PART II

Preface

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ENVIRONMENTS

If one were to produce a twenty-first century update to Raymond Williams' classic *Keywords* (1976/1983), a new entry would be needed for the word 'environment'. Over the forty years since Williams first published his book, few words have so completely reflected (and precipitated) a transformation in the ways in which scholars, politicians, authors, artists, and people going about their everyday lives understand and attempt to shape the world.

In that time, we have become acutely aware of the complexities and interdependencies of earth-ocean-atmosphere ecologies (Steffen et al. 2004), the vulnerabilities of these ecologies and their potential to endanger as well as sustain human life (Carson 1962), and the realisation that humans are transforming linked biogeophysical systems at an unprecedented rate (Crutzen 2002). As a result, it has become *de rigeur* for any proposal for the sustainable development of economies or societies to proclaim an attentiveness to 'environmental' concerns. To train the next generation of experts with the appropriate environmental sensitivities, universities have developed an extensive repertoire of degree programmes dedicated to environmental studies, science, planning, management, or humanities. These programmes' graduates, in turn, are employed by a plethora of government agencies and non-government organisations dedicated to the environment's protection. Planning can no longer occur without consideration of a project's environmental impacts, and plans must contain proposals for remediating those impacts.

But what precisely is this 'environment' and how can a consideration of its many meanings enhance our understanding of territory? A starting point might be to think of environment as 'nature', which *does* appear in Williams' listing. Williams

(1983, 219) identifies nature as ‘perhaps the most complex word in the [English] language’ as it refers simultaneously to essence, inherent force, and underlying matter**.** However, there are significant differences between the two terms. Nature, whether referenced as essence, force, or matter (or a combination of the three), suggests the ideal of a (meta)physical universe that ontologically and chronologically precedes society and that serves as an underlying condition or resource base for human existence. An environment, by contrast, is inherently interactive. Whilst natures are *used*, environments are *lived*.

Another similar term is ‘ecology’, which was one of the 21 keywords added in Williams’ 1983 revised edition. Again, although there are overlaps with the concept of ‘environment’, the two are hardly synonymous. ‘Ecology’ implies a degree of order, complementarity, and underlying logic (and hence constraints) amidst the intersection of elements and processes. An environment, by contrast, is indeterminate. It is made and continually remade through ongoing interactions between human communities and the surrounding biogeophysical world, with few limiting factors. As such, an environment is not simply an ecology but a *space*, an ever-imminent arena of embodiment and interaction (Massey 2005).

Environments are also *atmospheres*, structures of understanding that exist prior to human encounter but that also are transformed by that encounter (Anderson 2009). Atmospheres neither exist purely in the material nor in the immaterial, neither purely as an external object nor as that object’s subjective experience. Existing between the subject and the object, atmospheric properties structure actions but they also structure what one thinks is possible.

In short, an environment is simultaneously nature, space, and atmosphere. As such, an environment can be arena, object, or force of social organisation and contestation. In many cases, these contestations are mobilised by efforts to define the environment’s boundaries, and these include both its spatial boundaries and its conceptual boundaries. Thus, in the next chapter of this volume, Clayton Whitt profiles conflicts in Bolivia over not just *where* mud is but *what* mud is, as land or water, surface or volume. In the chapter after that, on flood control infrastructure in Canada, Stephanie Kane asks not just *where* a flood plain is but *what* it is, a hazard or resource, a norm or an exception. Following that, Ross Exo Adams explores the historic conceptualisation of the urban as a marine environment, a history that challenges accepted notions of both urban and maritime natures and spaces. In the

section's final chapter, on Arctic ice islands, Johanne Bruun and Philip Steinberg chronicle scientists, politicians, and jurists debating not just *where* ice islands are and who controls them but *what* an ice island foundationally is vis-à-vis other environments, geophysically (with reference to glaciers, ice floes, oceans, islands, molecules, and ships), geopolitically (with reference to territories, extra-territories, and non-territories), and scientifically (whether as objects for facilitating science or as objects of science).

By exploring various attempts to write order to space by defining the conceptual and spatial parameters of earthly environments, the contributors to this section all explore environments as *territories*. Indeed, it is in the territorial aspect of their investigations that the complexity of the environment, as a lived, indeterminate arena, most clearly contrasts with the discrete resources of nature that are idealised by those who would will its social control. While 'nature' may be broken into resources, an environment is always an assemblage. Indeed, none of the environments considered in the following chapters ever exists in a pure state. Mud alternately hardens and becomes land-like and then becomes water-logged and viscous. It eventually disintegrates into its constitutive parts, flowing water and deposited silt, but these then recombine in an ongoing cycle that perpetually transforms both landscapes and lifescapes, and which itself is continually interrupted and manipulated by human intervention. Similarly, engineering infrastructures fail and are rebuilt, cities are defined with varying relations to the ocean, ice melts and freezes. Attempts to calculate and order space (that is, to implement territory) that are based on models that assume flat, solid, and stable environments quickly run aground when one extends beyond the flat, two-dimensional conceptualisation of *terra*. Environments are neither singular nor stable.

Situated between the 'element' and the 'edge', conceptually and in the structure of this book, the environment is neither essence nor limn. Rather, a focus on environments highlights the complexities that emerge as politics is enacted across a range of landscapes and seascapes. In mud, flood plains, cities, and ice, environments challenge us to consider the ways in which territory both relies upon and exceeds its underpinning materiality.