

# **Salmon Tales: An Arts-Informed and Literary Inquiry into Salmon Farming in B.C.**

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# INTRODUCTION

Aquaculture has been practiced successfully for thousands of years. In places such as Thailand, rice growers alternate grain and fish crops where small ponds provide protein and added income for families (Morton, 1998). It is only within the last two decades that large corporations have discovered the cash crop of Atlantic salmon farmed for its high density, high yield and high profits (Morton, 1998).

## Why Salmon Farming Matters

My aim in this section is not to provide a detailed history of the rise of salmon farming in B.C. waters. There are many excellent articles, books and reports detailing this story (Keller & Leslie 1996; Volpe 2001; Marshall 2003; Glavin 1998, 2003; Morton 1998; the Leggatt Inquiry 2001, the Auditor General of Canada 2000; Schreiber 2002). Dorothee Schreiber (2002) wrote two excellent articles that examine the framing of farmed fish and ways both commercial and food fishers from Ahousaht and Namgis First Nations make sense of salmon farms in their traditional territory. In detailing some of the risks in salmon farming, my goal is to continue to raise questions about any benefits from such a destructive industry.

Salmon aquaculture or salmon farming is the industrial mass production of salmon. Farmed salmon are raised in floating net-cage pens located directly in the ocean and usually in coastal inlets. Each farm usually has 14 pens with each pen holding 50,000 fish providing each fish with a space of eight cubic feet (CAAR, 2002). In total, the 14 pens are the size of "three football fields" (CAAR, 2002, 5). In BC there are over approximately 140 salmon farm tenures with most of the product exported to the US, Japan, Taiwan, Korea (Living Oceans website). Currently, salmon farming occurs in places such as Chile, Scotland, Norway, US and both Pacific and Atlantic Canada.

### Environmental Pollution

On the surface, the practice of salmon farming would seem to be beneficial in terms of economic development, environmental preservation and food security. However, there are a number of documented risks associated with the practice.

#### Disease

Disease and parasite transfers such as sea lice can pose a threat to wild stocks. It is, because fish are in such close proximity, they are prone to disease and parasites. This has been particularly prevalent in the Broughton Archipelago, a place that holds the greatest concentration of fish farms in B.C. and has seen continuous declines in wild pink salmon returns in the past two years.

#### Fish Escapes

Fish escapes, or what some scientists call "biological pollution" happens when Atlantic salmon escape their pens and often end up in spawning channels and rivers. An exotic species on the Pacific coast, Atlantic salmon threaten the further depletion of the wild salmon stocks (CAAR, 2002). Between 1991 and 2001, at least 413,000 Atlantics escaped from B.C. fish farms, and in one 17-day period over 10,000 escaped Atlantics were caught by commercial fisherman (Marshall, 2003, p.19). To date, Atlantic salmon have been found spawning in thirty rivers in B.C. (Wickham, 2002).

#### Waste

Pollution from salmon farms is a huge problem as the pens are in open waters in delicate ecosystems. Excrement and uneaten fish feed account for much of the pollution that often smothers the sea life on the ocean floor below the farms (CAAR, 2002).

#### Marine animals

Whale researcher, Alexandra Morton has found that salmon farming poses risks to marine mammals such as whales and porpoises. These animals have abandoned areas in which fish farms are located due to “acoustic harassment” from a device used by farmers that broadcasts 195 db of underwater sound in order to keep seals from eating the product (Morton 1998). In addition, fish farmers can obtain a DFO Predator License to kill seals and sea lions that threaten their harvest! (Langer, 2003, p.3). Stellar sea lions are also a red-listed species under a provincial policy. Langer notes the lack of regulation in this area as the DFO did not receive a single sample from killed marine animals required under the permit (2003, p.3).

### **Antibiotics**

Antibiotics are used in farmed fish to treat disease such as sea lice, which we later ingest. Moreover, antibiotics not consumed by the fish get taken up by the natural ocean currents and are dispersed into the marine environment (CAAR, 2002, p.6).

### **Stolen Food**

Another risk of the industry lies in the protein-intensive nature of salmon farming. When raising salmon, they must be fed large amounts of protein, and the protein comes from the overexploited oceans, mostly anchovies and from the global South that feed a wealthy Northern and European consumers. For each pound of farmed salmon, about three pounds of wild fish is needed (CAAR, 2002, p.6). Marshall notes that there is no salmon production system in the world that is more efficient at converting energy inputs into protein than any commercial fishery (2003, p.23).

### **Chemicals**

In farmed salmon production, the pigment Canthaxanthin is used in fish feed to add the pink colour to farmed salmon, which would otherwise be gray (CAAR, 2002). There is evidence that these chemicals, once used in sun-tanning pills, can cause blindness (CAAR, 2002, p.6). In 2003, the European Union recommended the reduction of this chemical in fish food from 80 mg/kg to 25 mg/kg (SCAN quoted in Langer, 2003, p.4). Farmed salmon have been found to contain higher levels of toxic contaminants than wild salmon and this bioaccumulation of pollutants eventually ends up in human fatty tissue (CAAR, 2002). This build-up of toxins targets women as they often carry more body fat than men. Also, the quality of farmed salmon is soft as it is usually much fattier than wild salmon.

The BC Salmon Farmers Association and the BC government advocate that consuming farmed salmon takes pressure off wild stocks, and provides much needed jobs (1,800 direct and 2,000 indirect) for the struggling coastal communities (BCSFA website). However, the commercial fishery of wild salmon still provides 15,000 jobs and fish farming threatens traditional local economies, as well as driving down the price of the wild product on the market (CAAR, 2002; Langer, 2003).

### **Ownership and Economic Benefits**

Two significant changes occurred in the salmon farming industry that resulted in its significant growth. In the late 1980s, Norwegian companies faced with strict environmental regulations and size restriction in their own country, decided to expand in countries where regulations were less strict (Marshall, 2003, p.8). The second significant change was the shift from Pacific to Atlantic salmon as the Atlantics were what was being farmed in Norway because the Atlantics grew faster and were more successful at surviving intensive conditions (Marshall, 2003, p.8).

Currently, five multinational companies control 83 per cent (109 of 131) of fish farm licenses and generate 82 per cent of total production in B.C. (Marshall, 2003, p.9). To put this in perspective, in 1989 there were 50 companies; in 1997 there were 15; in 2003 there were 11. The myth that salmon farms are the savior of the economically depressed coastal communities doesn’t hold as only seven per cent of salmon farming tenures are B.C.-owned (Marshall, 2003, p.9). Although aquaculture is B.C.’s largest legal agricultural export, the industry only accounts for 0.55 per cent of B.C.’s GDP! (Marshall, 2003, p.9).

Currently the industry employs about 1,900 people. If the industry were to expand as the moratorium on new farm licenses has been lifted, the Salmon Farmers Association and the government would like to see the industry triple in size over the next ten years (Marshall, p.15). If this were to happen, Dale Marshall calculates in the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives’ (CCPA) latest report, the profits are likely to leave the province because foreign owned companies control this domestic industry. None of

these companies have head offices in B.C. therefore the benefits (city centre investment, high level jobs, income tax returns from high income earners) are never accrued in B.C. Furthermore, Marshall argues that job creation would be modest or non-existent, if Norway and Scotland are case studies to be followed (jobs actually declined) (2003, p.16).

Another important point in this story is that the Canadian aquaculture industry receives "significant" subsidies, tax credits and indirect government expenditures (Marshall, 2003, p. 17). Between 1997 and 2001, the aquaculture industry received \$15.7 million in direct federal government subsidies, B.C.'s share was 2.2 million (Marshall, p.17). Economic support to the industry from the federal and provincial government also comes from research and development, promotion, contributions to industry associations, and uncovered regulatory costs (Marshall, p.17). In 2000, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans pledged \$75 million over five years for "enhancing the development of Canada's aquaculture industry," even though its mandate is to "manage and protect wild fisheries" (Marshall, p.17). In addition, Marshall details many further threats salmon farms pose to other sectors of the B.C. economy such as marine eco-tourism and the sport fishery (2003).

### **First Nations**

Quite possibly one of the most important reasons to cease this industry is the fact that many of these farms are located in traditional territory never ceded by First Nations. Salmon farming has been found to impact traditional fisheries such as wild salmon and clams that many First Nations depend on (Marshall, 2003, p.26). Many First Nations have a "zero tolerance policy against all salmon farms" (Heiltsuk and Nuxalk), and many Nations would be greatly impacted by the collapse of the wild fishery. I should also point out that not all First Nations are opposed to salmon farms in their territory, and the Kitasoo and Klemtu Nations have signed agreements with many companies to operate farms.

### **Regulation**

Since 1972, the BC aquaculture industry has been regulated and guided by four federal departments and six provincial ministries (Volpe, 2001). There has been some research, development and testing into ocean-based closed containment systems and land-based farms however, the costs are simply too high for the industry. Why pay more in energy bills to pump waste out and clean water in when the sea can provide this service for free? Otto Langer, who worked at the DFO for 32 years before becoming Marine Conservation Director at the David Suzuki Foundation says "the introduction of Atlantic salmon to this [B.C.] coast is a prime example of DFO favoring industry over environmental protection" (2003, p.2). Despite numerous violations of the *Fisheries Act*, the government agencies "did not put this industry on an even playing field with other industries that would be held responsible for similar actions" (Langer, 2003, p.2.) Technology and capital clearly emerge as driving forces behind the depletion of the wild salmon stocks, and the rise of aquaculture in BC. But as Ecotrust's Seth Zuckerman writes in *Salmon Nation*, "[t]he perversity of the global economy is that it treats these farmed McFish as if they were the equivalent of the wild fish – fungible commodities, in the tongue of economists...But they are not the same...[they are] a tendril of an entirely different system of provision and exchange, one which ignores the distinct qualities of local varieties and cultures, and instead seeks to produce More of whatever Product can be sold at a profit" (2003, p.6).

This introduction is here to provide a brief overview to the issue I chose to address in my arts-informed inquiry. Clearly, there are many risks posed by salmon farming to the sovereignty of B.C.'s First People, the health of all British Columbians, as well as the destruction of marine and coastal environments.

### **Complexity of the Issue**

I could continue to write about all the horrors of salmon farming in an extensive academic report. Indeed, this issue is tremendously complex. However, my interest is not to overwhelm the reader with facts and statistics. My intention is rather to engage readers on many levels that perhaps prose cannot adequately accomplish on its own, and to change the way people see this issue. This is why I have chosen arts-based methods for my inquiry. I contend that form and content work together to create meaning; how we know affects what we know. In this inquiry, I attempt to establish counter-hegemonic narratives with respect to the way we understand salmon through literary and visual arts experiments.

There is an affective dimension to art that is missing in prose; through art we can explore our personal and collective attachments to important issues; we can challenge our commonsensical ideas to see the world in radically different ways; we can evoke emotions that tend to be excluded from “objective” studies; we can provoke the imagination to conjure new possibilities.

## Overview of the project

This project occurred in two parts. First, I co-created a banner installation in February 2004. “Telling Salmon Tales” is an interdisciplinary project by three graduate students with a shared history growing up in British Columbia and witnessing the annual returns of wild salmon to their home rivers. The banner project examines the intersection of salmon and human lives and the stories that emerge from these relationships. These stories reveal deeply felt personal, spiritual, political and cultural connections to this revered fish, stories of colonization and fragmentation, resistance and regeneration.

“Telling Salmon Tales” is a collaborative art installation prepared for the 2004 FES Eco-Art and Media Festival. The project was an experiment in creating a form of art that attempted to challenge and transform our understanding of salmon. There are three principal researchers/artists in this project: Lee Bensted, a Master’s student at U of T’s Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), Jacinda Mack, a Masters student in Communication and Culture at York University, and myself; however, there are *at least* four stories to tell. Each of us has an analysis of the final piece, and our creative process but what I am interested in telling is the story behind my banner as well as exploring the tensions in collaborative eco-art work.

My underlying interest in practicing arts-based ways of understanding is to expand the lenses I use to “see” human/salmon relationships. I also want to experiment with two different, but complementary ways of representing the world: writing and visual art. Both my “Salmoneers” story cycle and my banner installation have been exactly that: experiments. In this political struggle over meaning, I want to unfix the ways we know salmon; I don’t want to forget the life of a salmon when we look it as protein on our plate. Butler-Kisber argues,

[t]he rationale for including arts-based representation in qualitative research is form mediates understanding. Different forms can qualitatively change how we understand phenomena....As well, these nontraditional forms help disrupt the hegemony inherent in traditional texts and evoke emotional responses that bring the reader/viewer closer to the work, permitting otherwise silenced voices to be heard. (2002, p.230)

In “Telling Salmon Tales,” I wanted to choose a form dramatically different from the “scientistic reporting” that dominates the great pacific salmon fisheries debate, yet I didn’t want to discount the contribution science has made in understanding wild pacific salmon. I wanted to produce something other than a traditional academic response (i.e. formal write-ups, papers, etc). Instead, I wanted to evoke emotional, personal responses from the reader or participant.

Next I wrote a salmon story cycle called “Salmoneers”. I completed these stories in June 2004. A story cycle is a series of short stories fused together by the reappearance of a central character, characters, event, or set of events. I decided this was the best way to disguise the perceived polemical nature of telling stories about salmon farming. The story cycle also allowed for the diverse sides of the issue (e.g. salmon farm workers, owners, local community perspectives, and First Nation perspectives, etc.) to be re-presented.

After I wrote the stories, I researched and wrote a reflection piece on stories, art and literature as ways of knowing. This work synthesized eco-criticism, writing and visual arts-practice as a form of inquiry, along with other theorists such as Martha Nussbaum who speaks about the role of moral philosophy in literature. Finally I compiled my specific reflections on story-writing and art-making processes. Each story is very different in tone, style and form. Part of the reason for such a confessional tone in the banner reflections is because I continue to work with the two women with whom I collaborated on “Telling Salmon Tales.” I am still struggling and still processing the experience through writing about it. I have an ethical commitment to Lee and Jacinda that extends beyond the scope of this Major Research Project and Report.

The Major Research Project Report moves from a discussion of the theoretical investigations of story, art, and literature, to a more focused discussion of how I “applied” these theories to my own project. The introduction has provided a brief overview of why salmon farming is a critical environmental issue and details the risks associated with the industrial farming of Atlantic salmon in B.C. waters. Next, I present a theoretical discussion of story and the role it plays in transforming our understanding of the world. I then move into a discussion of eco-criticism and arts-informed research where I specifically examine the work of artist Susan Feindel, and poets Don McKay and Di Brandt. Part two of the report shifts to a reflexive discussion of my writing and arts-practice. In the final chapters I reflect on writing “Salmoneers” and creating the banner installation, “Telling Salmon Tales” highlighting the collaborative tension in creating art together.

## MEANING-MAKING: THE ROLE OF STORY IN POLITICS

Stories are theories, I tell my students, they are theories, opening up the scars of history, geography. Stories map us. Every work of research is in some sense a narrative, a fiction. Tell me your story and I will tell my own in new ways. I will read you, reread you, see myself anew, retell our stories intertwined, tangled, and the hallways of our ivory towers will breathe and pulse with the beating of hearts and wings and blood and apertures of hope.

Rishma Dunlop, 2002, p.33

### Politics as the struggle over meaning

This project and project report argue that literature and visual art have an important role to play within environmental politics. It is an effort to politicize and historicize our current social and environmental relations by exploring our relationship to salmon. I want to interrogate the current dominant ethical relationship between human communities and salmon. Is it one of instrumentality and economics? Are salmon seen only as food? Are these creatures merely commodities? Do other communities experience and know salmon differently? Through the two projects that comprise my Major Research Project, a collaborative banner installation called "Telling Salmon Tales," and a story cycle of short fiction called, "Salmoneers," my aim is to subvert dominant ways we (my community, British Columbians, Canadians) understand these beings. In other words, my project is an effort to challenge hegemony.

Hegemony is always an active struggle to fix meaning in particular ways that serve to reinforce unequal relations of power. Resisting hegemony is also an active process (marino, 1997, p.103-112). Hegemony happens when discourse solidifies and is seen as "natural" or as "common-sense." Some of the hegemonic narratives of salmon on the B.C. coast are salmon as foodstuff, salmon as commodity, salmon as natural resource, salmon as sport, salmon as contested and scarce resource between native and non-native fishers, and a strong romantic notion of salmon as a key component of B.C.'s cultural heritage. In the case of salmon farming on the B.C. coast, the industry has worked to naturalize a number of narratives: farmed salmon as the economic savior of small, coastal communities; the food to prevent world hunger; a reliable source of protein and other healthy nutrients; and the solution to over fishing of wild salmon stocks.

My project investigates the role of visual and textual representations in counter-hegemonic struggle. In particular, this project is an effort to unfix the meaning of "salmon" as, for instance, a machine and a global commodity in order to open spaces for the creation of new, less destructive meanings. At the World Summit on Salmon I attended at Simon Fraser University in June, 2003, I encountered Terry Brown and his multi-media (sound and photography/slide images) presentation of wild B.C. salmon at different times and places in their lifecycle. Although not an exhaustive list, some stories and representations that writers have come up with to challenge this hegemony include Seattle's "Salmon in the City" project that presents many counter-hegemonic representations of salmon, my favourite being a 40 foot long salmon pedestrian footbridge, where it is the salmon's turn to eat us (see Appendix B). In terms of counter-hegemonic literary interpretations, Roche and McHutchison's book *First fish, first people: salmon tales of the North Pacific Rim* is a visual and literary gem with stories from traditional cultures based on the Pacific: the Ainu from Japan; Ulchi and Nyvkh from Siberia; Okanagan and Coastal Salish from Canada; and Makah, Warm Springs, and Spokane from the United States (see Appendix C). Also excellent is a short fiction piece by Katherine Kerr, "salmon runs" that uses phrases such as "satin flesh" and "bloated decay all around me" (p.68). Also, is the poem "Coho Salmon" by R.W. Stedding:

Beached on a rounded stone, you flap  
Against earth like a new moon and fall  
Till gills flared, your eyes before my eyes  
Clouding, as your lips open and close  
Trying to say something entering death  
Amazed to see me standing here  
And breathing air. (p.31)

## The Role of Story in Political Struggle

Every day we tell ourselves stories about the way the world works. These embedded narratives are really theories, even if we don't acknowledge them as such. Thus, we need to be careful of the stories we tell (King, 2003). Our ethical, political, and moral assumptions are part of who we are, and are often expressed in language, stories and actions in the world. In fact it is through storytelling that Cherokee and Greek writer and professor, Thomas King explores literature, history, religion, politics, and culture as a way to investigate the relationship between North America and its First Peoples. He argues that all we are, are stories and that you can't understand the world or yourself without telling a story (King, 2003, p.32). Telling stories is a political act, one that occurs inside our homes, in grassroots environmental organizing, in the mainstream media, in the corporate public relations offices, through visual narratives, and inside the covers of literary works.

In the stories told about salmon and salmon farming, whether told by the BC Salmon Farmers Association, the David Suzuki Foundation, the Heiltsuk First Nation, you or me, we need to acknowledge the partiality of all stories. All stories attempt, consciously or not, to fix meaning in particular ways. All stories are told by someone and are partial to some interests and values. Thus, obviously, not all stories are liberatory or direct their efforts toward social change. However, we need to recognize the potential of stories to change the ways we understand the world and invite us to share a particular ethical position; re-writing these narratives into a story of transformation (through art and short fiction) is, for me, a personal and political act of resistance. In this arts-informed project, I use writing as a form of inquiry, not just into the subject, but into the ways we relate to one another, and for me, this inquiry includes the non-human. In this sense, writing stories and installing a salmon banner project also counts as research. I include animal others in my writing inquiry because it speaks to the anthropocentric nature of both visual and written language. For me, writing the non-human, whether a forest or a salmon, challenges the heterosexist, colonial, anthropocentric assumptions in using the tool of language.

## Challenge and transform the stories we tell

Numerous authors have commented on the crucial role of story in political struggle. Thinking specifically about stories as environmental education, Leesa Fawcett (2000) argues, "Humans are story-telling animals and the stories we tell shape who we are," and "as we re-write them they might also reshape us" and that "narrative ethics offer environmental educators the chance to remember what it is they are struggling for, what the messy contradictory places feel like, and how they are dealt with on a day to day basis" (p.145). Stories also engage us in an active dialogue, one where the reader and writer make meaning together. As Traci Warkentin (2002) argues, "reading is an active pursuit where-by the story and stories within are made intelligible through the active understanding and empathy of the reader, who is then implicated in the events as they unfold" (p.243). In writing, telling and reading stories, however, we need to be aware of the elements of the story that speak to reinforcing hegemonic power relations through language or use elements (metaphors) that explode common sense ways of understanding. As we will see in the next section, I argue Don McKay uses metaphor in ways that call for an active reading and explode hegemonic ways of knowing. Roger King also argues that environmental ethics needs to adopt narrative strategies, and along with Warkentin, both call for a critical awareness of taking into account metaphors used to set the narrative context (King 2003, p.33; Warkentin, 2002, p.242). A key point in my argument surrounds the idea of form: story, novel, painting, etc.; it is also the way we tell stories that allows for multiple ways of knowing (Baskwill, 2001). Therefore the form that stories can take is as important as the stories that can reach inside us, evoke emotion, ideas, and imagination in transformative ways. It is this "writing of new plot lines" that I argue is part the transformative potential of stories. In noting why many feminist scholars choose to write science fiction, Donna Haraway argues it is because boundaries (cultural, biotechnical, and political) can be reimagined and "some other order of difference" is possible" (1991). In reflecting on her PhD dissertation/novel, Rishma Dunlop argues that "the novel can be a vehicle for communicating research in a dissertation, providing a level of engagement and deep connection with art and understandings of human experiences" (2002, p.215). I too argue for literature and visual art as a way of understanding that nourishes and enters our consciousness in a way other philosophical or academic prose can not.

This research project also uses artwork as the method of investigation and as the final representation of my inquiry into salmon. I draw on arts-based theorists to address why visual art is an important medium in transforming our relationships with the natural world.

## The Role of Visual Art in Political Struggle

Like theory and action, there is a reciprocal relationship between form and content. Arts-based research is one way to look at alternative storytelling methods to support a re-telling of an idea or issue, in this case, salmon and salmon farming. Art-Educator, Maxine Greene argues that the arts "move us into spaces where we can envision other ways of being and ponder what it might signify to realize them. By moving into such spaces requires a willingness to resist the forces that press people into passivity and bland acquiescence" (1995, p.135). To resist such normalization tendencies Greene argues, "is to become aware of the ways in which certain dominant social practices enclose us in molds, define us in accord with extrinsic demands, and discourage us from going beyond ourselves and from acting on possibility" (p.135). Greene argues that it "is not only seeing something in the visible world that we would not have suspected were it not for Monet that is of value to us, it is also recognizing that the vision –and the meaning and the pulsation—are functions of a certain way of attending on our part.... Just as in poetry, in painting, meanings are ways of relating to things.... Meaning happens in and by means of an encounter with a painting, with a text, with a dance performance" (p.139). In this way, my act of re-telling salmon stories through art and fiction resists normalization processes within the sphere of the university, as well as asking many diverse readers to create meaning from interacting with both the banner installation and the story cycle.

In order to discuss my work and the work of other artists, poets and writers, I situate my work in a multi-disciplinary framework, one that intersects at many points. I will draw on theorists and ideas from eco-criticism, arts-informed research, community arts, and eco-arts.

## Three Examples of Story and Art as Political Practice

In order to discuss the idea of ecocriticism as an active mode of practice, I will focus on the essays of Don McKay and his writing nature into text in *Vis à Vis*. I will also draw on the poetry of Di Brandt in *Now You Care*. I present these two writers as examples of the active practice of writing to change hearts and minds, as well as ways of reading the world and the dialogic nature of literature.

In the section addressing visual art and the power to transform the ways we "know" or "see," I draw on Canadian artist Susan Feindel and engage primarily with her most recent work in her exhibition, *Landscapes Beneath the Sea*. I am drawn to Susan Feindel's work because of her interest in the sea, for her unusual work with scientists (including presenting together at scientific conferences), and for her strong connection and incorporation of the physical earth into her work.

## ECO-CRITICISM AND ART AS WAYS OF KNOWING

"the poetic and the political are inseparable"

James Clifford, "Partial Truths" (1986)

This section examines three artists whose work resonates with my thesis that literature and visual art have an important role to play within environmental politics and in challenging hegemonic narratives. Through the language of poetry, or a literary essay, or a painting, I argue we come to understand an issue in a unique way through these diverse forms.

I want to take up what Cate Sandilands calls a "green public culture" and follow Cheryl Lousley's argument that environmental fiction and poetry have a central role to play in shaping such a green public culture. In "Opinionated Natures," Sandilands describes a green public culture as "a cultivated practice of reflection and imagination by which individuals' opinions about nature might be debated and refined in public" (2002, p.123). Cheryl Lousley takes up Sandilands' position and further argues that "the imagination required for such response and performance is often developed in environmental fiction and poetry," and she draws on the novels *The White Bone* (Gowdy) and *Always Coming Home* (Le Guin) to illustrate her point (2001, p.7). Lousley calls these "wonderful, powerful textual performances of nature—re-imaginings of the common world—which contribute to further expanding that discursive space for attending to both the human and non-human dimensions of ecological concern" (p.8). In these fictionalized or non-fictionalized re-imaginings or re-tellings of the world around us, the creative possibilities are infinite in terms of changing our ideas, and possibly even our ethical relationship with the world.

Lousley argues that political speech is performative in the sense that it "produces bringing newness into the world, and it is a dramatic action on the public stage" (p.6). She sees a role for eco-criticism in performativity as cultivating the skills for aesthetic judgments on public performances of nature (p.8). Sandilands further argues:

the knowledge that arises from a performative politics is qualitatively different from the truths upon which ideas of environmental rationality almost inevitably instrumentally rest. Simply, a green performative politics is about developing a different set of knowledge practices, a different set of relations to the world and the others with whom we inhabit it, and a different set of understandings of nature and environment as a result. (p.125)

More specifically, we can think of the process of performativity as counter-hegemonic in the form these performances take, that meaning-making happens through stories and visual art that can enact a different set of relations with the world, and a different way of knowing, one that contributes to a green public culture. We can think of many "green performative politics" such as poetry, reading and writing fiction, sculpting, drawing, painting, drama, dance, music, film, and storytelling. In this inquiry I limit my examination into literature, poetry and visual art and draw on the work of others as well as my own work.

One question that arises here is how to include nature in politics? It is through the careful translation of nature into other ways of knowing (e.g. poetry of Don McKay and Di Brandt, or paintings of Susan Feindel) that performing nature happens.

### Eco-Criticism

Any interrogation into the role of art and literature, specifically environmental literature in politics, must start by situating that inquiry. Eco-criticism is a relatively new interdisciplinary field of study, but it is here where much of this paper's arguments spring from. Eco-criticism, or the study of stories that explore the relationship between literature and the natural environment, is now a recognized academic discipline, complete with its own association (Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment) and journal (Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment). In their landmark text, *The Eco-Criticism Reader*, editors Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm argue that "eco-criticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment...[a]s a critical stance, it has one foot in literature and the other on a land" (1996, p.xviii, p.xix). The study of the relationship between literature and the environment is as diverse as the authors who write in this field. For example, the "discipline"

spans texts from traditional nature writers (e.g. Thoreau, Leopold) to feminist science fiction writers such as Ursula Le Guin and Nalo Hopkinson, to scholars such as Diana Relke who conducts an eco-critical re-reading of published writing in *Greenwor(l)ds: Ecocritical Essays on Poetry by Canadian Women* (1999). Of course there are numerous noted scholars who write about this field of study such as Patrick Murphy, Greta Gaard, Lawrence Buell, Dana Philips, David Gildcrest, and many others (for a good introduction see Glotfelty & Fromm). However, my purpose here is to argue that stories and visual art contribute to a green public culture, and have the power to challenge and transform hegemonic relations of power.

The context of eco-criticism allows me to evoke a rich discussion of the role and function of environmental literature to social change. Environmental writing and the field of eco-criticism contribute to transforming and politicizing relationships with the natural world through story. Although I situate my reading of the world in eco-criticism, I also want to advocate for an *eco-critical* writing of the world as well. My aim is to apply this theory as an active mode of practice, as a way of knowing, writing, and visualizing the world. I see my own writing and visual art, and the work of Don McKay, Di Brandt, and visual artist Susan Feindel all within this eco-critical arts-practice. In this sense, I want to make it clear that usually, the act of judging (e.g. literary or eco-criticism) and the act of practicing (e.g. writing) are kept separate. I want to advocate for “eco-critique,” a process that both includes judgments and the practice of thoughtful attention to the world. Don McKay and Di Brandt clearly fall into the latter category. In this way, “eco-critique” can be thought of as the creative practice of subverting hegemonic discourses.

## **Stories as Research: writing as critical inquiry and environmental action**

In support of my project, I draw on King, Wittig, Nussbaum, Fawcett, and others to demonstrate that stories have a powerful ability to shift and transform ways of seeing the world. The political project I am engaged in is an eco-critical way of seeing the world, one that is focused on the crisis of salmon farming on the B.C. coast. In terms of proving that people are changed (politically) after reading a novel, story or essay, I can only offer anecdotal evidence. I can only tell you of the stories of my students in ENVS 1800 who told me that they never read anything like Gowdy's *The White Bone* before, and wanted to read more stories like this. And I can relate that after giving *The White Bone* to an old friend from high school, someone who loves to read but has no affinity for “environmentalism,” she told me after reading it that she will never look at an elephant the same way again. So proof, what proof do I have that stories have the ability to change the world and shift our ethics? I don't have hard evidence. I only know that stories speak to us in a way that traditional academic texts can not.

In the discipline of eco-criticism, there are many academics who argue for an eco-critical reading of the world, yet few (apart from nature writers) argue for an eco-critical writing of the world. Therefore, where eco-criticism leaves off in terms of studying the relationship between literature and the natural environment, I further argue that writing the environment is an academic pursuit, one that counts as research. As I mentioned, many eco-critics study texts, few discuss the practice of writing eco-critical texts. I have argued earlier that to me, eco-criticism is more than just a specific way of reading the world (e.g. imposing judgment), for me it is also the active practice of writing the world. The edited collection, *Ecocomposition* discusses writing as an ecological pursuit as it grows from a specific location where writers also situate themselves; however this book is a rare find. In the collection, Sidney Dobrin's chapter, “Writing Takes Place” argues that ecocomposition is the flip side of eco-criticism where ecocomposition focuses on “the textual production and the environments that affect and are affected by the production of discourse” (2001, p.13). Dobrin also supports my and others' argument for the transformative power of stories; he argues “[o]ppressive hegemonies manifest themselves in discourse; racial, cultural, sexist, classist oppression recurs through discourse. How we transgress those oppressive constructs, how we survive in them is both a matter of discursive maneuvering and a matter of physical, material positioning, and consequence” (p.12).

Theorists in the discipline of Education seem to be making strides in terms of publishing academic work on writing as research and I have found many qualitative researchers in this field who argue for writing inquiry and stretching the boundaries of narrative (Baskwill 2001; Dunlop 2002; Ceglowski 1997; Butler-Kisber 2002; Leggo 2001; Richardson 1994, 1995; and Knowles 2000). Most notable is Laurel Richardson, a scholar who examines writing as a method of inquiry, as research. Richardson argues that as a method of inquiry, writing is “a way of finding out about yourself and your topic” (1994, p.923). She states:

writing is not just a mopping-up activity at the end of a research project. Writing is also a way of “knowing”—a method of discovery and analysis. By writing in different ways, we discover new aspects of our topic and our relationship to it. Form and content are inseparable....we “word the world” into existence...This “worded world” never accurately, precisely, completely captures the studied world, yet we persist in trying. (p.923)

Thus, Richardson views language as the key site of exploration and struggle. She argues writing inquiry “honors and encourages the trying” and her central questions are: “How do we create texts that are vital? That are attended to? That make a difference?” (p.928). She speculates that one way to create such texts is through writing inquiry and that we often write to learn something we did not know before we wrote it (p.924). Her ideas resonate with those of Don McKay, as he argues language is a tool used to capture the world, but knowing and understanding comes about through the failure of language to capture the world around us. Hence writing and language point to the telling as much as to what is told.

In her article called “Getting Personal: writing-stories,” Richardson details her “top ten” thoughts about writing-stories as both personal and political and it is her seventh point that I am particularly drawn to: “writing-stories offer the writing of new plot lines” (1995, p.37). It is on this point that the storytellers, qualitative researchers, eco-critics, ecocompositionists, philosophers, and arts-based researchers converge and do not disagree about the power in writing and reading new plotlines, both of which I consider political action.

Martha Nussbaum is a rare academic who straddles the disciplines of philosophy, ethics and literature. She argues that “literature, and the literary imagination, are subversive. Literary thought is...the enemy of a certain sort of economic thought” (1998, p.224). She argues two points which my arts practice takes up. First, she argues that the ethical question, “how should one live?” cannot fully and adequately be addressed in the language of conventional philosophical prose. Second, “only in a language and in forms themselves more complex, more allusive, more attentive to particulars” (i.e. the novel) can moral and ethical views be adequately expressed (1990, p.3). In essence, she argues that “literary form is not separable from philosophical content,” rather that form is an integral part of content (1990, p.3). She writes:

a view of life is told. The telling itself—the selection of genre, formal structures, sentences, vocabulary, of the whole manner of addressing the reader’s sense of life—all of this expresses a sense of life and of value, a sense of what matters and what does not, of what learning and communicating are, of life’s relations and connections. Life is never simply *presented*, by a text; it is always *represented as* something. This “as” can, and must be seen not only in the paraphrasable content, but also in the style which itself expresses choices and selections, and sets up, in the reader certain activities and transactions rather than others. (1990, p.5)

In making my own stories to challenge and transform the discourse surrounding salmon farming in B.C., the elements I selected in my retelling were deliberate in order to express a sense of life and values, and in order to express what mattered especially with regard to human relations with the salmon and with indigenous peoples in Canada.

Don McKay and Di Brandt are both poets and philosophers, and in writing the world around them, they write as if to extend their ethical relationship with the world, with nature. They too are careful and attend to their act of translation as they present an ethical position to the natural world and the environmental crisis that is emotional, curious, honest and hopeful. It is for these reasons I have chosen to look at these two writers.

### **Don McKay: *Vis à Vis***

In *Vis à Vis*, Don McKay is concerned with the relationship between poetry and the world around him: “between human systems of order and structure – like art, language, and field guides – and the elusive objects of their attention” (Wheaton, 2003). A unique book of essays and poetry, *Vis à Vis* is an attempt by the author to “come to grips with nature poetry in a time of environmental crisis” (McKay, 2001, p.9). Throughout *Vis à Vis*, McKay argues several key points about using language and poetry to see and understand the world. He argues that language is a technology or tool. In his essay, “Baler Twine”

McKay writes, “[p]oets are supremely interested in what language can’t do; in order to gesture outside, they use language in a way that flirts with its deconstruction. Language wears tree ears and a false moustache for the moment. For whom? For the *moment*” (p.32). McKay is deeply aware of the failure of language to reflect “the real,” the meaningful outside in an impartial manner.

McKay argues that we can only know a meaningful world through language. He states that it is the task of poets to reveal the inadequacy of language to capture the world, and he argues that the elements in which to do this are metaphor and apostrophe: “metaphors point to a truth that lies outside of language. Metaphors are one way the poet shows the wildness of the world outside language” and “metaphor’s first act is to un-name its subject, reopening the question of reference...Thanks to metaphor, we know more; but we also know that we don’t own what we know” (p.69). In his meditations on apostrophe, he states, “[i]n ancient Greek it is an essential grammatical ingredient, the article attending the vocative case; in poetry it is the gesture loaded with lightness, an opening into awe. It says ‘this is for you, not just about you’” (p.66). We can see in his own poetry and in the poetry of Di Brandt, the power of metaphor and apostrophe to point with a long finger, at the possibilities of what we can never fully know.

McKay also argues that just like the meat grinder (as opposed to a food processor) makes the mincing process more visible, so too should the process of translating the world through language be made visible. He argues that poetic attention is always a translation:

There is, for this nature poet, at any rate, an important distinction between poetic attention and romantic inspiration. The romantic poet (or tourist, for that matter) desires to be spoken *to*, inspired by the other, so that perception travels into language (or slide show) without a palpable break...But poetic attention is based on a recognition and a valuing of the other’s wilderness; it leads to a work which is not a *vestige* of the other, but a *translation* of it. (p.27)

Therefore, poetic attention is speech with the listening incorporated and for McKay, this is an ethical moment (Sandilands, 2003). McKay argues for the visibility of the process of language, and by extension then good writing that aims to get close to transcribing nature, begins in failure.

McKay’s work resonates with my thesis that literature can play a strong role in expanding the discursive space of environmental politics because engagement with his work happens at a much more emotional level. His meditations are wonderfully delicious images: “Imagine: a trail made of moments rather than minutes, wild bits of time which resist elapsing according to a schedule. Pauses. Each one bell-shaped, into which you step as an applicant for the position of tongue” (31). Although we can never know the real or the meaningful outside, (e.g. a tree in all its glory) we can recognize the partiality of our perspectives, learn to situate ourselves and make visible the failure of translating the world with language. In the same way we are convinced that words like “resource” apply to forests, it is the task of the poet (or artist) to undo that arrogance (Sandilands, 2003).

McKay’s work is a call to creating an ethical relationship to nature in writing, in other words, a call for an ethical eco-critical reading and writing practice. So too is Di Brandt’s latest book of poetry, *Now You Care*.

### **Di Brandt: Now You Care**

In this collection, many poems accost the reader and demand a close reading of her evocative words. The poems in this compilation are angry, desperate and impassioned pleas to her readers: “The grief of earth/ gasps/ exhausted/ under cement,/ our great failure,/ our open wound” (2003, p.70). The book is divided into two sections, Zone and Heart. In Zone, Di Brant writes about environmental degradation close to her current home, as she begins the section with a poem called “Zone: <le Détroit>.” Originally a performance piece, this poem depicts Detroit and Windsor (her current place of residence) as wastelands and the tone, a bubbling mix of rage and despair, is constant throughout the book. She writes, “and even here, in this/ most polluted spit of land/ in Canada, with its heart/ attack and cancer rates,/ the trees can still knock/ you out with their loveliness/ so you just wanna drop/ everything and weep, or laugh,” (p.17). Her poems have a very urgent sense about them, of almost shouting at the reader, “listen!” In the above line, we can see that even though the trees have a beauty that might make your heart ache, pollution and toxic chemical work as silent killers and no one notices. She seems to ask why isn’t everyone yelling at the sky or falling down dead? In raging against pesticide use and women’s “missing breasts,” she writes, “how they just vanish/ from our aching chests/ and no one says a word,/

and we just strap on fake ones/ and the dandelions keep dying,/ and the grass on our lawns/ gets greener and greener/ and greener" (p.16). The repetition of the word "greener" contains despair, fury, and a sense of urgency.

The title of the book comes from the poem "Dog days in Maribor": "Now that it's much too late/ now you care" and Brandt says she wrote the lines "as a kind of passionate accusation" (Bailey Nurse, 2004). It is her concern for the environmental crisis that she writes this book; if she didn't care, she wouldn't be implicating herself and us (the readers) but she clearly creates an ethical relationship to the world as she writes it. In reviewing the book, Clarise Foster, editor of *Contemporary Verse 2* states, "[r]eading this collection is like walking through a tour of Chernobyl photographs and finding yourself in one. We are both victim and perpetrator, and Brandt firmly believes it is within the average person's power to care -- before there is nothing left to care about" (2004).

Brandt herself argues that poetry is an ecological pursuit. She states, "[p]oetry is traditionalist. It has managed to hold on to very old ways of being in language, ways that are ecstatic, emotional. Poetry is an ecological language because it is relational. It is able to put us in touch with the spirit of the natural world. It is a language that doesn't treat everything as a cold fact" (Bailey Nurse, 2004). In Zone, we can see her ideas of poetry as relational and how form mediates understanding in her compressed lines; we can feel the pressure of her ideas pressed into language.

I chose the work of Di Brandt because it resonates with the idea that how we know is as important as what we know. Poetry, literary essays, and visual art all tell stories in a way that can transform understanding. Visual art and literature are different ways of knowing, and each attend to expanding the multiple ways we can know an issue. Visual art forms such as sculpture and dance speak to us in different ways than lines of poetry on a page. In *Now You Care*, the contained fury in each word and each line speaks to the poet's plea for the fate of the planet, as well telling the reader, "A species gone every three minutes./ history racing us by"(p.38).

## Transformative Visual Arts-Practice

In this section I argue that visual art also has the power to transform our understanding, our ways of knowing. Like poetry, visual art has a way of entering our heart and mind in a way few other genres can. In considering how art is used to develop new ways of seeing, and possibly new ethical ways of understanding, David Haley notes that "our society tends to value economics over ecology, and monoculture and agro-industry over diversity and permaculture, is certainly worthy of ethical attention. Here I want to invoke a call for integrating art as a necessary contribution to ecological intervention." (p.143). I too call for a larger role for art in environmental politics, what Sandilands calls a green performative politics. In situating why arts-based methods of research are important, I draw on Butler-Kisber who argues a key point between form and content:

In the last decade, there has been a burgeoning interest in stretching the boundaries of narrative reporting to include other literary genres (reader's theatre, poetry, drama, musical drama, and hypertext), as well as non-textual or visual modes of representation (collage, quilts, portraits, drawings, photographs, film and video)... The rationale for including arts-based representation in qualitative research is form mediates understanding. (2002, p.230)

Arts-based practices are important modes of inquiry because they contribute to and expand the limitations of traditional scientific research; they open spaces for "experimentation of alternative approaches, approaches that weave in aesthetic sensibilities and postpositivist forms of expression" (Butterwick, 2002, p.243). Art educator, Shauna Butterwick argues that "[p]opular theatre is about creating a liminal space between 'real stories' and the making of a scene or fiction. New ways of being and knowing and relating can happen in this space" (p.246). These new ways of knowing often happen through the dialogic nature of visual art.

Dialogic reading of visual art allows for multiple interpretations where meaning is never fixed. Meaning emerges as readers and writer co-create the text as they engage with the installation, or art piece. Cole and McIntyre quote Denzin (1997) as he argues that "[t]his 'messy' approach to reading (and writing) embraces experimental, experiential, and critical readings that are always incomplete, personal, self-reflexive, and resistant to totalizing theories" (2003b, p.15). I see this messy, always partial approach in my work on "Telling Salmon Tales" and also in the work of visual artist, Susan Feindel.

Petra Halkes, an artist and scholar of Susan Feindel's work describes Feindel's artist book *Arctic Notebook* (1998) from her scientific expedition to the high arctic as "pseudo-scientific" arguing that "Feindel's delicate representations draw attention nature's secondary, non-objective qualities—beauty, color, and fragility—which are often lost in scientific records" (p.15-16). However, it is important for me to point out that although these qualities may be excluded from scientific records (i.e. one type of representation), they are not always lost on the scientist. Feindel does not take nature as an object of study, she takes nature as a co-creator of the art; a creative force (Halkes, 1998, p.15-16). In taking this eco-critical approach, Feindel, like Brandt and McKay, creates an ethical relationship to the world as she paints her translation of it.

### **Susan Feindel: *Landscape Beneath the Sea***

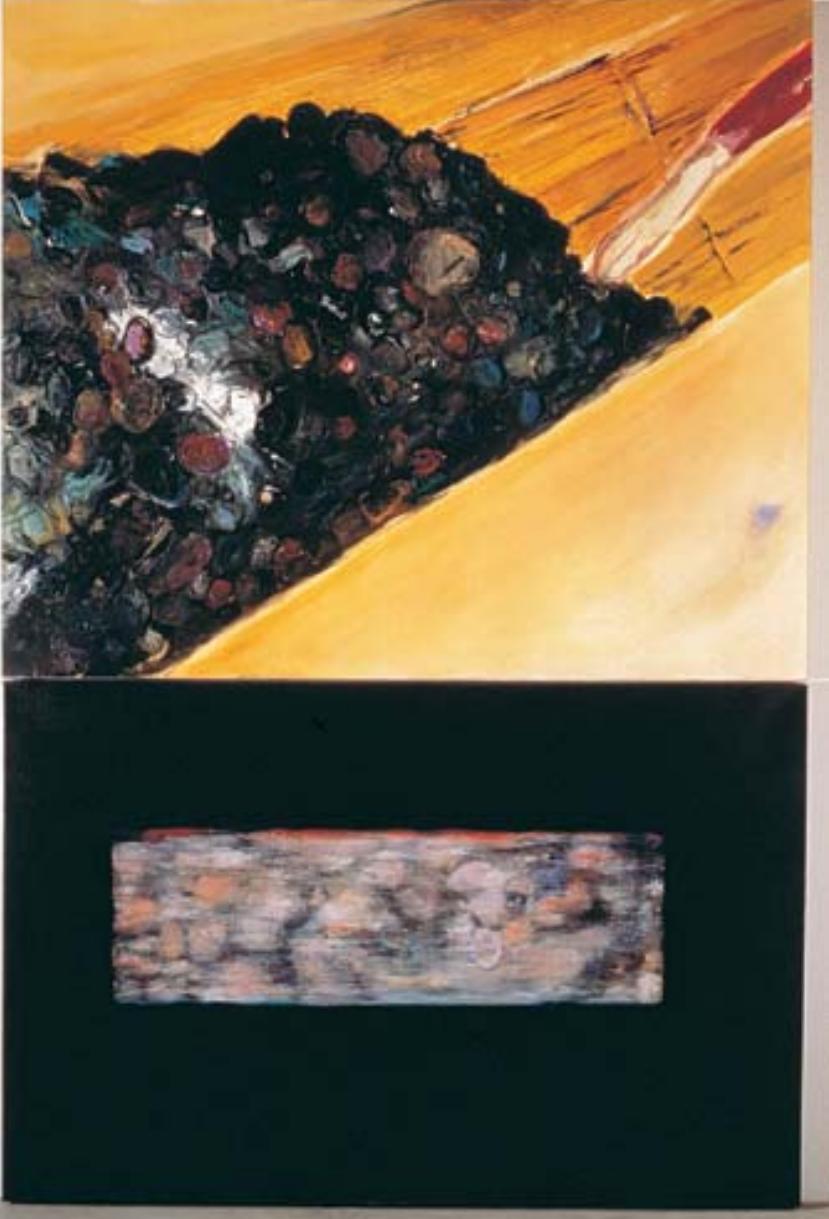
Although not self-described as an eco-artist, Susan Feindel's work exemplifies a unique way of seeing and understanding across disciplines. Her work interrogates changes in natural habitats, and in pursuing this research, she has accompanied scientists to locations such as the high Arctic, Clayoquot Sound, and the Scotia fishing banks of Canada's eastern continental shelf. Her installations are composed of large scale paintings for wall and floor, artist books, and videos in tiny monitors which emphasize "scale" and the difficulty of observing and understanding certain habitats (Artist Statement, 2004). For this reason, there are only a few good images for the reader of this paper to get a comprehensive sense of her work; however I have provided some images I was able to acquire.

In April 2003, Feindel, originally from the South Shore of Nova Scotia, exhibited *Landscape Beneath the Sea* at ARTsPLACE in Annapolis Royal, Nova Scotia. In *Landscape Beneath the Sea* she uses both scientific and artistic inquiry to explore the destruction of the northern deep-water coral gardens that lie off the coast of Nova Scotia and Newfoundland; the coral habitats are facing extinction because of the dragger fishery and proposed oil and gas exploration (Durr, 2000, p.43). Feindel's work for *Landscape Beneath the Sea* emerged out of her associations with fishermen, ecologists, oceanographers, her fellowship from The National Gallery's Claudia de Hueck Art and Science Fellowship, and her 1999 and 2001 residencies aboard the Bedford Institute of Oceanography vessel, the C.C.G.S. Hudson (Thórdís Juliusson, 2002, p.2). I am drawn to her work for her similar interest in human relations with the land and sea, for her community-arts approach and for her techniques of incorporating the physical world (dirt, human hair, etc.) into her artwork.

I am also deeply curious and excited about Feindel's ability to transgress academic and scientific boundaries. She, along with a group of scientists, ecologists, and fishermen, presented their findings "with anger, intellect, and imagination" on (east coast) deep sea coral habitats at a conference in July 2000 called the First International Symposium on Deep Sea Coral in Halifax (Thórdís Juliusson, 2002, p.2). Her presentation consisted of visual images obtained as part of her residency aboard the C.C.G.S. Hudson in May and June 1999, with the scientists from the Bedford Institute of Oceanography, where she drew on mythologies, fishing, military and ecological concerns. In this presentation she stated her work "seeks to bring humans closer to issues connected with the deep sea coral habitats" (Feindel, 2000, p.178).

In *Landscape Beneath the Sea*, Feindel says her work is "interested in the human/landscape experience: perceptions of the earth's surface relating to the care of the soil; human interventions in earth beneath the sea as well as above; and human interventions upon one another" (2004, Artist Statement). Like Brandt, she too is careful to implicate her readers and herself in her creative process and final work. In speaking about her process, she says she wanted to involve the scientists and technicians in her work; she wanted to "implicate the presence of the scientist/ technician in their creative process... [T]he scientists aboard the vessel produced images based on their own research – acoustical maps, video stills and graphs" (Thórdís Juliusson, 2002, p.3). Feindel took these images and adopted them and tied surgical knots using the scientist's hair, and where she wanted to indicate her presence she tied and knotted her hair to the final piece (Thórdís Juliusson, 2002, p.3).

<p><b>Harvested</b>, 2001 Susan Feindel Oil on canvas 122 x 327 cm</p>	
<p><b>Dredged</b>, 2001 Susan Feindel 5.5 x 6 ft. Torn photograph with watercolour, fishing line, and sand of Sable Island Bank.</p>	
<p><b>Grab Box: Suck In, Squeeze Out, land and sea</b> 2000-2001 Susan Feindel From artist book (limited edition), <i>Speculations and Intersections: Canada's Eastern Continental Shelf</i>. Image and text etched on somerset paper. Unbound page 8 x 16 in.  A filtering organism depicted within the grid of</p>	<p>Suck in, squeeze out, land and sea.</p>

an agricultural furrow	
<b>the grab</b> , 2001 Susan Feindel	

Her paintings: *Dredged*, 1999-2001, *Harvested*, 2001, *Grab Box: Suck In, Squeeze Out, Land and Sea* 2000-2001, represent the connections (narrative, visual and the symbolic) between the landscape and mortal bodies; Thórdís Juliusson argues, “[w]e see our bodily process on Feindel’s palate combined allegorically with the soil, and the sand; our hair falls out, we shit and we die” (2002, p.3). Petra Halkes writes, “[t]hrough paint -- with its propensities so similar to water, mud, blood and excrement -- Feindel seeks to recover the human kinship with the movement and historicity of nature, in order to encounter nature as a figure in her own right” (1998, p.12). In presenting the physical residues of this reenactment in her work, like McKay and Brandt, she paints nature into her texts.

Feindel’s critical inquiry for *Landscapes Beneath the Sea* explores the processes that connect human and mechanical devices with the mystery of ocean bottom (Thórdís Juliusson, 2002, p.2). She has a close relationship with the ocean and she identifies “human bodily processes with ocean organisms, and my (our) body, with the sea” (Feindel, 2001, p.180). Feindel states, “[i]t is possible to create a photo-

like map of the bottom of the sea using acoustical technology called 'sonar side scan'. Likewise, one can view the interior functions of a heart, womb, or any liquid environment using the same technology" (Feindel, 2002). Fellow artist and writer Thórdís Juliusson notes the connection between human bodies and the environment in Feindel's work:

If the ocean is unwell, so are we. And we speculate on its health in much the same way as we do on our own well being. We examine our bodies with the tools of nuclear science. Feindel has included a video of a renal scan "which traces the journey of radioactive isotopes through the human circulatory system, lighting up the body on the dark screen as they cruise through the body, gathering in the two kidneys and finally glowing like the sun in the bladder." (2002, p.2)

Feindel's dark abstract painting, *It will smell like the breath of a newborn baby* #2, also invokes the connection between the body and the environment. The painting is lit by ceiling lamps that descend to just a few feet above the floor that give the sensation of looking down at a landscape from a great height, but in this case it is one more than a kilometer deep in the Arctic Ocean, an invisible world where there is no natural light (Grande, p.56). In describing this work, John Grande notes:

Acoustical data or 'sonar side scans' from ocean depths of one to two kilometers inspired Feindel to make these powerful, evocative, installation paintings. The markings, though not clearly identifiable, allude to the destructive effects of fishing gear on natural habitats and life forms, such as the little-known northern deep-sea coral. For Feindel, these landscape/seascape details are to the planet Earth what stretch marks and other body details are to people. (2003, p.56)

In Susan Feindel's work and in the work of Don McKay and Di Brandt, they all have a particular ethical-political commitment to interrogating the relationship between humans and the environment. In all three cases I present as examples, the artists problematize human/ nature relationships as they see a conflict with their own values and identity. It is in the re-telling of this conflict in values with emotion, anger, and humility that supports the notion that visual and literary ways of knowing expand different ways of knowing. Although I include visual art and writing within arts-informed research, it is important to separate literature and visual art because different forms mediate different understandings. Paintings and stories engage our bodies and senses in different ways. Although both allow for dialogic interpretation, often paintings evoke an immediate visual reaction, whereas stories enter our consciousness in a more subtle way.

## EXPERIMENTAL SHORT FICTION: REFLECTION ON “SALMONEERS”

“Can a shift in language, metaphor, and the stories we tell foster a shift in ethics?”  
Traci Warkentin, 2002

“In order to change the world, we need to change to stories we tell”  
Thomas King, 2003

Writing is a form of inquiry, not just into the subject, but into the ways we relate to one another, and for me, this inquiry includes the non-human. I include animal others in my writing inquiry to disrupt anthropocentrism and hegemonic ways of understanding. Writing the non-human, whether a forest or a salmon can be a way of challenging the heterosexist, colonial, anthropocentric assumptions in using the tool of language. It is in the failure of translating the nature and the non-human through language that this inquiry begins.

### Getting Started

In getting started, I thought a lot about the word “salmon.” It comes from the Latin verb meaning “to leap,” and it seemed to me that intensive farming of any species of salmon seems to take the root(word) and rooted-ness of the embodied, storied, non-human being, right out of context. It seems unfair and unjust to even use the word salmon in any farmed product. I began my writing process by reading everything there is to know about salmon. I read books on aquaculture, salmon biology, salmon as food, and I was particularly interested in literary representations of salmon. I also scoured numerous the literary journals to find poems, essays, and stories on salmon. One of the most helpful books for references was Laurie Ricou’s *The Arbutus/Madrone Files*. I also read what I consider good political fiction: Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath*, Michaels’ *Fugitive Pieces*, and Robinson’s *Monkey Beach* in order to get a sense of how philosophy, ethics, and politics are woven into the narrative without shouting in your face. I specifically wanted to write about what is seen as an “environmental” issue, so I was always very conscious in my reading of how other successful authors wrote environmental stories. I also read Ivan E. Coyote’s *One Man’s Trash*, and *Close to Spider Man* for their humor, brevity and wit in telling a personal story. I also took an experimental short fiction-writing workshop with Ivan E. Coyote because I was drawn to the title, specifically, “short fiction” and “experimental”. I wanted to approach these stories as an experiment, as I did with the “Telling Salmon Tales” project. It was in this workshop where I was introduced to the story cycle genre and read Nancy Lee’s *Dead Girls* to get a sense of how a story cycle works.

After I had researched and read almost everything I could on salmon, I sat down to write. I went back to my salmon farming research for my content analysis where I had a year’s worth of newspaper articles from *The Vancouver Sun* and *The Province* from January 1, 2002 to February 1, 2003. Among my research, I found an article Steven Hume wrote called, “We are going to stop these fish farms” about a direct action protest at Ocean Falls, near Bella Bella where a multinational company is building a salmon hatchery. I decided to use this as the basis of my story and I chose some characters and the setting for the “Foundations” short story. I then went back through all the news articles and categorized the quotes and speakers into discourses of First Nations, corporate industry, industry association, BC government, Alaska government, fish plant workers and managers, local community members, environmentalist, and salmon farmers. All my important facts and figures about salmon farming were primarily gleaned from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) report, *Fishy Business* and others, but when it came time to incorporate them into the narrative, much of the statistical information seemed too polemical.

It was very hard to get started writing as I thought about this project this for almost two years and now that I sat down to complete it, I was overwhelmed. It took me about ten days to turn off the internal critics who seemed to whisper in my ears. Writing these stories was also more intimidating than working on “Telling Salmon Tales,” the banner installation. The banner work was pure joy and creative energy; writing for me, is often grueling and difficult work in getting the words and structure just right. As I tried to

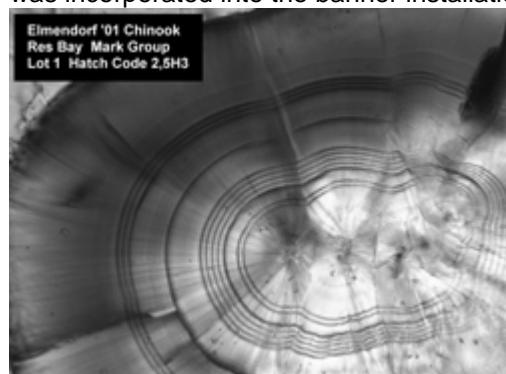
write in the day, I would write in my notebook and then edit on the computer. At night, I read fiction and thought: *I can't write like this*. When I would go back to writing in the morning, every word I wrote seemed to look back at me and scream "polemic!" Instead of reading fiction at night, I switched to reading Anne Lamott's *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life*. This gave me confidence to get up each morning and write. Of course writing is much harder than reading, and most of the time I was furious with myself for the arrogance of proposing a project that I clearly could not complete.

Writing these stories took much longer than anticipated. At many turns in the process, I would stop and pull different pieces of fiction off the shelf and scrutinize the beginnings, paying close attention to the opening lines. *Some are good* I thought. *Some are mediocre; I could do mediocre*. I had to consistently tell myself in my work on "Telling Salmon Tales," that this process was research. The same was true of the stories. I had to constantly tell myself it was an experiment in order to get something down on paper. In the end, I am happy with three of the five stories, and will continue them as works in progress.

## Form

Initially, I was only going to write one short story. However, after reading *Dead Girls* and thinking about how many competing discourses there are in the salmon farming debate, I decided to write a story cycle. A bit too ambitious, I outlined a story cycle with eight stories that approached salmon farming from different perspectives: eco-tourism, First Nations, industry, local community, and salmon industry workers. As my deadline drew nearer, I realized I couldn't complete all eight. I chose the ones that I felt were the most important discourses to highlight.

I chose the title "Salmoneers" because I wanted to play on "profiteers" and "pioneers"; I wanted to play on the colonial legacy of taming the west. I also wanted the title to be a play on "salmon-ears." In "Race to the Bottom" I incorporated the otolith as part of the story. An otolith is a kidney-bean shaped bone in a salmon's inner ear, and it reacts to water temperature changes by adding darker layers of calcium to its expanding shell. Like tree rings, otoliths map the life of a salmon in its lifecycle. A chemical technique allows the reconstruction of everything from the year of the salmon's hatching, to its migration pathways, to the temperature of the water in which it lived. Daily growth rings in the otoliths can be examined to determine if the fish are of hatchery or wild origin. The otolith itself is an interesting story that was incorporated into the banner installation.



*Chinook otolith*

## Literary Non-Fiction

I wanted to write in the genre of non-fiction partly because I had studied it, and because I was most comfortable experimenting in this genre. I also like literary non-fiction (also called creative non-fiction or new journalism) because I think it has a narrative political power that fiction does not. In writing my story cycle I was aware of the connections between form, style and content. As Julia Creet argues, literary non-fiction "[a]t its most achieved, melds the accuracy of non-fiction with the dramatic force of fiction, the best of expository prose with the readability of the novel or the short story" (2003). This has been my interest in Ivan Coyote's stories and Nancy Lee's *Dead Girls* because they are about the lure of events that actually happened. In *Dead Girls*, Nancy Lee melds the facts of the murdered Vancouver prostitutes by a pig farmer within each story in her cycle. In the same way that these already public facts of the actual case intrigued the reader, I too wanted to draw on the "truth" of publicized facts (B.C. protests against fish farms) with the power of fiction. The second reason I chose this genre is because

nonfiction plays with our reading habits and expectations. My aim was to tell a story, but I also wanted readers to be aware of the way the story was being told. The third reason I chose non-fiction is because of its tendencies toward self-consciousness about the politics of representation, and “the immensely productive tension between aesthetics and politics, between narrative and fact” (Creet, 2003). I wanted to explore these tensions through the different stories in the cycle.

## Style

Initially I also outlined a story as told by a salmon, but everything about it felt wrong. David Gilcrest argues that attempts to represent nonhuman entities as speaking subjects is really a colonizing move and not the best way to establish a more heterarchical, ecocentric relationship (2002, p.6). He quotes Lawrence Buell, “what counts is the underlying ethical orientation implied by the troping” (p.44). This point directly relates to my own struggle in reading salmon stories in the first salmon person and wrestling with this as a possible strategy to answer the questions: *what is the discourse of the salmon? Is there an authentic salmon voice? How will writing a story from the point of view of the salmon add to what I want to say about human/nature relationships?* I decided that I didn’t want to “reduce the unknown subjectivity of an ‘other’ being to the limited range of my own experiences” (Fawcett, 2000, p. 140). I can only conclude with more questions: “How do we ensure that their [animal] voices are audible and that we can co-author environmental stories to live, teach, and learn with?” (Fawcett, 2000, p. 140). I am still asking this question.

The order that the stories are placed in the sequence is significant. I wanted to open with “Mavis,” a story of growing up with salmon and witnessing spawning salmon. In a sense, I wanted to begin in my “home river” and with a story of salmon cycles. I didn’t want to begin the cycle with “Foundations” out of fear that readers might lose interest if it sounded too polemical. I placed “Foundations” second in the cycle to give readers a sense of the key points in the thread that connects all the stories. I also wanted readers to see that this was a particular ethical-political stance the narrator/author was taking against fish farming. After “Foundations,” I placed “News You Can Use” because I wanted to parody the way environmental issues and often direct action campaigns are represented by the media. These reports are often lacking in any context or history (e.g. the colonial history of the hatchery site at Ocean Falls) or idea that violence also comes in the form of policies directed against marginalized people. I placed “Drowning” next as it situates my own reflections about the partiality of all stories and I didn’t want it to be the last story told. Finally, I placed “Race to the Bottom” last as it closes the cycle by coming back to the title, salmon ears and profiteers, people who really have no ethical-political commitment to the communities that service the salmon farming industry.

Each story was an experiment in a different style to appeal to a certain set of values or “sense of life.” “Mavis” was initially written in the first person, however initial feedback from friends suggested that with “Drowning” there were then two of the five that were personal stories. So I changed the characters and tense to shape a different story, one that attempted to highlight the childhood memories of salmon and the natural life cycle of birth and death of salmon and people. I also included the color images of salmon species at the top of each short story as a way to connect the issue of farming fish back to the wild salmon. We try to exert control through language. For example, the words “farmed fish” or “sea ranching” work to further disconnect people from the salmon they eat. With the wild salmon species images and text, I wanted to use visual imagery and language to re-connect and juxtapose the issue of salmon farming with the word “salmon,” to leap – a leaping fish.

“Foundations” was written in parallel with a reporter’s article from *The Vancouver Sun*, as I needed a way for someone from outside the community to tell the story of what was happening. This way I could have him travel along the coast to meet locals, different First Nations along the northwest coast, and environmentalists working on resisting the hatchery. I wrote this story in a style that allowed diverse perspectives on the issue to flow along the plot line. I also wanted to suggest that PanFish (I changed the name to Trans Fish), Omega Salmon Group (I changed to Imperial Salmon Group) and the BC government, all working together to establish this hatchery, were complicit in the creation of this hatchery, and continued colonial relations with the First Nations on unceded land. My thinking around this came out of an interesting project I read about in *The New Quarterly* called “And Let the River Answer: The Walkerton Water Stories Project.” I thought it was an interesting way to involve the community in retelling the stories of Walkerton and water through photography, block printing, songs, visual art, and storytelling. However, I was disappointed because the story was told from the point of view of the river, but when it came to explaining how people in the community got so sick, blame was placed on cows in

nearby farms, the workers at the treatment plant, and the river itself! I would have much preferred to see a story that explored the relationship between former Premiers Mike Harris and Ernie Eve's government cut-backs and policies that may well have led to the violence and death inflicted on the people of Walkerton. So I decided that my story would focus more directly on how corporate power works –free trade, the power multinational companies hold over governments, and the expanding influence of the market on our daily lives. I wanted to give the reader a sense of the scope of what anti-fish farming groups are up against and the forces at work behind them.

In "News You Can Use," I wanted to play with the ways that mainstream media tend to ignore or trivialize many critical issues, while at the same time encouraging fear and xenophobia through a consistent barrage of crime stories. I also wanted to emphasize the way activists, environmental groups in particular, -- people who actually defend their set of values and beliefs by being active in their community – are treated as deviant "others."

"Drowning" is written in the second person. The story is meant to be a way of letting the reader know that my stories are partial too; I can not claim to know the whole truth. I wanted to make my role as storyteller evident, to emphasize the partiality of the stories. As in many non-fiction novels and stories, I wanted to point to the reader and say I'm telling you a story of a story of a story; we all tell partial truths when representing someone or something, and I see this in my own story and I want the reader to see it as well. I wanted to express that I am anxious about writing and specifically writing these stories, that I am still figuring things out. "Drowning" is meant to be funny. My experience in the writing workshop was a little traumatic, and it was only through telling it to various friends that I started to see the humor in it and tell it as a joke at my own expense. The story then became a humorous story I told after the fact; however, telling a funny story and writing that humor into the story turned out to be very different. I struggled around how to represent – through language – how I assumed who was queer and who was not, and how to represent myself as straight. It is only in my retellings and in my failure to capture this experience in language that I started to learn more about myself and what happened that day.

In "Race to the Bottom" I wanted to capture the worker-management discourse of the processing industry. Often workers are held up by both sides of the debate where salmon farmers use the number of jobs created to show how beneficial their industry is to the coastal economies, and yes, in a sense that is true. A prosperous community usually spends money in the community, but what is often neglected is the money that flows out of the area. With foreign-owned companies possessing most of the production, they provide few "white-collar" jobs (as we see in the fish plant), and their corporate profits leave the province. Also with foreign companies controlling a domestic industry, all the benefits of having a head office in BC (investment in cities, income tax from high income earners) goes elsewhere (Marshall, 2003, p.16). With this story I also wanted to show how many times, workers don't have a choice when a new industry comes to town claiming to be the savior of their community. Often, like Lou, people have to think about their families and just "getting by," rather than the plight of the wild salmon. Often the connection to the reasons for the loss of the wild commercial fishery (mismanagement, greed by large companies, lack of government enforcement of policies, etc.) is never discussed in depth when salmon farming is discussed. Salmon farming is just "common sense" for the attitude of *oh well – it's the next best technological solution*. It is in this story that I hoped to counter some of these "common-sense" ideas.

## Representing Indigenous Voices

In writing "Foundations" I worried about colonizing First Nations voices. Any way I tried to get around it, I saw it as a colonial move. But the only way for me to tell the story of Ocean Falls in a non-fiction style was to include the indigenous voices, as they are a central part of the struggle. The issue is much more complex than I have presented it. The indigenous peoples of B.C. are not a homogenous group, and many Nations have in fact made deals with Omega Salmon to be part of their operations. In fact, in the actual news article I used as the basis of my story, Chris Cook who represents the Native Brotherhood movement said the Heiltsuk and Nuxalk would go to war with their brothers and sisters over fish farms in their traditional territory. A large majority of the indigenous population on the North Coast do not support fish farms and their opposition intersects with other issues such as environmental racism, continued colonial relations, and stolen land.

The only solution I could see was to include word for word, the quotes I had found in newspaper articles, press releases from the Heiltsuk and Nuxalk Nations, and Sierra Legal Defence's news release regarding the lawsuit the Heiltsuk brought against Omega. While not perfect, I felt this was the lesser of

the colonial moves. Yet I also acknowledge the partiality of these quotes as they were almost always already edited before they were published.

Another tension for me was the decision to change or not change the names of the Heiltsuk and Nuxalk chiefs and elders. My fear is that I appropriated the “characters.” In the end, I decided to leave the original names for two reasons. First, these stories are not meant for wider publication and if one day they are submitted, I will revisit the issue then. Second, I do not speak these indigenous languages and I have no frame of reference to change the names to something in keeping with indigenous people’s traditions.

It is interesting to note that I did change the name of the manager at the Omega Salmon hatchery, and I did not struggle over it. His name is Kjell Aasen, a Norwegian name, and I went to the PAN FISH website and took a first name from one director of the company and a last name from another director and put them together to form Øyvind Østberg. In reflecting on this process, the decisions I made in representing these voices were in regards to historical factors. I was drawing on already marginalized peoples (First Nations in Canada), and dominant voices (Norwegian) and I didn’t want to continue to colonize those First Nation voices.

If these stories never leave this small circle of interested readers, I will be satisfied that they were a success. Writing these stories was a valuable experiment in “letting them loose in the world.” In the act of writing these stories I interrogated the issue of salmon farming from several perspectives and I attempted to be self-reflexive. I was constantly aware of the tensions in writing because of the partiality of all representations. I would have liked to explore other themes that I had researched and simply did not have time to write. If nothing else, writing these salmon stories was one experiment, one act of resistance; it was my attempt at an eco-critical writing of the world around me. More importantly, I didn’t just talk about writing, or discuss other salmon stories; I created some stories in the spirit of creating change in the world, and in contributing to counter-hegemonic narratives of salmon. In writing these stories I call for a continued blurring of the line between critique and practice; writing an eco-critical story can help me understand the world and myself better, and it contributes to performing nature in the spirit of a green public culture.

## WEAVING THREADS: REFLECTION ON “TELLING SALMON TALES”

For me, re:framing occurs when problems or experiences are represented in ways that both retain the realities of existing political relationships and transcend them by opening up new (for those involved) and real opportunities for acting on the inequalities of those relationships.

dian marino, 1997, pp.108-109

I will begin my discussion of making “Telling Salmon Tales” with an explanation of the materials, form, and composition and then move into a discussion of the creative process and the collaborative tensions involved in creating the eco-art installation.

### A Four-part Installation

“Telling Salmon Tales” is made up of four parts in order from left to right: Jacinda’s Banner titled, “Colonization of the Salmon People”; my banner titled, “Crossing (Disciplinary) Boundaries; Lee’s banner titled, “Regeneration Stories”; and a fourth collaborative, woven banner titled, “Re-Telling: weaving many truths.” The three individual banners hang together to form the main piece, and installed opposite the three banners is the collectively woven banner placed so that the bottom is just above the ground, and the audience can read the artist statements (at eye level) and pin stories to the banner.

My banner titled, “Crossing (disciplinary) Boundaries” primarily looks at the relationship between humans and nature and technoscience in the salmon farming debate. I want to highlight the notion that in order for humans to treat salmon as machines, there is a profound disconnection that must take place in discourse where we can only see these storied beings as a global commodity.



## Telling Salmon Tales

Left to right:

*Colonization of the Salmon People* (Jacinda); *Crossing (Disciplinary) Boundaries* (Aileen); and *Regeneration Stories* (Lee).

**Re-Telling:  
weaving many  
truths**



<b>Artist Statement: Aileen</b>	<b>Telling Salmon Tales: crossing (disciplinary) boundaries</b>  Cherokee writer Thomas King says “the truth about stories is that that’s all we are; we must be careful which stories we tell, which ones we let loose in the world.” He also says that in order to change the world, we need to change the stories we tell (2003).
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	<p>Both humans and the non-human are storied beings. There are many stories that make me up, and there are countless salmon stories. I grew up on the Columbia River in B.C., and therefore have many storied intersections with salmon.</p> <p>In studying salmon in the context of environmental politics, I often find these salmon stories contained by disciplines. As I envisioned this art installation I was interested in bridging some of the borders and (disciplinary) boundaries both salmon and I cross.</p> <p>I am interested in these ladders I have to build even if they are flimsy, experimental, and contingent. I/we can never know the whole story of the salmon. These stories are always partial. We can only know pieces, parts, fragments, but we need to attempt partial perspectives to speak to one another.</p> <p>The mechanical salmon image is one that repeats in my work as it does on the cloth. The image is one story that once let loose in the world, is dangerous because it is often claims to be the Truth. This reductionist science salmon story takes knowledge of the part and extends and universalizes it to the whole. These stories pretend to be whole. These stories pretend to be disconnected from power and politics.</p> <p>This collaborative work attempts to recognize the partiality of stories. The work also attempts to tell/gather multiple stories and re:tell old myths.</p> <p>I hope you will add your story to our collective re:telling of salmon.</p> <p>Aileen Penner MES Student York University</p>
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## Form

By employing the banner form, I can tell a story vertically and this has many advantages. I can shift or re-frame the idea of reductionist thinking and storytelling; I can tell this salmon story loud because these large, nine-foot hanging banners are visually striking. The disadvantages I encountered were that the salmon machine image I developed was quite detailed (machine parts) and it was difficult to convey these images onto such a large canvas. Another difficulty was finding the right space to hang nine-foot long banners at the Faculty of Environmental Studies. As I leaned by experimentation, finding the right space is key, as OISE did not have a space for the banners that was higher than eight feet so the banners dragged on the floor and took away from the visual impact.

## Materials

I wanted a natural fiber for the actual banner, so I chose linen because, again by experimentations, it seems to give sharper images with the silkscreen prints (as compared with hemp or cotton). I also chose a mossy green because I wanted to create the illusion that the sockeye salmon was against a DNA forest, hence the green on green helix. In order to represent the redness of sockeye I wanted the most shimmery, dramatic red I could find, so I chose a bright red raw silk. I didn't want to have a silver fish, I wanted people to reconnect with how red the sockeye turn when they spawn, and if they didn't know this, then I wanted them to inquire why the salmon was red instead of silver. The green silk for the fish head also needed to be the exact color, and I spent days searching for it.

Silkscreening is a technique that is forgiving of many mistakes, and it is also has the benefit of creating images that are easily reproduced. I experimented with pen and ink as well as pastels. Pen and

ink worked well to produce and represent the fine, precise lines of the otolith and tree rings. I like pastels because of the smudged, burry nature of the medium. The pastels could convey the ephemeral nature of all species, in this case wild salmon, can so easily be wiped away without anyone taking too much notice, because something else (farmed Atlantic salmon) has taken its place.

## Composition

In terms of my own banner, I knew from early experimentations and some good critical feedback from my cultural production class, my supervisor, Cate Sandilands, Leah Burns, Lee and Jacinda that there would be two central images to my banner: the machine salmon and the salmon connected by ladders. It was very important to me to speak loudly to the injustice of taking the storied, embodied being of a salmon and reducing it to a machine (as the industrial process of farming salmon does).

I wanted to highlight the notion that in order for humans to treat salmon as machines, there is a profound disconnection that must take place in discourse where we can only see these storied beings as a global commodity. So I wanted to represent this disconnection, and then re-frame the connections we might make to salmon through stories. This path came out of much thinking I did in TAing Environmental Ethics and Epistemology, and in preparing a three-hour presentation in ENVS 5147 on Thomas King's *One Good Story, That One* and Monique Wittig's radical lesbian feminist text, *Les Guérillères*. Both of these texts critique existing structures/stories of the world and then move into a radical re-telling of these dominant narratives. I very much wanted to do something similar with the "Telling Salmon Tales" project, and therefore I advocated strongly for a fourth banner that might act as a re-telling of some of the salmon stories we hear in the media, from government, through common sense, etc. It was Lee who insisted on the interactive nature of having the audience participate in telling these stories, thereby adding (I think) to one of the strongest elements of this installation.

## DNA Helix

With the machine salmon in the centre of the DNA helix, I juxtaposed the idea of the natural salmon forest built with nitrogen from decaying salmon in rivers, whose dying bodies help nourish other ecosystems, and the genetically engineered salmon forest, (represented by the DNA helix). This human-created forest is one where the biotech industry manufactures a "forest" of salmon through gene experimentation where the G.E. salmon grow two to three times faster than farmed salmon grown under the same conditions. The green DNA helix is painted on light green linen to be soft in the background, almost disguised; unnoticed unless you are paying attention. This is how the biotech industry operates — in the background. Even our own Department of Fisheries and Oceans is using public money on genetic engineering research and experimentation with alternative feeds in their West Vancouver Research Laboratory (Glavin, 2003, p.54). In the DNA helix, among all the green salmon, there are two red salmon prints that represent what science can never know. They speak to the unknown of what we do when we engineer our food. These fish represent what has already gone wrong in salmon farming (escapes, disease outbreaks affecting wild stocks, competition in spawning rivers, interspecies breeding) and what could go wrong. These red fish are a reminder to an arrogant industry and government that technologies can not solve the pacific salmon crisis, and that new technologies do not always behave as we would like.



### Machine Salmon

The mechanical salmon image is one that repeats in my banner and in my own research. The image is one story that once let loose in the world, is dangerous because it is often claims to be the Truth. This reductionist science salmon story, absent of responsibility, takes knowledge of the part and extends and universalizes it to the whole. These stories pretend to be whole. These totalizing stories pretend to be disconnected from power and politics. The green machine salmon represents farmed fish, factory fish; we can't tell when we go to buy salmon in the store the process it went through to get to the shelf. I wanted to highlight that process.



Through the machine parts of the fish (an unnatural combination) I wanted to speak to the idea that technology always works at something, for a particular we. In this case, salmon farming benefits accrue for a small minority of people in BC, primarily a few multi-national companies. Moreover, salmon

farming does not feed a hungry world; it steals from the global South (fish for feed) to feed a wealthy North.

### Salmon Pieces

As a graduate student studying salmon in an interdisciplinary faculty in the context of environmental writing and politics, I, naturally, found many salmon stories contained by disciplines. It seems, one must be a fisheries biologist to speak authoritatively on the life process of salmon, or one must be an environmental scientist to speak objectively about the interconnections between forest, humans and salmon. In collaborating on making “Telling Salmon Tales” I was interested in bridging some of the borders and (disciplinary) boundaries I cross in my studies and that have been established in our understanding of salmon. I wanted to represent the idea that I/you/ we can never know the whole story of the salmon. These stories are always partial. Although we can only know pieces, parts, fragments, we need to attempt partial perspectives to speak to one another.

Salmon also are mostly seen to consumers as pieces of the whole; I wanted to show this, but as a connected whole. In a sense, I wanted to piece together the story of the wild salmon and reveal the processes of farmed salmon. I was also conscious of how the idea of piece-work or seasonal work is associated with the wild fishery, but farmed fish have changed the nature of fish processing work to steady, all-season work. This idea was strongly represented in both “Salmoneers” and the salmon stories participants contributed to the Re-telling banner. Most notably, one about cutting fish in the summer to pay university tuition, and another about a chiropractor who accepted salmon (the only currency available) in exchange for his services.

### Ladders

The notion of ladders is two-fold. First, humans have to construct fish ladders to help salmon up the rivers to spawn because of dams other barriers on the river. Second, the ladder metaphor helps us think about salmon across disciplines. Salmon conservation tends to be discipline-specific. Scientists and resource managers talk to one another, but rarely speak about the social -- social science, social relations, ethics, environmental politics, etc. I am deeply interested in the ladders I have to build to speak across difference.



I made the ladders from the same raw red silk as the salmon, and I twisted and knotted them to give them a textured look and feel because they really are hand-made, flimsy, experimental, and contingent. I am also conscious of the fact that the language I chose to speak across difference (visual art) often has to struggle for recognition in the fields of biology, ecology, etc. This is why I am drawn to the work of Susan Feindel, for her ability to cross disciplines with her work. Her collaboration with scientists on deep sea corals speaks to her ability to translate the world through both ways of seeing that are scientific and artistic. She is careful to highlight the physical presence of the earth in her paintings, and this is another reason I see her work resonate with some of my ideas and arts-practice.

Arts-based research is often seen in the academy as “fluff” or not engaging in “real work.” Lee mentioned experiencing this dismissive attitude from other aquaculture researchers when she took “Telling Salmon Tales” to a conference in New York on the social transformation of food (personal communication). My connection with Feindel’s work is directly related to her method of research; her arts-practice investigating ecological themes without calling it research. She too is engaged in the practice of understanding human relationships to nature through thoughtful attention and translation.

### Re-telling: weaving many truths

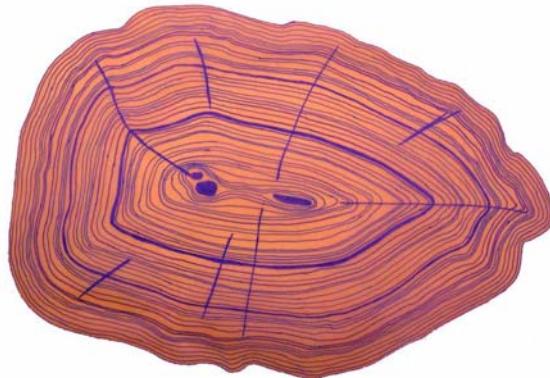
Our collaborative forth banner is a woven tapestry of cloth, ideas, stories and words that we want to re-tell the story of salmon.



For the weave, we chose pieces of fabric the three of us used in making our individual banners; we wanted the re-telling to act as a collage of material, ideas, and stories. The weave was inspired by a story Jacinda told us about the Nuxalk tradition of taking the first salmon that comes up the river, and placing it on a cedar mat, woven by the women in the community and offered as a gift. The salmon offer themselves as gift to humans with the understanding that they must return the offering with a ceremony to ensure the return of salmon year after year. Jacinda describes the weave in our project: “the cedar mat weave was used to re-present the respect and continued commitment to the necessary human-salmon relationships so that we may uphold each other” (personal communication). Jacinda taught Lee and I the technique of the specific weave for the cedar mat used for springtime salmon ceremonies; however, as we found out, weaving soft material was much harder than weaving stiff cedar bark, and we struggled to keep the weave from falling apart. This was also part of taking some stories and making them our own.

To hang the stories on the banner we initially wanted to use fish hooks. We wanted the small details to connect back to the individual process of capturing wild salmon. In the end we choose fish hooks to hang our artist statements on and to facilitate safe participation in writing and placing stories on the banner, we used safety pins.

The fourth banner is really where the community can interact with the ideas in the project and respond with their own salmon stories. It is why the subtitle is “weaving many truths” because we know there are an infinite number of stories that could be told about salmon, but here is where people can re-connect with their own stories and re-present them as part of the exhibit. The interactive nature of the banners can be seen to work towards a green public culture, where stories are tested and placed as opinions are formed. One story placed on the banner that challenged ideas of story was a black and white photograph of two Indigenous women near Kelowna wearing salmon aprons, cooking salmon over an open fire. This visual story opened up what others saw as “story” and soon newspaper articles and creative fiction appeared.



### Salmon Otolith

Initially we had plans to integrate the otolith idea and image into the project in a much more overt way. The otolith is really a tool of science to date the lifespan of a fish. Otoliths act as precise records, much like tree rings do, and in fact visually, they look strikingly similar. Lee and I saw this connection right away and worked on incorporating the connections between forest, salmon and humans through tree rings, otolith images and fingerprints. However, in the end, we chose to focus the otolith as part of the artist statement (top corner) and as the background on each of the cards given to people to write their own stories. The rings are good examples how parts are representative, but can never equal the whole. Like tree rings, otolith rings are a precise measure of history, but one can never know the whole life story of tree or a salmon, and it comforts me to know that despite the best science available, salmon still mystify researchers and academics. We can only ever access pieces, rings, images of a (salmon) life in time.

### Creative Process



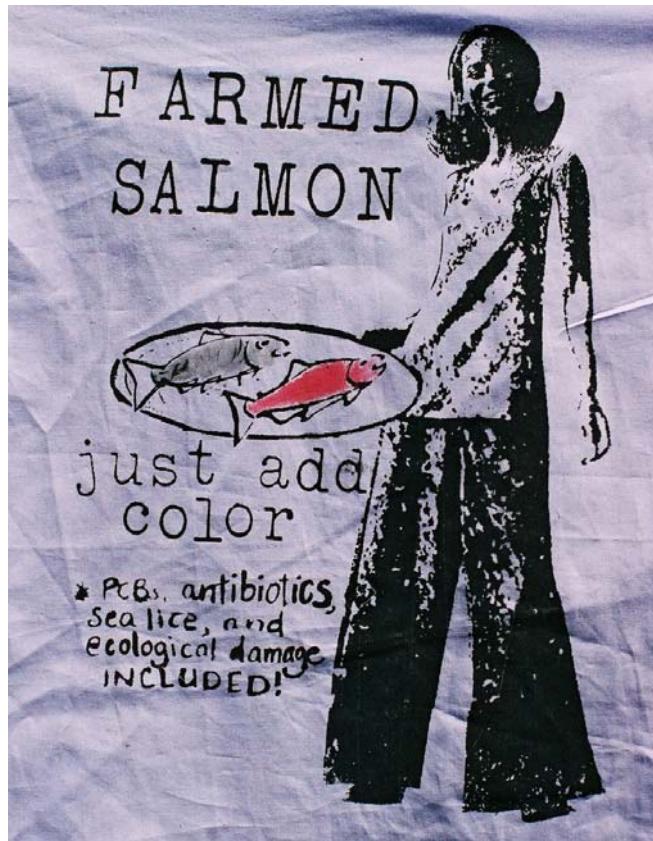
I do not mean to tell you this was a difficult and horrible process; I mean to tell you that for me, this process was always a struggle with myself and with others, but also a struggle with many wonderful

moments along the way. However, I think it is important to explore difficult moments in order that I/you/we can learn from these. As dian marino notes, “we’ve been deskilled in exploring fuck-ups” (1997, p.45). I agree and very much believe exploring these fuck-ups is a central part in linking critical and creative education. I could write a reflection on our creative process that focuses only on the positive, a reflection where I tell you everything went beautifully, as we worked in harmony to create the final installation. But I can not write that kind of reflection. I wish I could because I hate being the one to always say, “hmmm...what is going on here? What about democracy? Transparency? Accountability?” Therefore, this reflection is a highly critical analysis of my work, our work, my process and our process. By critical, I mean to push myself on my own ideas, my own process and our collaboration.

In the winter of 2003 I met Lee through my partner Scott. He was taking a course with Lee at OISE on feminist post-structuralism. Since that time, Lee and I had many conversations about FES, BC and my initial research on salmon farming. It was only in the fall of 2003 that we met regularly to begin collaborating on the beginnings of an arts-informed project on salmon. By December, I felt we had hit a rut in our ideas and our process, and hoped that submitting our project proposals to our professors (Deb Barndt/ Pop Ed; Leesa Fawcett/ Environmental Education) would spur some new ideas into motion. A critical time in this process for me was in November, when I asked Leah Burns to speak to Lee and I about the material reality of doing a large art installation such as this. It was in this meeting that I very much needed to hear Leah say that the actual experimentation with different ideas in different media was “authentic” research – so get going! Why? Somehow I needed to be given permission from an “expert” that what we were doing was research, and moreover, that it was important research. In January 2004 in our Cultural Production course, we met Jacinda, who was instantly drawn to working on this project after our original presentation of our ideas to the class. I felt it was when Jacinda, as the third artist, came to the project that the creativity really started to take off. I was also very excited at the perspective Jacinda brought given her indigenous perspective and I felt she could speak to a range of issues Lee and I could not even attempt for fear of appropriating indigenous culture.

Immediately Lee and I took a day-long workshop where we learned how to create a silkscreen and produced some amazing images and designs. It is incredible what people can accomplish given the time and space to let creativity flow. I am now using some of my silkscreen designs on canvas bags to give away and sell as part of continued awareness and education of the issue.





Taking an arts-informed approach was, for me, about finding a language I was comfortable in to cross boundaries and disciplines. I didn't want that feeling I had when I was at the World Summit on Salmon conference at Simon Fraser University in June 2003, where I felt like I was the only one in the room without a scientific background and therefore felt as if I had no authority, power, or even a language in which to speak to or across difference. At this conference, I was particularly interested the marginalization of a multi-media (slide and music) presentation on salmon given by an environmental educator, Terry Brown. The images and music had a powerful effect on me in reconnecting me to why we were at this conference – the salmon. It also seemed to me that an arts-informed approach is about doing critical work, not just studying it. In attempting this project we weren't asking anyone for permission, although we very often had to answer the question "why salmon?" This was a question that frustrated me at first (why wolves? why trees?), and now one I see as an opportunity to help people re-connect with those social relations that dominant discourse and hegemonic powers have worked very hard to disconnect. In a sense, this project can be considered direct action through an arts-informed approach, as we saw a need but we didn't ask for permission from people in power to create this installation. We saw it as a critical education process where we needed to speak back to dominant discourses and re-frame them.



## Collaborative Tension

This is the part of the concept of “working in collaboration” that never seems to be written down. It is the *difficulty in doing* that no one ever speaks about. It is about recognizing that not everyone has the skills to act democratically. It is about creating the capacity and space for those discussions of decision-making, expectations, and responsibility to take place.

In a collaborative project that aimed to produce counter-hegemonic narratives it was important to me that the way we worked was as democratic and dialogic as the goals of the installation. However, I made the naive assumption that we all understood how democracy works in small groups and this assumption gets us into trouble, as not everyone is skilled in working democratically. Questions like how are decisions made? How will the work be divided? Are we allowing time for reflexive thinking and practice? Are there opportunities for dissenting voices? How are gender roles and task roles (e.g. Editor) being allocated? I found I had a lot of assumptions that my questions were the same ones as my colleagues, but this wasn’t the case and therefore I found the process of working on the project difficult at times. These notions of democratic practice, relations of power, identity, voice, and representation are central to situating my writing, my environmental ethics, and contextualizing my collaborative work on “Telling Salmon Tales.”

There was a creative energy about the three of us that was palpable and hard to contain. Some of the best moments came from our collaborative brainstorming and sharing sessions. However, there were some specific tensions that arose in our creative process that are worthwhile exploring. The first tension was always the lack of assigned roles. The second tension is about voice and who speaks for whom in a collaborative project? Details are very important to me and I am a perfectionist when it comes to my own creative work. So to work with someone who was an organic thinker rather than a strategic planner like me, was very hard for me. What was even harder was to negotiate a solution to our opposing work styles. My expectations of myself are exceedingly high, and I tend to project these same expectations onto my colleagues in a collective situation. In turn, this often leads to bitter disappointments when I think I or others have failed to meet these high expectations. Thinking critically, I know my process needs to be improved in the following areas: accepting differences in working styles, recognizing contingencies, and learning to communicate my points in a manner that is not confrontational.

My plan was to get eighty per cent of my banner complete over spring break, and I did. Jacinda and I worked at Lumbers to get ready for the final silkscreen studio work at the end of the week. To me, this felt wonderful as it was a completely creative, indulgent time to collaborate and spend lots of time only thinking and working on the project.

In the middle of our creative process, it was very clear to me that Jacinda and I had the same working style; we had a strong vision of what we wanted to create and were able to clearly see the steps needed to bring that vision onto the banner. Lee had a completely different way of working, much more organic and messy. It is here where I knew I needed to work on accepting difference and respect other people’s process. For example, Lee and I met three days before we had to shoot our final designs in the

silkscreen studio. When I saw that she was struggling and had gone back to sketching original designs in pencil in her journal, I panicked. What resulted was an intense creative brainstorm on ideas for what later became her fetus-salmon central image. I felt comfortable enough with having worked with her to this point to tell her honestly that the image she had chosen to represent humans (a stiff man/ghost-like outline) wasn't working for me. I pushed her on what exactly she wanted to represent and say. What emerged was the idea for the circle salmon with the baby inside, a powerful image that (I think) gave focus to her banner.

As dian marino says, "I don't always go up and hug a difference," and I too struggle internally with my acceptance of difference (1997, p.47). In this project, my internal struggle centered on time management in a collaborative process where we depended heavily on one another to get portions of the work done by a particular deadline. I know I need to work on accepting that others do not plan everything like I do. How do I negotiate and initiate discussions on the fuck-ups with two other artists/ researchers I respect and admire? Perhaps in future we need to make explicit the implicit commitment we are making to one another when we agree to work collaboratively and the responsibility to one another that this entails. In this case, and in others, inattention to daily work details meant that organizing and coordinating duties fell to me. Perhaps my failure in these moments was to remain silent and not initiate a discussion about responsibility, workload, and democratic process.

### Who Speaks for Whom in a Collaborative Community Art Project?

I believe the single biggest mistake we made on this project was not having an open and honest discussion at the start on our individual working styles—our ways of working collaboratively, decision-making processes, expectations, and assumptions. As we met to discuss the collective reflection on the project, I stated that we needed to think about the question, "what does representation in a collaborative community-arts project look like?" To me, this is the most important question in how we move forward. What happens when someone wants to write an article about the project? Who speaks for the project? What happens when we all live in different geographic areas and the banner installation continues on in one location? What happens when we have to do a write-up of the project (e.g. abstract for journal/book) and by default I get the job of editor, and Lee sends me changes to Jacinda's text? I was conscious of the power I wielded in "holding the pen" and felt extremely uncomfortable with how this writing process unfolded, and said so at the time.

How are we going to be responsible to our work, and to each other? How is your speaking for my interests democratic? These questions are important for any future decisions regarding the project. The political stakes now are different as Lee is considering an expanded version of "Telling Salmon Tales" as her thesis work, and Jacinda and I only see our continued participation as a side project as our thesis and MRP work is almost complete, or of a different nature. Therefore, how do we as a collective negotiate these issues? These are only a few of the tensions I encountered in this project, and I have found a real silence in the literature on community arts practice that could speak to these tensions.

### Moving Forward

One of the things never discussed between the three of us was what to do after the banners went up. It seemed as if we worked painfully long hours to get this installation ready for the Eco-Art and Media Festival, and then we needed some time to catch our breath. Catching our breath is important, but after a month now this project continues to have a life of its own. Our banners were exhibited at the OISE student research conference March 26-28, as well as the *Spirit Matters: Wisdom Traditions And The "Great Work"* conference at OISE/UT's Transformative Learning Centre, May 13-16. Lee also took our Salmon Tales show on the road to New York for a conference on June 10-13 called *From Agriculture to Culture: The Social Transformation of Food* put on by the Culinary Institute of America, the Association for the Study of Food and Society (ASFS), and the Agriculture, Food, and Human Values Society (AFHVS) where there were three aquaculture roundtables.

Amazingly, we have received all sorts of requests to be part of food/justice/community festivals. I even received a personal invitation from Budd Hall to exhibit the banners at the University of Victoria. In May, we found out that our proposal to exhibit "Telling Salmon Tales" in the North Vancouver CityScape Community Art Space was accepted. Our exhibit dates are July – September 2005, and we will be fundraising, organizing, and planning for this next exciting opportunity.

## CONCLUSION

In the weekend before I finished this final paper, I attended Vancouver's third annual West Coast Poetry Festival. There was storytelling, spoken word, song poetry, and other amazing genres that push the boundary of how we (as "readers") think about poetry. I would argue we need to think more about the relationships between audiences and literature and visual art. There is a strong role of art and literature in environmental politics because reading and writing are active practices. The interpretive nature of these forms demands an active reader role; where communicative relationships can occur. Art and literature is about engaging people in a more participatory relationship, one that is dialogic. Throughout this paper, I have argued we need to engage in these arts-practices as much as speak about them. Eco-critique is about aesthetic judgment as well as arts-practice. We need to foster a kind of communication that will open up spaces for the relationships between form and content (poetry and politics) to flourish.

Reading and writing are ecological pursuits, and for me, an active eco-critical practice of being in the world. I have argued that literature, visual art, and poetry contribute to a green public culture and that in creating and engaging in these "performative politics" we come to know each and the world differently. Hegemony is always an active process, and any counter-hegemonic process must go further than the academic critique, it must be an active, creative re-telling. A re-telling where participation means active meaning-making, not commenting from the sidelines. That said, understanding and actually creating change are different, and I do not want the reader to think that my assumption is that because we shift forms of understanding, there is a domino effect on changing our actions. Certainly understanding and social change are connected in creative critical arts-practice, but it is a struggle that needs to be engaged on many fronts. dian marino states:

language isn't the only story in town. I don't think language and new interpretations are all that are needed, or that they're going to get us out of our unhealthy relations with each other and with our habits...I really wouldn't like to get caught in that practice alone: that if we can produce new interpretations, we're home free. This is, I think a temptation, and it falls back into that essentialist category. To know is to change things, and from what I know, if I'm being even mildly honest, that idea doesn't fit with my lived reality at all. I know a whole lot of things that haven't sunk into my bones, so to speak, and aren't connected to the way I am in the world. (1997, p.144).

That said connection often comes about through participation, and it has the power to change people. By participation, I mean actively engaged in a struggle. I do not mean to imply we are to be spectators. To a large extent, the pedagogy of learn by doing works, at least in these two arts-based experiments I engaged in. Not only was writing and visual art practices (silkscreens, sewing, painting) the tools I used to learn, but the representation at the end acts as a continuous dialogue as well. And it is encouraging that "Telling Salmon Tales" takes on a new life outside the academy because it is a testament to the fact that many diverse groups are interested in continuing this dialogue.

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