



“The Great Blue Heron and The Great Rainbow Trout Yogi in Phenomenal Space, Mental Space and The Space of Consciousness” (1979)

Eel River Watershed

Morris Graves

CASCADIAN zen

bioregional
writings
on cascadia
here and now

volume two

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Watershed Press
Seattle, Washington, Cascadia
MMXXIV

Cascadian Zen, Volume II: a Short User's Guide

This is the second volume of writings, essays, and interviews that speak from and toward the Cascadian bioregion. It is not a sequel to the first volume, but rather the second part of what we envisioned as a coherent whole, comprised of seven interlacing and intertextual baskets.

The first volume consists of the first three baskets: *The Buddha Way*, which collects poems that explicitly evoke Buddhist themes or are aligned with figures who do; *Empty Bowl*, which takes its inspiration from the legendary bioregional poetry and prose press founded in Western Washington in 1976 by Michael Daley and Bob Blair, and which collects poets who in some broad sense write in its ethos; and *Original Mind*, which collects writerly expressions dedicated to clarifying and developing the primal mind as it expresses itself in the Cascadian heart-mind-world.

The volume in your hands has the remaining four baskets.

Borders Without Binaries contains work that wiggles free of colonial mapping techniques and colonial sensibilities and contemplates boundaries that have no clear “A” starts here, while “B” starts over there.” There is an unspoken awareness that political borders do not register in geological time, and will never divide flora and fauna, or alter the long reach of our coastline and the cascade of watersheds that flow into it. Borders in this respect are edges that bleed from and into other bioregions, marking an interdependence within and between them.

Freed of the burden generated by our imagined identities, Ed Dorn would simply be in his body, here on the land, experiencing the scent of the Sound, “felt on the wrists and neck, cold bands on the body...” Others would meld with the landscape. Deborah Poe finds “distance and intimacy underlined by the lake.” Deborah Woodard draws “down a flap of the gray sky.” Their poetry is an antidote to our extraction-based culture’s habit of living so divorced from the rhythms and nuances of the land that we have, in many cases, as poet Stephen Collis states, even extracted our “selves.”

Sadly, another thing the political border cannot divide is our shared history of genocide, compelling Indigenous poets such as Jordan Abel, severed from his Nisga’a heritage at an early age, to ask how “those who have been dispossessed/ and severed from the land/begin to think through what land means to them?” Severance is a knife with a ragged edge. Again, here, there is no place where “A” ends and “B” begins, only an examination of the ragged wound left in its wake.

The *Wilson’s Bowl* basket is named after a perfectly round bowl-shaped petroglyph, believed to be a mortar rock, scooped from granite in the inner recesses of Long Harbour on Salt Spring Island in what was a large Coast Salish village site 7,000 years ago. Perhaps the bowl was used for grinding. However, as Phyllis Webb writes, “Moon floats here/belly, mouth, open-one-eye.” The image of the petroglyph serves as the nexus of stories, poems, and images related directly or indirectly to the work of anthropologist Wilson Duff who did groundbreaking work to introduce settler culture to the true nature of the Indigenous peoples whose land they had stolen.

Issei Zen is a work of love that comes out of Barbara Johns’ deep study of Issei culture in the bioregion and demonstrates that the experience of Japanese immigrants is an enormous Zen lesson. *Dekita koto wa, shikata ga nai*, indeed! How must we take the challenges of our time and make art from the deepest part of ourselves? The Issei generation endured more than their fair share as they navigated their wartime illegal incarceration, but the determination of the writers and artists collected in this basket can also help us pilot our brave new world of ecological and cultural chaos.

The work in the *Storm Clouds* basket documents the dark and ominous elements looming in the bioregion, current and ongoing. Joanne Arnott notices that her ancestors have peopled her Zoom during the pandemic. Rob Lewis looks out his window and contemplates a clouded fragment of the Salish Sea where the apex predators, the Southern Resident orcas are starving. In a poem by Meredith Quartermain, a bartender gazes from a twilit dome car on *The Canadian* asking, “whatever is that/the stolen land of sawmills/cutting, cutting, cutting trees/to shrink-wrapped two-by-fours”.

Finally, we again conclude with the wisdom of David McCloskey, whose vision of Cascadia remains a lodestar.

Although this volume concludes the project as it is currently conceived, no doubt we will discover many painfully glaring omissions. We know that our work, and the work of Watershed Press more broadly, is only beginning and that these omissions will inspire another volume and other projects.

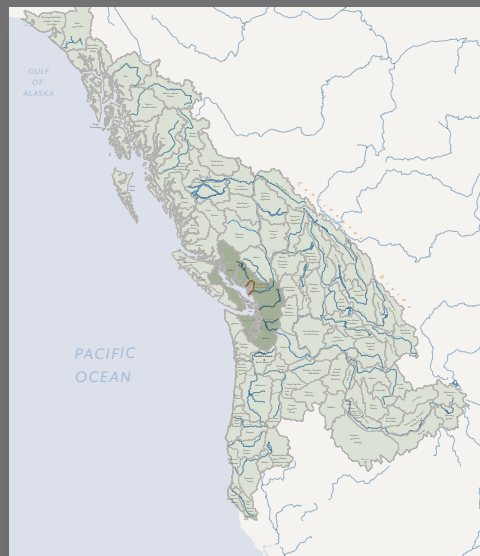
May all sentient beings flourish!

In Cascadia

summer 2024

For the protection of all beings in the bioregion of Cascadia

wilson's bowl





Wilson's Bowl

Collyne Bunn

Stephen Collis



Photograph courtesy of Lawrence Schwartzwald.

Change is the true nature of every place we inhabit, everything we are. I live on what was an island that became, in time, a peninsula only to—one day in the not-too-distant future, with the changing climate and rising seas—most likely become an island again. Indigenous Peoples travelled down this coast—when it had a different coastline, a different sea level yet again—thousands of years ago. European settlers arrived, in numbers and to stay, just a century and a half ago. Today, migrants the world over are being displaced by wars over resources and climate change driven droughts. No man is an island, John Donne famously wrote. Islands, too, sometimes cease to be, are swallowed by rising seas, gathered in by land formations, only to be cast adrift once again. At these time scales, life is a dizzying and mutable dance. We are such temporary stuff—but we love each other just the same, trying to hold each other on our turning Earth we tinker with at our peril, far arm of a galactic spiral, midst a universe that exploded into being billions of years ago, whose speeding shrapnel we, fiery-minded beings, are.

Salt Spring Island, like my Tsawwassen home, is part of the Coastal Douglas fir biogeoclimatic zone on Canada's Pacific coast. Lodged between Vancouver Island and the mountain chains of the continental

mainland, scattered across the Salish Sea, it is in a rain shadow, dry by West Coast standards. Not only Douglas fir dot these mossy, summer-browned islands, but arbutus trees are common too, red and undulating over exposed shoreline rocks. Garry Oaks twist and writhe in unique dry meadows where camas flowers and crocuses rise in spring from the yellow grass.

Seals and pods of resident orca whales ply the waters amidst the hundreds of islands. Salmon swarm towards river mouths to spawn. Ducks and all manner of migratory birds go north and south along the Pacific Flyway, making seasonal stops on rich river deltas. Plants and people move along the coast too. The blackberry has spread—following the pathways humans carved for roads and railways—from California to Alaska in a little over a hundred years. It is often difficult to know the difference between indigenous and invasive species. The Garry Oaks, seeming so much a part of this landscape, were brought by the Spanish in the eighteenth century. The more human beings travel all over the world, the more we may have to embrace what French gardener Gilles Clément calls the “planetary garden”—a conceptual shift that, in poet and Clément translator Jonathan Skinner’s words, “entails a certain hospitality to ‘invasive’ species.” For Clément, the “management of movement [human, plant, animal] is a mode of investigating displacement.” Blackberries may be colonizers, but they inhabit mostly abandoned and waste spaces, providing a bounty of free fruit to wayward humans and foraging animals.

I’m trying to write about poet Phyllis Webb, her “failure” (that’s how she describes it) to write a projected anarchist epic “Kropotkin Poems” in the 1970s, and the discoveries she began to make in her local environment as she settled into life on her island retreat.

There was, for instance, a well-known petroglyph carved on a bear-sized sandstone boulder on the beach at Fulford Harbour. With large concentric eye circles, a grill of long teeth and the outlines of a head, it has been described as a seal. Across the harbour is a deep, oval bowl carved in the bedrock, near the top of the high tide line. There are, in fact, bowls carved in the bedrock of each and every harbour on Salt Spring—in the south (Fulford Harbour), west (Burgoyne Bay), north (Hudson Point), and

east (Ganges Harbour)—offerings in every cove, the island encircled in ceremony.

On a May Day visit—unseasonably warm, the news filled with reports of wildfires about to descend on Fort McMurray, where in the midst of northern Alberta’s climate-change feeding tar sands, 30 degree Celsius spring temperatures were setting the boreal forest alight—I walk from the Fulford ferry to the tiny Catholic church tucked into the slopes above the beach. Descending there through bracken and curving blackberry canes—harangued by a kingfisher—I quickly find the bowl carving in the arching bedrock and set myself down beside it so I can look at the bowl, and look out over it at the harbour beyond, stretching away towards the other islands sparking there in the south. It is as though placed there—how long ago?—to invoke and invite entrance to the harbour—to funnel the ocean into its confines—perhaps for the sea to feed those living behind the bowl, at the end of the harbour where a small creek spills out onto the beach, the deep shell midden on the small alluvial plane marking long human habitation. On this day the bottom of the bowl is crusted with tiny yellow-brown and decaying maple flowers, the boughs of which drooped low over my head, dappling the bedrock with a network of sharp-tined shadows.

On another visit, another season, arriving on Salt Spring and taking the bus from Fulford Harbour to Ganges, I take a detour, following Phyllis’s instructions to the location of the real prize—Wilson’s Bowl, the stunning stone spirit of Webb’s titular 1980 book. No maps or guidebooks of the island note the location or even the existence of the bowl—the greatest work of art the island possesses. I follow the harbour around from Ganges to the east and head out Churchill Road. Somewhere here, at the end of this winding, up and down path, Phyllis’s friend Lilo Berliner stayed for a time in a small cabin owned by anthropologist Beth Hill. Somewhere here, in 1977, she walked into the sea, after leaving a small archive on the steps of Phyllis’s home.

The rain has been steady, but now it slows, and I lower my hood to let in light and sound. The beach at the end of the road is shell midden, the sea a low flat basin. People would have lived here for millennia—the bowl

itself dates to what anthropologists call the Marpole phase (roughly 1500 to 2500 years ago). A 1973 dig in the midden near the bowl revealed some 7,000 beads and many skeletal remains. I walk toward the west corner of the beach where rocks jut, clamber over slick boulders under low-hanging arbutus boughs. Sky all tattered rags of cloud, the water pewter reflections, liquid lead. I almost miss the bowl.

It is much smaller than I'd imagined—Beth Hill gives its measurements as twenty-four by twenty-three centimeters, maybe not much more than a centimeter deep, a “shallow saucer in bedrock” with a “pecked rim.” Just slightly more oval than round, the area outside its lip also carved away, to better shape the bowl, give it its raised rim. It is no accident of rocks and tide—it was definitely made by human beings. Limpets and barnacles—small and isolated—round about. Bottom of the bowl slicked dark with algae under a skim of water, smooth, as I gently, reverently draw my fingers across its surface. I move to catch the light in the bowl—grey sky silvered in its reflection—some raindrops falling again, ripples ringing out to its rim. The rock it is carved in is sandstone (and so easier to perfect its shape, as opposed to the other, typically granite bedrock bowls), yellow-green / brown, buckled, grooved, and riven.

December 24, 1973: Excerpt from a letter to Lilo Berliner

I have a feeling that I have finally cracked the code, and have found the trail that will lead to understanding the great things the Edenshaws were doing. I have gone beyond “Levels of Meaning” and have found another way in which the art was working. It involves paradoxes, like the box paradox in “Nothing”... It often makes use of pre-existing structural oppositions in the shapes of artifacts to state equations which are at the same time paradoxes (on a spoon, handle is to bowl as piercer is to container and as ultimate piercer is to ultimate engulfer). It has a complicated vocabulary of images to work with (... and as Raven's beak is to Bear's mouth). It plays with inversions of part and whole, literal and figurative, present and absent, explicit and implicit. It is always trying to find new images for the two hands of God.

The main thing the art seems to be saying is “I control paradox” (with whatever follows from that). It seems to work with some of the paradoxes that are hidden and implicit in myths (to a certain extent, Haida art is a structural analysis of Haida myth). If there is a paradox which it cannot control, it creates another paradox to cancel it out by producing the same result. One example is the paradox of Creation, which the mind creates by postulating an initial nothingness out of which the world emerges. But how can something be formed out of nothing? The Haida answer

was to construct another intertransformation out of two opposite things into each other. Raven, in the fact of being born, brings into existence his own mother. A process, creating its own antecedents and its own consequences, both at the same time. Needless to say, in this system, there is no "beginning of time," there only exists the present moment. There is no creation, there is only transformation. Opposites, intertransforming into each other.

This cannot be clear without a lot of examples. But I think you will know intuitively that something is there.

Wilson's Bowl

*In memory of Lilo, who walked into the sea,
January 1977, Salt Spring Island*

'You may read my signs
but I cross my path
and show you nothing
on your way.'

Found Poem

Duende
Dark song
'does not appear
if it sees no possibility
of death.'

Duende
'Like a straight fight
with the creator
on the edge of the well.'

Duende

'Where is the *Duende*?
An air smelling of a child's
saliva, of pounded grass
announcing the constant
baptism of newly created
things'

Duende

Dark sounds
'behind which we discover
volcanoes, ants, soft
winds, the Milky Way.'

'It burns the blood
like powdered glass.'

Duende!

Thus Lorca, his *Duende*

Over the world

Duende!

In this place

Tremendum.

The Bowl

This is not a bowl you drink from
not a loving cup.
This is meditation's place
cold rapture's.
Moon floats here

belly, mouth, open-one-eye

any orifice

come to nothing

dark as any mask

or light, ore light/is

holy cirque.

Serene, it says silence

in small fish

cups a sun

holds its shape

upon the sea

howls, 'Spirit entered

black as any raven.'

Smiles—

and cracks your smile.

Is clean.

Black Bird pecks at her ear

pushes through to a nest in her brain.

She hears heavy feathers twice:

once as riffs on a drum;

once as a black bird's sigh.

She Sings

"Over the holy water the dedication.

Over the holy water the syllables.

Over the holy water equations.

Over the holy water the golden disc

settles (mercy and loving beholding).

Noble the mathematics, the calculations.

Noble the old rock asleep and beyond our tears."

In This Place

The spirits are not benign
 up on Mt. Erskine chittering
 at fog-flyers
 up on Mt. Maxwell with a cougar
 who spies out the lambs of Musgrave.
 Up on Mt. Bruce mean spirits
 scrabble radio waves
 for living and dead.
 They doze on Mt. Tuam.
 They never sleep.
 At full moon
 they come down on the rocks
 of the sea's shore
 deliver such messages:
 are not gone.
 We quake. We draw curtains
 against the word's blaze.

She goes out on the water
 hearing.
 Is taken or given
 by tides.
 I go as far as I can
 collaborating in the fame.

Her scheme of last minutes
 her strategies
 are little songs
 for great earth
 (to which I listen carefully
 in this place).

#

I took the path.
 I crossed the signs.

I crossed the path.
 I took the signs.

Dark sounds.
 Dark sounds.

The Place Is Where You Find It

What was the path she took?
 As winding as her gut
 with the pain in it?
 Along the beach?
 To the caves in the hill?
 Path of her mind turning
 on symbols. Civility and
 the Wild Woman's scream.
 And horror. Horror.
 Path to the beach
 at full moon at last
 joy of that mean water,
 the manic ride out in the bay.

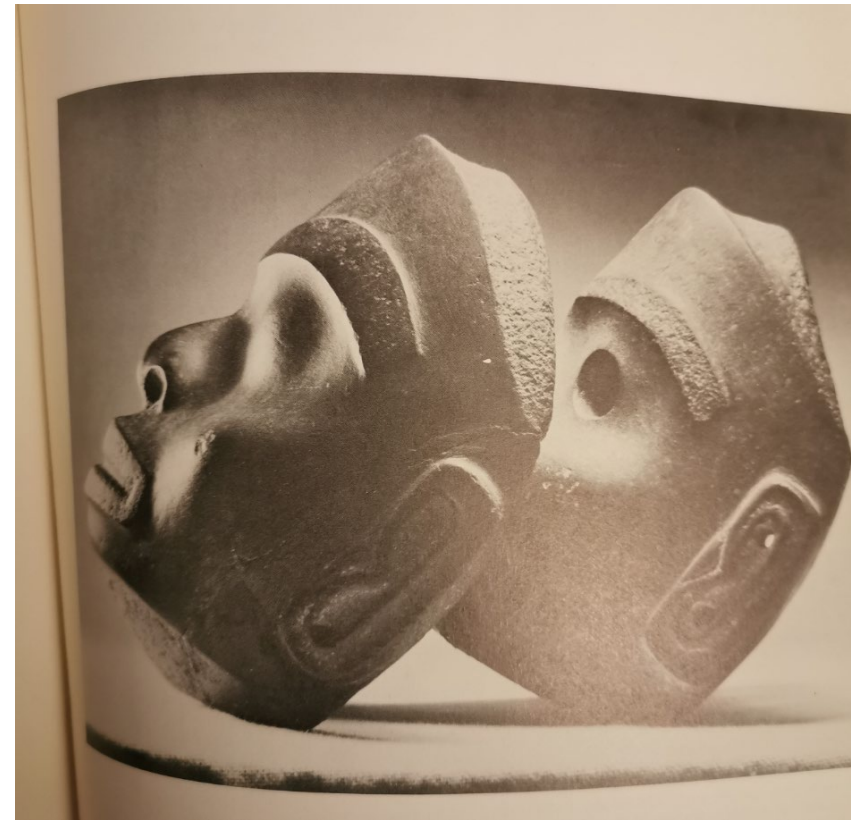
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'Oh air, I beat my wings
 against you
 against great songs

of little earth
O air!

Twin Masks

I ask if a woman could have made them
the two stone masks
that can nest together
one with its eyes open
one with its eyes closed.
Did Wilson ever think of that
before he shot himself so tidily
in his office?
I think of it and feel the weight
of the rock reject me.
For the dance! For the dance!
O stone, I hold whatever hands
that held you. O stone, we hold
this hour together under the artful
light of the gallery.
I stand here reading the lies
of paradox, reading the eyes
which have not worn you since
they flashed in the fires of
the Longhouse and went out—
dancing!



Tsimshian twin masks

CASCADIAN zen

Cascadian Zen: Bioregional Writings on Cascadia Here and Now, Volume II

Cascadian Zen was typeset in Dante and Adobe Caslon Pro with titling in Albertsthal Typewriter and Franklin Gothic, Han characters in Adobe Kaiti, and ornaments in Mrs Eaves. The book was printed on 80# book paper and perfectbound into soft covers.

The Dante font in *Cascadian Zen* was customized for the publication by Robert Bringhurst to include language support for the Coast Salish languages, Greek, and romanized Sanskrit and Arabic.

Additional Copyediting and Proofreading: Ursula Vaira and Justine Chan

Design and Typography: Theresa Whitehill, Adrienne Simpson, and Sarah McKinley, Colored Horse Studios, Mendocino County, California, www.coloredhorse.com

Typesetting: Joshua Rothes

Watershed Press Logo by Roberta Hoffman, www.robertahoffman.com

Printing & Softcover Bindery: Gray Dog Press, Spokane, Washington

About the Publisher

Watershed Press is based on the tenets of bioregionalism—the opposite of colonialism.

We publish work awakening the diversity of place in all manifestations.

Watershed Press is the imprint of Cascadia Poetics Lab.

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