CHAPTER 14

Non-Human Others and Spatial Knowledge in Canadian Prairie Writing

Janne Korkka
(University of Turku)

What kind of spatial knowledge is projected in Canadian literary texts via figures that are other than human? Parallel to the rise of ecocriticism and animal studies in recent decades, Canadian writing and criticism has sought new ways to represent agency and spatial knowledge in terms which perpetuate neither the traditional national/colonial representations of place and space, nor human authority over other actors who prove capable of transforming both human and other selves. This chapter explores ways to represent spatial knowledge that is other-than-human as proposed in poetry from the Canadian Prairies. While I focus on selected poetry by two prominent Prairie authors, Robert Kroetsch (1927–2011) and Lorna Crozier (1948–), I propose these texts shed light on questions that are also highly topical in reading and writing in other genres, both within Canada and beyond. They explore spatial presence and spatial practices which question human priority and which are not derived from hegemonic discourses, such as Canada's colonial heritage. I use the term *spatial practice* in the sense proposed by the French philosopher of the everyday Michel de Certeau. He discusses the use of space in ways that were not planned, and which thus become a form of resistance to hegemonies, resistance comprised of "multiform […] tricky and stubborn procedures that elude discipline" (96) as they entail actors using space in ways that were not envisaged by hegemonic authorities. Acknowledging spatial practices which are not controlled by hegemonic knowledge are crucial in attempts to grasp and negotiate environmental change, be it the global impact of rapid climate change, less cataclysmic shifts in localised land use or a search for more sustainable relations with lived space.

I focus on the Canadian Prairies as they are among the last areas in the two American continents where full incorporation into the governing structures of a colonial society took place in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Colonial and national discourses rapidly took over, but, in Prairie literature, they also began to unravel quickly in particular from the 1960s onwards as

both writers with immigrant family roots like Kroetsch, Rudy Wiebe, Aritha van Herk and Indigenous authors like Maria Campbell and Beatrice Culleton Mosionier sought to engage with voices and ideas silenced by hegemonies. My goal is to formulate strategies of reading for texts which arise from spaces that were largely silenced in discourses of colonisation and settlement and where spatial knowledge held by the Indigenous peoples or proposed by the material trace of their presence, let alone spatial knowledge projected through animal others, was ignored by new settlers.

Outside Hegemonic Narratives

Engaging with spatial knowledge deposited outside human words is a challenging project for both fiction writers and critics: how to put into words that which is not expressed in words? The way I use the concept *spatial knowledge* is closely related to de Certeau's spatial practice, and I will further illustrate what I mean by the former through a reading of Kroetsch's poem "Stone Hammer Poem" (1973). I propose the poem is a crucial Prairie text, which poses questions about space that are essential for developing a foundation for both artistic and critical readings of untapped spatial knowledge. This discussion also provides a foundation to my argument about representing animal knowledge in the later sections of this chapter. While Kroetsch's essays and criticism on his views on writing and space have been widely discussed in critical work, his poems also directly speak to theorisations of space and provide invaluable insights for building a foundation to formulate critical readings of Prairie literature. Pamela Banting wrote in 1998 that "no one has yet taken seriously the influence of gophers on Kroetsch's poetics" (201), which she then proceeded to do in the article which focused on the contributions of small mammals to Robert Kroetsch's literary technique. In a similar manner, the possibility of reading Kroetsch's poetry as a crucial expression of his theoretical considerations on space tends to be overlooked, but it is highly illuminating with regard to forms of agency whose impact remains underrepresented, particularly those forms of agency that are other-than-human. The discussion of what I mean by spatial knowledge which does not revolve around human selfhood alone as inspired by a reading of "Stone Hammer Poem" will also begin to shed light on complex questions about animal spatial agency, which I explore in the subsequent sections.

"Stone Hammer Poem" is not as extensive as the long poems of several thousand words for which Kroetsch is best known, but it is over 500 words long. Like his long poems, it is crafted in a manner which allows for some characterisation and historical narrative typical of longer prose texts. Yet, the central "character" or rather centrepiece in the poem is not a single human self or a human collective but an inanimate object: a stone hammer which was once

crafted by the Indigenous people and then fell out of use to resurface in the lives of three generations of men from a Prairie settler family. The poem employs a human voice as a speaker, but the speaking persona veers towards the possibility that the most important knowledge he encounters might reside outside human consciousness and be bestowed on inanimate objects and the spatial trace of animal presence. The latter two make fragmented appearances in complex temporal and spatial relations where at least those human (settler) selves who seem most prominent in the text hold little or no power. Author and critic Nicole Markotić (5) notes that "Stone Hammer Poem" "celebrate[s] a way of cataloguing found, non-literary material—thus cataloguing a then-absent rural written history." The novelist George Bowering reads the poem in his essay, "Stone Hammer Narrative" ([1985] 2017), in ways that foreground interrogating the certainty of knowledge built into national/colonial narratives and raises "Stone Hammer Poem" to the centre of unravelling such certainties. Bowering originally wrote his essay in 1985, but author and critic Larissa Lai's note from 2021 confirms that the impact of national and colonial narratives remains at the centre of studying Canadian – and other – literatures:

> The idea that the nation is the best container for a literature may or may not survive; this could be a good thing insofar as CanLit was conceived in the first place as a liberatory project, but also a national and colonial one. If its colonial roots threaten to overtake its liberatory ones, I think it is okay to move on and reframe. (186)

"Stone Hammer Poem" reframes the settler-coloniser narratives that wrote the Canadian Prairies into existence and emphasises elusive fragments of knowledge and experience which are temporally distant but spatially connected. The poem does not bestow the power to speak on the worn-out stone hammer, but the latter has narrative power which derails both colonial hegemony and human authority over narratives of space. The poem tempts readers with echoes of the narratives of colonization and settlement: this could be a world where the stone maul is never more than a random object "found in a wheatfield" (3). This could be a world where the lives of immigrant farmers perpetually revolve around "ripening wheat" (8), not the past of their place which they barely see even when they stumble on its remnants like the farmer whose plough by accident hits the stone hammer in the poem (5). To echo Markotić, that which is found, and which in the case of the stone hammer is neither written nor spoken, can carry traces of worlds which continue to linger in the Canadian Prairies. They include a world where an Indigenous woman used the stone as a maul to work on buffalo meat (4) before her people and the buffalo were both pushed into the fringe so that the Canadian Prairies could become what the Empire wanted. Those desires dictated "a consciously constructed space, an entity

deliberately produced in order to fulfil specific economic and imperial needs" which was "deliberately reconstructed […] as paradisal farmland" (Calder and Wardhaugh 4).

By raising the temptations of that imperial narrative, "Stone Hammer Poem" rejects them. The presence of the hammer pulls the Prairie lives it touches off the track imposed on them by what Kroetsch in the essay collection, *A Likely Story*, calls "the […] full page of our knowing" (95). That is, narratives perpetuated by the British Empire about its expansion and dominance and the emergence of what would be called Canada; as well as the American, mythological romance of the West, which trickles north from the Prairies of the United States. The stone hammer's presence does not allow for the certainty of knowing the past on which such narratives rely. The poem recounts how the hammer was used for by First Nations, perhaps by a child who "lost it in / the prairie wool or" then by the Indigenous woman who "left it in / the brain of a buffalo or" (4). It was an object of some value but too ordinary to be enshrined. Thus, it kept moving from one hand to another to be lost in child's play, or in hunting culture work, or as the closing word of the fragment quoted above suggests, simply "or"; lost in something that is now unknowable.

The stone hammer does not return to 'use' in the sense described above, but its presence rewrites spatial knowledge held by Prairie dwellers as it reveals the fragility of the strategies the Prairie men in the speaker's family had for remembering their past. The grandfather and the father knew the Prairies through a narrative of ownership, personal and colonial, but the stone maul raises a haunting doubt about that knowledge.[1] The hammer was discovered in a field which, during their time, both men, as the speaker notes, only *thought* were theirs (4). The stone maul draws our gaze towards that which is poorly remembered and known and forces the Prairie men who keep rediscovering its presence to ponder other ways of knowing and remembering than what they have relied on.

As the stone hammer continues to reside on what was thought to be family property, the authority of the narrative of white colonial possession crumbles. The hammer brings to writing that which was not written for the First Nations people who may have lost the stone, but it also brings forth lives on a Prairie farm which no longer revolve around cultivating the land. Such lives may be too mundane to be worth remembering for a nation or an empire which wants to produce the "paradisal farmland" that Calder and Wardhaugh write about (4), particularly as the poem shows how that construction does not last for either individuals or communities.

[1] Kroetsch was fascinated by doubts and incomplete knowledge; see, for example, *The Lovely Treachery of Words* (23).

The speaker notes how his father's retirement years on the Prairie farm are defined by absence: he misses his family, both his parents who are gone and his children who have left; he misses the horses and the sounds of the machines which enabled his work (7). The only thing that remains with him from a life of working the Prairie land is the stone maul his father's plough once hit and which he now keeps in a basket on the porch (7). The speaker closes the poem by saying that he now has the stone maul and keeps it on his desk, where he writes poems "for that / stone hammer" in the hot Prairie wind which carries the smells of Prairie space: cutting grass, or wheat fields, or buffalo blood (8). As above, "or" is a key word: the mere presence of the stone hammer forces the speaking persona to remember a full continuum of Prairie lives all at once, all of which are *other* – other than himself, other than white settler, or other than human.

The speaker is a poet, not a farmer, and thus perhaps more familiar with cut grass than ripening wheat, but he would remember the wheat from his childhood, and the stone maul projects the knowledge of how men in his family remembered their lives as revolving around the ripening wheat. The stone hammer also forces him to remember the Prairies of the buffalo hunters: people who were once pushed aside but who would not disappear, certainly not when their most mundane creation, a stone hammer, has the narrative power to derail colonial hegemony. And the stone hammer forces him to consider animal presence in the Prairies: the life his father knew would not have been possible without the horse, and the lives of Prairie hunting cultures would not have been possible without the buffalo. "Stone Hammer Poem" finds little continuity between the various levels of temporal and spatial knowledge evoked by exploring Prairie lives, except for the continuity that emerges from the stone hammer being continually anchored into one space. Through this spatial link, the experience and knowledge of various agents from different times intertwine and speak for the importance of turning our gaze towards that which is other-than-human.

Outside Human Narratives

If reading "Stone Hammer Poem" illustrates the complexity of questions of knowledge related to space, then other examples from Prairie poetry propose that a focus on animal presence further heightens the challenge. The colonial narratives that pushed aside the Indigenous peoples also sought to supplant native animals, most famously the buffalo, which was almost hunted to extinction in the 1800s. Many smaller animal species native to these regions were also hunted and displaced, but they never gained the aura of tragedy which would later make the buffalo extremely visible and valued. The animals and their trace that I discuss do not

represent the companion species – pets, domestic animals – on which animal studies often focuses as the prolific branch of literary studies and other scholarship that has emerged particularly after the turn of the millennium. Inspired by J. M. Coetzee's ponderings in *The Lives of Animals* on how animal presence calls humans to think our way "into the being of another" (35), I seek to show that animal presence in contemporary Prairie writing dismantles hegemonic human spatial knowledge. Meaningful human stories in the midst of spatial upheavals caused by climate change must not only seek new ways to interrogate human initiative, but they must also think their way into the being of other species. I argue that the resistance of the animals in Prairie poetry to hosting human self-representation, even resistance to simply becoming known, is what we need to learn from to develop more ethical ways to negotiate between selves and others, human or indeed *other*.

Canadian writing has recognised and is dismantling the historical desires to push wild animals further and further away from spaces that humans claim for themselves. The focus of such reversals varies as it is necessary to both recognise the processes which rendered animals invisible and to craft forms of language through which they can return to narratives of space and place. Further, that return can only be meaningful if it is conducted in a manner which does not reduce animals to echoes of human benevolence allowing their return, or to simple extensions of human voices reinventing their own relation to space. Historically, Prairie re-settlement and incorporation into a Neo-European state reduced animal species, such as the beaver or the various ground squirrels that are called gophers in Western Canada, to supplements to human presence. They were only relevant as a resource for the fur industry, or then they were simply to be eradicated as pests that disturbed the farming economy[2] that settlers built.

Kroetsch's poem "The Ledger" illustrates the processes of how colonisation and settlement pushed native animals aside. The poem notes that in order "[t]o raise cattle and hogs," the emerging Canadian settler-farmer communities would once simply "kill the bear," the marten, the beaver, and many other animals (13). They were eradicated from a particular location and, if that was not possible, they were forced to retreat out of sight. The structures that settlers imposed on newly acquired spaces became a lasting intrusion into animal spaces in ways that Kroetsch recognises in the poem "Excerpts from the Real World," which shows how

[2] See, for example, Calder who discusses the warlike language in advertisements etc. that characterises the early 1900s Prairie farmers' attempts to eradicate gophers. Calder recognises that sensitivities have changed and some Prairie dwellers are horrified by such hatred towards other living beings, but she also gives examples of how for others, animal presence in the Prairie continues to be an intrusion into their desires driven by "those fundamentally western concerns: land and power" (393).

the roads that emerged to connect the farming communities continue to limit animal visibility and animal lives in contemporary Canada:

> *7/6/85*
>
> We're on the road to Lake Winnipeg. The pelicans are measuring
> the sky for a new suit of clouds. The gophers measure the width of
> the road with their lives. (224)

The martens, beavers, and gophers Kroetsch depicts here and in "The Ledger" seem not to appear to claim permanent spatial visibility. Instead, they are placed on the historical sidelines of colonisation and settlement as Canada expands westward. In the contemporary setting, they are shown to carry the burden of human needs and infrastructure imposed on their space. Animal actions, such as the gopher's need to move across the Prairie landscape despite the deathly peril of cars and roads, are threatened by human initiative as animal lives are forfeit at the face of human presence.

This is, however, only a narrow glimpse into the breadth of readings of Kroetschian and other animals in recent Canadian writing. I argue that Prairie poetry shows the animals' continuing presence more than their absence: even fleeting encounters with nonhuman trace confirm animal visibility and spatial agency. These animals are not stage props employed to craft a more persuasive representation of the human Prairies, and they resist anthropomorphic desires which Philip Armstrong discusses: they do not imitate human strategies of "conscious planning, decision-making and choice" (3). Neither do they appear in order to speak "on behalf of [their] species to a 'civilized' audience" (213) which, by definition, could only be a human audience. Instead, their presence signals non-human agency which disassembles and denies human conceptions of superior agency and knowledge of space.

It seems inevitable that we will never come to fully grasp the spatial agency of animals: they often operate beyond our sight, or *below* our sight like the ground-burrowing gophers do. Their ultimate challenge may be that they operate outside the languages we possess to represent spatial relations. Kroetsch and Crozier frequently foreground various smaller Western Canadian mammals in their poetry, and Crozier extends this practice to birds, such as crows and ravens. As noted above, the appearances of gophers, minks, and martens often only claim a line or two in Kroetsch's poetry, but this does not suggest that the poems seek to push them aside. Rather, listening to the brevity of these encounters reflects a narrative strategy which Kroetsch discusses in *The Lovely Treachery of Words*, a strategy based on "trusting to fragments of story, letting them speak their incompleteness" (24). He sees in this a chance to address that which is in constant change, that which resides outside hegemonic narratives that come to us fully

worded and resistant to diverse readings. I trust the allure of fragments Kroetsch articulates: they open ways to engage with animals that constantly seek to evade our gaze, agents whose presence indicates narratives which can never be fully worded through human language. Thus, fleeting moments of animal presence become essential in a literary search for ways to make untapped forms of agency visible.

As we look beyond our companion species, mapping animal agency and their spatial knowledge becomes a project increasingly marked by both incompleteness and absence of words. We may only access those fragments of animal lives that they allow us to see, or those that we witness in moments when animals remain oblivious of or indifferent to human presence. Further, the spatial knowledge that animals possess does not manifest through human words. Kroetsch and Crozier illustrate how nonhuman trace gathers momentum through brevity and incompleteness. The animals in Kroetsch's poetry typically do not speak with a voice of their own. In that sense they are incomplete, and the brief, fragmented appearances of non-human agents are easy to overlook in favour of human voices. The latter also tend to be thoroughly fragmented in Kroetsch's poetry, but the form of the long poem he favoured allows human selves to gain various layers of character in terms of locality, history, and, thus, a voice of their own in ways that are much easier to register than in the case of animals.

Yet, Kroetsch's writing also shows how brief animal appearances may thwart human agency. His most famous long poem "Seed Catalogue" contemplates growing things in the Prairies, and, for example, ponders how the poem's speaker himself grows to adulthood in various guises: gardener (31), lover (32, 34), and poet (37, 38, 39, 40). The poem also zigzags from instances of declaring Western Canada as the best place in the world to grow cauliflowers (37) or other staple Prairie foods (31). It also asks questions of how to grow the early 1900s Prairie immigrant towns themselves (35, 36); and of how to grow "*a past*/to live in" (35) for new immigrant farming communities who have no past in Prairie landscapes.

Importantly, while the new settlers may try, they cannot escape the presence of agents who do have a past in Prairie landscapes. The continuing presence of the Indigenous peoples is recognised, but "Seed Catalogue" foregrounds animal presence and their spatial practices as perhaps the most powerful interruption to the settler-farmer's takeover of the Prairies. This interruption extends both to physical and ontological spaces where the settlers try to sow not only beans, potatoes, and cauliflowers but also their particular ways of knowing space. When the speaker in the poem tries his hand in Prairie gardening, the reward goes to others: "I planted some melons, just to see what would / happen. Gophers ate everything" (36).

The speaker speaks no more of the loss, but the general framework of his Prairie experience suggests he was not surprised by the gophers' irreverence to his labour. Earlier in the poem, he recounts a summer of epic tension between his father and a badger. The badger remains without words but lingers on the stage, insists on visibility at the face of deathly peril, and presents itself as a powerful presence which refuses to have superior human agency imposed on itself:

> the badger was digging holes in / the potato patch […].
> My father took the double-barrelled shotgun out into the
> potato patch and waited.
>
> Every time the badger stood up, it looked like a little man, come out
> of the ground. Why, my father asked himself—Why wouldso fine a / fellow live under the ground? […]
>
> My father couldn't shoot the badger. […] The badger dug an-
> other hole. My father got mad again. They carried on like that all summer.
> ("Seed Catalogue" 31)

The stand-off continues for a couple more stanzas, but the end result remains: the speaker's father could not shoot the badger. Human desires are not allowed to preside over animals, and the poem puts man and badger on a level playing field: the farmer goes through the cycle of planting and harvesting the potatoes, over and over. So does the badger although it skips the sowing and jumps straight to the reaping. The farmer uses the plough to burrow into the ground; and the badger uses its paws; they both work the land which sustains them by its produce. The two do not share words through which they could address the other, but, in Coetzee's words, their parallel spatial practices suggest they are digging their way "into the being of another" (35).

Susan McHugh writes about how "nonhuman traces" in literature may "betray human attempts at self-representation" (9). Since the badger seems to mirror both the farmer's physical labour and the latter's desires for the produce of the Prairie land, does the animal remain an elaborate reflection that allows Prairie-dwelling humans to speak of themselves? Further, if the badger "looked like a little man" ("Seed Catalogue" 31) when it stood up, does it join the ranks of "supplements to human subject forms" which McHugh (3) recognises as commonplace in

animal representation? I believe not: the badger rejects not just human words but even human bullets simply through its presence and never awards answers to questions about its desires. By insisting on its own spatial practices and both utter silence and bold visibility at the face of a loaded gun, the animal moves far beyond a supplement and dwarfs human spatial agency.

A single gopher, mink, or marten in Kroetsch's poetry may not seem to suggest a conclusive push for the reader to read them as more than supplements, but they should not be read in isolation from parallel animal encounters which abound in his writing. The reader should trust fragments and let them speak of something larger, as Kroetsch suggests in *The Lovely Treachery Words*, and accept incomplete animal stories as a signal that they possess complex knowledge and desires concerning Prairie space that cannot be put into human words. As Kroetsch's poems refrain from imposing such words on animals, they highlight the need for us to acknowledge the existence of ways of knowing that do not bend to the words we have this far crafted for spatial knowledge. Together such encounters with animal trace speak of nonhuman agency which poses an ethical obligation for us to respond as, to echo the philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, the simple presence of an other requires human selves to respond without seeking to reduce the other into manageable forms (77). This obligation extends to, in Coetzee's words, "think[ing] ourselves into the being of another" (35), and the obligation is not governed by a hierarchy in which human others or our knowable companion species supersede those in which we see no supplement to human selves.

Otters and others

Kroetsch seems fascinated by forms of agency that manifest through agents that do not use words to elaborate on the ways in which they know themselves, other living entities, or indeed the spaces they inhabit. Lorna Crozier's poetry further broadens the search for ways to represent animal knowledge and agency: some of her animals appropriate human words to speak, and some of her poems openly elaborate on the kind of knowledge suggested by animal presence. Crozier usually operates with a much shorter poetic form than Kroetsch, whose long poems may be up to 20–30 pages in length and incorporate extensive prose passages. Crozier frequently only gives 10–20 lines or a page or two for a full poem. Despite differences in form, Crozier's poems also heavily rely on incompleteness, on letting fragments speak. Her crows, gophers, and otters may speak with a voice of their own, or sometimes appear in poems where the speaker is a human voice. Importantly, such human voices recognise the presence of agency or knowledge that can be unfamiliar, enviable, superior or all at once; and certainly other-than-human with regard to time, emotion, and indeed spatial presence.

Crozier's poem "Late July" opens by declaring that a crow has knowledge of everyone's future fates (53). The brief poem does not elaborate on what that knowing entails but suggests it concerns humans. Common and ordinary Prairie birds, crows, keep appearing as a common site of extraordinary knowledge in Crozier's work. Her "Compendium on Crows" speaks of crow brains which do not arrange knowledge into different elements but just know it all "at once" (25). The poem "Crow's Take on Man" shows crows that transgress crucial human boundaries: they claim a voice of their own and take up human words to speak about humans. They recognise that humans take time to use many words when a caw would be enough; that human hearts work like crows' but taste bitter; and that humans do not recognise knowledge offered to them by wind, rain, and animals (79).

While adopting human words as a means of self-expression might seem to represent an immediate jump to supplementing human selves, the crows allow for little or no dilution of their distinctive separateness. They speak about humans only to confirm the incompleteness of human selfhood as they perceive a lack of understanding for other species and weather phenomena that define the everyday space of human lives. The crows toy with ideas which could suggest human self-representation by proxy as they compare language and the inner workings of body and mind, but they find nothing very appealing. Most importantly, human words do not domesticate the crows but accentuate their alienness: as they talk about knowing what human hearts taste like, they propose they *know* human beings in a profoundly disturbing way. They do not suggest they plan a murder by crows, but their words do nothing to supplement human subjectivity.

Perhaps inevitably, non-human knowledge in literary text is guised in human words. Kroetsch's avoidance of such words is perhaps his way of crafting a position which does not supplement human subjects. Crozier seeks additional strategies to preserve non-human trace: she is after forms of language that do not bestow animals with the desire to emulate human selves, and which show animal presence pushing human selves to realise they themselves may be incomplete. In Crozier's poem "Otter" (2015), the woman speaker is first appalled to discover that an otter has intruded in the space she considers intimately her own as the animal has been killing fish and turtles in her backyard pond. But when a wildlife officer discusses trapping and killing the otter, the speaker is thrown back to an encounter where she saw an otter lazing on her property. She does not recall a menace but ponders what it would be like to feel in her blood "a different way of being" and asks, "Would things be better if she could see herself as otter?" (27).

The speaker does not explain what she means by 'better,' but her transformation is clear. The speaker and the otter never interact directly; the otter offers her nothing other than a brief gaze of itself engaged in its own spatial practices, practices not governed by the designs that the speaker can imagine for herself. She has begun to think herself into the being of another: the otter remains itself, but the trace of its presence makes the human self aware of its own incompleteness, and of the way in which human words are inadequate to contain ways of being that other-than-human trace suggests. Kroetsch writes in *A Likely Story* that "perhaps the gaze is all we have that is special to us, as writers in this landscape" (69), and Crozier's otter and Prairie crows seem to confirm that the gaze is crucial in instigating transformative knowledge. Their appearances are too brief to accumulate the layers of character and history that narrative easily develops, but they appear for long enough to set their gaze on human selves and declare our hegemony of knowledge an illusion. Or if they momentarily become the object of human gaze, their mere presence can instigate a desire to rewrite human selfhood.

As in the case of the badger and the farmer in Kroetsch's "Seed Catalogue," Crozier's animal and human selves remain separate actors. Yet, their presence in a shared space indicates, to again echo de Certeau, that they are writing distinct but intertwined chapters in a spatial "'text' they write without being able to read it" (93), and in which insisting on human hegemony renders the text permanently flawed. If we declare such signals undesirable, we also declare undesirable various ways of being in space and of seeing space which only manifest through animal presence. I believe that engaging with spatial practices which are not our own is crucial in attempts to grasp and negotiate any environmental change – not to automatically adopt or mimic them but to better grasp practices that do not revolve around human selves.

Our species is not fully prepared to meet the escalating spatial change of the Anthropocene, and we cannot know which animal species might possess spatial practices that give them an advantage in negotiating such upheavals. Neither can we directly barter with different animal species for knowledge as our words cannot accommodate theirs. But if we move away from insisting on our words and our knowledge as I propose above, we may be able to craft a shared position with non-human others where non-human trace can force fully worded, hegemonic human knowledge to open up for diverse readings. Even if this does not give us the key to negotiate all spatial upheaval, it will show that the solutions we can imagine on our own are not the only ones. As Kroetsch and Crozier look beyond human hegemony, they project animals as complex figures who claim presence in Prairie space in ways which incite new human narratives, too. Their writings also shed light on the steps required to represent spatial knowledge for which we have no words until we engage with the spatial agency of actors

that are other than human. As human words become subject to the gaze of gophers, crows, otters, and others, they pose an obligation for us to ponder what is revealed when the task of negotiating both human and non-human trace is carried out from positions outside hegemonic knowledge and outside the sphere of human privilege.

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