IMAGINING AN ECOPOLITICAL SPACE

by

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Abstract

There exist at present a broad range of environmental challenges, and there are strong and varied movements seeking to take action on these issues in a range of ways. What is deeply contested, however, is how these environmental problems should be framed, and through what means solutions ought to be developed. At the heart of these questions is the need to critically evaluate dominant political framings that seek to contain and manage, rather than engage, these ecological challenges. What is required instead is the development of viable ecopolitical practices that are able to generate practicable solutions while retaining the capacity to grow, develop, and sustain life.

In addressing the challenge of theorizing such a viable ecopolitics, I work to productively combine phenomenologically-informed understandings of place with an Arendtian formulation of the conditions of political life in a way that can help to create inhabited ecological spaces of appearance. Such spaces can offer the potential to respectfully include ecological considerations in political decision-making, to foster an acknowledgement and valuing of the situatedness of particular political actions, and to open up discursive and interpretive possibilities while maintaining this openness through sustained political negotiation.

In order to explore the possibilities and potential implications of such an ecopolitical space, I begin by outlining what I understand to be the current ecopolitical challenge and its associated problematic inclusive and exclusive dynamics. I move on to offer a possible response to this ecopolitical challenge through an exploration of particular characteristics of place experience and the potential for phenomenological views of place to gather various elements of the more-than-human world into an arena of common engagement or appearance. Critically examining current state-centric political framings, and their inability to adequately meet this ecopolitical challenge, I appeal instead to a richer and more dynamic Arendtian formulation of political life. Finally I work to develop an understanding of how this expanded conception of the political can be combined with phenomenological understandings of place to begin to create vibrant and creative ecopolitical spaces in practice.
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Chapter 1 – Introduction: Framing the Problem

We must begin…with the recognition that the source of the environmental crisis lies not without but within, not in industrial effluent but in assumptions so casually held as to be virtually invisible. Oscar Wilde once asserted that art does not imitate life, life imitates art: we come to occupy the landscape we create. If so, our scarred habitat is not only of our doing, but of our imagining, and it will take a profound recreation of the social world to ‘un-say’ the environmental crisis and constitute a more benign alternative. (Evernden 1993: xii-xiii)

1.1 Framing the Issue

As consciousness regarding the fragile health of the planet continues to rise, environmentalists and others have now reached a point at which a broad range of environmental problems have been and continue to be identified. In addition, there exists a general acknowledgement that at least some action must be taken to address them1. What remains unclear, and deeply contested, is how these problems ought to be framed and understood, and through what means solutions ought to be developed2. How can effective action be taken to create positive environmental change? What needs to be understood before such action can be taken? On a broad scale, what is at question here is the development of a viable ecopolitics. And by viable I mean not only functional in the

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1 See Flavin et al. (2008) for an example the array of pressing environmental challenges that have been identified, as well as one proposal for addressing them (encouraging environmental innovation through private sector investment and market-based initiatives). See Clapp and Dauvergne (2005), Lipschutz (2004), Maniates (2003), DeSombre (2002), and Dryzek and Schlosberg (1998) for a comprehensive overview of the variety of contemporary positions on the nature and status of global environmental politics.

2 Consider, for instance, the tense dynamics occurring at G8 summits between state leaders developing top-down solutions to issues on their ‘environmental agenda’ and environmental campaigners advocating for alternative governance and decision-making models, or debates surrounding the appropriate ways to understand and address our current energy needs and the emissions associated with fossil fuel use.
sense that it is able to generate practicable solutions, but viable in the ecological sense of being capable of growing, developing, and sustaining life.

In my search to address this question of how we can begin to develop such an ecopolitical practice, I will be working with two deceptively simple concepts: place and politics. At first glance, these terms almost have the character of throw-away words: ubiquitous expressions, the meanings of which are seldom explicitly considered. In fact, reflecting on the meaning of these concepts can tend to induce an almost aporetic paralysis when the lack of established meaning becomes apparent. At the same time, however, this absence of clear definitional boundaries around ‘place’ and ‘politics’ holds a valuable creative potential. In honouring and maintaining this lack of certainty, and by operating with notions of place and politics that help to de-limit rather than define our understanding, it is possible to establish sustained conversations regarding these concepts and the relationship between them, allowing for the flourishing of epistemological diversity in a way that reflects and reinforces the concurrent existence of political and ecological diversity.

Just as Karena Shaw and R.B.J. Walker (2006) suggest in their critical examination of the current state of international relations theory, the most important strategy in the quest to engage with these concepts is to avoid the temptation to simplify them. Countless definitions of place and politics already exist, but few of them seem able

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3 The distinction I am seeking to make here is between ways of understanding that define particular terms and ideas, in the sense of circumscribing them and closing them in, and ways that de-limit them, characterizing and opening up dialogue regarding them in ways that free up analytic and discursive possibilities.
to adequately capture the range of ideas and practices that could be productively associated with them. In particular, simplified articulations of these terms tend to characterize and combine them in a way that simultaneously sanctions and elides specific kinds of inclusions and exclusions, a problematic process the effects of which will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter. What it is important to become aware of here, however, is that these simplifications can prove deeply troublesome for those desiring to somehow ‘protect nature4,’ to give adequate and respectful consideration to the more-than-human-world5 in political conversations. It is precisely this desire that motivates the present analysis, and what follows is an attempt to theorize the conditions and implications of such a viable ecopolitics.

1.2 Theoretical Approach

Embarking on a theoretical investigation of what it could mean to create a viable ecopolitics is a project that can have many starting points, and many ways forward. The

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4 See Walker (2006b) for an evocative account of the problematic implications of the terms ‘nature’ and ‘protection’, as well as of our desire to create a relationship between the two and work toward ‘protecting nature’. In particular, Walker argues that while in some ways it makes sense to discuss the protection of nature, in other ways it is “precisely the form of social, cultural, economic, ethical and political order that can think that a claim to protect nature is unproblematic that is the core problem we have to confront” (2006: 5).

5 Throughout this analysis, I use this term inclusively to refer to other animals, but also to entities typically characterized as inanimate features of the natural world, such as trees, mountains, or bodies of water. Following Abram (1996), I favour the expression ‘more-than-human’ for the way in which it attempts to avoid the oppositional and hierarchical implications that can be associated with the term ‘non-human’. One of the significant challenges that emerges when working to address these ecopolitical issues is that of developing an effective vocabulary with which to speak about them, and to avoid unconsciously falling back into problematic conventional expressions and understandings. This term is one attempt to navigate this linguistic (and underlying epistemological) challenge.
way that I have chosen here is to develop and follow through a particular conception of place and a recognition of its role in political interactions, and then to explore what the ecological implications can be of taking such an understanding seriously. In doing so, I have made particular choices regarding the kind of place theorists and literature I engage – specifically, those working within a phenomenological tradition – and what constitutes a rich and useful understanding of politics – namely, an Arendtian conception of action in the space of appearance. The particular personal histories and political contexts that these theorists are working within has influenced the worldviews and understandings they put forth, and similarities between particular theorists in terms of their backgrounds and experiences have likely helped to add an additional connecting narrative thread to the story I am constructing regarding the associations between place and politics. At the same time, my approach and perspective is also inevitably, substantially, and valuably informed by my own set of experiences and the political context in which I live. Acknowledging and working with this context is crucial; as Donna Haraway (1988) maintains in her argument for the value of situated knowledge, the first step in gaining perspective on the larger picture is to be somewhere in particular yourself rather than pretending to a false distance and objectivity. She argues that “all these pictures of the world should not be allegories of infinite mobility and interchangeability but of elaborate

6 For example, similarities in historical political circumstance between political theorist Hannah Arendt, living and writing through the devastating and oppressive political climate of Nazi Germany, and philosopher Giorgio Agamben, working in the political unrest and repression of Italy in the 1970s, and the ongoing struggles with institutional representation (Negri 1998), suggest one possible motivation for the interest they share in developing conceptions of politics that place such a central value on the creativity and agency of individual political actors, and the problem of the appearance or visibility of political action.
specificity and difference and the loving care people might take to learn how to see faithfully from another’s point of view” (Haraway 1988: 583). The number of socially and ecologically challenging inclusions and exclusions that are involved in current attempts to address environmental issues is great enough, and I do not wish to add the exclusion of my own authority. The kind of discursive openness and political engagement that I will be arguing for demands the accountability of such presences as much as it invites challenging and constructive dialogue with them.

1.3 Plan of the Present Inquiry

In order to avoid some of the problematic implications of this ever-present dynamic of simultaneous inclusions and exclusions, and to begin to develop a viable ecopolitics that is capable of promoting a flourishing way of life for both humans and others in the more-than-human world, it is necessary to take a step back from the details and specifics of particular environmental problems. By taking this broader view, it is possible to embark on an interrogation of our conceptions of politics itself, and to begin to evaluate how these understandings are shaping the kind of environmental solutions we propose. The way that a problem is framed in large part determines the kind of solutions that will be found; in this case, by examining responses to environmental crises through a framework that takes current understandings of what politics is and where it occurs as a starting point, we may begin to develop particular insights regarding the conditions for developing a viable ecopolitics. In the process of seeking such insights, however, I am
emphatically not attempting to develop a prescription, a set of steps to follow in establishing a fixed ‘ecological’ political framework. Recalling my initial argument for the positive implications of a lack of definition and certainty, what I instead aim to achieve is a critical deconstruction and destabilization of particular established and largely unexamined – and therefore problematic – understandings of what politics is and where it occurs, and explore instead a radically open and constantly negotiated political arena and its relation to an equally open and negotiated conception of place.

In the course of this exploration, I will argue strongly for the need to create ecological spaces of appearance in which political actions take place. This is the case in order to achieve three distinct but interconnected goals, the combination of which will help to generate productive spaces in which solutions to environmental problems can develop. The first of the aspirations that an ecopolitical space of appearance will help achieve is a means of respectfully\(^7\) including ecological considerations in our politics. The second is to foster an acknowledgement and valuing of where particular political actions come from, and the third is to open up political possibilities and maintain this openness through critical and constructive questioning. The details and importance of these aspirations will be outlined in the following chapters.

\[^7\] In another example of this struggle for adequate language, I have chosen the word ‘respectfully’ to indicate the way in which I am seeking to incorporate consideration of the more-than-human world into political consideration. While exactly what this will mean, and the various ways it may be instituted in practice, are exciting questions to be worked out largely through sustained ecopolitical conversations, I will continue to use this term throughout the following analysis to gesture toward a kind of inclusion that is substantially different from the resource- or utility-based framings that currently constitute the majority of ecological considerations in political contexts.
Chapter Two outlines in greater detail how I understand the current ecopolitical challenge, the kind of inclusions and exclusions that are created and perpetuated because of this challenge, and the potential implications of such inclusive/exclusive dynamics. Chapter Three begins to offer a response to this ecopolitical challenge by exploring the elements and value of place experience, and developing a phenomenological view of place that is capable of bringing various elements of the more-than-human-world into an arena of common engagement. Chapter Four provides a critical examination of the dominant perceived container for politics, the state, and challenges the primacy and utility of such a state-centric understanding of political life in attempts to address environmental challenges. Chapter Five moves on to outline a richer and more dynamic understanding of political action, drawing chiefly on an Arendtian formulation of politics, while Chapter Six develops an understanding of how this broader conception of the political can combine productively with phenomenological understandings of place to develop a vibrant and creative ecopolitical space. Finally, Chapter Seven concludes by considering some of the potential implications of working to develop and live this kind of viable ecopolitics.
Chapter 2 – The Ecopolitical Challenge

2.1 The Illusion of Disembeddedness

An aspect of modern Western rational thought that is having a deeply problematic effect on both ourselves and on the more-than-human-world is a fictitious perception that human beings are somehow isolated from and independent of the natural world. Terming this view the ‘Illusion of Disembeddedness,’ Val Plumwood argues that it is harmful for the way in which it “promotes various damaging forms of epistemic remoteness, for by walling ourselves off from nature in order to exploit it, we also lose certain abilities to situate ourselves as part of it” (2002: 98). Plumwood maintains that this sense of disembeddedness, which encourages a dangerous insensitivity to ecological limits and causes the countless dependencies and interconnections between human beings and the more-than-human-world to disappear, is causing us to lose track of ourselves as beings that are fundamentally ecologically constrained. It is important to recognize that the ecological constraint that is being elided is not only, or even chiefly, associated with straightforwardly ecological limitations such as carrying capacity. Rather, these ecological constraints that form part of our being are evident in circumstances ranging from our dependence on and connection with the air we breathe, to the perceptive abilities and limitations we have based on the capacity of our experiencing senses, to the emotional connection we experience with human beings and other elements of the more-than-human world. As we lose or deny these ecological constraints, and as a result of this
false sense of disembeddedness, there tends to be an increasing disregard for the influence that the more-than-human-world can exert and the effect, both positive and negative, that it can have on our lives and experiences. As a result of this illusion, various ecological considerations come to seem irrelevant and are subsequently excluded from political decision-making – when such issues have a political component and are not simply decided on economic terms – without these exclusions becoming apparent. It is the context and implications of this dynamic of inclusion and exclusion that form the basis of the current ecopolitical challenge.

2.2 Inclusions and Exclusions

This reciprocal dynamic of inclusion and exclusion is simultaneously ubiquitous and unavoidable. As Walker succinctly argues, “Any story of inclusion implies a story of exclusion, both stories hinging on the authorization of discriminations, of decisions about who should be in and who should be out, and under what conditions” (2006a: 67). The first point that Walker makes here is that any inclusive story necessarily comes with a shadow story of exclusions attached. Compiling a simple list of herbivores of the Serengeti (zebra, wildebeest, giraffe, etc.) requires the exclusion of Arctic-dwelling reindeer as well as carnivorous grey wolves, neither of which meets the predetermined conditions of list membership, the first in terms of location, and the second in terms of diet. In a more politically problematic case, a listing of Canadian citizens entitled to particular rights and protections excludes those within the territorial boundaries of
Canada who do not possess the requisite government authorization. This example speaks to Walker’s second point, that these inclusions and exclusions are based on the sanctioning of particular kinds of discriminations, the content of which is not accidental or inevitable. I do not in this inquiry seek to argue for ways that this dynamic can be avoided, or that means ought to be developed to decrease the number of inclusions and exclusions that are authorized as a result. To do so would be to disregard Walker’s first point. Rather, I maintain that in order to develop viable ecopolitical practices – and their ability to promote flourishing life – it is vital that we become aware of this dynamic and its effects, so that we may vigilantly keep such authorizations under continual examination and negotiation.

Consideration of a few examples of how these often unconscious dynamics of inclusion and exclusion are operating in contemporary political life, and of the problematic situations that can result from these discriminations, will help to make clear why these decisions must be constantly revisited and open for debate. In order to explore some instances of inclusion and exclusion, it is easiest to consider these examples by paying attention to the kind of problem framing that they employ, and the complexities that are denied or hidden through these particular conceptual frames.

### 2.2.1 Creating Sustainable Development

As a first example of the way in which particular political communities and others in the more-than-human world have become victims of these inclusive/exclusive
dynamics with regard to political consideration can be found in resource-centred narratives surrounding the increasingly popular notion of sustainable development. Considering the kind of tradeoffs that are proposed under this system, the justificatory rationales, and even the celebrated principle of sustainable development as that which “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED 1987: 4), it becomes evident that while developing countries were invited to participate in the development of this strategy, other potentially affected entities were not included the process. This particular example speaks to the substantial power of stories of inclusion: by focusing on the wide range of participants that were involved in these negotiations, it becomes that much easier to ignore who and what has been excluded. For instance, if we begin to ask questions regarding whose present needs and which future generations, answers emphasizing the equal consideration of developed and developing countries discourage further questions regarding consideration of the needs and generations of more-than-human others.

This is not to debate or discount the positive results of some initiatives falling under a sustainable development framework, but rather to highlight the way in which this

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8 Even though the success of this participation is debatable – see Whose Common Future?: Reclaiming the Commons (Ecologist 1993) for an informative discussion regarding the degree to which developing countries were able to steer the agenda of the proceedings for the World Commission on Environment and Development, and the subsequent United Nations Conference on Environment and Development.

9 For instance, while it is obvious that a Commission considering the relationship between development and the environment would have implications for the inhabitants of Kenyan wetlands or stands of British Columbian Douglas fir, little attempt was made to accord such members of the more-than-human world equivalent (although not, of course, precisely the same kind of) political consideration.

10 See Redclift (1993) for a more detailed discussion of some of the contradictions in the discourse of sustainable development, and a problematization of the favourable view of progress contained within the concept; see Tucker (1999) for a broader critique of development discourse and the troubling implications of its characterization as ‘natural’ and ‘inevitable’ in the social imaginary of the West.
particular discourse authorizes its own potentially problematic set of inclusions and exclusions that are not immediately evident. For example, in their problematization of the development-centred framing of the WCED, Chatterjee and Finger argue that “the answer that the Commission proposes in response to species extinction and habitat destruction, for example, is basically to put species, biodiversity, and nature overall on to the national and international development agenda, i.e. to make them resources for development” (1994: 20). It is precisely this view of the more-than-human-world as a collection of resources that allows for the exclusion of elements of this world from serious political consideration on their own terms, and the pairing of ‘sustainable’ with the word ‘development’ that encourages the meaning and value of development to disappear as a political question.

2.2.2 First Nations ‘in’ Canada

These stories of inclusion – and associated exclusion – can also have deeply problematic implications for both people and the more-than-human world when they occur within a colonial framing. As an example of this dynamic, it is difficult to find a more blatant story of constructed inclusion, and elided exclusion, than that of the fiction of *terra nullius* that allowed European colonizers to imagine North America as an empty land available for conquest and settlement, effectively excluding the presence of
hundreds of thousands of people from political consideration\textsuperscript{11}. What is equally compelling about this example, however, is the subsequent story of inclusion that allowed for the creation of Canada, setting out the conditions under which members of numerous First Nations were declared to be Canadians, and such Nations legislated to simply no longer exist in a substantively political way\textsuperscript{12}. Paying attention to this series of intertwined inclusions and exclusions, along with the remarkable amnesia regarding who authorized these distinctions and with what justification, provides one way of understanding a significant source of current political tensions. The consequences of these inclusions and exclusions have been instrumental in creating a situation whereby the dominant understanding of what ‘Canada’ is, who it includes, and how, is not endorsed and shared by everyone residing within the area.

At the same time, these authorizations have had profound ecological implications; the way in which indigenous ecological knowledge and practices have been appropriated and reinterpreted to suit contemporary situations, without according due respect to traditional ecological views and values, has resulted in particularly damaging exclusions. As Paul Nadasdy passionately argues, “despite the rhetoric of local empowerment that generally accompanies such processes [of co-management initiatives], they often actually

\textsuperscript{11} See Borrows (2002) for a clear account of the tension between Crown proclamations of sovereignty and the territorial rights of First Nations with regard to what has now been called Canada from the perspective of an indigenous legal scholar.

\textsuperscript{12} See Tully (2000) for an account of the dynamic of ‘internal colonization’ that has operated in the Canadian struggle between the establishment and development of settler societies and the pre-existence and continued presence of indigenous societies. In considering the effects of such a process, see Alfred (2005) for an impassioned articulation of the disappearance of a political culture of resistance in most Onkwehonwe (indigenous) communities in Canada, as well as for an inspirational perspective on how such circumstances can change in the future.
serve to perpetuate colonial-style relations by concentrating power in administrative centres, rather than in the hands of local/aboriginal people” (2005: 1). Here Nadasdy is pointing to the way in which even those working in cooperative co-management ventures, by not stepping far enough outside this colonial framing, can, often unintentionally or with no malevolent intent, benefit from the symbolic power of indigenous environmental stewardship to further their own agendas without having to give consideration to the kind of knowledge and human-nature relationships are being discounted and excluded through this process. The richness and complexity of human relations with the more-than-human world tend to be distilled out (Nadasdy 1999), and what is lost in such cases, without the opportunity even for consideration and debate, are the worldviews and relationships with others in the more-than-human world that accompany such knowledge, and with them diverse possibilities for valuing and giving consideration to these others.

2.2.3 What Public Hearings Can Hear

A final example of the potentially problematic implications of these ubiquitous inclusions and exclusions will suffice for the present analysis. This example concerns the challenges associated with a rationality framing, particularly with regard to interaction and communication with official channels of governance and political decision-making. Several years ago in my home town of North Saanich, I attended a public hearing regarding a highly controversial proposal to expand the local marina into the surrounding
Among the numerous articulate and clearly reasoned positions outlined for and against the marina expansion, one resident stood up and declared his desire to share a poem he had written that expressed his perspective on the issue. Ignoring the smirks and uncomfortable shifting of many in the room, he read aloud a poem ardently conveying his empathy and affection for the tiny mud shrimps that inhabit the harbour area. The recorded minutes for this meeting, however, simply state that this resident “enjoys observing the wildlife in the area and is opposed to the proposed marina expansion” (MCDNS 2005: 6). What both the reception this poem received and the way in which this particular opinion was recorded illustrate is the definite and established resistance to the presence of passion and emotion in these kinds of decision-making venues. With the exclusion of these modes of understanding, and the inclusion of those operating on rationales and justifications, comes the loss of particular ways of conceptualizing and expressing our relationships to the more-than-human world, its reciprocal effect, and associated possibilities for imagining our decision-making criteria and processes differently as a result.

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13 See Milton (2002) for a discussion of the perceived opposition between reason and emotion, and the incompatibility of the two in engaging with particular kinds of environmental protection activities: rationality, for instance, is seen to ‘belong’ in the courtroom, while passion ‘belongs’ on the protest lines. Milton also provides an example of the bizarre dynamic whereby there tends to be a greater allowance for emotion and subjectivity in indigenous testimony because of the perceived ‘authenticity’ of those expressions that are not typically regarded in the same light if and when expressed by non-indigenous people. It must be noted, however, that this allowance still rarely translates effectively into positive action in the courtroom.
2.3 Conclusion: Creating a Viable Ecopolitics

What the above examples illustrate, each in a different way, is the incredible actual and potential complexity of these ecopolitical issues, with their interrelated emotional, historical, institutional, territorial, definitional, and epistemological inclusions and exclusions. The politics of these issues emerge from the acknowledgement and mobilization of these complexities; similarly, disguising and denying such complexity makes the politics of these situations less evident. Ecopolitical spaces of appearance offer ways of confronting these inclusions and exclusions, of making them apparent and therefore openly subject to scrutiny and debate. Recall the initial goals set out in association with such an ecopolitical space: to respectfully include ecological considerations in our politics, to value where our political actions are coming from, and to open up and maintain political possibilities through sustained questioning. In working toward these three aspirations, the intension of which will be the creation of a viable ecopolitics, the existence of the inclusive and exclusive dynamics identified above can become visible, and some of the problematic aspects of these dynamics can begin to be addressed. Having identified the range of challenges that exist in current attempts to reconcile other elements of the more-than-human-world with current political understandings and processes, it remains to explore what kind of potential alternatives exist that can assist in creating viable ecopolitical spaces and practices.
Chapter 3 – Visibility and the Phenomenology of Place

3.1 The Importance of Place for Ecopolitics

In searching for opportunities to make the challenging features of specific authorizations of inclusion and exclusion politically visible, understandings of place, particularly phenomenologically-informed views, offer an exciting point of entry. There are three key results that such conceptualizations of place can achieve, each of which are instrumental to operating within an ecological space of appearance. First, appealing to such understandings of place can help to create an arena for common engagement, making visible the effects of the more-than-human-world in a compelling way. Second, such a perspective assists in directing our attention to our actual experience of environmental issues, rather than our intellectually or theoretically mediated understandings of what these issues should consist of. Finally, giving serious consideration to place involves a denial of abstract or ungrounded framings of ecological problems of the sort that lead to Plumwood’s Illusion of Disembeddedness. Each of these results, generated by operating with phenomenological views of place, will be of use in developing a vibrant and viable ecopolitics.
3.2 Conceptualizing Place

Place, on first consideration, often carries with it connotations of groundedness, stability, and settled definition. Familiar adages such as ‘a place for everything and everything in its place’ or ‘she seems to have forgotten her place’ speak to the anchoring role this concept can play in rigidly maintaining both our spatial and social order. Just as the notion of politics has accommodated a wide variety of definitions and understandings, however, so can place be conceptualized in a substantial range of ways, some of which will be of much greater interest to the present analysis than others.\(^\text{14}\)

In geometric or cartographic terms, place is generally set in opposition to space, conceptually situated in the same relationship of Cartesian dualism as conventional understandings of mind and body or form and matter.\(^\text{15}\) Within this theoretical framework, space is typically characterized as abstract, unlimited, and universal, while place is understood as particular, limited, and local (Escobar 2001). Such definitions tend to focus on place as location (points in the spatial distribution of social or economic activities) or place as locale (the setting for day-to-day customs and social interactions) (Agnew and Duncan 1989). As place was opposed to space and given this rather limited and static character, so it began to seem theoretically and conceptually inferior to space.

\(^{14}\) It is not my intention here to provide a comprehensive overview of the history of place theory; see Casey (1998) for a thorough account of the development of place thought in the Western philosophical tradition.

\(^{15}\) Cartesian dualism refers to Descartes’ philosophy of mind and his argument that operations of the mind must be carried out by something immaterial and entirely distinct from physical objects; see Descartes (1996) for an example of this argument. The connection to be made here between this formulation and ideas of space and place is the sense in which space, like mind, has been conceived of as undifferentiated and universal, while place and body have been characterized as distinct and particular; space has also shared the same conceptual privileging that mind has in terms of theoretical interest and value.
For instance, Casey (1997) suggests that while for the ancient Greeks place was of primary importance as that which defined existence, a transformation occurred during the Renaissance in which to exist came to be to exist in space, with a focus on boundlessness and infinity rather than closed containment. He argues that “compared with the unbounded extent and even distribution of space, place came to seem merely parochial, a matter indeed of “particular limited consideration.” The increasing ease with which the very word “place” became exchangeable with “space” is a leading symptom of this absorptive hegemony of the spatial world” (Casey 1997: 288), a circumstance that has continued into contemporary times.

Consistent with the Western tendency to give precedence to the universal over the particular, Henri Lefebvre argues that space has come to be associated with, and even constitutive of, the rational unity of analytic logic and the order of the world (Logos and Cosmos). Significant also in this constructed understanding of abstract space is its apparently universal and disembodied nature, allowing it to assume intellectual primacy over place in much the same way that objectivity has come to be privileged over subjectivity, and reason over intuition, in academic inquiry16. On this analytic understanding, abstract space embodies the “simple, regulated and methodical principle of coherent stability, a principle operating under the banner of political religion and applying equally to mental and to social life” (Lefebvre 1991: 238). It is this principle of

16 Recalling the earlier examples of the problematic implications of particular kinds of inclusions and exclusions, as well as Haraway’s argument for the value of situated knowledge, will help in clarifying precisely why these tendencies in academic inquiry are particularly problematic for the way in which they privilege a particular way of perceiving and understanding the world in a way that is seldom open to questioning and negotiation.
simplicity and stability, space as the measurable ‘gaps’ between actual things, that leads to its conceptual privileging; it is simultaneously that which makes such a notion of space appear uninteresting in a political sense, by eliding its active construction and associated dynamism. Key here, however, is that this formulation only causes space only to seem uninteresting: in the same way that the particular construction and historical recency of the modern state has been made to disappear, and the institution of territorially distinct and mutually exclusive states has come to appear inevitable, a process that will be explored in more detail in the following chapter, the elision of the political history of the imagining of abstract space allows it to be treated as if it is a neutral medium within which particular events take place. As Lefebvre argues, “abstract space is not homogeneous; it simply has homogeneity as its goal, its orientation, its ‘lens’” (1991: 287); the political use value of this kind of space is its ability to apparently render things homogeneous in a way that conceals their political commitments and potential.

What is truly valuable in Lefebvre’s project, the development of a critical understanding of the production and transformation of space, is the way in which it raises questions regarding space that remain unasked if this politically and socially ‘neutral’ view of space is simply accepted. The questions he raises regarding who produces space, how and for what purpose, who controls space and who is affected by this control, are questions that serve to politicize the production of space in a substantive way. In understanding space as neither subject nor object, but rather as a social reality in the sense of a set of relations and forms, Lefebvre is able to theorize space as “social morphology: it is to lived experience what form itself is to the living organism, and just
as intimately bound up with function and structure” (1991: 94). Such a view presents a deep challenge to the abstract space outlined above, and provides an essential opening for thinking about the kind of ecopolitical space that is of concern in the present analysis. It is an understanding of space and spatial practice that will be revisited at several points in the course of this analysis.

3.3 The Social Construction of Place

These initial characterizations of abstract space and concrete place are not, however, the only way to think about and value place. Recently, as scholars in fields as diverse as geography, philosophy, and anthropology have sought to reinvigorate understandings of the nature, value, and agency of place17, much more attention has been paid to the socially constructed character of place. Such treatments of place, and associated consideration of the mutual constitution that occurs between places and the entities within them, are particularly promising for the present analysis. These understandings have the potential to make interesting connections between place and politics, and offer the possibility for developing viable ecopolitical practices from this starting point. For instance, political theorist Ronnie Lipschutz, while emphasizing the broader potential consequences of local action, maintains that “political engagement among people in the places where they live, love, work, and play is at the root of civic

17 See Feld and Basso (1996), Smith (2001), Augé (1995), Verstraete and Cresswell (2002) and Casey (1993) for just a few examples of this extensive literature, exploring such varied aspects of place as senses of place, ethics of place, the dynamics and existence of non-places, associations between place and mobility, and features of placial experience.
politics and social power” (2004: 134). This link between place and politics illustrates one important motivation for giving consideration to particular notions of place when evaluating sources of mobilization for political, social, and environmental engagement.

There are, of course, certain social constructions of place that operate to create and then elide the same kinds of inclusions and exclusions that have been found to be particularly problematic from the beginning of this investigation. Appeals to place based primarily on localization often translate into a new justification for boundary-drawing on a different scale. Such practices promise outcomes very similar to those of the dominant state system, in that they seldom require underlying shifts in the permeability of these borders or the degree of transparency involved in the authorization of inclusions and exclusions. Even bioregionalist thinkers (Snyder 1995 and Sale 2000, for example), while attempting to operate with a more environmental focus, on close examination often merely redraw political boundaries according to the ecology of watersheds, reproducing a similar institutional structure on a smaller scale or working within and alongside already established political institutions. While bioregionalist thinking may indeed have interesting and potentially beneficial implications for the ecological and social flourishing of particular regions, it does not seem to hold the transformative potential that a more dynamic rethinking of politics and place can offer. For instance, definite distinctions are drawn regarding who is inside and outside a particular ‘bioregion’, and who or what is given political consideration within this space; the ease with which these boundaries are determined – through mapping a specifically-defined set of ecological features and
processes – greatly decreases the need to actively and continually question these decisions, while the very concreteness given to understandings of place in bioregionalist terms has the potential to lead to impulses to then begin ‘mapping’ place and peoples’ sense of place in ways that limit the creative potential that place thinking can foster\(^\text{19}\).

If we return for a moment to a consideration of the kinds of environmental problems we face today, very few of them can be understood solely as isolated issues that concern and involve only a particular and geographically limited community. While this is becoming increasingly clear in the case of human-induced climate change or rising levels of ocean pollution, this is also the case for seemingly ‘local’ issues such as the installation of a new hydroelectric dam or the construction of a strip mall within a threatened habitat area. The structural and institutional forces driving such developments, and the worldviews, priorities, and rationalizations of those participating in such projects, simultaneously influence and are informed by events occurring at other scales and locations, while decisions made in one location can have repercussions that extend far beyond who and what might be considered to constitute the local community.

Given this interconnected and multi-scaled nature of many environmental problems, and the way in which the salient dimensions of the problem can change depending on how it is framed, formulations of place that conceive of it as geographically

\(^{18}\) In addition, see McGinnis’ (1999) edited collection for more examples of bioregionalist thinking with regard to the history, governance possibilities, and applications of bioregionalism.

\(^{19}\) For instance, see Brown and Raymond (2007) or Grasseni (2004) for examples of fairly simplistic approaches to mapping place attachment, landscape values, and practices of locality. See Katz (2001) for a more nuanced approach to place mapping that attempts to theorize the topographies of capitalism. For the purposes of this analysis, however, and the kind of discursive and interpretive openness I am working toward, such strong associations between place and physical representation are problematically limiting.
bounded and intrinsically coherent or pre-given\textsuperscript{20} are less able to productively engage with environmental challenges characterized in this way. This is not to discount, however, the irreplaceable value of the particularity and richness of local knowledge in the process of developing and implementing appropriate solutions to specific environmental issues. As Edward Casey puts it, “to live is to live locally, and to know is first of all to know the places one is in” (1996a: 18). However, there are ways in which such strictly-defined conceptions of place curtail the creative potential contained in the concept, a potential that promises exciting resonances with the Arendtian formulation of political life that will be outlined in Chapter Five.

Therefore, what I would like to focus on here are notions of place that emphasize the ways in which it can be conceptualized in a more flexible, dynamic, and open manner. In contrast to the understandings of place outlined above, consider cultural geographer Tim Cresswell’s characterization of place:

\begin{quote}
Place is constituted through reiterative social practice – place is made and remade on a daily basis. Place provides a template for practice – an unstable stage for performance. Thinking of place as performed and practiced can help us think of place in radically open and non-essentialized ways where place is constantly struggled over and reimagined in practical ways (2002: 25)
\end{quote}

This understanding of place serves to emphasize the way in which place both provides an arena for social practice, and is itself constituted by this performance; as such, this

\textsuperscript{20} At the same time, it is important not to devalue such understandings of place. As is evident in many of the personal accounts of place that tend towards this characterization (Armstrong 1996; Basso 1996), these understandings are immensely valuable for the way in which they articulate a deep understanding of specific landscapes and human connections to various elements of the more-than-human world, and express a sense of place as home. However, they often lack the sense of openness and flexibility that promises to be of particular use in developing the kind of ecopolitics I am interested in for the present investigation.
conception of place is one that adamantly rejects some of the stabilizing and concretizing – and thus potentially problematically exclusive – impulses associated with several of the place descriptions mentioned earlier. This conception of place coordinates well with Lefebvre’s characterization of the relationship between productive social relations and space: “social relations of production have a social existence to the extent that they have a spatial existence; they project themselves into a space, becoming inscribed there, and in the process producing that space itself” (Lefebvre 1991: 129). These understandings of place and space as practiced and continually remade allow them to retain an openness and a character of possibility, the political implications of which be taken up further in Chapter Six.

In addition, Jeffrey Malpas (1999) argues that it is not only human beings who are associated with place: for Malpas, “the very possibility of the appearance of things – of objects, of self, and of others – is possible only within the all-embracing compass of place” (1999: 14-15). On this understanding, it is both in and through place that elements of the world present themselves and events can take place. Rather than focusing on the aspects of place that become evident through particular individual experiences of it, Malpas here is arguing for an understanding of place as a kind of structure through and in relation to which experience, and its associated instances of action, thought, and judgment, is made possible. In contrast to the above formulation of abstract space as the arena in which events occur, one that is characterized in terms of a uniform surface, focusing on the particular experience of ‘being-in’ the place-world allows for the recognition that our actions are informed by specific and historically informed senses of
place. Place theorists working in a phenomenological (experience-based) tradition\textsuperscript{21}, such as Malpas, Casey, and David Abram, value and build from this perspective of personal experience in developing their specific conceptions of place; their views will be canvassed in greater detail below.

### 3.4 Experiences of Place, Passion, and Identity

In exploring the ways in which place may be created through social practice while at the same time informing and influencing this practice, a helpful starting point is to consider the relationship between individuals and their understanding of place. Malpas (1999) argues that to have a conception of one’s self, to have a sense of one’s own identity, is to have a sense of a particular place within the world. For Malpas this sense of place does not refer to specific knowledge of the physical characteristics of a particular geographical location, but to having a grasp of a conceptually complex structure involving different spatial forms, concepts of self and of others, as well as an objective order of things. While attempting to establish a clearer idea of the complex conceptual structure of place, it is also important to consider its significance and its role – implicit and explicit, realized and potential – within the daily life of human being. A beautifully

\textsuperscript{21} The phenomenological philosophical approach, favoured by Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty among others, places emphasis and value on the ways we experience things (through our sensory perception, but also through such means as imagination, memory, thought, and action), and correspondingly the ways things appear to us as experiencing subjects, as that which is of primary interest in philosophical inquiry. Merleau-Ponty in particular places emphasis on the connection between body and place, and on our embodied experience as vitally important and informative – David Abram (1996), for example, takes up and explores the ecological implications of this connection. See Smith (2008) for a concise and clear overview of the history and key aspects of phenomenology.
worded passage from George Eliot’s *The Mill on the Floss* helps to illustrate the powerful physical, emotional, and intellectual pull of place:

We could never have loved the earth so well if we had had no childhood in it – if it were not the earth where the same flowers come up again every spring that we used to gather with our tiny fingers as we sat lisping to ourselves on the grass, the same hips and haws on the autumn hedgerows, the same red-breasts that we used to call “God’s birds” because they did no harm to the precious crops. What novelty is worth that sweet monotony where everything is known, and *loved* because it is known?

The wood I walk in on this mild May day, with the young yellow-brown foliage of the oaks between me and the blue sky, the white star-flowers and the blue-eyed speedwell and the ground ivy at my feet – what grove of tropic palms, what strange ferns or splendid broad-petalled blossoms, could ever thrill such deep and delicate fibres within me as the home-scene? These familiar flowers, these well-remembered bird-notes, this sky with its fitful brightness, these furrowed and grassy fields, each with a sort of personality given to it by the capricious hedgerows – such things as these are the mother tongue of our imagination, the language that is laden with all the subtle inextricable associations in the fleeting hours of our childhood left behind them. Our delight in the sunshine on the deep-bladed grass today might be no more than the faint perception of wearied souls if it were not for the sunshine and the grass in the far-off years which still live in us and transform our perception into love (Eliot 2002 [1860]: 41-42)

This evocation of place, while highlighting the way in which the natural world can both affect and be affected by human perceptions and values, and the complex variety of elements that can make up a single place perception, also suggests the important role that a historically rich and particular sense of place can play in fostering a deeper appreciation for and relationships with the more-than-human world.

This strong connection between human beings and aspects of the physical landscape often features prominently in discussions regarding the power of place. Entrikin, discussing the metonymic function place often plays in myth, suggests that
places “take on the meanings of events and objects that occur there, and their descriptions are fused with human goals, values and intentions. Places and their contents are seen as wholes” (1991: 11). This role of place in narratives, particularly those concerning the shared history and identity of a particular people, is further emphasized by Casey in his discussion of the Navajo and the struggles of displacement they are experiencing. He argues that “since they conceive their land as an ancestral dwelling place and since all significant learning proceeds ultimately from ancestors, culture is almost literally in the land” (Casey 1993: 36, original emphasis). Thus, for Casey, in this case to acquire new knowledge is not truly to learn something ‘new’, but rather to learn how to connect or reconnect with one’s place and the knowledge stored within it. While there is a certain danger in associating too closely or fixedly notions of myth and the contemporary lifeways of a particular people, with the problematic result that their understandings immediately take on the character of ‘traditional’ or even ‘primitive’ in a way that removes the content of myths from political questioning, both Entrikin’s and Casey’s analysis is helpful in pointing to the fusion of place, identity, and history that plays a key role in such place constructions.

While these accounts of place are vital for the passion and specificity they exhibit, the tendencies they display with regard to a quest for authenticity, rootedness, and fixity (Harvey 1990; Massey 1994) suggest that there may be problematic inclusive and
exclusive dynamics operating here as well. Similar to the exclusions identified concerning some bioregionalist thought, these evocations of place tend to be bounded and site-specific, and more or less resistant to establishing connections between places. In addition, within these accounts particular places can easily become stereotyped into Romantic representations of a landscape within which particular social groups are accepted or excluded based on the perceived match between the group and place stereotypes (Sibley 1995). Thus, these attachments to place based on a particular history and group identity – however constructed and reproduced such attachments are – generate and even encourage the practice of drawing conceptual boundaries around particular areas in such a way that place identity and place membership can come to appear static and given. As such, particular humans and others in the more-than-human world come to be excluded from consideration and participation in a manner that effectively erases the perceived need for further negotiation and political questioning.

Remembering Malpas’ emphasis on the complex structure of place, and the way in which it may be constructed and perceived in multiple ways, it is evident that there must be other ways to conceptualize the notion of place. In fact, Malpas reminds us that

Place may be viewed in terms that emphasise the concrete features of the natural landscape; that give priority to certain social or cultural features; or that emphasise place purely as

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22 David Harvey (1990), for example, draws attention to the way in which a (fictional) stability is sought by geographers in their appeals to such place understandings as a source of identity and roots. He argues instead that such appeals to stable groundings involve particular political decisions, and ought to be recognized and interrogated as such.

23 It should also be noted, however, that such attempts to construct a place-based identity, and an acceptance or even encouragement of the exclusions that come with it, can sometimes be the result of strong political motivation for such controlled membership (such as the experience of oppression in other areas, and the desire to establish a ‘safe’ area in which to ‘belong’) and such histories and reasons need to be negotiated with care.
experienced. Yet, as these different ways of grasping the structure of place are grounded in the complexity of place as such, so no such single way of grasping place can exhaust its complexity (1999: 173)

Keeping this complexity in mind, and respecting Walker and Shaw’s injunction to resist the temptation of simplification, it may be informative to shift perspectives from these rather bounded place characterizations to another way of understanding place, one that places a much greater emphasis on the experience of place and the presence and influence of the more-than-human world as part of this place experience.

3.5 Phenomenological Views of Place

Understandings of place and expressions of sense of place from a phenomenological perspective are vital in that they emphasize the ubiquity and value of place experience. In this way they are very similar to the place characterizations discussed above. Phenomenological understandings of place often highlight the way in which people and places are woven together in a manner that attempts – with varying degrees of success – to dispense with the struggle to distinguish absolutely between the ‘natural’ and the ‘cultural’, and to focus instead on connections between place, body, and culture. As phenomenological philosopher Edward Casey expresses it, “we are not only in places but of them. Human beings – along with other entities on earth – are ineluctably place-bound. More even than earthlings, we are placelings, and our very perceptual apparatus, our sensing body, reflects the kinds of places we inhabit” (1996a: 19). This idea of human beings as ‘placelings’ who are ‘place-bound’ may seem to have the
potential to fall prey to the same kind of problematic fixity of interpretation as some of the earlier place characterizations such as those appealed to in bioregionalism. However, what Casey is gesturing to with these terms is the way in which both humans and others in the more-than-human world are powerfully and inescapably influenced by the myriad features of the places we inhabit. As such, phenomenological understandings of place can play a powerful role in countering the Illusion of Disembeddedness identified above as posing a key ecopolitical challenge.

While such phenomenological accounts tend to focus on individual experience of place, and the ways in which elements of the more-than-human world can affect and be affected by this experience, this does not inevitably translate into a conception of place as bounded and static. In conjunction with his admonition that there can be no single way of grasping place, Malpas argues for the linked and interrelated nature of place:

Places contain sets of interconnected locations that are nested within those places such that, depending on how broadly I think of the place in which I now find myself (whether in terms, for instance, of the room in which I sit, the house where I live, the town where I reside), I can grasp the interconnected character of a variety of locations within my current location. Places also open out to sets of other places through being nested, along with those places, within a larger spatial structure of framework of activity – within some broader place. In being acquainted with a single place, then, one is also thereby acquainted with a larger network of places (1999: 105)

This experiential account of the way in which places are connected to each other provides one understanding of place that resists a pre-given fixity while working to express the way in which places are always already opening out into other places.

Also consistent with the phenomenological emphasis placed on the value of lived experience as a means of gaining knowledge of the world, Casey understands place as
“more an event than a thing to be assimilated into known categories” (1996a: 26, original emphasis). What Casey is here emphasizing the processual and constantly constructed and reconstructed nature of place. Casey extends this notion in an interesting way, however, to highlight not just the meeting but the gathering function of place. He argues that the ‘eventmental’ character of places, and their ability to provide a pivot point where space and time conjoin (1996a), can be considered as a comprehensive form of gathering. Thus this phenomenological view also understands place as capable of performing the important function of collection (and continual recollection) of that which transpires in both the lives of humans and of others in the more-than-human world. Casey characterizes the power of place in this respect as consisting in “gathering these lives and things, each with its own space and time, into one arena of common engagement” (1996a: 26).

Identifying the capacity of place to gather elements in common engagement actually suggests something quite promising in terms of its implications for interactions among various constituents of the more-than-human world. Rather than a chance meeting of disparate trajectories forced for a moment into contact and negotiation, the gathering in common of this conception of place offers a potentially more cooperative and less circumstantial setting for engagement. There is, of course, no guarantee that such a gathering of diverse elements will not in fact be antagonistic rather than harmonious; in fact, such antagonistic interactions may prove to be politically vitalizing and productive. However, the sense in which this gathering seems to provide the opportunity for sustained interaction in a manner that embraces and makes visible the range of entities
present in a particular place, rather than for circumstantial and contingent moments of collision, suggests the possibility for the development of supportive interactions.

Finally, one of the most useful features of Casey’s place-thought is the connection he makes between place and body. He argues that place is what occurs between body and landscape, and that the body is both our means of coming to be in place, and our means of orienting ourselves within that place. Casey writes, “My body continually takes me into place. It is at once agent and vehicle, articulator and witness of being-in-place” (1993: 48, original emphasis). Our embodied experience allows us to comprehend places as lived, as Lipschutz’s place of living, loving, working and playing, and they allow us to experience a coherent and oriented sense of place. However, rather than imagining a closed and defined connection between place and body, the reciprocal link Casey describes between body and landscape is lively and porous: “thanks to the mutual enlivening of body and landscape, a place constantly overflows its own boundaries. Uncontainable on its near edge, it flows outward into the circumambient world” (Casey 1993: 29). Thus for Casey to be in and experiencing a place is not to be confined to it, but rather to be conscious of, connected to, and moving toward places beyond.

David Abram’s (1996) appeal to synesthesia – the overlap and blending of the perceiving senses – illustrates the importance of the presence and connection of the body in experiencing and understanding place. Attempting to convey this sensuous synesthetic experience with regard to the language we use in attempting to give an account of our encounters with the more-than-human world, Abram writes

We regularly talk of howling winds, and of chattering brooks. Yet these are more than mere metaphors. Our own languages are
continually nourished by these other voices – by the roar of waterfalls and the thrumming of crickets. It is not by chance that, when hiking in the mountains, the English terms we spontaneously use to describe the surging waters of the nearby river are words like “rush,” “splash,” “gush,” “wash.” For the sound that unites all these words is that which the water itself chants as it flows between the banks. If language is not a purely mental phenomenon but a sensuous, bodily activity born of carnal reciprocity and participation, then our discourse has surely been influenced by many gestures, sounds, and rhythms besides those of our single species. Indeed, if human language arises from the perceptual interplay between the body and the world, then this language “belongs” to the animate landscape as much as it “belongs” to ourselves (Abram 1996: 82)

More than emphasizing the way in which our bodies experience place and interact with other elements of the more-than-human world, this account serves to illustrate the way in which this world can push back, influence, and inform even those phenomena, like language, which are generally regarded as located rather firmly within the provenance of ‘the cultural’. Such a result suggests that this relationship between place and experiencing bodies is also important when working towards an ecologically informed politics, a possibility that will be explored in greater detail in the following chapter.

Thus, these accounts characterize place as providing a gathering arena for common engagement and a means through which individuals and places can mutually influence each other. The question that such experience-based conceptions of place raise, however, is common engagement with whom? And for the phenomenologist, the answer often seems to be common engagement with the experience of the place under consideration more so than among the various elements being gathered. If so, this points to a larger challenge posed by a phenomenological construction of place, particularly in terms of political mobilization. These experience-based understandings, while offering
the potential to foster deep connections and reciprocal relationships with particular places, seem to remain focused on individual perceptions, understandings, and experiences. It may be that such a sense of place, while contributing substantially to an individual’s motivation to engage in environmental activism, is less able to engender a shared sense of place from which to instigate collective social action and movements. However, such a situation is not precisely what is most helpful here. Rather than seeking to cultivate a shared understanding of place, what is vital is to be able to initiate and sustain a political conversation that takes place seriously. And this is precisely what such phenomenologically-inspired place perspectives encourage.

After all, place on such a phenomenological conception need not be experienced only on an individual level. Although such accounts do focus heavily on the experiential aspects of place, they do not necessarily imply that such experience cannot be cooperative and communal. In fact, Casey maintains that for the most part we come into place together: “we partake of places in common – and reshape them in common. The culture that characterizes and shapes a given place is a shared culture, not merely superimposed upon that place but part of its very facticity” (Casey 1993: 31). He argues that it is the cultural aspects of place in particular that allow it to play a significant and animating role in our collective lives, both constituting and changing these collectivities. And while the shared culture that Casey refers to here is likely conceived of as a human culture, the deep connections between humans and the landscape in these phenomenological accounts leave open the possibility, at least, for a substantial role for the more-than-human world in such common partakings and reshapings.
It is not necessary, however, that this idea of shared experience be common to all who are present in place; what phenomenological approaches can also emphasize is the way in which places may be composed of individuals with very different phenomenological understandings and experiences. What is shared in this case would not be the experience itself, but rather could be a sharing of diverse experiences, with place providing the means through which such various perspectives come into contact with each other. Such an understanding of place fits well with Arendt’s conception of the space of appearance; this notion will be outlined in greater detail in Chapter Five.

3.6 Conclusion: Locating a Viable Ecopolitics

The above explication has outlined how notions of place, and in particular those working from a phenomenological perspective, can play a substantial role in the development of a viable ecopolitics by locating it in a particular way. They do this by creating an arena for common engagement that helps to make apparent the effects of the more-than-human world, by directing our attention to our actual experience of environmental issues, and by steadfastly denying abstract and disembedded framings of ecological challenges. Returning back to the very beginning of this analysis, and the three interconnected goals that can be reached through an ecopolitical space of appearance, giving consideration to place is of vital importance in promoting the engagement and visibility necessary for us to begin to acknowledge and value where our political actions are coming from, and to discover ways to respectfully include ecological considerations
in our politics. While the above analysis points to the ways in which notions of place can help to achieve these objectives, it is still unclear what notion of politics is being considered, and whether or not the currently dominant state-centric political framing is a viable arena in which to work toward developing this ecopolitical space. A critical analysis of the politics of the modern state will therefore be the focus of the following chapter.
Chapter 4 – Imagining State Space

4.1 Structuring Political Space

To begin to grasp the challenges posed by our particular dominant way of structuring political space, to become conscious and critical of the kinds of inclusions and exclusions such a system authorizes and conceals, it is important first to look closely at our current state system. This is the case because this state-centric perspective is the most common way that politics is framed, and state-based processes tend to be the conventional means through which change is thought to ultimately occur. As Rajni Kothari argues, the modern state has been “the premier institution through which the multiplicity and plurality of the civil domain has been ordered in both perception and reality” (1997: 143). In considering the basic characteristics of the modern state, John Gerard Ruggie (1993) characterizes these states as territorially distinct, mutually exclusive, functionally similar, and sovereign. Discovering how such states have come to be, and come to be understood, requires two key tasks: first, to pay attention to both the history and current practice of imagining state space, and second, to start to pry apart and discursively open up these imagined spaces. Such tasks are vital because this current state-centric political framing is largely inadequate for the kind of transformative ecopolitics I am arguing for. Broadly, state-based politics do not adequately accommodate ecological considerations, and their institutional structures are not open
enough to accommodate such elements\textsuperscript{24}; nor do they foster or even allow the dynamic political questioning and engagement by their citizens necessary to maintain a viable ecopolitical space. The examination of the history of state creation outlined below will help to elaborate on and offer an explanation for these two claims.

4.2 Challenging ‘Realism’

In initiating a critical analysis of the state, a practical starting point is to explore how the state is understood and treated in contemporary thought. In what is known in academic theorizing as the paradigm of ‘realism’ – and its practical embodiment in the prescriptive determinations of realpolitik – the state in itself does not tend to be the focus of much contemporary mainstream political analysis\textsuperscript{25}. Its importance may be asserted,

\textsuperscript{24} See Hay (1994) for a clearly-argued account of the range of responsibility and crisis displacement strategies that states have developed in order to retain their perceived legitimacy while avoiding engagement with other political actors in crafting responses to environmental problems; by seeking to frame environmental problems as crises within the state system, rather than of this system, they work to reinforce the value and legitimacy of their existence as a necessary component of the solution rather than as a part of the problem.

\textsuperscript{25} In most realist analysis, it is assumed that individual states are motivated by threats to their security and opportunities for power, and attention is then directed to interactions between states in what is assumed to be an anarchic international arena. See Morgenthau (1978) for an explication of the basic principles of classical political realism, Waltz (1979) for an account of the core features of neorealist international relations theory, and Brooks (1997) for a discussion of the commonalities and distinctions between various forms of realist thought, particularly the contrast between classical realism, neorealism, and postclassical realism.
its immanent disappearance lamented, lauded, or emphatically denied\textsuperscript{26}, but its own character, its origins, and its historical contingency are rarely examined. Walker highlights the problem with these ‘empty state’ portrayals, maintaining that “bald assertions consistent with ahistorical claims to state-sovereignty have been accepted all too easily as a substitute for a properly theoretical account of the state as an historically constituted and constantly reconstituted form of political life” (1993: 46)\textsuperscript{27}. Walker here is pointing to two important aspects of the state that static realist conceptions fail to capture: the state as having a particular history\textsuperscript{28}, and the state as an institution that is perpetually recreated and reinforced. It is these two features that we must pay attention to in order to gain a deeper, more theoretically substantial understanding of the modern state.

In accounting for the origin and logic behind this realist understanding of the state, Ruggie (1993) draws a parallel between the emergence of the single-point

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{26} Many accounts of the potential effects of increasing globalization, for instance, rely on a characterization of the state as a political structure that is losing its authority or relevance. There are, however, an equal number of authors arguing for the continued strength and influence of state power. As an example of this contested dynamic, Kothari writes that “instead of centrality and a dominant status, we face a combination of growing marginalization in the state’s role and status in civil society, accompanied by growing myopia, dehumanization and brutalization in its relationship with that civil society. Interestingly, the marginalization of the state that seems to proceeding apace is a result of both overextension and shrinkage” (1997: 145).

\textsuperscript{27} With regard to the motivation behind acceptance of particular assertions regarding the nature of states or inter-state relations, see also Smith (1995) for a genealogical analysis of the pictures of international relations theory that the discipline draws for itself – the self-images of the discipline, in his terms – that offers an excellent account of the kinds of questions and viewpoints that are of concern to so-called ‘realist’ political theorists and their critics, and the history and dynamics of particular schools of thought and entrenched debates within the discipline.

\textsuperscript{28} For instance, see Krasner (1993) for an example of a realist political theorist who purports to be giving attention to historical context in his analysis of state motivations and behaviour, but who does so in order to tell a particular story regarding the explanatory power of material, rather than ideational, factors. Such accounts do not give consideration to the dynamic historical constitution and reconstitution of the state in the way that Walker is arguing for.}
perspective in the visual arts – replacing the older style of depicting subjects from a variety of angles and viewpoints – and the development of a political space that is organized and envisioned from a single fixed point of view. Ruggie emphasizes the tensions and transformations this development created in the way rulers and citizens alike understood their relationship to their territory. He gives the example of France’s Francis I appointing four Secretaries of State, each responsible for a different quarter of France and its relations with neighbouring and distant states. By contrasting this with a modern approach, which would assign such administrative duties based on a distinction between foreign and domestic concerns, Ruggie highlights the difference resulting from this move toward a single perspective. It also becomes evident from this example that the concerns generated by dynamics of inclusion and exclusion become more pronounced as political space comes to be organized and envisioned from a single ‘state’ viewpoint. Ideas of who and what were ‘inside’ or ‘outside’ the state of France during the time of Francis I’s four Secretaries would likely be quite different from those employing a modern domestic/foreign distinction.

Reinforcing Ruggie’s characterization of the single state viewpoint, James C. Scott (1998) argues further that particular methods of simplification for the purposes of administrative efficacy accompany this consolidation and organization of political space. He maintains that “no administrative system is capable of representing any existing social community except through a heroic and greatly schematized process of abstraction and simplification” (Scott 1998: 22) executed with the deliberate purpose of creating and shaping a “single rational society perfectly legible from the centre” (Scott 1998: 32). It is
with an understanding of this motivation and resulting practice, coupled with an 
acknowledgement of the importance of giving consideration to historical context and the 
way in which institutions of sovereignty, capitalism, and modernity have coevolved in 
particular ways (Conca 1993), that we can begin to gain a perspective on the structure 
and character of the modern state. In fact, Lefebvre argues that

The state framework, and the state as framework, cannot be 
conceived of without reference to the instrumental space that 
they make use of. Indeed each new form of state, each new form 
of political power, introduces its own particular way of 
partitioning space, its own particular administrative classification 
of discourses about space and about things and people in space. 
Each such form commands space, as it were, to serve its 
purposes; and the fact that space should thus become 
classificatory makes it possible for a certain type of non-critical 
thought simply to register the resultant ‘reality’ and accept it at 
face value (1991: 281)

Thus, beginning to interrogate the space of the state, and the way it has been actively 
constructed through social practices, can provide a deeper understanding of the kind of 
power the state wields, and the way in which the inhabitants of such a space understand 
and act within it.

4.3 Imagining Communities

Building on this idea of developing a point of view from which the political space 
of the state is conceptualized, and remembering Walker’s emphasis on the historical 
constitution and reconstitution of the state, it is important to consider how this 
‘envisioning’ of the state comes to be. Benedict Anderson (1983) characterizes a nation(- 
state) as an imagined political community that is conceived of as both inherently limited
and sovereign. By characterizing them in this way, Benedict is not arguing that states are ‘imaginary’ or ‘unreal’ – at least, no more so than any other kind of community. He argues that the national community is *imagined* because “the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (1983: 6). It is only through these sometimes substantial acts of imagination that diverse and geographically separated people could ever consider themselves as a community.

On this account, all communities are imagined; the links between members are forged through a collective conviction of particular similarities, and communities can be distinguished by the way in which they are imagined. Members of environmental and social movements imagine themselves as communities working for a set of common goals and values. National communities imagine themselves as having a shared territory and history. Just how ‘imaginary’ this commonality is becomes evident upon examining the particularities of national histories: Anderson points out that those who imposed Magna Carta on John Plantagenet neither spoke English nor conceived of themselves as Englishmen, but are now depicted as early patriots in classrooms in the United Kingdom (a name which in itself is suggestive of the kind of imaginations operating in that space). Emphasizing the imagined nature of such communities, however, does not suggest that there are, by contrast, ‘true’ or ‘genuine’ communities for which individuals should be aiming. Rather, Anderson is helping to emphasize an important element that is often missing from realist analyses of the state: their historically constructed and actively reconstructed nature.
4.4 Forgetting Our Imagining

Once these political communities have begun to imagine themselves, what is it that creates a transition from an active, dynamic, conscious imagining – such as one might expect during a struggle for emancipation or revolution – and the kind of unconscious imagining Anderson finds in contemporary British classrooms? Michael Billig (1995) identifies this latter form of imagining as ‘banal’ nationalism, the everyday ways of thinking and patterns of discourse that naturalize and reinforce the existence of nation-states. He argues that “the metonymic image of banal nationalism is not a flag which is being consciously waved with fervent passion; it is the flag hanging unnoticed on the public building” (1995: 8). These overlooked flags – real and metaphorical – serve to subtly ‘flag’ our nationality such that they are rarely commented on but omnipresent, making it impossible for us to forget our membership in a particular national political community.

This simultaneous remembering and forgetting, remembering and celebrating the ‘history’ of the nation while forgetting its relatively late and contested historical emergence, is for Billig the means through which imagining becomes passive and unnoticed. Consider, for example, the substantial historical fluidity of borders in continental Europe, and the very recent establishment of current state boundaries (which are, of course, in many cases still under vigorous debate). Important here is the tendency for histories of nations to be told in teleological terms, a form of historicism in which all
or most historical events are interpreted with regard to their ultimate contribution to the current political and territorial constitution of states. Such a tendency helps to naturalize current state boundaries and constitutions, while making invisible opportunities for events and outcomes to have been otherwise. Extending Anderson’s analysis, Billig suggests that in established nations, the state is no longer actively imagined:

The poets are typically replaced by prosaic politicians, and the epic ballads by government reports. The imagined community ceases to be reproduced by acts of the imagination. In established nations, the imagination becomes inhabited, and, thereby, inhibited. In this sense, the term ‘imagined community’ may be misleading. The community and its place are not so much imagined, but their absence becomes unimaginable (1995: 77)

By their absence becoming unimaginable, these imagined communities manage to elide their own contingency, to make disappear the ways they could have been constituted differently, the ways in which we could have brought other principles of organization to our political spaces.

In this way, our identity as members of a national community, confined and defined by the limits of the state, becomes a vital but unobserved part of our daily life. Billig’s discussion of deixis in relation to nationalism is helpful here in explaining how this identity reinforcement can be both ubiquitous and disregarded. Deixis refers to those words or phrases that may only be understood from the context in which they are found: words such as ‘the’, ‘it’, ‘here’, or ‘then’ often have this deictic character. In terms of reinforcing national identity, Billig argues that these small words, when used in both media coverage and everyday conversation, serve to reaffirm their listeners as members of a common community. When Canadians speak of ‘the prime minister’, there is rarely
uncertainty as to whether we are referring to the political leader of Australia or Canada: our own national context is assumed. Billig argues that this “deixis can do its business unobtrusively, running up the flag so discreetly that it is unnoticed even by speaker or writer. The nation does not need to be mentioned, let alone named” (1995: 107). It is through practices such as this that the imagined political space of the state becomes routine. No longer actively imagined, it rather becomes a way of talking, speaking, and living fraught with its own inclusive and exclusive dynamics, but rendered so unremarkable that such in-or-out authorizations remain unexamined.

4.5 Depoliticizing State Space

Returning again to Walker’s point that inclusions imply exclusions, and that such conditions depend on the authorization of discriminations, it is necessary to consider the implications of rendering nationalism banal and eliding the imagined nature of the state as a political community. The most striking consequence of these circumstances is the creation of an ostensibly political space that is in practice largely absent of political questioning of the deeper sort that poses a genuine challenge to its existence or its current manifestation, and through such a challenge offering a truly transformative potential. By naturalizing the existence of the state, by characterizing it in the imaginations of its citizens as a permanent and inevitable container of political possibility, opportunities for genuinely transformative politics are severely curtailed. If states are the natural and unavoidable way of organizing political space, the inclusions and exclusions they
authorize, and the discriminations they endorse, seem inevitable as well. For example, the way that environmentalism comes to be institutionalized and framed within such an organizational system “remains attached to a closely integrated discourse that associates modernization, science, progressive administrative government, and a private market economy with the resolution of environmental problems and the containment of popular environmental claims” (FitzSimmons et al. 1994: 201). As such, these framings of environmental issues and solutions come to seem beyond interrogation, and beyond negotiation. Given the variety of inclusions and exclusions examined earlier, and the challenging implications of them, it becomes evident how problematic such unquestioned inclusions and exclusions can be for both human beings and the more-than-human world.

This is precisely why our first task, heeding Walker’s call for a theory of the state that pays serious attention to both its historical constitution and constant contemporary recreation, is so crucial. Without a sustained consciousness of the historical contingency of the modern system of sovereign states, and without a sense of the peculiarities of political and economic circumstance that led to this particular system, it becomes increasingly difficult to imagine alternative organizations of political space. In fact, such a state model

Contains the political by means of a series of limits and filters that maintain the perception that economic life and private life have no politics…and professionals who serve the institutional environmental movement as its theoreticians accept the liberal conception of the state, and their sense of possible environmental agendas is limited by this accommodation (FitzSimmons et al. 1994: 204-205)
Without due consideration given to the countless ways in which each of us through our actions reproduce the state on a daily basis\textsuperscript{29}, it becomes increasingly improbable to imagine ourselves as having the capacity to invoke change. It is a rather terrible irony that our method of organizing political space has in truth led to a great deal of depoliticization within these spaces, turning what ought to be openly and continuously debated political issues into administrative commonplaces\textsuperscript{30}. This situation makes the Illusion of Disembeddedness that much easier to maintain, and the associated inclusions and exclusions correspondingly more difficult to become visible and open to negotiation.

4.6 Discursive Openness

In paying serious attention to the historical constitution and continual reconstitution of the state as such, it quickly becomes evident that realist approaches direct analytic focus outside of the state in a way that imagines them to be uniformly constituted inside their boundaries; as a result, our everyday experience of the state – which we can understand better by paying careful attention to its ideational history – is often similarly unreflective and escapes critical interrogation. As such, this process

\textsuperscript{29} The fact that this statement at first seems odd is the very feature that makes this reality so politically problematic. Each of us quietly and unremarkably acknowledges and reinforces the authority of the state countless times in the course of our day; this process occurs not only through conspicuous and overt gestures such as voting, but also every time we slow down our vehicles in deference to posted speed limits, pay the goods and services tax on our groceries, or send our children off for another day of public school.

\textsuperscript{30} For example, permission regarding the construction of new residential developments, the number of deer or moose that may be ‘harvested’ in a particular year, or commercial pesticide application, is for the most part granted through various forms of administrative licensing rather than through open, accessible and sustained political dialogue.
allows a neglect and depoliticization of the inclusionary and exclusionary authorizations of modern states. Characterizing the state as natural and inevitable, as discussed above, greatly hinders the questioning of such discriminations. Going further, theorists such as Catriona Sandilands (2002) argue for the vital importance not only of disrupting this simulacral logic – the ‘realness’ or ‘givenness’ of the state as such – but of maintaining an attitude of discursive openness, of carefulness and fallibility, toward such conceptualized political spaces.

Such openness will emphatically not lead to a fuller or more complete understanding of what the state ‘really’ is. Quite the reverse. Generating these disruptions of traditional attitudes toward the state may simply – or rather, complexly – revitalize the multiplicity of viewpoints sacrificed in the move toward what Ruggie called the single-point perspective. In Sandilands’ view, “a rupture is not an answer, a firm standpoint from which to see an underlying “truth,” but it may be an opening to a less obviously problematic seeing” (2002: 151). What Sandilands is arguing for here, very much in keeping with Haraway’s (1988) focus on the valuable existence of situated knowledge and partial perspectives, is the maintenance of and appreciation for gaps in our understanding and for the conditionalities of our institutions and means of organizing ourselves.

While advocating for the maintenance of openness and disruption begins to address the second task – that of prying apart and untangling prevailing monolithic and theoretically unsatisfying conceptions of the state – the deeper value of discursive openness lies in acknowledging the limits of such discourse. Sandilands argues that to
respect these limits “is to avoid the authoritarian and totalizing claim that we “got it right”; it is to keep different forms of conversation going, to preserve the lack of closure that democracy requires” (1999: 206). Preserving this lack of closure, generating these ruptures in accepted views, and placing value on such practices as a crucial part of active political engagement, can begin to open up the possibilities for expansive and much more richly imagined conceptions of political space.

4.7 Conclusion: Imagining a Viable Ecopolitics

While gaining a deeper historical and theoretical understanding of the development of the dominant state-centric political system, it has become evident how and why such a conception of politics is unable to adequately accommodate ecological considerations and is not open enough to constructively accept sustained political questioning and negotiation regarding its existence and constitution. Establishing this understanding of the limitations of the current dominant means of political organization, however, is a necessary step toward developing and embracing alternative conceptions of the political. In addition, Sandilands’ argument for discursive openness outlined above has specific and important ecopolitical implications. Returning again to the initial consideration of the problematically invisible ecological inclusions and exclusions involved in much of contemporary political processes, and the way in which some of these elided exclusions can become apparent through a phenomenologically-informed conception of place, acknowledging and valuing these fissures and cracks in our
understanding can offer the opportunity for the respectful incorporation of ecological considerations into our politics, as well as for opening up political possibilities and maintaining them through constant questioning.
Chapter 5 – Creating Space for Politics

5.1 Seeking Political Space

In searching for a more dynamic and open way of understanding the space of politics, and with it the potential for addressing the ecopolitical challenge, it is crucial to rediscover and reinstate opportunities for political questioning. To do so requires a sustained questioning of what it means to live politically, what constitutes a political action, and how a political space could be understood. This exploratory process, however, must be undertaken with constant respect for the discursive and interpretive openness recognized in the previous chapter as a vital component of such an endeavour, or else the analysis runs the risk of simply recreating the closure and rigidity present in dominant contemporary political framings.

The potentially compelling counterargument to such a position is that action, rather than additional discussion and debate, is what is necessary to address our current environmental challenges\(^{31}\). However, as has been set out in the preceding chapters, what is vitally important about the kind of political and discursive space I am imagining is that

\(^{31}\) See Lovelock (2006) for an example of this argument for the need for immediate action, rather than prolonged discussion, in order to address our environmental problems. Also note, however, the kind of solutions proposed by Lovelock – large-scale nuclear power, and the use of giant pipes in the ocean to bring nutrient-rich water to the surface, encouraging algae blooms with the hope of sequestering more atmospheric carbon dioxide in the oceans (Lovelock and Rapley 2007). What is concerning about these proposals, for the present analysis at least, is not so much their technocratic content but rather their associated governance procedures: there is little opportunity for recourse if such proposals turn out to be misguided or unjust, and no strong mechanisms for critical reflection and intervention along the way.
it is one potential means for providing an arena of common engagement both among human beings and with the more-than-human world; it seems reasonable to hope that through such encounters and negotiations solutions can be developed that are able to more comprehensively and respectfully, and thus more effectively, address environmental challenges.

With this hope in mind, in order to engage with these questions of what constitutes a political life, action, and space, I draw heavily on Arendt’s articulation of the conditions for politics, augmenting and expanding upon her basic principles where appropriate. At this point I am looking primarily at a comprehensive overview of Arendt’s politics; an exploration of the ecopolitical implications of such a formulation is undertaken in Chapter Six. Finally, I place this articulation of political space in conversation with Vattimo’s account of ‘weak thought’ in order to explore the kind of ethical and interpretive relationships we ought to foster as part of this kind of political life. Such an account provides a helpful bridge between the phenomenological interpretations of place considered earlier and the understandings of politics outlined below.

5.2 Depoliticizing the Present

Considering the above description of the state conventionally understood as the natural and unavoidable way of organizing political space, and the way in which this conception discourages us from imagining alternatives and appreciating our capacity to
invoke change, it is important to evaluate the ways in which this is a problematically depoliticising process. I would argue, in fact, that the institutional machinery of the state is now unable – if indeed it ever could – to provide adequate space for the instigation and proliferation of genuinely political engagement in the Arendtian sense detailed below. Again, to claim this is not to engage in a debate over the degree to which the state is in ‘decline’: depending on the particular dimension of the modern nation-state under scrutiny, there are arguments to be made that the state is both strengthened and eroded by current conditions (Conca 1994). Characterizing the state as broadly one or the other does little to further an analysis of the political atmosphere of such a space.

A more helpful approach in this case is to consider the tendency of state governance toward administrative and procedural systems, driven by and catering to marketplace values of efficiency, service, and liberal individualism. Giorgio Agamben, for example, maintains that while the ‘empty shell’ of the state continues to stand as “a pure structure of sovereignty and domination, society as a whole is instead irrevocably delivered to the form of consumer society, that is, a society in which the sole goal of production is comfortable living” (2000: 113). Such a dynamic can be witnessed in circumstances ranging from flashy election campaigns designed to appeal to the ‘political consumer’ (Lees-Marchment 2004) to the service-centred orientation of various governmental websites.  

32 See the Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada website (http://www.international.gc.ca/index.aspx) for an example of this type of messaging: a wide range of information is available, particularly with regard to the services offered by this department. What is far less accessible, however, is information on how departmental priorities are developed, how genuinely political decisions get made, and what the entry points are for intervention in this process.
In searching for an explanation of this trend, an Arendtian conception of politics is particularly enlightening. Describing the deeply challenging vibrancy of political action, Arendt argues that

Exasperation with the threefold frustration of action – the unpredictability of the outcome, the irreversibility of the process, and the anonymity of its authors – is almost as old as recorded history. It has always been a great temptation, for men [sic] of action no less than for men [sic] of thought, to find a substitute for action in the hope that the realm of human affairs may escape the haphazardness and moral irresponsibility inherent in a plurality of agents. The remarkable monotony of the proposed solutions throughout our recorded history testifies to the elemental simplicity of the matter (1958: 197)

Arendt’s conception of politics, with a focus on her particular articulation of action and plurality, will be elaborated on below. What is important here is the motivation Arendt identifies for seeking an escape from the often uncomfortable experience of acting politically, and the homogeneity of practice that results from such an evasion.

Tracing further the implications of these depoliticising moves, it is useful to consider the kind of thinking they inspire. Thom Kuehls (1996), in particular, considers the way in which ‘state thought’ practically and theoretically limits our understanding of politics and possibility. Characterizing state-centric realist understandings as examples of tree-like thinking, he contrasts this with the non-linear rhizomatic thought outlined by Deleuze and Guattari33. Identifying the tendency of tree-thought to produce singular, universalizing answers in a way that cuts off the possibilities and diversity inherent in a

33 See Deleuze and Guattari (1987) for a more detailed exposition of rhizomatic thought. I am not here endorsing this view as an unproblematic solution to the limiting tendencies of state-centric analyses (global industrial capitalism, for example, operates in such a non-linear, rhizomatic space) but it is informative as an illustration of the potential alternative ways of conceptualizing political space.
more pluralistic approach, Kuehls laments that “Western thought and action are based on monocultures. Through their reification of the sovereign territorial state, Waltz and Bull [both adamantly realist political theorists] attempt to produce a monoculture politics” (1996: 139). Significant in this problem characterization is that such thinking attempts to produce a monoculture politics, suggesting that such conclusions are neither self-evident nor inevitable.

Thus, in the above identifications of the problematically universalizing and anaesthetizing consequences of conventional understandings of politics, both Arendt and Kuehls hint at the potential for more dynamic and diverse conceptions of political space. Recalling the way in which Walker challenged conventional ‘empty state’ portrayals, he has simultaneously worked to interrogate and enliven understandings of ‘the political’ in ways that stretch it far beyond state-centric conceptions such as Waltz’s (Walker 1991; 1993; 2006a)\(^{34}\). Projects such as these have significantly expanded the means through which we consider what it means to engage in political action, and have provided the inspiration for my own evolving conception of political space.

5.3 Action and Plurality

In order to develop such a critical understanding of politics, it is important to

\(^{34}\) Expanded understandings of the political can be seen, for example, in the efforts of transnational environmental activists, such as those involved with Greenpeace or Friends of the Earth, and the developments of ‘world civic society’ that have resulted in a kind of politics that overflows the conventions of state-centric political organization in interesting and powerful ways; as Wapner argues, “this does not mean that they ignored the state but rather that they made a strategic decision to explore the political potential of unofficial realms of collective action” (1995: 314).
consider what the *conditions* of politics are. It is equally necessary, however, to begin by suspending any prescription of what politics must look like in practice; such an attempt could only result in a reversion to the very proceduralistic and administrative organization of behaviour identified above as problematic. With the aim of avoiding such a situation, I will follow Arendt here in identifying action through plurality as a constituting feature of the political.

The Arendtian conception of action, and its associated requirement of plurality, provides a compelling starting point in determining what characterizes a ‘political’ moment. Arendt (1958) characterizes action, and the corresponding condition of plurality, as not only an essential condition of political life, but as the condition *through which* political life is realized. Further, she understands ‘action’ as the only activity that occurs directly between human beings without objects or matter acting as an intermediary. Arendt writes, “All human activities are conditioned by the fact that men [sic] live together, but it is only action that cannot even be imagined outside the society of men [sic]” (Arendt 1958: 23). Without this direct interaction between actors, for Arendt there would be no possibility of politics at all. This is so because, while one can imagine an isolated human being engaging in various activities, such as walking through a forest or lighting a fire, one cannot imagine such a being performing an action that could be considered *political*. Such an event would require an audience, a witness, someone to potentially challenge or require justification for the action, or to react in response. Someone to demand engagement. And, it must be emphasized, not only or even primarily engagement with likeminded people who will work harmoniously toward
a common vision. Rather, engagement with the difference and diversity of those who would substantially challenge one’s views and choices is precisely what is required for the maintenance of a vibrant and active political space. It is this reciprocal dynamic of engagement that creates the possibility for political action, and which makes clear the reason that plurality – the presence of others – is a necessary component of such action. Just as instances of fabrication require the surrounding presence of the world in order to provide both material and a location in which to place the resulting product, so action must be “surround by and in constant contact with the web of the acts and words of other men [sic]” (Arendt 1958: 167). This plurality is required for the actualization of possibility that forms the core of Arendt’s conception of action, such that an event needs the presence of others to have the truly transformative effect necessary to create an act in the political sense.

One of the most inspiring and intimidating aspects of this conception of the political life of action is its capacity to generate unpredictable and potentially limitless consequences. Beautifully capturing both the heady rush and daunting weight of political action, Arendt explains that

These consequences are boundless, because action, though it may proceed from nowhere, so to speak, acts into a medium where every reaction becomes a chain reaction and where every process is the cause of new processes. Since action acts upon beings who are capable of their own actions, reaction, apart from being a response, is always a new action that strikes out on its own and affects others… the smallest act in the most limited circumstances bears the seed of the same boundlessness, because one deed, and sometimes one word, suffices to change every constellation (Arendt 1958: 169-170)
As a result of this description, it becomes evident why Arendt would suggest that a political life, even for humans inclined to action, is daunting enough to inspire the search for a substitute for such action and the associated indeterminacy of plurality. What this description also highlights, however, is the substantive capacity and responsibility for change that each political actor always possesses. Such a view of politics accords an empowering sense of agency to individual actors in a way that is almost entirely absent in the apathy-inducing political climate of many modern states. In taking such actions, and simultaneously recognizing their responsibility for these actions, individuals engage in a process of defining themselves as particular individuals. Because of the accompanying requirement of plurality, however, this notion of political action is not solely an individualizing one; in each moment of action, individual actors are at the same time connecting themselves to others in an arena of common engagement. The ecological implications of this conception of political action will be explored further in Chapter Six.

It is this invigorating combination of capacity and responsibility that can give political action such a central place in human life. Agamben, drawing on a conception of politics strongly influenced by Arendt’s work, makes a helpful distinction between politics as an incidental or isolatable element of human life and politics as an intrinsic characteristic of such life. Stressing the significance of this distinction, Agamben maintains that “a political life, that is, a life directed toward the idea of happiness and cohesive with a form-of-life, is thinkable only starting from the emancipation from such a division” (2000: 4). That is, by doing away with the conceptual division between a ‘political life’ and what he refers to as a ‘form-of-life’: a life for which what is at stake in
its way of living is living itself. By this term Agamben refers to a life that always retains the character of a possibility. Such a life is in stark contrast to what he calls ‘bare life’ or ‘naked life,’ a human life (artificially) stripped of this potential and considered as an undifferentiated constituent of a population to be managed while simultaneously excluded from any meaningful role in the political process. Viewing the political in this way, as a de-limiting feature of human life, begins to establish an understanding of politics that already differs substantially from the state-bound conceptions outlined above. In combination with Arendt’s account of political action, and the space in which this action may occur, such a view offers a means of keeping open the life of possibility, creativity, and individuality that is vital for a truly viable ecopolitics.

Returning for a moment to the political value Sandilands places on a lack of closure and an acknowledgement of the limits of discourse, connections between these points and Arendt’s characterization of action become apparent. Using ‘nature’ as an example of a discursive limit in political negotiation, as well as a point of detection for the presence of the ‘Real’ (that which is perpetually beyond human conception or construction), Sandilands argues that “the Real runs through nonhuman nature as it runs through humanity, but strangeness is a constant, anarchic part of both realms” (1997:

35 Again, de-limiting here can be understood not as defining – politics as that which makes one essentially human – but as an expression of the human possibility to act; politics as an exercise of one’s freedom.
36 Drawing on the Lacanian notion of ‘lack’, Sandilands is gesturing toward the Real as that which escapes or exceeds capturability or representation. This failure of representation is not a negative feature, but rather something that must be “explicitly included in a radical democratic project if nature is to be represented at all; if the part of nature that is beyond language is to exert an influence on politics, there must be a political recognition of the limits of language to represent nature” (Sandilands 1999: 180). If this recognition of limits is absent, there is the strong tendency to revert to the kind of problematic inclusive/exclusive dynamics identified in Chapter Two as politically and ecologically problematic.
The constant presence and ineffable unpredictability of Sandilands’ Real can be understood as playing the same daunting and stimulating role as Arendt’s action. For instance, Emily Carr’s account of her visit to the old village of Skedans in Haida Gwaii is a wonderful example of this point of detection for the Real, of an attempt to capture this anarchic strangeness that runs through both the human and more-than-human world:

Skedans on a stormy day looked menacing. To the right of the Bay immediately behind the reef, rose a pair of uncouth cone-like hills, their heads bonneted in lowering clouds. The clumsy hills were heavily treed save where deep bare scars ran down their sides, as if some monster cruelty had ripped them from crown to base. Behind these two hills the sea bit into the shoreline so deeply as to leave only a narrow neck of land, and the bedlam of waves pounding on the shores back and front of the village site pinched the silence out of forsaken old Skedans (Carr 2003 [1941]: 120)

While this attempted capture is not, and can never be, successful, the impulse and struggle to gesture towards it, to point to its presence while always unable to master it, suggests a parallel struggle to the one articulated by Arendt with regard to the way in which the consequences of human action are beyond human predictability, but must be engaged with and accounted for in spite of this. Arendt’s formulation of the conditions of politics are particularly promising for the development of an ecopolitics because of this parallel; it is likely that ecological considerations may be productively incorporated into political consideration as a result of this built-in unpredictability.

5.4 The Space of Appearance

Having expanded on the conditions of political life, it is also important to consider what constitutes the space in which such a life is lived out in practice. Again beginning
with Arendt (1958), she uses the Greek conception of a *polis* in expressing her understanding of political space. In using this term, she does not refer to a merely, or even primarily, physical location. Although for Arendt the city-state of Athens is exemplary, her chief focus is the Athenian citizens and their active creation of a political space. She characterizes the *polis* as an organization of people that is created through their practice of acting and speaking in concert, recognizing its space as that which lies between people living together with such a common communicative purpose rather than as constituted and defined by their geographical location.\(^3\)

Arendt identifies this space as one of appearance, describing it as “the space where I appear to others as others appear to me, where men [sic] exist not merely like other living or inanimate things but make their appearance explicitly” (1958: 177). Agamben too makes reference to a political space of appearance, locating politics specifically in the act of exposition. In working to articulate his conception of this appearance he uses the idea of a ‘face’, but one that does not correspond to a particular person’s physical appearance. Instead, Agamben finds this face “wherever something reaches the level of exposition and tries to grasp its own being exposed, wherever a being that appears sinks in that appearance and has to find a way out of it” (2000: 92). What is critical in both of these understandings of the space of appearance is that it is constituted

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3\(^3\) For instance, Arendt argues that “to be political, to live in a *polis*, meant that everything was decided through words and persuasion and not through force and violence” (1958: 26), directing her readers’ focus to the active and communicative aspects of *polis* living, rather than the characteristics of its physical location.
by political actors taking possession of their own exposition, engaging in an active and continual process of ownership\textsuperscript{38} of their actions and recognition of the consequences.

What is so significant about this rather complicated space of appearance? Why is it a necessary component of this particular conception of political life? Evaluating its vital importance is easiest by imagining what would result from its absence. Central to Arendt’s conception of action is that it requires a plurality, a network of interconnected actors that can act and react in response to a particular action. In order for these reactions to and continuations of political actions to occur, there must be an arena in which these actions become visible, in which such decisions or choices are acted out. If this was not the case, there could be very little in the way of consequence or effect resulting from an individual action. The space of appearance provides the visibility necessary for the effectiveness of plurality. This space in which political actors make their appearance explicit and, following Agamben, take possession of their actions, is thus necessary in understanding how a political community can develop, negotiate, and evolve. Similarly, this explicit appearance of political actors is vital for the kind of ecopolitics I am looking to create; it is necessary in particular for the presence of elements of the more-than-human world, currently disappearing behind unexamined walls of exclusion, to become visible and acknowledged as politically influential entities.

\textsuperscript{38} The term ownership here is being used in the sense of a process, rather than as gesturing toward a set of relations in the sense of property and control; the process of ownership here, similar that of craftsmanship, indicates the way that political actors present and exemplify themselves through iterated instances of acting and taking responsibility for these actions.
5.5 Natality and Action

Given the above conditions for and space of political life, it remains to explore the dynamics driving such a politics. How do we account for change, innovation, and creativity within that space? The potential for such activity has been established above, but the means through which it may be achieved have yet to be fully articulated. Arendt offers a compelling answer to this puzzle of the origin of newness. Because action in the Arendtian sense involves the unpredictable actualization of a possibility, an act of creativity, she characterizes it as corresponding to the fact of birth and the actualization of the human condition of natality. She writes that “the new always happens against the overwhelming odds of statistical laws and their probability, which for all practical, everyday purposes amounts to certainty; the new therefore always appears in the guise of a miracle” (1958: 158). Understood in this way, each action we as political actors take is potentially able to generate the unexpected and initiate the improbable.

Expanding on and pushing further this connection between action, natality, and newness, Agamben imagines human beings as creatures that have chosen to remain in a neotenic state. Using first the example of the axolotl, a Mexican salamander that has settled into and remained in its larval environment, he goes on to imagine a human being as an infant that has not so much ‘settled into’ its early developmental state, but who actively embraces its lack of specialization; as such, it refuses to follow any prescribed developmental pathway and instead explores its own immaturity and indeterminacy. What is significant for Agamben in this characterization of humanity is not so much its historical or biological plausibility, but rather the fact that “life here is a possibility, a
potentiality that never exhausts itself in biographical facts and events, since it has no object other than itself. It is an absolute immanence that nevertheless moves and lives” (Agamben 2001: 122). Key in these associations of human action with natality and neoteny is the capacity they invoke for spontaneous creativity and unconstrained change.

This capacity for creativity and change is of paramount importance for the kind of political life being imagined here. Given the unpredictability and boundlessness of political action, it is inevitable that mistakes, trespasses, and unintended consequences will regularly occur. Arendt recognizes that forgiveness and liberation from these effects are necessary in order for human beings to continue to live political lives. She maintains that “only through this constant mutual release from what they do can men [sic] remain free agents, only by constant willingness to change their minds and start again can they be trusted with so great a power as that to begin something new” (1958: 216). By this release, Arendt presumably does not mean an escape from all responsibility and accountability for individual actions and choices, but rather an emancipation from the paralysing significance that a backward-looking historical account would attach to each particular action. What Arendt directs our focus to, instead, is the vitally empowering experience of our faculty of action: “only the full experience of this capacity can bestow upon human affairs faith and hope, those two essential characteristics of human existence” (Arendt 1958: 222).

A complementary perspective to these theories of natality is Sandilands’ articulation of the political value of those elements of our experience that overflow our descriptive capacity. Again using ‘nature’ as her example, Sandilands reflects on
particular experiences with nonhuman actors that highlight the failure of human language to fully capture and express these interactions. She argues that this failure “is experienced through lack, through an encounter with nature that overflows our ability to describe it, in which the overflowing signals an inexpressible jouissance… that returns to haunt our future attempts to fully capture nature in the realm of human discourse” (1997: 142).

Using the term ‘jouissance’ here in the Lacanian sense of painful pleasure, Sandilands is pointing to a kind of undetermined and indeterminate overflowing that has the same sense of unpredictability and newness drawn out by the creative experience of birth. It is important to appreciate the political value of such an experience, and the potential it offers for openness, inventiveness, and change. Particularly in ecological terms, these moments keep us open to the presence and wonder of the more-than-human world, and the important place it holds in our lived experience. At the same time, the existence of these experiences help to explain, in a similar manner to the above connections between natality and newness, the potentially dynamic presence of the more-than-human world in our politics.

5.6 Embracing Disorientation, Liberating Difference

Having traced through this conception of political life, with the goal of opening up a richer and more vibrant space of political possibility, it is important to reflect on the potential effects of such an understanding and practice of politics. In particular, it is informative to consider how such understandings fit with and challenge dominant
political understandings, and what they offer instead. The ethical philosophy of Gianni
Vattimo, and more particularly his formulation of ‘weak thought’, is helpful in shaping
such an exploration. Vattimo (1988), drawing inspiration from the philosophical nihilism
of Friedrich Nietzsche, emphasizes the infinite interpretability of reality and the resulting
weakening of foundational thought and formerly ‘strong’ categories of Being, Truth, and
Logic. For Vattimo, in such a situation each experience is reduced to an interpretation,
one which can never be absolutely and unequivocally defined. Embracing this
interpretive transition, Vattimo argues, need not be traumatic. Rather, it can become a
way, “however ‘weak’, of experiencing truth, not as an object which can be appropriated
and transmitted, but as a horizon and a background upon which we can move with care”
(1988: 13). We can find in this interpretive freedom resonance with Sandilands’
commitment to an appreciation of the limits of discourse and the need to preserve
ruptures in accepted views, as well as with Arendt’s emphasis on the liberating character
of natality and boundless action.

The kind of discursive openness and infinite interpretability called for by Vattimo
holds particular promise for developing fuller and more inclusive political conversations.
Along similar lines in ecopolitical terms, Sandilands advocates for “a proliferation of
discourses around nature, a validation of different experiences of nature, is a crucial part
of a democratic ecological politics; opening up nature to multiple interpretations means
that experiences of nature can be democratized and offers up the possibility of thinking of
nature as an actor in the process of co-constructing the world” (2002: 196). In searching
for the conditions that would most effectively allow for such a proliferation of discourses
and interpretations, Vattimo outlines two specific and related goals: sustaining disorientation and liberating diversity.

Understanding disorientation as an emancipatory experience, Vattimo (1992) argues that with the disappearance or weakening of a central rationality comes the opportunity for a multiplicity of local and particular rationalities to find their voices. Seeing in this disorientation the chance for a liberation of differences, Vattimo highlights the way in which such a process can free a diverse range of ‘dialects’ – sexual, religious, ethnic, aesthetic, cultural (and hopefully ecological) – to become visible and develop a sense of their own value and legitimacy. The source of this politically significant disorientation for Vattimo seems to be the opening up of interpretive possibility generated by the dissolution of the universalizing rationality of modernity. This same sense of liberating disorientation can occur, however, as a result of experiencing an instance of Sandilands’ ‘lack’ or ‘overflowing’, moments of inexpressibility running through our encounters with other members of the more-than-human world.

Finally, it is important to consider the aim and value of these moments of disorientation. Given the kind of political life outlined above, and the continual moments of action and negotiation that constitute it, it is vital that disorientation not be embraced for its potential to disrupt only to then work towards resettling relationships, understandings, and practices into a more pleasing configuration. Instead, disorientation as “an experience of estrangement, which then requires recomposition and readjustment” (Vattimo 1992: 51), must be continually cultivated and embraced in order to safeguard
the kind of discursive openness necessary for a creatively multifaceted and polyphonic political space within which we ‘move with care’.

5.7 Conclusion: Negotiating a Viable Ecopolitics

This particular understanding of political life, with its emphasis on plurality and action in the space of appearance, offers a conception of politics that is radically different from the dominant understandings of state-centric politics. Such a conception is crucial for the way in which it helps to release political possibilities by demanding the constant questioning and negotiation that is associated with discursive and interpretive openness. These processes of questioning and negotiation, far from being imagined in the cold combative manner of a courtroom interrogation, ought instead to be considered in an exploratory way, involving a sense of respect for, although not necessarily agreement with, those others engaged in political action in common. This is where Sandilands’ call for cultivating a sense of fallibility, and Vattimo’s injunction to move with care, become particularly important. When combined with the other features of the ecopolitical project I am undertaking, such as the desire to respect fully include the more-than-human world in political consideration and to pay attention to where our political actions come from, negotiating a viable ecopolitics ought to appear as a challenging, engaging, and ultimately welcoming experience. Having thus outlined a richer and more open understanding of politics, it remains to explore how such a political space can become a specifically ecopolitical space.
Chapter 6 – The Ecopolitical Space of Appearance

6.1 Elements of Ecopolitical Space

Having previously explored phenomenological perspectives on place that emphasize its constructed, open, and negotiated character along with the powerful role it can play in human life, it remains to explore what can happen when such a formulation of place is set in conversation with a similarly dynamic and open view of politics such as the Arendtian conception outlined above. In the search for a more vibrant and diverse conception of political space, two promising features of a phenomenologically-informed notion of place are of particular interest: place as that which is created out of social practice, and place as that which allows for action and appearance. Recalling, in Arendt’s outline of the conditions for politics, the interconnected requirements of plurality, action, and visibility, the aim of this final section is twofold: to explore the possibilities concerning where and how place might productively fit with these conditions to help develop a viable ecopolitics, while at the same time embracing Vattimo’s vision of liberating disorientation in evaluating these possibilities.

6.2 The Political Challenge of Place

Before investigating these particular connections in greater detail, it is important first to establish whether and in what way place, as conceived above, is able to offer a
substantive political challenge. In order to explore this question, it is helpful to appeal to a place theorist who, while not working within the phenomenological tradition that is of greatest interest here, is one of few contemporary place theorists making a sustained effort to theorize and advocate for the political potential of place. For Doreen Massey, the political challenge that places offer is that they require us to confront the challenge of negotiating multiplicities in a way similar to Casey’s articulation of the gathering function of place. She argues that in such moments of negotiation there will “always be an invention, there will be need for judgment, learning, improvisation; there will be no simply portable rules” (Massey 2005: 162), and that this continual newness and shifting in and of place is what demands political action. In Massey’s view, it is equally important that particular understandings of place not be simply accepted and quietly worked within. She proposes that challenging current constructions and perceived functions of a place will often be a more effective and productive strategy for opening up political dialogue and interaction than a straightforward defense of a particular place or place construction (Massey 2004)\textsuperscript{39}.

Aside from the experience of these meetings-up and negotiations, what are the potential results of this political challenge of place? Massey (2005) argues that what is at stake in developing a politicized understanding of place is a reshaping of the very ways in which politics is conceived. By focusing on place as an agent in political change, and by

\textsuperscript{39} For example, the collection of articles in Magnusson and Shaw’s (2002) \textit{A Political Space: Reading the Global Through Clayoquot Sound} help to identify and negotiate the complex politics of conflicts over logging on the west coast of British Columbia in large part by examining the way that this place has been constructed, and these constructions subsequently challenged, by various political actors concerned with the issue.
conceiving of place in such a way that connections and networks between places are understood to be an integral component, Massey sees the potential for linkages between places such that local struggles are able to find support and commonalities with other local struggles. She maintains that the “building of such equivalences is itself a processes, a negotiation, an engagement of political practices and imaginations in which ground is sought through which the local struggles can construct common cause…and this ground itself will be new; politics will change in the process” (Massey 2005: 182). Put another way, place, through these continual juxtapositions of various entities and trajectories in a common arena of engagement, is able to pose the question of how we ought to go about the process of living together (Massey 1994), including a critical examination of who and what is included in this notion of ‘together’.

6.3 Place as a Bounded Region for Action

In addition to posing these political challenges, place as it has been discussed above has the potential to offer a way of navigating these challenges while providing an arena for the discovery and acting out of new solutions to specifically human as well as ecological problems. As was mentioned earlier, Malpas characterizes place as that which allows for the possibility of the appearance of things, as a means through which elements of the world present themselves. In considering this allowance of appearance, it is also important to consider in what way and within what limits this appearance occurs. In engaging with this question, it may in fact be useful to consider place as having a
somewhat bounded character. While this may seem counterintuitive, given the emphasis that I have placed on flexibility, openness, and lack of definition, in some sense this boundedness is both necessary and inevitable; such boundedness, however, does not have to occur in a spatial or geographical sense. Rather, in much the same way that the inclusions and exclusions with which this analysis began are omnipresent, in order to be experientially coherent places must be defined against and in relation to other places. The difference, of course, lies in the kind of boundedness under consideration, and its associated effects. Malpas argues that “the concept of place is essentially the concept of a bounded, but open region within which a set of interconnected elements can be located” (1999: 170, original emphasis). This idea of place as being enclosed within some kind of bounds can also be seen in Malpas’ discussion of the ‘nested’ character of place – places as self-contained but connected and flowing into places conceived on a larger scale.

One way of understanding the constructive potential of the boundedness of place is to envision place as providing a frame for the political. As such, a particular place does not bring with it a specific and already-established politics, but by virtue of its complexity, resistance to simple definition or characterization, and its ability to incorporate and involve subjective and objective elements – as well as humans and others in the more-than-human world – it may be regarded as offering a frame within which the political can be located. This is a particularly important point for conceptions of place such as Malpas’, as for him it is only by grasping place as that within which the political can appear that we may even begin to formulate a politics that acknowledges and is respectful of our existence as developed in and through place (Malpas 1999). And, it
must be recalled, such an acknowledgement of where our political actions come from is precisely one of the three goals outlined at the beginning of this analysis as associated with an ecopolitical space of appearance. The potential of place as a frame for the political will be developed in greater detail below, with regard to how it may be productively associated with Arendt’s notion of the space of appearance and the possibility of political action.

6.4 The Danger of Place Politics

Given this possibility of place forming a bounded region for action, however, it is equally important to emphasize that such a characterization is not meant to provide the justification for a new practice of border-drawing or definition of spheres of authority along the same lines as those that have been discussed above as problematic. Thus it must be reiterated that this investigation does not seek to develop an understanding of place that can replace, while reproducing, the dynamics of the state, thereby becoming reified as the new ‘unit’ of politics around which lines may be drawn and exclusions can then be authorized and elided. Such a goal would simply close off interpretive possibilities and cement discriminations, promoting the kind of ‘monoculture thought’ that was of concern for Kuehls with regard to the modern territorial state. This risk, although related to the problematic implications of place-thought discussed earlier with regard to its tendency toward the Romantic, parochial, or isolationist, has a slightly different emphasis.
The hazard associated with seeking to politically motivate a notion of place that I am concerned with here lies in the potential for place to be understood in such a way that it functions as a closed terrain of social control (Harvey 1996). Echoing Foucault’s concern that place-bound communities can potentially produce “zones of social control that produce docile bodies totally enclosed and imprisoned in the repressive mechanisms of disciplinary powers” (Harvey 1996: 312), Harvey urges caution regarding notions of place that work to invent an imaginary authoritative enough to achieve a level of social cohesion and institutionalized order. Such political motivations of place can be observed operating, for example, in political associations that seek to establish an exclusive territory for themselves by appealing to an imagined (place-based) community in which members of a particular group belong in a particular place and are thereby authorized to determine what may occur within this region, while others do not and cannot.\(^40\)

However, such end results of appeals to place are neither what are sought here, nor are they what the place perspectives I am working with imply. These more radically open understandings of what is meant by ‘place’ require an appreciation of the openness of the concepts of boundaries and limitations as well. Casey beautifully expresses the vital importance of such an understanding:

A place could not gather bodies in the diverse spatiotemporal ways it does without the permeability of its own limits. The sievelike character of places might well be regarded as another

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\(^40\) Consider, for example, the obvious examples of states claiming sovereign control over their territory and municipalities claiming a certain amount of autonomy regarding local decision-making, as well as some claims to self-determination by indigenous communities in Canada and Australia. In intriguing contrast, there are also movements in existence for such claims to self-determination that are both trans-national and non-territorial, although not necessarily removed from the considerations and influences of place: the current case of the European Roma (Goodwin 2004; Bancroft 2001) is an interesting example of this kind of claim.
essential structure of place, one that could be called “elasticity.” But I prefer to regard it as a corollary property of that perceptual structure earlier identified as “external horizon.” For the very nature of such a horizon is to open out even as it encloses. It is intrinsic to perceptual fields to possess bleeding boundaries; the lack of such boundaries converts these fields to delimited and closed-off sites such as prison cells or jury boxes (Casey 1996a: 42-3).

While I would take issue in the present analysis with the way Casey speaks here of an ‘essential’ structure of place, thereby suggesting something elemental and constant about place, his articulation of the importance of permeable boundaries – and the implications of rigid ones – is clearly well-aimed.

Indeed, this conceptualization of the porosity and flexibility of the boundaries surrounding particular places is not one that attempts to rethink or transform place so that it can then reflect such an understanding, but rather is one that seeks to expose features of place that have been there all along, although perhaps forgotten or hidden in modern formulations that set great value on solid and static boundaries. As Ulrich Beck points out, it is already known that it is only in rather nostalgic imaginations that localities were ever isolated and complete in themselves, and what is needed in contemporary analyses is to draw out the implications of this knowledge. He argues that it is “not an idle fancy that concrete local places can be opened up to the world from the inside. They always were. It was always an inadequate simplification to think of them as isolated or separated off” (Beck and Willms 2004: 179, original emphasis). By highlighting, or making visible, such aspects of place that ‘always were,’ there comes the opportunity to explore the potential advantages of such characteristics.
6.5 Place, Appearance, and Politics

In drawing out the implications of this knowledge, and exploring the political potential of these formulations of place, it is helpful to begin by recalling once again the conditions for politics Arendt outlines: plurality, action, and appearance. On this understanding of politics, plurality is required for the actualization of possibility – the core of Arendt’s understanding of action – such that an action requires the presence of witnessing and challenging others in order to have the transformative effect necessary to create an act in the political sense. Put another way, it is this possibility of encountering challenge or requiring justification, of having an effect on others, that generates a political action in the Arendtian sense. Finally, it is within the space of appearance, a space constituted by political actors taking possession of their own exposition, ownership of their own actions, and recognition of their consequences, that such actions arise. In order for reactions and continuations of political actions to occur, there must be an arena in which these actions become visible, in which such decisions and choices are acted out. Thus, the space of appearance, and its associated condition of plurality, is what makes it possible for political action to take place.

The wording of the previous sentence is not accidental; rather, the focus on political action ‘taking place’ points to the very possibility that I would like to explore in making a connection between phenomenological conceptions of place and Arendtian politics. What happens if we consider place as substantially informing the space of appearance? While Arendt’s exposition of the space of appearance does a remarkable job of highlighting who political actors are and how actions can come to be considered
political, it is less clear regarding where these arenas of political engagement can be found. In this way it runs the risk of the same problematic implications of modern rationalist characterizations of political interactions between states or of ethical negotiations between individual moral agents: a tendency toward the abstract and universal rather than the particular and emplaced. Considering place as playing a constitutive role in the conditions for political action can provide a way of locating politics and the space of appearance in a way that pays attention to and learns from the various ways places both influence and are transformed by the decisions of and interactions between political actors. Such a move is particularly promising for the response it offers to several of the political challenges that I have been focusing on in this exploration.

6.5.1 Avoiding the Neutral and the Abstract

The first way in which associating a sense of place with the space of appearance may have helpful ecopolitical implications is the potential it offers for countering tendencies toward claims to either the neutral or the abstract in framing the political; as such, it can help to acknowledge where political actions are coming from. As was discussed earlier, constructions of abstract space tend to treat it as if it were a neutral medium within which particular actions happen to occur; this is the kind of space that is often appealed to explicitly or implicitly as the space of the state. Given this formulation, and the presence of this kind of space in modern political imaginations, there seems to be
the potential for Arendt’s space of appearance to take on the ‘objective’ and ‘neutral’ character associated with abstract space; at the very least, her theory does not explicitly reject this possibility. This propensity can be found, in fact, in the kind of political space associated with many deliberative democratic projects (Rawls 1999[1971]; Habermas 1985, 1987), even those attempting to develop an ecologically focused deliberative democratic space (Dryzek 1987). Instead, giving consideration and value to the situatedness of political actors, and the environment in which and from which they are acting, rather than attempting to abstract from this emplaced situation and focus on generalized common features, may help make this action-plurality-appearance dynamic more reflective and accommodating of our experience of acting politically.

For example, rather than evaluating a particular moment of political negotiation, such as a standoff between environmental activists and forestry workers regarding the future of a particular stand of trees, against a predetermined formula of rational action or the predicted tradeoffs given each actor’s apparent power, giving genuine consideration to the place through which this space of appearance has emerged may contribute more helpfully to developing an understanding of the outcomes of such a moment. Lipschutz, himself drawing on a loosely Arendtian conception of politics, emphasizes the importance of place in influencing how particular political actions can occur and be understood. He writes, “recall that it is the history of a place that accounts for the shape

41 In both philosophical and political analyses, game-theoretical approaches such as those favoured by Gauthier (1986) or Sober and Wilson (1998) conceptualize political actors as rational self-interested individuals who are motivated by personal gain, and generate rules and predictions for interactions between individuals based on these ‘rules’ of rational human behaviour.
of the landscape and its social organization and that establishes many of the patterns of
interaction among people… it is in the face-to-face encounters of people that debate and
action – politics – takes place” (Lipschutz 2004: 162-3). For Lipschutz, politics must be
understood as originating from the practices of specific times and particular places in
order to grasp and make sense of particular interactions.

Giving consideration to the emplaced nature of the space of appearance, and thus
its particular character with regard to the history and setting for any specific set of
political actions, also has profound implications for the dynamics of inclusion and
exclusion that have posed such concern from the beginning of this analysis. Focusing on
the experience of place, particularly with regard to its complexity and range of
constituent features, helps to make these inescapable inclusions and exclusions both
visible and negotiable. Return for a moment to the above example of tensions regarding
the fate of a forest area. Considering the space of appearance for this interaction with the
perspective of place would allow for the emergence of particular relations and dynamics
capable of calling into question the process through which particular concerns are
considered or dismissed, and how they are represented. For instance, commonalities
between the protesters and loggers – perhaps a shared history of growing up in the area,
or a love of hiking in the woods – could surface in a way that may encourage an
innovative and cooperative solution, while paying attention to the specifics of the area –
tree species, the variety of wildlife, the geological history of the land – could inspire new
approaches and relationships with the area while according respect and consideration to
elements of the more-than-human world. At the same time, however, there is a distinction
to be made between this idea of place informing the space of appearance and that of a more straightforward focus on a local approach; a space of appearance informed by place allows for and encourages a range of outward connections through the specificity of particular circumstance and experience.

### 6.5.2 Retaining Specificity and Passion

A second way in which associating understandings of place with the space of appearance may positively contribute to the development of a viable ecopolitics is its capacity for incorporating experiential elements typically deliberately excluded from political consideration. Extending the considerations of place-thought into the political realm, and by recognizing place as a vital part of this realm rather than as a mere contingency, allows for the specificity and passion of place experience to take a central political role. Rather than being relegated to the realm of private experience, as something personal, secondary and apolitical, the passion and commitment that places inspire can be helpfully considered as playing a constitutive role in political action. Chaia Heller (1999), arguing for the political importance and value of our desire for nature, writes that intellectual theorizing is of little value if it does not move us to action. And not just any kind of action, but compassionate and political action aimed at improving the lives of other human beings and of the more-than-human world. She views

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42 Consider again, for instance, the marina expansion and mud shrimp poem example given earlier, and the creative possibilities that could result from embracing and learning from this kind of passionate political expression, or even from acknowledging it as a political act.
this desire not as sourceless and impulsive, but as informed by an understanding of history, politics, and ethics; such a desire, for Heller, can help us to engage ourselves both critically and passionately in developing solutions to social and environmental problems. Linking this idea of a politics informed by desire with the above formulations of place that offer an account of where this desire comes from and the way in which the more-than-human world influences and is influenced by our relationships with it offers a means of incorporating and valuing this passion as a vital part of political action and thus as a crucial feature of the space of appearance.

Like Casey, Heller also argues for a strong connection between political action and our physical bodies. Outlining the means through which harnessing passion and desire can help to achieve political ends, Heller identifies the body as a crucial political tool:

> We need to appeal to as many media as possible to illustrate our analysis and vision, utilizing art, theatre, dance, electronic media, print media, speak-outs, and street demonstrations, illustrating the sensual presence and resistance of our physical bodies as well. In this way, illustrative opposition must be sensual: it should constitute the ultimate body politic in which we literally throw our bodies into social contestation, taking illustrative and expressive direct action. However, such actions must not only ‘show’ but they must also ‘tell’ a narrative, moving from the particular to the general or from the personal to the social and political (1999: 159)

This understanding of political action, while undoubtedly requiring a space of appearance in which such actions are acted out, made visible, and opened to contestation, also imagines this space of appearance as anything but abstract. Political action on this account very much involves literally embodying politics, and thus simultaneously requires the emplacement of politics. These political actions must be coming from
someplace in addition to someone, in a way that makes place not a contingent or generalizable feature of politics but rather an element that substantively shapes political action.

6.5.3 Place and Natality

Finally, incorporating considerations of place into the space of appearance has beneficial implications for fostering creativity and unpredictability in the political arena. Recalling Arendt’s association between natality and the miracle of newness and change, and Agamben’s vision of neotenic human life as one of possibility and absolute immanence, there is a way in which place, through perspectives that emphasize lived experience, indeterminacy, and constant construction and reconstruction, can provide a complementary accompaniment to these ideas of natality. Rather than focusing on the fixed and territorially bounded notion of place favoured by equally fixed and territorially bounded notions of politics, working with a more open formulation of place adds an informative dimension to the space of appearance. If place is understood as providing an opportunity for this coming into being of human – and political – possibility, and this place is itself understood as flexible, interconnected, and continually constructed, then it is likely that such a conception can foster political action that is based on, inspired by, and aiming for these same qualities. In addition, the way in which giving serious consideration to place experience allows the presence of and relationships with the more-
than-human world to become visible, the creative potential of more-than-human others may also be realized politically.

6.6 Politics and the More-Than-Human World

Having considered some of the ways in which a phenomenological understanding of place can productively inform the space of appearance, for the purpose of the present analysis it remains to explore how these two features may combine to respectfully incorporate others in the more-than-human world when working toward a viable ecopolitics. There will always be a certain amount of tension involved in attempts to incorporate consideration of and for more-than-human others into political decisions, as politics is itself a specifically human construction. However, the gathering function of place that Casey highlights, combined with the necessity for discursive openness and interpretive freedom advocated by both Sandilands and Vattimo, offer some promising potential in this regard.

As has been discussed above, one of the most important features of democratic politics for Sandilands is a failure of representation\textsuperscript{43} in general; this failure, and acknowledgement of and respect for the positive implications of this failure, are necessary particularly in order for the more-than-human world to be politically represented in a way that moves beyond conventional resource framings. Sandilands

\textsuperscript{43} Recall, from Chapter Five, the way in which this failure of representation is a positive and vital part of Sandilands’ radical democratic project: it is that which must be included if those elements of the more-than-human world that are beyond our ability to represent and comprehend are nevertheless to be accorded political consideration.
argues, “If the part of nature that is beyond language is to exert an influence on politics, there must be a political recognition of the limits of language to represent nature” (1999: 180). What Sandilands is here articulating is the way in which, in order to acknowledge and in a sense make visible the effect that the more-than-human world can have on politics, it is vital to avoid claims to have adequately represented such elements, and instead embrace a relationship to that which is unknown. In tandem with this failure of representation in terms of politics, it is possible to imagine a similar representational failure at the centre of place. As Casey puts it, “there is a hole in the heart of place – a lacuna even in the most stable, perduring place” (1996b: 463). This ‘hole’, this lack of established fixity in sustained practices of destabilization, is what Casey understands as generated by place conceived of as a constructed and reconstructed experience.

Somewhat bizarrely, it is this very lack, these holes and failures of representation, that offer the most promise for incorporating considerations of the more-than-human world into political action in ways that do not reduce to simplified human-centric evaluative terms such as resource, aesthetic, or even existence value. Once again it is Sandilands who provides a cogent example of this dynamic of consideration through unrepresentability. Using Marian Engel’s novella Bear as an example, she writes of the relationship that develops between the protagonist Lou and a wild black bear:

The bear, here, is the Other; he cannot be colonized, be made human, any more than Lou can “go wild,” can become the bear, much as she tries. The two cannot share a lifeworld, hers or his;

44 See Foster (1997) for an edited collection examining various ways of measuring and valuing elements of the natural world. As has been mentioned before, it is not my intent here to engage in debates regarding the potential benefits regarding this kind of valuation; it ought to be evident by this point, however, that this is not the kind of representation I am in search of in developing a viable ecopolitics.
they are Others to each other, sharing a mutual unknowing, a sense of the other’s irreconcilable difference (Sandilands 1999: 182)

Her point here is that while neither individual can fully enter the experiential lifeworld of the other, it is equally inappropriate to consider them as entirely separate from each other. She maintains that to assume that more-than-human actors are somehow apart from human discourse is to mistakenly dismiss the profound effect they can have on the constitution of human social life. At the same time, to suggest that they can be adequately incorporated into this human discourse is to lack due respect for their separate agency and Other-worldliness.

In a space of appearance understood in an abstract or disembodied way, it would be only too easy for others in the more-than-human world, and indeed, particular human actors, to be problematically excluded from consideration. However, by giving attention to the situatedness of particular spaces of appearance, to their specificity and diversity, it is much more likely that the presence of elements of the more-than-human-world will become visible. This is the case because, as more consideration is accorded to the historically rich and ecologically-informed experience of place that influences human action, the more open experiences of political moments can become, and with this can emerge new opportunities for respectfully addressing the more-than-human world. In addition, appealing to a space of appearance that is informed by place, and that pays attention to the constant presence and unrepresentability of the more-than-human, promotes an understanding of politics that is kept vibrant, open, and continually negotiated:
Wildness and politics are not stagnant realms of life, demarcated by clear and impermeable boundaries, they are characters of diverse possibilities, each enhancing the other. That, I think, is the democratic promise of paradox: essence eludes us, and openness is preserved in the contingent specificity of two interdependent moments (Sandilands 1999: 207)

It is in these ways that understanding the space of appearance for political action as one that is informed by a phenomenological conception of place can lead to a rich and promising beginning for the development of a viable ecopolitics.

6.7 Conclusion: Living a Viable Ecopolitics

In fact, the development of such an ecopolitics has already begun. Considering the strong connection Casey makes between bodies and place, and the emphasis in Arendt’s notion of politics on the need for political actions to become visible, one of Greenpeace’s 2006 anti-whaling campaign activities provides an interesting example. Greenpeace activists found a dead fin whale off the coast of Germany, and hung it outside of the Japanese embassy in Berlin as part of their campaign to get Japan to cease permitting whale hunting\(^45\). While reading about such a scene can certainly be emotionally evocative, it is the experience of being confronted with the presence of the whale that contains the potential for a truly politically transformative moment, and this experience was the object of the Greenpeace action. See Figure 1 for an idea of the scene facing employees at the Japanese embassy, and the sense in which such a strategy uses what Heller, in the quote above, called the ‘sensual presence and resistance of our physical

\(^45\) See http://www.spiegel.de/international/0,1518,396081,00.html for more detailed coverage of the protest.
bodies’ in order to make visible that which was being excluded from adequate political consideration.

Figure 1: Greenpeace Anti-Whaling Campaign (Spiegel Online 2006)

In a different but equally creative strategy, students at the University of Victoria in 2007 used their own bodies in political concert to form an image of that which they wished to protect. Shaping themselves into an outline of a spotted owl, these students participated in an aerial art demonstration orchestrated by the Western Canada Wilderness Committee to protest the logging of coastal old growth forests. See Figure 2 for the results of this project. In considering the potential of these kinds of actions to cultivate ecopolitical spaces of appearance, consider Lefebvre’s reflection on the
dynamics of embodied space: “this is a truly remarkable relationship: the body with the energies at its disposal, the living body, creates or produces its own space” (Lefebvre 1991: 170). In addition to this aspect of creating the political space they inhabit, these students, by physically embodying their political intentions, are making themselves visible and accountable for their political actions in an Arendtian sense. Finally, by shaping themselves into one of the elements of the more-than-human world for which they are seeking political consideration, but in a way that clearly does not purport to fully capture or represent it, thereby leaves space for that which is beyond representation to make its presence felt. Clearly these are not all of the ecopolitical implications that can be drawn out of this one moment of political engagement; that this is the case is demonstrative of how rich and complex these actions can be, and the kinds of considerations and responses they can generate.

Figure 2: Spotted Owl Aerial Art Event (Watt 2007)
What both of these above actions have in common is that they provide current examples of attempts to open up and enliven the kind of ecopolitical space of appearance that I have been theorizing. In such moments, an opportunity is presented to respectfully incorporate the more-than-human world into political consideration, attention is paid to the particular context of where such political actions are coming from, and political possibilities are opened up through an invitation to engage in reciprocal moments of questioning and negotiation. By engaging in such actions, these activists are putting a face, in Agamben’s terms, on the ecopolitical challenge, and in doing so demanding engagement with the way they are framing, interpreting, and communicating the ecological challenges they are experiencing.
Chapter 7 – Conclusion: Imagining a Viable Ecopolitics

7.1 Viable Ecopolitical Space

This inquiry began by posing two related questions: How can we act effectively to create positive environmental change? And what do we need to understand before we can begin to make these changes? The underlying driver of these questions was the recognition of the need to theorize an ecopolitics, and the present analysis has proceeded with this goal in mind. The aim has been to determine the conditions for ecopolitical practices that are viable: that are able not only to generate practicable solutions to social and environmental problems, but that also have the capacity to grow, develop, and sustain life. Through the creation of ecopolitical spaces of appearance, such practices have the potential to encourage the respectful consideration of the more-than-human world in political dialogues, to acknowledge and value where political actions are coming from, and to open up and maintain political possibilities through sustained questioning and negotiation.

This analysis began with an identification of the current ecopolitical challenge as one chiefly of the illusory disembeddedness of human being from the more-than-human world, and proceeded to consider phenomenological understandings of place as a potential means of countering this challenge. Through an examination of the current status of conceptions of politics within state-centric frameworks, it became clear that this arena as it is currently constituted is not a particularly promising avenue for developing
flourishing ecopolitical practices. However, by gaining a greater understanding of how political space is imagined, and developing an appreciation for the strong potential for it to be constructed differently, a much more lively conception of politics and the political life became possible.

Rather than attempting to construct an entirely new system of political organization, this analysis appealed to the political theory of Hannah Arendt as one that offers a valuable perspective on the political practices that are already constantly in operation, although subject to determined attempts by mainstream governmentality to render them apparently apolitical. Arendt’s formulation of politics, with its interrelated conditions of plurality, action, and visibility in the space of appearance, helped to highlight a broad range of activities that can be considered as politically significant. Combining a phenomenologically-influenced notion of place with Arendt’s political space of appearance provided a means of countering some of the problematic aspects of conventional political formulations, while at the same time offering a promising avenue for incorporating respectful consideration for the more-than-human world in the political arena.

While the above exploration has ranged through current understandings of the state and the origins of this understanding, alternative and more dynamic ways to frame the political, and equally dynamic and exciting ways to understand and politicize place, what has not been provided are proposals for how to go about developing and implementing viable ecopolitical practices. It has nowhere been set out what exactly such a politics should look like, or how precisely it ought to be established. At this point I
must direct focus to the other thread that has been running through the present analysis. In addition to searching for ways to avoid some of the deeply problematic consequences of accepted and elided political inclusions and exclusions, through theorists such as Sandilands and Vattimo I have worked to develop a notion of politics that has at its centre a commitment to discursive openness and continual destabilization. Such an analytic approach is emphatically not compatible with mainstream policy agendas, and the kind of ecopolitics explored here will not translate into conventional prescriptions and policies. Rather, attempts to generate such prescriptive formulations would run counter to the valuing of discursive openness and sustained political conversations that I have advocated for here.

In fact, the intent of this analysis has been to provide no definitive answers, but rather to propose de-limiting possibilities. I hope that this inquiry, and others like it, by posing challenging questions and interpretations, can help to promote events, situations, and practices that mainstream institutions are tempted to term ‘too political’. As Ronnie Lipschutz explains,

“Too political” is code for the creation of a space of appearance in which people can engage in environmental politics and praxis. In such spaces, people experience what is possible, and how action is a form of productive power. Politics in the space of appearance, whether focused on the watershed, the urban neighborhood, toxic wastes, global warming, or environmental disempowerment, is not only about the pursuit of shared interests, as collective action theorists generally describe it, or the mobilization of resources, as social movement theorists would have it. It is also about the application of power to produce.
People choose.
People decide.
This is an experience that institutionalized political processes – voting, lobbying, e-mailing representatives – never offer. It is an experience that illuminates the possibilities of politics in all of its raw, elemental form. It is disruptive and aggravating, but in terms of praxis, productive. It is not a “solution” to a problem, rather, it is a means of engaging with those things that ought not to be, but are. (Lipschutz 2004: 241-242)

The experience of political action conceived in this way, with its emphasis on the genuine agency of political actors and the disruptively productive potential of such action is precisely what I hope to encourage. This experience will not itself constitute a solution to the social and ecological problems we face, but it seems to me that it will be through iterated moments of such political actions in place that we can begin to engage constructively with these circumstances that ‘ought not to be, but are’. A resistance to settled answers, and a commitment to critical and sustained questioning of the conditions and authorizations of political choices, and what is at stake in these decisions, form a vital part of this experience.

Having made such an effort to free notions of politics and place from their conventional bonds of definition (Massey 2005), it makes little sense to imprison them once again in new bonds of my making, regardless of how superior or productive I may perhaps believe them to be. Instead, my aim has been to explore what can happen to politics and place when their conceptual foundations are deconstructed, and left to be continually deconstructed and negotiated. The initial worry with this move is that one is left with nothing: puzzle pieces painstakingly taken apart, and no idea of how to construct a picture out of them, or even what the picture ought to look like. That, of course, is also the greatest promise contained within this move. As Arendt makes clear, no matter how daunting a life of political action may seem, the capacity such a life offers for liberatory
moments of creativity and transformative change is valuable enough to keep engaging in such actions.

Thus what this investigation has ultimately been concerned with is the discovery of possibilities, and of multiple potential futures. It has worked to counter the problematic inclusions and exclusions, the monocultural thoughts, the chained and cemented political ‘imaginations’ that serve to cut off these possibilities and multiplicities in the interests of convenience, efficiency, or control. Considering the diversity of elements that make up the more-than-human world, and thus the diversity of responses and voices that are necessary to develop solutions that do as much as possible to respect all such constituents, the importance of plurality and openness in working toward solutions cannot be overstated. At the same time, however, it is important not to let this focus on discursive openness and lack of fixed definition become an excuse for avoiding the exercise of judgement and political position-taking. What it requires instead is a sense of accountability for particular actions, and a willingness to engage with others who may challenge such actions in an arena that fosters productive outcomes from such interactions. This is what I hope that Arendt’s space of appearance, when considered as substantively informed by place, can offer.

7.2 Where To Go From Here?

With this hope in mind, where should we go from here? The most important part of the answer to this query is contained within the question itself. It is, quite simply, an
acknowledgement that there is in fact a ‘here’ that we are coming from – an ecopolitical space that we inhabit. Despite the complexity of the formulations of politics and understandings of place canvassed in this inquiry, what it is most important to remember is the importance of here. Both the here of each of us as individual political actors, and the here of others with their own distinct experiences and understandings. What common engagement and negotiation in the ecopolitical space of appearance, through iterated series of political actions, reactions and realized consequences, can help us develop is an appreciation for the place of politics by providing the tools for constructing, sustaining, and reconstructing such places in common and valuing the epistemological, biological, and political diversity that exists within these places. It is my hope that out of these common places, when accompanied by a commitment to the continual questioning of the conditions of their construction and the authorizations permitted within them, will come the beginning of viable ecopolitical practices.

What is required, of course, is that such an ecopolitics be worked out in practice; negotiated, applied, challenged, and reformulated through countless moments of political action in place. In considering the potentially transformative change that can result from such attempts to inhabit ecological spaces of appearance, and the vital importance of these spaces in achieving ecopolitical goals, it is helpful to once again appeal to Lefebvre:

A revolution that does not produce a new space has not realized its full potential; indeed it has failed in that it has not changed life itself, but has merely changed ideological superstructures, institutions or political apparatuses. A social transformation, to be truly revolutionary in character, must manifest a creative capacity in its effects on daily life, on language and on space –
though its impact need not occur at the same rate, or with equal force, in each of these areas. (1991: 54)

In working through and embracing these political actions in place, and by manifesting this creative capacity, politics can cease to be regarded as irrelevant, or dangerous, or inaccessible, and instead become a means through which a diverse range of concerns regarding the human and more-than-human world can appear and be respectfully and productively addressed.
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