



## Border, Environment, Neighbourhood

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**Abstract.** In our academic environment, borders are usually treated within the territorial-institutional demarcation or the political resistance against such actions. In his essay “What is a Border?” Étienne Balibar focuses on political examples. What kind of demarcation is at work here? What kind of boundaries integrate everything in the space of social historical relations as if there was nothing else outside us? Politically speaking, we have created the institution of border, but according to the Australian philosopher Jeff Malpas, our being-in-the-world implies all-encompassing places as the material condition for the appearance of things and living creatures. The Hungarian term “*határ*” (border) has a specific meaning referring to the natural environment of a settlement: not a concrete line, but a field with depth around the built habitat of people. Can we apply a border theory based on political issues to our neighbourhood with non-human creatures? To what extent will the concept of border be changed if we consider different spaces of contact making? Through the close reading of some fragments from Henry David Thoreau’s *Walden* and Jack London’s *White Fang*, my paper shows how literature and the arts help us ask and investigate such questions.

**Keywords:** territorial-institutional demarcation, the space of social historical relations, non-human, spaces of contact making, literature.

## Seminar on a Contextualist Time Projection

If we accept Étienne Balibar’s proposal (2002) regarding the border as institutional demarcation and as the place of transgression, we also proclaim that the socio-historical space is endless or at least that there is nothing outside of it. Consequently, we must prove that anything that could function as its alternative (God or nature, for instance) is a socio-historical construction. This may solve the problems within the paradigm, but if a socio-historical construction incorporates its own borders as well, it entails that we distance ourselves from or forget everything that is not a socio-historical construction.

In a paper published in 2016, in which I extended contemporary string theory to temporal directions of practices, I introduced the notion of “complementary rhythmic dimensions” (Berszán 2016).<sup>1</sup> Taking into consideration that time is not only measurable duration, but also rhythm, we have to take into account, besides its passage, its different rhythmic directions as well. In this case, however, direction does not stretch along a straight line but becomes the rhythm of a movement and, consequently, changing direction in time is equal to changing the rhythm. I consider approaches to a happening from different disciplinary directions as *time projections* of that happening according to the complementary rhythmic dimensions of the applied research practices. Every research practice has its special complementary rhythmic dimension. Deconstruction, for instance, is happening in the rhythmic dimension of rhetorical exchange, in a way that we enter its kinetic space by our attention gestures tuned to the rhetorical movement of signifiers. A paradigmatic space has no equivalent neighbours, because every occurrence is projected to the rhythmic dimension of a practice through which we enter that particular paradigmatic space. In the case of a contextualist approach, any practice, including literary writing or reading, is projected to the rhythmic dimension of *construction*.

Let us consider as a case study, the contextualist time projection of nature writing. At an ecocritical seminar, we read an excerpt from Thoreau’s *Walden* (2004 [1854], 132–133) about the colour variations of the lake and a chapter from Jack London’s *White Fang* (1906, 84–100) on a wolf cub that leaves its native cave for the first time. Students familiarized with contextualist literary criticism were sceptical: a human can be neither a lake nor a wolf cub, it is naive anthropomorphization. Any attempt to find such “passages” is merely an illusion and, of course, the camouflage of a hidden ideology. After all, nature writing is just concealment, masking real social problems.

At this point I asked the students whether such a radical separation of the human from the non-human can be one of the causes of an environmental crisis. Why should attempts at establishing contact with a lake or a wolf cub be fake from the outset? As if it were impossible to get in touch with them, except a distant and mediated relation. I reminded my fellow readers that, if we render absolute the difference between human and animal, we ignore everything that connects us. The wolf cub is also alive, is in fear of its life but finally will die. He sees with his eyes, walks on his feet, breathes... The chapter entitled “The Wall of the World” focuses on how he is scared of the unknown but, at the same time, very curious about it. His attempts, sometimes lucky, sometimes botched, all teach him a lot. Are all these things really alien or unfamiliar to us? Does

1 The practice research or practice-oriented physics proposed by me examines literature not as a corpus of texts and network of contexts, but rather experiments with the attention gestures of writing and reading practices. Actually, reading a novel or a poem means practising, in the time of reading, attention gestures prompted by the respective art of writing.

the small animal really have nothing in common with us? It is true that a wolf cub is different from us in many respects (he sees the entrance of the cave as a bright wall, likes raw meat, does not understand and approach situations with our notions, etc.), still, we can perceive his otherness only by making contact with him – by becoming his neighbour.

In his paper *Place and the Problem of Landscape*, Jeff Malpas reveals how a distant, spectatorial attitude involved in the English term “landscape” entails our separation from the non-human environment (2011). If we suppose that we only have a visual relation to the landscape, it seems that practically we have little to do with it and it has little to do with us, as if it were constructed by our vision in its entirety. Nevertheless, we have to take into consideration the influence of the landscape as well, even in the case of mere contemplation (colours may be our impressions, but they are effects of lights with different wavelengths). We are not only contemplating the landscape, but somehow step into it (at least we arrive at its margin, its border or neighbourhood) and are active there in a way or another. Thus, it not only affects us through the impressions it makes upon us, but it also influences the activity that we carry out there.

Considering all the above, even Lawrence Buell’s (2001) or Christa Grewe-Volpp’s (2006) approach regarding culture-nature relations as mutual or “constrained construction” become problematic, because in spite of their hint to mutual influence and their willingness to balance these influences, they ignore the concrete ways of contact-making: any kind of getting in touch is considered a construction. The concept of construction focused on the product is as simplistic as the generalization of institutional demarcation in border theory. My point is that ecocriticism should not remain an extension of previous critical paradigms to the non-human environment, such as constrained or mutual constructivism (see Grewe-Volpp 2006), ecofeminism (Plumwood 1993) or a rhetorical analysis of the structural metaphors concerning our imagination about the human–non-human relation (Garrard 2004). All these attempts insist on the determining role of culture.

If we extend the struggle for the rights of women in order to defend the rights of the natural environment, the philosophy of place (Malpas 2004) raises the following questions: Can a socio-historical space encompass the encounter between human and non-human? Can we be sure that culture and nature are connected by political relations or we have to recognize that ecofeminism turns the natural environment into representations of power relations? Is it acceptable to change the rhythms we take on by the art of nature writing in order to pursue a political endeavour or struggle? In such cases we do not read the gestures of attention that make contact with the lake or the wolf cub, but we interpret the text according to the aims and practices of a political movement. In this procedure, the lake becomes the camouflage of the fact that its adored beauty is constructed as the object of desire, and in the meantime we totally forget the colours of the lake.

Unlike these attempts, artistic practices, including those of nature writing, attune themselves to many different rhythms: this time to the colourful reflections of the lake or to the attempts of a young wolf to discover what is outside the cave. Changing the rhythms of our attention practices we cross, back and forth, the borders of kinetic spaces. While attuning our attention gestures to the playful colours of the lake or to the experiments of the grey cub, we cannot remain in the kinetic space of a political orientation. While contextualist criticism tries to unmask nature writing as an ideological construction, it refuses to depart from its ideology-oriented practice: instead of entering the multiple orientation practices offered by art, it projects these practices onto its own rhythmic dimension. In order to orientate ourselves in and between multiple rhythms, we must leave the cave of our familiar kinetic spaces – just as some of the prisoners of Plato’s cave do (1963). This is the only way to discover the lively colours of the lake or the experiments of a young animal.

## What Colour is a Lake?

“The scenery of Walden is on a humble scale, and, though very beautiful, does not approach to grandeur, nor can it much concern one who has not long frequented it or lived by its shore; yet this pond is so remarkable for its depth and purity as to merit a particular description” (Thoreau 2004 [1854], 132).

The scale in itself is free of values, but here we are speaking about a scenery on a “humble scale” in contrast to magnitudes that approach the peaks of the scale. Such ranking matters when we advertise places offered as spectacle in order to increase the flux of tourism. Magnitudes included in the world’s top ten or the top three of the country are valuable in comparison with the offer of other agencies or regarding the “trophy-sceneries” of “rival” tourists, and are not necessarily connected to a considerable acquaintance with that place. Many times, the experience of a trophy-place is mainly reduced to observing the grandeur at first sight or by a single visit suggested by a certain position in the ranking system of touristic objects.

*Walden* also reminds us of such a ranking approach, but Thoreau’s narration definitely exceeds the kinetic space of this stance. What is revealed in this narration needs a different kind of contact. *This* pond has a considerable influence only on those who have “long frequented or lived by its shore.” What matters here is not the scale of the magnitude, but the manner of contact-making, because the intensity of this story stems from the manifold influences the pond makes upon us. Such an attentive turn toward the lake “on a humble scale” makes it at least as “remarkable” as its most distinguished counterpart, but not in the same way: the unforeseeable effects of its depth and purity qualify it for “a particular

description.” To describe it accurately can in itself be perceived as a frequent or lasting companionship with the lake, just as a great number of visits or a period of living by its shore. After all, description is akin to the actual visit or stay in that it is another return to a place we have visited many times before or where we have already lived.

Why is Thoreau’s description “particular”? We have to consider not only the style or the qualities of a discourse, but everything that is happening in the practice of writing. It is obvious that we cannot attribute all these events in their entirety to the one who is writing; they also belong to the place which triggered the literary interest and the writing activity. This place does not only merit a particular description, but it influences every descriptive gesture. In fact, we have to deal with a “four-handed” art written by a man and a lake, or rather, with an artistic piece performed by both of them for a reader who also has his own role in the performance. Description is thus a many-handed art with many protagonists, but we have to add that “hands” and “roles” themselves imply multiple participants and multiple ways of participation, just as the quality of “writer” or the act of “writing” are shared by man and lake in a joint happening.

It seems that the *particular* description by Thoreau and Walden begins with the same measured quantities we deplored in the case of ranking by magnitude: “The surrounding hills rise abruptly from the water to the height of forty to eighty feet, though on the south-east and east they attain to about one hundred and one hundred and fifty feet respectively, within a quarter and a third of a mile. They are exclusively woodland” (Thoreau 2004 [1854], 132). But there is a *remarkable* difference: this time measures are not abstract magnitudes taken as the ranking criteria of the offered or acquired touristic trophies, but concrete measures taking into account the shape, placement and the relief of that countryside. And we continue getting acquainted with a particular place. Lakes in the mountain area are usually supported by a brook and at the lowest point of their shore the surplus of their water overflows in a channel. But Walden is rather a huge “well” of pine and oak woods, because even though it has no visible inlet or outlet, it remains exceptionally fresh and clear, and has kept its water on a relatively constant level for thousands of years. In fact, it is a vertical river: a perennial spring was able to fill the deep crater of the pond up to a certain level, where the sixty-one and a half acres of its surface made the evaporation of a quantity of water (approximately) equal to the yield of its spring possible. More precisely, there is a sophisticated balance there, because we have to consider the “regulatory systems” of the local climate as well, such as annual precipitation, daily and seasonal temperature variations influencing the quantity of evaporation or the (changing) humidity of the air of a huge woodland. Thus, this unusual river is rising up and up as a bigger and bigger lake-surface until it joins the sea of air-moisture. Vertical river, crater-like delta and an invisible sea in the air – all these are truly *remarkable*.

We have to recognize that the uniqueness of a lake does not depend only on its grandeur, but on its secret way of being as large as it actually is.

And yet we face an even more enigmatic problem here: why is the lake that particular colour at the moment? The passage chosen for our seminar reveals a series of practical experiments which are not less interesting than the cleverly devised physical experiments. First and foremost, they prove the considerable practical difference between relation creating distance and contact-making by proximity. As the lake assessed according to its abstract magnitude will be changed by an encounter with the actual pond, Walden will also turn the default colour of all lakes into lavish nuances, if long frequented or by choosing its shore as our dwelling place. This happens not only because of getting closer in space, but also due to the way of contact-making. The first experiment makes a distinction between the cartographically standardized blue of distant waters and the “more proper” (Thoreau 2004 [1854], 132) colours of waters at hand. Especially when agitated, the lake can reflect the sky in the right angle even from a small distance and consequently, it appears blue to our sight. At a great distance, it always reflects the sky alone: if the weather is clear, waters are cerulean, if it is cloudy, they turn into a “dark slate color” (Thoreau 2004 [1854], 132).

But how is it possible then that the sea is blue one day and green on the next without any visible change in the atmosphere? Or how can it be that the water and ice of a river are “almost as green as grass” (Thoreau 2004 [1854], 132) even in the winter time, when there is snow around? The colour of liquid and frozen water is usually considered bluish, but one paddling in a boat and looking down into the water can discover multiple colours there. The surface of Walden, for instance, can be blue or green even from the same point of view. One solution for this enigma is offered by finding out that “[l]ying between the earth and the heavens, it partakes of the color of both” (Thoreau 2004 [1854], 132).

But what does it mean that waters lie between the earth and the sky? Is it not obvious that they run or accumulate on the ground? From a distance they do, but inasmuch as water is running or accumulates on the ground, it gets above the soil and thus it is between earth and heavens. Where shallow, it does not entirely cover the sandy bottom from our eyes, but it already reflects the sky as well. Partaking of the colours of earth and sky means, on the one hand, that we can see the soil in the transparent water, and we can also watch the remote sky in its mirror as a reflected depth. On the other hand, double partaking means that not only the sky, but also the land around and everything on it can be reflected in the water. From a distance from where it becomes impossible to see the soil under the water, the whole surface becomes a mirror of the sky, and thus usually blue. But “near at hand it is of a yellowish tint next the shore where you can see the sand, then a light green, which gradually deepens to a uniform dark green in the body of the pond” (Thoreau 2004 [1854], 132) – partly because the considerable

“body” of water ceases to be transparent, so the colour of sand disappears, and partly because the less transparent it is, the more visible its own colour becomes.

Yet all these considerations seem to be a rough awareness of the colours of a lake. There are further special experiments that will persuade us about this: “In some lights, viewed even from a hill-top, it is of a vivid green next the shore” (Thoreau 2004 [1854], 132). According to the explanations above, it should be blue, but it is not. It is useless to say that we see the verdure of the trees growing by the shore, because repeating the experiment “against the railroad sand-bank” (Thoreau 2004 [1854], 132) or in early springtime before the branches leaf, we will see an equally green inshore belt there. Thus we realize that the waters between earth and sky do not only reflect many different colours but, from a certain distance, they are masters of the colour mixture as well. From a hill-top, not very far from the lake, we can see the reflection of the blue sky and the yellowish sandy bottom at the same time. But because of the distance our eyes cannot discern them anymore, so we will see a certain green which appears as the mixture of blue and yellow.

The encounter of the seeing man with the lake does not happen in optical experiments alone. If we spend enough time getting close to the lake in many different ways, the waters “partaking” of the colours of the earth and sky will also *reflect our eye* not as a mirror, but as a partner. More precisely, we have to deal with a divided vision again, not according to the optics of transparent and reflecting water, but through the projection of seeing and looking upon each other. When Thoreau looks at the vivid green inshore belt around the deep waters of the pond, melted first in the springtime and encircling the frozen middle, he sees it as the colour of the lake’s “iris” (Thoreau 2004 [1854], 132). In other words, the whole lake becomes a single big eye. According to this refined looking experiment, the pond does not reflect the viewer’s eye optically but by *looking back* at him. Maybe we should rather speak about the reflection of the lake in the writer’s eyes “lying between” the visible things and the inner world of the viewer and partaking of – as the lake between earth and sky – the “colours” or visibilities of both realms.

It seems evident to continue with a research on *constructions* of human vision and discourse, and the romantic and transcendentalist view of the world that includes all the previous so-called “experiments” as well. But in the context of such a discerning experiment that we have been following up to this point, this would be a mistake, just as assuming that the vivid green along the shore originates exclusively from the reflection of the surrounding woods. Remember that such assumptions have prevented us from discovering the lake’s artistic mixing of colours.

Further experiments will help us decide whether we are dealing with a similar case here or not. Let us repeat the lake’s eye experiment by leaving the “sand-bank” of romantic Transcendentalism. I wonder whether the rejection of this

philosophy necessarily prevents us from seeing the iris of the lake. We can change the *shore sequence* by any philosophy or ideology; it is enough to keep our eyes open to see the lake's eye too. Not because of a formal resemblance between the way the vivid field of our iris encircles the pupil and the way the melted channel encircles the frozen middle of the lake; nor through the archetypical connection alone that links the soul and deep waters by the transparency and impenetrable darkness of the eye or by its mysterious inward and outward reflection. In the attention experiments of writing, Walden reflects not only the eye, but also the act of looking. This *eye-contact* called "face to face" by Lévinas (1998) is created by a "proximity" which transforms the other into an irreducible You. The experimenter does not separate the lake from himself anymore as an element of his environment, but he is searching for its company. What else could have triggered such persistent and varied experiments like the ones we are talking about, including the two years, two months and two days spent on the shore of Walden (see Thoreau 2004 [1854], 6)?

In this "particular description" of Walden it is not enough to adjust the right angles and perspectives; we also have to tune the time of the day and/or weather conditions with a certain way of looking, then, the memory of this vision with other refined visual memories:

Like the rest of our waters, when much agitated, in clear weather, so that the surface of the waves may reflect the sky at the right angle, or because there is more light mixed with it, it appears at a little distance of a darker blue than the sky itself; and at such a time, being on its surface, and looking with divided vision, so as to see the reflection, I have discerned a matchless and indescribable light blue, such as watered or changeable silks and sword blades suggest, more cerulean than the sky itself, alternating with the original dark green on the opposite sides of the waves, which last appeared but muddy in comparison. It is a vitreous greenish blue, as I remember it, like those patches of the winter sky seen through cloud vistas in the west before sundown. (Thoreau 2004 [1854], 133)

Catching *that* blue on the surface of the lake, in the memories or in the *mirror* of this "particular description" makes all these experiences turn into each other as "watered or changeable silks," "sword blades" and "patches of the winter sky seen through cloud vistas in the west before sundown" do by their colours. We are supposed to attune our sight to a multiple vision in order to see all these in the brightness of the same blue. It is a refined and intensive exercise in which senses and attention are working together with the lake, the sky and the always unforeseeable play of light. But no doubt it is and remains a repeatable experiment as long as there are senses, attention, lake, sky and lights. To miss



or give up this experiment in the time of literary reading would be such a great loss like describing all waters at any time as being the same default colour by which we represent them on the maps. The entire “particular description” this lake “merited” is constituted of experiments in which we learn ways of looking, we face the proximity of the other and we find ourselves in its company. This is what goes beyond Romanticism (a commonly accepted view of Thoreau’s art of writing) in *Walden*. It is not enough to recognize the style, the philosophy of Transcendentalism or our own ecocritical projects in the concrete literary writing and reading experiments – all these are reflections of our culture. Among and beyond them, we are supposed to take into consideration the pond as well. If we really want to read Thoreau’s literary experiment, it is not enough to reveal the author’s prejudices, his previously acquired knowledge or its contexts – we are invited to enter his experiments in the course of reading.

Writing in itself is a *mirror* (this is the Hungarian term for the print space of a page as well), so we can create experimental contacts with it as the dweller of the forests did with the lake in the course of two years, two months and two days. Paying attention in different ways or “looking with divided vision,” we can see the culturally (epistemologically, disciplinarily or historically) discerned styles, periods or currents together with the places and creatures that surround us: the lake, the sky, our own eyes reflected by them or their eyes looking back at us. The company of the lake breaks through the romantic style as the yellowish sandy bottom breaks through the green of the Walden’s body. It is worth learning how to look in the time of reading in order to see more than the historical text or the Transcendentalism of that period – in order to perceive the lake as being there then and now. It is recommendable to read this “particular description” not from the perspective of the history of culture alone, but also as the art of the lake. All these are possible by experiments that we can try to execute during our reading or – why not? – on the shore of a lake as well. Any place can be unique by its amazing richness or versatility, irreducible to a mere material environment. Or, in other words, somebody who has read Thoreau cannot say that a lake is merely water. “Walden” becomes a real proper name because its signified is one of our acquaintances, and *vice versa*, of course.

## The Wall of the World as Border-Slit

The first book I read myself at the age of ten was *White Fang*. Before this experiment, adult readers had mediated between me and the books by reading or telling me stories, but then I tried myself to get through the *letter-wall of the world*. I stumbled through the paths of rows. Sometimes, I forgot the first part of a long sentence, so the second part just hung in the air: I could not incorporate

it into the text I was just reading. There were sequences I felt I could understand apart from the whole, but I could not understand how they were connected to the description or the plot-sequence I was reading. I tried to hear the problematic paragraphs in the voice of my primary school teacher or my parents, but the cadence of their sentences as I remembered them did not fit among those I was actually reading. Soon, I got a headache, so I had to stop reading. On the first pages, the awkward pencil marks, sometimes in the middle of a sentence, show how far I managed to get with my attempts. But in spite of my failures, I tried over and over again. I read a paragraph several times until I managed to put the pieces together and to orientate myself in the field of its meaning.

The great discovery came after several weeks, when I realized that in the time of reading I was allowed to forget the sentences. This was my chance to really breach the letter-walls of the world. From that moment on, I stopped feverishly following rows of letters, and instead, I focused on the events that happened to the wolves; these held me spellbound. The wall of letters “suddenly leaped back before [me] to an immeasurable distance” and “[a]lso, its appearance had changed. It was now a variegated wall, composed of the trees that fringed the stream, the opposing mountain that towered above the trees, and the sky that outtowered the mountain” (London 1906, 87–88).

Previously, to me the wolf had been a maleficent beast of fairy tales, but then it became not only a loveable creature, able to form an attachment to men, but together with him, I could also find passages between the mysterious worlds of animals and humans. In the meantime, we had become so attached that after finishing the book I got a dog friend straightaway, and thirty-two years later I named my son by the old Hungarian name *Farkas*, meaning wolf.

All these were possible because this novel is not only a series of fabulous adventures, but also a collection of fascinating attempts to find passages between different kinetic spaces. As the grey cub leaves his native cave for the first time, so does he arrive suddenly among humans and their dogs. As parental authority is replaced by the authority of “gods,” he is urged, on the one hand, to adapt himself to new rules, and on the other, to accommodate his instincts, skills, and abilities to the dangers, constraints, temptations, situations, and fellow creatures he meets in the meantime: he has to fight his violent masters and ferocious enemies, to do his job in an Indian village, or work as a sled-dog with gold miners, and finally, to live in the company of the Love-master. London’s narrative is not only a story about these themes, but also an attempt to find common kinetic spaces with a wolf through writing. Let us read the chapter entitled “The Wall of the World” and see what kind of border theory it requires, and what kind of border crossing practices are revealed to us.

Institutional demarcation is not an unprecedented cultural achievement. Marking territories or the “border incidents” of fear and curiosity are much earlier, and still

influence our cultural actions as a pre-cultural heritage. It is true that civilization has overgrown the passage-ways linking the two sides, but such connections cannot become totally insurmountable until – similarly to other creatures like wolves – blood runs in our veins. The pressure of a global environmental crisis warns us to reinforce our neighbourhood with the non-human environment, because in spite of separating it many times and in many ways from ourselves, its proximity cannot be devoid of passages. London, as member of a civilization assaulting Alaska, still remembered the experiences of the adventurers going into the wild by dogsleds and already felt the delicate differences between passage-ways: how a dog can return to the wolf-pack in *The Call of the Wild*, how a wolf becomes a dog in *White Fang*, and how people find ways between their civilized world and their onetime home, the surrounding wilderness.

Following the wolf cub getting through the wall of light means the same two-directional movement, because in the meantime we also learn how to cross the border between different kinetic spaces: writing practice discovers the rhythmic dimension of the young wolf's experiments, just as the little wolf discovers the world outside the cave. Even though we have already acquired proficiency in several kinetic spaces, while for the wolf cub, this was the first attempt, we would also face many surprises in his story, just as the wolf cub would not stop experimenting.

What does a new kinetic space mean? Occurrences that are impossible in the previous ones. For instance, you can dip in a wall, which previously seemed impossible:

The substance of the wall seemed as permeable and yielding as light. And as condition, in his eyes, had the seeming of form, so he entered into what had been wall to him and bathed in the substance that composed it. [...] He was sprawling through solidity. [...] The wall, inside which he had thought himself, as suddenly leaped back before him to an immeasurable distance. (London 1906, 87)

The wolf cub confronts a rule he has obeyed so far, namely his mother's repeated prohibition. But crossing the border of the cave cannot be reduced to this transgression. The border between instinctual fear and curiosity that he would cross several times back and forth during his first discovery trip is equally important. And there is the wall, previously known as a solid border delimiting space, which unexpectedly has become passable in the form of a wall of light, hence opening a hole on the cub's formerly familiar kinetic space.

During his cave-life, the wolf cub first learned to orient himself with the help of his mother's gestures preventing him from getting close to the light wall, and to conform to the solid rocks that were impeding his tender nose. Even when alone

in the cave, he attuned his gestures to these impulses knowing what to follow and what to avoid. His instinct for concealment “suppressing the whimpering cries that tickled in his throat and strove for noise” (London 1906, 85) was another impulse he obeyed when he heard the foreign sniff of the wolverine at the entrance. From the beginning, he tried to approach the wall of light, because it was shining much brighter than any other wall of the cave. He learned to resist its attraction, because his mother reaffirmed that it was prohibited for him, but the temptation persisted. Practical orientation is unavoidable because of multiple impulses reaching us simultaneously. The grey cub was familiar with his mother’s warnings and with the instinctual fear of the unknown, but he also felt the attraction of the light and the urge of curiosity. During his cave-life, he had first learned to orientate himself by following the previous restrictions, and ignore the enticement. Or more precisely, to tune his gestures to the impulses of the former instead of and against the latter. The kinetic space in which he acquired proficiency this way was not merely the scene of the cave: orientation attempts I sketched out above all belonged to it, just as the physical environment.

“Entering the wall of the world” becomes possible when the growing cub dares to follow his increasing curiosity and the thrill of light for the first time, rather than his mother’s warning and the rule of fear. But border crossing cannot be reduced to this transgression in the sense of disobeying a rule, because it also represents a practical transit into another kinetic space: learning how to orientate himself according to other impulses and urges. Henceforth, something utterly different happens to him than ever before: he enters the wall formerly strictly precluded by his mother for the first time, and breaches the resistance of the surface previously known as solid. And if entering the wall is possible, that means that the wall is not exclusively wall-like, but it can also be hole-like. The cub changes his practical orientation among the same variety of impulses and urges he has already been exposed to, and this leads him to the discovery of a new kinetic space in which different occurrences are unfolding.

By comparison, the down-hill experience when the cub, only familiar with a horizontal ground, rolls down the slope cannot be considered a new way of orientation. He was merely swept away by the current of a happening in which he failed to orientate himself. “The unknown had caught him at last. It had gripped savagely hold of him and was about to wreak upon him some terrific hurt” (London 1906, 89). But inasmuch as the drift in the unknown current had not taken a disastrous turn, it offered a chance for a new way of orientation, accurately followed by the narrative:

He traveled very clumsily. He ran into sticks and things. A twig that he thought a long way off would the next instant hit him on the nose or rake along his ribs. There were inequalities of surface. Sometimes he overstepped

and stubbed his nose. Quite as often he under-stepped and stubbed his feet. Then there were pebbles and stones that turned under him when he trod upon them; and from them he came to know that the things not alive were not all in the same state of stable equilibrium as was his cave; also, that small things not alive were more liable than large things to fall down or turn over. But with every mishap he was learning. The longer he walked, the better he walked. He was adjusting himself. He was learning to calculate his own muscular movements, to know his physical limitations, to measure distances between objects, and between objects and himself. (London 1906, 91)

Consequently, the cub learned to walk on unlevel terrain. Later on, he acquired experience in swimming. At first the river had also “gripped savagely hold of him,” but he learned something new again. He realized that by moving his legs under the water and stretching his neck, he could maintain himself on the surface of the smooth sequences of the river. And this was enough for the moment to escape from the unknown flow (or the flow of the unknown). As if his legs had known what they had to do in the water. Also, when he stopped rolling down the slope, “as a matter of course, as though in his life he had already made a thousand toilets, he proceeded to lick away that dry clay that soiled him” (London 1906, 89). Outside the cave, everything was fearfully or amazingly unknown, but in the same time, it seemed that he was cut out for this kind of unknown and the unknown was cut out for such creatures dropped here through the “wall of the world.” Every machination of the unknown made him unsure of this, but every discovery and learned motion confirmed his feeling that, after all, he was fit to meet the surprises. Once, he chanced upon a ptarmigan nest, where he could eat live meat for the first time and could try out fighting as a predator; and once, his misfortune led him to a weasel, which could have easily turned into disaster, had his mother not arrived just in time.

How does narration guide us in all these happenings? It offers attention exercises through which we learn how to orientate ourselves in the kinetic spaces of the wolf cub. It is important, but not enough to be familiar with the place where the cub is wandering. We need to get in the rhythm of his orientation attempts as well. London’s narrative offers a series of such experiments. Of course, it is always difficult to combat the tendencies of our own ways of orientation. At the beginning we may repeatedly return to our previous kinetic spaces, just as the wolf cub was kept from entering the wall of the world. The only solution is the same both for man and wolf: to turn toward impulses that get them out from their familiar ways of orientation. How did the wolf cub learn that it was forbidden to approach the entrance? Based on our contact-makings with animals, including hunting, livestock raising, ethology or animal psychology, we can identify two kinds of incentives: educative impulses from his mother and the instinct of fear

that came from thousands of previous generations, but in one way or another, he needed to incorporate it into his own life. “Possibly he accepted it as one of the restrictions of life” (London 1906, 84), such as hunger or his mother’s warnings. This “possibly” is not only a logical deduction, but also a search, sometimes doubtful, sometimes hopeful, for the other’s kinetic space.

We can follow the mother’s instructions, the limitation by solid walls and hunger, and the unknown legacy of fear, because similar impulsions are experienced by us too. However, we have to be cautious not to bestow the wolf cub in a kinetic space unreachable for him. “He did not reason the question out in this man-fashion. He merely classified the things that hurt and the things that did not hurt. And after such classification he avoided the things that hurt, the restrictions and restraints, in order to enjoy the satisfactions and the remunerations of life” (London 1906, 85). After these logical explanations of fear and curiosity, narration trends towards the practical experiments of the cub in order to learn (and teach us) new ways of orientation by gestural resonances.

What happens to the little animal when he tries to touch the wall of light “with the tender little nose he thrust out tentatively before him” (London 1906, 87) the same way he touched the other walls of the cave many times before? Approaching the strange wall from the point of view of his earlier cave experiments is already attuning our orientation to his attempt, and hence, we are also surprised by the upcoming events that happen in the wall and with the wall. Border crossing between our human kinetic space and the wolf cub’s kinetic space occurs by writing and reading such *surprises*. Our entering the unexpectedly soft wall or the wall suddenly leaping back are not happening in the kinetic space of a banal, unimpeded exit through the entrance of the cave, but in the kinetic space of something impossible that miraculously becomes possible. It is happening neither to a human, nor to a wolf cub alone, but to both: as an encounter between the human and the wolf cub in a common kinetic space. This time we do not meet the cub on a trail in the forest, but we are following the trail of his attempts and everything that is happening to him as a result of these practical choices. Being with and at him does not only mean a common scenery, nor a position that makes possible observing what is happening to him, but intensive attention exercises which follow the temporality or rhythm of his gestures.

Acquiring proficiency in a kinetic space is not equal to certain functions in action, such as advancing on an unlevel terrain or avoiding collisions with impediments. It is also the experimentation or practical resonance with the gestures which facilitate us in advancing forward and avoiding obstacles. We do not merely observe whether the wolf cub succeeds in getting out of cave or not; we also follow the shock of entering the substance of a wall, and that of the wall leaping back to an undetermined distance. In the kinetic space of observation, one can neither follow the cub entering the wall, nor the wall leaping back. For such

happenings we have to cross the border of observation by entering the kinetic space of the cub's experiments. Anything that happens beyond a familiar kinetic space, *practically* equal to Plato's cave (1963), proves to be as surprising to us as the outer world is to the grey cub: writer and reader are both fascinated by seeing the entrance as a wall of light, by dipping in its bright substance or noticing that it suddenly leaps back to an undetermined distance.

It is just as exciting as patting an adult wolf berserk of being closed in a cage and beaten repeatedly by humans, or as for a wolf being touched for the first time by a human hand without biting or snarling (see London 1906, 249–254). When Matt, the dogmusher saw this, he almost dropped the pan of dirty dish-water. It was not a coincidence that on the only coloured illustration of the 1974 Hungarian edition on the first page of the novel, he was seen dropping it. And it was not a mistake of the illustration that the wolf harkening to any noise and motion, at that time did not instantly react to the opening of the cabin's door, or to the voice of the dogmusher. Matt is, in fact, an illustration of the reader in this picture. If somebody had seen how Weedon Scott, the Love-Master was patting White Fang, without noticing the wolf's incredible border crossing between the space of violence and the space of amicable proximity, he would not have been so astonished. Border crossing here is a fascinating change of intensity. A wolf that considers people his fiercest enemies is being so enthralled by such intensive friendly gestures that he forgets to snarl and bite. And the new master, once already bitten by White Fang, is now reaching out his bare hand again without defending himself against the teeth. Even the wolf is astonished. He notices that this is not a sophisticated human trickery by which the new master wants to bear down on him, nor the acquiescence of a weaker pack member making himself vulnerable in front of the alpha-male. This unknown gesture of the Love-master means a gentle self-devotion of the stronger party, urging for an equally gentle requital. Yes, an animal can definitely recognize this. And for the first time, the berserk wolf follows, yet half-willing, something totally different than his defending and aggressive innervations. And the same way the wolf forgets to snarl and bite, albeit being in the proximity of a man, Matt also forgets that he is balancing a pan filled with dish-water. The exciting happening between the wolf, inapproachable yesterday, and Love-master shifts Matt from the careful balancing of the pan. An intensive rhythm draws all his attention and he attunes his gestures to it. The reader is invited to follow London's narration in the same manner, not in order to read a series of fabulous adventures, but to transit into new kinetic spaces in the time of reading. Akin to the pan dropped from Matt's hands, the reader is dropped from his everyday routines, because his attention is attuned to the intensive contact-making between a human and an animal.

Both Thoreau's and London's writings resonate to refined and strong gestures, this is why these are very intensive happenings themselves. Even though as their

readers, we are not the new Love-masters of White Fang, we might enter the rhythm of happening the way Matt does. This is enough to learn how to orientate ourselves in the time of these gestures and this knowledge creates holes on our familiar kinetic spaces in a very similar way the wall of light did on the wolf cub's cave. It is true that the border distinguishes and separates fields, but according to the above examples, it can also be a hole towards a different kinetic space. It seems to be an impassable wall until we keep a distance or approach it through our skills provided in the *cave* of the socio-historical space. As we manage to find a way out (in the time of reading, for instance), the transgression of an institutional demarcation line appears as only one possible way of transition through border-slits. There are many other ways too, in accordance with the rhythms our attention is attuned to. Those gestures of attention by which we get acquainted with the colours of the lake, pat the wolf or follow these practices in the time of reading are able to cross the border of alienation between us and our non-human company, to shape our practical orientation in a way that we learn to transit between kinetic spaces distinguished and separated along their rhythmic dimensions.

## Conclusions

Both Thoreau and London implement frequent and/or durable experiments in order to get in touch with the non-human other. Living more than two years on the shore of the lake, mushing by dogsled in Alaska or domesticating a wolf are not ideological patterns, but experiments to get acquainted with the projections of the lake's body and with the behaviour of an animal, influencing us and being influenced by our own behaviour. How do such acquaintances change our relation and responsiveness to the natural environment? They help us, for instance, to realize that neighbourhood is not only demarcation, but closeness as well. Or proximity in Lévinas' sense (Lévinas 1998) – not always the same responsibility, but various experiments of contact making.

The literary description of the lake or the literary narration about a wolf can draw the reader's attention to the events of the non-human environment, because these writing practices are themselves very intensive labour of attention. After examining the way nature writing is engaged in a symbolic construction of nature, we have to deal with the ways a lake or a wolf cub participates in the art of writing. How do the writer, the reader, and the non-human environment become each other's company as neighbours? Consider that if there were no lakes and no animals on our planet, it would be absolutely impossible to invent such a description or such a narration we have enjoyed here. The lake engages our gaze into very demanding experiments. The wolf cub is himself a very skilful experimenter and as such, very close to the refined and intensive literary reading and writing experiments.



A possible final conclusion could be this: if border does not only refer to an institutional demarcation, but to neighbourhood and to the company of the other, we have to extend Balibar's theory in two ways: 1. towards the spaciousness of the ecosystem (beyond the socio-historical space) and 2. towards the spaciousness of parallel kinetic spaces in contact-making. By doing the first, we can find out that there are places and creatures beside us and our culture. And through the company of these places and creatures, the second can help us find alternative ways of orientation in addition to the socio-historical one.

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