

sources (i.e. anywhere on earth) is not inevitable. The latter tale is, then, a story of human ingenuity and resilience, not folly—or so it seems.

These two opposing tales describe precisely the metaphoric fork in the road at which we are positioned today. In scenario one, humankind continues its global assassination of all that is Other, bringing to fruition an end day where all life collapses in permanence. Alternately, working with incrementally fewer resources amidst continuous decimation, the human species adapts and persists indefinitely.

MacKinnon's collection of societal triumphs and dramatic environmental change lead the reader toward what the author observes to be an injurious, deep-seeded social condition. Central to the phenomenon of disconnection is human distance from the nonhuman world. Here, this nature includes other species as well as aspects of our physical environment. MacKinnon appropriately identifies the importance of social relationships and contrasts this with the troublesome dominant belief in the inapplicability (indeed, ridiculousness) of nonhuman/human connectivity in Western society. Motivating this move away from symbiotic human and non-human life is knowledge, or, more accurately, a societal, insidious tendency toward a lack of knowledge. Ignorance here is often a choice. MacKinnon suggests that although the discontinuity of human societies prohibits sweeping

statements, one key condition has been well documented over and over: human cultures choose to forget. We rewrite and overwrite what is or was 'normal' within our lives, our connections with other lives and the relationship between the two. By shifting the baseline, we experience "environmental amnesia," where what was, is erased and replaced with a perpetual 'new' reality. Indeed, St. Augustine's inquiry—"How then am I to find you, if I have no memory of you?"—is easily answered with our silent proclamation that this is of no real concern; we will forever endure.

MacKinnon challenges this Utopian ontology with faith—however tenuous—in humanity's ability to gain sight through knowledge and a belief that anthropocentric power could prove essential rather than caustic. Tapping into the 'unique' human ability to survive, thrive, resurrect, rework, and revive, we could shed our falsely amnesiac tendencies for a global rewrite of sorts.

This work, then, should serve environmental and social justice scholars well as an accessible place to situate and grow anti-apocalyptic discourse. MacKinnon's assemblage of well-placed, research-based analogies and historical accounts in *Future World*, collectively and cleverly persuade the reader that, as a species, humans alone have the capability to not restore, but to rewire—"rewild"—our world. From this perspective, all may not be lost (or forgotten).

and reimagine such notions of Canadianness. In this way Francis offers an insightful and thought-provoking perspective on the topic, and contributes to the broader task of generating an "imaginative reconsideration" of Canadian cultural mythology.

This book draws from a rich and diverse body of theoretical work. As a whole, the analysis is grounded in Michael Billig's concept of banal nationalism, which describes the relationship between common national symbols and identity formation. However, Francis pushes this idea forward by connecting to her earlier writings, and the wider literature on haunting and the notion of public secrets. Here, Francis offers a broadened perspective on banal nationalism, recognizing the counter-narratives (ghosts) that, while systematically concealed, are ever present within the evolution of such national symbols, and Canadian society as a whole. Francis also draws on the writings of Derrida and Benjamin in her approach to acts of revelation, or "outing a ghost." Based on the work of these scholars, Francis asserts a need for careful and self-reflective practice in any acts of exposure, as the risk of distortion and/or appropriation of the cause can generate a perpetuation of injustice.

This theoretical framework serves a dual purpose, as the objectives of the book are twofold. First, Francis applies this lens in order to carry out her analysis of the four specific national images. Through an examination of historic documents, relevant literature, and personal interviews, Francis traces the evolution of the prominent colonial discourses surrounding these objects, and simultaneously draws out the shadowy underrepresented counter-narratives, or public secrets. She then applies these same ideas in looking at the artistic interventions that expose public secrets and "play with and against the very notion of belonging." More so, while not referenced directly, *Creative Subversions*, as well as several of the artistic works highlighted in the book (e.g., the *Lesbian National Parks and Services* performance) can also be situated within the field of queer ecology, as Francis problematizes the heteronormative lens

## Creative Subversions: Whiteness, Indigeneity, and the National Imaginary

By Margot Francis, UBC Press, 2011 \$32.95

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### REVIEWED BY FLEURIE HUNTER

*Creative Subversions: Whiteness, Indigeneity, and the National Imaginary* looks at the process through which commonplace national symbols carry, as well as inform, cultural narratives of identity and belonging. The author, Margot Francis, analyzes how seemingly neutral and benign Canadian iconography—the beaver, the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR), Banff National Park,

and the image of the "Indian"—act to reinforce certain ideas about race, masculinity, and sexuality, as they propagate the dominant "white, Anglo-Canadian historical memory." This is achieved by first offering a critical examination of the historic and contemporary discourses surrounding these symbols, followed by a look at the efforts of various contemporary artists to challenge

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through which ideas of ‘nature’ and ‘wilderness’ are constructed and reinforced through banal national images.

Each of the central chapters of the book trace the specific and unique history of the four symbolic representations. At the same time, clear themes emerge in the meta-narrative surrounding the origin and evolution of the nation. Canada is portrayed as a wild and open landscape, a space for certain bodies to pursue dreams of material well-being. Categories of the colonized and colonizer are secured and reinforced in many ways. Male territorial mastery is also a common thread. As an example, the Canadian Pacific Railway can be considered as an emblem of masculinity’s domination over nature. This characterization was simultaneously denied to racialized bodies, whereby boundaries of ‘us’ and ‘them’ were construed through various means, such as homophobic sexual paranoia about men from ‘the Far East.’ Central to the evolution of each of these symbols is the parasitic Canadian relationship with Indigenous peoples—the simultaneous historic erasure as well as a spectacularization or fetishization of the ‘Indian,’ which is wrapped up in the narratives surrounding these banal national symbols as well as Canadian identity in itself.

The second portion of each chapter is dedicated to presenting the work of contemporary artists who challenge the dominant cultural myths associated with these banal national symbols. The creative interventions are diverse both in medium and intention—ranging from satirical sculptures that play with behavioural codes of female sexuality (e.g., *The Spirit of Canada Eating Beaver* by Wendy Coburn), to Richard Fung’s video *Dirty Laundry*, which challenges prevailing historical memory surrounding the Canada Pacific Railway both in form and in content. The images and narrative of the video serve to problematize misconceptions regarding the Chinese workers who built the railroad, as well as the considerable absence of their memory altogether. At the same time, through the style of the film, which presents multiple and conflicting narratives, the very notion of historical

truth is destabilized.

As mentioned, a common thread within the book is the (mis)representation of Indigenous peoples, which, through both systemic erasure as well as strategic appropriation of ‘the Indian’ caricature, is a key component of the Canadian origin myth as represented within the national symbols described. While many of the artistic works that play with/against the first three symbols address the racialized discourse of “white national belonging,” the fourth chapter looks specifically at how Indigenous artists have responded to ‘Indianness,’ which arguably continues to haunt Canadian national memory. The works described engage in “tactics of appropriation” whereby the artists present a form of mimicry that strategically intensifies certain aspects of misrepresentation, and also refute other characterizations to be substituted with their own self-image.

## Strange Natures: Futurity, Empathy, and the Queer Ecological Imagination

*By Nicole Seymour, Illinois UP, 2013 \$25.00*

REVIEWED BY CAMERON BUTLER

Nicole Seymour’s *Strange Natures* makes a strong case for the need to cultivate a queer ecological empathy that celebrates the strange and ugly, promotes difference, and rejects constructions that oppress and divide, be it for bodies or landscapes. Her work is one in the growing field of queer ecology, seeking to destabilize our understanding of ‘the natural’ and reconfigure our relationship with/in nature. Seymour’s archive is comprised predominately of American films and novels, from 1987 to 2006. The book contains a thorough introduction and four chapters of critical readings of her archive, as well as a short conclusion. Throughout the book, she engages with major queer theorists, such as Lee Edelman, Judith Butler, and José Muñoz, and builds on the works of queer ecological writers, including Catriona Sandilands, Greta Gaard, Noël Sturgeon, and Gordon Brent Ingram.

The introduction traces the histor-

The content and format of *Creative Subversions* are both clear and insightful, and the writing is complemented by the many images that supplement the analysis. The theoretical concepts of banal nationalism and haunting are effectively woven through the text, although I would have been interested to hear more about how the artistic works included (and subsequently what has been excluded from this volume) move beyond simply exposing a public secret to achieve a “transgressive uncovering” (as framed by the writings of Derrida and Benjamin). Overall, however, *Creative Subversions* provokes the reader to critically reflect on taken-for-granted emblems of ‘Canadianness,’ and the broader historical narrative therein.

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FLEURIE HUNTER is a graduate student in Social Policy & Planning at York University.

ical divide between queer theory and ecocriticism. Seymour does not seek to define queer ecology as a field, but rather to explain why collaboration has taken so long to occur. Naturalization of heteronormativity and the labeling of queers as being “against nature” have stalled queer theorists from positive engagements with “the natural” that is so often used to justify their oppression. Conversely, ecocriticism has often lacked poststructuralist positions, opting instead for an essentialized nature, while environmentalism frequently builds its ethics out of concern over “white, heterosexual, familial reproductivity.” Following this quick history lesson, Seymour describes her archive and their places within her project to outline “concrete, sincere environmental politics even while remaining, to varying degrees, skeptical, ironic, and self-reflexive.”

Chapter 2, “Post-Transsexual Pas-