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Aquaterrapolises: Swamp Cities and Marsh Metropolises

Human beings made the city and the city was made for human beings. The city and humanity largely go together. Humans have lived before and without the city (both outside the city, in the country, and prior to its creation), and may do so after the city, or in a ruined cityscape, in a postapocalypse world. In the meantime, cities help define human beings and confine human beings as our predominant habitat on the larger home-habitat of planet earth. Even to think of the country outside or before the city is to think of the country in relation to the city. The city is the prime term around and against which the country as noncity is defined and defines itself as absence and lack, as zero.

The city for some writers about the city has an obvious and self-serving importance. Cities for P. D. Smith (2012: xi) are “our greatest creation,” where “our” refers presumably to urban humankind. Smith is largely parroting Kotkin (2005: xx) for whom “humankind’s greatest creation has always been its cities.” Both are following in the footsteps of Jacques Ellul (1970: 154), the great theologian of the city and critic of technocracy, for whom “the city is man’s greatest work.”

By contrast, “the City of God” for St Augustine is God’s greatest work. Augustine (1998: 449) certainly poses the heavenly city of God against “the earthly city” of “the pagans.” He later cites Galatians 4:26 that “Jerusalem which is above is our eternal mother in heaven” (457). By inference, Jerusalem, or any other secular city for that matter, which is below is our temporal mother on earth. Augustine, however, failed to distinguish among patriarchal pagans for whom the city is their temporal mother on earth; matrifocal

pagans for whom the swamp is their eternal mother of the earth as it gives birth and is nourishing; and patriarchal Christians for whom the swamp is hell on earth that is inimical to both the heavenly and earthly cities, and so for whom drainage or filling and destruction of the swamp is a divine mission and sacred trust.

The citizen, or city-zen, or city-dwelling human being, is for Smith (2012: xi) the greatest creation of humanity. For him the human species is *homo urbanus* (urban humanity), and so not *homo sapiens* (wise humanity), nor *homo faber* (maker humanity), nor *homo ludens* (playful humanity). But *homo urbanus* is not possible without *homo sapiens*, *homo faber*, and *homo ludens*. Indeed, the city is where all of these beings, these *homos*, find their ultimate expression, creativity, and playground in and by virtue of the city itself. *Homo urbanus*, and the city with it, is only about 7,000 years old, as Smith (2012: xi) points out, whereas *homo sapiens* is 27,000 years old and our ancestor, *homo erectus*, is up to 2 million years old.

Moreover, for Smith (2012: 29), “in the beginning” was “the city.” This is bad theology, if not heresy. In the beginning was the heavens and the earth (Gen. 1:1), and then there was the wetland (Gen. 1:2). The wetland was the womb of watery chaos, fecund and fertile, out of which the city later emerged. The city, as Lehan (1998: 14) says, “emerged out of water and chaos.” In a word, the city emerged out of mud, out of wet land. Later for Lehan “the mud” is that “from which the city—indeed life itself—emerged” (46). The city came after God had completed his creation, including the Garden of Eden, after the Fall, and then, after Cain murdered Abel, God cursed Cain and Cain created the city (Gen. 4:17). Drawing on Ellul (1970: 5), Ackroyd (2010: 72) reminds us that “God created the natural world . . . but humankind made the city. After his murder of Abel, Cain became the founder of cities.”

Cain is also the father of marsh monsters as related in the Old English *Beowulf*, an unwritten chapter of Genesis that had to be written for Christianity to demonize and destroy pagan marshes (see Giblett, 2015). The monstrous city destroyed the monstrous marsh; the dryland city dredged and drained the wetland. Perhaps this is a case of history repeating itself, of the sin of the father of fratricide being repeated and revisited on the next generation with one of his progeny, the city, killing another, the marsh monster and monstrous marsh. By contrast, in *Cities and Wetlands* I aim to nurture and

promote sibling harmony between cities and wetlands, and break the repetitious cycle of history.

Cain not only “built a city,” as Ellul (1970: 5) argues, but also “for God’s Eden he substitutes his own.” As Eden was a garden (Gen. 2:8), the city is a substitute garden (and Ebenezer Howard’s [1902] “Garden City” is a substitute for a substitute, a simulacrum). The city is pastoro-technical¹ from its beginning before it aspired to be, and became, to some extent, techno-pastoral in the twentieth century courtesy of le Corbusier and Robert Moses and both their acolytes. For le Corbusier ([1929] 1987: vi and xvii) “the great modern city” is “a vast and complicated machine,” yet it is an organic machine as not only would open spaces be the city’s lungs, but also “the whole city should be one vast breathing organ.”

As Ellul (1970: 16) says, “It is only in an urban civilization that man has the metaphysical possibility of saying, ‘I killed God,’” and it is only in an urban civilization that “man” has the metaphysical possibility of saying “I am God.” Cities built on or by wetlands are not only the work of fallen “man” in creating something that God did not create, but also of fallen “man” who rises up and wrests from God the divine function of dividing land from water (Gen. 1:6), and becomes as God. The builders of the ancient city of Babel became as God by building a city that rose to the heavens; the builders of the ancient, medieval, Renaissance, and modern cities set in wetlands became as God by building cities that divided land from water immersed in the earth. However, they could not become as God by creating wetlands; in fact, they destroyed wetlands in and by creating the city. Only recently has “man” become as God by creating wetlands. “Man” thus arrogated to himself the power to both destroy and create wetlands and thereby became more than God, a super-God.

The rate and scale of the development of cities has accelerated as time has gone by. The twenty-first century is what Kotkin (2005: xvii) calls “an urban century, the first where a majority of people live in cities.” Indeed, Sanderson (2009: 33) notes that “2007 marked the first time in human history that more people lived in cities than in rural areas.” In the United States, this turning point came nearly ninety years earlier. Manuel de Landa (2000: 92) relates how “the year 1920 marks a turning point in the acceleration of American city building, the moment when the number of Americans living in cities

surpassed the number inhabiting rural areas.” The rest of the world has been following suit ever since and catching up.

This development is noteworthy not only demographically but also environmentally. For Sanderson (2009: 33) “the most important land-use trend in the last hundred years has been urbanization.” The most important land-use aspect of urbanization in this period, and what has made it possible, is the filling or draining of wetlands to “reclaim” land for urbanization to take place. In 1900 six out of the ten most populous cities in the world had been built on or adjacent to wetlands: London, New York, Paris, Berlin, Chicago, and St. Petersburg (Flint, 2006: 38). Cities are our greatest creation—and the greatest destroyer of wetlands.

In the beginning was the swamp. Genesis 1:2 says so. In the ending is the city. In the middle is the city in the swamp. The beginning of the city is in the swamp. The ending of the city is in a swamp too, both in the sense, as Mumford (cited by Hall, 2014: 344) puts it, that the outskirts of a modern city “ended suddenly in a swamp” and in the sense that the city ends in an artificial “swamp” of a wasteland. The city begins in mud and ends in crud. The city was born of wetlands, not of the forests as Harrison (1992: 47) claims. The city of Rome was born of the forests as he says, but Rome is hardly the first or archetypal city, despite being “the so-called eternal city” (46). A cursory glance at the history of the world’s major and iconic cities indicates that the wetland gave birth to them. According to Alter (2005: 70), the three great nineteenth-century metropolises of London, Paris, and St. Petersburg, which are “often subjected to novelistic scrutiny ... were all ... built along marshlands.” For Alter this is “no doubt only fortuitous,” whereas I argue that this was necessary for the development of the modern metropolis and modern novel, not only for London, Paris, and St. Petersburg, but also for the two other great nineteenth-century metropolises of Berlin and Chicago and for other great and older metropolises of Boston, New York, New Orleans, Toronto, and Venice, all of which were also “built along marshlands” and were “subjected to novelistic scrutiny” (as *Cities and Wetlands* shows).

Cities are a relatively recent phenomenon with a buried history. Not only are they built, as Smith (2012: 102 and 324) suggests, “on top of earlier cities,” but also many earlier cities were built on top of wetlands, such as London, Paris, St. Petersburg, Berlin, Chicago, Boston, New York, New Orleans,

Toronto, and Venice. These wetland cities could be called “aquaterrapolises.” Not only “beneath your feet lie yesterday’s cities” as Smith suggests, but also beneath yesterday’s cities lie the wetlands on which many of them were built. “Beneath the pavement, lies the marsh,” to rejig the Situationists for whom beneath the city was the beach. Wetlands played a foundational role for cities.

One city was built on a city built on wetlands. Mexico City, “the largest city in the world” (Galeano, 2000: 237), was built on Tenochtitlán, the Aztec wetland city built, in turn, on wetlands. It is a salutary instance of a non-European culture successfully building a city on a wetland. Around 1325 the Aztecs began to build what Schenker (2009: 68–69) calls “the fabled floating city of Tenochtitlán in Lake Texcoco” (see the cover illustration of *Cities and Wetlands*). The city’s foundations were constructed, as she goes on to point out, “by anchoring floating islands of woven reeds . . . in the marshy shallows at the edge of the brackish lake.” Tenochtitlán, “the precursor of Mexico City” (Burrows and Wallace, 1999: xi), was a marvel to the Spanish Conquistadors in 1519, but this did not stop them from conquering what Smith (2012: 1) calls “this strange yet beautiful city in the lake.” The Conquistadors did not learn how to build a city in a swamp, and so they did not pass this knowledge on to their fellow Europeans. Smith claims that Cortés destroyed “the great city of Tenochtitlán” in 1521, but Mexico City was built on its ruins and remnants of the wetland city remain to this day (6) (as I will discuss shortly). What Smith calls the “Venice of the New World” was built, like its European namesake, in a swamp, but, unlike Venice, it was not built by dredging canals and making dry land out of wet land (2). Rather, it was built as a floating city in a lake, unlike Venice, which merely appeared to be floating (as we will see in a later chapter).

Smith (2012: 4–5) goes on to draw another inappropriate European parallel: “like the Dutch, the Aztecs had become extremely skilled at reclaiming swampland both for construction and for cultivation.” This is a blatant misreading of the historical record as the Aztecs did not drain and “reclaim” swampland (as if it were lost) by using dykes and windmills like the Dutch, but constructed not only, as Smith goes on to point out, “floating gardens,” but also floating buildings (5). The Dutch did not construct floating buildings and gardens; they constructed fixed buildings and gardens. As a sea-going people, they craved moorings and stability in the floating and mobile

world of the ships of their far-flung empire. Smith subsumes Tenochtitlán to European exemplars, not only to Venice, but also to Dutch drainage, whereas Tenochtitlán was its own exemplar that no city or culture followed, neither in Europe as the present book attests, nor in its colonies as the history of Djakarta/Batavia shows in the case of Dutch colonization, a city that was laid out, as Merwin (2004: 156) puts it, “like a Dutch city with a network of canals.” (see also Abeyasekera, 1989: 14–15).

By contrast, the noted Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano gives the corrective to Smith and recounts a wetland-friendly environmental history of Tenochtitlán from an ecocritical and radical political point of view. What Galeano (1985: 41, 67, 71; 2009: 130) calls variously “the great city of Tenochtitlán,” “the capital of the Aztecs,” “this warrior city,” and “the city which will be queen of all others” was “of water born and of water built. Dikes, bridges, sewers, canals: along streets of water two hundred thousand canoes travelled back and forth between houses and squares, temples, palaces, markets, floating gardens, planted fields . . . liquid streets.” The Spanish conquest of Mexico, for Galeano (2009: 130, 131, 362), “began as a water war,” the first such war in Latin America, and was part of ongoing water wars in which, “century after century, the dry world waged war on the wet world.” He might have added that the dry world of modern European cities and its colonies waged war on wetlands, a war that came before the water wars in Latin America and followed after them.

Unlike the Europeans who dredged and drained, or filled, wetlands at home and abroad, the Aztecs, for Galeano (1997: 44),

responded in a remarkable way to nature’s challenges. The surviving islands in the dried-up lake where Mexico City now rises on native ruins are known to tourists today as “floating gardens.” The Aztecs created these because of the shortage of land in the place chosen for establishing Tenochtitlán. They moved large quantities of mud from the banks and shored up the new mud-islands between narrow walls of reeds until tree roots gave them firmness. Between these exceptionally fertile islands flowed the canals, and on them arose the great Aztec capital with its broad avenues, its austere beautiful palaces, and its stepped pyramids: rising majestically out of the lake, it was condemned to disappear under the assaults of the foreign conquest.

The Spanish never completely destroyed Tenochtitlán for, as Galeano (2009: 131) reiterates eloquently elsewhere, “vanquished water gave birth to Mexico City, raised on the ruins of Tenochtitlán” and its ruined waterworks. Vanquished water generally gives birth to cities. Out of the womb of defeated wetlands (dead or wounded) were born many dryland cities. In the case of Tenochtitlán, the dryland city of Mexico was born out of this vanquished and ruined wetland city.

The buried and repressed wetland history of Mexico City returned, however, when “water took revenge” on the Spanish with repeated flooding of the city and continues to this day with the drying out of the city. Galeano (2009: 131) goes on to relate that “now Mexico City is dying of thirst. In search of water, it digs. The deeper it digs, the further it sinks. Where once there was air, now there is dust. Where once there were rivers, now there are avenues. Where once water flowed, now traffic streams by.”

Where once there were gardens floating, there still are some floating gardens. Where once there were floating gardens, there now are also slums. The fabled floating wetland city of the Aztecs is now the infamous polluted dryland city of the Mexicans. Galeano (2000: 237–238, 264) describes how Mexico City “lives in a state of perpetual environmental emergency ... Today the city once called Tenochtitlán is under siege from pollution” as “atomic clouds of [air] pollution hang over Mexico City.” Wetlands are vulnerable to water pollution and valuable environments for absorption of air pollutants and for maintaining healthy micro-climates. They are bellwethers for the state of health of the environment—urban and otherwise.

Mexico City is also under siege from urban development, groundwater overextraction, and toxic plumes of water pollution billowing under the city. These siege-layers all go hand in hand. Recently Frédéric Saliba (2015: 30) reported that a “7,500 hectare expanse of gardens and canals” is “one of the few living reminders of the Aztec city of Mexico-Tenochtitlán.” Like all wetlands in cities, they are under threat from urban development. The network of waterways and floating market gardens, or *chinampas*, which “features on the UNESCO World Heritage list, is threatened by unbridled urban development and over-exploitation of groundwater.” It should be a UNESCO “city of wetlands” (a designation that does not exist at present) along the same lines as a UNESCO “city of literature” (which does exist).

In response to the unbridled urban development and overexploitation of groundwater Saliba (2015: 30) also reported that the “Mexico City council is about to launch an action plan . . . to save this huge district of the capital, with its ancestral farming traditions and outstanding biodiversity.” Local activist Claudia Zenteno points out that illegal urban development is turning the area into a slum. She made a complaint against a neighbor but “since then, it’s been hell” with death threats made against her, damage inflicted on her property, and violence perpetrated against her husband, her son, and her dog as related in a harrowing story of city versus wetland. By contrast, the Aztec history of Tenochtitlán is the story of city and wetland, an exemplary one in its own right that merits retelling in its entirety and not subsumed to European exemplars as Smith makes it out to be.

Galeano is much more sensitive than Smith to the environmental history of Tenochtitlán and Mexico City, to the largely unique and exemplary status of Tenochtitlán as a truly wetland city, and to environmental history and politics more generally as demonstrated in his immense body of work (see, for instance, Galeano, 2000: 215–243). Smith’s monumental guidebook for the urban age is not a guide to the environmental history of the city as the city for him does not take place in a particular place and on a specific site, but could be located anywhere. The planet earth and its surface for him is a blank slate, a *tabula rasa*, on which the city is inscribed. Where the city does encounter a particular physical feature such as a wetland, it “reclaims” dry land from wet land. Smith does not consider the free environmental goods the earth provides, nor the environmental impacts that the city has on the planet earth as home-habitat. The city for him is an extraterrestrial spaceship floating off world connected to the earth by nutrient-giving and waste-disposing tubes. The city for him is not an organic part of the body of the earth.

Nor is it for some late-nineteenth-century writers, such as Arthur Conan Doyle, Friedrich Engels, George Gissing, Jack London, and James Thomson, for whom the modern city (principally London) has a dark or criminal underside figured as jungle or nether land. What could be called a circularity of the figural occurs here: the pejorative associations of a jungle swamp are applied to the city slum and the jungle swamp comes to be seen in the same pejorative light (or dark) as the city slum. The obverse also applies where a human-made wet wasteland is made to figure a native wetland and the pejorative

associations of the former are applied to the latter. Late-nineteenth-century writing about London is the most prominent example of this process occurring as Chapter 4 shows. This pejorative figuring of wetlands becomes mutually reinforcing and culturally naturalized, but its logic is circular.

Wetlands were subjected to a double, double whammy in and by patriarchal society and culture. First, wetlands were inimical to the city. The hard and heavy materials of European-style cities cannot be supported in and by the soft and moist soils of wetlands. The establishment of cities in wetlands, such as London, Paris, and Venice, involved the draining and filling or canalizing and reclamation of wetlands in the foundational event for establishing European cities, and later their settler diasporas, as well as for the age of the cities that is still ongoing. The city triumphs over the swamp, the metropolis over the marsh. The repressed wetland returns, however, in floods, as with New Orleans in the aftermath of hurricane Katrina.

Second, wetlands were denigrated and demonized by Christianity in the foundational event for the establishment of Christian hegemony over sacral-ity in both Europe and its colonies (see Giblett, 2015). Third, wetlands were drained and filled by wind-powered pumps and later by steam-powered dredgers in the foundational event of the modern age with the development of modern industrial agriculture and cities, followed later by the expansion of suburbia in megapolises into wetlands. To add insult to injury, the slums and the dark underside of modern cities were also figured as wetlands. The repressed wetland returns in figures of speech and writing for slums and the dark underside of the modern city. Fourth, and as we will see later, modern industrial technology, agriculture, cities, and war created wet wastelands in the foundational event of the hypermodern age. To add further insult to injury, the wet wastelands of World War I were also figured as wetlands (as we will see later in Chapter 4).

In the early twentieth century the swamp was pressed into service to figure criminality. For Robert Walser (2010: 50) “the bottom-most level of criminality . . . is a sort of swamp.” For Hans Fallada (2014b: 31) in his *Tales from the Underworld* the criminal (or “the crook”) is the creature most at home in the urban jungle and the swamp of criminality as he is “like a hunter” for whom “no one escapes his rapid observation” as he sizes up “his quarry.” In the early twenty-first century the swamp has been conscripted to figure terrorism. In

September 2014 Australian opposition Labour leader Bill Shorten said that it would take more than military action to “drain the swamp of terrorism.” Shorten was echoing an unlikely bedfellow in former US defense secretary Donald Rumsfeld, who, in September 2001, a week after “9/11,” said that “the best way to get at the terrorist networks is to ‘drain the swamp they live in,’ referring to action against countries that harbor terrorist activities” (Rhem, 2001). Swamps in all these instances are figured as fertile places for the birth and nurturing of evil and not for new life and for good.

This pejorative figuration of the swamp contrasts with Henry David Thoreau (as we will see in Chapter 10). The pejorative figuration of the underside of the city as swamp contrasts with Walter Benjamin (as we will see in Chapter 6) and Sigmund Freud, especially when for both it comes to the lower-class inhabitants of the urban underside, such as servant girls and prostitutes. For Gissing the nether world of servant girls and prostitutes was largely an object of horror, whereas for Benjamin it was a source of fascination. For Freud the dark underside of the city was both fascinating and horrifying as it was a place where the uncanny as both homely and unhomely was manifested. Yet despite their differences, for all these writers on the city, its dark underside is experienced as a psychological region of dread, anxiety, or the uncanny.

Freud ([1919] 2003: 124) defined the uncanny as “that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar.” The uncanny for Freud is a feeling or state of fascination and horror evoked by the “dark continent,” whether it be of Africa, female sexuality, the slums, the swamp, or its monstrous creatures, such as alligators or crocodiles (see Giblett, 2009: chapter 2). These places are redolent of our first home as a species in primeval swamps and as an individual in a maternal womb, as well as being disconcertingly unhomely. Strolling in a town and ending up in its red light district can also evoke the uncanny, such as when Freud ([1919] 2003: 144) relates in *The Uncanny* how he was

strolling one hot summer afternoon through the empty and to me unfamiliar streets of a small Italian town, I found myself in a district about whose character I could not long remain in doubt. Only heavily made-up women were to be seen at the window of the little houses, and I hastily left the narrow street at the next turning. However, after wandering about for some time without asking the way, I suddenly found myself back in the same

street, where my presence began to attract attention. Once more I hurried away, only to return there again by a different route. I was now seized by a feeling that I can only describe as uncanny, and I was glad to find my way back to the piazza that I had recently left and refrain from any further voyages of discovery.

Freud's lost object is himself that he repeatedly finds in the wrong place, or more precisely, the place to which he unintentionally returns. This return enacts an unconscious desire.

The uncanny is a return *to* the repressed, including the urban repressed. Rather than simply the repressed past returning to present consciousness, the present returns momentarily to the past. Two processes occur involving the repressed: a return *to* the repressed in the uncanny; and a return *of* the repressed in tropes. Both involve opposite trajectories in time: a present, momentary return to the past in the uncanny; and the past returning momentarily to the present in tropes. In Freud's autobiographical anecdote the repressed is not only his sexual repressed, but also the morally and spatially repressed of the small Italian town, its red-light district, to both of which he keeps on returning.

By contrast, Lehan (1998: 44) notes how in Dickens's later novels the uncanny is evoked and enacted in the liminal space of the marsh:

Between the country and the city is a strange, eerie, primitive world of the marshes—a world of water and mire with houses sinking into the mud, a world of sluice gates and mills. The narrative flash points in Dickens's fiction occur where water and land meet, or where the country and city intersect, or where the past and present converge. Here we find the return of the repressed.

Here we also find the return to the repressed in the uncanny and even that the past is figured as wetland and the present is figured as city.

Along similar lines to Lehan, Alter (2005: 53) refers to Dickens's "aqueous urban landscape of iron, rust and rot." Or more precisely, waste wetlandscape. Regions of ruin and rust are the stuff-in-trade of recent writing about edgelands, perhaps beginning with Antoine Picon (2000). I return to a discussion of his work in a later chapter. Yet rather than a later development in Dickens's novels (as Lehan argues), he was fascinated with wet wastelands over

the course of his long career, such as in *The Mudfog Papers*, which Lehan does not discuss. Dickens published the first part of *The Mudfog Papers* in 1837 and did not publish it in its entirety until 1880 (Dickens, [1880] 1984; see Giblett, 1996: 14–15). His fascination with wet wastelandscapes began with this and other of his earliest published writings, such as in his description of Walworth in “The Black Veil” first published in 1836:

The back part of Walworth, at its greatest distance from town, is a straggling miserable place enough, even in these days; but, five-and-thirty years ago, the greater portion of was little better than a dreary waste ... Very many of the houses which have since sprung up on all sides ... were of the rudest and most miserable description. The appearance of the place ... was not calculated to raise the spirits ... or to dispel any feeling of anxiety or depression ... [The] way lay across a marshy common, through irregular lanes, with here and there a ruinous and dismantled cottage fast falling to piece with decay and neglect. A stunted tree, or pool of stagnant water, roused into sluggish action by the heavy rain of the preceding night, skirted the path occasionally ... so much of the prospect as could be faintly traced through the cold damp mist which hung heavily over it, presented a lonely and dreary appearance perfectly in keeping with the objects we have described. (Dickens, [1836] 1994: 363–364)

This prospect was not the pleasing prospect so beloved of rural landscape writers and painters but a displeasing prospect on the marshy margins between city and country in which “mud and mire” (364) predominated. The pool of stagnant water was the stock-in-trade of nineteenth-century writing about the city as it stood for a source of disease in the prevailing miasmatic theory of disease and sanitary practices of inspection.

Similar views of wetlands persist into twentieth-century writing (see Giblett, 1996), though there is also more appreciation for them contending with pejorative views. André Gide’s *Marshlands*, first published in French in 1895, but not translated into English until 1953, contains contrasting and conflicting views of wetlands that acknowledges their unpleasant features but also values their redeeming qualities. This paradoxical view of wetlands is exemplary. To hold both sides of the paradox simultaneously without denigrating the wetland in pejorative terms or romanticizing the wetland in idyllic terms is the challenge.

The first-person narrator expostulates that “malignant fevers are prevalent in these marshes” and recommends eating mud worms as “the very essence of the marshes is concentrated in them” (Gide, [1895] 1953: 30). Presumably this is a health-giving essence rather than a fever-inducing one. Perhaps it is beneficial for one’s health to ingest the essence of the marshes, but not to breathe its air or be stung by its fever-carrying mosquitoes. Later the first-person narrator meditates on “the feeling of an unprofitable contemplation” and is prompted to write about “the wide, flat landscapes that attract me—the monotonous heaths” and how “I seek level plains, unsmiling pools, and heaths. I wander gentle with them there” (32). He later writes that “I love wandering besides peat-bogs.” He contrasts the paths through these bogs where “the earth is less spongy and more solid” with the fact that “everywhere else the ground is yielding, and accumulation of mosses sinks beneath one’s feet; the mosses are full of water, soft” (38). The bog is a native quaking zone.

In Gide’s ([1895] 1953: 38–39) *Marshlands*, the first-person narrator acknowledges the upside and downside (literally) of wetlands and neither represses the latter, nor valorizes the former, when he writes that

on the surface of the waters, there spreads a marvelous iridescence, and even the most beautiful butterflies have nothing on their wings to match it; this many-cultured film is formed of matter in a state of decomposition. Night on the pools of water awakes phosphorescences, and the will-o’-wisps that hover above them seem the sublimation of those same phosphorescences.

These will-o’-wisps are neither monstrous marsh monsters, nor ghosts of the departed, nor miasmatic swamp exhalations, but a sublimation of decomposition. Out of the decaying and dying life of the wetland sublime new life springs. Slime is the secret of the sublime, as in Zoë Sofoulis’s parenthetical portmanteau word “s(ub)lime” (cited by Giblett, 1996: 27). The sublime for Sofoulis is not possible without slime.

Yet the city and the wetland have been inimical to each other. It has largely been impossible for them to coexist in the same place. In most cases when a city has been located in or close to a wetland, the wetland has had to be drained or filled, or dredged and canalized, to make land for the city to be founded or developed. In the beginnings of some cities located close to wetlands, the wetland has provided a number of advantages one of which is the

military consideration that wetlands are easy to defend and hard to attack. The location of such cities is a reminder not only that many cities have their beginnings in wetlands but also that the city has its beginnings in warfare, or is an urban activity, natural state, and institution. The city fights a war against wetlands. The war of the city against wetlands culminated with Fascist Mussolini's war against the Pontine Marshes outside Rome, the kind of war he said he liked to fight because it was so easy to win in the short term with modern technology (see Giblett, 1996: 115).

For Jacques Ellul (1970: 13 and 51), "urban civilization is warring civilization," "the city and war have become two of the poles around which the entire economic, social and political life of our time move," and "war is an urban phenomenon, as the city is a military phenomenon." The first three index entries under "War" in Lewis Mumford's (1961: 656) monumental *The City in History* list war "as chief urban activity," "as natural state of cities," and "as new urban institution". He leaves the trawler of indexes and the scholar of cities in no doubt that the city and war are intimately associated and mutually dependent. Each of these three index entries has one page devoted to it. In the case of war "as chief urban activity" Mumford argues that "war and domination, rather than peace and cooperation, were ingrained in the original structure of the ancient city" (44). The layout and materials of ancient and medieval cities with their buttresses, ramparts, and moats were designed for military purposes. The modern city does not have these features but it does have its liminal spaces, quaking zones, and protected points of ingress and egress.

The city for other writers, such as Simmel and Spengler, was founded not in war but in the intellect. For Simmel (1950: 409–424) and Spengler the intellect developed in conjunction with the rise of the modern metropolis. Indeed, for Spengler (1932: 96), "the city is intellect," and for Virilio (and Lotringer, 1983: 3) the city is founded in war, or the preparations for war. Arguably the city is founded in the intellectual preparations for war. For von Clausewitz politics is war by other means, so intellection is preparation for war by other means. Arguably intellection is sublimated warfare.

Like its predecessors in settlements and towns, the city has its residents, or citi-zens, the denizens of the city, who are "a permanently mobilized standing army," as is the city itself as Mumford (1961: 44) puts it in relation to war "as

chief urban activity.” In the case of war “as natural state of cities” Mumford cites Plato’s *The Laws* in which he declared that “every city is in a natural state of war with every other” (51; and Kotkin, 2005: 20). Hobbes declared the converse that the state of nature is the war of each against all. The city is the embodiment of the Platonic natural state, and the individual is the embodiment of the Hobbesian state of nature and of the Platonic natural state. The Platonic natural state of every city at war with every other is for Mumford “a simple fact of observation,” a fact of life and of history. The Platonic natural state of every city at war with every other city was also the rationale and context for Plato’s desire for the foundation of a just city ruled by a philosopher king. The Hobbesian war of each against all was a projection of Hobbes’s royalist reaction to the terrors of the English Civil War onto the state of nature in order to justify and legitimate restoration of the monarchy. The law of nature is each with all, for each is all. The just city enshrines and practices this law of nature. Law and natural state are opposed. The point and practice of law is to overturn the natural state, including the natural state of the city. In the case of war “as new urban institution” Mumford (1961: 40) argues that “urban man sought to control natural events.” Urban humans generally seek to use their control over natural events to allow the natural state of every city at war with every other to be fulfilled rather than living bio- and psychosymbiotic livelihoods in their bioregional home-habitat of the living earth (see Giblett, 2011: chapter 12).

One way in which to begin thinking about how the city and the wetland might live together symbiotically is through the concept-metaphor of porosity, as it not only has an obvious swampy quality, but it also has both temporal and spatial coordinates, just like the wetland. Walter Benjamin’s essay or travel diary about Naples (not a wetland city, or aquaterrapolis, as far as I can ascertain, but a rock city, a petropolis), what Eiland and Jennings (2014: 210 and 211) call “the first of Benjamin’s memorable city portraits,” is for them “uncannily alive to both the city’s wretchedness and its glory.” In his portrait of Naples, Benjamin noted that “the city is craggy” and has “grown into the rock” on which it is built and from which it is built. He presses the porous quality of this rock into service as a metaphor for the architecture and spaces of the city. Porosity becomes “the defining feature of the city” (211), literally and materially as well as metaphorically and culturally. Commenting in a radio

talk on everyday life and festival days in Naples, Benjamin (2014: 151) notes that “what is remarkable is how the two blend into each other.” Porosity is also literally and materially the defining feature of the city and its architecture partly because of the porous stone out of which it is built. In his essay about Naples, Benjamin (1979: 169) notes that “as porous as this stone is the architecture. Building and action interpenetrate in the courtyards, arcades, and stairways. In everything they preserve the scope to become a theatre of new, unforeseen constellations.”

Constellations are an important astronomical figure for Benjamin for bringing seemingly disparate aspects together. Arcades and courtyards are important city sites for Benjamin (as we will see in Chapters 3 and 6). They are also gendered spaces for Benjamin where “building and action interpenetrate,” as are cities themselves (as we will see later). Benjamin thus renders these places and city sites as passive feminine spaces, rather than regarding them as active fertile wombs, like wetlands. Arcades and courtyards are gendered, liminal, and porous places where inside and outside, the private and the public, fecundly and procreatively interpenetrate and invaginate to give birth to new space–time constellations, just as wetlands are liminal, porous places where solid and liquid, earth and water also fecundly and procreatively interpenetrate and invaginate to give birth to new space–time constellations.

Benjamin (1979: 170) goes on to suggest on the following page that “porosity results not only from the indolence of the Southern artisan, but also, above all, from the passion for improvisation, which demands that space and opportunity be at any price preserved. Buildings are a popular stage.” Buildings are a place and space where human drama is played out. These buildings are erected on the foundation of dry land, or of wet land drained to become dry land. Wetlands are a space where the performance of divine and biological improvisation takes place and the foundation on which some cities are built. In the process, the city usually destroys the wetland in the inscription of the city in grids of streets and blocks, and the erection of monuments, on their blank surface. The porosity of wetlands is improvisation par excellence resulting from the work of the divine artisan (indolent, passionate, or otherwise) who mixed, and biology that mixes, earth and water, and thereby created space and time, and opportunity for the performance of improvisation.

Lawrence Powell (2012: 100) also presses the metaphor of the porous into service in his history of New Orleans subtitled *Improvising New Orleans*, where he notes “the porous membrane of a wall-less city implanted in a frontier,” and in a porous swamp, I would add and as Powell notes. Previously he described “the town’s mudscape” (99), “the spongy environment” (92), and suggests it was not easy “creating a town from a swamp” (64), which ended up “engendering strange kinds of fluidity” (105), and later describes “a semi-aquatic landscape that remained untamed” among plantations (155). In other words, the porous swamp is a watery wilderness, a native quaking zone, that became a watery wasteland, a feral quaking zone, in the aftermath of hurricane Katrina (as we will see in Chapter 11). The watery wilderness and wasteland, the native and feral quaking zones, are places of both life and death.

Porosity for Benjamin (1979: 171) in Naples is “the inexhaustible law of the life of this city,” as it is also the inexhaustible law of the life of the wetland, and as it should be for the life, and wetlands, of cities built in, on, or alongside wetlands. For Andrew Benjamin (2010: 45) Walter “Benjamin configures porosity as ‘the law of life.’” Porosity for Benjamin is a feature of both public and private life in Naples. For him “each private attitude or act is permeated by streams of communal life. To exist, for the Northern European the most private of affairs, is here ... a collective matter” (Benjamin, 1979: 174). Wetlands are permeable too and often off to the side, or the deltas, of streams and rivers collecting matter, stripping nutrients and creating new, communal life as a habitat or home for a suite of plants and animals.

Night time and sleep in Naples for Benjamin (1979: 175) are also porous as “here, too, there is interpenetration of day and night, noise and peace, outer light and inner darkness, street and home,” just as in there is the wetland of dark and light, open and closed spaces, solid and liquid, time and space. Porosity for Andrew Benjamin (2010: 41) “provides a way of making space and time work together” as it is “a temporal concept rather than a purely spatial one.” Wetlands, as Aldo Leopold (1949: 96) said, are places where “a sense of time lies thick and heavy.” They are also a place where a sense of eternity and new life hangs heavy in their watery womb about to give birth.

Porosity has been recently employed appreciatively as a figure for the permeable and marginal cultural, economic, and political relations between nations. In discussing the vexed relationship between Canada and

its neighbor of “Empire” to the south, Jody Berland (2009: 3) notes “the porous quality of Canada’s borders” metaphorically without mentioning the literally porous qualities of its lakes and wetlands that form much of the border between the two countries (see Giblett, 2014). This porosity and permeability of Canada as nation and country perhaps constitutes its post-modernity. Canada for Schecter (cited by Berland, 2009: 53) is “the first postmodern state willing to do something about post-modernity.” Canada, notes Berland, is for some commentators “the world’s first postmodern country” and is marked “as an exemplar of the postmodern nation” (51 and 17). If wetlands, as I have argued elsewhere (see Giblett, 1996), are the postmodern landscape par excellence, then Canada as the wetland country par excellence is also the postmodern nation par excellence (see Giblett, 2014: chapter 1). Its border porosity makes it a distinctively postmodern nation and country in both culture and landscape, in both its cultural and natural landscapes though in its relations to its wetlands, especially on the margins of its cities, such as Toronto and Vancouver, it has been just as destructive as many other nations (for Toronto, see Chapter 12; for Vancouver, see Giblett, 2014: chapter 6). Pressing porosity into service as a figure for the relation between cities and wetlands is a way of nurturing bio- and psychosymbiotic livelihoods in bioregional home-habitats of the living earth.