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## A New Gentleness: Affective Ficto-regionality

Ecology must stop being associated with the image of a small nature-loving minority or with qualified specialists.

Ecology in my sense questions the whole of subjectivity and capitalistic power formations, whose sweeping progress cannot be guaranteed to continue ...<sup>1</sup>

### 1: A Generalized Ecology

As the quotation above shows, Félix Guattari had definite and profound views on the state of ecology, wanting to broaden its parameters to include "subjectivity" and "power formations", since, he argued, "the ecological crisis can be traced to a more general crisis of the social, political and existential", asking

How do we change mentalities, how do we reinvent social practices that would give back to humanity ... a sense of responsibility, not only for its own survival but equally for the future of all life on the planet, for animal and vegetable species, likewise for incorporeal species such as music, the arts, cinema, the relation with time, love and

compassion for others, the feeling of fusion at the heart of the cosmos?<sup>2</sup>

This coupling of responsibility for the “cosmos” with an expanded ecology including the “incorporeal” and the “corporeal”, ideas, affects, and emotions is a fascinating, speculative, and productive route to “trigger creative sparks” and “engender pockets of awareness” through “elaboration and intervention”.<sup>3</sup> Through shifting perspectives and deliberately introducing innovative terminology and ways of thinking and writing that challenge established structures and definitions, Guattari generates what he calls “new collective assemblages of enunciation” or “different ways of seeing and of making the world”.<sup>4</sup> This “expanded ecological consciousness” rejected “archaizers and folklorists” who for too long had cornered arguments about ecology through a narrow attention upon “nature-loving” and “specialism” in favour of new social practices and politics that insisted “issues of a very local nature” were always linked with “the global problems of our era”.<sup>5</sup> Guattari believed, therefore, ecology had to be this expanded triangulation of “social”, “mental” and “environmental”; famously, what he termed his Three Ecologies.

This chapter explores this “triangulation” in dialogue with my concept of affective critical regionality as a way of seeing

the local as both charged and dynamic, working critically across the social / mental / environmental spheres through the active prism of regionality, employing Kathleen Stewart's fictocritical writing whose careful attunements follow lines, webs, connections spinning out and thrown together into assemblages of affect as lived "compositionality" rather than a dead specimen, already defined and represented for us.<sup>6</sup> To this end, the chapter examines how Stewart's fictocriticism combined with her attention to the local or regional allows such productive attunements to emerge. In one of its founders, Stephen Muecke's, briefest definitions of fictocriticism, "it tells a story and makes an argument at the same time", blurring the lines between established practices, creating the unsettling "intersection, on the page, of storytelling with philosophical arguments - making the two indistinguishably reliant on each other" and producing, as a consequence of this intersection, "valid fictional contributions to non-fictional debates".<sup>7</sup> Many of these aspects are summed up in Amanda Nettelbeck's words:

Fictocriticism might most usefully be defined as hybridized writing that moves between the poles of fiction ("invention"/"speculation") and criticism ("deduction"/"explication"), of subjectivity ("interiority") and objectivity ("exteriority"). It is writing that brings

the “creative” and the “critical” together - not simply in the sense of placing them side by side, but in the sense of mutating both, of bringing a spotlight to bear upon the known forms in order to make them say something else.<sup>8</sup>

Such fictocritical approaches enable a nuanced appreciation of the world as what Jane Bennett calls “vibrant matter”, and can, I believe, aid a reconsideration of Guattari’s notion of “generalized ecology” or “ecosophy”.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, such reflexive strategies might enable us “to think transversally”, and so appreciate “resonances, alliances and feedback loops between various regimes, signifying and non-signifying, human and non-human, natural and cultural, material and representational”.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, Guattari’s interest in aesthetics and “mental ecology” and his call for “new ecological practices” confronts capitalism’s deleterious effects “in everyday life: individual, domestic, material, neighbourly, creative or one’s personal ethics” and pleads for “political regeneration ... as an ethical, aesthetic, and analytic engagement ... a new gentleness”.<sup>11</sup> Integrated World Capitalism operated for Guattari as a process of limitation and control, environmental damage, climate change and uneven power relations, forming a “sedative discourse”, squeezing creative difference into routines of predictability, infantilization, and sameness.<sup>12</sup> Life’s potential refrains, in

other words, were compromised by this capitalist consensus of consumerism, media blandness and curtailed values but could be countered by Guattari's forms of dissensus celebrating active difference, "infinite variety", underpinned by a "new gentleness" of affective experience, responsibility, attunement, and mutuality.<sup>13</sup> To re-energize Guattari's ideas, I will put them in dialogue with Kathleen Stewart's "ordinary affects", the title of her second book, in which fictocritical vignettes of place, action, and descriptive detail assemble the inflections and surprises of the everyday as an emergent and sensitive form of ecology, both proximate and engaged in the complex relations of worlding.<sup>14</sup>

To demonstrate these connections, I focus here on how fictocriticism can be closely aligned to Guattari's "ecology of the virtual" which is "as pressing as ecologies of the visible world ... [and] will not simply attempt to preserve the endangered species of cultural life but equally to engender conditions for the creation and development of unprecedented formations of subjectivity that have never been seen and never felt".<sup>15</sup> The Guattarian subject is, therefore, as Genosko makes clear, "an entangled assemblage of many components, a collective (heterogeneous, multiple) articulation of such components before and beyond the individual; the individual is like a transit

station for changes, crossings, and switches".<sup>16</sup> Stewart's attention to subjectivity as a "transit station" registers and forms an "idiosyncratic map of connections", visible and "virtual", material and immaterial, tracking events and "forms of attention and attachment" through which a different, expanded ecology emerges.<sup>17</sup> Through her fictocritical engagement, this becomes an active composition of affective regionality revealed as an assemblage or "bloom space"; "an event that jumps between landscape and bodies of all kinds ... ambient, and therefore atmospheric ... It strikes the senses. It pulls hard matter into alignment with a composition".<sup>18</sup> "One gets to know" such assemblages (regionality is the assemblage here), "not through representation but through affective contamination", argues Guattari, as "hyper-complex compositions" of affects pulsing through the "transit station" akin to the way aesthetics work through and within us as a "block of sensation": "I am no longer as I was before. I am swept away by a becoming other, carried beyond my familiar existential Territories".<sup>19</sup> Utilizing Stephen Muecke's work on and of fictocriticism as a guide, I will show how Stewart realigns anthropology and ecology to tell new stories of place, things, and people, forming regionality as a "praxic opening-out which constitutes the essence of 'eco'-art".<sup>20</sup>

Affective critical regionality is, therefore, not made from “coherent imprints or effects of something else” imposed and fixing place, nature, and people, but rather “lived modalities and a history of social production and uses”, “qualities and affects” that are dynamic, in composition; “living forms that generate a zone of connectivity” not because of “what they are” in some already-decided definition or territory, but because of “what they do” and how they provoke, project and vibrate with interrelations and trajectories.<sup>21</sup> Feeling and thinking regionality in this way generates a “prismatic ecology”, a “geography of what happens”, a “speculative topography of the everyday” captured in the unconventional, affective contamination or “incorporeal ecosystem” of fictocriticism.<sup>22</sup> To experience regionality, therefore, demands both the “energetics” needed to reflect and speculate about the motions of its changing nature whilst simultaneously carrying the weight of its role as a “carapace of spent and living forms”.<sup>23</sup> Thus, affective critical regionality is always ecological since it preserves and activates, holds onto and lets go, contains and edges; it worlds.

## 2: Fictocriticism

Stewart’s “work is an experiment that writes from the intensities in things. It asks what potential modes of knowing, relating or attending to things are already being lived in

ordinary rhythms, labors, and the sensory materiality of forms of attunement to worlds".<sup>24</sup> Learning from Martin Heidegger's "The Thing", an essay she often refers to, Stewart's approach is "attending to what is near" in order to appreciate how things "stand forth" through their relations with the world.<sup>25</sup> Rejecting narrow acts of "mere information", representation, or scientific, universal definitions, Heidegger enacted a deep opening-up of the apparently inert thing, like a simple jug, to its fullest "round dance" with the world, standing forth as a relational process of interconnections, "gathering in" and out-pouring, being of a source, a process *and* a becoming: "The thing", as he puts it, "things" and "Thinging gathers".<sup>26</sup> An object becomes activated through attention and attunement to its various relations with the world, its "gatherings" themselves dynamic, vibrant, and multiple. "The world presences by worlding"; that is, we come to experience the world not through representations of it, but rather through the actions, reactions, and relations between those processes that compose it.<sup>27</sup> As Muecke explains, "As long as history has Man central stage and things (animate, inanimate, natural) as a support act, the kinds of continuities and necessary dependencies among them will be obscured".<sup>28</sup> Through attention to the overlooked small things, our careful attunement to their different, often contrary, active relations, flows, and

surprising presences, we are drawn “nearer” to the multiple processes that constitute the world or Guattari’s “ecology”.

Nature is not separate and distinct from other processes, but rather part of the relational flux of things, an elaborate, entangled meshwork of lines, forces, thoughts, dreams and elements, corporeal and incorporeal “species”. Muecke’s fictocriticism has influenced Stewart’s writing, explaining how, in a similar fashion, “things” take on a life or a “career”, as he calls it, as a “composition” both material and “more fanciful”, becoming “hybrid ... packaged into a network of relations that move the object around and give it life - vibrancy, as Jane Bennett would say of the ‘political ecology of things’- particularly in relation to those human beings who are connected with such commodities...”.<sup>29</sup>

Bennett, cited above, influenced by Deleuze and Guattari in her call for “vibrant matter” tracked through the “liveliness of its relations” with other forces and objects, explains Guattari’s three ecologies as “a more ecological sustainable relationship with nonhuman nature”.<sup>30</sup> Bennett understands Guattari’s vision as concerned with “new micropolitical and microsocial practices, new solidarities, a new gentleness, together with new aesthetic and new analytic practices”.<sup>31</sup> This is achieved, recalling Heidegger’s jug, through commingling relations of human and

nonhuman, distant and near, trammelled together to the point that “the environment is actually inside human bodies and minds [like] unruly relatives to whom you are inextricably bound and with whom you will engage over a lifetime, like it or not”.<sup>32</sup> So, with Stewart in mind, “when we couple criticism to fiction, to the imaginative, we seek rather to perform a kind of ethics by asking, what can that thing do that it couldn’t do before? What can that sentence say? And in consideration of these things, how has my place in the world shifted?”<sup>33</sup> New forms of writing, therefore, bring these types of question to life on the page because “fictocriticism is concerned with our linguistic-discursive and especially textual practices of being in the world”.<sup>34</sup>

One of Muecke’s essays, for example, traces the relational histories of coal and ivory through their use, cultural meaning, economic value, or the associated “magic of the stories spun about [them]”, as if precisely showing “what they do” and how this affects our relative positions in the world:

I have highlighted ivory and given it a career, which is to say a kind of life. In being alert to the forces at work in real time in shaping this life, one notices different kinds of agency, which lead me to endorse the idea of objects

being animated ... in every relationship that gives them function, meaning and affect.<sup>35</sup>

Objects are not secondary or dead matter since they “vibrate” through multiple relations with other material and immaterial forces along complex “lines of affect”, following “trajectories ... transformations and connections” (ibid.: 6). Muecke tracks ivory’s relations, its “composition”, from the butchered elephant and slavery, through ornate artworks, billiard balls, jewelry, and piano keys to its “decomposition” through its banning and cultural decline through the affective challenges of outrage, compassion, and moral righteousness. Thus “a more-than-human vision of the world” emerges, an ecological narrative without the “conceit, so common in phenomenology, that reality comes into being through human interpretation of it”.<sup>36</sup>

This attention to relational networks of forces working across life, from the very smallest, overlooked thing to the larger contextual frameworks (Guattari’s micropolitical and microsocial practices) typifies Stewart’s and Bennett’s drive to register the liveliness of matter through, as Muecke notes, the affective. For as Deleuze and Guattari put it, “We know nothing about a body until we know what it can do ... what its affects are, how they can or cannot enter into composition with other affects, with the affects of another body”.<sup>37</sup> Muecke wants a different

kind of writing following “various lifelines, its political trajectories, its liveliness” “bringing together relational networks or assemblages, incorporating the “technological, the economic, the political, the social and the natural and the affective in the one text”, one that would “be interdisciplinary, but also novelistic”, something like Bennett’s “onto-story” capable of conveying that “everything is, in a sense, alive”.<sup>38</sup>

Similarly, Guattari felt that “mental ecosophy” would enable different views to emerge challenging reductionist, established, prejudicial attitudes to human / nonhuman relations (Integrated World Capitalism), and offer instead ways of working that would “be more like those of an artist”, because as Genosko explains, “Ecosophic activism ‘resembles’ the work of artists in extracting details that serve as path-breakers for subjective development and as guidance in responsibly negotiating refrains”.<sup>39</sup>

Variously called “paraliterature”, “philosophical fiction” or “autoethnography”, Muecke sees fictocriticism as primarily dialogical: “The ficto- side of fictocriticism follows the twists and turns of animated language as it finds new pathways. The -criticism part comes in the risky leap of taking the story to a different ‘world’”.<sup>40</sup> Muecke sees fictocriticism as

Not ... an inflammatory critique, but a cooler one that proceeds by way of tracing the relations between things, that decomposes these relations in such a way that decision-making processes are slowed down (rather than rushing to the usual conclusions via the usual transcendent concepts). Combine inventive storytelling with a more cautious analysis, then, in a poetry that decomposes and recomposes things in their lively relations.<sup>41</sup>

Refusing to explain, judge, or summarise, fictocriticism is “experimental” in the sense implied by Stewart: “not a judgment. Committed not to demystification and uncovered truths that support a well-known picture of the world but to speculation, curiosity and the concrete, it tries to provoke attention to the forces that come into view as habit or shock, resonance or impact”.<sup>42</sup> Influenced by working with Michael Taussig at the University of Michigan, her readings within écriture feminine and poststructuralism, and with her admiration for writers like Muecke, Donna Haraway, and Alphonso Lingis, Stewart’s mix of self-reflexivity, recitation, storytelling and critique owes much to their approaches. Stewart’s ficto-regionality, as I term it , contains the ghostly traces of other voices, reinforcing Anna Gibbs’s assertion that “fictocriticism is a “haunted writing”: traced by numerous voices which work now in unison, at other

times in counterpoint, and at others still against each other, in deliberate discord".<sup>43</sup> Like Muecke, Stewart's acute attunement to things, events, and ordinary affects gradually evolve towards a complex and poetic expression of ecological relations as a compositional, fluid and dynamic assemblage of regionality. At the heart of such fictocriticism is a desire "to keep thought on the move" by not, as much fiction does, "finishing itself off", but instead finding the critical edge of self-reflection allowing it to reach out beyond the "human scale", and refuse to be hemmed in by commodification.<sup>44</sup> Fictocriticism "will surprise" and experiment with "ways of being in the world, with forms of subjectivity", but as a "process of thought or a way of knowing" rather than any fixed and presupposed framework:

It follows leads, sidesteps, and delays, and it piles things up, creating layers on layers, in an effort to drag things into view, to follow trajectories in motion, and to scope out the shape and shadows and traces of assemblages that solidify and grow entrenched, perhaps doing real damage or holding real hope, and then dissipate, morph, rot, or give way to something new.<sup>45</sup>

Stewart's storied arguments therefore express regionality as a complex assemblage of human and nonhuman relations, intersections, and "bloom spaces", an edgy compositionality of

things, circulations, sensations, and events that “encompasses not only what has been actualized but also the possibilities of plenitude and the threat of depletion”.<sup>46</sup> Through such reimagining of place-person relations ficto-regionality, with its strong pull to affectivity through eddies of descriptive detail, functions like “a magnet burdened with impressions, a matter of drawing lines that set off reveries and produce palpable edges”.<sup>47</sup> Suddenly, through the “ficto” appreciation of experience and impressionistic intensities a whole energized meshwork of potential links and relations are opened up, “set off” and “produced”, in the processual sense of regionality being explored. Like Guattari’s three ecologies Stewart produces “a mixed media composite of matter and thought-feelings” registering “the energetic life of an emergent object that exists as meaning, matter, and potentiality in objects, scenes, situations, social formations, laws, and figures”.<sup>48</sup> Guattari himself argued his “new ecosophy” would have to be “at once applied and theoretical, ethico-political and aesthetic ... a multi-faceted movement ... that will simultaneously analyse and produce subjectivity ... that completely exceeds the limits of individualization, stagnation, identificatory closure, and will instead open itself up on all sides”.<sup>49</sup>

These words spell out fictocriticism as a toolkit for new ecological writing, or what Muecke called "Stories, then, but also forms of analysis", permitting Stewart to register the multiple, dialogical nature of regionality without falling into the nostalgic trap of looking back to an origin of things or to an imposition of prescribed values.<sup>50</sup> As she has said, "Forms, to me, are social material. My claim is always that these are compositions that are happening and ones that I'm doing. I'm interested in what something is, what is going on, and where it is going".<sup>51</sup> Thus fictocriticism's hauntedness creates a layering of the text without repeating an already established structure of thought or ideology such as submissive modes of authority or established values and attitudes. For Gibbs, this is "the necessity of haunted writing: to move from citation, the kind of repetition you have when reference is deference to disciplinary authority, to recitation - the performance of repetition, a repetition of repetition in order not to reproduce identity, but to try instead to engender new differences".<sup>52</sup> Rather than "deference to disciplinary authority", Stewart's writing omits theoretical frames, "I just embed the theory in whatever it is I'm writing", leaving its traces in brief asides, which the reader then actively engages with (or not), following lines of flight, "trajectory" or suggestion (or not), "not to reproduce identity" or place as a finished thing, but to spark instead new

differences and relations out of the lived experience of the writing and where it points us.<sup>53</sup> Such a processual and active approach frees up “descriptive eddies that wonder what the object of analysis might be, to create a speculative attunement that ... aspires to align with the commonplace labours of becoming sentient to whatever is happening”.<sup>54</sup> Or as Guattari put it, echoing fictocriticism, “Process ... strives to capture existence in the very act of its constitution, definition, and deterritorialization”.<sup>55</sup>

Stewart explains her rejection of standard critical writing for a form imbued with “curiosity and responsibility that attempts to approach the diverging practices, materialities, and events that comprise an object of analysis”.<sup>56</sup> In the friction her writing creates, she gathers up and follows, delves into and deflects so that the “ficto” and the “critical” emerge as provocative, projective elements entangled and questioning of the “objects” under discussion. Hence, her essay “New England Red” becomes a multi-stranded, “prismatic ecology” through which we see a range of refracted histories, objects, refrains and imaginings of “redness” in the region of New England whilst “Road Registers” explores “roadness” accumulated as a “live composition” revealing “the lines of force and prismatic potentialities of the road” in a “series of snapshots shot

through with ... rhythms, tones, and spatio-temporal orientations".<sup>57</sup> To return to the contribution this type of work might make ecologically, is to understand how, as Guattari reminds us, one must not separate human and nonhuman, micro or macro, body, earth and world, for as Stewart explains, "Each element thrown together into a form of the road has precise and shifting histories, generative forms, divergent social functions, and qualities that link it to countless other elements and partial assemblages".<sup>58</sup>

Crucially, her affective ficto-regionality "tries to mimic felt impacts and half-known effects as if the writing were itself a form of life" that "leaps", performing not like a "trusted guide" helping the reader link objects seamlessly to meanings or to represent the world reassuringly, but rather provocatively and "more-than-representationally", "caught in the powerful tension between what can be known and told and what remains obscure or unspeakable but is nonetheless real". Consequently, her writing throbs with critical questions: "What is going on? ... What forces are becoming sensate as forms, styles, desires, and practices? ... How are people quite literally charged up by the sheer surge of things in the making? What does cultural poesis look like?"<sup>59</sup> "Road Registers" assembles roadness as an "ontological contact zone" or "worlding" through which generative events are

described: “elderly, handicapped, and minority bodies” like “a world held apart” because they do not drive cars; Kerouac’s On the Road “folding world into word ... a perpetual variation ... an audience yet to come”; New Hampshire remembered as “walks, drives, gatherings, natural disasters, or shopping trips ... a thing made up of our itineraries shuttling back and forth across its surface”; a body by a freeway in Medellin in a story told by Michael Taussig, or Las Vegas car culture.<sup>60</sup> Together, as one reads and responds to the essay an ecology emerges through her attention to the “regionality” of the road as a “composition scored into matter ... charged with potentiality”. Her writing actively creates a “world” made up of force lines that “propel”, “spread” and “diverge” so that we become drawn into its production “like a musical score” through which the road is layered in myth, history, aesthetics, hard practicality, economics and aspiration becoming a “creative geography ... of effects and affects”, an assemblage of regionality bringing together much of this chapter’s expanded ecology capable of jumping “from matter to metaphor, structure to fantasy, dull repetition to virtuality” aligned with a new gentleness of curiosity and responsibility, “wondering and worlding”. This process serves to “displace and flatten conceptual hierarchies” between the “big (important) and small (off-register, invisible)” so that distance is reduced in favour of the intricacies and

nuances of the everyday which nonetheless always relates to wider narratives, like the road itself as a “national macadam of living form ... matter touching dreamworlds”. To return to Guattari’s ecosophy, Stewart’s road registers an assemblage in which “matter and thought are not opposed” but mix to form “the energetic life of an emergent object that exists as meaning, matter, and potentiality” like a complex, shifting and composing ecology.<sup>61</sup>

### 3: An ecology of paths

Stewart’s attention to “ordinary affects” assemble what Guattari would term “existential territories”: the road, “New England”, a suburban street, Vermont, a life – “strands of cohabitation with the things of the world”, which can be “precarious, finite, finitized, singular, singularized, capable of bifurcating into stratified and deathly repetitions or of opening up processually” through something “almost imperceptible” which from its smallness might spring “enormous repercussions”.<sup>62</sup> Guattari’s ecological vision insisted upon opening up potentially circumscribed existential territories onto “a constellation of Universes”, just as Stewart’s often small-scale environments, such as the road or a house, are connected to wider forces and patterns: “the contours of the landscape, the rocks the glaciers left, the climate, the layers of determination laid down by histories, the leftovers of everything that has happened”.<sup>63</sup> In a

series of examples Guattari too explains how the small, minor, or overlooked can work to such ends: "a rock loosed by frost balanced on a singular point of the mountain-side, the little spark which kindles the great forest, the little word which sets forth the world a-fighting ...".<sup>64</sup> From the minuscule to the "Universes" of possibility, these trigger "thresholds" or an "interface between sensible finitude ... and the trans-sensible infinitude", making possible "incorporeal domains of entities" where a "nuclei of eternity lodges between instants".<sup>65</sup> In Stewart's terms, Guattari "outlined a theory of the affective as a state of potential, intensity, and vitality" and her work translates this into language that "tracks the pulses of things as they cross each other, come together, fragment, and recombine in some new surge", creating a "cartography of what happens here", "Something atmospheric distributed across a geography of elements that swell ... that produces worlds out of thin air".<sup>66</sup>

Guattari's "analytic cartographies" "extend beyond existential Territories", like affective critical regionality extends beyond regionalism, "as in painting or literature" with their capacity to "evolve and innovate ... open up new futures, without their authors having prior recourse to assured theoretical principles". Just as some forms of regionalism are nostalgic and romanticized, Guattari is quick to point out that

“it would be absurd to want to return to the past in order to reconstruct former ways of living” since in extending and unsettling old existential territories (like regions) “nature cannot be separated from culture” because to comprehend “the interactions between ecosystems” and understand that there are three ecological registers, one must “learn to think ‘transversally’”. Guattari opposed closure and stasis in his work and saw subjectivity as a creative work-in-progress, assembling itself through its relations and contacts to others and the world (other existential territories, Universes, and the Cosmos). Thus transversality promotes greater sensitivity, like new gentleness, working across and between the three ecologies and their “interfaces”, non-reductively as “a logic of intensities ... concerned only with the movement and intensity of evolutive processes”. Guattari’s eco-logic captures process as opposed to rigid systems, structures, or frames, presenting “existence in the very act of its constitution, definition and deterritorialization ... processual lines of flight”.<sup>67</sup> However, as I have shown, fictocriticism performs a similar process, refusing, as Stewart puts it, to use theory to “beat its objects into submission to its dreamy arguments” and to instead to “approach its object slowly and enigmatically” through “descriptive detour or a lyrical evocation ... attuning to it as a thing of promise and contact ... things coming into form”.<sup>68</sup>

Similarly, ecological consciousness is about “becoming sentient to a world’s bodies, rhythms, ways of being”, tracking worlds of all kinds forming and deforming, “both abstract and concrete, actual and unfolding”, through writing that “tries to mimic felt impacts and half-known effects as if the writing itself were a form of life”.<sup>69</sup>

So, like Muecke’s affective histories of coal and ivory, Stewart will follow the itineraries of “New England Red” along what she calls an “ecology of paths” tracing “redness” along “lines of contact [that] radiate out in a prismatic structure of etchings and refrains”, “sparking from tree to blood to paint to skin to photograph” as a “cartography of color”. In so doing, her approach records how “Energies distribute across a field of subjects-objects-bodies-trajectories-affects”, starting from Sarah Messer’s Red House (2005): “Before the highway, the oil slick, the outflow pipe; before the blizzard, the sea monster, the Girl Scout camp; before the nudist colony and flower farm; before the tidal wave broke the river’s mouth ...”.<sup>70</sup> Here Stewart challenges “regional prejudice” finding in the Red House a “compositional node” or “prismatic structure” through which matter produces a “worlding landscape” radiating energies, stories, memories, hauntings, affects like light through a prism stretching, connecting, and creating still further new lines,

moving outward towards something like Guattari's "constellation of Universes". Rather than rely on ready-made representations and established categories "metastasized into circulation" by repetition and habit, Stewart's ecology of paths, her affective ficto-regionality active in "Road Registers", "prompts curiosity and care about the potentialities in things that happen". Curiosity and care are vital elements in any ecological vision, recalling Guattari's comment at the opening of this chapter that ecology struggles to "give back to humanity ... a sense of responsibility, not only for its own survival but equally for the future of all life on the planet, for animal and vegetable species". To see and feel the potential in all things, as relations, energies, and interconnected destinies demands the type of new gentleness ever-present in Guattari's three ecologies and played out in Stewart's "cultural poesis" of curiosity and care following multiple, entangled lines, like "a tendril of practices and sensibilities gathered into an energetics of form" producing "affinities, accidental admixtures, and refrains on which people and things travelled ... worlded".<sup>71</sup>

Guattari's desire too was to interrupt the self-perpetuating "turning in circles" defining so much established institutional thought and practice with tangled lines of difference presenting the political possibilities of ecology and regionality as an

energised sense of care – a “new gentleness” – of responsibility, attunement, and mutuality. “Ways should be found”, he writes, “to enable the singular, the exceptional, the rare, to coexist with a State structure that is the least burdensome possible”, but one which will always have to be cognisant of the small-scale and the local, or what he terms “multiple molecular revolutions”.<sup>72</sup>

An example Guattari gives is of the kitchen at the La Borde clinic functioning as an affective “territory” or, for my purposes like a region “close[d] in on itself ... the site of stereotyped attitudes and behavior, where everyone mechanically carries out their little refrain”. Like one of Stewart’s vignettes of the ordinary, this territory / region “can also come to life, trigger an existential agglomeration, a drive machine ... a little opera scene: in it people talk, dance and play with all kinds of instruments, with water and fire, dough and dustbins, relations of prestige and submission”. Suddenly, the kitchen shifts from repetitive behaviors within the ordinary to something that sparks, spawning different relations like a “resource of ambience, of contextual subjectivity ... indexed to the degree of openness”.<sup>73</sup> Thus territory / region is “more than” it first appears, like Stewart’s “live composition”, becoming a layered “ecology of potentiality” which might “find itself in direct contact with Universes of alterity” beyond its “existential

entrapment"; "a story in which there is always something more to be said".<sup>74</sup>

Like regionality, Guattari's "existential territorialities" are always "partial and yet open to the most diverse fields of alterity" (such as La Borde's kitchen) so that even "the most autistic enclosure", like the most inward-looking, nostalgic, conservative region, "can be in direct contact with ambient social constellations ... historical complexes and cosmic aporias" that challenge, extend and stretch it beyond itself. Of course, this maps onto Guattari's expansive sense of "the future of all life", which requires "different ways of seeing and of making the world", emphasising new modes of understanding relating to the everyday, the small-scale and the minor as consistent building blocks to wider perceptions and actions in the world. From the local to the global, from self to other, finite to infinite, subject to object, across all possible "bodies", affective critical regionality similarly functions to "reinvent social practices that would give back to humanity ... a sense of responsibility" with "love and compassion for others" and "the feeling of fusion at the heart of the cosmos". Of course, this is political, insisting upon a "new type of social practice better suited both to issues of a very local nature and to the global problems of our era", gathering up and producing "assemblages of

enunciation" reflecting "the singularity of a situation".<sup>75</sup> In other words, politics produced from "multiple micropolitical registers" and affects providing "ways of connecting, to others and to other situations", offering "our angle of participation in processes larger than ourselves", resonate back to Stewart's "ordinary affects" and a "new gentleness".<sup>76</sup>

For Guattari, this is exemplified in the work of writers, artists and poets whose efforts foreground this contestation over the "question of subjectivity" aligning with his tri-ecosophical vision. Subjectivity is, therefore, no more a "natural given ... than air or water" and so artists must engage in the narrowest and widest of struggles: "How do we produce it, capture it, enrich it, and permanently reinvent it in a way that renders it compatible with Universes of mutant value?" This too is the progressive, active and potential function of affective critical regionality and its firm belief that "the world can be rebuilt from other Universes of value and ... other existential Territories should be constructed towards this end".<sup>77</sup> As geographer David Matless explains, "Movements make the region, furnishing rather than diminishing geographic particularity. Never complete, always refurbished, regional identity cannot help but be provisional; provision denoting not only tentativeness, but sustenance".<sup>78</sup> Through Guattari's leaps of language and concept there emerges

this exact sense of the “provisional” applied to a rethinking of regionalism as regionality, as well as ecology, being both tentative, precarious and vulnerable and simultaneously productive and sustaining.

In one last poetic example, Guattari expresses this sense of provisionality as a resource emerging through our interactions with place and our capacity for creative change and the formation of “new constellations” triggered by the “refrain-making of the sensible world”:

[W]hat sometimes minuscule details does the perception of a child walking down the dismal passageways of a social housing estate fasten on to? How, starting from a distressing seriality, does he succeed in consummating his discovery of a world of magical haloes?<sup>79</sup>

From the distressing seriality and repetition of ordinary experience a world of magical haloes might emerge; worlds born of immanence not transcendence, not from life as it should be, but from life as it is. Or, to return to Stewart, this invokes the capacities of affective ficto-regionality not as “social construction – but the moment itself when an assemblage of discontinuous yet mapped elements throws itself together into something” which even if repetitive “leaves a residue like a track or a habit ... a composition – a poesis – and one that

literally can't be seen as a simple repository of systemic effects imposed on an innocent world but has to be traced through the generative modalities of impulses, daydreams, ways of relating, distractions, strategies, failures, encounters, and worldings of all kinds".<sup>80</sup> What Stewart performs in her fictocriticism then is an "ecology of paths", veering and tracking, leaping and following, delving into and scoring the surface of things, because her ficto-regionality is, as she says, "a hinge. Or a necessary detour. Or a phenomenal cartography that reaches a point of expressivity: a queer performativity of flighty infrastructures, an energetics of attention, a comagnetizing of things".<sup>81</sup>

Every scene I can spy has tendrils stretching into things I can barely, or not quite, imagine ... The world is still tentative, charged, overwhelming and alive. This is not a good thing or a bad thing. It is not my view that things are going well but they are going ... Ordinary affect is a surging, a rubbing, a connection of some kind that has an impact. It's transpersonal or prepersonal - not about one person's feelings becoming another's but about bodies literally affecting one another and generating intensities.

Human bodies, discursive bodies, bodies of thought, bodies of water.<sup>82</sup>

Here, curiosity and care extends into a new political and ecological consciousness, to Guattari's "new gentleness", which Muecke sees as fictoriticism's purpose, propelling the reader "gently but firmly on a journey whose signposts sometimes express feelings, sometimes ways of knowing. So that's how you got there, the reader sighs at the end, I never thought you'd make it!"<sup>83</sup>

Indeed, Bennett conveys the impact of Guattari, Muecke and Stewart together in a powerful, final ecological vision, suggesting that the "new gentleness" of ficto-regionality outlined in this chapter, might "chasten my fantasies of human mastery, highlight the common materiality of all that is, expose a wider distribution of agency, and reshape the self and its interests".<sup>84</sup>

- <sup>1</sup> Guattari, The Three Ecologies, 52.
- <sup>2</sup> Guattari, Chaosmosis, 119-20.
- <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.
- <sup>4</sup> Guattari, Chaosmosis, 120.
- <sup>5</sup> Guattari, The Three Ecologies, 52; Chaosmosis, 122, 121.
- <sup>6</sup> See Campbell, Affective Critical Regionality, 2016; Stewart, “Regionality”, 277.
- <sup>7</sup> Muecke, Joe in the Andamans and other fictocritical stories, 113; Haas, Ficto/Critical Strategies, 11, 14.
- <sup>8</sup> Nettleback, “Notes towards an Introduction”, in The Space Between: Australian Women Writing Fictocriticism, 4.
- <sup>9</sup> Bennett, Vibrant Matter, 43.
- <sup>10</sup> Herzogenrath, Deleuze/Guattari & Ecology, 5.
- <sup>11</sup> Guattari, The Three Ecologies, 50; Guattari, Chaosmosis, 91-2.
- <sup>12</sup> Guattari, The Three Ecologies, 41.
- <sup>13</sup> Guattari, The Three Ecologies, 47, 50, 38.
- <sup>14</sup> Stewart, Ordinary Affects, 2007.
- <sup>15</sup> Guattari, Chaosmosis, 91.
- <sup>16</sup> Genosko, “Subjectivity and Art in Guattari’s The Three Ecologies” in Herzengerath, 106.
- <sup>17</sup> Stewart, Ordinary Affects, 4-5.
- <sup>18</sup> Stewart, “Regionality”, 275.
- <sup>19</sup> Guattari, Chaosmosis, 92-3.
- <sup>20</sup> Guattari, The Three Ecologies, 53.
- <sup>21</sup> Stewart, “Regionality”, 279.
- <sup>22</sup> Stewart, “Regionality”, 281, 283; Guattari, Chaosmosis, 94. See Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015, p. 27 and her discussion of “contamination as collaboration” – “We are contaminated by our encounters; they change who we are as we make way for others” (27). Tsing is an example of ecological ficto-regionality employing “curiosity” (6) as she follows the matsutake mushroom’s stories as “an open-ended assemblage” “making worlds” (viii, 58).
- <sup>23</sup> Stewart, “Regionality”, 284.
- <sup>24</sup> Stewart, Official Webpage, n.p.
- <sup>25</sup> Heidegger, Poetry, Language, Thought, 166.
- <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.
- <sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.
- <sup>28</sup> Muecke, Joe in the Andamans, 40.
- <sup>29</sup> Muecke, “The composition and decomposition of commodities: the colonial careers of coal and ivory”, 2.
- <sup>30</sup> Bennett, Vibrant Matter, 113.
- <sup>31</sup> Guattari, The Three Ecologies, 51.
- <sup>32</sup> Bennett, Vibrant Matter, 116.
- <sup>33</sup> Muecke, Joe in the Andamans, 15.
- <sup>34</sup> Haas, Ficto/Critical Strategies, 32.
- <sup>35</sup> Muecke, “The composition and decomposition of commodities”, 5, 9 – emphasis added.
- <sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 6, 14.
- <sup>37</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, 257.
- <sup>38</sup> Muecke, “The composition and decomposition of commodities”, 6, 8; Bennett, Vibrant Matter, 117.
- <sup>39</sup> Guattari, The Three Ecologies, 35; Genosko in Herzengerath, 110.
- <sup>40</sup> Muecke, The Mother’s Day Protest, xii.
- <sup>41</sup> Muecke, “The composition and decomposition of commodities”, 10.
- <sup>42</sup> Stewart, Ordinary Affects, 1.
- <sup>43</sup> Gibbs, “Fictocriticism, Affect, Mimesis: Engendering Differences”, n.p.
- <sup>44</sup> Muecke, Joe in the Andamans, 15.
- <sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 15; Stewart, “Cultural Poesis: The Generativity of Emergent Things”, 1028.
- <sup>46</sup> Stewart, “Regionality”, 277; Stewart, “Weak Theory in an Unfinished World”, 80.
- <sup>47</sup> Stewart, “Road Registers”, 560 – emphases added.
- <sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 560.
- <sup>49</sup> Guattari, The Three Ecologies, 68 – emphasis added.
- <sup>50</sup> Muecke, “The composition and decomposition of commodities”, 10.
- <sup>51</sup> Stewart in Pittman, “An Interview with Kathleen Stewart”, n.p.
- <sup>52</sup> Gibbs, “Fictocriticism, Affect, Mimesis: Engendering Differences”, n.p..
- <sup>53</sup> Stewart in Pittman, “An Interview with Kathleen Stewart”, n.p.
- <sup>54</sup> Stewart, “The Achievement of a Life, a List, a Line”, 32.

- <sup>55</sup> Guattari, The Three Ecologies, 44.
- <sup>56</sup> Stewart, “Road Registers”, 550.
- <sup>57</sup> Ibid., 550.
- <sup>58</sup> Ibid., 551.
- <sup>59</sup> Stewart, “Cultural Poesis”, 1016, 1028; Stewart, Ordinary Affects, 5; Stewart, “Cultural Poesis”, 1028.
- <sup>60</sup> Stewart, “Road Registers”, 556-7.
- <sup>61</sup> Ibid., 549-50; 550; 551; 553; 560.
- <sup>62</sup> Stewart, “The Achievement of a Life, a List, a Line”, 33; Guattari, The Three Ecologies 53, 10.
- <sup>63</sup> Guattari, Chaosmosis, 17; Stewart, “Regionality”, 278.
- <sup>64</sup> Guattari, The Three Ecologies, 11.
- <sup>65</sup> Guattari, Chaosmosis, 111, 17.
- <sup>66</sup> Stewart, “Cultural Poesis”, 1028, 1041; “Regionality”, 276.
- <sup>67</sup> Guattari, The Three Ecologies, 40, 41, 43, 28, 42, 43, 44.
- <sup>68</sup> Stewart, “Regionality”, 284.
- <sup>69</sup> Stewart, “Cultural Poesis”, 1028.
- <sup>70</sup> Stewart, “New England Red”, 19, 23; Messer, Red House, 1.
- <sup>71</sup> Ibid., 20, 24.
- <sup>72</sup> Guattari, The Three Ecologies, 51; Chaosmosis, 21.
- <sup>73</sup> Ibid., 69.
- <sup>74</sup> Stewart, “New England Red”, 32; Chaosmosis, 95, 70; Stewart, A Space on the Side of the Road: Cultural Poetics in an ‘Other’ America, 7.
- <sup>75</sup> Guattari, Chaosmosis, 118, 120, 121 – emphasis added.
- <sup>76</sup> Ibid.; Massumi, Politics of Affect, 6)
- <sup>77</sup> Guattari, Chaosmosis, 135, 134.
- <sup>78</sup> Matless, In the Nature of Landscape: Cultural Geography of the Norfolk Broads, 219.
- <sup>79</sup> Guattari, Schizoanalytic Cartographies, 209.
- <sup>80</sup> Stewart, “Weak Theory in an Unfinished World”, 73.
- <sup>81</sup> Stewart, “New England Red”, 29.
- <sup>82</sup> Stewart, Ordinary Affects, 128.
- <sup>83</sup> Muecke, Joe in the Andamans, 16.
- <sup>84</sup> Bennett, Vibrant Matter, 122.

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