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Oceans Governance on Canada's West Coast
Interactive Panels for Exchange of Views I
Transboundary Initiatives and Regional Oceans Governance
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(Chair: Peter Heap, Centre for Global Studies)

Step Across this Line: Why Emerging Transboundary Institutions Are Always Emerging, Never Revealed? (Justin Longo[*])

The last time I was invited by Rod Dobell to address a group on the topic of the Georgia Basin Puget Sound region (that bland, bureaucratic and anachronistic term for the much sexier Salish Sea), in a now legendary (in my mind) performance, I chose not to speak of the Georgia Basin but to sing. In what became known, somewhat famously amongst my then-graduate student colleagues as "Georgia Basin On My Mind", my intent was not simply to entertain but also to provoke by cutting down to size an ecosystem that had become too enormous – in its definition, its scope, its problems, its pretences.

Welcome to the Salish Sea. From its origins as the Georgia Depression (while a term of geological reference, this name reveals the irony of geologists – the Madness of King George III indeed) to the less evocative Georgia Basin (I always remember the conversation on Parliament Hill with the Member for something like Muskeg and the East Islands, who – when speaking to him about the Georgia Basin – revealed the light of recognition and, attempting to contribute something to the conversation, enthused "I love Georgian Bay – my family has a summer cottage on Georgian Bay!"). Then the institutional versions erupted – first the Georgia Basin Initiative (the GBI, given institutional form under the BC Round Table on the Environment and Economy, and given momentum by the former Mayor of Nanaimo Joy Leach). Then (when the Roundtable was deep-sixed to make room for the Commission on Resources and Environment), the GBI found a temporary home within the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and was kept alive by the skilful hands of the legendary Erik Karlsen. Erik found a pliable partner with money (we're all looking for one of those, aren't we?) in Environment Canada and worked with them to create the Georgia Basin Ecosystem Initiative. When the GBEI (as you begin to be overloaded with acronyms and initialisms, I'm back at the baseball park, recalling the calls of program vendors "Getcher programs here! Can't tell a player without a program") when the GBEI gave life (if not money) to the Georgia Basin Futures Project (and I moved from co-op student at the GBEI to graduate student at the GBFP), I then found myself becoming referred to occasionally as "that Georgia Basin guy". Failing to read this typecasting as a detriment to my long term prospects, I found myself recently engaged in several different capacities with Environment Canada's latest attempt to find an audience for this ecosystem, through the now-sunsetting Georgia Basin Action Plan and, most recently, to my terminal position as Canadian Chair of the Georgia Basin Puget Sound Research Conference.

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[*] As I note in the text, this essay draws heavily upon the work of Salman Rushdie, specifically his lecture "Step Across this Line", delivered as the annual *Tanner Lectures in Human Values* at Yale University in February 2002 (printed in Rushdie, Salman. 2002. *Step Across This Line: Collected Nonfiction 1992-2002.* New York: Random House.). I have noted direct quotes where I have appropriated them verbatim; however, if anything in this essay strikes the reader as interesting, insightful, erudite or engaging, it is Sir Salman (as he is now known) who deserves the credit. I will take responsibility for anything pedantic, prosaic, tedious or tiresome that remains.

Now – just now as we feel some traction on the concept of the Georgia Basin, as perhaps we could hope that, were I to walk down main street, Georgia Basin and ask people what they thought of the Georgia Basin, perhaps greater that 3% of respondents would have some idea what I was talking about – now we are witnesses a move afoot to re-christen – if I can inappropriately mix spiritual traditions – the Georgia Basin Puget Sound Region (or, perhaps, just the Georgia Basin part – apropos to my theme today, rarely do our institutions and initiatives transcend the border) as I say, there is a movement to rename the Georgia Basin as the Salish Sea – as an homage to the Coast Salish peoples whose traditional territory largely corresponds to the Georgia Basin. I admit to having a hand in afooting that movement, as I – along with my colleague Tony Hodge, and in partnership with some First Nations friends in a collaborative organization – or is it cooperative? Before I came to this meeting I thought I knew the difference, but I'm not so sure any more – at any rate, an organization know as the Coast Salish Aboriginal Council, have dabbled in quiet diplomacy in an effort to encourage the province of British Columbia to officially change its term of reference for this region from the Georgia Basin to the somewhat lyrical Salish Sea.[†]

To put Rod (and perhaps everyone else) at ease: I do not intend to sing today. But I have taken the opportunity to take licence. For if the proposed title of my discourse is the severely bland and rather bureaucratic "Emerging transboundary institutions in the Salish Sea", I see this as an opportunity to provoke and engender reaction, not merely to entertain (though I am never displeased to be intentionally entertaining) and to focus on the word "emerging", which strikes me as akin to "potential", which implies no evidence of success to date but, well, success could happen any day now. Which can be a tad frustrating, no? I mean, some of my baseball players have a lot of potential – but sometimes all I want is a hit, you know? So the question I am asking of you is: why are transboundary institutions in the Salish Sea always emerging and never revealed?

Rather than song, I have been influenced by a series of lectures given by the legendary Salman Rushdie[‡] – "Step Across this Line" they are collectively called, delivered at Yale University in 2002. Here, the winner of the Booker Prize and the recipient of that other, highly un-sought-after prize, the Ayatollah's *fatwa*, Rushdie considers the boundaries in the mind and the boundaries on the map, asks why we cross them and whether our timid new world makes crossing boundaries less plausible, less likely. Anything of significance or insight that follows is his – I am simply the medium through which it passes.

Rushdie considers first the boundary our earliest ancestors faced, those ancestors with fins and gills – as those first proto-creatures looked up from the water and asked "what would it be like up there, on the land". The first successful attempt preceded by millions

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[†] See Longo, Justin and R. Anthony Hodge. 2007. "The Ecosystem Dilemma: Discordance between Nature and Culture." Horizons: The Journal of the Policy Research Initiative. Vol. 9, no. 3. February 2007. Available at http://policyresearch.gc.ca/doclib/Horizons_V9N3_e.pdf#page=25

[‡] This is the new Rushdie, the post-fatwa, post-9/11 Rushdie, the beyond-his-work Rushdie. Even when Jay McInerney takes a literary swing at him ("It wasn't just Salman and his heady aura of celebrity; his new girlfriend was absurdly beautiful, to the point of being a socially disruptive force", McInerney wrote in his brilliant 2006 treatment of September 11th called "The Good Life"), it is done with a sense of the cynic's admiration, wondering why it is Rushdie and not him that gets to go on-stage with U2 and be the guest of honour at cocktail parties peopled with supermodels. Perhaps it's just the U2 part, as McInerney has certainly partied with his share of New York supermodels.

of unsuccessful attempts, attempts which paved the evolutionary way for that first pioneer to make it as a land-dwelling air-breather. He asks what motivated those early explorers to leave the familiarity of the water for the unknown of the smoky, sulphurous, volcanic young planet. “Why did the sea so thoroughly lose its appeal that they risked everything to migrate from the old into the new?” Darwinian science tells us that there is nothing like motive or curiosity or a sense of adventure that led our ancestors across borders into new frontiers – whether it’s transgressing the border between water and land, or between the Old World and the New, or in our contemporary scene between the poor South and the rich North. Instead, says the scientist, random mutation and natural selection is what compels us to cross the boundary. But I side with Rushdie here, against the Darwinists’ impersonal irresistible force, that “in our deepest natures, we are frontier-crossing beings”, that we cross boundaries – whether on the map or in our mind – precisely because we are curious, daring, adventurous, heroic.

Yet in the present context – for I have been invited here to address the topic in the context of the Salish Sea, and it would be ungracious of me not to do so – in the present context, where is this sense of adventure? I’ve been working in this issue of transboundary cooperation in this region for 15 years and continue to be dismayed at the entrenched divisiveness of the border, the extreme deference shown it, and the absence of heroism, supplanted by bureaucratism whether operating in governments or not. Rather than ask: where are we in terms of transboundary institutions and where are we going? I would ask the question more pressingly: when did we get so scared, and why have we only gotten this far? Why do we show such deference for and fear of the border on the map that, as I say, our transboundary institutions are always emerging and never revealed?[§]

I ask this question as someone who is a product of borders and boundaries and transboundary movements and, will proudly say, have a healthy lack of deferential respect for them. My family history is full of movements across borders, of great-great-grandparents from the Mezzogiorno in the Kingdom of Italy co-joining across the ancient boundaries of Campania and Abruzzo and defying centuries-old blood feuds, moving across language and ethnic and nationalist borders where their first child was born in Germany, to settle in Scotland, and then emigrate again to America – to sail to Ellis Island, have their names changed, settle in nearby Newark where my family’s connection to the real historic inspiration for the creation of Tony Soprano still lives. While I let that bit of trivia sink in, follow me towards another frontier – to the gold fields of Colorado, where heartbreak and disillusion set in, to gravitate across another border, the immigrant experience in Canada, to help conquer a new frontier and create a new boundary, the St. Lawrence Seaway. To hear family legends about Uncle Jumbo and Gumpy and daring midnight trips across a raging Niagara River to satisfy the demands of American clients prohibited from enjoying an occasional tumbler of Canadian rye. For me, personally, to grow up literally in the mist of Niagara Falls, in view of the border. To cross that border weekly, regularly, routinely, prosaically, under the guidance of my

[§] While the subject of this essay is transboundary cooperation in the Salish Sea, the cautious bureaucratism – the mantra of “don’t do something, just stand there”, the incentive and preference inside bureaucracies for doing nothing rather than doing something wrong – that is focused on here is not just endemic to transboundary cooperation but pandemic, infecting bureaucracies universally. As a metaphor, the border on the map exists everywhere that a boundary between jurisdictions, authorities or responsibilities lays. Whether it is a physical international border, a relationship between orders of government, or an interaction with colleagues, I ask the same question about fear and deference.

father, the doctor, the respected leader in the community, who counselled me "when you cross the border … take off your glasses … look the customs officer right in the eye … and LIE". Rushdie calls the migrant, the man without frontiers, the archetypal figure of our age. If so, I am the product of a line of archetypes, proud to be their descendant. As I say, I have a healthy lack of deferential respect for borders, no fear of frontiers and boundaries, and I come by this honestly.[**]

But in the era of a national Office of Homeland Security (George Orwell could not, in his most intellectually fecund moments, have dreamt up such a term), is it bravado that propels me to speak of a lack of deference for borders? I leave it to others to evaluate why I am a failed bureaucrat, but I will say that fear and extreme deference are not my forte. Nonetheless, I do not expect a vigorous argument to the contention that our approach to transboundary institution building has always been more bureaucratic than heroic. While we understand the need to "think like an ecosystem", to wistfully admire the salmon as they thumb their noses – if salmon had thumbs – at border guards, refusing to show biometric identification or line up, bovine like, in order to gain access across an imaginary line on a map – while we understand the imperative to develop these transboundary institutions, why does this border hamper us so?

Imagine yourself at a border crossing: What is your state of mind? Do you hand across your papers passive, docile, hoping not to attract attention or engender suspicion? Where we spend the rest of our lives trying to be interesting, crossing the border compels us to be simple, boring, one-dimensional. "… Canadian … Business … No, nothing to declare … Thank you." Is this what we have become? That a frontier is seen as an administrative barrier, something that is routine when handled routinely – impassable for those lacking the right documentation, skin tone or name. How did this happen? How did we go from late night runs across the Mexican border with Jack Kerouac in search of Tristessa, to the possession of a Nexus Card being a status symbol? Rushdie, a New Yorker on September 11 2001, is as changed as anyone in that metropolis was that day. But he remembers that it is no so long ago that the frontier evoked freedom, not unease.

When I first worked with Rod in 1994, I helped out with a book of his called "Transborder Citizens". What a quaint concept today: transborder citizens. Part of that thesis was the possibility of virtual transborder citizenship, and the potential of the Internet to make such citizenship powerful. Matured in the time of Bush 39 and Clinton and Albright and Axworthy, the concept of transboundary cooperation is now hampered somewhat – had the oxygen sucked out of it, more accurately – in the post 9/11 world of Bush 41 as our

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[**] I do not feel alone in this, as many of my generation share this sentiment. In 2000, in the inaugural issue of Isuma (that short lived Canadian Journal of Policy Research), Jennifer Welsh asked "is a North American generation – a North American Nexus Generation – emerging?" As part of this Nexus generation, born after the British Invasion but before the Reagan Revolution, I share experiences, values and attitudes with a quarter of the population in both Canada and the United States, according to Professor Welsh. This may not seem like much to the dominant boomer generation, but ours is perhaps a more exclusive club – even if one of its character traits is its inclusivity across races, ethnicities and nationalities. Yet despite the emergence of a North American Nexus generation, Welsh finds national distinctiveness alive and well in North America and a lack of a shared consciousness. In short, the border on the map exists as a border in our mind. (John Helliwell found a similar result in the economic community, that despite the opportunities presented by the NAFTA era of an open North American border, trade flows were still constrained by the borders on the maps.)

every email passes through the Raptor and Carnivore filters that scan for the coincidence of words like bomb, president, attack, Allah. Transborder citizens indeed. Compare this quaint concept to the watchtower citizens of southern Arizona, characters in a real life “Most Dangerous Game”, who organize hunting parties taking aim at illegal immigrants crossing from Mexico.

Remember Cascadia, that quaintly hippy Pacific Northwest concept? With the Georgia Basin Puget Sound – sorry, Salish Sea – at its epicentre, Cascadia was to be the new model for the New World Order. That the Cascadia Institute today is the intellectual (if I can call it that) home of the Intelligent Design movement in America is perhaps ironic. It’s at least disheartening for those of us cheering those always emerging transboundary institutions.

But let us not be so myopic as to forget that America’s is a history of pushing through boundaries out into the frontier, alternated by retreating behind fortress walls. The time will come again when there is receptivity to transborder entreaties. Cascadia will be revived, foreign policy will centre on issue slightly more pressing than how long the line-up is at the passport office, and America will again one day takes its place as a cooperative leader within the community of nations, to follow more the Wilsonian doctrine of “cooperatively wherever possible, unilaterally whenever necessary” rather than the current W’s “unilaterally whenever possible.” The question for us – as those who will need to lead the creation of these transboundary institutions, to see that they are actually revealed and not just emerging – the question is: will we be ready? Will we be willing to step across this line?