that sets one to the side: to go to the world, you must leave the “world” of apparently sustaining meanings and observances, otherwise you are engaged with the merely scenic.¹⁹

Lilburn is suggesting, among other things, a way of entering the world as something other than a tourist. Anachoresis is a movement that does not convert beauty into something “merely scenic.” There’s no guided tour, and you may not even be able to return home. So this retreat from the “world,” for Lilburn, signals a kind of marginality. You leave behind the “apparently sustaining meanings and observances” which constitute it, and so find yourself “to the side.” You find community, against all odds, in the desert. But even if one desires to enter the world, how to leave “the world” behind? Is such a movement even possible? And what, exactly, does it involve?

§ Turning Away

The withdrawal of the early monks, of course, was a physical exile from the world. They left the cities — and often their families and careers — in order to enter the surrounding desert. But this withdrawal, while physical, was also understood as a spiritual retreat. The monks withdrew not only into the desert, but also into themselves. In fact, the ancient Greek word for desert — ἐρήμος, *eremos* — is the etymological root of “hermit.” Eremos, as Kim Haines-Eitzen writes in *Sonorous Desert*, “could refer to a deserted place, a wilderness, a desert, but it could also refer to a person’s state of aloneness or being in solitude.”²⁰ By withdrawing from the distractions of the inhabited world, the monks entered the desert of their own solitude. This ancient indeterminacy between place and soul courses through Lilburn’s work. For instance, although Lilburn’s withdrawal is a labour of living deeply in place, he insists that entering the desert need not “involve a physical change in one’s life.”²¹ And yet, to withdrawal *is* to enter a different world. (Think of the last time

¹⁹ Tim Lilburn, *The Larger Conversation*, “Contemplative Experience; Autochthonous Practice,” 204.

²⁰ Kim Haines-Eitzen, *Sonorous Desert*, “Hermits and the Quest for Solitude,” 28.

²¹ Tim Lilburn and Jan Zwicky, *Contemplation and Resistance: A Conversation* (Saskatoon: JackPine Press, 2003), 7.

you saw someone simply looking at something, how unusual this behaviour appears. Where, exactly, were they? And where were you?) “The desert is everywhere,” Lilburn writes, “and everyone must enter it.”²²

So for the early monks, withdrawing into the desert was only the beginning of their journey. Once there, they had to contend with an interior terrain, a landscape teeming with distractions and disorders. This paradox has long been observed in the tradition of Christian monasticism, and recent scholarship has attempted to repurpose it for the contemporary ecological crisis. Haines-Eitzen, for instance, points out that St. Antony, the father of Christian monasticism, “left the noise and distractions of city life for the quiet of the desert, seeking solitude and silence and simplicity, but he found that the desert, too, was loud and distracting.”²³ But while Haines-Eitzen is interested in the paradox primarily in terms of exterior noise and silence, I would like to attend to its interior sense. As Basil of Caesarea wrote: “I have indeed left my life in the city ... but I have not yet been able to leave myself behind ... For we carry our indwelling disorders about within us, and so are nowhere free from the same sort of disturbances.”²⁴ In other words, the silence of the desert, its remove from worldly affairs, became an interior terrain that amplified the monks’ obsessions. In keeping with this tradition, Lilburn describes anachoresis as an *interior* movement. It is a “turning away from what clamours, reaches for attention and splits this attention into a thousand pieces, turning away and stowing this dispersive force in a cloud of forgetting.”²⁵ To withdrawal, then, means turning away from distraction in order to gather attention.

Before probing the question of what, exactly, we might turn away our attention *from*, I want to address the issue of attention itself. Lilburn’s understanding of withdrawal reveals the importance

²² Ibid, 8.

²³ Kim Haines-Eitzen, *Sonorous Desert: What Deep Listening Taught Early Christian Monks—And What It Can Teach Us* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2022), “Prologue,” 2.

²⁴ St. Basil, Roy J. Deferrari, and McGuire Martin R P., *Saint Basil, The Letters* (London: W. Heinemann, 1961), 7.

²⁵ Lilburn, Tim, *The Larger Conversation*, “Faith and Land,” 214. The cloud into which this force is stowed is a reference to the 14th century anonymous Carthusian mystic’s method of prayer, in which all thoughts, attachments and distractions are cast below the monk in order to enter further into the “cloud of unknowing.”

of attention in the unfolding of eros. The erotic life, for Lilburn, *is* a life of attention. He describes contemplative attention as an “alert passivity,” a permeability to beauty edged with desire.²⁶ And for the early Christian monks, contending with temptation and distraction was of utmost importance. Evagrius Ponticus, in particular, developed extensive taxonomies of thoughts that would stir up the passions.²⁷ He was concerned with the way these *logismoi* could disperse the mind’s attention, making prayer impossible. In his book *Antirrhêtikos*, for example, Evagrius observed that when Jesus went into the desert and was tempted by Satan, he did not respond to him in conversation but rather by quoting scripture.²⁸ The early monks used this as a model to prevent their attention from being drawn in and dispersed by afflictive thoughts.²⁹ This dynamic is also evident in *The Cloud of Unknowing*, a 14th century manual on apophatic prayer. In it, the anonymous author suggests to a young monk the repetition of a single-syllable word: “With this word, thou shall smite down all manner of thought under the cloud of forgetting. Inasmuch, that if any thought press upon thee to ask thee what thou wouldest have, answer them with no more words but with this one word.”³⁰ Here we encounter the inseparability of attention and desire. Why are these thoughts, for the author of *The Cloud*, distracting? Because they present themselves as the sheer possibility of *having* something. The clamour of distraction — what St. Antony called “a great dust cloud of considerations” — seems to appeal to a possessive mode.³¹ And so just as distraction splits attention, possession dissipates desire. The contemplative’s task, according to *The Cloud*, is the refusal to indulge this temptation, and instead to return to the word — an emblem of the heart lifted up with “a meek

²⁶ Tim Lilburn, *Going Home*, “Philosophical Apokatastasis: On Writing and Return,” 48.

²⁷ These later became known as Seven Deadly Sins, but despite their popularity — or perhaps because of it — their psychogogic intent seems to be largely lost in modernity.

²⁸ Martin S. Laird, *Into The Silent Land: The Practice of Contemplation* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2009), 34.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Evelyn Underhill, *The Cloud of Unknowing: The Classic of Medieval Mysticism* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2003), Ch. 7.

³¹ Douglas E. Christie, *The Blue Sapphire of the Mind: Notes for a Contemplative Ecology*, “*Prosoche: The Art of Attention*,” (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 152.

stirring of love.”³² Lilburn’s understanding of anachoresis is indebted to this text. For him, the task of turning away is a prayerful act, one in which the dispersive force of distraction is stowed away “in a cloud of forgetting.” In the labour of this prayer, the gathering of attention and desire are inseparable. In fact, as Simone Weil wrote, “Absolutely unmixed attention *is* prayer.”³³ And so this withdrawal from thoughts that disperse attention, from passions that enflame the ego, is a gathering of focus and fundamental desire.

Weaning oneself from the allure of distractions, then, is also a process of disentangling oneself from certain erotic postures — from the “indwelling disorders” that followed St. Basil into the desert. Again, Lilburn calls anachoresis a “retraction of the ego with its stickiness, its credulity and omnivorous appetite.”³⁴ So this process entails a slendering of the self and a detachment from its various impulses. In gathering oneself “into the channel of one eros,” the contemplative allows other enticements “to atrophy, especially ones that are ultimately enervating, vainglory, anger, a taste for lassitude, power.”³⁵ This aim was repeatedly emphasized by the early desert monks. Saint Theodorous, for instance, claimed that withdrawal from the world meant “the withering away of our obsessions.”³⁶ Evagrius instructed: “Cut the desire for many things out of your heart and so prevent your mind being dispersed and your stillness lost.”³⁷ To European settlers in technocratic North America, such ascetical labour may appear extreme, even unnecessary. Do we really need to find “stillness” in order to be where we are? But Lilburn’s retrieval of withdrawal suggests that these concerns address the misalignments at the root of settler subjectivity. Stickiness, credulity, omnivorousness: these postures inhibit in us the capacity to let go, the courage to inquire, and the discernment to pursue what is good. They obstruct what the desert monks called singleheartedness.

³² Evelyn Underhill, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, Ch. 3.

³³ Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, “Attention and Will,” 170, (emphasis mine).

³⁴ Tim Lilburn, *The Larger Conversation*, “Faith and Land,” 214.

³⁵ Tim Lilburn, *Living In The World As If It Were Home*, “How to Be Here?,” 17.

³⁶ St. Theodorous, “A Century of Spiritual Texts,” chap. 17, in *The Philokalia*, vol. 2, trans. G. Palmer, P. Sherrard, and K. Ware (London: Faber and Faber, 1981), 17.

³⁷ Martin S. Laird, *Into The Silent Land: The Practice of Contemplation* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2009), 53.

And in them, we might hear an echo of Glaucon's interior dispositions: his attachment to honour, his dogmatic inclination, and his pleonexia make him unwilling to undergo an ascetical journey.³⁸ Instead of being drawn by beauty, Glaucon's is "a mind that prefers to adore the limitless will."³⁹

The path Glaucon avoided, in favour of limitlessness, is the path the desert monks took up. As Lilburn puts it, their contemplative practice⁴⁰ was developed "so that the self's limitless ambition to care for itself might be disabled."⁴¹ Their lives are a testament to the difficulty of withdrawal, of extricating oneself from the "mised labour" of impulsion and distraction. It is, as Lilburn puts it, "a very slow, very difficult route."⁴² But their renunciation of the world, which drew them into the desert, was also a turning toward what the soul most desires. It was, in other words, a conversion — *metanoia*, in Greek: to change one's mind or posture — a retreat that is a return.

§ Limitlessness

The work of anachoresis was hard enough for the ancient Greeks or the desert monks of Egypt. But now, in North American society, the adoration of "the limitless will" has become something of an organizing principle. It enshrines the technocratic ideologies of settler society. We see this limitlessness politically in our liberal individualism; culturally, in our avidity for distraction; and economically, in our perilous march of progress.⁴³ In *The Unsettling of America*, Wendell Berry responds to an article celebrating the prospect of limitless resource energy. Beneath the author's enthusiasm for the age of abundance, Berry zeroes in on its hubris:

³⁸ And just as we saw in the *Republic*, these qualities are not "interior" in the sense that they have no consequence in the physical world. On the contrary, they manifest themselves as the shape and pattern of our lives.

³⁹ Tim Lilburn, *The Larger Conversation*, "Faith and Land," 214.

⁴⁰ This is a reference, specifically, to Evagrian imageless prayer.

⁴¹ Tim Lilburn, *The Larger Conversation*, "Imagination, Psychogogy, Ontology," 35.

⁴² Tim Lilburn and Jan Zwicky, *Contemplation and Resistance: A Conversation* (Saskatoon: JackPine Press, 2003), 5.

⁴³ It's worth noting that here, and throughout this chapter, I'm playing with Lilburn's notion of "the limitless will" as a way of advancing my own argument: that the limitlessness of technocratic subjectivity signals not only a characterological crisis, but a crisis of perception. And while Lilburn himself does not use "limitlessness" in this way, I believe my argument is nonetheless consonant with his insights.

To have even the illusion of infinite quantity, we would have to debase both finite and infinite, we would have to sacrifice both flesh and spirit. It is an old story. Evil is offering us the world: “All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.” And we have only the old paradox for an answer: if we accept all on that condition, we lose all.⁴⁴

In this passage, Berry alludes to Jesus’s trials in the desert, quoting Satan’s third and final temptation. Satan offers him “all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour.”⁴⁵ For Berry, to refuse the illusion of infinite quantity is to turn away, as Jesus did, from the Tempter. And I think it is to withdrawal, as the desert monks did, from the clamour of thoughts and appetites — from Antony’s “great dust cloud of considerations.”⁴⁶ Berry points out, such a refusal gives rise to paradox: to refuse to fall down and worship technocracy is to *submit* to the limits of the world — one of these being mortality.⁴⁷ Ecologically, this limitlessness has begun to violate planetary limits. This points to the deep meaning (and irony) of Berry’s paradox: because the world’s limits are also our own, a failure to submit to human mortality is, in the end, suicidal.

Against such temptations, the desert monks advised a different path: “The reason why we do not get anywhere,” one elder said, “is that we do not know our limits.”⁴⁸ In this ancient wisdom, as in Berry’s critique, we may sense an understanding of the interior quality of limitlessness.

Limitlessness, they both suggest, is not simply a lack of self-control; it is also failure of humility. To not know our limits is to not know our place in the world. And so in technocratic modernity, to know one’s limits means, among other things, to repair an epistemic hubris on which it’s built. But Lilburn’s work insists that such hubris is not merely characterological: the violence of the European settler does not arise merely from a moral arrogance. Rather the importance of attending to this hubris of limitlessness is also phenomenological. Humility, Lilburn writes, “is another name for

⁴⁴ Wendell Berry, *The Unsettling of America: Culture & Agriculture* (Sierra Club Books, 1986), 83.

⁴⁵ “Matthew 4:7-9,” Bible Gateway (New Catholic Bible), accessed December 5, 2022, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+4%3A7-9&version=NCB>.

⁴⁶ St. Antony, quoted in Douglas E. Christie, *The Blue Sapphire of the Mind: Notes for a Contemplative Ecology*, “*Prosoche: The Art of Attention*,” (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 152.

⁴⁷ Mortality being a limit that some technocrats, like Google executive Ray Kurzweil, have dedicated their lives to transcending.

⁴⁸ Thomas Merton, *The Wisdom of the Desert: Sayings from the Desert Fathers of the Fourth Century*, 24.

permeability.”⁴⁹ In other words, humility restores our perception of the world, “allowing what is there, the *kosmos* itself, say, its nimble order, that lucky, luminous thing, to seep in.”⁵⁰

§ Attention and Will

Lilburn’s answer to the limitless will is the asceticism of prayer. But the interior dynamic of contemplative prayer, and the labour of anachoresis, are themselves paradoxical. The paradox arises from a tension between attention and will: the “alert passivity” of prayer is scattered, not advanced, by the will’s attempt to possess what it desires.⁵¹ That is to say, grasping at endless considerations disperses attention and dissipates desire. I want to examine this interior dynamic by returning to the clamour and “dispersive force” of the mind.

Lilburn describes Evagrian *logismoi*, or thoughts, as “misdirections capable of stirring the passions, blocking attention, truncating eros itself — gluttony, impurity, avarice, sadness, anger, acedia, vainglory and pride (Pr. 6) – all plausible, febrile, enervating.”⁵² What, in the midst of this cacophony of possibility and angst, does it look like to turn away?⁵³ How to find silence and stillness? Perhaps, given the febrile nature of these thoughts, the labour of retreating from them is not unlike fighting a fever: the counterintuitive combat of withdrawing to one’s bed. For Evagrius, Lilburn notes, “anachoresis, turning within, the yielding of withdrawal, wrestles all demons (Pr. 52).”⁵⁴ I am struck by the tension these metaphors suggest: how can a process of “yielding” to something summon the strength to “wrestle all demons”? One might imagine this paradox, expressed in terms of a muscular tension, as a kind of interior martial arts: you use the weight and

⁴⁹ Tim Lilburn, *The Larger Conversation*, “Thinking the Rule of Benedict within Modernity,” 165.

⁵⁰ Tim Lilburn, *Going Home*, “Philosophical Apokatastasis: On Writing and Return,” 48.

⁵¹ After all, receptivity is antithetical to the agendas of a mind entranced by its own ability to manipulate the world.

⁵² Tim Lilburn, *Going Home*, “How Cassian Read,” 81-82.

⁵³ As the novelist Paul Kingsnorth has observed, Evagrian *logismoi* are exceptional drivers of economic growth.

⁵⁴ Tim Lilburn, *Going Home*, “How Cassian Read,” 83.

momentum of your opponent against them. Within such a posture, discipline and surrender somehow coincide: one's discipline lacks ambition, and one's surrender resists lassitude. This, I think, is what Lilburn has in mind when he refers to the labour of withdrawal as an "unclenching rigor."⁵⁵ What kind of rigor does not involve a willful strain?⁵⁶ Is this not what rigor, by definition, implies? But if we recall the rigor of Socrates — his erotic, ambling way — we may be able to imagine something else. And as Simone Weil wrote in *Gravity & Grace*: "Inner supplication is the only reasonable way, for it avoids the stiffening muscles which have nothing to do with the matter. What could be more stupid than to tighten up our muscles and set our jaws about virtue, or poetry, or the solution to the problem? Attention is something quite different."⁵⁷ For Weil, attention is not a faculty of the will: you don't see farther by squinting. In fact, squinting *impedes* your field of vision. Looking as receiving the impress of things, as yielding, is something quite different.

This inner supplication, the yielding attention of withdrawal, is a posture of humility. And this relationship goes back to the beginning of Western monasticism. Take Benedict of Nursia's image of the ladder. For Benedict, the monk's aim is to climb the ladder and "arrive at the heavenly heights."⁵⁸ But in order to ascend this ladder, he claims, the monk's interior posture must be one of humility: "we go up by humbling ourselves and down by praising ourselves."⁵⁹ Just like Lilburn's metaphors, the spiritual labour here is paradoxical, involves a slackening, not a tensioning, of self — up is down; down is up.

Together, these metaphors, I think, encourage an epistemological impasse, or aporia. In their paradox, we may confront the limits of our rationality to grasp their meaning. And yet these metaphors, despite their ambiguity, perhaps most *accurately* describe the labour of withdrawal. This

⁵⁵ Tim Lilburn and Jan Zwicky, *Contemplation and Resistance: A Conversation*, 8.

⁵⁶ Recall, in the first chapter, how "rigor" appears as something Socrates both lacks, from the perspective of systematic philosophy, and something Socrates sees lacking in Glaucon.

⁵⁷ Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace* (London: Routledge, 2004), 169.

⁵⁸ Benedict of Nursia, *The Rule of St. Benedict*, trans. Anthony C Meisel and M L del Mastro (Garden city, NY: Image Book, a division of Doubleday, 1975), 57.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

point itself appears to be paradoxical, as accuracy and ambiguity tend to be mutually exclusive categories. But how much of the fact that they occupy different taxonomical poles — one sharp, one blurry — is a product of our epistemological allegiances? To the extent this is true, it suggests that the epistemological labour of anachoresis departs from those allegiances.⁶⁰

What would it be like if our knowing were synonymous with humility — which is to say permeability? How would the world appear if we managed to stop squinting? For Lilburn, these questions are foundational to any attempt to settle. Writing about the hesychastic prayer of Gregory of Palamas, Lilburn insists that by withdrawing attention from “the multiplicity of things seen,” those things are transformed into what they actually are.

For Gregory, the advantage of the exercises is the avoidance of the mind’s dispersal among the multiplicity of things seen, but it is also a way of restoring those things to their private and providential suchness. They become what they are by not being the object of an appeal to found a life. In their freedom, they then become an unintended source of perfectly sustaining wealth. Hesychasm holds the self back so that it becomes clear that the self’s estrangement from satisfaction is the result of its own interventions. The retraction of self, which is continuous prayer, is cosmos-forming struck emptiness. This is more than philosophically fundamental. It is the origin of the autonomous world itself as it truly is.⁶¹

This passage offers not only an interior phenomenology of withdrawal, but also a glimpse at its philosophical significance. How should we approach it? Despite the enormity of Lilburn’s claim, or perhaps precisely because of its enormity, it might appear (to those of us in the intellectual milieu of the postmodern academy) as either nonsensical or hopelessly naive. How could anyone claim to have

⁶⁰ I wonder: could our difficulty in grasping these metaphors be related to our colonial associations with labour itself? Consider, for instance, the relationship between these metaphors and George Grant’s observation from *Technology and Empire*:

When one contemplates the conquest of nature by technology, one must remember that the conquest had to include our own bodies. Calvinism provided the determined and organized men and women who could rule the mastered world. The punishment they inflicted on non-human nature, they had first inflicted on themselves (“In Defence of North America,” 77).

⁶¹ Tim Lilburn, *The Larger Conversation*, “Mostly on Prayer,” 67-68.

access to the world “as it truly is?” And yet, Lilburn’s exegesis of Gregory’s prayer carries the pressing sense of being informed by his own contemplative experience. Responding to this sense, Jenny Kerber asks whether Lilburn’s poetics encourages a privileging of “mystical revelation” over other modes of knowledge that might broaden, and be more useful for, ecocritical discourse. Drawing from the work of Dana Philips, Kerber identifies this as a troublesome trend in ecocriticism: “Scientific, social, political and other forms of knowledge about nature [...] take a backseat to the recounting of personal mystical experience.”⁶² Kerber’s concern here is that Lilburn’s contemplation of nature — instead of “addressing questions about how it is constructed and negotiated” — risks a kind of essentialism.⁶³ In other words, she doesn’t trust Lilburn’s desire to know the world “as it truly is,” and would rather see his work examine the cultural artifice of its own linguistic interventions. Regardless of what we make of Kerber’s critique of Lilburn, I want to draw attention to the radical difference between their epistemological allegiances — because it helps us to get a sense of the intellectual marginality that Lilburn’s withdrawal entails. And I think this difference is obfuscated in the way Kerber places Lilburn’s contemplative experience among the “other forms of knowledge” she names. Although she doesn’t invalidate Lilburn’s contemplation as a form of knowing, she implies that “scientific, social and political” knowledge are as different from each other as they are from contemplation. But to claim, in this context, that scientific, social and political thought are “different forms of knowledge” would be like claiming that a pickup truck is a different form of transportation than a mini van. There are meaningful differences between them (you’d want the pickup, not the mini van, to move a load of mulch), but without grasping that they belong to one genus of “modes of transportation” — that is, automobiles — we may not even consider others: trains, bicycles, or walking. Thus the scope of what constitutes knowledge is severely distorted by an implicit and unknowing allegiance to vehicular thought (or, following Val

⁶² Jenny Kerber, “‘Looking with Care and Desire Seemed a Political Act’: Environmental Concern in the Poetry of Tim Lilburn,” *Canadian Poetry: Documents, Studies, Reviews* 55, no. Fall/Winter (2004): 93.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

Plumwood, “hyper-rationality” — which Lilburn describes as “the cognitive lymph of turbo capitalism.”)⁶⁴ So while Kerber’s critique of Lilburn’s work is that it inhibits a broadening of possibilities for ecocritical discourse, it ironically narrows those possibilities by failing to attend to the shared epistemological structure of the “different forms of knowledge” she proposes. Furthermore, it’s a strange argument to make within a culture that systematically invalidates or ignores erotic experience (even *if* such thought has more credence in ecopoetics). It’s one thing for the critic to translate an altogether different form of knowledge into academic discourse — which already is quite risky — quite another to insist that the poet *himself* engage in those discourses. Must even the lyric poets subscribe to the culture’s hegemonic rationalism? Is there not a greater epistemological danger — and even a colonial posture — in this intellectual approach?⁶⁵ I’m not trying to suggest, to return to the analogy, that no one should be driving cars (despite the ecological consequences of our dependence on them, they’re undeniably a good way to get around). I’m questioning the priorities of someone who, in a society organized around the automobile, is concerned about how much space pedestrians take up.

I began the last paragraph by asking what it would be like if our knowing were synonymous with humility — which is to say permeability. And I’ve digressed considerably from this question. But this digression, I think, reveals just how marginal Lilburn’s thought is within North America’s intellectual culture. (That is, if we approach it with the epistemic tools at our disposal, we may find ourselves talking about something else entirely.) So I want to return, briefly, to Lilburn’s passage and try not to stray too far from its meaning — which lies at the heart of this essay. Lilburn claims that as attention gathers, the self retracts. In this “continuous prayer,” the limitless will is chastened, no longer dispersed among “the multiplicity of things seen.”⁶⁶ But as I’ve already suggested, the significance of withdrawal is not merely about personal mystical experience; rather, for Lilburn, it is

⁶⁴ Lilburn, Tim, *The Larger Conversation*, “Epilogue,” 237.

⁶⁵ Lilburn, Tim, *The Larger Conversation*, “Mostly on Prayer,” 67-68.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

“the origin of the autonomous world itself.”⁶⁷ Through this prayer, through the withdrawal of attention “from the multiplicity of things seen,” those very things are “restored” to what they really are, to their suchness. The world does not feed us, Lilburn suggests, because of how we hold ourselves in it — our epistemic allegiances and the actions that arise from them. There is a relationship, then, between this retraction of self through the gathering of attention and a withdrawal from the culture that creates such a self. Again, as Lilburn puts it: “to go to the world, you must leave the ‘world’ of apparently sustaining meanings and observances.”⁶⁸ These meanings and observances — mediated by the self’s interventions and ambitions — turn the world into something it isn’t: something to manage.

§ Two Forms of Looking, Two Forms of Withdrawal

Lilburn’s first collection of essays, *Living In The World As If It Were Home*, traces his ascetical journey into the places he lives — Batchawana Bay, the South Saskatchewan River, Quill Lakes, the Moosewood Sandhills. In these places, his sense of exile, of not knowing how to be where he is, appears to be enhanced by the land itself. “Human thinking hardly comes here,” he writes, “the land is turned away, forgotten, blurred, curled in.”⁶⁹ It is odd, “useless land” that shuffles off “the entrepreneurial look, the remodelling gaze,”⁷⁰ thwarting his approach at every turn. The land, in other words, seems inaccessible, withdrawn from human desire and consciousness, because human desire has withdrawn from it.

Halfway through his essay “How To Be Here?” Lilburn refers to the monastic revival of the 12th century — the beginning of what would become the Cistercian Order.

When the monks left the rich abbey at Molesmes in 1098 and came to Cîteaux intending to ‘pursue heavenly studies’ and seek, in that extreme time, a stricter application of Benedict’s rule, they noted with delight that the country they

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Tim Lilburn, *The Larger Conversation*, “Contemplative Experience; Autochthonous Practice,” 204.

⁶⁹ Tim Lilburn, *Living In The World As If It Were Home*, “Author’s Preface,” xxiii.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

entered was ‘a place of horror, a vast wilderness’ that seemed to ‘hear’ their religious hunger. Where else to be now but in these deer-coloured, long grass hills, cactus lands, in the margins of the age?⁷¹

Here Lilburn folds this ancient practice of withdrawal into his own encounter with land. Just as the wilderness of Cîteaux heard the religious hunger of the monks, Lilburn senses a similar homology between his eros and the “scrawniness, lostness” of the Moosewood Sandhills. Just as the withdrawal of the monks from the “rich abbey” places them in an austere locale, Lilburn finds himself in the “margins of the age.” And so while his entrance into this “bleak place” is solitary, it is not of his making alone. Rather, it is inherited; it belongs to an erotic tradition. How far back does this pattern go? The Cistercian revival itself was, in a sense, a re-enactment of the desert tradition. And even the eremites of the 4th century, those who made famous this practice of withdrawal, were themselves inspired by Jesus’ trials in the desert. And were those forty days of fasting and temptation not a mythic reenactment of the Israelites forty years in the desert? Anachoresis, then, belongs to an ancient rhythm. As Lilburn turns toward the forgottenness of the “cactus lands,” his withdrawal is an invocation of the ancients. He is in the company of monks who moved from the city to the desert, from wealth to poverty.

For Lilburn, anachoresis is part of an “inevitable pattern” arising in eras that provoke contemplation.⁷² He suspects we may be in, or on the verge of, such an era now.⁷³ But how this pattern is expressed depends on the times themselves. And Lilburn’s philosophical vision, I think, is a testament to this fact. While his prose retrieves ancient wisdom from the eremites, his appropriation of it is intended to meet the particular crises of colonial modernity. And so his thought would appear just as odd to those monks as their thought does to us. One reason for this is that Lilburn refurbishes the early monastic tradition for land apprenticeship — approaching the

⁷¹ Ibid, “How To Be Here?” 9.

⁷² Tim Lilburn, *The Larger Conversation*, “Faith and Land,” 215.

⁷³ Ibid.

infinity of place as the ancient monks approached God. And yet despite these differences, Lilburn insists that their ascetical labour, their eros, is isomorphic. While the “object” may differ, the reach is the same. To this point, Mark Dickinson, Lilburn’s biographer, offers an insightful description of this period of Lilburn’s career: “What would happen, he found himself wondering, if he laid Christian mystical theology on its side in this particular landscape, and tried to see it through desert eyes?”⁷⁴

§

It’s worth asking — given Lilburn’s approach to the land “through desert eyes” — to what extent Lilburn’s looking transform the land into something other than itself. Is his mythic re-enactment of withdrawal a distortion of the place he seeks to enter? In fact, one could read the homology he traces between the “vast wilderness” of Cîteaux and the “lostness” of the Moosewood Sandhills as reinstating a version of terra nullius.⁷⁵ He even describes the land as “thin and empty,” and says that “[l]ittle thinking rests on it; it is sparse even in this.”⁷⁶ In passages like this, it may be difficult to discern the difference between a courteous look and a colonial gaze. On the one hand, Lilburn is attending to a place that has been deserted by the colonial culture in which he lives; on the other, it does not appear to accommodate the human history of the place. It’s worth noting, though, that Lilburn does allude to Indigenous presences throughout *Living In The World As If It Were Home* — although the peoples themselves, their cultures, are never named. And Dickinson points to these moments without naming them himself: “He came across piles of buffalo bones and traces of worked stone. He wondered at kill sites.”⁷⁷ In these observations, the absent presence of Indigenous peoples is felt not as a psychic weight, but rather as a curiosity. Lilburn’s allusions are less oblique: “This is the delta of a glacial river. It’s good country for game; aboriginal kill sites lie everywhere on it, the bones of bison lying in places just a few feet under the scrawny topsoil. The sandy

⁷⁴ Mark Dickinson, “Tim Lilburn: The Conversationalist,” in *Canadian Primal: Poets, Places, and the Music of Meaning*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2021, 203.

⁷⁵ Tim Lilburn, *Living In The World As If It Were Home*, “Return to the Garden,” 41.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Mark Dickinson, “Tim Lilburn: The Conversationalist,” 203-204.

uselessness of the hills and flats has saved them from the cultivation that goes on all around.⁷⁸ This passage qualifies, in some ways, Lilburn’s description of the land as “empty” with historical texture — both geological and cultural. And yet, while Lilburn acknowledges the presence of Indigenous use, this does not seem to affect his insistence that the land is useless. The place may have been “saved from the cultivation that goes on all around,” but it was not saved from colonization.⁷⁹ In light of this, I’d like to offer the name of its original people: Wápaha Ská Dakhóta Oyáte — the Whitecap Dakota First Nation — whose reserve, for a time, was called “Moose Woods Sioux Reserve.”⁸⁰

Another challenge to Lilburn approaching the land “with desert eyes” has been his reliance on Christianity. As Michael Lista writes of Lilburn’s poetry collection *Assiniboia*, “It’s a bit rich to prescribe as the balm for our colonial wound a kind of nebulous Catholic mysticism, whose eschatological esurience played no small part in colonialism.”⁸¹ Lilburn himself grapples with this tension — noting the peculiarity of his hunch that Christian contemplative prayer can be a way of healing the settler’s estrangement from land. As he puts it: “One difficulty in thinking this thought is that it is clear a source of this chthonic estrangement of the colonist from his spoils has been the non-syncretism of doctrinal Christianity, especially in its missionary forms,” but then he insists that “this is not the sort of causality [he wishes] to explore.”⁸² In other words, despite the difficulty of holding this paradox, Lilburn understands contemplative prayer — what Lista calls “nebulous Catholic mysticism” — as epistemologically distinct from the doctrinal forms of Christianity subtending settler conquest.⁸³ Indeed, his entire philosophical vision insists that colonization required an abandonment of the esoteric elements of Christianity and Platonism. There may be

⁷⁸ Tim Lilburn, “Return to the Garden,” 41.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Thompson, Christian, “Whitecap Dakota First Nation,” *Indigenous Saskatchewan Encyclopedia* (University of Saskatchewan), accessed November 28, 2022, https://teaching.usask.ca/indigenoussk/import/whitecap_dakota_first_nation.php.

⁸¹ Michael Lista, “Assiniboia, by Tim Lilburn,” *On Poetry* (The National Post, April 27, 2012), <https://nationalpost.com/afterword/michael-lista-on-poetry-assiniboia-by-tim-lilburn>.

⁸² Tim Lilburn, *The Larger Conversation: Contemplation and Place*, “Mostly On Prayer,” 60.

⁸³ Ibid, “Nothingness,” 227.

something paradoxical about attempting to retrieve these elements for decolonial purposes, but it's arguably more rich to think that a "balm for our colonial wound" would *not* attend to the site of it.

Lilburn's looking, in respect to the presence of Indigenous peoples, becomes more accommodating throughout his career. Much of his later poetry and prose examines the history of land theft — the "suppressed memory" of which, he claims in *The Larger Conversation*, "fogs all understanding."⁸⁴ And as Dickinson notes, Lilburn's awareness of colonial violence starts to appear more forcefully in *Desire Never Leaves*, where he suggests

that anyone who embarks on a rapprochement with the land must at some point engage with First Nations cultural authorities in the context of actual, lived relationships. He stresses that non-Indigenous people should not come empty-handed to that conversation, but bring with them those teachings and practices from their own culture that have either been lost or buried over the last several centuries.⁸⁵

Now living on the traditional territories of the ɫəkʷəŋən and WSÁNEĆ people, Lilburn has spent more than a decade learning SENĆOŦEN from the poet Kevin Paul — a practice that he claims has informed his approach to, as well as his understanding of, the land he lives on.

The land also will step back from newcomers if we do not bring a sense of colonial history with us, if we do not bear in mind Indigenous people, their epistemologies and dreams, their languages, which the land has fostered. ȚIWEN—have pity—SOS SEN—I am poor—I say to the oaks, arbutus, camas and stones as I walk on the mountain behind the house. Take me in.⁸⁶

§

Although Lilburn did not have this understanding when he withdrew to the Moosewood Sandhills, I think that his retrieval and reenactment of Western monasticism in that place was, nonetheless, an unknowing preparation for his current approach. Because his contemplative labour was an attempt, from the outset, to remedy an epistemological wound. After all, why does the land

⁸⁴ Mark Dickinson, *Canadian Primal*, 226-227.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Tim Lilburn, *The Larger Conversation: Contemplation and Place*, "Epilogue," 239.

appear withdrawn, inaccessible to him?⁸⁷ In *Living*, Lilburn suggests the answer has something to do with looking: “The project to convert what is into product heaves forward almost everywhere; almost everything seems caught in the beam of this attention. While this goes on, I’ll go down to the river; I’ll look.”⁸⁸ There are two forms of looking here, which Lilburn sets in juxtaposition: one “converts what is into product,” the other simply goes “down to the river.” And my argument here — which is different than Lilburn’s — is that they constitute two different forms of withdrawal. The former is a technocratic retreat — of settler society and its foundational epistemologies — from the land, and ultimately a retreat from eros. The latter form of withdrawal, Lilburn’s contemplative look, is a retreat from the former: it retracts from the technocratic gaze, its misalignments and epistemologies, and is an expression of, rather than a retreat from, eros.

Within Lilburn’s form of looking, the paradoxes abound: its reach is yielding; its penetrating gaze is permeable. Instead of changing the world into something else, it allows itself to be changed. And I want to argue that this form of looking, Lilburn’s modern monasticism, is an *answer* to the project of colonialism and the interior postures subtending it. It offers the world a form of attention that withdraws from the “remodelling gaze.” Once again, this intuition is not unique to Lilburn; in fact, it is still alive within the tradition of Western monasticism. Thomas Merton, for instance — a monk who belonged to the Cistercian Order — drew a similar parallel: “There are some men for whom a tree has no reality until they think to cut it down, for whom an animal has no value until it enters the slaughterhouse, men who never look at anything until they decide to abuse it and who never even notice what they do not want to destroy.”⁸⁹ Just like Lilburn, Merton insists that our interior disposition is not just inseparable from the health of the natural

⁸⁷ Here, again, Lilburn is more explicit in his later work about the ways in which this phenomenon is informed by settler colonialism. In the essay “Contemplative Experience; Autochthonous Practice,” he writes: “Because my presence is historically, and actually in this moment, colonial, the land may step back before me—or, to say this more accurately, conditions in me will cause it continuously to recede.” In the discussion I pursue above, I trace this phenomenon largely through his earlier work, but I think it’s nonetheless relevant to the process of psychic decolonization.

⁸⁸ Tim Lilburn, *Living In The World As If It Were Home*, “Author’s Preface,” xxiii.

⁸⁹ Thomas Merton, *A Thomas Merton Reader*, “Silence,” ed. Thomas P McDowell (Garden City, N.Y: Image Books, 1974), 459.

world, but that our misalignments are the very possibility condition for its destruction. And I don't think it's coincidental that Merton's description of these men, furthermore, bears remarkable resemblance Martin Heidegger's notion of enframing. Enframing, a form of thought that Heidegger claims emerged from the physics of the 17th century, converts objects from their autonomous separateness into "standing reserve" — an undifferentiated mass that appears only as a means to human ends.⁹⁰ Today, this form of thinking, which we've already encountered in Lilburn's account of the "remodelling gaze," is culturally endemic. Just like the men Merton describes, enframing — which Lilburn calls a "denial of reality" — is a threat to the world itself.⁹¹ So while it may be true that we cannot see the forest for the trees, our situation, in modernity, is perhaps more dire: we cannot see the trees for the wood.

For Lilburn and Merton, this way of looking at the world is a form of violence. Merton continues: "These men can hardly know the silence of love: for their love is the absorption of another person's silence into their own noise."⁹² Without a degree of quiet in oneself, in other words, we cannot hear the silence of others. And without the ability to perceive others, we cannot truly love. Their noise, which is a kind of inattentiveness, is an interior posture wherein the world exists only insofar it conforms to the their will. What would it mean, though, for one's looking to be loving? Lilburn's description of such a posture, I think, helps us to see how it differs from the noise of these modern men: "This stance must be cultivated. Such cultivation is asceticism and it is one with knowing. It involves submitting to be disarmed and taking on the silence of things, the marginality and anonymity of grass, sage, lichen, things never properly seen."⁹³ Here Lilburn's metaphors resonate with Merton's on two levels. In both passages, there is a sense of laying down one's weapons — be they an axe, a slaughterhouse, or a hegemonic form of Enlightenment thought.

⁹⁰ Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings: Martin Heidegger*, trans. David Farrell Krell (London: Routledge, 2011).

⁹¹ Tim Lilburn, *The Larger Conversation*, "Imagination, Psychogogy, and Ontology," 39.

⁹² Thomas Merton, "Silence," 459.

⁹³ Tim Lilburn, *Living In The World As If It Were Home*, "How To Be Here?" 19.

By “submitting to be disarmed,” Lilburn’s contemplative is stripped of a capacity for violence, and so can offer the world a loving-attention. And notice that for both Merton and Lilburn, this love is described in terms of silence. The cultivation of asceticism, for Lilburn, is intended, among other things, to achieve an “interior state of spreading quiet” which “has a single offspring, *agape*.”⁹⁴ For both writers, a shift in one’s interior noise (one’s relationship to thoughts and desire) is necessary for proper seeing — that is, seeing that restores the world to itself. But there is also an interesting difference: while both Lilburn’s and Merton’s silence affirms the silence of the other, Lilburn’s silence seems to come, at least in part, *from* the other. He takes on, mimics, the silence of grass, sage, and lichen. In doing so, their marginality becomes his. And by moving toward them, he withdraws from the noise of a world that abandons them.

These thoughts help us understand Lilburn’s claim that this looking is “a politics of silence and solitude.”⁹⁵ Considering the depth of the epistemological problems he’s trying to address, Lilburn’s monasticism is strangely countercultural. Indeed, the technocratic rationality of North American settler society — which George Grant claimed underpinned both left and right political persuasions — can make silence and solitude appear *apolitical*. Silence, we say, is violence. And who could be more irrelevant, politically, than a hermit? It’s hard for us to imagine silence and solitude as anything other than complicity. But if Lilburn is right, then the violence of interior noise, and the need to withdrawal from it should be of serious political concern. Not everyone is convinced by such a claim. Kerber, for instance, questions whether Lilburn’s looking and the apophatic gestures of his poetry “constitute a *retreat* from political discourse about nature.”⁹⁶ And while she recognizes that Lilburn’s looking attempts to reverse the appropriative itch at the root of so much ecological destruction, she writes: “What is less clear, however, is how looking can be understood as a political

⁹⁴ Tim Lilburn, *Going Home*, “How Cassian Read,” 80.

⁹⁵ Tim Lilburn, “How To Be Here?” 9.

⁹⁶ Jenny Kerber, “‘Looking with Care and Desire Seemed a Political Act’: Environmental Concern in the Poetry of Tim Lilburn,” *Canadian Poetry: Documents, Studies, Reviews* 55, no. Fall/Winter (2004), 94. (emphasis mine)

act. Can mere attentiveness function in the service of more overtly environmental goals?”⁹⁷ These challenges to Lilburn’s looking, I think, reveal something about the epistemological postures from which he’s trying to withdraw. How can something be “political,” Kerber’s questions seem to ask, without measurably changing the world? Without concretely advancing certain goals? What does “mere attentiveness” actually *do*?

I’ll try to answer these questions, briefly, by attending to Lilburn’s work in *The Larger Conversation*, where he points to the inherently ecological and political consequences of our epistemological postures — which, as we’ve seen, rely on different modes attention. Enframing, it turns out, does not just affect how we see sage, grass, or lichen; for Lilburn, it deeply informs our collective subjectivity. As he puts it, “This violence to the autonomous reality of things bites into human character as well, through its endless, solipsistic repetitions, shaping our ethics, as it deepens our boredom.”⁹⁸ Here we catch a glimpse of how Lilburn’s diagnosis of these interior phenomena manifests materially and ideologically in the culture. Ways of knowing that violate “the autonomous reality of things” (by homogenizing them) lead to solipsism. In other words, when the world is not real to us — and so cannot provide nourishment — then meaning is entirely ours to make. And Lilburn claims that, much like Glaucon’s calculative thinking, enframing erodes our capacity for ethical action. Why? Because if the world only *exists* insofar as it is useful, then our ethics lacks an other. And what good is an ethics without an other? For Lilburn, place affords us a “grateful humility that will build into a complete ethics, for we cannot harm something or someone whose idiosyncratic beauty has become our domicile; and if we cannot harm this, we may begin a habit, or discipline, of not harming in general.”⁹⁹ Furthermore, in Lilburn’s later work, he begins to articulate a relationship between the “idiosyncratic beauty” of things and the subjectivity of those who perceives them. The “violence to the autonomous reality of things bites into human character” not

⁹⁷ Ibid, 89.

⁹⁸ Tim Lilburn, *The Larger Conversation*, “Imagination, Psychology and Ontology,” 40.

⁹⁹ Ibid, “The Ethical Significance of the Human Relationship to Place,” 8.

only because it produces solipsism, but because our identity is shaped by that to which we attend.¹⁰⁰ And Lilburn scales this observation up. When a technocratic culture turns the world into “standing reserve,” when the individuality of things melts away, so, too, does the autonomy of its people. And so the sameness of this world, a world produced by our inattention, leads, for Lilburn, to a “socialized, homogenized narcissism” — a form of collective subjectivity in which differentiation makes no difference.¹⁰¹ With the rise of liberal individualism and its attendant malaise, our identities — fed by a culture that conflates meaning with distraction — become more assertive and less secure. As Heidegger claims, enframing leads to the illusion “that everything man encounters exists insofar as it is his construct. This illusion gives rise in turn to one final delusion: it seems as though man everywhere and always encounters only himself.”¹⁰²

Lilburn’s withdrawal from such looking — from the world of settler society — is an affirmation of the reality of the world. And in a culture starved of meaning, I believe, this in itself is a political act.

Chthonic citizenship requires we bring this sort of contemplative keenness, the optic power of the heart, to the place where we happen to live. If we don’t bring this sort of seeing to our engagement with where we find ourselves, the length of residence won’t bring us home to it. We still won’t know the names of those plants even after a hundred generations: we’ll be filled only with the shimmer and distraction of whatever global commercial culture remains.¹⁰³

For Lilburn, truly to belong to the places where we live, to become their citizens, requires we cultivate the “optic power of the heart.” Which means that this way of seeing, the contemplative look, is not just visual. How does the human heart, alert to its own foundational desire, *see*? Not, I think, with the inattention of the men Merton describes. Neither with the fragmented look of those

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, “Imagination, Psychogogy, Ontology,” 40.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 42.

¹⁰² Martin Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology,” *Basic Writings: Martin Heidegger*, trans. David Farrell Krell (London: Routledge, 2011), 332.

¹⁰³ Tim Lilburn, *The Larger Conversation*, “Faith and Land,” 214.

of us caught in the beams of the culture's distractions. When Lilburn contemplates a particular birch branch near Batchawana Bay, he approaches it with a desire beyond the impulse to reduce it to something *else* — either through sentiment or abstraction. Instead, his eros approaches its utter specificity, what John Duns Scotus called *haecceitas*: “The end of contemplation is not dominance or circumscription, but affective domesticity: the birch branch is not an item of knowledge but where I love, where my look rests in insistent and adoring incomprehension.”¹⁰⁴ The strangeness of this thought, as Lilburn suggests, might alert us to its epistemic and political significance. Seeing in this way is an epistemology of incomprehension, of unknowing: it thwarts the very basis of what we take knowledge to be. Perhaps the world is not as plottable as we tend to believe. Perhaps its meaning, as Lilburn says, cannot be held “in the palm of the mind.”¹⁰⁵ And we can hear this epistemic challenge in the passage above in the music of the language itself. The birch branch, without losing its utter specificity, sheds its tin-eared status as an “item” and becomes a boundariless “where.”

§ Polysemy: World

The paradox of anachoresis — of leaving the world in order to enter it — invites an open question: What *is* the world?

§ The Life That Is Hidden

As I mentioned earlier, despite the connotations of withdrawal — a word we readily associate with fear, separation, and retreat — Lilburn suggests it has a positive polarity. And while in this essay I focus primarily on the labour involved in its negative polarity, the *escape* from exile, it is important to keep in mind that this motion is inseparable from *entrance*. But what, or where, is the world we might enter?

As we've seen, Lilburn's use of “world” is polysemic and non-systematic. He never offers a definition. Take, for example, Lilburn's description of Vallejo's poetry: he claims it “harbours a

¹⁰⁴ Tim Lilburn, *Living In The World As If It Were Home*, “Contemplation and Cosmology,” 27.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

belief that the mind can be well only in a new world, or in the act of constructing one, or in the deep confession of the old one. The mind is in trouble precisely because it does not reside in this world. Residence can begin at any moment.”¹⁰⁶ What’s the difference, if any, between a new world and the old one? What does it mean for the mind to construct one? And if “this world” is synonymous with all three of these, then what’s the point of these vague distinctions? I’m not convinced that trying to answer these questions will help us understand what Lilburn is saying. As Thomas Merton wrote:

When ‘the world’ is hypostatized (and it inevitably is), it becomes another of those dangerous and destructive fictions with which we are trying vainly to grapple. And for anyone who has seriously entered into the medieval Christian, or the Hindu, or the Buddhist conceptions of *contemptus mundi*, Mara and the “emptiness of the world,” it will be evident that this means not the rejection of a reality, but the unmasking of an illusion. The world as pure object is something that is not there.¹⁰⁷

If Merton is right that world is not a pure object — a claim that Lilburn, I think, would agree with — how would it affect our inquiry? How do you look for something that isn’t an object? One possible answer to this would be to interrogate it as a set of contested linguistic discourses; that is, to be vigilant against all hypostatization so as not to enable “those dangerous and destructive fictions” to which Merton alludes. We’ve already encountered this approach in Kerber’s review of Lilburn’s poetry. Writing about Lilburn’s reliance on contemplative experience, Kerber writes that while it “may inspire a kind of wonder for nature in the reader, even prompting him/her to go out and seek similar experiences, it is arguably less successful at starting a conversation *about* nature, addressing questions about how it is constructed and negotiated by different actors on both local and global scales.”¹⁰⁸ Kerber’s preference for discursive reason seems, in part, beholden to a desire to evade essentialist, calcified forms of knowledge. And yet this preference, ironically, ends up treating

¹⁰⁶ Tim Lilburn, *The Larger Conversation*, “Imagination, Psychogogy and Ontology,” 52.

¹⁰⁷ Thomas Merton, *Choosing to Love the World: On Contemplation*, “The Inner Ground of Love,” (Boulder, CO: Sounds True, 2015), 21.

¹⁰⁸ Jenny Kerber “‘Looking with Care and Desire Seemed a Political Act’: Environmental Concern in the Poetry of Tim Lilburn.” 90.

nature as a discursive object — “an item of knowledge” — however distributed, contested, and reflexive it is. This is not, I think, what Merton has in mind when he writes that “[t]he world as a pure object is something that is not there.”¹⁰⁹ So what *does* he mean?

Lilburn’s reading of Vallejo suggests that we do *not* reside in this world, but that we could at any moment. The mind’s health, he claims, depends on this residency. But instead of deconstructing these notions of world, I think it might be more fruitful to hold up an ancient image of it and let our imaginations scramble. In other words, to catch a glimpse of the old world, or a new one, we must perceive our own mind’s separation from it. (This hunch, I think, resembles George Grant’s insistence that “intimations of authentic deprivation are precious, because they are ways through which intimations of good, unthinkable in public terms, may appear to us.”)¹¹⁰ Take Saint Theodoros, whose definition of withdrawal includes both its negative and positive polarities: “Withdrawal from the world means two things: the withering away of our obsessions and the revelation of the life that is hidden in Christ.”¹¹¹ What on earth could we possibly learn from such a claim? What does “the revelation of the life that is hidden in Christ” have to do with the world? And furthermore, why retrieve Christianity in a colonial context so informed by its thought? Merton offered a similar remark about the monastic life. The monk, he insisted, enters the monastery in order “to *live* — to live in Christ.”¹¹² In an essay on Merton’s talks on monastic observances, Lilburn calls this “a truly astonishing, non-empirical, non-rational, non-Kantian observation on cognition, a claim that easily could be misread, caricatured, as piety.”¹¹³ How, in modernity — one might understandably ask — could such a claim be anything *other* than piety? But Lilburn insists that this would be a misreading. And here, perhaps, it might be best to defer to someone steeped in the knowledge of the monastic

¹⁰⁹ Thomas Merton, *Choosing to Love the World: On Contemplation*, “The Inner Ground of Love,” 21.

¹¹⁰ George Grant, *The George Grant Reader*, William Christian and Sheila Grant, eds., (Toronto, 1998), 452.

¹¹¹ St. Theodoros, “A Century of Spiritual Texts,” chap. 17, in *The Philokalia*, vol. 2, trans. G. Palmer, P. Sherrard, and K. Ware (London: Faber and Faber, 1981), 17.

¹¹² Tim Lilburn, *The Larger Conversation*, “Thomas Merton’s Novitiate Talks on Cistercian Usages and Richard Kearney’s Theandricism” 176.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

tradition. Remarkably, Lilburn offers a translation, phenomenologically, what Merton is talking about. No doubt, one may find the translation itself incomprehensible, but perhaps in the tension between Merton's claim and Lilburn's translation of it, we might catch a glimpse, if not of the life that is hidden, then something of the hiddenness itself.

What would it be if one's knowing were to be accurately described as "living in Christ"? It would be the world manifesting itself proteanly, flickeringly, in the theatre of aligned, isomorphic-with-its-nature and of course (to say the same thing), generously dilated interiority, *vita Christiformus*.¹¹⁴

§ Shimmer and Distraction

Let's revisit Lilburn's description of anachoresis. He calls it a "turning away from what clamours, reaches for attention and splits this attention into a thousand pieces, turning away and stowing this dispersive force in a cloud of forgetting."¹¹⁵ As we've already explored, this is an apt description of the mind's relentless production of thoughts, and of the interior withdrawal of the desert monks. But Lilburn is also referring to the "shimmer and distraction" of late capitalism. In our era, more so than any other, this "dispersive force" reaches both from within and from without.

Lilburn's philosophical priorities are not sociological, and so he does not examine the intricacies of the rapid economic and technological shifts in North America. But by attending to interior phenomena, he gestures toward the cost of its frenetic allure. In his essay "Faith and Land," for example, he insists that the mind transfixed in prayer resembles the alert attention of the hunter gatherer. He notes, however, that "few know this sort of attention as an economic necessity now — we no longer need this sort of openness to survive."¹¹⁶ While distraction, within an autochthonous form of social arrangement, might have had lethal consequences, it is perfectly suitable within a technocratic society. This is why, in addition to withdrawal and retrieval, Lilburn notes that the task

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, "Faith and Land," 214.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

of living deeply in place requires a labour of “unmodern attention.”¹¹⁷ Modern attention — fractured, dispersed — is incapable of the openness required to live deeply in place. Aldous Huxley’s view of this predicament, from 1945, is perhaps even more poignant today:

Men have always been prey to distractions, which are the original sin of the mind; but never before today has an attempt been made to organize and exploit distractions, to make of them, because of their economic importance, the core and vital center of human life, to idealize them as the highest manifestations of mental activity ... Recollectedness, or the overcoming of distractions, has never been more necessary than now; it has also, we may guess, never been so difficult.¹¹⁸

This is the world from which Lilburn’s withdrawal must take place, and we may guess that it has since become even more difficult. Because Huxley’s claim that distractions are “the original sin of the mind” — while resonant with the desert spirituality of the Christian monks and their resolve to withdrawal from a turbulent world — contends with an altogether different magnitude of fragmentation: a world *ordered* by distraction.¹¹⁹ The natural resource of this media landscape — what is being harvested — is the same desire-inflected-attention we discussed earlier. The images we consume draw our attention precisely by hijacking eros: it presents us with something we *want*, and promises instant gratification. How does one achieve recollectedness when one’s attention has become standing reserve — razed by our media as forests for wood?

But fractured modern attention is not just suitable for life in late capitalism, it is profitable. Indeed, the structure of North American settler colonialism has become what Herbert A. Simon calls an “attention economy.” For Simon, a “wealth of information creates a poverty of attention.”

¹²⁰ This is because an “information-rich world” implies, economically, “a scarcity of

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 215.

¹¹⁸ Aldous Huxley, “Distractions I,” in *Vedanta for the Western World*, ed. Christopher Isherwood (Nabu Public Domain Reprints, 2012), pp. 125-129, 129.

¹¹⁹ The names for this stage of technological progress have proliferated in recent years. Shoshana Zuboff calls it surveillance capitalism; Herbert A. Simon, the attention economy; Yanis Varoufakis, technofeudalism; McKenzie Wark, vectorialism.

¹²⁰ Herbert A. Simon, “Designing Organizations for an Information-Rich World,” in *Computers, Communications, and the Public Interest*, ed. Martin Greenberger and (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971), 40.

whatever information consumes.”¹²¹ That is, a scarcity of attention. Lilburn’s metaphors, it’s worth noting, do not go this far. Rather, he claims that residents of the West’s erotic poverty “interiorly dine on ... ersatz nourishment trucked in from elsewhere—celebrity, reality TV, managed opinion, and various irritable dissents.”¹²² In other words, Lilburn’s metaphors emphasize the quality, or lack thereof, of the interior food we consume. Although he doesn’t question whether our attention is eating or being eaten, I think it’s worth considering. Because in the age of Big Data, as Shoshana Zuboff, McKenzie Wark and others have made clear, attention *itself* has become a resource — as well as a form of labour. This leads Wark to make the provocative claim that we no longer live in a capitalist society. Wark illustrates this economic transition through Amazon’s artificial intelligence called Alexa, “whose objective is to learn your habits, needs, and desires – and service them.”¹²³ Attention and desire are not just being harvested here; they’re being put to work. And for Wark, this signals a form of labour that we’ve never seen before. She continues: “Your job, for which you are not getting paid, is to train a machine to know what the “human” is when seen entirely from the perspective of consuming.”¹²⁴

These insights, I think, provide a more complicated view of what Lilburn’s withdrawal from technocracy, for most European settlers, will entail. Our residence in this world is perhaps even more totalizing than Lilburn suspects. Moreover, with the advent of digital technology, Heidegger’s observations achieve an added resonance — as if enframing is now parodying itself in the physical world. We no longer merely encounter, everywhere and always, ourselves; we encounter *images* of ourselves. And some theorists, like Jean Baudrillard, would suggest it’s far worse: we encounter ourselves as images. Baudrillard begins his essay *Simulacra and Simulations* by recalling Borges’ story of the cartographers who create a map of an empire so detailed it becomes the size of the empire

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Tim Lilburn, “Thomas Merton’s Novitiate Talks on Cistercian Usages and Richard Kearney’s Theandricism” 176.

¹²³ McKenzie Wark, *Capital Is Dead: Is This Something Worse?*, “Introduction,” (London ; New York: Verso, 2021), 9.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

itself. But given the modes of abstraction and communication in late capitalism, Baudrillard insists the story must be revised.

The territory no longer precedes the map, nor survives it. Henceforth, it is the map that precedes the territory — *precession of simulacra* — it is the map that engenders the territory and if we were to revive [Borges'] fable today, it would be the territory whose shreds are slowly rotting across the map. It is the real, and not the map, whose vestiges subsist here and there, in the deserts which are no longer those of the Empire, but our own. *The desert of the real itself*.¹²⁵

§ Polysemy: Withdrawal

By retrieving *anachoresis*, both as a concept and a practice, from the early Christian monks, Lilburn introduces it to a radically different world. Seventeen centuries separate us from them. This can be the source of some confusion, perhaps especially if it remains, for us, merely conceptual.¹²⁶ But rather than delving into the philology of determining what, exactly, withdrawal meant to the desert monks, what if we attempted to understand it by imagining what it would mean for us? What if we were to supply, as Benjamin put it, “a unique experience with the past”?¹²⁷

In the space between these worlds, the word “withdrawal” takes on a polysemic quality: withdrawal not only as retreat, but as detoxification. Today in North America, withdrawal is most associated with physical addiction to substances, and the often painful experience of weening oneself from them. And yet we tend to think of addiction as afflicting those on society’s margins. But as David T. Courtwright argues in his book *Age of Addiction: How Bad Habits Became Big Business*, addiction has become central to the organization of capital in the 20th and 21st centuries. This principal is so fundamental to the socioeconomic arrangement of modern consumption that Courtwright coins the term “limbic capitalism” to describe it.¹²⁸ Be it oil or opioids, alcohol or

¹²⁵ Jean Baudrillard, “Simulacra and Simulations,” in *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings, 2nd Ed.* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 166.

¹²⁶ Walter Benjamin, Hannah Arendt, and Harry Zohn, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” in *Illuminations* (London: The Bodley Head Ltd, 2015), XVI.

¹²⁷ David T. Courtwright, *The Age of Addiction: How Bad Habits Became Big Business* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press/Harvard University Press, 2021).

entertainment, the new religions of productivity and convenience, or the new sugar of digital technology, addiction is the psychic site where our omnivorousness is most observable.

But it's important to remember that addiction is an attempt, however insufficient, to soothe. What is white settler society trying to soothe? One reason why Lilburn's work is so significant, I believe, is because it offers an answer to this question: "We are apart from the world; unless drugged with distraction, we feel the ache of this. The ache can assume the form of either attention or mourning."¹²⁹ For Lilburn, to be "drugged with distraction" is to attempt to escape our apartness — our unbelonging to land in a disinherited culture. And this escapism, I'm suggesting, is its own kind of retreat. Our addictions are so vast, so deep, that I suspect undergoing a withdrawal from them is a prerequisite to, though part of the unfolding of, so much of the spiritual labour Lilburn envisions.

§ Monasticism and Modernity

Few know the difficulty of this labour better than Evan Bednarz, a former Cistercian novice who lived three years in St. Benedict's Abbey. Arriving in 2017, his entrance into the monastery was, simultaneously, a withdrawal from the modern attention economy. And as a millennial, Bednarz undertook this retreat as a so-called "digital native."¹³⁰

This physical and interior withdrawal from technocracy, for Bednarz, induced a "dark night of sense," which he describes as "the purgation of sensuousness and its disordered appetites."¹³¹ This purgation, in keeping with the monastic ascetical tradition, is a withdrawal of attention and misaligned eros. For Bednarz, this period was plagued with "boredom and emptiness," symptoms of a withdrawal from the addictive and hyper-stimulating tug of digital technology. "It was like colour draining away from my eyes and having to learn to see again,"¹³² he writes. But it was also, for Bednarz, a confrontation with what festered beneath that addiction: the ennui of American culture.

¹²⁹ Tim Lilburn, "Two Books About Love," *The Fiddlehead* 199, no. Winter (1999), 91.

¹³⁰ The racial / territorial inflection of this term, I think, should alert us to the extent to which we inhabit a digital landscape, one that seems to generate obliviousness to the land it relies on.

¹³¹ Evan Bednarz, "Field Notes From the Noviciate," *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 54, no. 3 (2019), 306.

¹³² *Ibid.*

Like Lilburn, Bednarz points to a spiritual malaise that *informs* our technological obsessions. And he argues that his generation, in particular, “is marked by a specific desire to be interesting, having at our disposal previously unimaginable means with which to sublimate this free-floating anxiety into satisfying self-image.”¹³³ Because of this, the process of withdrawal, for Bednarz, is not just a turning away from the glare of screens, but a disappearing of self. By retreating from a world in which, as Heidegger wrote, “man everywhere and always encounters only himself,” he encounters precisely the dread and ambiguity that enframing seeks to eliminate.¹³⁴ Bednarz does not have enframing in the cross-hairs of his critique of secular modernity. And yet his assessment of American culture seems aligned with Lilburn’s insight about the ethical consequences of enframing.

As more and more choices abound, more ways to connect with and engage the world, without a moral center one becomes passive in the world’s disassembling, forced to retreat into oneself because one cannot refer or relate to anything outside oneself. One’s moral gravity becomes synonymous with self-affirmation, and any means that serve this become *de facto* good.¹³⁵

In this passage, Bednarz articulates a technological retreat endemic to American culture — one he’s trying to retreat from. And through it, he arrives at an insight similar to Lilburn’s about the ethical consequences of solipsism. Of course, without being able to “refer or relate to anything outside one’s self,” one is not just incapable of a genuine ethics, one is also hopelessly alone.

For Bednarz, digital technology presents us with this paradox: in a time of unprecedented connectedness, we’ve never been more lonely. This idea is almost cliché today, hardly controversial, and yet we remain “passive in the world’s disassembling,” incapable of turning away. How, though, one might ask, can solitude be a viable solution to loneliness? Is withdrawing to a monastery, or an inner desert, really necessary? There are many ways to answer this, some of which give rise to more paradoxes (monastic anachoresis, as Douglas E. Christie notes, suggests an “integral relationship

¹³³ Evan Bednarz, “Disappearing: An American Vocation,” *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 58, no. 2 (2018), 196.

¹³⁴ Martin Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology,” 332.

¹³⁵ Evan Bednarz, “Disappearing: An American Vocation,” 196.

between solitude and community.”)¹³⁶ But Lilburn himself addresses this concern more directly, suggesting that the labour of withdrawal “could, of course, be a mistake: solitude for someone who doesn’t need it.”¹³⁷ Here discernment is crucial. How do you know whether or not withdrawal is a mistake? As many monastic stories can attest, one’s motives for entering the desert are never pure: “we carry our indwelling disorders about within us.”¹³⁸ Just before leaving the Cistercian Order, Bednarz wrote another essay, in which he expressed that, only into his novitiate did he begin to understand that “beneath the desire to follow Christ whole-heartedly as a Cistercian, I also wanted escape, an exit. There was a self-righteous, unnuanced wringing of hands over the world I left, about which now I feel somewhat ashamed.”¹³⁹ Bednarz’s grappling with the sincerity of his motives echoes Merton’s famous insight on the corner of Fourth and Walnut in Louisville, Kentucky:

I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all these people, that they were mine and I theirs, that we could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers. It was like waking from a dream of separateness, of spurious self-isolation in a special world, the world of renunciation and supposed holiness.¹⁴⁰

With Bednarz and Merton, we see the real possibility that anachoresis can be an expression of escape — a flight from the world that aims not to enter it more fully, but to disavow it. This is what Jenny Odell’s critique of monastic retreat, in her book *How To Do Nothing*, latches onto. To disavow the world in such a way, her argument goes, one abandons one’s responsibility to it. This concern, I think, offers a needed challenge to the integrity of the gesture of withdrawal. In a letter to Lilburn, Jan Zwicky poses a similar challenge to his notion of retreat from technocracy: “What really gives me pause is the suspicion that such a retreat would be self-indulgent. It looks like a fantasy of relief: no more shoulder to the wheel, an escape from politics. But surely washing one’s hands of the

¹³⁶ Douglas E. Christie, *The Blue Sapphire of the Mind*, “Contact, or The Blue Sapphire of the Mind,” 51.

¹³⁷ Tim Lilburn and Jan Zwicky, *Contemplation and Resistance: A Conversation*, 7.

¹³⁸ St. Basil, Letter 2, in *The Letters*, vol. 1, rans. R. Deferrari, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1926), 7-9.

¹³⁹ Evan Bednarz, “Field Notes from the Novitiate,” 304.

¹⁴⁰ Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 149.

technocracy is a kind of cop-out?”¹⁴¹ In Lilburn’s response, he agrees that retreat “*would* be self-indulgent if it were a day at the beach,”¹⁴² but insists that it is hard work. Nor does he agree with the idea that contemplative practice is detachable from politics, and qualifies that he’s “not speaking of an impossible purity but a refusal to be a collaborator.”¹⁴³ But Lilburn goes further, pushing against the charge of abandonment by suggesting that “some sort of eremiticism may just be your responsibility.”¹⁴⁴ The call for integrity, in other words, cuts both ways. Just as one can disavow the world to promote “a dream of separateness, and spurious self-isolation,” as Merton put it, it’s also possible to abandon one’s responsibility to the world by disavowing the desert. The desert, after all, is not just a place where people abandoned the world, it is also an abandoned place. It is the place from which the world has withdrawn. And so while Odell’s and Zwicky’s critiques of monastic retreat are good tests of its integrity, I think they miss an important paradox: that in the case of both Bednarz and Merton, it was *precisely* their escape from the world that forced them to confront their escapism.

In this sense, I think, monastic anachoresis differs from the flight to New Media. The solitude Lilburn takes up, his withdrawal from the world, is an act of communion with the world. Its eros tilts toward *apokatastasis panton* — ‘the restoration of all things’ — not the solipsistic individualism of settler culture. And as Christie argues, the retreat of the early monks had a similar telos: “To engage in the act of anachoresis or withdrawal was to seek in solitude not an escape, but a means of reconstituting a broken whole.”¹⁴⁵ But the conviviality of monastic solitude is not the connectivity of New Media. And Bednarz experienced this first-hand in the monastery: “Obscurity can be a real weight pressing down; there is no phone, no Twitter, Instagram, or Facebook into which I can retreat and remember my significance as an individual.”¹⁴⁶ This observation brings into

¹⁴¹ Jan Zwicky, “Contemplation and Resistance,” 7.

¹⁴² Tim Lilburn, “Contemplation and Resistance,” 8.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ Douglas E. Christie, *The Blue Sapphire of the Mind*, “Introduction,” 15.

¹⁴⁶ Evan Bednarz, “Field Notes from the Novitiate,” 306.

focus the two forms of withdrawal I've been examining — here framed in terms of obscurity and significance. Interiorly speaking, they could not be more different. While the retreat into digital technology is an act of self-remembering, monastic withdrawal is a process of self-forgetting. What would happen if we forgot our own significance? If we exchanged one form of withdrawal for another? As Benedict wrote 1500 years ago: “We go up by humbling ourselves and down by praising ourselves.”¹⁴⁷

§ Bowing

Humility is not just moral disposition. Humility, for Lilburn, is permeability. It corrects one's perception of the world by making one available to it. In an essay on Merton's talks about the importance of quotidian observances in Cistercian life, Lilburn advances Merton's connections “between how one performs the infinite acts of living and true comprehension, ultimate affective fulfillment and complete individuation.”¹⁴⁸ In doing so, Lilburn makes a startling claim:

Ontology, ethics and politics are not the result of analytical philosophical acuity—the rationalist insight severely romanticized in modern European thought—but are inevitable byproducts of both conscious and unconscious epistemological allegiances, wrong worlds as well as true. A true ontology, a sustaining ethics and politics, arises out of a broadly construed, atavistic and superceded cognitive discipline, one that is a shadow of a certain pattern of behaviour or, to put this another way, is aligned by ascesis. The actual world, in its own nature, on its own terms, appears as a result of a particular, decorous way of acting in it.¹⁴⁹

Upon first reading this argument, I noticed an impulse to protest, to point out the seemingly glaring contradiction at its heart: How can a particular, and so necessarily limited and subjective, way of being in the world result in a “true ontology?” Even if I were to accept this, wouldn't it mean accepting potentially infinite ontologies as true (at which point the word “true” would be meaningless)? And if not, how would one be able to discern one from another if their veracity was,

¹⁴⁷ Benedict of Nursia, *The Rule of St. Benedict*, 57.

¹⁴⁸ Lilburn, Tim, “Thomas Merton's Novitiate Talks on Cistercian Usages and Richard Kearney's Theandrim,” 175.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

as he puts it, “indistinguishable from one’s carefully considered relationship to it”?¹⁵⁰ Moreover, Lilburn claims elsewhere that such a view does *not* require a relativistic theory of truth. If it’s indeed true that our worlds are not the result of “philosophical acuity” but rather of a “way of acting in it,” then how can one claim that certain ways of acting in it are “true” and others “false”?

On retreat this summer at Guadalupe Abbey, I got up hours before sunrise to hear the monks chant Vigils. For some reason, I decided to mimic the movements of the monks as they prayed — standing, sitting, bowing. The bowing, I noticed, was uncomfortable for me. What, exactly, were they bowing *to*? A god made in their image? But despite my skepticism, I continued to bow. Days later, upon re-entering the world, I was struck by the sight of people hunched over their phones. Everywhere, it seemed to me, people were transfixed — in the middle of the sidewalk, or a visit with a friend, even in traffic — by the allure of digital technology. After days in the monastery, I couldn’t help but see this as a kind of ritual. What are *we* bowing to?

But this thought, however provocative, feels incomplete. Because as I fell into the rhythm of monastic life, I sensed that my initial response to the bowing monks had been mistaken. More compelling than the question of the “object” of their worship was the manner in which they bowed. The monks’ movements were ceremonial, not merely habitual. I began to realize that their observances were not just a display of piety; they were, through their erotic attention, *doing* something.¹⁵¹ “[T]o go to the world,” Lilburn writes, “you must leave ‘the world’ of apparently sustaining meanings and observances.”¹⁵² In bowing, we were making our way into another world, a world I hadn’t even considered existed — nor would I have, had I not decided to bow.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ My point here is not that one form of bowing (ceremonial) does something and another (habitual) does not. Rather, that they both make different worlds. Perhaps all forms of acting, as Lilburn suggests, are a making of “wrong worlds as well as true.” And just as it matters what we’re bowing to, it also matters (much more than we care to admit) how we’re bowing. While we may question the object of their worship, it’s also important consider that — quite unlike our technological rituals — the monks at least *knew* they were bowing. And they knew why: “The actual world, in its own nature, on its own terms, appears as a result of a particular, decorous way of acting in it.” How can we test the veracity of such a claim if our own actions are not particular, decorous?

¹⁵² Tim Lilburn, *The Larger Conversation*, “Contemplative Experience; Autochthonous Practice,” 204.

Epektasis: Homelessness as Home

Whatever the spiritual meaning of homelessness may be, it seems increasingly clear that it cannot be separated entirely from the precarious and fragile character of our material existence. Indeed, much of its meaning is to be found there. So it is also with the hunger for home.¹

– Douglas E. Christie

I do not define the branch; it defines me by giving me a home. Knowledge is the generosity of being to the homeless mind.²

– Tim Lilburn

Fuck a home in this world, if you think you have one.³

– Fred Moten

Lilburn has been writing into and living out questions of home for more than three decades. How to be here? How to live in the world as if it were home? And as some commentators on Lilburn's work have noted, the "as if" in the title of his first book of essays — *Living In The World As If It Were Home* — gestures toward the difficulty, and ambiguity, of such an undertaking.⁴ What should we make of this "as if"? It seems to imply, on the one hand, that the world *is not* home. Or perhaps it means that, even if the world is home, we don't live as though it were. It's tempting, given this ambiguity, to ask: which is it? But I want to argue, as I've tried to do in the last two chapters, that the tension in Lilburn's language is vital to its meaning. I think it would be better — for us and for the world — to sit in its ambiguity than to try to pry it apart.

Because for the descendants of European settlers, Lilburn's questions gesture toward the existence of a condition that we may not know we have: homelessness. And the pervasive obliviousness to this condition is, I think, a symptom of it. Yet it is no secret, or ought not to be,

¹ Douglas E. Christie, *The Blue Sapphire of the Mind: Notes for a Contemplative Ecology*, "Topos: At Home, Always a Stranger," 107.

² Tim Lilburn, *Living In The World As If It Were Home*, "Contemplation and Cosmology," 27.

³ Fred Moten and Stephano Harney, *The Undercommons Fugitive Planning & Black Study*, "The General Antagonism," 140.

⁴ G Maillet, "In a Boat on the River Nowhere Writing Home: The Spiritual Poetic of Tim Lilburn," *Studies in Canadian Literature / Études En Littérature Canadienne* 30, no. 1 (2005), 230.

⁵ Alison Calder, *Desire Never Leaves: The Poetry of Tim Lilburn*, "Introduction," Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2006. ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://www.proquest.com/legacydocview/EBC/3050354?accountid=14846>.

that the advent of modernity is a history of mass displacement.⁶ As Fred Moten and others have argued, modernity itself is inaugurated by the trans-Atlantic slave trade and the colonization of the Americas. The spoils of this plunder, what we call privilege, have kept Europeans somewhat insulated from its violence. But for those whose ancestors were bought and sold and shipped across the world; those whose ancestors survived disease and genocide, who were removed forcefully from their land, the violence of modern homelessness, of unbelonging, is much more palpable.

Given that the homelessness of Indigenous peoples and the African diaspora was inflicted by European settlers, what are we to make of Lilburn's preoccupation with home? After all, home is precisely what is politically contested in the settler colonial project. As Hagar Kotef's analysis of Israeli settler colonialism insists, home — as a physical dwelling, an economic unit, and a discursive force — is “a tool of destruction.”⁷ If settler colonialism is fundamentally a “home-making project,” as Tuck and Yang claim, then what are the implications of Lilburn's insistence on “going home”? One might even suggest that the word itself is so laden with violence that, regardless of Lilburn's intentions, his use of the term is politically counterproductive. As Edward Said said: “I suppose part of my critique of Zionism is that it attaches too much importance to home. Saying, we need a home. And we will do anything to get a home, even if it means making others homeless.”⁸ This eloquent formulation suggests that the homelessness inflicted by settler colonization — be it upon Palestinians or the Indigenous peoples of the land we live on — is perpetrated by those with a different kind homelessness: specifically, one that “attaches too much importance on home.” This posture could easily be conflated with Lilburn's intellectual project. And why not? The resemblance is striking: Lilburn has met his acute sense of homelessness, that of European settlers in North America, with a persistent attempt to come home.

⁷Hagar Kotef, *The Colonizing Self: Or, Home and Homelessness in Israel/Palestine* (Durham ; London: Duke University Press, 2020), 17.

⁸Edward W. Said, “Interview with Ari Shavit,” *Ha'aretz*, August 18, 2000, republished in *Power, Politics, and Culture: Interviews with Edward W. Said*, by Edward W. Said, ed. Gauri Viswanathan (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), 458.

Few offer more searing a critique of home than Fred Moten, a poet and social critic in the black radical tradition. Throughout this essay, I place Moten's thought into conversation with Lilburn's, and I do this for several reasons. Much like Lilburn, Moten's entire philosophical project is concerned with the diasporic experience in settler colonial modernity. And yet, despite this similarity, Moten, as a descendent of African slaves, occupies a vastly different subject position than Lilburn, a descendent of European settlers. I suspect that by placing them into conversation with each other, I'll be able to complicate and enrich these questions of home and homelessness. Which brings me to my third reason for placing them in dialogue: both Lilburn and Moten play with the terms "home" and "homelessness" in order to understand their experience in colonial modernity. And because this word play, for both of them, involves polysemy and paradox, I often sense an uncanny epistemological resonance between them — the significance of which I hope to explore.

And yet this resonance, upon first glance, may not be evident, because Moten's work insists that homelessness should be embraced against the political disaster of "home."

I think what I'm gonna do is embrace homelessness for the possibilities that it bears, hard as that is, hard as they are. Homelessness is hard, no doubt about it. But, home is harder. And it's harder on you, and it's harder on every-god-damn-body else too. I ain't so concerned, necessarily, about the travails of the settler. The horrible difficulties that the settler imposes upon himself are not my first concern, though in the end they are a real thing. It's the general "imposition of severalty," to use Theodore Roosevelt's evil term, that I'm trying to think about and undermine. He knew that possessive individualism — that the self-possessed individual, was as dangerous to Native Americans as a pox-infested blanket. Civilization, or more precisely civil society, with all its transformative hostility, was mobilized in the service of extinction, of disappearance. The shit is genocidal. Fuck a home in this world, if you think you have one.⁹

Before applying Moten's critique of home to Lilburn's project, I want to attend to the language he uses. Specifically, I want to point out that Moten's use of "home" is polysemic. He exploits the

⁹ Fred Moten and Stephano Harney, *The Undercommons Fugitive Planning & Black Study*, "The General Antagonism," (Wivenhoe: Minor Compositions, 2013), 140.

tension between home and homelessness without concern for systematic specificity: they function on multiple levels of meaning. Home is, simultaneously, the locus of disappearance, genocide; a sociopolitical unit, its imposed severalty of American racial capitalism and conversion of land into property; it is also the parcelled individuality (settler subjectivity) that attempts to reduce the collective, the communal, into something owned. Although this polysemy is discernible — we can *tell* that home has broad significance — its use demonstrates the impossibility of separating its multiple meanings. And much like Lilburn’s polysemous prose, I sense within Moten’s riff a political gesture — a form of thought that, precisely in its musicality, refuses (or perhaps overwhelms) rational circumscription. These thoughts will become more relevant later in our discussion.

But for now it’s worth considering how Lilburn’s contemplative labour might be subjected to Moten’s critique. Indeed, what does it mean to find a home in a world founded on dispossession? Moten’s notion of home would seem to cast doubt on the political telos of Lilburn’s project. Given how fraught the notion of home is in the context of settler colonialism, as well as how deep the epistemological roots of “severalty” go, Lilburn’s interior labour might appear to be *extension* of the settler colonial project — some kind of private, esoteric colonization of the land. Is entering the ‘desert’ not a reproduction of John Locke’s *tabula rasa*? How is this not a projection of the European man’s fantasy onto a landscape that merely signals the possibility of his Enlightenment? If Lilburn’s homesickness is a refusal of modern homelessness, could it risk deepening, at least discursively, the dispossession Moten is pointing to? Can you find home in a place that your ancestors stole? Wouldn’t embracing homelessness be, as Moten insists, a more accommodating and courteous posture?

I don’t have answers to these questions, but I do think that before following them too far, it’s worth considering the complexities of Lilburn’s thought — which he calls a “protean nesting maneuver.”¹⁰ Because, paradoxically, Lilburn’s movement toward home *does* embrace homelessness.

¹⁰ Tim Lilburn, *Contemplation and Resistance*: 3.

In fact, he suggests homelessness is the way home. And while his embrace differs, in important ways, from Moten's, I believe their gestures are ultimately resonant. To the extent that this is true, I suspect that Lilburn's paradox of home and homelessness is a decolonial gesture that goes to the root of modern rootlessness: whiteness.

§ Home and Homelessness

In his essay "Epektasis: Under the Instruction of Things," Lilburn writes:

Having no home, while bending into the world where one would live as if it were home, is the human home. The refusal of this paradox, its littling, is the source of any pursuit of firm control and the delimitation of the probe of desire. The experience of moving erotic homelessness is us in the world as the grass is the grass and the river is itself.¹¹

Homelessness takes many forms in Lilburn's work. At least two of these, I think, can be sensed in this passage. The first is the homelessness of human consciousness, separated from the Garden, from its embeddedness in the world. The second is the homelessness of desire in its fundamental state — empty, off-center, thrust toward the beauty of the Other. And while we can distinguish between them, it's important to consider how inseparable these forms of homelessness are. As Neil Querengesser notes in his review of Lilburn's early poetry, this inseparability is contained in the word "desire" itself, which, "from the Latin *desiderare*, literally "*de-sidera*, from the stars," implies paradoxically both a derivation (in a physical sense) and a separation (in a spiritual sense) of human beings from the stars and, by extension, things heavenly."¹² This paradox is also evident in Lilburn's reading of Aristophanes's speech in Plato's *Symposium*. Following Zeus' severing of human beings, he writes, "love began in the search for one's lost half."¹³ But rather than reading this love as searching for "an ideal version of ourselves," Lilburn suggests that "our desire ceaselessly pursues

¹¹ Tim Lilburn, *Living In The World As If It Were Home*, "Epektasis: Under The Instruction of Things," 84.

¹² Neil Querengesser, "'God in His Blank Spaces: Quantum Theology in Tim Lilburn's Names of God,'" *Canadian Literature* (2013), 218.

¹³ Tim Lilburn, *Living In The World As If It Were Home*, "Afterword," 88-89.

... the earth itself, that place we often imagine ourselves apart from, unlike, above.”¹⁴ And yet this imagined, or psychic, separation from the earth, this homelessness, is the source of our yearning to return to it.

But the dynamics of this return, of *apokatastasis panton* — ‘the restoration of all things’ — is an endless riddle. Home, for Lilburn, can only be found by yielding to erotic homelessness. This suggests, among other things, that our exile from home has itself become a home. This home may be comfortable, but is likely not hospitable to the “breathtaking otherness” of things.¹⁵ And this could be a problem if Lilburn is right that “our deepest desire insists on bending us toward them, stripping us of ourselves, from language, from a feeling of being masters in our own house. Long seeing casts us out of doors and impoverishes.”¹⁶ Here the ascetical looking I discussed in the last chapter converges with images of homelessness. And one can feel this homelessness register on several layers of significance. To be cast “out of doors,” made homeless and poor in this way, implies a kind of wealth in our domicile — a satisfying (and despairing) aboveness to which we aspire. But it also suggest a severance from the wild — a life domesticated, cordoned off. As one yields to eros, Lilburn writes, “consciousness becomes feral.”¹⁷ To become feral, though, is not to become wild. Feral means a failed domestication, and so one must fail *into* it.¹⁸ One can only approach the world, Lilburn insists, by being thwarted in one’s attempts to know it — turned back again and again until the approach becomes more yielding, courteous. One can hear this failure in Lilburn’s description of being stripped “from language, from the feeling of being masters in our own house.”¹⁹ And here we encounter not only a psychogogic and ecological meaning, but also a political one. Much like Moten’s homelessness, Lilburn’s description of eros implies the cozy brutality of home, its feeling of mastery.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Tim Lilburn, *Living In The World As If It Were Home*, “Return to the Garden,” 42.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid, 44.

¹⁸ Ibid, “Epektasis: Under The Instruction of Things,” 80.

¹⁹ Ibid, “Return to the Garden,” 42.

Yet all this talk of homelessness, we must remember, is an ascetical movement *toward* home. The impoverishment of contemplation breeds a knowledge identical to “the human self quelled, domesticated to dwell in the world.”²⁰ Eros bends and strips; “bending us toward them, stripping us from ourselves.”²¹ Who are we without ourselves? Such a question is lived by the lover, who bends endlessly toward his beloved: “This is love and admiration, the courting of ascesis, the sweet inkling of home-coming in the divesting of what feels most home-like: the centrality of oneself.”²² Home, for Lilburn, is not only what the contemplative moves toward, but also what she leave behind. Home as the centrality of oneself, then, is released by the tug of eros; and the resulting homelessness, a de-centering, is a flight into the world of things. It is tempting to read this formulation, which implies a neat polarity between self and world, as a solution to the paradox: erotic homelessness as selflessness; selflessness as home. But Lilburn, knowing the self’s itch for security, seems to anticipate this temptation. In the next paragraph, he writes: “But there is no home and there is no arrival. This is always so, even far along in the erotic enterprise. To imagine there are is to still calculate, to still colonize what is with fantasy and, thus, to abandon the genius of desire.”²³ Somehow, for Lilburn, the world is and is not a home. Here, too, Lilburn’s homelessness resonates with Moten’s critique of home: his insistence on the ongoingness of desire, *epektasis*, does not settle for colonial fantasy. Indeed, for Lilburn, the paradox of home, the riddle of desire, is always “littling.” To walk away with an answer tucked in your pocket is to retreat from fundamental eros. And such a retreat, Lilburn claims, “is the source of any pursuit of firm control.”²⁴ To think oneself as settled, in other words, as having arrived, is to abandon the world and desire for counterfeits of each. Scaled up and projected outward, such fantasies of home and arrival, their interior violence, are omniscidal. “Fuck a home in this world, if you think you have one.”²⁵

²⁰ Ibid, “How To Be Here?” 12.

²¹ Ibid, “Return To The Garden,” 42.

²² Ibid, “There Is No Presence,” 70.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid, “Epektasis: Under The Instruction of Things,” 84.

²⁵ Fred Moten, “The General Antagonism,” 140.

Here I've wandered into a third form of homelessness, implicit in Lilburn's passage above. It's the homelessness that arises from "a refusal of the paradox" of home. The homelessness, in other words, of thinking you're home. This is not merely a sociological description of the European settler diaspora; it is fundamentally an interior homelessness — one that, for Lilburn, is both informed by our historical condition and also gives rise to it.²⁶ It is the omnivorousness we discussed in the first chapter and the escapism we discussed in the second. In a letter to Lilburn, Jan Zwicky makes the distinction between this homelessness — which is a refusal of desire — and erotic homelessness.

There is good homelessness and bad homelessness, I think. Good homelessness feels like being carried out to sea on a strong current, or as though one were a compass needle and someone finally undid the catch holding one down; bad homelessness feels, in some important sense, unreal — even if one foot after another appears to be coming to rest on solid ground.²⁷

Although these different kinds of homelessness are new to our discussion, I want to emphasize that we've already encountered the interior dispositions they gesture toward. We saw "good homelessness" in the erotic disposition of Socrates, who, in the *Symposium*, is described as *atopos* — literally, placeless. We saw bad homelessness, on the other hand, in the fantasies of limitlessness we encountered in the last chapter: *utopia* — literally, no place. For Zwicky, the appearance of a life's procession, its tangibility, is perfectly compatible with the unreality of "bad homelessness." And even if we brush up against the erotic alternative, we might prefer this sense of unreality: to be anchored in a harbour seems much safer than being carried out to sea.

But what does this have to do with refusing paradox? Consider, for a moment, one's epistemic itch for certainty — the temptation to excise ambiguity from one's life, or the pain of an unresolvable problem. The promise of certainty is the end of ambiguity, a promise it cannot keep. Why? Because life just is ambiguous. Certainty, in this sense, is a false refuge for the homeless mind;

²⁶ Jan Zwicky, *Contemplation and Resistance: A Conversation*, 7.

certainty is a white picket fence. This points to a relationship between our epistemic allegiances and our language use, and I think it also hints at a relationship between our language use and our experience of life itself. Ambiguity is the noetic essence of metaphor and paradox: metaphor tells the truth by lying, and paradox undermines its own polarities. “The world is built for metaphor,” Lilburn writes.²⁸ “And metaphor [...] is not mere aesthetic embellishment, but probing, true description, a sagacious form of realism.”²⁹ If life is inherently ambiguous, paradox and metaphor afford us, among other things, a way to speak our mortality. Consider, for instance:

the shape of a birth

to breathe
for the first time
is to cry, is to hear
the sound, as you enter
the world, of the world
entering

To make a habit of refusing paradox, of indulging the certainty of home, is to treat life as a problem to solve — and so to retreat from it. Because if life cannot be solved — because it is not a problem, is inherently ambiguous — then an obeisance to certainty entails an epistemic violence. Hence, the feeling of unreality. Lilburn identifies this “bad homelessness” in Descartes, whose thought, he claims, is “a shying away before the wilderness of indeterminacy.”³⁰ Lilburn’s play with the word “wilderness” here reenforces the connection I’ve been sketching. The epistemic violence of shying away “from the wilderness of indeterminacy” is ultimately an ecological violence — a threat, we might say, to the indeterminacy of wilderness. It’s important to consider how Lilburn’s use of “wilderness,” here and throughout his work, is interiorly informed. It refers not an uninhabited or pristine ecosystem, but rather to an epistemological encounter with the world. In an interview on his collection *Moosewood Sandhills*, Lilburn says, “Augustine speaks of the world one enters when one

²⁸ Tim Lilburn, *The Larger Conversation*, “The Ethical Significance of the Human Relationship to Place,” 8.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Tim Lilburn, *Living In The World As If It Were Home*, “Sorrow; The River,” 53.

prays as ‘the land or region of unlikeness.’ I think everything is the region of unlikeness. Everything is distant, far, discrete, itself, non-representative, ultimately non-colonizable, wild.”³¹ In this sense of wilderness, “everything” is simply itself. Wilderness is the resistance of things to the epistemic reductions of reason and representation. This understanding resonates with Don McKay’s definition of wilderness as “whatever eludes the mind’s appropriations.”³² When the world eludes the mind’s appropriations, when things become themselves, one encounters the “wilderness of indeterminacy.”³³

It may not be possible to live a life without making contact with such indeterminacy. But one can make a habit, like Descartes, of resisting its ubiquity. Lilburn writes: “The ambition of this certitude is the acquisition of command . . . the transformation, in Descartes’ case, of human knowers from fruitless speculators to ‘masters and possessors of nature’”³⁴ For Lilburn, then, the violence of Cartesian certitude cuts two ways: it not only results in the destruction of nature, but also the “transformation . . . of human knowers” into masters and possessors of it. Thus to aspire to mastery and ownership is not only to abandon the world and its paradoxes; it is also to neglect something of ourselves. To be a boat that never sets sail; a compass needle that can’t tremble.

§ Two Impositions

It’s worth noting that despite Moten’s critique of home, he employs a paradox similar to Lilburn’s. In his words: “Homelessness is the condition in which you share your house, literally. It’s the condition in which you give your house away, constantly, as a practice of hospitality . . . Home is where you give home away.”³⁵ So home, for Moten, too, is a practice of homelessness. But despite the similarities here, it’s important not to conflate these paradoxes. Unlike Lilburn, Moten is writing

³¹ Tim Lilburn, “Listening With Courtesy: A Conversation with Tim Lilburn,” ed. Darryl Whetter, *Studies In Canadian Literature* 22, no. 1 (1997), https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/sc122_1int02, 143.

³² Don McKay, *All New Animal Acts*, “[] or Iconostalgia,” Gaspereau Press, 125.

³³ Tim Lilburn, *Living In The World As If It Were Home*, “Sorrow; The River,” 53.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, citing René Descartes’ *Discourse on Method*, Part 6, 62.

³⁵ Fred Moten, “Give Your House Away, Constantly,” interviewed on *Millennials Are Killing Capitalism*, July 11, 2021, <https://millennialsarekillingcapitalism.libsyn.com/give-away-your-home-constantly-fred-moten-and-stefano-harney>.

out of the black radical tradition, and his critique, following the work of Cedric Robinson and others, is based on (as well as a critique of) Marx's theory of political economy. And so Moten's use of home — while blurring the boundaries between metaphor and literality — nonetheless occupies more of a socioeconomic register than it does, like Lilburn's, a psychogogic one. Lilburn's homelessness, while historical and political, is fundamentally erotic. And Moten himself makes this distinction in the passage I quoted earlier. He's not concerned with the "the horrible travails the settler imposes upon himself" so much as the "imposition of severalty" — that is, the imposition of property through and as the self-possessed individual, and the concomitant theft of the commons.³⁶ For Moten, home is a political-ontological unit: its foundations is a delimitation of being and non-being, life and social death. The social force of blackness, then, is homelessness because it occupies the negative categories of the distinctions "home" erects: it is that which is necessarily excluded for the constitution of political being and life as such. Home is the racial violence of private property itself — of the settler subjectivity that dispossesses others through possession. So when Moten says that "home is where you give home away," he means that to embrace homelessness is, fundamentally, to steal what has been stolen.³⁷

But while Moten makes the distinction between "the horrible difficulties the settler imposes upon himself" and Theodore Roosevelt's "imposition of severalty,"³⁸ I want to blur the boundary between the two. And Moten, despite his distinction, has already helped blur the boundary with his play on the word "impose": it suggests an intimacy, perhaps causal, between the "travails of the settler" imposed on herself and the severalty she imposes on others. I think Lilburn's work helps blur Moten's distinction even further, because for Lilburn the ascendancy of individualism in liberal capitalism is inseparable from the settler's "horrible difficulties." In fact, it constitutes a form of exile from the world.

³⁶ Fred Moten, "The General Antagonism," 140.

³⁷ Fred Moten, "Give Your House Away, Constantly," interviewed on *Millennials Are Killing Capitalism*, July 11, 2021.

³⁸ Fred Moten, "The General Antagonism," 140.

For Lilburn, the travails of the settler is a spiritual exile as much as it is an ecological and cultural one, and we can see a paradox emerge in Lilburn's attempt to remedy it. For instance, he claims that asceticism requires the "renunciation of all secret pleasures that cosset consciousness in its estrangement from the physical world, like the delectable satisfaction of having something to look down on, the attractiveness of which is our estrangement."³⁹ The shape of this paradox, I think, is homologous to that of a tragedy. Why does coming home to the world mean renouncing the very pleasures that sought to secure a home? Because the home of the self — the colonizing ego's management of the world — banishes itself from the world. This erotic paradox, then, is also modernity's epistemological tragedy, and it manifests politically and ecologically as the tragedy of the commons. What is revealed when one holds this interior dynamic — which Lilburn applies to brome and fescue (i.e. human supremacy) — up to something like American exceptionalism? From the perch of imperial power, the empire is surrounded, and therefore threatened, by that which it has attempted to subdue.⁴⁰ Everything outside the walls of the settler's fort is made savage. Interiorly, the privilege of "having something to look down on" places one above, and so apart from, the world. Its pursuit of security makes one increasingly remote, increasingly vulnerable. Despite the unfathomable loss this inflicts, this exceptionalism, or estrangement, is precisely what is seen as attractive. The problem, then, is erotic. And it's no wonder why we avoid the kind of desire that requires letting down those walls: it would mean, among other things, the loss of all that we've achieved. That is to say, the loss of separation, and so, in a sense, the loss of identity.

George Grant's insight — that the conquest of nature by the European settler required the use of their own bodies — is resounding here. He claimed that "[t]he punishment they inflicted on non-human nature, they had first inflicted upon themselves."⁴¹ Here we encounter, once more, the

³⁹ Tim Lilburn, *Living In The World As If It Were Home*, "How To Be Here?" 19.

⁴⁰ Here I'm playing with Moten's and Harney's concept of "the surround," which is the sociality which the political necessarily excludes in order to constitute itself. Paradoxically, through this exclusion, Moten and Harney claim, "We got politics surrounded."

⁴¹ George Grant, *Technology and Empire*, "In Defence of North America," 77.

paradox of privilege and poverty, of accumulation and deprivation. Of course, it's important to understand the ways in which the possession of the colonizer spells the dispossession of the colonized, as Kotef does in her theory of home and settler identity. But Grant, like Lilburn, is pointing to the way this paradox is *internal* to settler subjectivity. For Grant, the conquest of the European settler, including the "imposition of severalty," would not have been possible without a corresponding violence interior to the settler herself. And Grant's insight suggests that this interior violence is somatic: we carry it in our bodies. The self-possessed individual, then, is an instrument of violence insofar as he inflicts his own dispossession onto the world.

§ Politics and Virtue

It's within this context, attending to the depth of these epistemological problems, that we might understand Lilburn's claim that his ascetical endeavours are "an activism of forgetting the royalty of one's name, of yielding, of stepping aside."⁴² Just to accept such a posture as a legitimate form of "activism" requires an understanding of colonialism informed by eros. For Lilburn, the roots of colonial violence are epistemological: that is to say, the violence and theft of colonization arises from a problem with how European settlers understand ourselves-in-the-world, which is fundamentally a problem with our relationship to knowledge itself. As I showed in the second chapter, this can be seen in the hyper-rationality of late capitalism and its refusal of contemplative attention as a vital form of thought. It's not difficult to examine such a problem today. In the North American university, for example, the notion that knowledge and virtue are coincident appears anachronistic — not just because they've been separated, or belong to different categories of cognition, but because virtue has become another item in our intellectual museum. Apart from those involved in reviving virtue ethics, virtue tends to be engaged with as something the ancient Greeks and early Christians believed in.⁴³ As a result, critique becomes our primary recourse to

⁴² Lilburn, Tim, *Going Home*, "Going Home," 182.

⁴³ Warren Heiti's book *Attending: An Ethical Art* is one example of serious scholarly engagement with virtue as a way of knowing the world with integrity.

ethics.⁴⁴ (Judith Butler's speech *Can One Live A Good Life In A Bad Life?* exemplifies this situation; in it, they off-handedly dismiss Aristotelian virtue ethics as individualistic, and insist on relentless critique as an answer to Adorno's question.)⁴⁵ But Lilburn's activism, his contemplative resistance, cuts against this understanding: it dethrones itself, it yields, it steps aside. "If there is no virtue," he writes, "there is no comprehension: indeed, comprehension *is* virtue, a stance that receives the whole thing awkwardly, blindly, with gratitude."⁴⁶ This way of thinking may not seem political enough (or, following Butler, too individualistic) to justify the term "activism." Indeed, its ethos cuts against that of critique, which might be our primary political instrument these days. And, to include that instrument here, I can imagine someone asking: 'Isn't the project of virtue itself, with its Christian drive to purity, epistemologically complicit in birth of white supremacy?' I don't want to dismiss the importance of such questions, or challenge the need to critically examine our ideological inheritance. Is Lilburn fighting fire with fire? That's certainly one way to look at it. But it's worth considering what happens to the concept of "virtue" when met by such a question: it's approached as an intellectual relic rather than a living disposition. Is virtue so far from our modern experience of life that we can't think of it apart from notions of piety, rectitude, or political conservatism? Indeed, today it's more closely associated with supremacy than with humility! Is this a result of our skillfulness at uncovering dangerous ideological ploys or because we don't believe in 'the good life'? (This, I admit, is a trick question).

What I'm driving at here is a question about the efficacy of our political instruments, which is related to the integrity of our actions. As Lilburn claims, "the individual alone, at least these days, seems incapable of generating ethical grace; instead, what is brought forward for admiration

⁴⁴ Scholars like Rita Felski make important interventions in this epistemological trajectory; she identifies an affective "mood" of skepticism subtending the modes of critique prevalent in literary scholarship.

⁴⁵ Judith Butler, "Can One Live A Good Life In A Bad Life: Theodore Adorno Prize Lecture." *Radical Philosophy*, 176, no. 9 (2012).

⁴⁶ Tim Lilburn, *Living In The World As If It Were Home*, "Sorrow; The River," 56.

from that place is an apparently unfoolable cunning, often clothed as irony.”⁴⁸ How effective, in other words, are our attempts to uncover modernity’s ideological ploys at fostering a posture “of yielding, of stepping aside”⁴⁹? Presumably, this is exactly what we understand ourselves to be doing when we engage in critique: we’re getting out of the way, making space for something else. But without attending to the erotic postures beneath our approach, Lilburn suggests, they cannot generate a viable political alternative. One example of this, I think, is Kotef’s political critique of “home” within the structure of Israeli settler colonialism. Drawing a link between “home” and the construction of settler subjectivity, Kotef writes that this connection

does not mean that settlers necessarily bring about destruction maliciously, but if in settler colonialism the primary identity is the relation to place, and if this belonging is an act of elimination and dispossession, then by being who one is, one is already implicated in violence. Violence, then, emerges as a precondition for the integrity of one’s subjectivity.⁵⁰

Kotef’s argument here compliments the observations of both Lilburn and Moten. The notion that violence is a “precondition for the integrity of [the settler’s] subjectivity” is especially evident in Lilburn’s work in *The Larger Conversation* — where he grapples more explicitly with the colonial violence from which he’s benefited. And yet, Kotef’s claim that the settler’s identity is primarily based on his relation to place does not examine that relationship in terms of the land itself. Indeed, despite the acknowledgment of violent conquest — “elimination and dispossession” — place seems, in her account, to be reduced to sociopolitical territory. And so while it does gesture toward the forms of ownership and conquest imposed upon Indigenous lifeworlds, it nonetheless seems to reproduce, ironically, a rather colonial conception of land. Lilburn’s work does not engage in such political analysis; instead it meets the violence of settler subjectivity through his relationship to the land, not an abstraction of it. As he puts it:

⁴⁸ Tim Lilburn, *The Larger Conversation*, “Nothingness,” 220.

⁴⁹ Lilburn, Tim, *Going Home*, “Going Home,” 182.

⁵⁰ Hagar Kotef, *The Colonizing Self: Or, Home and Homelessness in Israel/Palestine*, “Introduction,” 18.

We yearn precisely for what is elementally needful and yet out of range. The ministering land is what a culture of acquisition and mastery—and resulting chthonic anarchy—has driven away. It is possible that the larger self we miss and pursue is a terrain or locale.⁵¹

This is related, I think, to Lilburn’s insistence on the role of ascesis — which means ‘practice’ or ‘exercise’ in Greek — in the undertaking of philosophy. In a post-Cartesian intellectual milieu, we tend to approach knowledge by way of an adherence to accepted methods. This is a radical departure from Platonic philosophy, in which truth could only be approached through the erotic transformation of those drawn to it. Because the epistemic problems at the root of colonialism, for Lilburn, are not merely about having faulty ideas or methods — which could be corrected or disassembled through a critique — but rather concern our way-of-being-in-the-world, their renovation requires nothing less than the transformation of subjectivity itself.

This means, among other things, asking different questions: How much of my own endeavours — be they an intellectual project or an intimate relationship — feed confectioned ambitions: the pursuit of recognition, the promise of security, the false refuge of exceptionalism? How mangled do those endeavours — a whole life — become, when I cannot find a more flexible, porous root? For Lilburn, the self beholden to these erotic misalignments, these “secret pleasures” and acquisitive desires, is incapable of correctly perceiving — which is to say participating in — the world. And the colonial culture we inhabit was founded by, as well as on the very idea of, such an individual self. So while Lilburn insists that his contemplative labour is politically charged, it’s not political in the sense that it can be mapped onto existing political postures. In *Going Home*, Lilburn claims that the political telos of contemplation is “*kallipolis* (the beautiful city), *The Kingdom of Heaven*,”⁵² which emerge from “the disposition of contemplative courtesy that is the antipode of ‘that self-propelling will to technology,’ which George Grant said marked the versions of modernity

⁵¹ Tim Lilburn, *The Larger Conversation*, “Contemplative Experience, Autochthonous Practice,” 202.

⁵² Tim Lilburn, *Going Home*, “Introduction,” 10.

of both the left and the right.”⁵³ This is why Lilburn claims that “our current central need” — which he defines as everything included in interiority and its politics — is threatened by the victory of “the powers of the liberal, assertive, Enlightenment, autonomous self.”⁵⁴ And on this point — regardless of what Moten would make of Lilburn’s ascetical activism — I think they would agree.

§ Fictitious Singularity

Moten also understands his work as anterior to the politics of modernity — though in a different way than Lilburn. His criticism is an embrace of black sociality, an expression of the undercommons, which is excluded by, and so surrounds, the political. His work attempts to give voice to the indeterminacy of everything outside the walls of the settler’s fort. In their essay “Politics Surrounded,” Moten and Harney write: “We owe each other the indeterminate. We owe each other everything.”⁵⁵ And we might think of the indeterminate, that which evades enclosure, representation, and articulation — which is to say: “everything” — as antipodal to Locke’s possessive individualism. “John Locke creates tabula rasa as a container for properties – properties of the mind, and properties owned by the propertied mind. Self-knowledge is self-possession and self-positioning in Locke. His accumulation process is auto-location, because one can’t help but settle for that.”⁵⁶ This reading of Locke’s theory of property as “auto-location” suggests that ownership, the possession of self and other, is a securing-of-oneself in (or apart from) social space. Locke does this, for Moten and Harney, by projecting emptiness onto the earth, thus abstracting it, imagining it as something to be filled, thus allowing for the making of the world.⁵⁷ (The earth, in this case, being associated with the social; the world, with the political). So the earth and all its indeterminacies is

⁵³ Ibid, 11.

⁵⁴ Tim Lilburn, *The Larger Conversation*, “Nothingness,” 228.

⁵⁵ Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons Fugitive Planning & Black Study*, “Politics Surrounded,” 20.

⁵⁶ Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *All Incomplete* (Colchester: Minor Compositions, 2021), “We Need a Precedent,” 17.

⁵⁷ Here I’m introducing a distinction between “earth” and “world” made by Moten and Harney — which I suspect they take from Heidegger. I believe this polarity, in some ways, maps onto the distinction between the world and “the world” that Lilburn makes.

turned into (by imagining it as) something plotted, knowable insofar as it can be owned. And yet, for Moten and Harney, this indeterminacy — which they call “fugitivity” — extends even to that which threatens it: property itself.⁵⁸

For Moten and Harney, it is through the act of possession and accumulation that the settler individual comes to know himself. This returns us to my attempt to blur the distinction between “the horrible difficulties the settler imposes upon himself” and the “imposition of severalty” he imposes on the earth. This act of self-knowledge through and as ownership is, on the one hand, an existential threat to the earth, and on the other, is the means by which the settler individual is estranged from it. Thus white people, according to Moten and Harney, who, following James Baldwin, describe them as the people “who think they are white or that they ought to be,” are

emplotted, as they’ve been taught to do, establishing the spacetime of possession and self-possession in ownership. Every step they take is a standing of ground, a stomping of the world out of earthly existence and into racial capitalist human being. It grows more pronounced the more it is threatened, consumed by its own feedback loop, and it produces sharper and sharper subject reactions in the face of this threat.⁵⁹

In the violent feedback loop of whiteness — which, just like the settler’s fort, excludes the indeterminate — the act of self-possession *is* an act of aggression. Or, put differently, whiteness threatens the earth by creating the conditions — epistemological and material — in which “earthly existence” is threatening. For me, this resonates with Lilburn’s embrace of the paradox of home and his approach to the “wilderness of indeterminacy.”⁶⁰ What is wild, for Lilburn, is everything — and

⁵⁸ As I point out later, Moten’s and Harney’s concept of fugitivity is similar to Lilburn’s use of wilderness. And given the complementary nature of Lilburn’s and McKay’s concept of wilderness, I think it’s worth considering McKay’s observation as it might relate to the fugitivity of property: “That tools retain a vestige of wilderness is especially evident when we think of their existence in time and eventual graduation from utility: breakdown. To what *degree* do we own our houses, hammers, dogs? Beyond that line lies wilderness.” (*Baler Twine: Thoughts on Ravens, Home, and Nature Poetry*)

⁵⁹ Moten, Fred and Stephano Harney, *All Incomplete*, “The Theft of Assembly,” 17.

⁶⁰ The resonance here between Moten and Lilburn makes me wonder how “the separation of consciousness from the world” — which Lilburn traces to the Enframing that emerges in the 17th century physics of Descartes and Bacon — is related to the emergence of “emplotment” Moten and Harney see in Locke. What is the relationship between Grant’s “self-propelling will to technology” characteristic of North American settler subjectivity and the racial constitution of the settler via ownership and self-possession? I don’t have an answer to this question, but I want to highlight that both Lilburn and Moten are tracing the social and ecological destruction of colonialization to Enlightenment epistemologies and the ways they fashion the separation of the ‘human’ from the world — a schism they, tragically, take to be their advantage.

in this sense it's not unlike Moten's and Harney's concept of fugitivity. And the significance of this resonance, I think, is that it suggests that — although Lilburn does not engage directly with contemporary discourses on racial capitalism, nor is he preoccupied with interrogating the construction of the “human” within that history — his ascetical philosophy involves an undoing of the epistemological basis of supremacy, be it human, white, or otherwise. Moreover, it speaks to an ethical orientation, a way of living, that doesn't determine one's position in the world. Indeed, Lilburn's homelessness is a “divesting of what feels most home-like: the centrality of oneself.”⁶¹ Within this off-centeredness, which for Lilburn is a kind of love, one eschews the self-defensiveness of a privileged position. As he puts it, in the stance contemplation provokes, “your various acquisitivenesses – for knowledge, supremacy, consolation – are stilled.”⁶²

§

Against the schisms the Enlightenment produced in the world, Lilburn and Moten — in their own committed ways — are attempting to approach, or participate in, communion. For Moten and Harney, as I've mentioned, this appears in their concept of the undercommons: that which is fugitive and evades emplotment. To be restored to the undercommons does not require vying for political power or representation; on the contrary, it is about becoming what one already is. And paradoxically, what one is, for Moten, is *not* one. (This paradox having two meanings: the first being that blackness constitutes the “non-being” delineated by the political; the second being that the very notion of a single, self-possessed being is, for Moten, an epistemological violence). So Moten's attention to blackness is a social ontology: he is interested in “actually existing social life,”⁶³ which is life rendered non-existent by whiteness. In other words, his “we” includes the earthly life being pushed to extinction as much as it does the descendants of African slaves. Blackness, for Moten, life itself, signifies the impossibility of purity and its politics; the impossibility, even, of individuation;

⁶¹ Tim Lilburn, *Living In The World As If It Were Home*, “There Is No Presence,” 70.

⁶² Ibid, “How To Be Here?” 18.

⁶³ Stephano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons*, “Politics Surrounded,” 20.

they belong to the undercommons. Lilburn's erotic approach to communion, as I mentioned earlier, is apokatastatic: its telos is the restoration of all things. So while Moten's socio-ontological approach attempts to restore communion by recognizing how communion always already *is* — despite its material and political theft through ownership — Lilburn's approach grapples more with the phenomenological and psychic estrangement of the settler. In other words, he does not point to the ways in which communion is a fact of life so much as press against the reality that we don't live as though it were. And as we've seen already, Lilburn traces a remedy for this severalty to the pre-Cartesian thought of Plato and the many contemplative traditions that inherited his ascetical philosophy. On the apokatastatic nature of desire, Lilburn writes:

This union, with human beings, can be sundered if one submits to the passions, thereby fostering a fictitious singularity, rather than yielding to the erotic tug of communion. The striving to acquire, as Plato says (Gorgias), is at odds with the musicality of geometry: with it, 'there is no friendship.'⁶⁴

The “fictitious singularity” fostered by the passions marks the impossibility of union — which, for Lilburn, is communion — and he makes it quite clear why this is: the nature of friendship is at odds with acquisitive desire. It's no wonder, then, that the acquisitive striving of the European settler — so evident in his dispositions of mastery, ownership, and supremacy — leads to loneliness.

And yet, despite these distinctions, I still sense a resonance between Moten's and Harney's undercommons and Lilburn's erotic communion. Lilburn continues: “Communion requires poverty -- emptiness -- to be approached; this union is uncovered -- it has never not been there -- not fashioned. The experience of it is not a breaking into new terrain but a going home. ‘We shall find it,’ Plato remarks, ‘for it is there.’”⁶⁵ Communion, then, the restoration of all things, is a return to something that “has never not been there.” So this return, while nostalgic, is not pining for a bygone political primitivism; nor is it utopian, pressing toward a restoration in the future. Like the homelessness of the undercommons, this union is approached by “yielding,” not by erecting

⁶⁴ Tim Lilburn, “Two Books About Love,” *The Fiddlehead* 199, no. Winter (1999), 109.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

something new. Because it is “uncovered” and not “fashioned,” because it requires poverty and not resplendence, this communion is neither acquisitive nor intrusive. Moreover, the “emptiness” Lilburn claims is necessary to approach communion is not the “emptiness” Moten and Harney see in Locke. Locke’s emptiness projects a kind of vacancy onto the land — *tabula rasa* — that allows for ownership and severalty. His emptiness manifests as an ambition to own, whereas Lilburn’s kenotic emptiness is *precisely* the absence of this ambition. If it is a home — or, as Lilburn puts it, “a going home” — it is quite unlike the settler’s home.⁶⁶

Of course, Lilburn is not explicitly attempting to suture the “severalty” imposed by Roosevelt’s policies. That is, he’s not preoccupied primarily with the ways in which the “self-imposed exile” of the settler is bound up in racial and political expressions of possession. Rather, he’s focused on how the European colonization of the continent extended and deepened a phenomenological exile from “a daimonically sustaining world.”⁶⁷ Lilburn engages the crisis of colonialism not by diagnosing its political and racial histories, but by attending to the absence of a lifeworld inhabited by European settlers. (And I think his work can be read, in part, as an attempt to begin uncovering one — both through apokatastatic desire and a “psychic archeology” that retrieves disinherited knowledge from Europe’s wisdom traditions).⁶⁸ And yet, one can trace an evolution in Lilburn’s thinking on the significance of race and political theft to colonization by reading through his trilogy of essays. Especially in his later work, Lilburn grapples with the epistemological significance of the colonial reality he inhabits. Lilburn himself admits in *The Larger Conversation*: “[t]he insight that my condition is, in significant part, the result of my occupying and deriving benefit from a colonial situation is, I am abashed to say, a relatively recent one.”⁶⁹ And this confession is important to keep in mind as we examine notions of home and homelessness —

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Tim Lilburn, *The Larger Conversation*, Fresh Coherence, 119.

⁶⁸ Ibid, “Introduction” XI.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

because it reveals possible discursive limits to Lilburn's prose as well as, I think, a kind of trustworthiness to his interior labour. Limited because, as some of his writing in *Living* attests, his approach to remedying "the separation of human consciousness from the world" at times risks homogenizing "human" experience, not attending to the array of relationships to place and knowledge held by different cultures and communities in modernity. But in *Thinking and Singing*, a collection Lilburn edited in 2002, he insists that

a person can't simply inhabit the fine ear of another culture through mere intention; to attempt this is to be homeless with recklessness and to risk infecting the destination culture with one's own desperate rootlessness, making it in some way a tourist site, enervating it with casual romantic traffic – and besides the fit is always poor. We've got to find our own way of being where we are, something in our past that will show us a path to our idiosyncratic way of residency, a route back for us, an *apokatastasis*.⁷⁰

Lilburn's quest for autochthonicity, then, is hardly a move to innocence. And his reticence to engage extensively with Indigenous epistemologies and cosmologies should be read, I think, as a gesture of respect. As Jenny Kerber notes, Lilburn's prose is awake to "how colonialism can dangerously reassert itself in new forms in the impetus to indigenize the self. The concept of indigeneity, like the concept of citizenship, has the potent to come a universalized term that fails to adequately recognize internal differences between and among groups."⁷¹ Indeed, these internal differences have become a central preoccupation for his work. His writing in *The Larger Conversation* makes more explicit the ways in which the phenomenological and psychic wounds he's trying to remedy are deeply conditioned by the "colonial war" in which he lives. For instance, in "Contemplative Experience; Autochthonous Practice," he writes: "Because my presence is historically, and actually in this moment, colonial, the land may step back before me—or, to say this more accurately, conditions in me will cause it continuously to recede."⁷² And so while Lilburn's

⁷⁰ Tim Lilburn, "Philosophical Apokatastasis: On Writing and Return," In *Thinking and Singing: Poetry and the Practice of Philosophy*, edited by Tim Lilburn, 95-119, Toronto: Cormorant, 2002.

⁷¹ Jenny Kerber, *Writing in Dust: Reading the Prairie Environmentally* (Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2011), 214-215.

⁷² Tim Lilburn, *The Larger Conversation*, "Contemplative Experience; Autochthonous Practice," 204.

essays have always traced his experience of exile to the epistemologies of Enlightenment Europe, his later work makes more room for the autochthonous experience of First Nations. I mention the trustworthiness of his interior labour because, as these evolutions in his understanding makes clear, his sense of homesickness *preceded* his current understanding of its colonial origins. Once again, I believe it suggests an ethical practice that is more sensitive to the conditions of life in modernity than those reliant on the fluctuations of political discourse. Trustworthy, too, because he acknowledges the limits of his own work. The essays in *The Larger Conversation*, he admits, “do not adequately address directly the issue of compunction for colonial theft and violence. The guilt is deep. I would like to say this goes without saying, but it does not. The guilt is too deep to adequately address and I do not know the whole of it even now; possibly no one does.”⁷³

§ Loss

Both Lilburn’s and Moten’s work trace modernity’s political and ecological violence to the epistemological postures of the Enlightenment and the false ontologies they birth. Another way of putting this: When we refuse a paradox, we are refusing to be at a loss. But what is the difference between refusing to be at a loss, and denying loss itself?

§

Moten’s and Harney’s elaboration on the epistemic roots of whiteness circles around loss. For them, loss is bound up in ownership. And so while the focus of my inquiry here shifts, it doesn’t wander from the issue of home and homelessness, possession and dispossession, severalty and communion. In *All Incomplete*, Moten’s latest collaboration with Stephano Harney, whiteness is described as a kind of “disordering.” Quoting Erwin Schrödinger — who says that “living matter evades the decay to equilibrium” — they begin to think through the relationship between whiteness and life itself.⁷⁴ Unlike living matter, they argue that the unit of property/murder/robbery/slavery is

⁷³ Ibid, “Introduction,” XIII.

⁷⁴ Stephano Harney and Fred Moten, *All Incomplete*, “The Theft of Assembly,” 13.

a kind of social death that decays to equilibrium — this unit being necessary for the historical construction of race. In their words: “How we evade ownership/equilibrium is given precisely in that refusal to prevent loss that we call sharing, rubbing, empathy, hapticality.”⁷⁵ But this “decay,” they make clear, is not the decay inherent to, and necessary for, life. Rather, this decay — in the ownership of land and people, its violence and its theft — drives toward extinction. So their intention to evade “equilibrium,” I think, must be understood as an embrace of, or alignment with, the properties of “living matter.” And it’s worth attending to the language they use to describe this embrace. The posture they are proposing takes the form, linguistically, of a triple negative: it is given “in that refusal to prevent loss.” The disordering of whiteness, which they describe as “loss prevention,” is refused through practices in which loss is allowed. So this paradoxical refusal, a kind of yielding resistance, distinguishes itself from whiteness precisely in its relationship to loss. Rather than preventing it, they embrace it. But the loss they embrace, or allow — no doubt related to Moten’s description of homelessness — is “sharing, rubbing, empathy, hapticality,” the prevention of which is a disordering of life itself. Why? Because what is given in loss *is* life, just as life is what is taken in ownership.

So whiteness, which Moten and Harney call “the science of loss,” inflicts loss by trying to prevent it.⁷⁶ And as ownership escalates, so too does the fear of loss: the settler’s fort is surrounded. As Moten and Harney put it: “Ownership was a feedback loop – the more you own the more you own yourself. The more logistics you apply the more logic you acquire; the more logic you deploy the more logistics you require.”⁷⁷ There is a relationship, in other words, between the epistemological impulse to know the world as a plotted, appropriable thing and the social violence that emerges in order to prevent further “loss.” Moten and Harney make this link explicitly clear, continuing:

⁷⁵ Ibid, 14.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 15.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 17.

As Hortense Spillers says, the transatlantic slave trade was the supply chain of the Enlightenment. It was never-ending quest and conquest, because ownership is perpetual loss. Gilles Deleuze said that he would rather call power “sad.” We might say the same of ownership, where lies the most direct sense of loss of sharing. This feeling of loss translates into a diabolical obsession with loss prevention.⁷⁸

Here we encounter, once again, something like a tragic structure. The feedback loop of ownership is driven — through logic and logistics — by the “subject reaction” of the settler and the slaveowner. Like ancient heroes who bring about the very thing they attempt to evade, the history and thought of the Enlightenment, for Moten and Harney, is a story of the follies and dangers of loss prevention. And the sadness of this story — like the guilt we hold in our bodies — is beyond what we call comprehension.

I have a hunch that there is a meaningful relationship between “the subject reaction” outlined by Moten and Harney and the “bad homelessness” described by Zwicky. How is the “feeling of loss” given in ownership and the colonial wreckage that ensues affectively related to the feeling — despite each foot appearing to land on concrete — of unreality? Although Zwicky doesn’t arrive at such questions by way of political analysis — and so is not, like Lilburn, concerned with loss as it relates to private property — she appears, nonetheless, to be pointing at this relationship.

A subsidiary aim of the great systems of Western European philosophy has been to secure the world from loss.

Lyric allows us to see the whole in the particular; and in so doing to bring the preciousness, which is the losability, of the world into clear focus.

So the two — lyric thought and the aim of philosophical security — are reconciled only in that moment when the world is secured by the act of relinquishing it. That is, if the way to secure the world from loss is to give it over to the fullest possibility of loss.

⁷⁸Ibid, 17.

The idea would be not to confront this, but to come to exist,
ourselves, as that possibility.⁷⁹

How peculiar is it that Zwicky's lyric thought — and Lilburn's apokatastatic eros — resonates so forcefully with Moten's and Harney's "refusal to prevent loss"? Indeed, they belong to entirely different intellectual traditions, and their philosophical ambitions differ considerably, too. And yet, both find philosophical security in life itself, with all its losses, rather than in the homes erected, in the mind and in the world, to prevent it. They both find home in non-systematic philosophy, in the indeterminacy of paradox, and the permeability of homelessness. My tentative answer to this question (which is also the main argument of this essay) is that erotic homelessness, "good homelessness," attends to that which whiteness, by its very constitution, ignores. But this is not merely about attending to different objects; it's about attending differently. If whiteness ignores the world by eating it, we can't just offer it better food. Contrary to this intellectual inheritance, for which the world is an object of knowledge or distribution, a thing to be consumed, eros does not set out to circumscribe, possess, or define it. It relinquishes the world by relinquishing these postures — postures which subtend our preconceived notions of thought itself. This is the strange political charge of eros: in its giving the world over to loss, it refuses the epistemological appetite of colonial modernity. This means that it lies beyond what we call comprehension. In the paradoxical refusal of eros, knowledge becomes, as Lilburn puts it, "the generosity of being to the homeless mind."⁸⁰

The one who knows in this way — whose knowledge is not *hers* but rather a kind of gift — is homeless. She is neither self-possessed, nor can she possess the world. "Contemplation," Lilburn writes, "refuses any bifurcation of life and knowing."⁸¹ And is this not another way of describing

⁷⁹ Jan Zwicky, *Lyric Philosophy*, LH §302.

⁸⁰ Tim Lilburn, *Living In The World As If It Were Home*, "Contemplation and Cosmology," 27.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 28.

the disordering outlined by Moten and Harney? If whiteness is largely responsible for this bifurcation — through its “diabolical obsession with loss prevention” — then meaningful resistance to it must seek to suture the wound: it must restore life and knowing to a complicity worthy of human being.⁸² “But how to stand in emptiness,” Lilburn asks, “to want as food the tastelessness of having nothing?”⁸³ Loss prevention, of course — however blunderingly violent and self-exiling — is an understandable impulse. Against what Lilburn calls “the worthy enormities presented to mind,” it makes sense to settle for the comfort of a fictitious singularity.⁸⁴ In fact, if we see Descartes’ itch for clarity in ourselves, it may appear as an expression of a deep human yearning to know the world. How not to enact this impulse which seems to arise so naturally? But as Lilburn notes, what Cartesian “judgment affirms is not a knowledge of a subject but a transformation of it.”⁸⁵ It’s knowing, for Lilburn, reduces and skews the world. Unlike Cartesian judgment — which satisfies its “impulse to clarity” by transforming the world — the knowledge that eros affirms transforms the individual. Not into a master or possessor of nature, but into what Lilburn calls a “citizen of the polis of all things.”⁸⁶ And so, to return to Zwicky’s aphorism, instead of trying to confront our problem of “loss prevention,” to confront the difficulty of relinquishing the world, we must come to “exist, / ourselves, as that possibility.”⁸⁷ It’s only through this erotic transformation, Lilburn claims, that we can refuse the bifurcation of life and knowing; that we can refuse to prevent loss; and that we can receive the sustenance of the places we live: “This is the opposite of the necessity of some foods having to be altered, by soaking or boiling, say, to be made edible.”⁸⁸

⁸² Stephano Harney and Fred Moten, *All Incomplete*, “The Theft of Assembly,” 17.

⁸³ Tim Lilburn, *Living In The World As If It Were Home*, “Epektasis: Under The Instruction of Things,” 81.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, “Contemplation and Cosmology,” 29-30.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, “Sorrow; The River,” 53.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, “There Is No Presence,” 72.

⁸⁷ Zwicky, Jan, *Lyric Philosophy*, LH §302.

⁸⁸ Tim Lilburn, *The Larger Conversation*, “Thomas Merton’s Novitiate Talks on Cistercian Usages and Richard Kearney’s Theandricism,” 178.

§ Epektasis

The argument I've been making could encourage a misapprehension of Lilburn's understanding of eros. While I suspect Lilburn's ascetical philosophy, if genuinely undergone, quells fundamental dispositions of settler subjectivity — something he himself suggests in his later work — it would be a mistake to call such quelling its *aim*. Lilburn's eros is for the land, for “the larger self we miss,” not for some enhanced, because shaved, version of himself.⁸⁹ In an interview, Darryl Whetter asks Lilburn: “Is it important for us to be so shaved?” Lilburn responds:

No. That's coming at it the wrong way; you just *are* shaved if you look long and deeply without presumption. That's a large part of what looking is, the refusal of presumption or caricature. Otherwise what you're seeing is simply yourself; you're looking in the mirror everywhere. Being shaved is just the realization that all of your notions of power and centrality are stolen or made-up, it's stolen fire. Hard looking can relieve you of this.⁹⁰

So to think of ascesis as a political program or posture one can assume — a willful stripping of oneself — is to be off the scent. Why? One reason is because this kind of pseudo-ascetical posture, Lilburn suggests, risks reinstating the narcissism one is supposedly trying to remedy, and is thus likely to cause further harm. Another reason is because to be homeless is to understand the impossibility, and insufficiency, of erecting a home. This means that any attempt to systematize eros is bound to fail. As Lilburn puts it: “Insofar as system is a hedge against loss (of one's place, one's orientation), it repels eros: try to make yourself sleep.”⁹¹ Like falling asleep, eros us undergone: to seek to *acquire* sleep is to mistake it for yet another object, rather than a kind of undoing. You lose your place and your orientation. Eros, as Lilburn says, is “there when nothing's left.”⁹² And yet, I think it would also be a mistake to consider the transformation of settler subjectivity merely incidental to Lilburn's ascetical labour. Because the longing to belong to the place where one lives

⁸⁹ Tim Lilburn, “Contemplative Experience; Autochthonous Practice,” 203.

⁹⁰ Tim Lilburn, “Listening With Courtesy: A Conversation with Tim Lilburn,” ed. Darryl Whetter, 142-143.

⁹¹ Tim Lilburn, *Contemplation and Resistance: A Conversation*, 5.

⁹² *Ibid.*

will inevitably, if held with integrity, lead one to encounter the site of separation. Go see for yourself: walk into a meadow, or stop on the sidewalk in front of a tree, and watch your intention curl into something sentimental, a Romantic desire to transform it into a pat on the back, or a sofa.

This qualification, I believe, is important to understanding the inextricability of desire and loss. Our patterns of loss prevention are so deep that it is easy, disturbingly easy, to think of loss itself as yet another concept to wield. Lilburn insists that it is not:

the deeper into the practice [of poetry and contemplation] you travel, the emptier you become; you lose your bearings; the outlines of the self become less bold. I am not speaking of sentimental vacuity or an occult intuitionism or a poetic inspirationalism, those pseudo-wisdoms, pseudo-poetries, but of real loss: the loss of the sense of language as a tool, the loss of thinking as an explanatory power, the loss of the image of oneself as a knower to whom the world is presented.⁹³

Lilburn's essay "Epektasis: Under The Instruction of Things," in which he outlines the paradox of home and homelessness, is a meditation on this relationship between desire and loss. Here's how he begins the essay: "Summer river, jewelled variety; fat, flirtatious, yet oblique, bank grasses, a green, vegetable mist over the evening river. Poverty is the clearing in which the world strides toward you: lose and the wheat is closer."⁹⁴ Throughout the essay, loss and poverty are described as a way home. Control, security, competence are shaken in this poverty. That is, the epistemological dispositions aimed at securing the world from loss go limp. "There is no consolation of judgement here; no calm of management."⁹⁵ The way home, in other words, is the loss of the very things that feel most home-like. And this "home-offering absence," Lilburn insists, cannot even be crafted by the will; it "must be given not chosen."⁹⁶ What does all this mean? To return to our initial concern, it means that Lilburn's contemplative labour — which insists on the need to come home to the places we live — does not understand this movement as a claiming or seizing of land for oneself. In fact, it is

⁹³ Tim Lilburn, *The Larger Conversation*, "Thinking The Rule of Benedict in Modernity," 169.

⁹⁴ Tim Lilburn, *Living In The World As If It Were Home*, "Epektasis: Under The Instruction of Things," 77.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 82.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 80.

precisely the opposite. The only way home, for Lilburn, is an interior task relinquishing the itch to establish a home, of renouncing the ways of knowing-oneself-in-the-world that indulge possession and mastery. It is a burrowing back through layers of separation, through postures of entitlement, judgement, and supremacy. Coming home to the land as a European settler — a work that may always be incomplete — is a paradoxical labour, an unclenching rigor. And Lilburn makes it clear that this labour, the paradox of home and homelessness, is “littling.” Identity breaks up in this ascetical journey; walls are felled. “Humiliation, grief, regret can alter into beauty and kinship: poverty in us is like the forgottenness in grass which is the furthest tip of its beauty; it may place us in the family of grass. Lose and the wheat is closer.”⁹⁷ Is it possible that we fear what we most need?

The poverty, or loss, of eros arises because desire is *epektatic*. This means, according to Gregory of Nyssa, that it has no limit in itself. In the limitlessness of desire, one realizes that there is not any place of arrival. “To imagine there [is] is to still calculate, to still colonize what is with fantasy and, thus, to abandon the genius of desire.”⁹⁸ So if eros appears to have stopped, it is because it has become something other than itself.

The end of lack is the end of eros. Without absence and absence’s opening out, there is something else, good intentions, piety, good management. It’s like the people in the dialogues who shy away from the erotic business of philosophy because they fear to appear foolish or because they fear the ‘stripping’ of the exercise. They devote themselves to what most people think of as philosophical activity – geometric speculation or otherworldly abstraction or butcher-like analysis or political theory or righteousness – but that is in fact a way to strangle the convulsive erotic energy of philosophy.⁹⁹

To refuse the paradox of homelessness as home is to refuse the absence and limitlessness of desire. And so if there *is* a limit — which we could call a home — it means that eros has been replaced by

⁹⁷ Ibid, 77.

⁹⁸ Ibid, “There Is No Presence,” 70.

⁹⁹ Ibid, “Epektasis: Under The Instruction of Things,” 79.

its counterfeits: “good intentions, piety, good management.” By refusing the limitlessness of eros, these counterfeits become the basis of any the “pursuit of firm control” — the source, in other words, of the limitless will.¹⁰⁰ For Lilburn, what masquerades as virtue, however well intentioned, cannot address our poverty at the depth it exists. Indeed, because political postures built on “good intentions, piety, good management” seem perfectly capable of colonization, I would argue that they are also incapable of decolonization.

But if one can’t even elect to take up such erotic labour, if it “must be given not chosen,” what is one to *do*? How do we *not* refuse the paradox? If we live in a culture without sapiential sustenance, one built on the destruction of countless lifeworlds; if the tools we use to solve our problems have been handed to us by this culture; if we can’t seem to help, through our subject reactions, but obsessively prevent, and so inflict, loss; what are we to do? What does it mean to live in the world *as if* it were home? Lilburn’s answers to these questions do not resolve their desperation. And this, I think, is one reason we need to hear them. “The true ascesis,” he writes, “which is genuine political practice, is being honestly and deeply what we actually are.”¹⁰¹

§

Look around: there’s enough to regret. Stand back from the monumental human striving over the last four centuries, this gleaming, rippling intentionality; lift your hands from the heaving controls; leave the building. Calculation, purpose are nothing before this darkness. Give up. Sorrow is the one faint path. It isn’t marked, not really a way at all.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 84.

¹⁰¹ Tim Lilburn, *The Larger Conversation*, “On Sholem, Ruusbroec and Exegesis,” 33.

¹⁰² Tim Lilburn, *Living In the World As If It Were Home*, “Epektasis: Under The Instruction of Things,” 78.

Conclusion: *Worthy Enormities*

In the epilogue to *The Larger Conversation*, Lilburn quotes the beginning of “Blue Marrow” by Cree poet Louise Halfe, gesturing toward its invocation of the names of Indigenous women. “‘The prairie is full of bones,’ says Halfe. She bids them to stand and be heard.”¹ For Lilburn this poetic act is fundamental to the work of philosophy. “This is remembering,” he writes. “This is thinking. Remembering is one of the chief springs of ethics — okâsîmâsaskiy (Mother Earth); âtayôhkan (Spirit Beings). Remembering is courtesy, is regard; it brings forth the full self of the one who recalls.”² This thought — potent, expansive and strange — must be imagined to be known. Leaning on Halfe’s image of disinterment, of recalling the dead, Lilburn points us toward the significance of retrieval. To remember in this way throws the identity of the settler self, the atomic individual, off center — or maybe swallows its puniness in a self previously unconsidered, inaccessible, because unthinkable. To remember is to encounter a fullness of identity brought forth seemingly from without.

I wonder if there is a tragic refusal of this kind of courtesy in the phrase: “Go back to where you came from.” In North American settler society, this epithet has become more popular in recent years, with the increasing hostility of white supremacy. From the vantage point of liberal multiculturalism, its politics of recognition, what’s wrong about this phrase is simply that it is racist: *we’re all immigrants; everyone belongs here*. With a more critical analysis, of course, we might note the irony: that those hurling the phrase at racialized settlers, or even at Indigenous people, are settlers themselves. From here, we can see that the phrase reveals an impoverished sense of home — one that has much more to do with property than with place; one in which land belongs to humans, not the other way around.

¹ Lilburn, Tim, *The Larger Conversation*, “Epilogue,” 236.

² Ibid.

I suspect there is still another layer to this. That the projection is a symptom of a repressed shame, a refusal of hospitality due to an awareness, however unconscious, that we ourselves have not received a proper welcome. Not because the land or its peoples were unwelcoming, but because to receive a proper welcome, one must have the capacity to receive. For Lilburn, it is Europe's renunciation of its own esoteric traditions that disinherited settlers of this alert receptivity, and so of a place in this world. This is forgetting, a shrivelling of self. "Amnesia," as Derek Walcott put it, "is the true history of the New World."³ And where there is repression, there is also recognition. Perhaps not just a recognition of what we've done, but also of what we've left behind. And you can almost hear an echo of this in the phrase itself — as though some part of us, even if we're shouting at a racialized Other, knows we're addressing ourselves, is telling us what to do:

"Go back to where you came from."

§

In his essay "How Cassian Read," Lilburn discusses Christian contemplative forms of reading. Much like Socratic dialogue, the practice of such reading is therapeutic: "One does not read for comprehension but to be made comprehensible, tried."⁴

Reading Lilburn's work is often disorienting. You plod your way through his prose, as if following a game trail through thick bush, stopping every once in a while to look up an obscure word or ponder a turn of phrase; you think you're getting somewhere. It's hard work, reading Lilburn, not just because the esoteric traditions he writes out of are exotic to the modern ear, but also because his prose is dense and churning. You go on like this for a while — slow, determined — but eventually you start to suspect that there's no vista up ahead, nothing you'll be able to take a picture of, only more trail. This is confusing, at times humiliating, because, as you read, it *feels* as though you're advancing toward something. And here the analogy starts to wobble, risks inverting

³ Derek Walcott, "The Muse of History," ed. Radomir D. Mitrić, Arkadija, June 26, 2015, <http://arkadijski.blogspot.com/2015/06/derek-walcott-essay.html>.

⁴ Tim Lilburn, *Going Home*, "How Cassian Read," 80.

itself entirely. The bush starts to look oddly familiar, which usually means you're lost: you've been here before. All you're left with, when you finish one of his essays, is the hint of a path: a rustling within you.

§

I read Lilburn's prose as an offering. Through his labour of retrieval, withdrawal and unmodern attention, he provides European settlers with a way to approach their poverty. And this "way," as we've seen, is hardly straightforward. It's a path full of paradox and polysemy. It insists that in order to go forward, we must go back to forms of thought and behaviour we've abandoned.

Throughout my thesis, I have tried to attend to the relationship between the spiritual poverty of white settlers and the material reality we inhabit. And although the concerns addressed in my chapters are sprawling, they can also be read as different expressions of eros. *Pleonexia* is about discernment and greed. *Anachoresis* is about attention and will. *Epektasis* is about loss and certainty. All of them are paradoxical precisely because they are erotic. And although I've separated these paradoxes to examine different elements of settler poverty, it's worth considering how intimate they are. Glaucon's pleonexia, after all, is a retreat from philosophy and from the world. And the humility of withdrawing from the limitless will is a gesture of erotic limitlessness.

An implicit argument throughout my thesis has been that the shape and movement of Lilburn's thought points to the need for an ascetical, and therefore countercultural, knowledge. How is it countercultural? The paradoxical motion of erotic asceticism compels starving people to "want as food the tastelessness of having nothing;"⁵ to accept, in a world of limitless possibility, our own limits; to embrace indeterminacy and loss in a culture built on their denial. These movements suggest the possibility of an escape from our exile, a way into the places — both in ourselves and the world — that we've neglected.

⁵Tim Lilburn, *Living In The World As If It Were Home*, "Epektasis: Under The Instruction of Things," 81.

This abandonment, of course, has not just deprived European settlers of a nourishing world. The city we inhabit, a “garrison against loss,” inflicts more loss on others than we can fathom.⁶ It has destroyed countless Indigenous worlds in its construction; all the privilege and property we possess are the spoils of dispossession. And far from being a retreat from this reality, I think Lilburn’s ascetical philosophy, his concern for the settler soul, offers a way that we might finally and faithfully confront it.

Here is the point of asceticism: you gather yourself in, amassing a density of attention, in order to bring your eros to what can evoke its length and breadth, depth and height: sorrow for the world, ravishment by the world, attention to splendour, attention to horror. The abnegation of the ‘way’ is a stilling of other itches (for distraction, for approbation, for security) which deflect attention from the worthy enormities presented to mind, dwindle fundamental human eros to comfort.⁷

To live in the world as if it were home, Lilburn insists we must long for what is worthy of longing.

⁶ Tim Lilburn, *The Larger Conversation*, “Turning the Soul Around,” 14

⁷ Tim Lilburn, *Living In The World As If It Were Home*, “Contemplation and Cosmology,” 29-30.

Bibliography

- Basil, Roy J. Deferrari, and McGuire Martin R P. *Saint Basil, The Letters*. London: W. Heinemann, 1961.
- Baudrillard, Jean, and Mark Poster. "Simulacra and Simulations." Essay. In *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings, 2nd Ed.*, 166–84. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001.
- Bednarz, Evan. "Disappearing: An American Vocation." *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 58, no. 2 (2018): 189–213.
- . "Field Notes From the Noviciate." *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 54, no. 3 (2019): 301–41.
- Benedict of Nursia. *The Rule of St. Benedict*. Translated by Anthony C Meisel and M L del Mastro. Garden city, NY: Image Book, a division of Doubleday, 1975.
- Benjamin, Walter, Hannah Arendt, and Harry Zorn. "Theses on the Philosophy of History." Essay. In *Illuminations*. London: The Bodley Head Ltd, 2015.
- Berry, Wendell. *The Unsettling of America: Culture & Agriculture*. Sierra Club Books, 1986.
- Brigg, Morgan, Sarah Maddison , and Jon Altman. *Unsettling the Settler State: Creativity and Resistance in Indigenous Settler-State Governance*. Sydney, NSW: Federation Press, 2011.
- Butler, Judith. "Can One Live A Good Life In A Bad Life: Theodore Adorno Prize Lecture." *Radical Philosophy* 176, no. 9 (2012).
- Carlson, Keith Thor. *You Are Asked To Witness: The Stó:lō in Canada's Pacific Coast History*. Chilliwack, B.C.: Stó:lō Heritage Trust, 2000.
- Christie, Douglas E. *The Blue Sapphire of the Mind: Notes for a Contemplative Ecology*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Cohn, Carol. "Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 12, no. 4 (1987): 687–718. <https://doi.org/10.1086/494362>.
- Courtwright, David T. *The Age of Addiction: How Bad Habits Became Big Business*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press/Harvard University Press, 2021.
- Dickinson, Mark. *Canadian Primal: Poets, Places, and the Music of Meaning*. Montreal ; Kingston ; London ; Chicago: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2021.
- Felski, Rita. *The Limits of Critique*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2022.
- Frank, Jill. *Poetic Justice: Rereading Plato's Republic*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2018.
- Fung, Amy. "Is Settler Colonialism Just Another Study of Whiteness?" *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 53, no. 2 (2021): 115–31. <https://doi.org/10.1353/ces.2021.0011>.

- Grant, George. *Technology and Empire*. House of Anansi Press, 2018.
- . *The George Grant Reader*, William Christian and Sheila Grant, eds., (Toronto, 1998).
- Greenberger, Martin, and H A Simon. “Designing Organizations for an Information-Rich World.” Essay. In *Computers, Communications, and the Public Interest*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971.
- Haines-Eitzen, Kim. *Sonorous Desert: What Deep Listening Taught Early Christian Monks—And What It Can Teach Us*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2022.
- Hardy, Karl. “Unsettling Hope: Settler Colonialism and Utopianism.” *Spaces of Utopia: An Electronic Journal* 2, no. 1 (2012).
- Harney, Stefano, and Fred Moten. *The Undercommons Fugitive Planning & Black Study*. Wivenhoe: Minor Compositions, 2013.
- Harney, Stefano, Fred Moten, Silva Denise Ferreira da, and Zun Lee. *All Incomplete*. Colchester: Minor Compositions, 2021.
- Heidegger, Martin. *Basic Writings: Martin Heidegger*. Translated by David Farrell Krell. London: Routledge, 2011.
- Heiti, Warren. *Attending: An Ethical Art*. Montreal ; Kingston ; London ; Chicago: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2021.
- Hintze, Hannah. “Gluttony and Philosophical Moderation in Plato's ‘Republic.’.” Thesis, The University of Chicago ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2009.
- Huxley, Aldous. “Distractions I.” Essay. In *Vedanta for the Western World*, edited by Christopher Isherwood, 125–29. Nabu Public Domain Reprints, 2012.
- Kerber, Jenny. *Writing in Dust: Reading the Prairie Environmentally*. Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2011.
- . “‘Looking with Care and Desire Seemed a Political Act’: Environmental Concern in the Poetry of Tim Lilburn.” *Canadian Poetry: Documents, Studies, Reviews* 55, no. Fall/Winter (2004): 86–97.
- Klassen, Abigail. “The Larger Conversation: Contemplation and Place.” *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies* 38 (2018): 223.
- Kotef, Hagar. *The Colonizing Self: Or, Home and Homelessness in Israel/Palestine*. Durham ; London: Duke University Press, 2020.
- Kyong, Chun Wendy Hui. *Updating to Remain the Same Habitual New Media*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2017.
- Laird, Martin S. *A Sunlit Absence: Silence, Awareness, and Contemplation*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

- . *Into The Silent Land: The Practice of Contemplation*. London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2009.
- Lilburn, Tim, and Jan Zwicky. *Contemplation and Resistance: A Conversation*. Saskatoon: JackPine Press, 2003.
- Lilburn, Tim. *Desire Never Leaves: The Poetry of Tim Lilburn*. Edited by Alison C. Calder. Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2007.
- . *Going Home*. Toronto: Anansi, 2008.
- . “Listening With Courtesy: A Conversation with Tim Lilburn.” Edited by Darryl Whetter. *Studies In Canadian Literature* 22, no. 1 (1997): 135–44. https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/scl22_1int02.
- . *Living In The World As If It Were Home*. Scotland: Xylem Books, 2019.
- . “Philosophical Apokatastasis: On Writing and Return.” *Thinking and Singing: Poetry and the Practice of Philosophy*, edited by Tim Lilburn, 95-119, Toronto: Cormorant, 2002.
- . “Placeless Drifting, Colonization and Reconciliation as Interior Journey (an Interview with Tim Lilburn).” Edited by Cary Campbell. *Philosophasters*, September 27, 2019. <https://philosophasters.org/blog/2019/8/12/an-interview-with-tim-lilburn-interiority-place-de-colonization>.
- . *The Larger Conversation: Contemplation and Place*. Edmonton, Alberta: The University of Alberta Press, 2017.
- . “Two Books About Love.” *The Fiddlehead* 199, no. Winter (1999): 106–11.
- Lista, Michael. “Assiniboia, by Tim Lilburn.” *On Poetry*. The National Post, April 27, 2012. <https://nationalpost.com/afterword/michael-lista-on-poetry-assiniboia-by-tim-lilburn>.
- Maillet, G. “In a Boat on the River Nowhere Writing Home: The Spiritual Poetic of Tim Lilburn.” *Studies in Canadian Literature / Études en littérature canadienne* 30, no. 1 (2005): 230.
- “Matthew 4:7-9.” Bible Gateway. New Catholic Bible. Accessed December 5, 2022. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+4%3A7-9&version=NCB>.
- McKay, Don. *All New Animal Acts: Essays, Stretchers, Poems*. Kentville, Nova Scotia: Gaspereau Press, Printers & Publishers, 2020.
- Merton, Thomas, and Jonathan Montaldo. *Choosing to Love the World: On Contemplation*. Boulder, CO: Sounds True, 2015.
- . *A Thomas Merton Reader*. Edited by Thomas P McDowell. Garden City, N.Y: Image Books, 1974.
- . *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*. Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 1974.
- . *Preface to Japanese Edition of the Seven Story Mountain*. Trappist, Ky: Abbey of Gethsemani, n.d.

- . *The Wisdom of the Desert: Sayings from the Desert Fathers of the Fourth Century*. New York: New Directions, 1970.
- Moten, Fred. "Give Your House Away, Constantly" - Fred Moten and Stefano Harney Revisit The Undercommons In A Time of Pandemic And Rebellion (part 2). Other. *Millennials Are Killing Capitalism*, July 11, 2021. <https://millennialsarekillingcapitalism.libsyn.com/give-away-your-home-constantly-fred-moten-and-stefano-harney>.
- Nadeau, Denise Marie, and Deanna Reder. *Unsettling Spirit: A Journey into Decolonization*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2020.
- Nielsen , Karen Margrethe. "The Tyrant's Vice: Pleonexia and Lawlessness in Plato's Republic." Wiley Online Library. Accessed December 4, 2022. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdfdirect/10.1111/phpe.12129>.
- Odell, Jenny. *How To Do Nothing: Resisting the Attention Economy*. New York: Melville House, 2021.
- Plato, Chris Emlyn-Jones, and William Preddy. *Republic*. Cambridge, Mass, etc. : Harvard University Press, 2013.
- "Pleonexia Definition & Meaning." Merriam-Webster. Merriam-Webster. Accessed December 4, 2022. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/pleonexia>.
- Querengesser, Neil. "'God in His Blank Spaces:' Quantum Theology in Tim Lilburn's Names of God." *Canadian Literature* 218 (2013).
- Regan, Paulette. *Unsettling the Settler Within: Indian Residential Schools, Truth Telling, and Reconciliation in Canada*. Edited by Taiaiake Alfred. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014.
- Said, Edward W. "Interview with Ari Shavit," republished in *Power, Politics, and Culture: Interviews with Edward W. Said*, by Edward W. Said, ed. Gauri Viswanathan (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), 458. Other. *Haaretz*, August 18, 2000.
- Shaw, Emory. "The Larger Conversation: Contemplation and Place by Tim Lilburn." *The Goose* 17, no. 1 (2018). <https://scholars.wlu.ca/thegoose/vol17/iss1/22>.
- Simpson, Anne. *Experiments in Distant Influence: Notes & Poems*. Kentville, Nova Scotia: Gaspereau Press, Printers & Publishers, 2020.
- Simpson, Leanne Betasamosake. "White Supremacy in the Bush." *Geist*, April 8, 2019. <https://www.geist.com/findings/prose/white-supremacy-in-the-bush/>.
- St. Theodoros, "A Century of Spiritual Texts," chap. 17, in *The Philokalia*, vol. 2, trans. G. Palmer, P. Sherrard, and K. Ware (London: Faber and Faber, 1981), 17.
- Thompson, Christian. "Whitecap Dakota First Nation." Indigenous Saskatchewan Encyclopedia. University of Saskatchewan . Accessed November 28, 2022. https://teaching.usask.ca/indigenoussk/import/whitecap_dakota_first_nation.php.
- Timber Timbre. *Grand Canyon*. MP3. *Hot Dreams*. Full Time Hobby, n.d.

- . *Floating Cathedral*. MP3. *Sincerely, Future Pollution*. City Slang Records, n.d.
- Tuck, Eve, and K. Wayne Yang. “Decolonization Is Not A Metaphor.” *Tabula Rasa* 38 (2021): 61–111.
- Underhill, Evelyn. *The Cloud of Unknowing: The Classic of Medieval Mysticism*. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2003.
- Walcott, Derek. “The Muse of History.” Edited by Radomir D. Mitrić. Arkadija, June 26, 2015. <http://arkadijski.blogspot.com/2015/06/derek-walcott-essay.html>.
- Wark, McKenzie. *Capital Is Dead: Is This Something Worse?* London ; New York: Verso, 2021.
- Weil, Simone. *Gravity and Grace*. London: Routledge, 2004.
- Wolfe, Patrick. “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native.” *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 387–409. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623520601056240>.
- Zander, Shannon E. “In Defense of Socrates' City of Sows (370B7-372d3): The Pedagogical Role of Prefiguration in the Republic,” n.d.
- Zuboff, Shoshana. *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*. New York: PublicAffairs, 2020.
- Zwicky, Jan. *Lyric Philosophy*. Kentville, N.S.: Gaspereau Press, 2011.